What were the main standardizing forces that led to the emergence of Standard English?

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The Making of Modern English
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Overview

● Middle English Varieties

● Rise of Standard English
  • Why did a Standard Variety Rise?
  • How Was the Standard Variety Established?

● Conclusion
Varieties of English c.1400

- Varieties of Middle English in different parts of England
- There was variety in both spoken and written language
- During the Middle English period there was not a recognized literary standard so writers used their own dialect
Varieties of English

- Five main dialects:
  - Northern
  - East Midlands (London)
  - West Midlands
  - Southern
  - South-Eastern
Rise of Standard English

- Towards the end of the 14th century emerged a written and spoken language that became standard during the 15th century.

- It had as a basis the East Midlands English dialect, specially that of the metropolis, London.
Why did a Standard Variety Rise?

• The standard language was not established by the government or any official institution or body

• People had communication difficulties due to the big variations in language (e.g. flower: flower, floor, flour...)

• English became the language of the nation and took over French and Latin in some fields

• The work of Chaucer and the Bible translations by John Wycliffe.

• Influence of London as capital and economic centre
How Was the Standard Variety Established?

- Chancery Standard
- Chaucer and the Bible
- The East Midlands Dialect
Chancery Standard

- It was a written form of English that the government used because a clear and unambiguous variant of the language was required to use in official documents.
- It was developed during the reign of Henry V (1413-1422) and broadly standardized by the 1430s.
- It was based mostly in the London and East Midlands dialects. Political and Demographic prominence
Chancery Standard

• It was spread through England by bureaucrats and gained prestige.

• Although there was variation in Chancery Standard, it provided a widely-intelligible form of English for the first printers in the 15th century.

• By the middle of the 15th century it was used in all contexts except in the Church (Latin) and some legal matters (French and Latin).
Chaucer and the Bible

- The work of Chaucer and the first translation of the Bible by John Wycliffe have been called "incipient standards".
- Internal consistency in usage.
- These works were read in places outside their place of origin.
- This helped people to get used to supra-local texts in which features of other dialects appeared.
The East Midlands Dialect

- Both Chancery Standard, Chaucer and the Bible used the East Midland Dialect
- The East Midlands district was the largest and more populous of the major dialectal areas
- Prosperity in agriculture.
- Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.
- Middle position between South and North.
  - Therefore it shared features with both dialects groups and did not have extreme divergences. Easy to learn and understand
The East Midlands Dialect: London

- As the capital of England, London was the centre of political and commercial matters in England.

- Seat of the court and the highest judical tribunals

- Focus of social and intellectual activities of the country

- Migrations that helped spread features of London dialect and, at the same time, influenced it
The Spread of the London Standard

• By the end of the 15th century London English as Standard English was accepted in most parts of the country, at least in writing.
  • Correspondence and local records
  • Documents of the national bureaucracy
• After 1450 it was difficult to tell the region in which a text was written
• There was still diversity in Spoken English
Conclusion

• During the 15th century a Standard English emerged from London English thanks to different factors.

• However, it has to be born in mind that there was not a complete standardisation of the language at all. This process would be much longer, around 400 years, until the publication of Dr Johnson's Dictionary in 1755.
The End

Thank you
Bibliography


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