The Printing Press & English

Ling 390: The History of English

4 November 2020

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(IF YOU DON'T MIND)

Blog post #3

- Graded according to rubric in blog post guidelines document, on our website.

- Most points off were for updated/changed spellings (at least 3), not citing the text that was used, and using the wrong citation format.

- Some used undependable sources, e.g. dictionaries for other languages or Wikipedia, which led to some wrong definitions.

Before printing

- Texts were produced by hand, one-by-one, usually by monks, usually for a particular buyer. (Not mass produced.)

- These handwritten texts are manuscripts.

- Manuscripts were expensive. Owning one was often a status symbol.

From *Marvels of the East*, c. 1000 AD

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Scribe copying a manuscript, c. 1320. (Royal MS 14 E III)
The room where monks did this work was called the *scriptorium*.
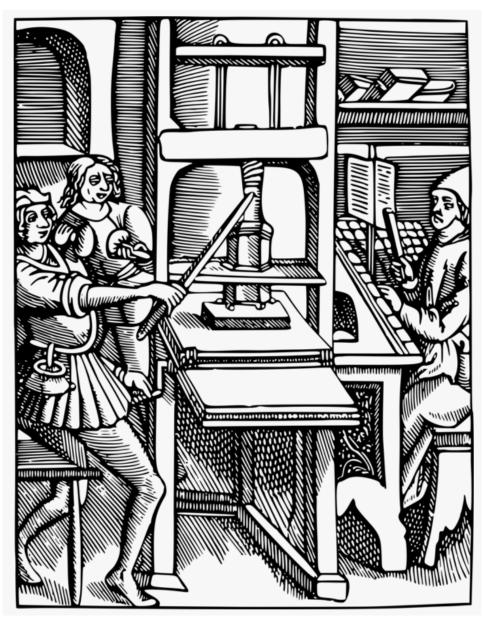
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Invention of Printing

- The printing press was invented by Johann Gutenberg in the 1450s, in Mainz, Germany.

- Movable type: Metal letter-forms arranged in what's essentially a giant stamp. (Origin of *typesetting*, i.e. setting type in the form.)

- Hugely influential – spread through Europe rapidly in the mid-late 15th century.

- Set the stage for growing literacy, language standardization, and various social movements (including the Protestant reformation, English Civil War, and witch-hunts).

Excerpt from the Gutenberg Bible, c. 1455. Note printed text + hand illustrations.

A printing press in use.

Printing and English

William Caxton, our hero.

- William Caxton, an English merchant, born in Kent about 1420.

- Worked in the Low Countries, modern-day Netherlands and Belgium, especially Bruges.

- Learned printing in Cologne/Köln, involved in printing *De Proprietatibus Rerum* in 1472.

- About 1473, printed the first English-language book in Ghent, *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy.*

- Set up England's first printing press in London in 1473. Printed over 100 books, many his own translations into English.

London, where he set up England's first printing press, 1476.

Kent, where Caxton was born, ~1420.

Bruges, where he often worked.

Cologne, where he learned to print, ~1470.

Ghent, where he printed *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*, 1473.

Note: This base map is anachronistic, showing 21st-century borders.

fayn wolde I satysfye euery man/ and so to doo toke an olde boke and redde therin/ and certaynly the englysshe was so rude and brood that I coude not wele understande it. And also my lorde abbot of Westmynster ded do shewe to me late certain euydences wryton in olde englysshe for to reduce it in to our englysshe now usid/And certaynly it was wreton in suche wyse that it was more lyke to dutche than englysshe I coude not reduce ne brynge it to be understonden/ And certaynly our language now used varyeth ferce from that. Which was used and spoken whan I was borne/ For we englysshe men/ben borne under the domynacyon of the mone. whiche is neuer stedfaste/but euer wauerynge/wexynge one season/ and waneth & dycreaseth another season/ And that comyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from a nother. In so moche that in my dayes happened that certayn marchaũtes were in a ship in tamyse for to haue sayled ouer the see into zelande/ and for lacke of wynde thei taryed atte forlond. and wente to lande for to refreshe them And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam in to an hows and axed for mete. and specyally he axyd after eggys And the goode wyf answerde that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaũt was angry. for he also coude speke no frenshe. But wolde haue hadde egges/ and she understode hym not/ And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren/ then the good wyf sayd that she understod hym wel/ Loo what sholde a man in thyse dayes now wryt. egges or eyren/ certaynly it is harde to playse euery man/ by cause of dyversite & chaũge of langage. For in these dayes euery man this is in ony reputacyon in his coũtre. wyll utter his cõmynycacyon and maters in suche maners & termes that fewe men shall understone theym

From the preface to *Eneydos,* Caxton's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid,* 1490.

Print's role in language standardization

- Printed books flip the old standard. Now, you mass produce books, and find buyers.

- With printing, you need to find a form that is acceptable to a diversity of readers, as Caxton's prologue to *Eneydos* shows.

- Literacy expanded with broader access to print materials.

- People come to see texts as primary, oral language as secondary. (Sense of written English as 'real' English, and spoken English as something inferior.)

- This contributed to a broader standardization of the language, internationally.

Print & orthography

- Caxton and the printers who followed him based their spellings on late medieval manuscripts, <u>not</u> contemporary pronunciations, even though the great vowel shift had already taken place (Algeo 2009: 141). This transformed the sounds that many English letters represented.

- Type was often imported from the continent, where innovative English letters never occurred. This led to the demise of þ (thorn) and ȝ (yogh).

- þ became *th* in virtually all contexts, but *y* in 'ye', as in 'ye olde'

- ȝ became *gh* in most contexts, but *z* in Scottish, e.g. in the surname Menzies [mɪŋɪs] (because ȝ looks a lot like ʒ, a variant form of *z*)

What kinds of printed works were there?

- What kind of print materials did you work with on blog post 3?

- Bible, plays, pamphlets, broadsides, romances, almanacs, remedies, histories, works of natural history

Blog Post #4

- Due by 6:30pm on Wednesday, 11 November.

- Write an introduction to your topic. Your introduction should set the scene for what your topic is, what you are going to say about it in the final paper, and how you are going to go about doing it. Include reference to at least three sources. You may include the sources you referred to in blog post #3, or you may refer to new sources. Citations should follow the USS standard. Your introduction should be at least 300 words long. This may be used as the introduction for your final paper.

- See the final paper guidelines, on our class site, for more information on how to write an effective introduction.