

**Лингвистические особенности произведений британских драматургов  
(диахронический обзор)**

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**Аннотация.** Целью исследования является определение культурно-исторического фона развития английского языка на примере британской драматургии. В поле исследования, учитывая его исторический характер, не вошли авторы, относящиеся к более позднему периоду развития английского языка, за исключением отдельных выдающихся писателей девятнадцатого века, оказавших значительное влияние на драматургию и современное состояние английского языка.

**Ключевые слова:** английская драматургия, пьеса, язык, грамматика, лексика.

**Linguistic Features in the Works of British Playwrights (Diachronic Review)**

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**Abstract.** The purpose of the research is to define the cultural and historical background of the English language development using the British drama as an instance. The authors of the later period of the English language development are not involved in this article due to its historical character with the exception of the particular outstanding writers of the nineteenth century, who influenced the drama and the modern state of the English language significantly.

**Key words:** English drama, play, language, grammar, vocabulary.

**Introduction.** What is drama? Drama can be defined as a form of performance or a literature composition that involves conflicts, emotions, the portrayal of human experience through a dialogue and action. It presents a story of a situation that engages the interest, and it is typically designed to be performed on stage. The English drama came to be one of the most significant and influential in the world, it can be called the basis for the further development of drama in other countries. The history of the English drama involves four periods: the Medieval Period, the Renaissance Period, the Restoration Period and the Victorian Period. The Restoration Period is considered to be the transition between the Renaissance and the Victorian stages. Old plays acquired new interpretation during this time, therefore the language of the plays remained almost the same. Due to this fact, the study is conducted on the three other periods.

### **Medieval Period or Early Period (11th to 15th Century)**

The earliest theatre in England evolved out of church services of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were such genres as mystery and morality plays. Mystery plays depicted events from the Bible. Mystery plays were often performed as cycle plays, a sequence of plays portraying all the major events of the Bible, from the fall of Satan to the last judgment. One of the most well-known of the mystery plays is “*The Second Shepherds’ Play*”, a part of the Wakefield cycle. The play blends comic action, serious social commentary, and the religious story of the angelic announcement of the Christ’s birth to shepherds.

Morality plays are intended to teach a moral lesson. These plays often employ allegory, the use of characters or events in a literary work to represent abstract ideas or concepts. Morality plays, particularly those that are allegorical, depict representative characters in moral dilemmas with both the good and the evil parts of their character struggling for dominance. From the characters' difficulties, the audience could learn the moral lessons the Church wished to instill in its followers. One of the most well-known of extant morality plays is "*Everyman*". In this morality play, God sends Death to tell Everyman that his time on the Earth has come to an end [Trussler: 2000, 203].

Most of the English plays traditionally counted as medieval are written in a form of the English language called Middle English. There are no consistent spelling rules, the word can be spelled in multiple different ways, even by the same author in Middle English. Middle English has letters that are no longer a part of the modern alphabet. In early Middle English, Æ, æ ("æsc" or "ash") can be counted, which makes the same sound as in Modern English "cat," or Ð, ð ("eth"), which was used interchangeably with Þ, þ in Old English. But these had generally fallen out of use by the 14th century [<https://www.oed.com/discover/middle-english-an-overview>].

Two very important linguistic developments characterise Middle English. In grammar, English came to rely less on inflectional endings and more on the word order to convey grammatical information. Grammatical gender was lost early in Middle English. The range of inflections, particularly in the noun, was reduced drastically (partly as a result of reduction of vowels in unstressed final syllables), as was the number of distinct paradigms. In vocabulary, English became much more heterogeneous, showing many borrowings from French, Latin, and Scandinavian, which had serious consequences for the meanings and the stylistic register of those words which survived from Old English [Burrow, Turville-Petre: 1996, 153].

### **Renaissance Period (16th to 17th Century)**

First public theatres were constructed during this period. The London audience had six theatres to choose from: three surviving large open-air "public" theatres, the Globe, the Fortune, and the Red Bull, and three smaller enclosed "private" theatres, the

Blackfriars, the Cockpit, and the Salisbury Court. The establishment of large and profitable public theatres was an essential enabling factor in the success of English Renaissance drama. Once they were in operation, drama could become a fixed and permanent rather than a transitory phenomenon.

Genres of the period included the history play, tragedy, comedies and a new hybrid subgenre of the tragicomedy. The most remarkable feature of the period is William Shakespeare's works. He wrote 38 plays and numerous sonnets. It is not just the breadth of his work that makes Shakespeare the greatest British dramatist but the beauty and inventiveness of his language and the universal nature of his writing [Nicoll:1952].

Shakespeare took advantage of the relative freedom, flexibility and the protean nature of English at the time, and played free and easy with the already liberal grammatical rules, for example in his use nouns as verbs, adverbs, adjectives and substantives - an early instance of the “verbification” of nouns which modern language purists often decry - in phrases such as “he pageants us”, “it out-herods Herod”, dog them at the heels, the good Brutus ghosted, “Lord Angelo dukes it well”, “uncle me no uncle”, etc.

He had a vast vocabulary (34,000 words by some counts) and he personally coined an estimated 2,000 neologisms or new words and phrases we still use today. By some counts, almost one in ten of the words used by Shakespeare were his own invention, a truly remarkable achievement. However, not all of these were necessarily personally invented by Shakespeare himself: he was more than happy to make use of other people's neologisms and local dialect words.

Plural noun endings had shrunk from the six of Old English to just two, “-s” and “-en”, however Shakespeare sometimes used one and sometimes the other. By the time of Shakespeare, English had developed a complex auxiliary verb system, although to be was still commonly used as the auxiliary rather than the more modern to have (e.g. I am come rather than I have come). Do was sometimes used as an auxiliary verb and sometimes not (e.g. say you so? or do you say so?) The old verb ending “-en” had in

general been gradually replaced by “-eth” (e.g. loveth, doth, hath, etc), although this was itself in the process of being replaced by the northern English verb ending “-es”, and Shakespeare used both (e.g. loves and loveth,). Thee, thou and thy (signifying familiarity or social inferiority, as in most European languages today) were still very prevalent in Shakespeare’s time, and Shakespeare himself made good use of the subtle social implications of using them [Mitchell, Robinson:1995,137].

As an instance, there can be shown a dialogue from «*Much Ado About Nothing*» by William Shakespeare. Some comments about words and idioms which were typical for the period or for the Shakespeare's language, can be seen directly in the text.

**Hero:** Why, how now? Do you speak in the sick tune?

**Beatrice:** I am out of all other tune, *methinks* (old and humorous for «I think»).

**Margaret:** Clap’s into ‘Light o’Love’ - that goes without a burden. Do you sing it and I’ll dance it?

**Beatrice:** Ye light o' love, *with your heels* (there is an idiom «to have one's heels in the air» which meant to be wanton»)! Then, if your husband have stables enough, you'll see he shall lack no barns.

**Margaret:** O illegitimate construction! *I scorn that with my heels* (the respond for «with your heels» that meant «contemptuously»).

**Beatrice:** 'Tis (the old grammatical form of «it is») almost five o'clock, cousin, 'tis (the old grammatical form of «it is») time you were ready. *By my troth* (the idiom meaning «to be honest»), I am exceeding ill. Hey-ho!

**Margaret:** For a hawk, a horse, or a husband?

**Beatrice:** *For the letter that begins them all, H* (the wordplay)

**Margaret:** Well, and *you be not turned Turk* (the idiom «to turn Turk» meaning the betrayal of beliefs and values), there's no more sailing by the star.

**Beatrice:** *What means the fool* (the old grammatical constuction with the missing axillary), *throw* (the old word for «believe»)?

**Margaret:** Nothing I, but God send everyone their heart's desire!

**Hero:** These gloves the Count sent me, they are an excellent perfume.

**Beatrice:** I am stuffed, cousin, I cannot smell.

**Margaret:** A maid, and *stuffed* (a joke with the twisted meaning of this word)! There's goodly catching of cold.

**Beatrice:** O, God help me, God help me! How long have you professed apprehension?

**Margaret:** Even since you left it. *Doth not* (the old grammatical form of «does not») my wit become me rarely?

**Beatrice:** It is not seen enough, *you should wear it in your cap* (an idiom used to tell that someone should accept the criticism). *By my troth* (the idiom for «to be honest»), I am sick.

**Margaret:** Get you some of this distilled carduus benedictus (the wordplay to tease Beatrice), and lay it to your heart: it is the only thing for a qualm.

**Beatrice:** Benedictus? Why benedictus? You have some moral in this benedictus [4]?

Most characters enjoy witty exchanges to display their humour and intelligence at some point. Witty banter is a playful way to compete, exchange insults or to flirt. Shakespeare uses different types of witty wordplay, one of which is ‘the pun’ where a word has more than one meaning but sounds the same. Margaret teases Beatrice about being in love with Benedick. As well as showing us just how clever Margaret can be, the wordplay lightens the mood for Hero, who is nervous about her wedding.

### **Victorian Period (1837 to 1901)**

Victorian period saw an overdue revival of drama. As influenced by romantic period, the early Victorian period still did not have passion in drama writing. At that time, the existence of drama was not really appreciated by society of middle class who dominated social life in England. After entering 1860, the situation started to change because of the interest of Queen Victoria in drama, and afterwards it was followed by her society. Thomas William Robertson was one of pioneers for the advance of realism in drama, Oscar Wilde with his comedies was better in entertaining and attracting audiences. Beside Wilde, there were several well-known dramatists during late

Victorian period. Dramatists as Shaw, Jones, and Pinero. They were also influential towards the development of drama at that time [3].

The 1800's is when English truly blossomed into what we consider "iconic victorian" linguistics. This type of English is much closer to modern English and as such makes it much easier to "interpret". Some widely used words during the Victorian era had more of a Latin root or polish to them. One of the most common things to see is that English language by this point had been modernized. Another frequent thing among the language is sarcasm. This was not often used in previous English writings. However, the English spoke exactly as the literature was written. The language was very proper, often deep thinking, and with only slight slang. The slang terms were quite different from what we would use today, but our slang spans across whole sentences. Normally a word or two would have been replaced. Overall, their English was extremely proper but very easy to understand by today's standards. [Bratton:2003,238]. We can analyze some elements from "*The Importance of Being Earnest*" by Oscar Wilde.

1) **Cecily:** Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

**Jack:** Who?

**Cecily:** Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

**Jack:** What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

**Cecily:** Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack?

**Chasuble:** These are very joyful tidings.

**Miss Prism:** After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

**Jack:** My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

2) **Jack:** How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

**Algernon:** Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

**Jack:** I say it's perfectly heartless you eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

3) **Algernon:** And who are the people you amuse?

**Jack:** Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

**Algernon:** Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

**Jack:** Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them [8].

The first term which comes to mind when thinking of vocabulary and style is the diction or choice of words. Wilde uses idiosyncratic vocabulary. Adjectives are frequently of negative meaning, or used in negative context, such as «heartless, horrid, unfortunate, wicked, vulgar, and absurd». Most frequent adverbs are used to describe negative quality, especially some which tend to be used as positive modifiers. The word «perfectly» is frequently seen in negative context, it is most frequent in modifying unpleasant emotional state. Many words in the play are employed in unusual context which presents occurrence of things that cannot be controlled, but people act as if they could be. The tone is brightly serious, the witty wordplay reveals the disparity between the artificial social customs of English aristocratic society.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, we have explored the most important linguistic changes that were reflected in English plays. Medieval Period or Early Period are characterized mostly by grammar and vocabulary changes; Renaissance Period produced a lot of new words due to Shakespeare's use nouns as verbs, adverbs, adjectives and substantives; Victorian Period "polished" the language making it proper, often deep thinking, and with only slight slang. Therefore, we may conclude that the development of English Drama influenced the development of English language. Some of the changes still tend to be used in modern drama writing, while others were modernized or remained only a part of the history.



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