EVOLUTION OF THE GRAMMATICAL SYSTEM FROM THE 11TH TO 18TH C.

In the course of ME and Early NE the grammatical system of the language underwent profound alteration. Since the OE period the very grammatical type of the language has changed; from what can be defined as a **synthetic or inflected language**, with a well -developed morphology English has been transformed into a language of the **analytical type**, with analytical forms and ways of word connection prevailing over synthetic ones. This does not mean, however, that the grammatical changes were rapid or sudden; nor does it imply that all grammatical features were in a state of perpetual change. Like the development of other linguistic levels, the history of English grammar was a complex evolutionary process made up of stable and changeable constituents. Some grammatical characteristics remained absolutely or relatively stable; others were subjected to more or less extensive modification.

Between the 10th and the 16th c., that is from Late OE to Early NE the ways of building up grammatical forms underwent considerable changes. In OE all the forms which can be included into morphological paradigms were synthetic. In ME and Early NE, grammatical forms could also be built in the analytical way, with the help of auxiliary words. The proportion of synthetic forms in the language has become very small, for in the meantime many of the old synthetic forms have been lost and no new synthetic forms have developed.

In the synthetic forms of the ME and Early NE periods, few as those forms were, the means of form building were the same as before: inflections, sound interchanges and suppletion; only prefixation, namely the prefix **ȝe**-, which was commonly used in OE to mark Participle II, went out of use in Late ME (instances of Participle II with the prefix **y**- (from OE **ȝ**e-) are still found in Chaucer's time (see Line 8 of the extract from the CANTERBURY TALES).

Inflections – or grammatical suffixes and endings – continued to be used in all the inflected ("changeable") parts of speech. It is notable, however, that as compared with the OE period they became less varied. As mentioned before the OE period of history has been described as a period of "**full endings**", ME – as a period of "**levelled endings**" and NE – as a period of "**lost endings**" (H. Sweet). In OE there existed a variety of distinct endings differing in consonants as well as in vowels. In ME all the vowels in the endings were reduced to the neutral **ə** and many consonants were levelled under -**n** or dropped. The process of levelling – besides phonetic weakening – implies replacement of inflections **by analogy**, e.g. -**(e)s** as a marker of plural forms of nouns displaced the endings -**(e)n** and -**e**. In the transition to NE most of the grammatical endings were dropped.

Nevertheless, these definitions of the state of inflections in the three main historical periods are not quite precise. It is known that the weakening and dropping of endings began a long time before – in Early OE and even in Proto-Germanic; on the other hand, some of the

old grammatical endings have survived to this day.

The analytical way of form-building was a new device, which developed in Late OE and ME and came to occupy a most important place in the grammatical system. Analytical forms developed from free word groups (phrases, syntactical constructions). The first component of these phrases gradually weakened or even lost its lexical meaning and turned into a grammatical marker, while the second component retained its lexical meaning and acquired a new grammatical value in the compound form.

The main direction of development for the **nominal parts of speech** in all the periods of history can be defined as morphological simplification. Simplifying changes began in prehistoric, PG times. They continued at a slow rate during the OE period and were intensified in Early ME. The period between c. 1000 and 1300 has been called an "**age of great changes**", for it witnessed one of the greatest events in the history of English grammar: the decline and transformation of the nominal morphological system. Some nominal categories were lost – Gender and Case in adjectives, Gender in nouns; the number of forms distinguished in the surviving categories was reduced – cases in nouns and noun-pronouns, numbers in personal pronouns. **Morphological division into types of declension practically disappeared**. In Late ME the adjective lost the last vestiges of the old paradigm: the distinction of number and the distinction of weak and strong forms.

Already at the time of Chaucer, and certainly by the age of Caxton the English nominal system was very much like modern, not only in its general pattern but also in minor details.

The evolution of the **verb system** was a far more complicated process; it cannot be described in terms of one general trend. On the one hand, the decay of inflectional endings affected the verb system, though to a lesser extent than the nominal system. The simplification and levelling of forms made the verb conjugation more regular and uniform; the OE morphological classification of verbs was practically broken up. On the other hand, the paradigm of the verb grew, as new grammatical forms and distinctions came into being. The number of verbal grammatical categories increased, as did the number of forms within the categories. The verb acquired the categories of Voice, Time Correlation and Aspect. Within the category of Tense there developed a new form – the Future Tense; in the category of Mood there arose new forms of the Subjunctive. These changes involved the non-finite forms too, for the infinitive and the participle, having lost many nominal features, developed verbal features: they acquired new analytical forms and new categories like the finite verb. It is noteworthy that, unlike the changes in the nominal system, the new developments in the verb system were not limited to a short span of two or three hundred years. They extended over a long period: from Late OE till Late NE. Even in the age of Shakespeare the verb system was in some respects different from that of Mod E and many changes were still underway.

Other important events in the history of English grammar were the changes in **syntax**, which

were associated with the transformation of English morphology but at the same time displayed their own specific tendencies and directions. The main changes at the syntactical level were: the rise of new syntactic patterns of the word phrase and the sentence; the growth of predicative constructions; the development of the complex sentences and of diverse means of connecting clauses. Syntactic changes are mostly observable in Late ME and in NE, in periods of literary efflorescence.

THE NOUN. Decay of Noun Declensions in Early Middle English

The OE noun had the grammatical categories of Number and Case which were formally distinguished in an elaborate system of declensions. However, homonymous forms in the OE noun paradigms neutralized some of the grammatical oppositions; similar endings employed in different declensions – as well as the influence of some types upon other types – disrupted the grouping of nouns into morphological classes.

Increased variation of the noun forms in the late 10th c. and especially in the 11th and 12th c. testifies to impending changes and to a strong tendency toward a re-arrangement and simplification of the declensions. The most numerous OE morphological classes of nouns were **a-stems, o-stems and n-stems.** Even in Late OE the endings used in these types were added by analogy to other kinds of nouns, especially if they belonged to the same gender. That is how the noun declensions tended to be re-arranged on the basis of gender.

The decline of the OE declension system lasted over three hundred years and revealed considerable dialectal differences. It started in the North of England and gradually spread southwards. The decay of inflectional endings in the Northern dialects began as early as the 10th c. and was virtually completed in the 11th; in the Midlands the process extended over the 12th c., while in the Southern dialects it lasted till the end of the 13th (in the dialect of Kent, the old inflectional forms were partly preserved even in the 14th c.).

In Late ME, when the Southern traits were replaced by Central and Northern traits in the dialect of London, this pattern of noun declensions prevailed in literary English. The declension of nouns in the age of Chaucer, in its main features, was the same as in Mod E. The simplification of noun morphology was on the whole completed. Most nouns distinguished two forms: the basic form (with the "zero" ending) and the form in -(e)s. The nouns originally descending from other types of declensions for the most part had joined this major type, which had developed from Masc. **a-stems**.

Simplification of noun morphology affected the grammatical categories of the noun in different ways and to a varying degree. The OE **Gender**, being a classifying feature (and not a grammatical category proper) disappeared together with other distinctive features of the noun declensions. In Chaucer's time gender is a lexical category, like in Mod E.

The grammatical category of **Case** was preserved but the number of cases in the noun paradigm was reduced from four (distinguished in OE) to two in Late ME. The syncretism of cases was a slow process which went on step by step. The gradual reduction of the case-system

is shown in the following chart below:

OE	Early ME	Late ME and NE
Nominative		
	Common	
Accusative		Common
Dative	Dative	
Genitive	Genitive	Genitive

The reduction in the number of cases was linked up with a change in the meanings and functions of the surviving forms. The Common case, which resulted from the fusion of three OE cases assumed all the functions of the former Nom., Acc. and Dat., and also some functions of the Gen. The ME Common case had a very general meaning, which was made more specific by the context: prepositions, the meaning of the verb predicate, the word order. With the help of these means it could express various meanings formerly belonging to different cases.

The history of the **Gen. case** requires special consideration. Though it survived as a distinct form, its use became more limited: unlike OE it could not be employed in the function of an object to a verb or to an adjective. In ME the Gen. case is used only attributively, to modify a noun, but even in this function it has a rival – prepositional phrases, above all the phrases with the **preposition of**. The practice to express genitival relations by the of-phrase goes back to OE. It is not uncommon in Ælfric's writings (10th c.), but its regular use instead of the inflectional Gen. does not become established until the 12th c. The use of the **of-phrase** grew rapidly in the 13th and 14th c. In some texts there appears a certain differentiation between the synonyms: the inflectional Gen. is preferred with animate nouns, while the of-phrase is more widely used with inanimate ones.

The other grammatical category of the noun, **Number** proved to be the most stable of all the nominal categories. The noun preserved the formal distinction of two numbers through all the historical periods. Increased variation in Early ME did not obliterate number distinctions. On the contrary, it showed that more uniform markers of the plural spread by analogy to different morphological classes of nouns, and thus strengthened the formal differentiation of number. In Late ME the ending **-es** was the prevalent marker of nouns in the plural. In Early NE it extended to more nouns – to the new words of the growing English vocabulary and to many words, which built their plural in a different way in ME or employed -es as one of the variant endings.

The ME plural ending **-en**, used as a variant marker with some nouns (and as the main marker in the weak declension in the Southern dialects) lost its former productivity, so that in Standard Mod E it is found only in **oxen, brethern, and children**.

Demonstrative Pronouns. Development of Articles

Demonstrative pronouns were adjective-pronouns; like other adjectives, in OE they agreed with the noun in case, number and gender and had a well-developed morphological paradigm. In Early ME the OE demonstrative pronouns **sē, sēo, þæt** and **þes, þēos, þis** – lost most of their inflected forms: out of seventeen forms each retained only two. The ME descendants of these pronouns are **that** and **this.** The development of the demonstrative pronouns **sē, sēo, þæt** led to the formation of the definite article. This development is associated with a change in form and meaning. In OE texts the pronouns **sē, sēo, þæt** were frequently used as noun determiners with a weakened meaning, approaching that of the modern definite article. In the manuscripts of the 11th and 12th c. this use of the demonstrative pronoun becomes more and more common. In the course of ME there arose an important formal difference between the demonstrative pronoun and the definite article: as a demonstrative pronoun **that** preserved number distinctions whereas as a definite article – usually in the weakened form **the** - it was uninflected.

In the 14th c. the article had lost all traces of inflection and became a short unaccented form-word. The meaning and functions of the definite article became more specific when it came to be opposed to the **indefinite article**, which had developed from the **OE numeral one**.

The use of articles in the age of Chaucer is often similar to what we find in English today; e. g.:

A knyght ther was, and that **a** worthy man
("There was a knight, and (he was) a worthy man')
Whan **the** sonne was to reste
("When the sun set (lit. "was at rest")")

It is believed that the growth of articles in Early ME was caused, or favoured, by several internal linguistic factors. The development of the definite article is usually connected with the changes in the declension of adjectives, namely with the loss of distinctions between the strong and weak forms. Originally the weak forms of adjectives had a certain demonstrative meaning resembling that of the modern definite article. These forms were commonly used together with the demonstrative pronouns **sē, sēo, þæt**. In contrast to weak forms, the strong forms of adjectives conveyed the meaning of "indefiniteness" which was later transferred to **an**, a numeral and indefinite pronoun. In case the nouns were used without adjectives or the weak and strong forms coincided, the form-words **an** and **þæt** turned out to be the only means of expressing these meanings. The decay of adjective declensions speeded up their transition into articles.

Another factor which may account for the more regular use of articles was the changing function of the word order. Relative freedom in the position of words in the OE sentence made it possible to use word order for communicative purposes, e. g. to present a new thing or to

refer to a familiar thing already known to the listener. After the loss of inflections, the word order assumed a grammatical function – it showed the grammatical relations between words in the sentence; now the parts of the sentence, e. g. the subject or the objects, had their own fixed places. Accordingly, the communicative functions passed to the articles and their use became more regular.

The growth of the articles is thus connected both with the changes in syntax and in morphology.

THE ADJECTIVE

Decay of Declensions and Grammatical Categories

In the course of the ME period the adjective underwent greater simplifying changes than any other part of speech. It lost all its grammatical categories with the exception of the degrees of comparison.

In OE the adjective was declined to show the gender, case and number of the noun it modified; it had a five-case paradigm and two types of declension, weak and strong.

By the end of the OE period the agreement of the adjective with the noun had become looser and in the course of Early ME it was practically lost. Though the grammatical categories of the adjective reflected those of the noun, most of them disappeared even before the noun lost the respective distinctions.

The geographical direction of the changes was generally the same as in the noun declensions. The process began in the North and North East Midlands and spread south.

In the 14th c. the difference between the strong and weak form is sometimes shown in the singular with the help of the ending **-e**. In the age of Chaucer the paradigm of the adjective consisted of four forms distinguished by a single vocalic ending **-e**.

Degrees of Comparison

The degrees of comparison is the only set of forms which the adjective has preserved through all historical periods. However, the means employed to build up the forms of the degrees of comparison have considerably altered.

In OE the forms of the comparative and the superlative degree, like all the grammatical forms, were synthetic: they were built by adding the suffixes **-ra** and **-est/-ost**, to the form of the positive degree. Sometimes suffixation was accompanied by an interchange of the root-vowel; a few adjectives had suppletive forms.

In ME the degrees of comparison could be built in the same way, only the suffixes had been weakened to **-er**, **-est** and the interchange of the root-vowel was less common than before. Since most adjectives with the sound alternation had parallel forms without it, the forms with an interchange soon fell into disuse.

The most important innovation in the adjective system in the ME period was the growth of analytical forms of the degrees of comparison.

The new system of comparisons emerged in ME, but the ground for it had already been prepared by the use of the OE adverbs **mā, bet, betst, swiþor** — 'more', 'better', 'to a greater degree' with adjectives and participles. It is noteworthy that in ME, when the phrases with ME **more** and **most** became more and more common, they were used with all kinds of adjective, regardless of the number of syllables and were even preferred with mono- and disyllabic words.

It appears that in the course of history the adjective has lost all the **dependent** grammatical categories but has preserved the only specifically **adjectival category** - the comparison. The adjective is the only nominal part of speech which makes use of the new, analytical, way of form-building.

THE VERB

Unlike the morphology of the noun and adjective, which has become much simpler in the course of history, the morphology of the verb displayed two distinct tendencies of development: it underwent considerable simplifying changes, which affected the synthetic forms and became far more complicated owing to the growth of new, analytical forms and new grammatical categories. The evolution of the finite and non-finite forms of the verb is described below under these two trends.

SIMPLIFYING CHANGES IN THE VERB CONJUGATION

Finite Forms. Number, Person, Mood and Tense

The decay of OE inflections, which transformed the nominal system, is also apparent in the conjugation of the verb – though to a lesser extent. Many markers of the grammatical forms of the verb were reduced, levelled and lost in ME and Early NE; the reduction, levelling and loss of endings resulted in the increased neutralization of formal oppositions and the growth of homonymy. The simplifying changes in the verb morphology affected the distinction of the grammatical categories to a varying degree.

Number distinctions were not only preserved in ME but even became more consistent and regular; towards the end of the period, however, - in the 15th c. - they were neutralized in most positions.

In the 13th and 14th c. the ending -**en** turned into the main, almost universal, marker of the plural forms of the verb: it was used in both tenses of the Indicative and Subjunctive moods. The ending -**en** was frequently missed out in the late 14th c. and was dropped in the 15th; the Past tense stems of the strong verbs merged into one form (e. g. *found, wrote*). All number distinctions were thus lost with the exception of the 2nd and 3rd p., Pres. tense Indic. mood: the singular forms were marked by the endings -**eth /-es** and were formally opposed to the forms of the plural. Compare the forms of the verb with the subject in the plural in the 14th

and the 17th c.:

Thanne **longen** folk to goon on pilgrimages. (Chaucer)
(Then folks long to go on pilgrimages.')
All men **make** faults. (Shakespeare)

The differences in the forms of **Person** were maintained in ME, though they became more variable. The OE endings of the 3rd p. sg merged into a single ending **-(e)th.**

The variant ending of the 3rd p. **-es** was a new marker first recorded in the Northern dialects. It is believed that **-s** was borrowed from the plural forms which commonly ended in **-es** in the North; it spread to the singular and began to be used as a variant in the 2nd and 3rd p., but later was restricted to the 3rd.

In Chaucer's works we still find the old ending **-eth**. Shakespeare uses both forms, but forms in **-s** begin to prevail. Cf.:

He **rideth** out of halle. (Chaucer)
('He rides out of the hall')
My life ... **sinks** down to death. (Shakespeare) but also:
But beauty's waste **hath** in the world an end. (Shakespeare)

In Shakespeare's sonnets the number of **-s**-forms by far exceeds that of **–eth** forms, though some short verbs, especially auxiliaries, take - th*:* **hath**, **doth**. Variation of **–s /-eth** is found in poetry in the 17th and 18th c. In the early 18th c. **-(e)s** was more common in private letters than in official and literary texts, but by the end of the century it was the dominant inflection of the 3rd p. singular in all forms of speech. (The phonetic development of the verb ending **-(e)s** since the ME period is similar to the development of **-(e)s** as a noun ending. The use of **-eth** was stylistically restricted to high poetry and religious texts.

The ending **-(e)st** of the 2nd p. singular became obsolete together with the pronoun **thou**. The replacement of **thou** by **you/ye** eliminated the distinction of person in the verb paradigm - with the exception of the 3rd p. singular of the Present tense.

CHANGES IN THE MORPHOLOGICAL CLASSES OF VERBS

The historical changes in the ways of building the principal forms of the verb ("stems") transformed the morphological classification of the verbs. The OE division into classes of weak and strong verbs was completely re-arranged and broken up. Most verbs have adopted the way of form-building employed by the weak verbs: the dental suffix. The strict classification of the strong verbs, with their regular system of form-building, degenerated. In the long run all these changes led to increased regularity and uniformity and to the development of a more consistent and simple system of building the principal forms of the verb.

The seven classes of OE strong verbs underwent multiple grammatical and phonetic

changes. There was a strong tendency to make the system of forms more regular. The strong verbs were easily influenced by analogy. The most important change in the system of strong verbs was the reduction in the number of stems from four to three, by removing the distinction between the two past tense stems. These circumstances facilitated analogical levelling, which occurred largely in Late ME.

One of the most important events in the history of the strong verbs was their transition into weak. In ME and Early NE many strong verbs began to form their Past and Participle II with the help of the dental suffix instead of vowel gradation. Therefore the number of strong verbs decreased. In OE there were about three hundred strong verbs. Some of them dropped out of use owing to changes in the vocabulary, while most of the remaining verbs became weak. Out of 195 OE strong verbs, preserved in the language, only 67 have retained strong forms with root vowel interchanges roughly corresponding to the OE gradation series

By that time the weak verbs had lost all distinctions between the forms of the Past tense and Participle II - small as these distinctions were. The model of the weak verbs, with two basic forms, may have influenced the strong verbs.

The evolution of the **weak verbs** in ME and in Early NE reveals a strong tendency towards greater regularity and order. The formal distinction between three classes of weak verbs disappeared. The development of the inflection -**(e)de** in Early NE shows the origins of the modern variants of the forms of the Past tense and Participle II in standard verbs. The marker of the Past tense and Participle II employed by the weak verbs - the dental suffix –**d /-t** – proved to be very productive in all historical periods. This simple and regular way of form-building, employed by the majority of OE verbs, attracted hundreds of new verbs in ME and NE. As mentioned above, many former strong verbs began to build weak forms alongside strong ones, the strong forms ultimately falling into disuse. The productivity of this device is borne out by the fact that practically all the borrowed verbs and all the newly-formed verbs in ME and NE built their Past tense and Participle II on the model of weak verb.

DEVELOPMENT OF NEW GRAMMATICAL FORMS AND CATEGORIES OF THE VERB

The evolution of the verb system in the course of history was not confined to the simplification of the conjugation and to growing regularity in building the forms of the verb. In ME and NE the verb paradigm expanded, owing to the addition of new grammatical forms and to the formation of new grammatical categories. The extent of these changes can be seen from a simple comparison of the number of categories and categorial forms in Early OE with their number today. Leaving out of consideration Number and Person – as categories of concord with the Subject – we can say that OE finite verbs had two verbal grammatical categories proper: Mood and Tense. According to Mod E grammars the finite verb has five categories – Mood, Tense, Aspect, Time-Correlation and Voice. All the new forms which have

been included in the verb paradigm are analytical forms; all the synthetic forms are direct descendants of OE forms, for no new synthetic categorial forms have developed since the OE period.

Development of the Future Tense

In the OE language there was no form of the Future tense. The category of Tense consisted of two members: Past and Present. The Pres. tense could indicate both present and future actions, depending on the context. Alongside this form there existed other ways of presenting future happenings: modal phrases, consisting of the verbs **sculan, willan, magan, cunnan** and others (NE **shall, will, may, can**) and the Infinitive of the notional verb. In these phrases the meaning of futurity was combined with strong modal meanings of volition, obligation, possibility.

In ME the use of modal phrases, especially with the verb **shall**, became increasingly common. In Late ME texts **shall** was used both as a modal verb and as a Future tense auxiliary.

In the age of Shakespeare the phrases with **shall** and **will**, as well as the Pres. tense of notional verbs, occurred in free variation; they can express "pure" futurity and add different shades of modal meanings. Phrases with **shall** and **will** outnumbered all the other ways of indicating futurity.

The change of **shall** and **will** into form-words is to be found in the rules of usage in the grammars of the 17th-18th c.

Passive Forms. Category of Voice

In OE the finite verb had no category of Voice. The analytical passive forms developed from OE verb phrases consisting of OE **beon** (NE to be) and **weorþan** (become') and Participle II of transitive verbs. In ME **beon** plus Past Participle developed into an analytical form. Now it could express not only a state but also an action. The formal pattern of the Passive Voice extended to many parts of the verb paradigm: it is found in the Future tense, in the Perf. forms, in the Subj. Mood and in the non-finite forms of the verb, e.g. Chaucer has:

... the conseil that **was accorded** by youre neighebores
("The advice that **was given** by your neighbours')
But certes, wikkidnesse **shal be warisshed** by goodnesse.
(“But, certainly, wickedness **shall be cured** by goodness.')

Thus in ME the Passive forms were regularly contrasted to the active forms throughout the paradigm, both formally and semantically. Therefore we can say that the verb had acquired a new grammatical category - the category of Voice.

The wide use of various passive constructions in the 18th and 19th c. testifies to the high productivity of the Passive Voice. At the same time the Passive Voice continued to spread to new parts of the verb paradigm: the Gerund and the Continuous forms.

Perfect Forms. Category of Time-Correlation

Like other analytical forms of the verb, the Perfect forms have developed from OE verb phrases. The main source of the Perfect form was the OE "possessive" construction, consisting of the verb **habban** (NE **have**), a direct object and Pariciple. II of a transitive verb, which served as an attribute to the object.

Towards ME the verb phrases turned into analytical forms and made up a single set of forms termed "perfect". In the Perfect form the auxiliary **have** had lost the meaning of possession and was used with all kinds of verbs, without restriction. **Have** was becoming a universal auxiliary. By the age of the Literary Renaissance the perfect forms had spread to all the parts of the verb system, so that ultimately the category of time correlation became the most universal of verbal categories.

Continuous Forms. Category of Aspect

The development of Aspect is linked up with the growth of the Continuous forms. In the OE verb system there was no category of Aspect; verbal prefixes especially **ȝe**-, which could express an aspective meaning of perfectivity in the opinion of most scholars, were primarily word-building prefixes. The growth of Continuous forms was slow and uneven.

Verb phrases consisting of **bēon** (NE **to be**) plus Part. I are not infrequently found in OE prose. They denoted a quality, or a lasting state, characterizing the person or thing indicated by the subject of the sentence.

In the 17th c. the semantic difference between the Continuous and non-Continuous forms is not always apparent. It was not until the 18th c. that the Continuous forms acquired a specific meaning of their own; to use modern definitions, that of incomplete concrete process of limited duration. Only at that stage the Continuous and non-Continuous made up a new grammatical category – Aspect. By that time the formal pattern of the Continuous as an analytical form was firmly established. The Continuous forms were used in all genres and dialects. They had extended to many parts of the verb system, being combined with other forms. Thus the Future Continuous is attested in the Northern texts since the end of the 13th c.; the first unambiguous instances of the Perfect Continuous are recorded in Late ME.

Word Order

In ME and Early NE the order of words in the sentence underwent noticeable changes: it has become fixed and direct: subject plus predicate plus object (S+P+0) or subject plus the notional part of the predicate (the latter type was used mainly in questions).

Stabilization of the word order was a slow process, which took many hundreds of years: from Early ME until the 16th or 17th c. The fixation of the word order proceeded together with reduction and loss of inflectional endings, the two developments being intertwined;

though syntactic changes were less intensive and less rapid. They may have been delayed by the break in the written tradition after the Norman conquest and by the general unsettling of the grammatical system during the Early ME dialectal divergence, whereas morphological changes may have been intensified for these very reasons.

Though the word order in Late ME may appear relatively free, several facts testify to its growing stability. The practice of placing the verb-predicate at the end of a subordinate clause had been abandoned, so was the type of word order with the object placed between the Subject and the Predicate.

In the 17th and 18th c. the order of words in the sentence was generally determined by the same rules as operate in English today.