Much like the Cely letters, the collection of letters written to and by Lord Lisle, his family, friends, and staff, provide valuable linguistic information. Lord Lisle was Governor of Calais for Henry VIII from 1533 to 1540. The French town was at that time an English possession. The first text below is by the 14-year old George Bassett, Lady Lisle’s son by her first marriage who was being educated in the household of Sir Francis Bryan. The letter of 1539 is purely formal: the boy has nothing to say and he says it in the approved Tudor manner.

George Bassett to his parents Lord and Lady Lisle, 1 July 1539

Ryht honorable and my most dere and singler goode lorde
and ladye / in my most humble man[ner] I recômaunde me unto yow
beschynge to have yo’ dailye blessynges / and to here of yo’ goode
and prosperous helthe / fore the conservacione of which / I praye
dailye unto almyghty godde. I certifiye youe by theys my
rude lett[eres] that my Maister and my Ladye be in goode helthe /
to whome I am myche bounde. ffurthe’more I besche
yo’ lordshipe and ladieshipe eve’ in goode / longe / and
prosperus helthe w’ hono’. ffrom Woburn the
first daye of Julye

By yor humble and
owne Son George
Bassette
The next letter of 1533 is from Sir William Kingston, who was a member of the King's Privy Council and Constable of the Tower of London at the time. It is an example of an educated man's style of writing which, at first glance, would be unacceptable today in its presentation because there is no punctuation. Several names of birds used in hawking or falconry are mentioned.

**Sir William Kingston to Lord Lisle, 26 September 1533**

my lord to advertyse you of newes here be nonne 3it or now that be abowt the pesse (= peace) in the marches of scotland & with goddes grace all shalbe well & as 3it the kynges grace hathe hard now word from my lord of Wynchester & so the kyng hawkes evry day with goshawkes* & other hawkes that ys to say layners,* sparhawkes* and merlions* both affer none & after yf the wether serve I pray you my lord yf ther be hony gerfawken* or yerkyng* to help A me to both yf it may be & for lak of bothe to have wun & to send me worde of the charges ther of & then your lordshyp dose meche for me I & my wyfe both ryght hartely recõmaunde hus unto my gud lady & we thanke my lady for my token for it cam to me in the church of the blake freres (= friars) & my wyf was desposed to have offerd it to saynt loy ( = St Eligius) (th)at hyr horse shuld not halt & he never went up ryght syne ( = since) I be(see)che your lordshyp to have me in your reymembrance to master porter & my lady & to master mershall & my lady ...

* Goshawks, lanners (southern European falcons), sparrowhawks, merlins (small falcons), gyrfalcons (large falcons), and jerkins (male gyrfalcons), respectively.

**Exercise**

Using the two passages, describe the 'approved Tudor manner'. Is the spelling significantly irregular or inconsistent? How many words have more than one spelling? What do the phrases to advertise you of newes and yf the wether serve mean?

An example of formal written language contemporary with the Lisle Letters is Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The boke named the Gouernor*, printed in London in 1531 and dedicated to Henry VIII. Elyot’s purpose was ‘to describe in our vulgare tunge/the fourme of a iuste publike weale (= welfare or prosperity)’. He wrote in English but regarded Latin as the essential language of education and learning. In the second and third passages, Elyot sets out a programme for young noblemen in which learning Latin begins before the age of seven.
A publike weale is a body lyving, espacte, publike or made of sondry astates and degrees of men, whiche is disposed by the orde of cquite and governed by the rule and moderation of reason. In the latin tonge it is called Respublike of the whiche the wordes Respublike hath divers significationes, & the nat only betoken that that is called: a thynges which is distinete from a persone, but also significeth astate, condition, substance, and profite. In our olde vulgare, this is called weale: And it is called a wellye contraye: wherin is all thyng that is profitable: And he is a wellye man that is riche in money and substance. Publike, as Parro saith, is virtuied of people: whiche in latin is called Populus, wherfore bit semeth that men haue ben lisse abused in calling Republiek a comune weale. And they which do suppose it so to be called for that that every thinge shulde be to all men in comune without dispreance of any astate or condition be ther to moved move by sensualite than by any good reason or inclination to humanite. And that shall one appare onto them that wyll be satisfied either with autorite or with naturall ordre and example.

But there can be nothing more convenient than by lost and little to trayne and exercise them in spechynge of latyne: insomuch that to knowe first the names in latyne of all thynges that commeth in sight, and to name all the partes of theyr bodys.
Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Gouernor*, 1531 (iii)

 Exercise

1. Explain the few alternative spellings in the texts: hit/it, latin/latine/latyne, onely/only, shal/shall, significacions/signification, ther/there, thinge/thyng, which/whiche.

2. What was the meaning of the following words in the 1530s: common, vulgare, astates, equite, diuers, betoken, abused, discrepance, sensualite?

3. Do any verb inflexions differ from those of Standard English today?

During the sixteenth century, writers were responding to a growing sense that the language needed an agreed form of spelling, grammar, and vocabulary, just as Latin had. People saw that the letters of the alphabet were too few to match the sounds of English, and that the spelling of many words did not match their pronunciation. A common description was that it was 'corrupted'.

One of the earliest books which advocated a reform of English spelling was John Hart's *An Orthographie*, published in 1569. In the following extract, he is justifying the need for his new spelling system, 'the new maner'. An example of the system he devised is given below.
An exercise of that which is said: wherein is declared, how the rest of the consonants are made by th'instruments of the mouth: which was omitted in the premisses, for that we did not much abuse them. Chapter vii.

In this title above-written, I consider of the <i>i</i>, in exercise, & of the <u>u</u>, in instruments: the like of the <i>i</i>, in title, which the common man, and many learned, do sound in the diphthongs <ei>, and <iu>: yet I would not think it meet to write them, in those and like words, where the sound of the vowel only, may be as well allowed in our speech, as that of the diphthong used of the rude: and so far I allow observation for derivations. Whereby you may perceive, that our single sounding and use of letters, may in process of time, bring our whole nation to one certain, perfect and general speaking.

I have ended the writing, and you the reading of this book, I doubt not but you and I shall think our labours well bestowed. And not-with-standing that I have devised this new manner of writing for our /English/, I mean not that /Latin/ should be written in these letters, no more than the /Greek/ or /Hebrew/, neither would I write t'any man of strange nation in these letters, but when as I would write /English/, I do confess it is strange to my self, though before I have ended the writing, and you the reading of this book, I doubt not but you and I shall think our labours well bestowed. And not-with-standing that I have devised this new manner of writing for our /English/, I mean not that /Latin/ should be written in these letters, no more than the /Greek/ or /Hebrew/, neither would I write t'any man of strange nation in these letters, but when as I would write /English/, I do confess it is strange to my self, though before I have ended the writing, and you the reading of this book, I doubt not but you and I shall think our labours well bestowed.
**Exercise**

Discuss what an ideal alphabetic system of spelling should be like and give some examples of what Hart calls ‘confusion and disorder’ in our present system. How many letters are there in the Roman alphabet and how many contrastive sounds (phonemes) are there in English today? What are some of the ways in which the mismatch between phonemes (Hart’s *voices*) and letters (Hart’s *markes*) has been dealt with in our spelling system. Which of them developed in ME before the sixteenth century?

Sir Thomas Elyot expressed a scholar’s view on the superiority of the resources of Latin, from which hundreds of words were ‘Englished’. These words were disparagingly referred to as ‘inkhorn terms’ – words coming from the scholar’s horn of ink and therefore pedantic – and there was a lot of controversy over this. This is illustrated in the following passages, all from the 16th century.

1. **Thomas Lupset, *A Treatise of Charitie* (1533)**
   
   ...when we be druuen to speake of thynges that lacke the names in oure tonge, we be also druuen to borowe the wordes that we haue not, sometyme out of Latin, sometyme out of Greke, euen as the Latin tonge doth in like necessitie borowe and take of other. And though now at fyrst hearyng this word stondeth e straungelye with you, yet by vse it shall waxe familiar, specially when you haue it in this maner expressed vnto you.

2. **Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Book named the Gouernor* (1531)**

   His Highnesse [Henry VIII] benignely receyuynge my boke, whiche I named *The Gouernor*, in the redynge therof sone perceyued that I intended to augment ou r Englyshe tongue, wherby men shulde as  well expresse more abundantly the thynge that they conceyued in theyr hartis – wherfore language was ordeyned – hauyng wordes apte for the pourpose, as also interprete out of Greke, Latyn, or any other tonge into Englysshe as sufficiently as out of any one of the said tongues into another. His Grace also perceyued that throughouht the boke there was no terme new made by me of a Latine or Frenche worde but it is there declared so playnly by one mene or other to a diligent reder that no sentence is therby made derke or harde to vnderstande.


   Among all other lessons this should first be learned, that wee neuer affect any straungue ynhorne termes, but to speake as is commonly receiued, neither seeking to be ouer-fine nor yet luing ouer-carelesse, vsing our speeche as most men doe and ordering our wittes as the fewest haue done. Some seeke so far for outlandish English that they forget altogether their mothers language. And I dare sweare this, if some of their mothers were aliue thei were not able to tell what they say; and yet these fine English clerkes will say they speake in their mother tongue, if a man should charge them for counterfeiting the Kings English. Some farre-iourneyed gentlemen at their returne home, like as they loue to goe in forraine aparell, so thei wil pouder their talke with oversea language. He that commeth lately out of Fraunce will talke French English and neuer blush at the matter. Another chops in with English Italianed, and applieth the Italian phrase to our English speaking, which is as if an oratour that professeth to vtter his mind in plaine Latine would needs speake poetrie, and farre-fetcht colours of straunge antiquitie.
4. Sir John Cheke, letter (1557)

I am of this opinion, that our own tongue shold be written cleane and pure, vnmixt and vnmangled with borowing of other tunges; wherein if we take not heed bi tijm, euer borowing and neuer payeing, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tongue naturallie and praishable vtter her meaning, when she boroweth no conterfeitness of other tunges to attire herself withall, but vseth plainlie her own with such shift as nature, craft, experiens, and folowing of other excellent doth lead her vnto.

5. William Turner, comments on a religious treatise (1543)

This translatour hath applied himselfe as much as he can to find out the most plain and vsed wordes that be in England, that men of all shyres of England maye the more easly perceiue the meaneing of the boke. Summe noweadayes, more sekyne their owne glorye then the profite of the readers, writ so French Englishe and so Latine that no man, except he be both a Latin man, a French man, and also an Englishe man, shal be able to vnderstande their writinge – whose example I would disswade all men to folowe. For the people, if they should haue any profyte by such mennes laboures, had nede of two dictionaries euer by them, one in French and another in Englishe; which thing, because it is so tedious, it would pluck back all men from the redynge of such good and Christen bokes as they do translate.


[The work was begun by Sir Philip Sidney and completed by Golding.]

In his [Sidney's] name, therefore, and as executor of his will in that behalf, I humbly offer this excellent worke vnto your good Lordship, as his and not myne. Wherein if any words or phrases shall seem straunge (as in some places perchaunce they may) I doubt not but your good Lordship will impute it to the rareness and profoundnesse of the matters there handled, not accustomed heretofore to bee treated in our language. For the avoiding of which inconuenience as much as might be, great care hath been taken, by forming and deryuing of fit names and termes out of the fountaynes of our own tongue (though not altogether most vsual, yet alwais conveyuable and easie to be understood), rather than by vsurping the Latin termes or by borrowing the words of any foreine language, least the matters which in some cases are misticcalle enough of themselues by reason of their owne profoundnesse might haue bene made more obscure to the vnlearned by setting them downe in terms vtterly vnknowne vnto them.


> auncient feete means the verse rhythms of the classical Latin and Greek poets. A foot is a unit of rhythm. peaush here indicates distaste: ‘expressing rather the speaker's feeling than any quality of the object referred to’ (*OED*).
   
a. Nowe whereas a number of men doe suppose that our language hath no words fitte to expresse the rules of this arte [rhetoric], and whereas some men do argue that it must needes be so, bycause they that speake or write thereof at large use terms and wordes that no mere English man can understande, it is playn that neyther their supposition is true nor yet their reason good. For as time doth inuent a newe forme of building, a straunge fashion of apparell, and a newe kinde of artillerie and munitions, so doe men by consent of speache frame and devise new names, fit to make knoen their strange deuises.

b. As for devising of newe termes, and compounding of wordes, our tongue hath a speciall grace, wherein it excelleth many other, and is comparable with the best. The cause is, for that the moste parte of Englyshe wordes are shorte, and stand on one sillable apeece, so that two or three of them are ofte-times fitly ioyned in one. Of these kinde of wordes I haue deuysed many.

9. E.K., preface to Spenser’s *Shepheardes Calender* (1579)
   
   …in my opinion it is one special prayse, of many which are dew to this poete, that he hath laboured to restore, as to their rightfull heritage, such good and naturall words as haue ben long time out of use and almost cleare disherited. Which is the onely cause that our mother tonge, which truely of itself is both ful enough for prose and stately enough for verse, hath long time ben counted most bare and barren of both.

*Elements in the Vocabulary of Early Modern English*

Although the vocabulary we use most frequently in every-day conversation can be traced back to OE and ME, the vast majority of the words to be found in dictionaries date from after 1500. The following list gives different types of additions to the lexicon between 1500 and 1700.

1. **Words current in Early Modern English but now obsolete**
   
   contemn ‘despise’, fantastical ‘existing only in imagination, fanciful’, festinate ‘hasty’, mislike ‘dislike’, revengement ‘retribution, punishment’

2. **New vocabulary of short duration in Early Modern English**
   

3. **Loanwords acquired after 1500 and still used**
   
   analysis (16c), cabinet (16c), deflect (17c), detail (17c), develop (17c), dictionary (16c), judicious (16c), major (16c), method (16c), polymath (17c), refuge (17c), research (16c), selection (17c), society (16c)

4. **Ways in which new words were formed**
   
   Compounding: daybreak (16c), home-spun (16c)
   
   Suffixation: scholarship (16c)
Conversion:  
**Verbs from nouns:**  
16c – grade, mask, sample, shipreck, whitewash; 17c – blanket, lacquer, model, puncture  
**Verbs from adjectives:**  
16c – empty, equal, idle, mellow, obscure; 17c – lower, muddy, numb  
**Nouns from verbs:**  
16c – blemish, push, shine; 17c – bitch, shudder, struggle  
**Back-formation:**  
**Verbs from agent-nouns:**  
16c – peddle; 17c – scavenge  
**Verbs from compound nouns or adjectives:**  
16c – backslide, rough-hew; 17c – browbeat, eavesdrop, spoonfeed  
**Shortening:**  
coz (16c, from cousin), chap (16c, from chapman), gent (16c, from gentleman), van (17c, from vanguard), wig (17c, from periwig)  
**Phonetic symbolism:**  
bang (16c), clang (16c), purr (17c), quack (17c)  

We have seen that loanwords formed an important component of English vocabulary in OE and ME. In Modern English loanwords have been adopted at an incredible rate. A list of examples from different languages and centuries is given below:

**Latin**
16th century: abrupt, abscond, accurate, adjunct, adumbrate, aggravate, allude, ambiguous, anarchy, aqueduct, area, audible, belligerent, bucolic, captivate, catastrophe, censor, century, diagonal, dictionary, ebullient, encomium, estuary, exterior, fluent, futile, genial, gerund, gladiator, gradation, imprecation, inchoate, inveterate, inarticulate, meticulous, metropolis, munificent, myriad, nefarious, negotiate, notion, numeral, obsolete, obtrude, omen, ovation, pallid, parabola, pecuniary, peninsula, plausible, proficient, pungent, recant, recuperate, salient, sector, segregate, species, thesis, turbulent, vertigo

17th century: abduction, abstemious, acclaim, accretion, acquiesce, adept, adventitious, ancillary, apparatus, apposite, armament, atmosphere, atrocious, calculus, capillary, carnivorous, castigate, cathartic, chrysalis, decimal, delinquent, derelict, diploma, discriminate, dogma, elastic, emissary, emollient, farrago, fatuous, fluctuate, formula, fulcrum, garrulous, graphic, hallucination, hesitate, hieratic, innuendo, meretricious, miscellaneous, nascent, noxious, ornithology, parahernalia, phenomenon, philanthropy, primogeniture, recondite, stagnant, tendency, torpor, turgid

**Greek**
16th century: topic; 17th century: autonomy, demagogue, dichotomy, euthanasia, pathos, protagonist, strophe, threnody

**Literary terms adopted from Latin and Greek**
alliteration, anaphora, antithesis, apostrophe, hemistich, hendiadys, hexameter, hyperbole, iambus, irony, litotes, metonymy, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, pentameter, periphrasis, trochee, trope, zeugma
New Formations from Latin or Greek elements

17th century: barometer, microphone ('an instrument by which small sounds can be intensified')

French
16th century: abeyance, abscess, adage, affable, artisan, bastion, baton, battalion, bourgeois, buffoon, buffet, bullet, cabinet, cannon, colonel, decadence, demolish, entrance, gauze, grotesque, machine, minion, moustache, musket, piquant, pioneer, populace, rendezvous, sally, surpass, terrace, trenchant, trophy, vogue, volley

17th century: accolade, adjust, adroit, aggrandise, alert, ammunition, altitude, avenue, balustrade, barricade, bayonet, bizarre, brigade, brilliant, brusque, buccaneer, bulletin, bureau, cajole, campaign, cascade, chandelier, charlatan, dragoon, effete, facade, grimace, marauder, nonchalance, omelette, parade, rapport, tableau

Italian
16th century: argosy, artichoke, ballot, biretta, canto, carnival, cupola, gondola, macaroni, madrigal, motto, mountebank, squadron, stucco

17th century: balcony, baritone, broccoli, chiaroscuro, gambit, incognito, lagoon, opera, portico, regatta, sonata, virtuoso

Spanish
16th century: anchovy, armada, armadillo, banana, bravado, cannibal, potato, renegade, sherry, tornado

17th century: alligator, avocado, barbecue, cargo, matador, siesta, vanilla

Dutch or Low German
16th century: cambric, freebooter, landscape, muff, splice, yacht

17th century: brandy, easel, knapsack, slim, smuggle

High German
17th century: hamster, plunder, sauerkraut

Indian languages
17th century: bungalow, chintz, juggernaut, pundit

Portuguese
buffalo (16c), flamingo (16c), macaw (17c)