

# Introduction to Chaucer's Language and World

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## History of the Language

### Norman invasion

- Influence of French of language
- Growth of English language (1250-1350)
  - *The Owl and the Nightingale*
  - *Ywain and Gawain*
  - *Sir Percyvale de Gales*
- Henry 2<sup>nd</sup> –comes to French throne spoke central dialect instead of rural (Norman)  
French = 2 dialects in court
- Mid English begins to dominate by late 14th.
- Chaucer easier to read then was for original audience; many of the words are now commonly known which weren't then.
  - Words borrowed from French mostly
  - However, Middle English also gained from Scandinavian languages (they).  
Though influence not so strong in Chaucer.

### Dialect: South East Midland SEM

- The London dialect gradually became the standard. By 15<sup>th</sup> century writers such as John Lydgate chose to write in London dialect rather than their own.
- South West midlands was commonly used for religious texts such as King James Bible: and Piers Plowman. Lolards area John Wycliff- 1<sup>st</sup> to translate bible; others translate Wycliff and modernize.

### Present endings

-th old English, -s old Norse for present

Present ending east midlands

-e      -en

-th     -en

-th/s   -en

### Pronouns

hi – he she they

him or heom old English = 'em modern

### Pronunciation

i- [ee]

e- [A]

a- [hard]

### Word change

- Soote – sweate both forms present. Meaning forms in flux at this time.
- Me thynketh – it seems to me = it seemed me
- Swich – such

## **Chaucer's World**

Chaucer associated with court maybe low-level ambassador. (See Timeline of Chaucer's life Overhead)

### Chaucer's Worldview

- Medical Science – Humours (See Humours overhead)
- Ptolemaic- earth center, moon – Saturn 7 movable spheres
- Zodiac age of Pisces (Moses Aries)
- Stages of moon
- Ptolemaic – year begins in March 25<sup>th</sup>
- Beginning – spring icon