

English became dominant in Britain again, but with many French words added. This language is called **Middle English**. It was the language of the great poet **Geoffrey Chaucer** (c1340-1400), but it would still be difficult for native English speakers to understand today.

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertú engendred is the flour;

Text: The Canterbury Tales (Geoffrey Chaucer)

The dialects of **Middle English** are usually divided into three large groups: (1) *Southern*, (2) *Midland*, (3) *Northern*

Modern English

Early Modern English

Towards the end of Middle English, a sudden and distinct change in pronunciation (**the Great Vowel Shift**) started. The Great Vowel Shift (GVS) was a series of systemic changes in the pronunciation of English vowels that occurred in southern England during the **late Middle English period** (roughly the period from Chaucer to Shakespeare).

According to linguist *Otto Jespersen*, who coined the term, the great vowel shift consists in a general raising of all long vowels. In phonetic terms, the GVS involved the raising and fronting of the long, stressed monophthongs. One of the primary reasons that this vowel shift has become known as the 'Great' Vowel Shift is that it profoundly affected English phonology, and these changes coincided with the introduction of the printing press: **William Caxton** brought the first mechanized printing press to England in **1476**. Prior to mechanized printing, each particular scribe wanted to spell the words according to his own dialect.

During 16th century, the British had contact with many peoples from around the world. This, and the **Renaissance** of Classical learning, meant that many new words and phrases entered the language. The invention of printing also meant that there was now a common language in print. Books became cheaper and more people learned to read. Printing also brought **standardization** to English. Spelling and grammar became fixed, and the dialect of London, where most publishing houses were, became the standard. In **1604** the first English dictionary (i.e. *Robert Cawdrey's Table Alphabeticall*) was published.

A Brief Chronology of English

55 BC	Roman invasion of Britain by Julius Caesar	Local inhabitants speak Celtic
AD 43	Roman invasion and occupation. Beginning of Roman rule of Britain	
436	Roman withdrawal from Britain complete	
449	Settlement of Britain by Germanic invaders begins	
450-480	Earliest known Old English inscriptions	Old English
1066	William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, invades and conquers England	
c1150	Earliest surviving manuscripts in Middle English	Middle English
1348	English replaces Latin as the language of instruction in most schools	
1362	English replaces French as the language of law. English is used in Parliament for the first time	
c1388	Chaucer starts writing The Canterbury Tales	
c1400	The Great Vowel Shift begins	
1476	William Caxton establishes the first English printing press	Early Modern English
1564	Shakespeare is born	

In order to differentiate between the structure that governs language and the millions of individual utterances that are its surface phenomena, Saussure called the structure of language **langue** (the French word for language), and he called the individual utterances that occur when we speak **parole** (the French word for speech).

The components of a structure are not merely a collection of independent items: they form a working unit because they exist in relation to one another. They interact and we are able to perceive those components, as Saussure noted in terms of the structure of language, only because we perceive their difference from one another. Difference simply means that our ability to identify an entity (such as an object, a concept, or a sound) is based on the difference we perceive between it and all other entities. For example, if we believed that all objects were the same color, we wouldn't need the word red (or blue or green) at all. Red is red only because we perceive it to be different from blue and green. According to structuralism, the human mind perceives difference most readily in terms of opposites, which structuralists call **binary oppositions**: two ideas, directly opposed, each of which we understand by means of its opposition to the other. For example, we understand *up* as the opposite of *down*, *female* as the opposite of *male*, *good* as the opposite of *evil*, *black* as the opposite of *white*, and so on.

Furthermore, unlike his predecessors, Saussure argued that words do not simply refer to objects in the world for which they stand. Instead, a word is a linguistic sign consisting, like the two sides of a coin, of two inseparable parts: **signifier** + **signified**. A **signifier** is a "sound-image" (a mental imprint of a linguistic sound); the **signified** is the concept to which the signifier refers. Thus, a word is not merely a sound-image (signifier), nor is it merely a concept (signified). A sound image becomes a word only when it is linked with a concept. Furthermore, the relationship between signifier and signified, Saussure observed, is **arbitrary**: there is no necessary connection between a given sound-image and the concept to which it refers.

The relationship between signifier and signified is merely a matter of social convention: it is whatever the community using it says it is.

In the 1950s, Saussure's ideas were appropriated by several prominent figures in *Continental philosophy* and *anthropology* from there were borrowed in literary theory.

Functionalism

Functionalism, in linguistics refers to the approach to language study that is concerned with the *functions* performed by language, primarily in terms of *cognition* (relating information), *expression* (indicating mood), and *conation* (exerting influence). Especially associated with the **Prague school of linguists** prominent since the 1930s; the approach centers on how elements in various languages accomplish these functions, both grammatically and phonologically. Some linguists have applied the findings to work on stylistics and literary criticism. In the functional paradigm a language is conceptualized as an instrument of social interaction, based on communicative relationships. It revolves around the instrumentality of language with respect to what people do and achieve with it in social interaction. A natural language, in other words, is seen as an integrated part of the *communicative competence* of the natural language user.

Prague school of linguistics

Prague school refers to a school of linguistic thought and analysis established in Prague in the 1920s by *Vilém Mathesius*. It included among its most prominent members the Russian linguist *Nikolai Trubetskoy* and the Russian-born American linguist *Roman Jakobson*; the school was most active during the 1920s and '30s. Linguists of the Prague school stress the function of elements within language, the contrast of language elements to one another, and the total pattern or system formed by these contrasts. They developed distinctive-feature analysis of sounds; by this analysis, each distinctive sound in a language is seen as composed of a number of contrasting *articulatory* and *acoustic* features.