

A Comparative Analysis of Morphological Changes in Old and Modern English: Evolution, Patterns and Implications

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the morphological and phonological changes that have occurred in the English language over time, specifically focusing on the transition from Old English to Modern English. The research draws upon a wide range of sources, including Old English texts, dictionaries, Modern English texts, and linguistic studies, to conduct a comprehensive analysis. By employing Labov's (1981) theory of language change and variation, the study investigates the evolution of Old English morphological structures and its impact on Modern English. A selection of 20 Old English words and their Modern English counterparts serves as the basis for examining the morphological patterns of change and variation in Old English vocabulary. The study employs descriptive and comparative approaches, analysing representative linguistic samples from both Old English and Modern English texts. The findings reveal that the morphological changes in Old and Modern English reflect a trend towards simplification, regularisation, and the loss of complex inflectional systems, while providing insights into the impact of these changes on language comprehension, communication, and language acquisition.

Keywords: Old English, Modern English, morphological changes, comparative, evolution

Introduction

Language is a dynamic and ever-evolving entity, shaped by the historical, social, and cultural forces that influence its development.

The morphological changes undergone by languages over time provide fascinating insights into the evolution of linguistic systems. One such language that has experienced significant morphological transformations is English, which transitioned from Old English to Modern English. A comparative analysis of the morphological changes in Old and Modern English offers a unique perspective on the linguistic shifts that have shaped the language we use today. This study aims to explore the evolution, patterns, and implications of these morphological and phonological changes, thus shedding light on the transformative journey of English.

Old English, spoken from the 5th to the 11th centuries, was vastly different from the Modern English we are familiar with. Old English exhibited a rich inflectional system, characterised by a complex system of noun declensions, verb conjugations, and extensive use of grammatical cases. However, with the passage of time, Old English underwent a series of linguistic changes that gradually transformed it into the Modern English we know today.

Morphology, a fundamental branch of linguistics and a key element within grammar, delves into the examination of the structures of words. This field particularly focuses on the exploration of morphemes, which are the most basic constituents of language. These morphemes encompass both foundational words and constituent parts that amalgamate to create complete words. Among these constituent parts are affixes, which play a pivotal role in expanding the meanings and forms of words through the addition of prefixes, suffixes, and infixes. Morphological change pertains to alterations in the makeup of words, encompassing modifications in their structure (Trips, 2017). Given that morphology is closely interconnected with phonology, syntax, and semantics, any modifications influencing the structure and attributes of words should be interpreted as changes occurring at the corresponding intersections within the realm of grammar. However, Maquieira (2013) defines morphological change as a sort of language change that may

affect the phonetic representation of the meaning conveyed by or the usage rules of a specified morpheme. Maquieira also emphasises that morphological change may be prompted by phonetic developments, sociolinguistic or psychological factors, etc. The morphological changes in English can be attributed to various factors, including language contact, social developments, and historical events. Language contact with Norse, Latin, and French during different periods influenced the borrowing of vocabulary and the adaptation of new morphological patterns. Additionally, social and cultural changes, such as the Norman Conquest and the rise of the English Renaissance, had a profound impact on the language, leading to shifts in grammar and word formation. ...Norman Conquest contributed to 'an enormous enrichment of the English vocabulary' (Ahmed & Al, 2021). The implications of these morphological changes extend beyond the realm of linguistics. They have significant consequences for language comprehension, communication, and language acquisition. By investigating these implications, we can gain a deeper understanding of how these changes impact language users and shed light on the challenges and advantages posed by the evolution of English.

Language comprehension is influenced by the morphological changes in English, as speakers need to navigate through archaic or irregular word forms encountered in Old English texts. Furthermore, the changes impact vocabulary acquisition and the interpretation of word meanings, requiring individuals to grasp the historical development of morphological patterns, for accurate comprehension. Communication in Modern English is shaped by the simplification and regularisation of word forms and grammatical structures. The morphological changes have contributed to standardisation, enabling efficient communication among speakers of Modern English. However, the borrowing of words from other languages has also introduced new morphological structures, enriching the vocabulary and allowing for more diverse and nuanced communication. ICLS (2021) affirms that the English

language, as spoken today, has borrowed profoundly from many languages. Rao (2018) also asserts that the key reason for borrowing is to provide a word from the source language variety when there is no appropriate existing word in the target language. The English language still keeps expanding its vocabulary by means of loanwords from other languages.

The morphological evolution of English also has implications for language acquisition. The changes in word forms and grammatical structures in Modern English simplify the learning process for learners who encounter regularised patterns. However, understanding the historical changes is crucial for recognising and comprehending irregular forms, as learners can identify patterns and similarities between Old and Modern English. Moreover, knowledge of the morphological evolution provides insights into the historical development of the language, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of English as a dynamic and evolving system.

By undertaking a comparative analysis of the morphological changes in Old and Modern English, we can delve into the intricate processes that have shaped the language over time. This study aims to explore the evolutionary patterns, identify the driving forces behind the morphological changes, and evaluate the implications of these changes on language comprehension, communication, and language acquisition. By doing so, we hope to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the transformative journey of English and the implications it carries for language users in various contexts.

Statement of Problem

The morphological evolution of English from Old English to Modern English has been extensively explored in existing literature, with studies focusing on specific aspects of this transformation. Scholars have examined distinct facets of the morphological evolution of English, encompassing sound changes, shifts in inflectional and

derivational processes, alterations in grammatical structures, semantic transformations, language borrowing, standardization, morphological variation, analogy and regularisation, and the impact of language contact. However, there remains a gap in the research concerning a comprehensive analysis of the overarching processes underlying these morphological changes. While extant studies have investigated particular dimensions of this evolution, there remains a need to investigate the overall processes involved in the morphological changes that have occurred. Understanding these processes is crucial for unraveling the patterns and implications of the morphological evolution, particularly in terms of how it influences language comprehension, communication, and language acquisition.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the processes involved in the morphological changes and evolution of English?
2. How do the changes in the morphological evolution of the two English forms have significant impacts on language comprehension, communication, and acquisition?
3. What are the learning implications of morphological evolution in Old English and Modern English?

Literature Review

The comparative analysis of morphological changes in Old and Modern English has garnered significant attention from scholars in the field, who have contributed valuable insights into the evolution, patterns, and implications of these linguistic transformations. This literature review examines the seminal works of renowned scholars, highlighting their significant contributions to our understanding of the topic.

Morphology, a fundamental concept in English grammar, involves the study of word formation. Booij (2005) defines morphology as the study

of word form. Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) affirms that the term “morphology” originates from the Greek words “morphē” (form) and “logos” (study), reflecting its focus on analysing the structure and construction of words. It encompasses the syntactic structure of words and the rules that govern word formation within a language. In contemporary linguistics, the term “morphology” denotes the investigation of the internal structure of words and the systematic correspondences between form and meaning. According to Lieber (2010), morphology encompasses the examination of word formation, the processes by which new words are coined across languages, as well as the variations in word forms based on their usage within sentences. Morphology plays a pivotal role in shaping the evolution and perception of English words. Morphemes, encompassing roots, stems, prefixes, and suffixes, constitute the fundamental units of words that carry meaning. Proficiency in utilizing this intermediate level of language is fundamental for building an extensive vocabulary and comprehending English content. Morphology pertains to the utilisation or study of morphemes, the building blocks of words that convey semantic significance. However, the precise role of morphology varies across languages, contingent on the word formation processes characteristic of each language. A morphological process represents a mechanism for altering a word stem to adapt its meaning to suit its syntactic and communicative context. The presence of related words exhibiting systematic differences in form and meaning is essential for assigning morphological structure to a word (Booij, 2005). Indeed, a universal role of morphology applicable to all languages is not universally established (Libben & Jarema, 2004).

In the context of the English language, morphemes serve as the raw material for the creation of novel words, and the manipulation of morphemes contributes significantly to the generative potential of the English language. The fusion of familiar morphemes often renders

many new words easily understandable. Kuo and Anderson (2006) argue that morphological awareness is intricately intertwined with other facets of metalinguistic awareness and linguistic competence, notably phonological awareness, syntactic awareness, and vocabulary knowledge. They further posited that in English, morphological awareness gradually becomes a more influential predictor of reading proficiency. Building upon this, Anglin (1993) proposed that readers can employ morphological analysis to deconstruct unfamiliar words into constituent morphemes, thereby enhancing their vocabulary acquisition. In reality, both morphological awareness and vocabulary knowledge have recently emerged as significant predictors in various studies (Hall et al., 2014; Mellard & Fall, 2012; To et al., 2014).

Goethem (2020) claims that affixation is a fundamental morphological process involving the attachment of affixes (bound morphemes) to a morphological base, either to create new lexemes (derivational affixation) or to adjust a word's form within its morphosyntactic context (inflectional affixation). According to Manova (2014), the term “affix” originated from Latin, where it was first used as a verb “affixus,” derived from the past participle of the verb “affigere.” The Latin components “ad-” meaning “to” and “figere” meaning “to fix” contribute to its etymology. Affixation serves as a significant morphological mechanism for generating new words and word forms across different languages. Each language follows its own rules regarding word structure and formation. In English, affixation is the primary method of constructing words. The commonly observed affixes are suffixes (bound morphemes following the base) and prefixes (bound morphemes preceding the base), with suffixation being more prevalent across languages than prefixation. Additional, though less frequent, forms of affixation include circumfixation and infixation (Goethem, 2020). For instance, the prefix “un-” attaches to stems in words like “unavailable” or “unjust.” The suffix “-s” attaches to the end of noun roots to indicate plurality, as seen in languages. Affixation

is characterised by two key aspects. Firstly, the resulting form, known as the derived form, consists of the base (the form to which the operation is applied) along with an additional morpheme. Secondly, the affix itself remains constant regardless of the specific base to which the operation is applied (Manova, 2015).

In the realm of diachronic morphology, the primary focus has been on discerning the core categories of change, elucidating their mechanisms, and investigating the underpinnings of morphological transformation. The causative factors behind morphological change are traditionally classified into internal and external driver (Trips, 2017). Historical linguists commonly categorize the factors driving change into those originating within the linguistic system and those resulting from external influences, specifically language contact (Joseph, 2020). Although some scholars adopt a broader perspective by suggesting that the locus of change lies in the transmission of grammar across generations, known as abductive change (Trips, 2017).

When examining the primary categories of linguistic change, it becomes evident that a substantial portion of these transformations occurs precisely at the intersections where morphology interacts with various other linguistic elements. These shifts frequently materialize in key domains: adjustments situated at the juncture of phonology and morphology, as evidenced by phenomena like i-mutation; transitions unfolding between syntax and morphology, as showcased by the rise of inflectional morphology; and alterations transpiring between semantics and morphology, typified by the expansion of derivational suffixes (Joseph, 2020). Instances drawn from the historical development of English, occasionally supplemented by examples from German and the Romance languages, demonstrate that certain changes indeed traverse the boundaries between linguistic components, if only on rare occasions. Beyond these interface phenomena, it is widely acknowledged that morphology undergoes internal changes, with analogy standing out as a prominent illustration.

Within the field of Morphology, affixation encompasses the use of bound morphemes, which can function as either roots or affixes.

Manova (2014) claims that the most common types of affixes found across different languages are prefixes, which precede the root, and suffixes, which follow the root. These affixes play a significant role in marking derivational changes (e.g. “-er” in “preacher”) and inflectional changes (e.g. “-s” in “preachers”). Bauer (1983) explains that affixes are inherently bound elements, meaning they cannot function as independent words on their own. Distinguishing between a bound root and an affix may not always be apparent. In this context, Bauer emphasises that the root or stem serves as the basic form of a word, which cannot be further analysed or broken down in terms of derivational or inflectional morphology. In simpler terms, the root is the core component of a word that carries significant morphological meaning and serves as the point of attachment for other affixes. It is the central element to which additional affixes can be appended, altering the meaning or grammatical characteristics of the word.

Bauer (1983) explores the morphological changes that occurred from Old English to Modern English, examining processes such as compounding, derivation, and inflection. This comprehensive analysis provides an overview of the evolution of English word formation over time. Plag (2002) delves into the intricate details of word formation, covering affixation, compounding, conversion, and blending. Plag's work examines the usage and patterns of these processes in both Old English and Modern English, highlighting similarities and differences between the two language stages. However, Lightfoot (2006) offers insights into how new languages emerge and how existing languages change over time. Although not focused specifically on English, his work provides a broader perspective on the factors and mechanisms

involved in morphological evolution, while enriching our understanding of the subject.

These scholars' contributions have significantly advanced our understanding of the evolutionary patterns, driving forces, and implications of these morphological transformations in Old and Modern English. By examining the historical shifts in word forms, valuable insights are gained into the processes involved in morphological change. This study focuses on the inflectional aspect of morphological changes that occurred in Old and Modern English. Inflectional morphemes under no circumstances change the grammatical category (part of speech) of a word. Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) asserts that inflection involves modifying the form of a word to convey information such as number, person, case, gender, tense, mood, and aspect, while preserving the word's syntactic category.

Methodology

The study employed a systematic search across dictionaries and language resources in collecting 20 Old English words and their Modern English counterparts. The selection criteria were based on the frequency of usage in Modern English and the direct or indirect connection to Old English. To analyse the evolution of Old English morphology and its impact on Modern English, the study adopted a descriptive approach of comparing the two language forms. Countable and uncountable nouns, verbs in their present forms and adjectives were considered. The selected words underwent a comprehensive analysis. A comparison was made between the morphological structures of the words in Old English and their counterparts in Modern English, allowing for the identification and detailed examination of the changes that occurred.

Framework

Labov's (1981) theory of language change and variation is highly relevant to the analysis of the morphological changes, as it provides a

framework for understanding how morphological and phonological structures change over time within a language. According to Labov's theory, language change occurs as a result of variation and selection. Variation refers to the existence of different forms or structures within a language, while selection refers to the process by which certain forms or structures become more prevalent and others decline. This theory acknowledges that language is not static, but rather undergoes constant change and evolution.

Labov's theory also emphasises the role of linguistic variation within a community or speech community. This variation can manifest in different forms of morphological structures, such as alternative word forms and inflectional endings. By studying this variation, researchers can gain insights into the processes of morphological change and the factors that drive it.

Data Presentation

The examples below showcase the changes in word forms, spelling, and pronunciation from Old English to Modern English, highlighting the morphological evolution of the language.

Here are the transcriptions of the Old English and Modern English examples:

1. Old English: *āscianāscian* /'a:skian/ Modern English: ask /æsk/
2. Old English: *cild* /tʃild/ Modern English: child /tʃaɪld/
3. Old English: *bōc* /bo:k/ Modern English: book /bʊk/
4. Old English: *sittan* /'sit:an/ Modern English: sit /sɪt/
5. Old English: *dēor* /'de:or/ Modern English: deer /dɪər/
6. Old English: *wīf* /wi:f/ Modern English: wife /waɪf/
7. Old English: *brecan* /'bretʃan/ Modern English: break /breɪk/
8. Old English: *sunne* /'sun:e/ Modern English: sun /sʌn/
9. Old English: *dēop* /'de:op/ Modern English: deep /di:p/
10. Old English: *hūs* /hu:s/ Modern English: house /haʊs/
11. Old English: *fisc* /fisk/ Modern English: fish /fɪʃ/

12. Old English: *mōna* /'mo:nɑ/ Modern English: moon /mun/
13. Old English: *mōna* /sta:n/ Modern English: stone /stoun/
14. Old English: *cēne* /'ke:ne/ Modern English: keen /kin/
15. Old English: *wudu* /'wu:du/ Modern English: wood /wɒd/
16. Old English: *swefn* /'swefn/ Modern English: dream /dri:m/
17. Old English: *brōþor* /'bro:θor/ Modern English: brother /'brʌðər/
18. Old English: *ēage* /'e:aye/ Modern English: eye /aɪ/
19. Old English: *stræt* /stræ:t/ Modern English: street /stri:t/
20. Old English: *tīd* /ti:d/ Modern English: time /tam/

Analysis and Results

The analysis of the Old English and Modern English words, in terms of the morphological changes involved in their evolution, are shown below:

1. Old English: *āscian* /'a:skian/; Modern English: ask /æsk/:- This example showcases the process of sound change, where the Old English long vowel /a:/ transformed into the Modern English short vowel /æ/. Here, there is a phonological shift leading to a simplified spelling and pronunciation as well as vowel reduction. There is also the reduction of the word length in the Modern English. The Old English word “āscian” was disyllabic, while the Modern English word “as” is monosyllabic. Also, the suffix “-ian” is lost in the Modern English through sound change. It can be observed that many of these changes manifest at the junctures between morphology and other linguistic components: alterations at the phonology–morphology interface, such as i-mutation; shifts at the syntax–morphology interface, exemplified by the emergence of inflectional morphology; and changes at the semantics–morphology interface, like the proliferation of derivational suffixes (Trips, 2017; Joseph, 2020).
2. Old English: *cild* /tʃild/; Modern English: child /tʃaɪld/:- The word “child” demonstrates the process of sound change as well,

where the Old English monophthong /i/ is substituted with the diphthong /ai/ in Modern English. In other words, the word has experienced a phonological shift. In Old English, the word “cildru” /tʃildru:/ has evolved to children /tʃildrən/ in Modern English. The -“ru” suffix denoted the plural. Overtime the plural form of “child” in Modern English has evolved to become “children.” The vowel sound in the word changed, and the “-ru” suffix was replaced with the modern “-ren” suffix. Also, there is the insertion of consonant /n/ at the word boundary. So, the word “child” underwent morphological changes in both Old and Modern English, with different plural forms emerging. Following Labov’s Variability Theory, the factors that influence language change include: social factors, style, social networks, identity and prestige, linguistic market place, listener's expectation, frequency and frequency effects, analogical processes, internal factors, cognitive factors, etc.

3. Old English: bōc /bo:k/; Modern English: book /bʊk/:- The word “book” exemplifies the process of sound change in terms of substitution, where the Old English long vowel sound “ō” became the Modern English short vowel sound “ʊ.” In Old English, the plural of “bōc” is “bēc” The Old English plural consonant “-c” was replaced by the Modern English regular plural suffix “-s.” to form /bʊks/.
4. Old English: sittan /'sit:an/; Modern English: sit /sɪt/:- The word "sit" demonstrates the process of analogical change, where the Old English verb "sittan" underwent simplification and regularisation in its word form to match other verbs in Modern English. There is also the loss of the suffix “-an.” There is the reduction of the word length in the Modern English. Old English was disyllabic while the Modern English is monosyllabic.

5. Old English: *dēor* /'de:or/; Modern English: *deer* /dɪər/:- The word “deer” changes in form of showcasing the process of sound substitution, where the Old English long vowel sound “ē:” evolved into the Modern English diphthong sound /ɪə/, thus strengthening the word deer. The morphological process maintains the same form for both the singular and plural of the two forms of English. In Old English, “dēor” was used for both singular and plural forms. This pattern continued into Modern English, where “deer” remains the same for both singular and plural, without any significant morphological changes occurring.

6. Old English: “wīf” /wi:f/; Modern English: *wife* /waɪf/:- The word “wife” represents the process of sound change, where the Old English long vowel sound /i:/ transformed into the Modern English diphthong sound /aɪ/, thus strengthening the word “wife.” In Old English, the plural form of “wīf” (wife) was “wīf” (/wi:f/) itself. The word “wīf” served as both the singular and plural form in Old English. This pattern is an example of a strong or “irregular” pluralisation process in Old English, where certain nouns had the same form for both singular and plural. It is important to note that Old English had various patterns for pluralisation, and irregular plurals like “wīf” were not uncommon. Regarding the pluralisation of “wife” /waɪf/ in Modern English, a regular plural suffix “-s” is added to the singular form to form *wives* /waɪvz/. The morphological processes that occurred in the transition of the word “wīf” from Old English to Modern English include vowel change and suffix addition. Additionally, a regular plural form is used.

7. Old English: *brecan* /'bretʃan/; Modern English: *break* /breɪk/:-The word “break” illustrates the process of sound change, where the Old English monophthong /e/ evolved into the diphthong /eɪ/ in Modern English. The second syllable in the Old English “-tʃan” had a complete loss, and substituted with the consonant /k/

at the word final position of the Modern English. There is also the reduction of the word length in the Modern English. The Old English was disyllabic in both singular and plural forms, while the Modern English is monosyllabic.

8. Old English: “sunne” /'sun:e/; Modern English: sun /sʌn/:- The word "sun" demonstrates the process of analogical change, where the Old English word "sunne" underwent simplification in its word form to align with other nouns in Modern English. It resulted in pronunciation and spelling change. The vowel /e/ is lost at the syllable boundary of the Old English. There is the reduction of the word length in the Modern English from /'sun.ne/ to /sʌn/. In other words, the Old English was disyllabic while the Modern English is monosyllabic.
9. Old English: dēop /'de:op/; Modern English: deep /di:p/:- The word "deep" showcases the process of sound change, where the Old English long vowel sound /ē:/ and short vowel /o/ transformed into the Modern English long vowel sound /i:/. There is no significant morphological changes in the Old and the Modern English. The absence of significant morphological changes in the word “deep” between Old and Modern English may be attributed to stability of meaning, linguistic conservatism, orthographic tradition, phonetic resilience, frequency and function, linguistic borrowing and influence, linguistic analogies, and cultural and historical significance. McMahon (2012), in a similar instance, claims that the absence of insignificant change may be as a result of the absence of predictability regarding the altered stem vowel based on phonological context. Instead, this change turned into a morphological characteristic specific to individual words.
10. Old English: hūs /hu:s/; Modern English: house /haʊs/:- The word "house" exemplifies the process of sound change, where

the Old English long vowel sound /ū/ evolved into the Modern English diphthong sound /aʊ/. In Old English, the word "hūs" had the same form for both singular and plural. In Modern English, the regular plural suffix "-es" was added, resulting in "houses" /haʊsɪz/.

11. Old English: fisc /fisk/; Modern English: fish /fɪʃ/:- The word "fish" demonstrates the process of sound change, where the Old English final consonant cluster "sc" simplified into the Modern English fricative sound /ʃ/. It had the plural form "fiscas" /fɪʃɪz/. The morphological changes involved in the plural formation of "fisc" was the suffix "-as" which was added to the singular form. This plural suffix was commonly used in Old English for masculine and neuter nouns.

In Modern English, the noun "fish" underwent further changes, both in form and meaning. The word "fish" is an example of an irregular plural noun. It remains the same in both the singular and plural forms. The irregular plural form "fishes" can be used in certain contexts to refer to multiple types or species of fish. It is less commonly used and typically used in specialised or poetic contexts.

These examples demonstrate that "fish" is an irregular noun in Modern English, as it does not follow the regular pattern of adding "-s" or "-es" to form the plural. Instead, the word "fish" remains the same in both the singular and plural forms, with the option of using the irregular plural "fishes" in certain context.

12. Old English: mōna /' mo:nɑ/; Modern English: moon /mun/:- The word "moon" showcases the process of sound change,
13. where the Old English long vowel sound "ō" transformed into the Modern English short vowel sound "ʊ." It was treated as a singular, non-countable entity. There is the reduction of the word length in the Modern English. In Old English, the word was

disyllabic, while in the Modern English the word is monosyllabic.

14. Old English: *stān* /stɑ:n/; Modern English: *stone* /stəʊn/: The word “stone” demonstrates the process of sound change, where the Old English long vowel sound /ā/ evolved into the Modern English diphthong sound /əʊ/. In Old English, “stan” was the singular form of “stone.” It had a single syllable and did not undergo any significant morphological changes. It retains its monosyllabic form and does not undergo any significant morphological changes. The plural form of “stone” in Old English was “stanas” /stana:z/. It involved the addition of the plural suffix “-as” to the singular form. This suffix was commonly used in Old English for masculine and neuter nouns. In Modern English, the regular plural form of “stone” is “stones” /stəʊnz/. The regular plural suffix “-s” is added to the singular form to indicate multiple stones. This is a common pattern of pluralisation in Modern English.
15. Old English: *cēne* /'ke:ne/; Modern English: *keen* /kin/: The word “keen” exemplifies the process of sound change, where the Old English long vowel sound /ē/ transformed into the Modern English short vowel sound /i:/. The change from “cene” to “keen” involved the shift of the vowel sound from /e:/ to /i:/. This vowel change is a common feature in the transition from Old English to Modern English. More so, there is a reduction in the length of the word in the Modern English. The word “cēne” /'ke:ne/, a disyllabic word in Old English has transformed to a monosyllabic word “keen” /kin/ in Modern English.
16. Old English: *wudu* /'wu:du/; Modern English: *wood* /wʊd/: The word “wood” showcases the process of sound change, where the Old English long vowel sound /u:/ evolved into the Modern English short vowel sound /ʊ/. The change from “wudu” to

“wood” involved the loss of the final “u” sound, which is a common phonological change in English over time. There is also the reduction of the word length in the Modern English. In Old English, the word “wudu” was spelled and pronounced as “wu:du” /'wu:du/. The plural form included “wuda” for the plural. This plural form demonstrates minimal inflectional change. Old English was disyllabic, while the Modern English is monosyllabic.

17. Old English: swefn /swefn/; Modern English: dream /dri:m/: The word "dream" demonstrates the process of analogical change, where the Old English noun "swefn" underwent simplification and regularisation in its word form to match other nouns in Modern English. The plural form is “swefnas” (/swefnas/). It had a regular plural form by adding the suffix “-as” to the singular form. This change includes the transition from vowel /e/ in Old English to the Modern English long vowel /i:/. Additionally, the final consonant “n” in “swefn” has been dropped in the singular form. In Modern English, the plural noun is realised as “dreams” (/dri:mz/), with the regular plural suffix “-s” added to the singular noun. There are no significant morphological changes involved in the pluralisation of “dream” to “dreams” other than the addition of the plural suffix. There is also the reduction of the word length in the Modern English in the plural word compared to the Old English, which was disyllabic.
18. Old English: brōþor /'bro:θor/; Modern English: brother /'brʌðər/: The word "brother" represents the process of analogical change, where the Old English word "brōþor" underwent simplification and regularisation in its word form to match other nouns in Modern English. In Old English, the word “brother” had various forms depending

on the gender (masculine or neuter) and case. The plural forms included “broþor” or “broþru” for masculine nouns and “broþor” or “broþorru” for neuter nouns. These plural forms demonstrate inflectional changes in endings and vowel sounds. In Modern English, the word “brother” has undergone minimal morphological changes. The singular form “brother” remains the same, and the regular plural form is created by adding the suffix “-s” to the singular form /'brʌðəz/. This is a common pattern of pluralisation in Modern English.

19. Old English: *ēage* /e:ɑye/; Modern English: *eye* /aɪ/: The word “eye” showcases the process of sound change, where the Old English vowel sound /ēa/ transformed into the Modern English diphthong sound /aɪ/. In Old English, the plural form included “*ēagan*” /'e:ɑ.γɑn/ for the plural. This plural form demonstrates inflectional changes in endings, “-an”. In Modern English, the word “eye” has undergone minimal morphological changes. The regular plural form is created by adding the suffix “-s” to the singular form *eyes* /aɪz/. This is a common pattern of pluralisation in Modern English. There is also the reduction of the word length in the Modern English in the plural word. In Old English, the word was disyllabic while in the Modern English, the word is monosyllabic.
20. Old English: *stræt* /stræ:t/; Modern English: *street* /stri:t/: The word “street” demonstrates the process of sound change, where the Old English vowel sound “æ” evolved into the Modern English diphthong sound “/i:/.” The plural forms included “*strætu*” for the Old English. The vowel “u” represents the plural suffix. This plural form demonstrates inflectional changes in vowel sounds. In Modern English, the word “street” has undergone minimal

morphological changes. The regular plural form is created by adding the suffix “-s” to the singular form /stri:ts/. This is a common pattern of pluralisation in Modern English.

21. Old English: *tīd* /ti:d/; Modern English: *time* /taɪm/: The word “time” exemplifies the process of sound change, where the Old English vowel sound “ī” transformed into the Modern English diphthong sound “/aɪ/.” It was treated as a singular, non-countable entity. Although, it can be used in another context as a period of time, and as such will be used as a singular and plural.

Discussion

This analysis highlights various processes involved in the morphological evolution of English, including addition or loss of affixes, phonological shift, analogical change, simplification, reduction in word length, regularisation, and alignment with other words or patterns in the language. These changes are quite different from the ones identified with the Modern English. In the evolution of English, morphological changes and phonological changes are intricately connected. As the language developed over time, alterations in pronunciation had a significant impact on the form and arrangement of words, and morphological changes frequently mirrored shifts in sound patterns. These findings represent typical examples of how sound change can cause a modification to the morphological component of the grammar.

Similar to many languages around the world, English exhibits irregularities or exceptions in its morphology. While examples of English words have been primarily provided where various inflectional morphemes can be easily identified as distinct units of meaning or grammatical function, it's important to acknowledge that irregularities exist.

In English, the plural morpheme “-es” is typically added to nouns to create plurals, as seen in the transformation from “house” to “houses.” However, there are certain nouns that form their plurals irregularly. Examples of such irregular plurals include “dēor dēor” in Old English, and “deer-deer” in the Modern English. The presence of these irregularities can be attributed to both historical influences and the impact of borrowed words from other languages. Furthermore, it is observed that the verbs and adjectives have no suffixes in their base forms.

As observed, the evolution of the English language is evident not only in its consonant inventory but also in its vowel system. This alteration had a profound impact on the pronunciation of specific vowel sounds and came to be recognised as the “Great Vowel Shift” (GVS), a comprehensive phenomenon that spanned from approximately 1400 to 1650, extending its influence even into the eighteenth century (McIntyre, 2009, p. 16). The Great Vowel Shift encompassed a gradual and extended modification in the articulation of the seven long vowels in the English language. This transformative process involved an upward shift in the pronunciation of long vowel sounds, leading to modifications in the seven long vowels of Middle English and even prompting the diphthongisation of certain vowels (McIntyre, 2009). The implications of this shift were significant, altering the phonetic landscape of the English language and contributing to the evolution of its vowel sounds over time.

The changes in the morphological evolution of the two English forms have significant impacts on language comprehension, communication, and language acquisition. Here are some ways in which these changes influence these aspects:

- i. Language Comprehension: Morphological changes can affect language comprehension by altering the word forms, inflectional endings, and grammatical structures of words. For instance, in Old

English, “singan” (to sing) is realised in Modern English as “sings.” In Old English, the verb “singan” had different inflectional endings for various subjects and tenses meanwhile, Modern English simplified this to a single ending, “sings,” making it easier to comprehend the verb's form in different contexts. Understanding the historical development of morphological patterns enables speakers to interpret and decode words correctly, even when encountering archaic or irregular forms. Additionally, knowledge of the morphological evolution can aid in comprehending the etymology and meaning of words, facilitating a deeper understanding of vocabulary and lexical connections.

- ii. Communication: The morphological changes in English impact communication by influencing word usage, word formation, and grammatical patterns. The simplification and regularisation of word forms enhance clarity and ease of communication, as irregularities are reduced, and consistent patterns emerge. These changes contribute to standardisation and facilitate efficient communication among speakers of Modern English. Additionally, borrowing words from other languages introduces new morphological structures and enriches the vocabulary, allowing for more diverse and nuanced communication. Examples: *deurmekaar* (confused) *lepak* (to loiter aimlessly) from Malay, *deurmekaar* (confused, muddled) from Afrikaans, *kaveera* (a plastic bag) from Luganda.
- iii. Understanding the historical changes: This also aids in recognising and understanding irregular forms, as learners can identify patterns and similarities between Old English and Modern English. Furthermore, knowledge of the morphological evolution provides insight into the historical development of the language, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of English as a dynamic and evolving system.

- iv. **Lexical Ambiguity:** The morphological changes in English can lead to variations in word forms, which may result in lexical ambiguity. For example, Old English had more extensive inflectional endings that provided additional information about case, number, and gender. In Modern English, many of these inflections have been lost or simplified, leading to potential ambiguity in interpreting word meanings. This impact on language comprehension highlights the need for context and additional linguistic cues to disambiguate the intended meaning.
- v. **Language Variation and Dialects:** The morphological changes in English have contributed to the development of different dialects and regional variations such as American English with its usage of “gotten” for “got,” British English encompassing variations like “I’ve not seen him” for “I haven’t seen him,” Australian English featuring terms like “arvo” for afternoon, Scottish English employing expressions like “I’m no going,” Irish English preserving Gaelic-influenced structures like “I’m after eating,” and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) showcasing unique forms like “finna” for “going to.” These variations underscore the intricate interplay of morphological shifts, historical contexts, and cultural influences, shaping the rich tapestry of the English language. As the language evolved, different regions adopted and preserved distinct morphological features, resulting in variations in word forms and grammatical structures. This diversity in morphological patterns can affect communication and comprehension between speakers of different dialects, requiring an understanding of these variations for effective cross-dialect communication and comprehension.
- vi. **Historical Perspective and Cultural Understanding:** The study of morphological evolution provides a historical perspective on the development of English and its cultural context. By examining the changes in word forms, inflectional endings, and grammatical

structures, we gain insights into the cultural influences, societal shifts, and historical events that shaped the language over time. This understanding enhances language comprehension and communication by fostering a deeper appreciation of the historical and cultural dimensions embedded within the language.

In summary, the changes in the morphological evolution of English impact language comprehension, communication, and language acquisition by influencing lexical ambiguity, contributing to language variation and dialects, and providing a historical perspective for cultural understanding. The manifestation of numerous linguistic changes often occurs at the intersections between morphology and other linguistic elements. These observations are in line with certain scholars (Trips, 2017; Joseph, 2020). These alterations become apparent at pivotal points, such as the phonology-morphology interface, evident in phenomena like i-mutation; transitions at the syntax-morphology interface, illustrated by the evolution of inflectional morphology; and shifts at the semantics-morphology interface, demonstrated by the expansion of derivational suffixes. This transition carried significant implications, reshaping the phonetic landscape of the English language and playing a pivotal role in the evolutionary trajectory of its vowel sounds across the passage of time (McIntyre, 2009). Recognising these impacts is crucial for effective language use, cross-dialect communication, and developing a comprehensive understanding of the English language.

Implications for Learning

It stands to reason that language learners who possess an understanding of how English words are constructed, through the combination of prefixes, suffixes, and roots, tend to have a larger vocabulary and a better grasp of written texts (Kieffer&DiFelice Box, 2013). By enabling students to develop morphological awareness, teachers can empower them to decipher unfamiliar words, identify their meaning, and even generate new words themselves. This approach holds

immense potential in facilitating language learning and enhancing students' overall language proficiency. The morphological evolution of English has several implications for language learning. Here are some key implications:

1. **Vocabulary Acquisition:** Understanding the historical changes in word forms and inflections can aid learners in acquiring vocabulary more efficiently. By recognising patterns and connections between Old English and Modern English, learners can grasp the meanings and usage of words more effectively. This knowledge allows learners to make connections between related words, comprehend etymological origins, and expand their vocabulary.
2. **Grammar and Sentence Structure:** The study of morphological evolution provides insights into the development of grammatical patterns and sentence structures. By understanding the changes in inflections and word forms, learners can grasp the rules and principles that govern Modern English grammar. This knowledge helps learners construct grammatically accurate sentences and apply appropriate morphological patterns in their spoken and written communication.
3. **Historical and Cultural Awareness:** Learning about the morphological evolution of English enhances historical and cultural awareness. By studying the language's development over time, learners gain insights into the social, political, and cultural factors that influenced the language's changes. This broader understanding fosters cultural appreciation, helps learners contextualize texts from different time periods, and enables them to engage more deeply with literature and historical documents.
4. **Adaptation and Interpretation:** As learners encounter archaic or irregular forms in Old English texts or historical documents,

understanding the morphological changes equips them with the skills to adapt and interpret the language. It enables learners to decipher unfamiliar word forms, identify root words, and infer meanings based on context. This adaptability enhances reading comprehension skills and facilitates a deeper understanding of historical texts.

5. **Language Proficiency and Mastery:** A comprehensive understanding of the morphological evolution of English contributes to overall language proficiency and mastery. It provides learners with a strong foundation in the language's historical development, allowing them to navigate linguistic complexities, understand variations, and communicate effectively across different registers and dialects. It also facilitates language acquisition by providing a deeper understanding of the language's structure and aiding in the internalisation of grammar rules and vocabulary.

In summary, the implications of the morphological evolution of English for language learning include enhanced vocabulary acquisition, improved grammar and sentence structure skills, increased historical and cultural awareness, improved adaptation and interpretation abilities, and overall language proficiency and mastery. Understanding the morphological changes in English contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced grasp of the language, supporting learners in their language acquisition journey.

Conclusion

Overall, the morphological changes in Old and Modern English reflect a trend towards simplification, regularisation, and loss of complex inflectional systems. This is supported by Kulsum-Binder (2016) who claims that “an interesting morphological change that occurred in English over the period spanning from Old English to Present Day English has been the loss of inflection on words.” The language has

undergone significant transformations over time, resulting in a more streamlined and simplified morphology in Modern English. Old English had a more complex system of inflectional endings, with nouns and verbs displaying various forms to indicate case, gender, number, and tense. In contrast, Modern English has undergone a simplification process, with many inflectional endings being reduced or lost. . As observed by McIntyre (2009), Old English demonstrated characteristics of a synthetic language, extensively employing inflections within words to communicate supplementary grammatical nuances. Conversely, in Present Day English, a distinct shift towards analytic tendencies is evident, marked by a reduction in inflections on words and a heightened reliance on syntactic order to fulfill analogous functions. In Old English, nouns often had irregular plural forms that involved changes in vowels, consonants, or both. However, in Modern English, there is a general tendency towards regular pluralisation by adding the suffix “-s” or “-es” to singular nouns. Old English had grammatical gender distinctions, with nouns categorised as masculine, feminine, or neuter. Modern English has largely lost these gender distinctions, and nouns are now generally treated as gender-neutral. Morphological changes in English are closely intertwined with phonological changes. As the language evolved, shifts in pronunciation influenced the form and structure of words, and morphological changes often reflected changes in sound patterns. For language learners acquiring Modern English, the simplified morphological structure can facilitate the learning process. The absence of additional morphological inflections or complex spelling patterns in the Modern English word makes it easier for learners to recognise and memorise the term. Additionally, the consistency in the morphology of similar words (such as “houses” for plural) allows learners to apply general rules and patterns more readily.

Recommendations

1. **Incorporate Historical Context:** Include lessons or activities that explore the historical context of English language development. This can involve reading excerpts from Old English texts, discussing language changes over time, and examining the cultural and historical factors that influenced the language. By providing learners with a deeper understanding of the language's evolution, they can develop a richer appreciation for English and its complexities.
2. **Integrate Etymology:** Emphasise the etymology of words and their historical connections. Encourage learners to explore the origins of words, trace their development from Old English to Modern English, and discover relationships between words with similar roots. This approach helps learners expand their vocabulary, develop word associations, and improve their overall language skills.
3. **Practice Analogy and Pattern Recognition:** Engage learners in activities that promote analogy and pattern recognition. Provide exercises where learners can identify common morphological patterns, draw connections between related words, and apply these patterns to new vocabulary. By strengthening their ability to recognise and apply morphological patterns, learners become more proficient in deciphering word meanings and constructing grammatically correct sentences.
4. **Expose Learners to Diverse Texts:** Include a variety of texts that showcase different time periods and dialects of English. This exposure allows learners to familiarize themselves with a range of language forms and styles, enabling them to adapt their language usage to different contexts. Reading texts from different periods also enhances reading comprehension skills and fosters a broader understanding of the language's evolution.

5. Foster Cultural Appreciation: Encourage learners to explore the cultural aspects embedded in the language. Provide opportunities for learners to engage with literature, songs, and historical documents from various time periods. This exposure not only enhances language skills but also fosters cultural appreciation and understanding.
6. Utilise Technology and Online Resources: Take advantage of technology and online resources to supplement language learning. Online platforms, interactive exercises, and language tools can provide learners with additional opportunities to practice morphological analysis, explore language history, and expand their vocabulary.
7. Provide Authentic Language Input: Expose learners to authentic language input through videos, audio recordings, and native speaker interactions. This exposure to real-life language usage helps learners develop a more intuitive sense of morphological patterns and allows them to acquire language in context.

By implementing these recommendations, language learners can develop a deeper understanding of the morphological evolution of English, enhance their language skills, and engage with the language in a more comprehensive and meaningful way.

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