Exercise 1.4

A number of examples from Shakespeare’s plays, written in the Early Modern English period, are presented here which illustrate differences from how the same thing would be said today. Think about each example and attempt to state what changes have taken place in the language that would account for the differences you see in the constructions mentioned in the headings, the negatives, auxiliary verbs and so on. For example, in the first one we see: Saw you the weird sisters? The modern English equivalent would be Did you see the weird sisters? Had the heading directed your attention to yes–no questions, you would attempt to state what change had taken place, from former saw you (with inversion from you saw) to the modern version which no longer involves inversion but requires a form of do (did you see) which was not utilized in Shakespeare’s version.

Treatment of negatives:

1. Saw you the weird sisters? ... Came they not by you? (Macbeth IV, i)
2. I love thee not, therefore pursue me not (A Midsummer Night’s Dream II, 1, 188)
3. I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers (Henry V V, v)
4. Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet: I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg (Hamlet I, ii)
5. But yet you draw not iron (A Midsummer Night’s Dream II, i, 196)
6. Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit (A Midsummer Night’s Dream II, i, 211)
7. And I am sick when I look not on you (A Midsummer Night’s Dream II, i, 213)
8. I will not budge for no man’s pleasure (Romeo and Juliet III, i)
9. I cannot weep, nor answer have I none (Othello IV, ii)
10. I am not sorry neither (Othello V, ii)
Treatment of auxiliary verbs:

1. Macduff is fled to England (Macbeth IV, i) = ‘has fled’
2. The king himself is rode to view their battle (Henry V IV, iii) = ‘has ridden’
3. Thou told’st me they were stolen into this wood (A Midsummer Night’s Dream II, i, 191) = ‘had stolen away/hidden’

Treatment of comparatives and superlatives:

1. She comes more nearer earth than she was wont (Othello 5, 2)
2. This was the most unkindest cut of all (Julius Caesar 3, 2)
3. What worser place can I beg in your love (A Midsummer Night’s Dream II, i, 208)

Differences in verb agreement inflections (endings on the verbs which agree with the subject):

1. The quality of mercy is not strain’d
   It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
   Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
   It blesseth him that gives and him that takes

   (The Merchant of Venice IV, i)

2. The one I’ll slay, the other slayeth me

   (A Midsummer Night’s Dream II, i, 190)

3. O, it offends me to the soul to
   Hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear
   A passion to tatters

   (Hamlet III, i, 9–11)

4. And could of men distinguish, her election
   Hath seal’d thee for herself: for thou hast been
   As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing

   (Hamlet III, i, 68–71)
Exercise 1.6

The text in this exercise is a sample of Early Modern English, from William Caxton, *Eneydos* (c. 1491). As in Exercise 1.5, three lines are presented: the first is from Caxton’s text; the second is a word-by-word translation, with some of the relevant grammatical morphemes indicated; the third is a more colloquial modern translation. Compare these lines and report the main changes you observe in morphology, syntax, semantics and lexical items. (Again, do not concern yourself with the changes in spelling or pronunciation beyond the most obvious ones.)

And that commyn englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth
from a nother. In so moche
and that common English that is spoken in one shire varies from
another. In so much
‘And the common English that is spoken in one county varies so
much from [that spoken in] another. In so much’

that in my days happened that certayn marchauntes were in a ship
in tamyse
that in my days happened that certain merchants were in a ship in
Thames
‘that in my time it happened that some merchants were in a ship on
the Thames’

for to haue sayled ouer the see to zelande/ and for lacke of wynde
thei taryed atte forlond;
for to have sailed over the sea to Zeeland. And for lack of wind
they tarried at the coast;
‘to sail over the sea to Zeeland. And because there was no wind,
they stayed at the coast’

[NOTE: Zeeland = a province in the Netherlands]

and wente to land for to refreshe them And one of theym, named
sheffelde a mercer
and went to land for to refresh them. And one of them, named Sheffield, a mercer,
‘and they went on land to refresh themselves. And one of them, named Sheffield, a fabric-dealer,‘
cam in to an hows and axed [aksi] for mete, and speyally he axyd after eggys.
came into a house and asked for meat, and especially he asked after eggs.
‘came into a house and asked for food, and specifically he asked for “eggs”.’

And the goode wyf answerede, that she coude no frenshe.
and the good woman answered that she could no French.
‘And the good woman answered that she knew no French.’

And the marchaunt was angry. for he also coude speke no frenshe.
and the merchant was angry, for he also could speak no French,
‘And the merchant was angry, because he couldn’t speak any French either.’
[NOTE: coude = ‘was able to, knew (how to)’]

but wolde haue hadde egges/ and she vnderstode hym not/
but would have had eggs; and she understood him not.
‘but he wanted to have eggs; and she did not understand him.’
[NOTE: wolde = ‘wanted’, the source of Modern English would]

And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue eyren/
and then at last an other said that he would have eggs.
‘and then finally somebody else said that he wanted to have eggs.’

then the good wyf said that she understod him wel/
then the good woman said that she understood him well.
‘Then the good woman said that she understood him well.’

(Source of Caxton’s text: Fisher and Bornstein 1974: 186–7)