



Great Vowel Shift: From Middle to Standard English

Victoria Tutschka

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Seminar paper from the year 2009 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Linguistics, grade: 1,3, University of Erfurt (Sprachwissenschaft), course: Regionale Varietäten, language: English, abstract: Every language changes over time. Due to historical, political and social events, like population shifts or movements, a language develops and becomes versatile, as intralinguistic variations emerge between different regions and dialects.

One of the most important changes in the English language, which appeared especially in the south of England during the 15th to 18th centuries, was a Chain Shift, the so-called Great Vowel Shift.[INT1] A Chain Shift is “a change in the position of two phonemes in which one moves away from an original position that is occupied by the other.”(Labov 1994: 118)

The linguist William Labov classifies three principles, which are applicable to all the Chain Shifts:

Principle I: long vowels rise (as in the Great Vowel Shift)

Principle II: short vowels fall

Principle IIa: the nuclei of upgliding diphthongs fall

Principle III: back vowels move to the front

(Labov 1994:116)

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