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3e [ye] knowe ek [also] that in [the] fourme [form] of speche
[speech] is chaunge [change],
With-inne [within] a thousand 3eer [years], and wordes tho [then]
That hadden [had] pris [value], now wonder [wonderfully]
nyce [stupid] and straunge [strange, foreign]
Us thanketh hem [we think them/they seem to us]; and 3et [yet] thei
[they] spake [spoke] hem [them] so,
And spedde [succeeded] as wel [well] in loue [love] as men now do.

(Geoffrey Chaucer [1340–1400],
Troylus and Criseyde, book II, lines 22–6)

1.1 Introduction

What is historical linguistics? Historical linguists study language change. If you were to ask practising historical linguists why they study change in language, they would give you lots of different reasons, but certainly included in their answers would be that it is fun, exciting and intellectually engaging, that it involves some of the hottest topics in linguistics, and that it has important contributions to make to linguistic theory and to the understanding of human nature. There are many reasons why historical linguists feel this way about their field. For one, a grasp of the ways in which languages can change provides the student with a much better understanding of language in general, of how languages work, how their pieces fit together, and in general what makes them tick. For another, historical linguistic methods have been looked to for models of rigor and excellence in other fields. Historical linguistic findings have been utilized to solve historical problems of concern to society which extend far beyond linguistics (see Chapter 15). Those
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dedicated to the humanistic study of individual languages would find their fields much impoverished without the richness provided by historical insights into the development of these languages – just imagine the study of any area of non-modern literature in French, German, Italian, Spanish or other languages without insights into how these languages have changed. A very important reason why historical linguists study language change and are excited about their field is because historical linguistics contributes significantly to other sub-areas of linguistics and to linguistic theory. For example, human cognition and the human capacity for language learning are central research interests in linguistics, and historical linguistics contributes significantly to this goal. As we determine more accurately what can change and what cannot change in a language, and what the permitted versus impossible ways are in which languages can change, we contribute significantly to the understanding of universal grammar, language typology and human cognition in general – fundamental to understanding our very humanity.

More linguists list historical linguistics as one of their areas of specialization (not necessarily their first or primary area of expertise) than any other subfield of linguistics (with the possible exception of sociolinguistics). That is, it is clear that there are many practising historical linguists, though this may seem to be in contrast to the perception one might get from a look at the lists of required courses in linguistics programmes, from the titles of papers at many professional linguistic conferences, and from the tables of contents of most linguistics journals; nevertheless, historical linguistics is a major, thriving area of linguistics, as well it should be, given the role it has played and continues to play in contributing towards the primary goals of linguistics in general.

1.1.1 What historical linguistics isn’t

Let’s begin by clearing away some possible misconceptions, by considering a few things that historical linguistics is not about, though sometimes some non-linguists think it is. Historical linguistics is not concerned with the history of linguistics, though historical linguistics has played an important role in the development of linguistics – being the main kind of linguistics practised in the nineteenth century – and indeed historical linguistic notions had a monumental impact in the humanities and social sciences, far beyond just linguistics. For example, the development of the comparative method (see Chapter 5) is heralded as one of the major intellectual achievements of the nineteenth century.

Another topic not generally considered to be properly part of historical
linguistics is the ultimate origin of human language and how it may have evolved from non-human primate call systems, gestures, or whatever, to have the properties we now associate with human languages in general. Many hypotheses abound, but it is very difficult to gain solid footing in this area. Historical linguistic theory and methods are very relevant for research here, and can provide checks and balances in this field where speculation often far exceeds substantive findings, but this is not a primary concern of historical linguistics itself.

Finally, historical linguistics is also not about determining or preserving pure, 'correct' forms of language or attempting to prevent change. The popular attitude towards change in language is resoundingly negative. The changes are often seen as corruption, decay, degeneration, deterioration, as due to laziness or slovenliness, as a threat to education, morality and even to national security. We read laments in letters to newspapers stating that our language is being destroyed, deformed and reduced to an almost unrecognizable remnant of its former and rightful glory. These are of course not new sentiments; laments like this are found throughout history. For example, even from Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm (1854:iii), of fairytale fame and founding figures in historical linguistics, we read:

The farther back in time one can climb, the more beautiful and more perfect he finds the form of language, [while] the closer he comes to its present form, the more painful it is to him to find the power and adroitness of the language in decline and decay.

The complaint has even spawned poetry:

Coin brassy words at will, debase the coinage;
We’re in an if-you-cannot-lick-them-join age,
A slovenliness provides its own excuse age,
Where usage overnight condones misusage,
Farewell, farewell to my beloved language,
Once English, now a vile orangutanguage.

(Ogden Nash,
Laments for a Dying Language, 1962)

However, change in language is inevitable, and this makes complaints against language change both futile and silly. All languages change all the time (except dead ones). Language change is just a fact of life; it cannot be prevented or avoided. All the worries and fears notwithstanding, life always goes on with no obvious ill-effects in spite of linguistic change. Indeed, the changes going on today which so distress some in
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our society are exactly the same in kind and character as many past changes about which there was much complaint and worry as they were taking place but the results of which today are considered enriching aspects of the modern language. The beauty (or lack thereof) that comes from linguistic change may be in the eye (better said, in the ear) of the beholder, but language change is not really good or bad; mostly it just is. Since it is always taking place, those who oppose ongoing changes would do their stress-levels well just to make peace with the inevitability of language change. Of course, society can assign negative or positive value to things in language (be they new changing ones or old ones), and this can have an impact on how or whether these things change. This sociolinguistic conditioning of change is an important part of historical linguistics (see Chapters 7 and 11).

1.2 What is Historical Linguistics About?

As already mentioned, historical linguistics deals with language change. Historical linguistics is sometimes called diachronic linguistics (from Greek dia- ‘through’ + chronos ‘time’ + -ic), since historical linguists are concerned with change in language or languages over time. This is contrasted with synchronic linguistics, which deals with a language at a single point in time; for example, linguists may attempt to write a grammar of present-day English as spoken in some particular speech community, and that would be a synchronic grammar. Similarly, a grammar written of Old English intended to represent a single point in time would also be a synchronic grammar. There are various ways to study language diachronically. For example, historical linguists may study changes in the history of a single language, for instance the changes from Old English to Modern English, or between Old French and Modern French, to mention just two examples. Modern English is very different from Old English, as is Modern French from Old French. Often the study of the history of a single language is called philology, for example English philology, French philology, Hispanic philology and so on. (The term philology has several other senses as well; see Chapter 14.)

The historical linguist may also study changes revealed in the comparison of related languages, often called comparative linguistics. We say that languages are related to one another when they descend from (are derived from) a single original language, a common ancestor: for example, the modern Romance languages (which include Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and others) descend from earlier Latin (see Chapters 5 and 6).
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In the past, many had thought that the principal domain of historical linguistics was the study of ‘how’ languages change, believing that answers to the question of ‘why’ they change were too inaccessible. However, since the 1960s or so, great strides have been achieved also in understanding ‘why’ languages change (see Chapter 11). Today, we can say that historical linguistics is dedicated to the study of ‘how’ and ‘why’ languages change, both to the methods of investigating linguistic change and to the theories designed to explain these changes.

Some people imagine that historical linguists mostly just study the history of individual words – and many people are fascinated by word histories, as shown by the number of popular books, newspaper columns and radio broadcasts dedicated to the topic, more properly called etymology (derived from Greek etymon ‘true’ [neuter form], that is, ‘true or original meaning of a word’). The primary goal of historical linguistics is not etymologies, but accurate etymology is an important product of historical linguistic work. Let us, for illustration’s sake, consider a couple of examples and then see what the real role of etymology in historical linguistics is. Since word histories have a certain glamour about them for many people, let’s check out the history of the word glamour itself. Surprisingly, it connects with a main concern of modern linguistics, namely grammar. (The example of glamour is also considered in Hock and Joseph 1996 and by Pinker 1994.)

Glamour is a changed form of the word grammar, originally in use in Scots English; it meant ‘magic, enchantment, spell’, found especially in the phrase ‘to cast the glamour over one’. It did not acquire its sense of ‘a magical or fictitious beauty or alluring charm’ until the mid-1800s. Grammar has its own interesting history. It was borrowed from Old French grammaire, itself from Latin grammatica, ultimately derived from Greek grammata ‘letter, written mark’. In Classical Latin, grammatica meant the methodical study of literature broadly. In the Middle Ages, it came to mean chiefly the study of or knowledge of Latin and hence came also to be synonymous with learning in general, the knowledge peculiar to the learned class. Since this was popularly believed to include also magic and astrology, French grammaire came to be used sometimes for the name of these occult ‘sciences’. It is in this sense that it survived in glamour, and also in English grammar, as well as in French grimoire ‘conjuring book, unintelligible book or writing’. English grammar, grammar means ‘grammar, learning in general, occult learning, magic, necromancy’, a word revived in literary usage by later writers; it is clearly archaic and related to the cases of vocabulary loss discussed in Chapter 9.

What is of greater concern to historical linguists is not the etymology
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of these words per se, but the kinds of changes they have undergone and the techniques or methods we have at our disposal to recover this history. Thus, in the history of the words glamour and grammar we notice various kinds of change: borrowing from Greek to Latin and ultimately from French (a descendant of Latin) to English, shifts in meaning, and the sporadic change in sound (r to l) in the derived word glamour. Changes of this sort are what historical linguistics is about, not just the individual word histories. These kinds of changes that languages can and do undergo and the techniques that have been developed in historical linguistics to recover them are what the chapters of this book are concerned with.

Let's take goodbye as a second example. This everyday word has undergone several changes in its history. It began life in the late 1500s as god be with you (or ye), spelled variously as god be wy ye, god b'uy, and so on. The first part changed to good either on analogy with such other greetings as good day, good morning and good night, or as a euphemistic deformation to avoid the blasphemy of saying god (taboo avoidance) – or due to a combination of the two. The various independent words in god be with you were amalgamated into one, goodbye, and ultimately even this was shortened (clipped) to bye.

In large part, then, a word's etymology is the history of the linguistic changes it has undergone. Therefore, when we understand the various kinds of linguistic change dealt with in the chapters of this book, the stuff that etymologies are made of and based on becomes clear. Historical linguists are concerned with all these things broadly and not merely with the history behind individual words. For that reason, etymology is not the primary purpose of historical linguistics, but rather the goal is to understand language change in general; and when we understand this, then etymology, one area of historical linguistics, is a by-product of that understanding. For an explanation of the notions of borrowing, analogy, amalgamation, clipping and sound change mentioned in these examples, see Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 9.

1.3 Kinds of Linguistic Changes: An English Example

As seen in these sample etymologies, there are many kinds of linguistic change. A glance at the chapter titles of this book reveals the major ones. In effect, any aspect of a language’s structure can change, and therefore we are concerned with learning to apply accurately the techniques that have been developed for dealing with these kinds of changes, with sound change, grammatical change, semantic change, borrowing,
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analogy and so on, and with understanding and evaluating the basic assumptions upon which these historical linguistic methods are based.

We can begin to get an appreciation for the various sorts of changes that are possible in language by comparing a small sample from various stages of English. This exercise compares Matthew 27:73 from translations of the Bible at different time periods, starting with the present and working back to Old English. This particular example was selected in part because it talks about language and in part because in translations of the Bible we have comparable texts from the various time periods which can reveal changes that have taken place:

   Shortly afterwards the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you are another of them; your accent gives you away!'

2. Early Modern English (*The King James Bible*, 1611):
   And after a while came vnto hym they that stood by, and saide to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

3. Middle English (*The Wycliff Bible*, fourteenth century):
   And a litil aftir, thei that stoo den camen, and seiden to Petir, thou art of hem; for thi speche makith thee known.

   þa æfter lytlum fy尔斯 genealÆtæon þæ in de þær stodon, cwæðon to petre. SoÆlice þu eart of hym, þyn spræc þe gesweotolæð.
   [Literally: then after little first approached they that there stood, said to Peter. Truly thou art of them, thy speech thee makes clear.]

In comparing the Modern English with the Early Modern English (1476–1700) versions, we note several kinds of changes. (1) *Lexical*: in Early Modern English *bewrayeth* we have an example of lexical replacement. This word was archaic already in the seventeenth century and has been replaced by other words. It meant ‘to malign, speak evil of, to expose (a deception)’. In this context, it means that Peter’s way of speaking, his accent, gives him away. (2) *Grammatical* (syntactic and morphological) change: from came vnto [unto] him they to the Modern English equivalent, they came to him, there has been a syntactic change. In earlier times, English, like other Germanic languages, had a rule which essentially inverted the subject and verb when preceded by other material (though this rule was not obligatory in English as it is in German), so that because and after a while comes first in the sentence, they came is inverted to came they. This rule has for the most part been lost in Modern English. Another grammatical change (syntactic and
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morphological) is seen in the difference between thou... art and you are. Formerly, thou was 'you (singular familiar)' and contrasted with ye/you 'you (plural or singular formal)', but this distinction was lost. The -eth of bewrayeth was the 'third person singular' verb agreement suffix; it was replaced in time by -(e)s (giveth > gives). (3) Sound change: early Modern English was not pronounced in exactly the same way as Modern English, but it will be easier to show examples of sound changes in the later texts (below). (4) Borrowing: the word accent in Modern English is a loanword from Old French accent 'accent, pronunciation' (see Chapter 3 on borrowing). (5) Changes in orthography (spelling conventions): while mostly differences in orthography (spelling conventions) are not of central concern in historical linguistics, we do have to be able to interpret what the texts represent phonetically in order to utilize them successfully (this is part of philology; see Chapter 14). In unto for modern until we see a minor change in orthographic convention. Earlier in many European languages, there was in effect no distinction between the letters v and u (the Latin alphabet, upon which most European writing systems are based, had no such difference); both could be used to represent either the vowel /u/ or the consonant /v/ or in other cases /w/, though for both /v/ and /u/ usually v was used initially (<vnder> 'under') and u medially (<haue> 'have'). One could tell whether the vowel or consonant value was intended only in context - a v between consonants, for example, would most likely represent /ul/. More revealing examples of changes in orthography are seen (below) in the Old English text. In thou (formerly pronounced /θu:/) we see the influence of the French scribes - French had a monumental influence on English after the Norman French conquest of England in 1066. The ou was the French way of spelling /u/, as in French nous /nu/ 'we'; later, English underwent the Great Vowel Shift (a sound change, mentioned below) in which /u:/ became /au/, which explains why words such as thou, house and loud (formerly /θu:/, /haus/ and /lu:d/ respectively) no longer have the sound /u:/ that the French orthographic ou originally represented.

Examples of kinds of changes seen in the comparison of the Middle English (1066–1476) text with later versions include, among others, (1) Sound change: final -n was lost by regular sound change under certain conditions, as seen in the comparison of Middle English stooeden, camen and seiden with their modern equivalents stood, came and said. (2) Grammatical change (morphological and syntactic): the forms stooeden, camen and seiden ('stood', 'came' and 'said') each contain the final -n which marked agreement with the third person plural subject
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(‘they’, spelled *thei*). When final -n was lost by sound change, the grammatical change was brought about that verbs no longer had this agreement marker (-n) for the plural persons. (3) Borrowing: the *hem* is the original third person plural object pronoun, which was replaced by *them*, a borrowing from Scandinavian, which had great influence on English.

Between Old English (c. 450–1066) and Modern English we see many changes. Some of the kinds of change represented in this text include (1) Lexical change: there are instances of loss of vocabulary items represented by the words in this short verse, namely *genēlētōn* ‘approached’, *cwǣdon* ‘said’ (compare archaic *quoth*), *soōlice* ‘truly’ (soothly, compare *soothsayer* ‘one who speaks the truth’) and *gesweotolað* ‘shows, reveals’. (2) Sound change: English has undergone many changes in pronunciation since Old English times. For example, the loss of final -n in certain circumstances mentioned above is also illustrated in *pyn* ‘thy’ (modern ‘your’) (in *pyn spērc* ‘thy speech’ [modern ‘your accent’]). A sporadic change is seen in the loss of r from *spērc* ‘speech’ (compare German *Sprache* ‘language, speech’, where the r is retained). English vowels underwent a number of changes. One is called the Great Vowel Shift (mentioned above), in which essentially long vowels raised (and long high vowels /i:/ and /u:/ became diphthongs, /ai/ and /au/, respectively). This is seen in the comparison of some of the Old English words with their Modern English equivalents:

- *Soōlice* /suθ-li:/ soothe /suθ-/ (‘soothly, truly’)
- *pū /ðu:/* thou /ðau/.
- *pyn /ði:ni/* thy /ðai/.
- *pe /θi:/* thee /ði/.

(3) Grammatical: the change mentioned above, the loss of the subject–verb inversion when other material preceded in the clause, is seen in a comparison of *genēlētōn* *pa* ‘approached they’ with the modern counterpart for ‘they approached’. The loss of case endings is seen in *aefter lyllum*, where the -um ‘dative plural’ is lost and no longer required after prepositions such as *after*. The same change which was already mentioned above in the Middle English text is seen again in the loss of the -n ‘third person plural’ verbal agreement marker, in *genēlētōn* ‘(they) approached’, *stōdon* ‘(they) stood’ and *cwǣdon* ‘(they) said’. Another change is the loss of the prefix ge- of *genēlētōn* ‘approached’ and *gesweotolað* ‘shows’. This was reduced in time from [je] to [j] to [i] and finally lost, so that many perfect forms (‘has done’, ‘had done’) were no longer distinct from the simple past (‘did’); that is, in the case
of *sing/sang/have sung*, these remain distinct, but in the case of *bring/brought/have brought* they are not distinct, though formerly the *have brought* form would have borne the ge- prefix, distinguishing it from the *brought* ('past') without the prefix, which is now lost from the language. (4) *Orthographic*: there are many differences in how sounds are represented. Old English þ ‘thorn’ and ð ‘eth’ have been dropped and are spelled today with *th* for both the voiceless (θ) and voiced (ð) dental fricatives. The æ (called ‘ash’, from Old English æsc, its name in the runic alphabet) is also no longer used.

The various sorts of changes illustrated in this short text are the subject matter of the chapters of this book.

### 1.4 Exercises

**Exercise 1.1**

This exercise is about attitudes towards language change.

1. Try to find letters to newspapers or columns in newspapers or magazines which express opinions on the quality of English in use today and about changes that are taking place. What do you think they reveal about attitudes towards language change?
2. Ask your friends, family and associates what they think about language today; do they think it is changing, and if so, is it getting better or worse?
3. Find books or articles on ‘proper’ English (prescriptive grammar); do they reveal any attitude towards changes that are going on in today’s language?
4. Consider the many things that schoolteachers or school grammar books warn you against as being ‘wrong’ or ‘bad grammar’. Do any of these involve changes in the language?
5. Compare books on etiquette written recently with some written thirty years ago or more; find the sections which deal with appropriate ways of speaking and use of the language. What changes have taken place in the recommendations made then and now? Do these reveal anything about change in the language or in language use?

**Exercise 1.2**

Observe the language you hear about you, and think about any changes that are going on now or have taken place in your lifetime. For example, if you are old enough, you might observe that *gay* has changed its basic
meaning: today it mostly means ‘homosexual’ although until recently it did not have this meaning, but rather meant only ‘happy, cheerful’. Slang changes at a rather fast rate; what observations might you make about recent slang versus earlier slang? Can you find examples of ongoing change in other areas of the language besides just vocabulary?

**Exercise 1.3**

Changes in spelling and occasional misspellings have been used to make inferences about changes in pronunciation. This can, of course, be misleading, since spelling conventions are sometimes used for other purposes than just to represent pronunciation. Try to find examples of recent differences in spelling or of misspellings and then try to imagine what they might mean, say, to future linguists looking back trying to determine what changed and when it changed. For example, you might compare the spelling *lite* with *light*, *gemma* with *going to*, *wannabee* with *want to be*, or *alright* and *a lot* with *all right* and *a lot* respectively. In particular, variations in spellings can be very revealing; see if you can find examples which may suggest something about language change.

**Exercise 1.4**

A number of examples from Shakespeare’s plays, written in the Early Modern English period, are presented here which illustrate differences from how the same thing would be said today. Think about each example and attempt to state what changes have taken place in the language that would account for the differences you see in the constructions mentioned in the headings, the negatives, auxiliary verbs and so on. For example, in the first one we see: *Saw you the weird sisters?* The modern English equivalent would be *Did you see the weird sisters?* Had the heading directed your attention to yes–no questions, you would attempt to state what change had taken place, from former *saw you* (with inversion from *you saw*) to the modern version which no longer involves inversion but requires a form of *do (did you see)* which was not utilized in Shakespeare’s version.

Treatment of negatives:

1. *Saw you the weird sisters? . . . Came they not by you?* (*Macbeth* IV, i)
2. *I love thee not, therefore pursue me not* (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* II, 1, 188)
3. *I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers* (*Henry V* V, v)
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4. Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet: I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg (Hamlet I, ii)
5. But yet you draw not iron (A Midsummer Night's Dream II, i, 196)
6. Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit (A Midsummer Night's Dream II, i, 211)
7. And I am sick when I look not on you (A Midsummer Night's Dream II, i, 213)
8. I will not budge for no man's pleasure (Romeo and Juliet III, i)
9. I cannot weep, nor answer have I none (Othello IV, ii)
10. I am not sorry neither (Othello V, ii)

Treatment of auxiliary verbs:
1. Macduff is fled to England (Macbeth IV, i) = 'has fled'
2. The king himself is rode to view their battle (Henry V IV, iii) = 'has ridden'
3. Thou told'st me they were stolen into this wood (A Midsummer Night's Dream II, i, 191) = 'had stolen away/hidden'

Treatment of comparatives and superlatives:
1. She comes more nearer earth than she was wont (Othello 5, 2)
2. This was the most unkindest cut of all (Julius Caesar 3, 2)
3. What worser place can I beg in your love (A Midsummer Night's Dream II, i, 208)

Differences in verb agreement inflections (endings on the verbs which agree with the subject):
1. The quality of mercy is not strain'd
   It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
   Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
   It blesseth him that gives and him that takes
   (The Merchant of Venice IV, i)
2. The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me
   (A Midsummer Night's Dream II, i, 190)
3. O, it offends me to the soul to
   Hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear
   A passion to tatters
   (Hamlet III, i, 9–11)
4. And could of men distinguish, her election
   Hath seal'd thee for herself: for thou hast been
   As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing
   (Hamlet III, i, 68–71)
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Exercise 1.5

The following is a sample text of Middle English, from Chaucer c. 1380. It is presented three lines at a time: the first is from Chaucer’s text; the second is a word-by-word translation, with some of the relevant grammatical morphemes indicated; the third is a modern translation. Compare these lines and report the main changes you observe in morphology, syntax, semantics and lexical items. (Do not concern yourself with the changes in spelling or pronunciation.)

*The Tale of Melibee*, Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1380)

Upon a day bifel that he for his desport is went into the feeldes hym to playe.
on one day befell that he for his pleasure is gone to the fields him to play.
‘One day it happened that for his pleasure he went to the fields to amuse himself.’
[NOTE: *is went* = Modern English ‘has gone’; with verbs of motion the auxiliary used was a form of the verb ‘to be’, where today it is with ‘to have’]

His wif and eek his doghter hath he laft inwith his hous,
his wife and also his daughter has he left within his house,
‘His wife and his daughter also he left inside his house,’
[NOTE: *wif* = ‘wife, woman’]

of which the dores wer-en faste y-shette.
of which the doors were-Plural fast Past.Participle-shut
‘whose doors were shut fast.’

Thre of his old foos ha-n it espied, and setten laddres to the walles of his hous,
three of his old foes have-Plural it spied, and set-Plural ladders to the walls of his house,
‘Three of his old enemies saw this, and set ladders to the walls of his house,’

and by wyndowes ben entred, and betten his wyt,
and by windows had entered, and beaten his wife,
‘and entered by the windows, and beat his wife,’
[NOTE: *ben entred* = ‘have entered’, a verb of motion taking ‘to be’ as the auxiliary]
and wounded his doghter with fyve mortal woundes in fyve sondry places –
and wounded his daughter with five mortal wounds in five sundry places –
‘and wounded his daughter with five mortal wounds in five different places –’

this is to sey-n, in hir feet, in hir handes, in hir erys, in hir nose,
and in hir mouth, –
this is to say-Infinitive, in her feet, in her hands, in her ears, in her nose,
and in her mouth, –
‘that is to say, in her feet, in her hands, in her ears, in her nose,
and in her mouth –’

and left-en hir for deed, and went-en away.
and left-Plural her for dead, and went-Plural away.
‘and left her for dead, and went away.’

(Lass 1992: 25–6)

Exercise 1.6
The text in this exercise is a sample of Early Modern English, from William Caxton, Eneydes (c. 1491). As in Exercise 1.5, three lines are presented: the first is from Caxton’s text; the second is a word-by-word translation, with some of the relevant grammatical morphemes indicated; the third is a more colloquial modern translation. Compare these lines and report the main changes you observe in morphology, syntax, semantics and lexical items. (Again, do not concern yourself with the changes in spelling or pronunciation beyond the most obvious ones.)

And that common englyssh that is spoken in one shyre varyeth
from a nother. In so moche
and that common English that is spoken in one shire varyes from
another. In so much
‘And the common English that is spoken in one county varies so
much from [that spoken in] another. In so much’

that in my days happened that certayn marchauntes were in a ship
in tamyse
that in my days happened that certain merchants were in a ship in
Thames
‘that in my time it happened that some merchants were in a ship on
the Thames’
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for to haue sayled ouer the see to zelande/ and for lacke of wynde thei taryed atte forlond;
for to have sailed over the sea to Zeeland. And for lack of wind they tarried at the coast;
‘to sail over the sea to Zeeland. And because there was no wind, they stayed at the coast’

[NOTE: Zeeland = a province in the Netherlands]

and wente to land for to refreshe them And one of theym, named sheffelde a mercer
and went to land for to refresh them. And one of them, named Sheffield, a mercer,
‘and they went on land to refresh themselves. And one of them, named Sheffield, a fabric-dealer,’
cam in to an hows and axed [aksed] for mete, and specely he axyd after eggys.
came into a house and asked for meat, and especially he asked after eggs.
‘came into a house and asked for food, and specifically he asked for “eggs”.’

And the goode wyf answerede. that she coude no frenshe.
and the good woman answered that she could no French.
‘And the good woman answered that she knew no French.’

And the marchaunt was angry. for he also coude speke no frenshe.
and the merchant was angry, for he also could speak no French,
‘And the merchant was angry, because he couldn’t speak any French either.’

[NOTE: coude = ‘was able to, knew (how to)”]

but wolde haue hadde eggys/ and she vnderstode hym not/
but would have had eggs; and she understood him not.
‘but he wanted to have eggs; and she did not understand him.’

[NOTE: wolde = ‘wanted’, the source of Modern English would]

And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren/
and then at last an other said that he would have eggs.
‘and then finally somebody else said that he wanted to have eggs.’

then the good wyf said that she understod him wel/
then the good woman said that she understood him well.
‘Then the good woman said that she understood him well.’

(Source of Caxton’s text: Fisher and Bornstein 1974: 186–7)