Morphological Changes in English between 17th and 20th Century

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at exploring morphological changes in English language from 16th to 20th century as represented in the works of William Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice" of 17th century and George Bernard Shaw's play "Arms and the Man" of 20th century. Using literature review as a primary source of data collection, the study found morphological changes of different types over the period of time.

Keywords: Morphological change, 17th Century, 18th century

Introduction

Many speakers of English find that reading a text written by Shakespeare is not as easy to read as a text written in the twentieth century. Reading a text is a meeting of minds and when the minds are separated by 400 years, there are some difficulties, and these difficulties could be at any level semantics, phonology, syntax and morphology. This study focuses on morphological changing in English from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. It focuses on the morphological changes between these centuries as represented in a sample play from both the century.

Literature Review

Late Modern English aggregated many new words as a result of two main historical aspects: the Industrial Revolution, which required new terms for new inventions and concepts that had not previously existed; and the rise of the British Empire, during which time English adopted many foreign words and added them to its own dictionary. Early Modern English is characterized by more loss of inflections. There are both adopts and losses in the morphological patterns such as, the loss of the second person singular pronoun *thou*, which was replaced by the by the plural form *you*. English borrowed many words and suffixes from other languages as a result of language contact.

For example, the suffix–*ment* from Latin and attached it to many English roots

e.g., *establish.........establishment*

The importance of studying morphological changes stems from the consequences of change for fully understanding texts that are separated by four centuries. Morphological analysis illuminating information about the history and the rules of forming English words. Since language continuously changes, words and their structures are aspects that appear to the reader and listener.

As languages change and English is a language, the phenomenon applies to it. English roots go back to its Germanic origin in Germany. But since the eighth century it has undergone both internally and externally induced changes. Externally induced changes resulted from its being the target of invasion by other groups speaking other languages, Norse, Scandinavian languages, and Norman French. In the age of discovery and later colonization around the world, it comes in contact with speakers of other language in the new territories. Added to these changes, is the change from inside

Language changes over time; the English of the 17th century (Shakespeare's age) is not an exception. This research focuses on the morphological changes in English from the seventeenth century as represented in William Shakespeare's play The Merchant of Venice to the twentieth century as represented in George Bernard Shaw's play Arms and the man.

Languages undergo constant changes over time. Some of the main influences on the change of languages include: the movement of people across countries and continents, due to invasion, colonization and migration. These movement patterns bring speakers of different languages in close sustained contact. This kind of change is externally investigated language contact causes linguistic change. Even without these kinds of influences, a language can internally change due to the fact that if users of language alter aspects of its internal structure. As change takes place, it affects any aspects or combination

aspects of language such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, the lexicon and style.

Language change takes place for several reasons. One of which is language contact which occurs when different speakers of different languages or culture engage in close interaction with each other as communities. Language contact generally leads to bilingualism and multilingualism, in this case structural change and lexical borrowing happen. Typically both languages influence each other in different degrees in terms of the direction of influence and the extent of influence in each of the components of language.

Power prestige plays a part in language change. This takes place when a language associates with power is used in a territory under occupation. The French ruled England for about 300 years following the Norman invasion of 1066. French became the language of power in all domains of life related to being a dominating language. The aspect above concerns changes associated with two communities. However, this is not the only source of change. Native users of a language bring about change in their own language over times an internally induced form of change. It comes across generations of the users. Language change takes place across generations in unnoticed steps in all aspects of language. As a result, children's' language differs a little bit from their parents due to the differences between their needs. New technology, inventions, and other social aspects require new terms and ways of viewing language features. Eventually languages change but slowly.

Over time, the morphology of English changed. Changes include the function and the meaning of morphemes, inflectional paradigms and derivational patterns. Likewise, English lost inflections indicating the grammatical function on nouns e.g. doer, receiver, beneficiary. (Finegan ,2008)

Morphology in linguistics is the study of the ways that words are structured. The word books has two morphemes book (free content morpheme) and –s (bound morpheme). Derivation is a process by which words can be expanded. Derivation is the formation of a new word from an already existing word such as singer derives from sing. This formation involves adding an affix (prefix, suffix or both). For example

Prefix: **unimportant** = un + important. 2. Suffix: **beautiful** = beauty + ful

In the process of derivation, new word classes are generally formed. For example, beauty is a noun and beautiful is an adjective. Derivation is one type of a larger process, affixation. The other type of affixation adds a suffix to indicate one or more function, such as, tense, mood, gender, number, person or case can be marked by these endings in different word classes. Adding an inflectional affix to a word does not change its word class (Aronoff and Fudeman 2004).

Statement of the problem

The present user of the English language may find it difficult to read and understand the original language used by the William Shakespeare. Most importantly the people who belong to the once colonized countries of the Great Britain may not understand the text and that may block their understanding of the text completely. Therefore, this research investigates and traces the most important morphological changes that have taken place since then. To illustrate the morphological changes from the Early Modern English till the Late Modern English, two texts are examined. The first of these is a play by William Shakespeare *the Merchant of Venice,* 17th century, and a play by George Bernard Shaw *Arms and the man,* 20th century.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to find out how English morphology in George Bernard Shaw's play *Arms and the man* written in the 20th century differs from English morphology in William Shakespeare *The Merchant of Venice* written in the 17th century.

Research Questions

In order to accomplish the aforementioned objective, this study attempts to answer the following question

1. What are the types of Morphological changes occurred in English language over a period of time?
2. What are the morphological changes of English in the eighteenth century as used in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the man* contrasted with the same in the seventeenth century as used in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice?*

Results and Discussion

The history of English is generally divided into three periods, and the periodization generally follows important external historical dates or events. Some scholars generally divide the history of the English language generally into the following four periods.

1. Old English, (ca. 600-1100)
2. Middle English, (ca. 1100-1500)
3. Early Modern English, from about 1500 to about 1800
4. Late Modern English, from 1800 up to the present.

1. The old English period (600-1100AD)

The history of English started when three Germanic tribes (the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes) overstayed their help to the British Celts against the invasions by the Scots in Britain in the fifth century AD. The three dialects of the Germanic tribes began to develop features in isolation from German and as a result of contact with speakers of Celtic in southern Britain. The language which the invading German tribes spoke evolved to English as of the seventh century.

2. Middle English period (1100-1500AD)

In 1066, England was invaded and conquered by William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy, as the dominant contender for the vacant throne in England. The French Norman language became the language of the Royal Court, and the ruling and business classes whereas the lower classes spoke English, their native language. In the 14th century the Normans were defeated and English became dominant in England again, but with many French words added. The language of this period is called Middle English and ended when the Tudor dynasty with Queen Elizabeth the first came to the throne in 1485.

During the Middle English period the use of most and more began to form the degree of comparison of different root. For example

Most- mēst

Lasse- lēst

Evil- werse- werst

gōd –better- best

In addition, double comparison was used like the use of "more swetter".

Middle English adverbs also were changed by adding the suffixes –ly and –e e.g. bright

–brighte

The degree of comparison of the adverbs is formed by the using of –er and -est e.g

gretly-gretter-grettest.

A great change took place in English morphology is the shift of strong verbs to the weak paradigm i.e. generalizing the regular form.

e.g., help-holp-holpen   help-helped –helped

3. Early Modern English, from about 1500 to about 1800

Early Modern English, used by Shakespeare, is dated from around 1500. The language was further transformed by the Renaissance of Classical learning, the invention of printing and increases in literacy. As a result, books became more widespread and cheaper and more people learned to read. Printing also brought the initiation of the standardization to English.

Barber (1997) states that three morphemes –s genitive -s plural of regular and –s 3rd of singular present with their allomorphs (/iz/,/z/,/s/) were used, e.g. The use of –s plural in Early Modern English replaced some older inflections such as, **shooen: shoes**. But words like children is still in use.

The strong verbs have witnessed great changes: many strong verbs (i.e. irregular verbs) from Middle English have changed in to weak verbs (i.e. regular verbs) in Early Modern English:

Early Modern**: melt - molt- molten**

Late Modern**: melt – melted – melted**

4. Late Modern English, from 1800 up to the present

Late Modern English underwent more changes after 1800. The main changes in vocabulary during the Late Modern period were due to two principal factors: firstly, *the Industrial Revolution* and t*echnology* created a need for new words and secondly, the British Empire and the spread of its colonies.

Methodology

This study is based on content analysis of two British plays. The selected works present a case study that focuses on investigating the morphological changes in the English language since the seventeenth century. This study takes two plays of two different historical periods. The purpose of this study is to find what morphological changes took place between the 17th till the 20th century and then compare and contrast the morphological changes of these two historical periods.

Samples of the Study

The samples of the current study are the following:

A play by William Shakespeare *the Merchant of Venice* of the seventeenth century, and a play by George Bernard Shaw *Arms and the Man* of the twentieth century. A synopsis of the playwrights and the plays is given before the analysis and a discussion of the specific findings.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare, also known as the " ," is England's national poet and their greatest writer of all centuries. William Shakespeare was born in England on 23 April 1564 and died on 23 April 1616 and was buried in Holy Trinity Church, at the age of 52.

He was an educated person; he attended King's New School, where he learnt Latin and Greek and studied a theology and rhetoric.

His legacy to the world includes 38 plays that address a wide range of human emotion and conflict such as love, death, jealousy, grief, revenge, murder, magic and mystery in both poetry and prose. Some of his most famous are Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice and Hamlet. Alongside writing plays he wrote 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and several other poems. Most of Shakespeare's works were written between 1589 and 1613. Shakespeare's influence on the English language was great.

He invented hundreds of words which are still used up to now e.g. amazement, bedroom, and accommodation. It is now more than 400 years after his death, but people still appreciate his work all around the world, just like great literary figures since ancient documented periods.

The Merchant of Venice

The Merchant of Venice was written by William Shakespeare in 1596. It is classified as a comedy, but it is sometimes considered as a tragicomedy because it has some elements that feature in tragedies. In brief, the play is about Antonio who is a wealthy Venetian merchant who tries to help his best friend, Bassanio, to get money in order to go to Belmont to appear in a good look because he is trying to get the liking of the beautiful and wealthy heiress Portia of Belmont. Unfortunately, Antonio does not have cash money to help Bassanio since Antonio`s ships are still at the sea. So, both go to a Jewish, greedy money lender, Shylock, to borrow money. Antonio would be the loan's guarantor. Shylock agrees to lend them the money under one condition. If Antonio defaults on repaying the loan on time, Shylock would cut a pound of flesh from Antonio defaults. Bassanio takes the money and goes to Belmont. Luckily, Bassanio meets the condition because according of Portia's father on the successful suitor to Portia. Therefore, Portia and Antonio get married and also his companion Gratiano and Portia's maid Nerissa. News from Venice reaches that Antonio's ships are lost and he is unable to repay the money to Shylock, who is happy with this news because he hates the charitable Antonio who lends money to poor people with Ex interests. Portia gives the money to Bssanio to pay back the loan to Shylock, but he refuses to accept hoping he will execute his condition. Portia and Nerissa, disguised as lawyers, succussed in saving Antonio's life by telling

Shylock that he can cut the flesh but without a drop of blood. Otherwise his fortune will be forfeited under Venetian laws. Realizing the impossibility of the matter, Shylock agrees to take the money which was offered by Bssanio. Portia, under Venetian laws, manages to forfeit Shylock's property, half to the Venetian state, for which the Duke takes a fine in order to save Shylock's life and half to Antonio who gives it back to Shylock under two conditions, First, if Shylock converts to Christianity and second, if he gives all his fortune to Jessica, his daughter, who ran away with Lorenzo her lover, and Lorenzo after his death. Finally, the end was happy to all, except for Shylock. Antonio's ships arrive safely and the three couples celebrate happily.

George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw was born on July 26, 1856, in Dublin, Ireland and died on November 2, 1950. He was a playwright, critic, and polemicist who had great influence on the Western theatre, culture and politics. He wrote more than 60 plays during his lifetime and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925.

Some of his earliest works in drama such as ***Widower's Houses*** and ***Arms and the Man*** were collected and published in a volume called Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant,1898. Other significant plays written by Shaw are ***Caesar and Cleopatra*** (1901), ***Androcles and the Lion*** (1912), and Arms and the Man (1894). Many scholars and critics have rated him as second only to Shakespeare among British dramatists.

Arms and the Man

Arms and the Man is a romantic comedy play by George Bernard Shaw in 1898 about love but mocks insincerity of human nature and cruelty of war. ***Arms and the Man*** title comes from the opening words of Virgil's Aeneid, in Latin: ***Arma virumque cano ("Of arms and the man I sing").***

The actions of this play take place during the 1885 Serbo-Bulgarian War. It is about Raina Petkoff, a young Bulgarian woman engaged to Sergius Saranoff, a Bulgarian soldier. The events start by the entrance into Raina's room from the balcony of a Swiss soldier of the Serbian army, Captain Bluntschli and how she hides and saves him from Bulgarian soldiers. After a conversation between Raina and Bluntschli, she knows that the soldier has no bullets in his bag. Instead, he carries some chocolate to eat. So, she calls him the chocolate-cream soldier. He explains that to survive a soldier needs to carry more food than cartridges. The soldier stays that night in Raina's room. Before dawn Raina and her mother Catherine let him escape wearing an old coat of major Petkoff's. The war ends and the major and Raina's fiancé, Sergius, return from the battle field. A treaty of peace has been signed by the Bulgarians and Serbians. Raina is very happy

to see Sergius. She shows how proud she is of his bravery. The Swiss soldier comes back to return the coat and to thank Raina and her mother. Petkoff recognizes him as the soldier in the negotiation for the peace treaty. So, he invites him to stay as a guest. Raina reveals the relationship between her fiancé, Sergius, and her maid Louka and they break their engagement. Not only Sergius and Louka get married, but also Raina and Bluntschli.

Analysis and Findings

This study depends basically on the analysis of dialogues, which were between characters in each of the two plays, not the narration or notes needed for acting the plays. The researcher read the first play **The Merchant of Venice** then read the second play **Arms and the Man**. While reading the researcher underlined any morphological patterns that are unfamiliar in current Standard English patterns and difficult understand by the reader. The researcher sought to find differences between the morphology of the two plays. Finally, the researcher chose the lines in the play on pages -selected in a special random interval way of ten pages in the first play but six pages in the second because the second is shorter than the first. The outcome was ten pages from each play.

Below is a discussion of the changes that have taken place within the period separating the two plays.

1. Change One: Personal Pronouns **_thou_** and its derivatives and **_you_** in its derivatives.
   There was the loss of pronoun thou, which is replaced by you.

Singular	both plural and singular
Thou	you
Thee	you
Thy	your
thine	yours

For example,

Portia: **_"Away! make haste: thou knowest where I will tarry_**."

<div align="right">The Merchant of Venice, IV, 2.</div>

Man: **_"I've not had two hours' undisturbed sleep since the war began. I'm on the staff you don't know what that means."_**

<div align="right">Arms and the Man, Act 1</div>

It is noted that "**you**" were used to the second person singular in Early Modern English but only to indicate respect, formality or politeness. The following examples clarify this.

Bassanio: "*Madam, you have bereft me of all words, Only my blood speaks to you in my veins; And there is such confusion in my powers.*"

The Merchant of Venice, Act III.

- Informality was shown by using **thou**.

Antonio: "*I am as like to call thee so again, to spit on thee again, to spurn thee too. If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not as to thy friends; for when did friendship take A breed for barren metal of his friend?*"

The Merchant of Venice, I, 3.

- Meanwhile, in Late Modern English as represented in Arms and the Man, the singular "**you**" is used for both the singular and plural.

Nicola: "*you heard Miss Raina say that I did, sir.*" - Formal

Arms and the Man, III, 51

Louka : "*We shall see whether you dare keep your word.*"- Informal

Arms and the Man, III.

- There was also the loss of thee and of thou. e.g.

Lorenzo: "*He is not, nor we have not heard from him. But go we in, I pray thee, Jessica and ceremoniously let us prepare some welcome for the mistress of the house.*"

The Merchant of Venice, V, 1.

Lorenzo: "*No, pray thee, let it serve for table-talk; shall digest it.*"

The Merchant of Venice, III.

- **"Thee"** is also replaced by you in the accusative and dative cases in Late Modern English as in

Catherine: " *My orders! Why should I order you to bring Captain Bluntschli's luggage out here? What are you thinking of, Nicola?*"

Arms and the Man, III.

Sergius: "*I will do as I please with you.*"

Arms and the Man, III.

- **_"Thine_**" was also used as a possessive pronoun as in the following example

Portia: "*A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine: The court awards it, and the law doth give it.*"

The Merchant of Venice, IV.

Man: "*Why, a lot of your cavalry—the greatest blackguards in your army—will burst into this pretty room of yours and slaughter me here like a pig* "

Arms and the Man, I.

- Another change in pronouns is the change of the pronoun "**_thyself_**" to become "**_yourself_**" in Early Modern English. For example

Gratiano: "*Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang thyself:*"

The Merchant of Venice, IV

Catherine: "*You are a barbarian at heart still, Paul. I hope you behaved yourself before all those Russian officers.*"

Arms and the Man, II,

The following table shows the changes in the pronoun from Early Modern English to Late Modern English as represented in the two plays.

Early modern English		Late Modern English	
Singular	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**
Thou	Ye, You	You	You
Thee	You	You	You
Thee	You	You	You
Thy	Your	Your	Your
Thine	Your	Yours	Yours
Thine	Yours	Yourself	Yourselves
Thyself	Yourselves		

2. _Changes in the forms of irregular verbs: Present, Past and Past Participle_

Forming the past tense and the past participle form of irregular verbs had not been regularized yet during Early Modern English. Strong verbs witnessed variation during this period.

For example, the verb **_"write"_** had the past form **_"writ"_** as in **The Merchant of Venice** and also wrote which it did not appear in the whole play but it is found in other works by Shakespeare.

For example,

Lorenzo: _"I know the hand: in faith, 'tis a fair hand; And whiter than the paper it **writ** on. Is the fair hand that **writ**."_

The Merchant of Venice, II, 4.

Another example, the verb "**speak**", had the past form spoke as in The Merchant of Venice. The participle form was also spoke. For example,

Tubal:" I **spoke** _with some of the sailors that escaped the wreck._" (Past form)

The Merchant of Venice, III, 1.

Portia:" _I have **spoke** thus much to mitigate the justice of thy plea_;" (Past participle)

The Merchant of Venice, IV.

Another example, the verb **_"speak"_** had the past form spoke as in **The Merchant of Venice**. The participle form was also spoke.

For example,

Tubal:" I **spoke** with some of the sailors that escaped the wreck." (Past form)

The Merchant of Venice, III,

Portia:" I have **spoke** thus much to mitigate the justice of thy plea;" (past participle)

The Merchant of Venice, IV.

The most important morphological differences between Early Modern English and Late Modern English are associated with pronouns and some aspects of the verbs. As it is shown in table number 1 above the majority of the person pronouns of Early Modern English are clearly the same as those in Late Modern English. However, the important difference in the pronouns is related to the second person pronoun. The researcher investigated another change in this chapter based on the data found in the selected pages from each play. It is the

change in the forms of some verbs. Some forms are no longer found in Late Modern English while some changed due to the disappearance of the second person singular pronoun, thou. Nouns, adjectives, prepositions, and other parts of speech show no basic difference relative to Early Modern English.

The following table summarizes the changes that took place in the ***Be and Have*** while used in the Tenses.

	Early modern English	Late modern English	Use
Be			
	Wast	Were	Past tense
	Art	Are	Present tense
	Wert	Were	Past tense
Have			
	Hast	Have	Present tense
	Hath	Has	Present tense
	Hadst	Had	Past tense
	Dost	Do	Present tense
	Doth	Does	Present tense
	Didst	Did	Past tense
Others			
	Canst	Can	2nd person Singular
	Mayst	May	Second person Singular
	Shalt	Shall	Second person Singular
	Shouldst	Should	Second person Singular
	Wilt	Will	Second person Singular

Conclusion

The main focus of this study is to identify some morphological changes that took place in the period between the 17th and 20th centuries as represented in two literary works by W. Shakespeare and G.B Shaw. The importance of studying morphological changes stems from the consequences of change for fully understanding texts that are separated by four centuries. Morphological analysis illuminating information about the history and the rules of forming English words. Since language continuously changes, words and their structures are aspects that appear to the reader and listener. At a first glimpse, a text written in the 17th century will not be clear to the reader of the 21st century. So morphological analysis helps readers to understand the form and the meanings of words in such texts. The most important morphological differences between Early Modern English and Late Modern English are associated with pronouns and some aspects of the verbs. As it is shown in table number 1 above the majority of the person pronouns of Early Modern English are clearly the same as those in Late Modern English. However, the important difference in the pronouns is related to the second person pronoun. The researcher investigated another change in this chapter based on the data found in the selected pages from each play. It is the change in the forms of some verbs. Some forms are no longer found in Late Modern English while some changed due to the disappearance of the second person singular pronoun ***thou***.

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