Lesson 7

Language and Languages

Primarily there is a distinction between one language and another; usually it may be through country boundaries, population culture, demographics and history. Each country through combinations of blending cultures, environment and other factors has evolved their own unique style of a language. Although Australia, United States and United Kingdom all speak English, they all possess different mannerisms, words used and accents. It is also common that many dialects have formed over time in many different towns within the same country. For example in Italy many dialects from the south and vastly differ from the north.

A language may have a relation with other languages. It can be related to other languages in 3 possible ways :

1-Genetic relationship : There is a common ancestor some where in the family line, it's like the relation between mother and daughter or between 2 daughters. . In 1786 the English scholar Sir William **Jones** suggested the possible affinity of Sanskrit and Persian with Greek and Latin, for the first time bringing to light genetic relations between languages.

2-Cultural Relationship : It arises from contact in the world at a given time. There are people who speak more than two languages and this leads to borrowing e.g. : restaurant, pizza, kif-kif…etc

3-Typological Relationship : Is the relation of resemblance regardless of where they come from .e.g. languages can be classified according to the number of their vowels and according to the word order.

Language families

A **language family** is a group of languages related by descent from a common ancestor, called the proto-language of that family.

As with biological families, the evidence of relationship is an observable shared characteristics (this is one character on which linguists rely to classify a language family). An accurately

identified family is a ***phylogenetic*** unit; that is, all its members derive from a common ancestor, and all attested descendants of that ancestor are included in the family. Most of the world's languages are known to belong to language families. For the others, family relationships are not known or only tentatively proposed.

-The concept of language families is based on the assumption that over time languages gradually diverge into underlined dialects and then into new languages.

-There are extreme cases of languages mixing due to language contact in conquest or trade.

-A number of sign languages have developed in isolation and may have no relatives at all.

-It is possible to recover many features of a proto-language by applying the comparative method—a reconstructive procedure worked out by 19th century. For example, the re-constructible common ancestor of the Indo-European language family is called *Proto-Indo-European*. Proto-Indo-European is not attested by written records, since it was spoken before the invention of writing.

-Language families can be divided into smaller phylogenetic units, conventionally referred to as *branches* of the family because the history of a language family is often represented as a tree diagram. The Germanic family, for example, is a branch of the Indo-European family.

-Languages that cannot be reliably classified into any family are known as *isolates*.

Classification of languages: Language can be classified into different families on the following basis.

1- **Similarities and dissimilarities or typological classification**: This way is based on the similarities which exist between languages. It is an attempt to group languages in terms of their structural correspondences .e.g.: Proto Germanic language (since English is our concern).

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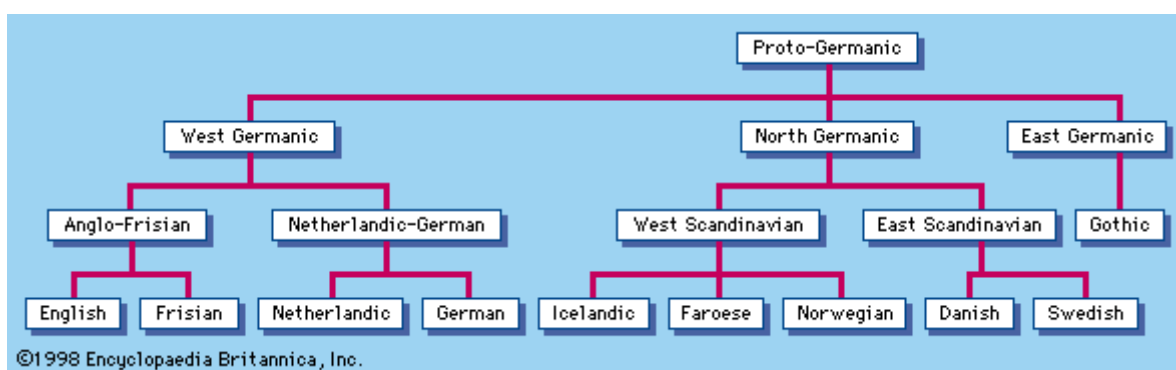
Other families: This is a list of the top ten families with wide recognition as phylogenetic units, in terms of numbers of native speakers, listed with their core geographic areas.

1. Indo-European languages (Europe, Southwest to South Asia, America, Oceania)
2. Sino-Tibetan languages (East Asia)

3. Niger-Congo languages (Sub-Saharan Africa)
4. Afro-Asiatic languages (North Africa to Horn of Africa, Southwest Asia)
5. Austronesian languages (Oceania, Madagascar, maritime Southeast Asia)
6. Dravidian languages (South Asia)
7. Altaic languages (Central Asia, Northern Asia, Anatolia, Siberia)
8. Austro-Asiatic languages (mainland Southeast Asia)
9. Tai-Kadai languages (Southeast Asia)
10. Japonic languages (Japan)

Sub-families of Indo -Europen Language:(see page 5)

Languages of Africa

1. Afro-Asiatic languages (formerly Hamito-Semitic)
2. Niger-Congo languages (sometimes Niger-Kordofanian)
3. Nilo-Saharan languages
4. Khoe languages (part of the Khoisan proposal)
5. Tuu languages (part of Khoisan)

6. Juu-ǂHoan languages (part of Khoisan)
7. Ubangian languages
8. Mande languages (perhaps Niger-Congo)
9. Songhay languages
10. Kadu languages
11. Koman languages (perhaps Nilo-Saharan)

-Sub Families of Hamito-Semetic Languages

Hamito-Semetic Languages

Hamitic Languages   **Semiic Languages**

Haussa   Galls   Somali   kabyle   Arabic   Hebrew
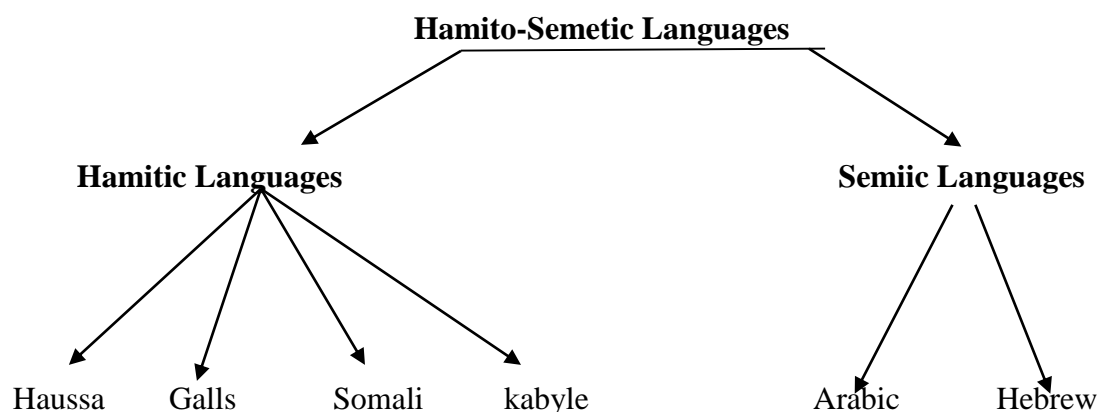
2-Genetic classification: This is a way in a historical classification which is based on the assumption that languages have diverged from a common ancestor. In the case when evidence is lacking, conclusions are deduced using the comparative method .

Closed terminology to the word "language"

1-Unclassified languages

Languages are considered unclassified either because, for one reason or another, little effort has been made to compare them with other languages, or, more commonly, because they are too

poorly documented to permit reliable classification. Most such languages are extinct and most likely will never be known well enough to classify.

2-Language vs Dialect: In terms of its dictionary definition, a dialect is 'a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group.' This implies that we can view a language in the role of parent, with a range of dialects stemming from it
 The difference between a **language** and a **dialect** can be political rather than linguistic. For example, linguistically, **Croatian** and **Serbian** are closely related dialects of the same language. However, they are written in different scripts and are spoken by people of different religions living in Catholic Christian. The main language of **Iraq** and **Morocco** are both called **Arabic** but they differ greatly.
The study of languages and their relationships gives us information about how people have migrated during historical times. It also helps with the dating of developments like plant domestication and the use of tools. Each language gives an insight into a unique way of thinking. People who are living in isolated parts of the world and are not technologically advanced do not necessarily have a more primitive language than people living in modern cities. All languages have simple and complex parts. There is no correlation between the life of a people speaking a language and the complexity or otherwise of their language.
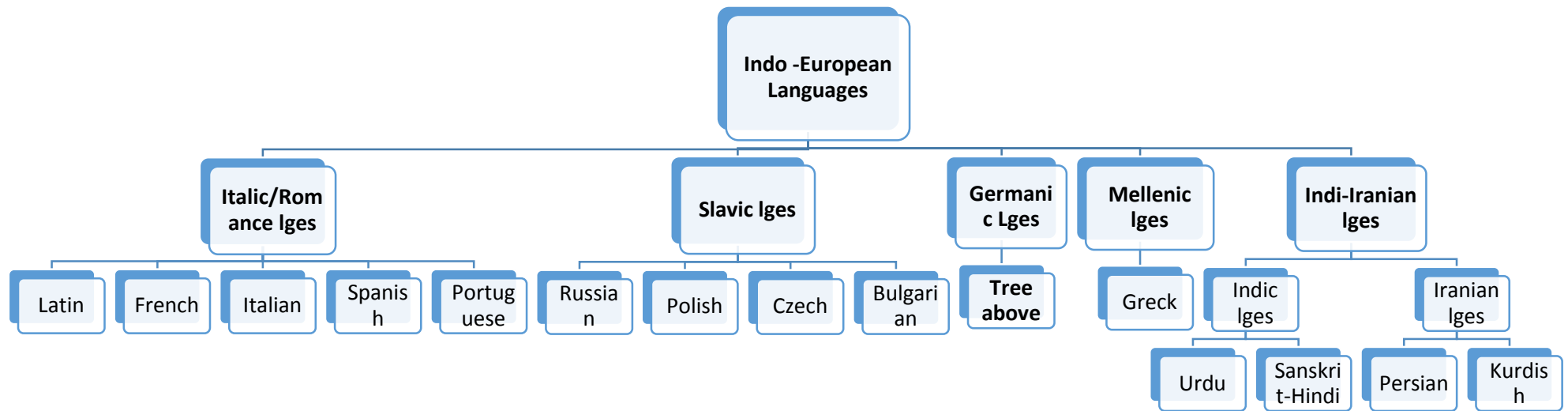
3-Accent vs Dialect : Accents affect the way that a language is pronounced. They can vary hugely within a country but, as a general rule, an accent relates to pronunciation only. When different regions use different words to describe the same thing, they can reasonably be considered to be using different dialects, rather than simply different accents.

4-**Mixed languages: A mixed language** is a language that arises among a bilingual group combining aspects of two or more languages but not clearly deriving primarily from any single language. It differs from a creole or pidgin language in that, whereas creoles/pidgins arise where speakers of many languages acquire a common language, a mixed language typically arises in a population that is fluent in both of the source languages.
Michif, a mixture of French and Cree.

5-A Creole language or simply **creole**, is a stable <u>natural language</u> that develops from the simplifying and mixing of different languages into a new one within a fairly brief period of time.

6-A **pidgin** or **pidgin language**, is a grammatically simplified means of communication that develops between two or more groups that do not have a language in common: typically, its vocabulary and grammar are limited and often drawn from several languages. It is most commonly employed in situations such as trade, or where both groups speak languages different from the language of the country in which they reside (but where there is no common language between the groups). Linguists do not typically consider pidgins as full or complete languages.

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                              Indo -European
                                Languages

        Italic/Rom              Slavic lges        Germani      Mellenic      Indi-Iranian
        ance lges                                  c Lges        lges            lges

  Latin   French   Italian  Spanis  Portug   Russia  Polish  Czech  Bulgari   Tree    Greck  Indic   Iranian
                              h      uese      n                      an      above           lges    lges

                                                                                          Urdu   Sanskri  Persian  Kurdis
                                                                                                 t-Hindi            h
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Additional Reading:

*It appears that the use of language came about independently in a number of places.

All languages change with time. A comparison of Chaucer's English, Shakespere's English and Modern English shows how a language can change over several hundred years. Modern English spoken in Britain, North America and Australia uses different words and grammar.

If two groups of people speaking the same language are separated, in time their languages will change along different paths. First they develop different accents; next some of the vocabulary will change (either due to influences of other languages or by natural processes). When this happens a different dialect is created; the two groups can still understand each other. If the dialects continue to diverge there will come a time when they are mutually unintelligible. At this stage the people are speaking different languages.

One of the best examples in Western history occurred after the Roman Empire collapsed in the 4th Century AD. **Latin** was the language of that empire. All the Latin speakers in different parts of Europe (**Italian Peninsula**, **Gaul**, **Iberian Peninsula**, **Carpathia**) became isolated from each other. Their languages evolved along independent paths to give us the modern languages of **Italian**, **French**, **Spanish**, **Portuguese** and **Romanian**. The **Sanskrit** spoken in North India changed into the modern languages of the region: **Hindi**, **Urdu**, **Punjabi**, **Bengali** and others. **Ancient Persian** has evolved into **Farsi**, **Kurdish** and **Pashto**.

In time, with enough migrations, a single language can evolve into an entire **family** of languages. Each language family described below is a group of related languages with a common ancestor. Languages in the same **branch** are **sister** languages that diverged within the last 1000 to 2000 years (**Latin**, for example, gave rise to the **Latin Branch** languages in the **Indo-European Family**). Languages in different branches of the same family can be referred to as **cousin** languages. For most families these languages would have diverged more than 2000 years ago. The exact times scales vary for each family. Languages in the same family, share many common grammatical features and many of the key words, especially older words, show their common origin. The table below shows this effect with the word for **month** in several Indo-European languages:

English	month
Dutch	maand
German	Monat
Swedish	månad
Welsh	mis
Gaelic	mí
French	mois
Spanish	mes
Portuguese	mês
Italian	mese
Polish	miesiac
Russian	myesyats
Lithuanian	menuo
Albanian	muaj
Greek	minas
Farsi	mâh

*Ten Language Families in Detail

The Indo-European Family

The most widely studied family of languages and the family with the largest number of speakers. Languages include **English**, **Spanish**, **Portuguese**, **French**, **Italian**, **Russian**, **Greek**, **Hindi**, **Bengali**; and the classical languages of **Latin**, **Sanskrit**, and **Persian**.

The Uralic Family

A family found in Europe (**Hungarian**, **Finnish**) and Siberia (**Mordvin**) with complex noun structures.

The Altaic Family

A family spread from Europe (**Turkish**) through Centra Asia (**Uzbek**), Mongolia (**Mongolian**), to the Far East (**Korean**, **Japanese**). These languages have the interesting property of vowel harmony.

The Sino-Tibetan Family

An important Asian family of languages that includes the world's most spoken language, **Mandarin**. These languages are monosyllabic and tonal.

The Malayo-Polynesian Family

A family consisting of over 1000 languages spread throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans as well South East Asia. Languages include **Malay**, **Indonesian**, **Maori** and **Hawaiian**.

The Afro-Asiatic Family

This family contains languages of northern Africa and the Middle East. The dominant languages are **Arabic** and **Hebrew**.

The Caucasian Family

A family based around the Caucas Mountains between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. **Georgian** and **Chechen** are the main languages. They are known for their large number of consonants.

The Dravidian Family

The languages of southern India (in contrast to the Indo-European languages of northern India). **Tamil** is the best known of these languages.

Austro-Asiatic Family

This family are a scattered group of languages in Asia. They are found from eastern India to Vietnam. Languages include **Vietnamese** and **Khmer**.

Niger-Congo Family

This family features the many languages of Africa south of the Sahara. The large number of languages include **Swahili**, **Shona**, **Xhosa** and **Zulu**.

Other Language Families

Other Families (Summary)

There are over 100 language families in the world. This section looks at some of them including **Nilo-Saharan**, **Koisan**, **Eskimo-Aleut**, **Iroquoian**, **Uto-Aztecan**, **Mayan**, and Independent languages which are unrelated to others.

*The Present and Future

In 2003, the total number of languages in the world was estimated to be 6,809. 90% of these languages are spoken by less than 100,000 people. Between 200 and 150 languages are spoken by more than a million people. There are 357 languages which have less than 50 speakers. The **Cambap** language (Central Cameroon) has 30 speakers; the **Leco** language (Bolivian Andes) has about 20 speakers. **Mati Ke** (in northern Australia) had four speakers in 2003. A total of 46 languages have just a single speaker. Unfortunately, with the onset of mass communications (rapid flights, radio, television, telephone, the internet), many of the smaller languages are in real danger of extinction. With their passing, a unique cultural way of looking at the world disappears with them. The linguist, **Edward Sapir**, wrote:

"No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The words in which different cultures live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached".

Over the last 500 years 4.5% of the world's described languages have disappeared. In North America, 52 of the 176 languages have become extinct since 1600. In Australia, 31 of the 235 languages have gone. Even so, some countries and regions are still rich in linguistic diversity. Mexico has 52 languages spoken within its borders. The old USSR (Soviet Union) had 100. Nigeria has over 400. The island of Papua New Guinea has over 700, virtually a different one in each valley. India has over 800 languages in several families (Indo-European, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic).

*English Development

Over the last 2,000 years or so, English has undergone extensive changes

History of the English language

English is primarily a West Germanic language that originated from the Anglo-Frisian dialects and was brought to Britain by Germanic invaders or settlers from what is now called North West Germany and the Netherlands. It uses a vocabulary unlike other European languages of the same era. A large portion of the modern English vocabulary came from the Anglo-Norman languages. English is considered a "borrowing" language.

Middle English differed from Old English because of two invasions which occurred during the Middle Ages. The first invasion was by people who spoke North Germanic languages. They conquered and colonised parts of Britain during the 8th and 9th centuries AD. The second invasion was by the Normans of the 11th century, who spoke Old Norman and eventually developed an English form of this, called Anglo-Norman. A new vocabulary introduced at this time heavily influenced many organizations including the church, the court system and the government. European languages including German, Dutch, Latin and Ancient Greek influenced the English vocabulary during the Renaissance.

Old English initially was a diverse group of dialects, reflecting the varied origins of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Britain. The Late West Saxon dialect eventually became dominant. Written Old English of 1000 AD was similar to other Germanic languages such as Old High German and Old Norse in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Written Old English is relatively unintelligible today, in contrast to written Modern English and written Middle English. Close contact with the Scandinavians resulted in much grammatical simplification and lexical enrichment of the English language, which had been based on Anglo-Frisian. These changes did not reach South West England until the Norman invasion in 1066. Old English developed into a full-fledged literary language, based on the most common manner of speaking in London during the 13th century.
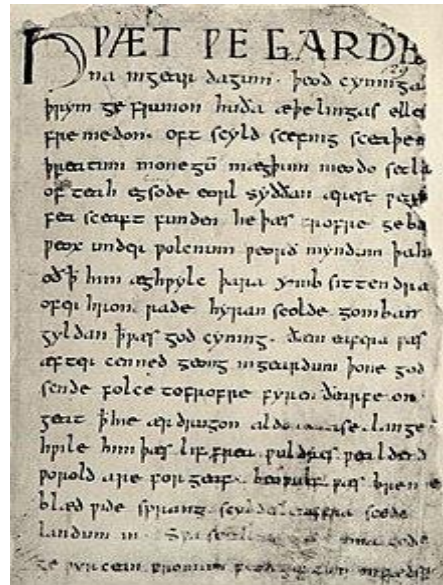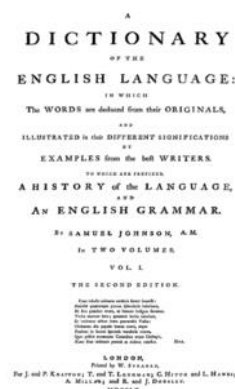
Old English – from the mid-5th century to the mid-11th century

Middle English – from the late 11th to the late 15th century

Early Modern English – from the late 15th to the late 17th century

Modern English – from the late 17th century to the present

The followings are some examples taken from the three periods:
Old and Middle English singular to the Modern English archaic informal

		Old English	**Middle English**	**Modern English**
Singular	Nominative	þū	þu / thou	thou (you)
	Accusative	þē / þeċ	þé / thee	thee (you)
	Dative	þē		
	Genitive	þīn	þi / þīn / þīne / thy /thin / thine	thy, thine (your, yours)
Plural	Nominative	ġē	ye / ȝe / you	
	Accusative	ēow / ēowiċ	you, ya	you
	Dative	ēow		
	Genitive	ēower	your	your, yours

Note that the ye/you distinction still existed, at least optionally, in Early Modern English: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" from the King James Bible.

Historic English text samples

Old English

Beowulf lines 1 to 11, approximately 900 AD

Hwæt! Wē Gār-Dena   in geārdagum,
þēodcyninga   þrym gefrūnon,
hū ðā æþelingas   ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scēfing sceaþena þrēatum,
monegum mǣgþum,   meodosetla oftēah,
egsode eorlas.   Syððan ǣrest wearð
fēasceaft funden, hē þæs frōfre gebād,
wēox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þāh,
oðþæt him ǣghwylc þāra ymbsittendra
ofer hronrāde   hȳran scolde,
gomban gyldan.   Þæt wæs gōd cyning!

Which, as translated by Francis Barton Gummere, reads:

Lo, praise of the prowess of people-kings
of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,
we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!
Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,
awing the earls. Since erst he lay
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:

for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,
till before him the folk, both far and near,
who house by the whale-path, heard his mandate,
gave him gifts: a good king he!

Here is a sample *prose* text, the beginning of *The Voyages of Ohthere* and *Wulfstan*. The full text can be found at [The Voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan](#), at [Wikisource](#).

Ōhthere sǣde his hlāforde, Ælfrēde cyninge, ðæt hē ealra Norðmonna norþmest būde. Hē cwæð þæt hē būde on þǣm lande norþweardum wiþ þā Westsǣ. Hē sǣde þeah þæt þæt land sīe swīþe lang norþ þonan; ac hit is eal wēste, būton on fēawum stōwum styccemǣlum wīciað Finnas, on huntoðe on wintra, ond on sumera on fiscaþe be þǣre sǣ. Hē sǣde þæt hē æt sumum cirre wolde fandian hū longe þæt land norþryhte lǣge, oþþe hwæðer ǣnig mon be norðan þǣm wēstenne būde. Þā fōr hē norþryhte be þǣm lande: lēt him ealne weg þæt wēste land on ðæt stēorbord, ond þā wīdsǣ on ðæt bæcbord þrīe dagas. Þā wæs hē swā feor norþ swā þā hwælhuntan firrest faraþ. Þā fōr hē þā giet norþryhte swā feor swā hē meahte on þǣm ōþrum þrīm dagum gesiglau. Þā bēag þæt land, þǣr ēastryhte, oþþe sēo sǣ in on ðæt lond, hē nysse hwæðer, būton hē wisse ðæt hē ðǣr bād westanwindes ond hwōn norþan, ond siglde ðā ēast be lande swā swā hē meahte on fēower dagum gesiglan. Þā sceolde hē ðǣr bīdan ryhtnorþanwindes, for ðǣm þæt land bēag þǣr sūþryhte, oþþe sēo sǣ in on ðæt land, hē nysse hwæþer. Þā siglde hē þonan sūðryhte be lande swā swā hē meahte on fīf dagum gesiglan. Ðā læg þǣr ān micel ēa ūp on þæt land. Ðā cirdon hīe ūp in on ðā ēa for þǣm hīe ne dorston forþ bī þǣre ēa siglan for unfriþe; for þǣm ðæt land wæs eall gebūn on ōþre healfe þǣre ēas. Ne mētte hē ǣr nān gebūn land, siþþan hē from his āgnum hām fōr; ac him wæs ealne weg wēste land on þæt stēorbord, būtan fiscerum ond fugelerum ond huntum, ond þæt wǣron eall Finnas; ond him wæs āwīdsǣ on þæt bæcbord. Þā Boermas heafdon sīþe wel gebūd hira land: ac hīe ne dorston þǣr on cuman. Ac þāra Terfinna land wæs eal wēste, būton ðǣr huntan gewīcodon, oþþe fisceras, oþþe fugeleras.

This may be translated as:

[Ohthere](#) said to his lord, [King Alfred](#), that he of all Norsemen lived north-most. He quoth that he lived in the land northward along the North Sea. He said though that the land was very long from there, but it is all wasteland, except that in a few places here and there Finns [i.e. [Sami](#)] encamp, hunting in winter and in summer fishing by the sea. He said that at some time he wanted to find out how long the land lay northward or whether any man lived north of the wasteland. Then he traveled north by the land. All the way he kept the waste land on his starboard and the wide sea on his port three days. Then he was as far north as whale hunters furthest travel. Then he traveled still north as far as he might sail in another three days. Then the land bowed east (or the sea into the land — he did not know which). But he knew that he waited there for west winds (and somewhat north), and sailed east by the land so as he might sail in four days. Then he had to wait for due-north winds, because the land bowed south (or the sea into the land — he did not know which). Then he sailed from there south by the land so as he might sail in five days. Then a large river lay there up into the land. Then they turned

up into the river, because they dared not sail forth past the river for hostility, because the land was all settled on the other side of the river. He had not encountered earlier any settled land since he travelled from his own home, but all the way waste land was on his starboard (except fishers, fowlers and hunters, who were all Finns). And the wide sea was always on his port. The Bjarmians have cultivated their land very well, but they did not dare go in there. But the Terfinn's land was all waste except where hunters encamped, or fishers or fowlers.[21]

Middle English

From *Ayenbyte of Inwit*, 1340:[22]

Nou ich wille þet ye ywite hou hit is ywent
þet þis boc is ywrite mid Engliss of Kent.
Þis boc is ymad vor lewede men
Vor vader and vor moder and vor oþer ken
ham vor to berȝe vram alle manyere zen
þet ine hare inwytte ne bleve no voul wen.
'Huo ase god' in his name yzed,
Þet þis boc made god him yeve þet bread,
Of angles of hevene, and þerto his red,
And ondervonge his zaule huanne þet he is dyad. Amen.

From *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, 14th century:

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open yë
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages),
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

Early Modern English

From *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, 1667:

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast

Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.

Modern English

Taken from *Oliver Twist*, 1838, by Charles Dickens:

The evening arrived: the boys took their places; the master in his cook's uniform stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out, and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared, the boys whispered each other and winked at Oliver, while his next neighbours nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger and reckless with misery. He rose from the table, and advancing, basin and spoon in hand, to the master, said, somewhat alarmed at his own temerity—