The History of the English Language
Part I
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The History of the English Language

Scope:

This course of thirty-six lectures introduces the student to the history of the English language, from its origins as a dialect of the Germanic-speaking peoples, through the literary and cultural documents of its 1500-year span, to the state of American speech of the present day. In addition to surveying the spoken and written forms of the language over time, the course also focuses on a set of larger social concerns about language use, variety, and change: the relationship between spelling and pronunciation; the notion of dialect and variation across geographical and social boundaries; the arguments concerning English as an official language and the status of a standard English; the role of the dictionary in describing and prescribing usage; and the ways in which words change meaning and, in turn, the ways in which English coins or borrows new words. Each of these issues, charged with meaning in the present day, had historical examples. People have puzzled over these problems throughout time, and it will be the purpose of this course to illustrate the many ways in which speakers and writers of English, and its antecedents, confronted the place of language in society and culture.

In the course of these lectures, too, we will be looking at some special problems in the study of language generally—for example: how we describe and characterize language change over time; how we can accurately describe differences in pronunciation and, thus, recover earlier pronunciation habits; and how we can use the study of literature not only to chart the different periods of the English language, but to recognize how literary writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Twain, and others used the fluid resources of their language to grant meaning to a changing world.

Some of the approaches of this course will touch on linguistics. There will be a little bit of literary criticism. And, at times, it will call attention to the material culture of the book (specifically, how people read and wrote and what materials they used to do so). These are all issues that could demand full courses of their own. Our goal here, however, is to understand the great impact that studying the history of English can have on our appreciation of social, cultural, literary, and linguistic change. With these lectures, the student can find the history of English embedded in the words we use, the literature we read, and the everyday lives we lead. We will learn about the past, but also see the making of our own present.

In Part 1 we focus on the development of Old English, precursor of the modern tongue we speak today. We trace Old English back to the beginning: from its position as one of the Germanic languages all the way back to its ultimate roots in the theoretical language known as Indo-European. We consider the specific qualities of Old English that have been lost to modern English speakers: grammatical gender, synthetic structure, the presence of “strong” verbs, and the
emphasis on poetic alliteration. We also examine the basic vocabulary of Old English that comprises a significant part of Modern English even today.

With the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, English was eclipsed as an official language by French and Latin. English, in fact, survived several centuries of inferior social status before it became, at the close of the Middle Ages, the primary language of the British Isles.

**Learning Objectives**
Upon completion of these lectures, you should be able to:

1. Recognize why we spell and speak the way we do today.
2. Identify words of early English origin, as well as words of more recent, non-English origin.
3. Use a dictionary, and other resources, to learn the etymologies of words and chart their changes in meaning and use.
4. Explain the ways in which major English authors used the resources of their language.
5. Summarize the relationship of English to other European languages.
6. Summarize the differences between Old English (OE) and Middle English (ME).
7. Describe generally the dialect boundaries in England.
Lecture One

Introduction to the Study of Language

Scope: The major purpose of this course is to trace the development of the English language from its earliest forms to the present. To do so, we need a working notion of what language is and how it changes—we need to know the subject of our study. We also need to develop certain tools for studying that subject—we need a method. And we also need to know what questions we want to ask about the English language, both in its historical forms and in its present usages—we need a point of view.

In this lecture, we will defer for the moment the larger questions of subject and method and concentrate on point of view. Many of us are interested in the history of language because it may help us answer questions we have about language and society today. Questions about the standardization of English, about English as an official language, and about the relationships among spelling, pronunciation, grammar, and style are all ones we have asked probably since grade school. Each of these questions has a history, and each has been asked (in some form or another) by speakers and writers of English for nearly a thousand years.

This lecture surveys the content and approaches of the course as a whole by framing these questions historically. It anticipates many of the issues we will explore in detail in later lectures. It also provides students with a set of reference points for recognizing that, even in the welter of technical detail sometimes necessary to the historical study of English, problems of language and behavior vital to our lives are always behind this study.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Identify the important questions that motivate the historical study of English and of language in general.

2. Explain the points of contact between the historical study of English and contemporary debates on language use and legislation.

3. Describe the major periods in the history of English.
Outline

I. We must ask a number of questions that will inform our historical study of English. A philosophical question stands out: Should there be a standard English?
   A. As early as the tenth century, teachers in the church schools of Anglo-Saxon (AS) England argued about the same point. Some claimed there should be rules of spelling, pronunciation, and usage. Such rules were based on a particular regional dialect of Old English—one that gained social prestige because it was used in the region of the King’s court or of the central ecclesiastical administration.
   B. From the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century, writers argued about whether standard English should be based on regional dialects or on schoolroom instruction (we will look at several of their debates later in the course).
   C. American English similarly focuses on the problem of the standard. Regional dialects, habits of education, and differences from British English motivate discussions of American language.

II. Should the study of language be prescriptive or descriptive?
   A. When we make a dictionary, we are ostensibly recording spelling, pronunciation, meaning, and usage. But by recording those facets of a word, we may also be codifying them. We may be presenting features of a language that become prescriptive—in other words, that become statements of how we should speak and write rather than descriptions of how we actually speak and write.
   B. When we write the history of a language, we often look for grammatical categories. If you study Old English, for example, much as if you study French or German, you begin with a grammar book. But when you look at Old English texts, you very often find departures from the grammar we have reconstructed. Were the writers, or scribes, ignorant or corrupt; or did people not really, as a group, speak as “grammatically” or “correctly” as we would wish? Does anyone today really speak according to the rules of English grammar all the time?

III. Why do we spell the way we do? Why is there such a gap, in Modern English, between spelling and pronunciation? These are important questions, because in answering them we learn about the etymology, or origins, of words; and we also learn about the attitudes of writers, speakers, and teachers toward the relationship of spelling and speaking.
   A. English spelling is historical and etymological. English preserves older forms of the language by using conservative spellings. Words such as knight, knee, and know; marriage, name, enough; and so on have what we call silent letters. But, in fact, there was a time when all these words
were pronounced just about the way in which they were spelled. As the history of pronunciation changed, spelling did not.

B. A major reason why spelling did not change was the influence of official standards of writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England.

C. The development and use of dictionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fixed spelling and pronunciation according to ideals of educational attainment or social class.

IV. Why do we pronounce words the way we do? The history of English pronunciation is the history of sound changes.

A. During the earliest period of recorded English language usage, the Old English period from about the seventh to the twelfth centuries, English vowels and consonants were pronounced in just about the same way as those of other European languages.

B. But Old English, descending from a set of dialects of the Germanic languages, had a special set of sounds that other languages did not.

C. Over time, speakers of Old English came into contact with speakers of other languages, most notably the French-speaking Normans who came in the Conquest of 1066.

D. Contact with other languages helped provoke changes in pronunciation. Vowels and consonants came to be pronounced differently, as we will see later in the course.

E. Even later, contacts and shifts among dialects of English speakers helped to change the pronunciation of vowels and consonants. The so-called Great Vowel Shift of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries may have resulted from different dialects coming into contact with each other and with social and linguistic pressures to shift the system of pronouncing English long vowels.

F. Finally, as English-language speakers migrated to America and other colonial possessions, new dialects developed from the original, regional dialects of the colonists or settlers. Thus we cannot really speak of American English descending from British English; we need to see how American English developed from the particular regional dialects of certain settlers from certain places in England, and how those dialects were also separated, in America, along certain natural and man-made boundaries (for example, rivers, mountains, and roads).
V. Why does English grammar seem simple when compared to the grammar of other languages? We have no grammatical gender as French, German, Spanish, and other languages do (our nouns are not masculine, feminine, or neuter). We do not have case endings. Our verbs end in relatively simple forms of limited variety.

A. Old English, like its contemporary European languages, was a highly inflected language. Meaning was determined by case endings: that is, the relationship among words in a sentence was determined not by the order of the words in the sentence, but by the special endings of the words that determined which nouns were the subject, direct object, or indirect object; whether the nouns and verbs were singular or plural; whether the nouns were masculine, feminine, or neuter; and whether certain relationships of agency or action operated among nouns and verbs (we now use prepositions for this).

B. Over time, English shifted from an inflected to an uninflected language. In the Middle English period (from about the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries), English tended to lose its case endings. Meaning in a sentence was determined more and more by word order; grammatical gender began to disappear. Why this happened is hard to explain, though there are many theories, and some of them will be discussed later in the course.

C. But the fact is, it did happen, and this set of changes made English distinctive among its European counterparts. There is a history to these changes, and there are also many unchanged, older, or what we might call “fossilized” forms of the language.

D. In fact, what we will learn throughout this course is just where these little fossils of language are—how we can trace the history of English from the resources of our own, present-day forms of speech and writing. Texts like the King James Bible of 1611 are, even in their own time, archaic: they deliberately preserve old-fashioned forms, and they have passed into our own language. Certain regional dialects in England and America also preserve older forms, often because their speakers have been geographically or socially isolated for long periods of time. And many of the major works of literature we still read today have bequeathed old forms of English for our quotation, reference, and usage.

VI. Scope of the Lectures.

A. The overall lectures will examine issues of methodology; the Indo-European context; and the development of Old English into Middle English and into Modern English.

B. We will consider English in its various colonial manifestations, from American dialects to Indian literature.
C. We will examine the role that scientific study has played in the development of English.

D. We will explore the development of linguistics as an intellectual discipline from the medieval world to the modern.

E. Finally, we move toward a conceptual goal: to consider the relationship between language and mind; between language and self; and between language and the culture in which it develops.

Suggested Readings:

Questions to Consider:
1. What effect did the creation of dictionaries have on the history of English spelling?
2. How has English changed over time with regard to inflected endings?
Lecture Two

The Historical Study of Language:
Methods and Approaches

Scope: This lecture introduces students to the methods of studying language historically. It reviews the approaches of the course and defines some of the key terms of its inquiry.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Define the central problems in the historical study of language, with special reference to the methods of describing linguistic change.
2. Explain the key terms of the study of language.
3. Describe and discuss the myths or presuppositions that have governed discussion of language use and change and recognize their social and ideological foundations.

Outline

I. The major purpose of this course is to trace the development of the English language from its earliest forms to the present.
   A. We need a larger notion of what language itself is and how it changes.
   B. We need a practical method for the historical study of language.
   C. We will consider three tools for the study of language:
      1. articulatory phonetics: the representation of a language’s sounds using symbols developed for that purpose
      2. sociolinguistics: the study of language in society, social attitudes toward language variation, use, and change
      3. comparative philology: the reconstruction of earlier forms of a language, or of earlier languages, by comparing surviving forms in recorded languages
   D. With these tools, we will spend the course examining four specific areas of language change:
      1. pronunciation
      2. grammar and morphology
      3. meaning (semantic change)
      4. attitudes toward language change

II. What is the evidence for language change?
   A. Surviving written evidence is important, though not definitive.
      1. We must establish relationships between speech and writing; people spoke before they wrote; individuals speak before they learn to write; language is not writing.
2. How reliable are texts? what is the relationship between, e.g., spelling and pronunciation? Learned forms and popular speech? Fixed traditions of grammatical usage and historical changes?

B. Knowledge of speech sounds is critical. The historical study of language presents us with certain rules and conventions of sound change; nineteenth-century historical linguistics codified many of these as “laws” that established relationships of sound among different languages and language groups. We thus can work backwards from these laws and conventions to reconstruct the sound of earlier languages.

C. We also consider writing about language: manuals of, for example, Latin schoolroom teaching; interlinear glosses; dictionaries, grammar books, diaries and journals, etc.—all can give us evidence for the spoken and written forms of a language over time.

III. We need to recognize that language is a form of social and human behavior.

A. Thus, no language is inherently better or more grammatical than any other; and no earlier form of a language is any simpler, or more complex, or more or less “grammatical” than any other form.

B. Languages have rules and conventions of successful communication; and yet, throughout history, people have judged language, language performance, and individual linguistic competence.

C. The historical study of language has often operated along two axes:
   1. Should the teaching and study of language be prescriptive: i.e., should it be designed to prescribe standards of language use drawn from historical examples and, in the process, trace a lineage of development?
   2. Should the teaching and study of language be descriptive: i.e., should it be designed to describe language use and linguistic behavior in order to characterize different forms and habits?
   3. Can we really draw the line between describing and prescribing?

IV. Four Myths of Language.

A. The myth of universality: There is, as far as we can tell, no “universal” language, no form of utterance that can be understandable to every human being. While there have been attempts to recover historically an ultimate, “ur-language” for human beings, and while some psychologists and linguists have sought to understand the neurological structures involved in language learning, acquisition, and processing, we cannot at present posit a universal form of language.

B. The myth of simplicity: No language is harder or simpler for its own speakers to learn as a first language. All children learn to speak at the same rate, and all children, regardless of nation, speak their own languages comparably well. As a corollary, no historical form of a
language is simpler or more complicated than any other. English may have lost its old inflectional system, but it has gained new patterns of syntax and word order. No language decays or gets corrupted from an older form.

C. The myth of teleology: Languages do not move in a particular direction with a goal. In retrospect, we may observe certain patterns of change, but there is no discernible predictive value to evidence from the current state of a language that can enable us to posit a goal or telos for language change. We might also call this the myth of evolution in language: Languages do not evolve from lower forms into higher ones.

D. The myth of gradualism: Languages do not change evenly over time. Languages change at different rates and in different areas. For example, the language of Shakespeare, 400 years old, is relatively comprehensible to us. But the language of Chaucer, 150 years older than the language of Shakespeare, was almost incomprehensible to Shakespeare’s contemporaries (here, changes in pronunciation were rapid and wide-ranging during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries). Languages change in different areas (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) at different rates and at different times.

Suggested Readings:

Questions to Consider:
1. For the speakers of a given language, are some languages inherently more difficult to learn than others?
2. Do most languages gradually evolve toward a higher or lower form?
Lecture Three

The Prehistory of English:
The Indo-European Context

Scope: This lecture formally begins our historical study of English by looking at the mix of languages from which English ultimately emerged: Indo-European. By examining some of the features of the different surviving Indo-European (IE) languages, linguists can reconstruct the sounds and the possible meanings of a language spoken by a group of agricultural peoples approximately five or six thousand years ago. By exploring some of these features, we can see how words and concepts are related in various speech communities. We can also come to understand the ways in which languages are classified and studied.

In many ways, Indo-European is a discovery of the nineteenth century, and part of this and the following lecture will illustrate some of the high points in the history of historical linguistics itself. In the process, we may come to a better sense of what it means to study language, what it means to associate languages with political or ethnic populations, and what it means to trace changes in pronunciation and meaning over long stretches of time.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the current scholarly consensus on who the IE peoples were and when and where they lived.
2. Explain how relationships among the IE languages were discovered.
3. Describe some of the key examples of cognates in the IE languages and what they tell us about the history of the different language groups.

Outline

I. By the term Indo-European, we mean that postulated “language” or group of dialects out of which the Western and Eastern European, Indian, and Iranian languages developed. Some language groups, like Hittite, have not survived.

A. Who were the “Indo-Europeans”? It is generally believed that they probably lived in Southeastern Europe in the fourth millennium B.C. Recent archaeological discoveries have suggested that they buried their dead and that they moved into central Europe in about the third millennium B.C. and into Asia Minor and Indo-Iranian areas after about 3400 B.C. A series of later migrations brought them to Mediterranean and Northern Europe.

B. It is believed, too, that they were primarily an agricultural population.
C. All the IE languages have shared words for certain animals, plants, topographical formations, and certain meteorological phenomena. Such words help us geographically locate the IE peoples. They almost all have a word for snow, corn, and wolf.

II. Why study Indo-European?
A. Of course, some shared words can be illusory. All the IE languages have shared or cognate words for wind, heart, lung, foot, night, sun, moon, and so on—implying that the IE peoples all had hearts, lungs, and feet, and that they all lived on Earth. These words tend to be conservative, constituting a core vocabulary.
B. The real point is to see how we can trace the origins of words back to shared roots, and in the process, to reconstruct something of the social or intellectual structure of IE civilization. More importantly, we want to see how words of seemingly different sound and sense in modern languages go back to shared originals.

A. Scholars posted to colonial positions in the British empire began to notice something recognizable in the exotic languages they encountered.
B. At the end of the eighteenth century, the English scholar and diplomat William Jones, working in India, noticed certain features in the vocabulary and grammar of Sanskrit (the ancient classical language of India) that were shared with Latin and Greek and the modern European languages.
1. In particular, he noticed certain words, like Sanskrit raj, Latin rex, German reich, and Celtic rix, that seemed similar in sound and meaning (they were all words for king or ruler).
2. He also noticed certain grammatical features, like forms of the verb to be, that were shared in the different languages.
3. Jones posited that these various languages must have descended from an original tongue. In 1799, he identified the tongue as Sanskrit, thus subscribing to the myth of language decay.
C. In the nineteenth century, following up on Jones’s discovery, language scholars began to develop the study of comparative grammar.
1. Scholars, particularly in Germany, began to codify relationships of sounds among different languages.
2. They also proposed lines of descent among the different languages, introducing the metaphor of the “language tree.”
D. In the nineteenth century, scholars made the development of language the subject of linguistics. By the 1870s, scholars had formulated a series of sound relationships among the languages that were recognized as having historical meaning: i.e., they showed not only relationships
among living languages, but also lines of descent from earlier forms of the languages.

1. These came to be known as sound laws. One of these, Grimm’s Law, offers much valuable empirical evidence in spite of its imperfections.

2. The historical study of language (what we call diachronic linguistics) came to dominate the scholarly side of linguistic inquiry.

E. The IE languages preserve certain words that are clearly not from IE. Such words tell us something about the patterns of migration and the kinds of people the IE peoples absorbed.

Suggested Readings:

Questions to Consider:
1. Who were the “Indo-Europeans,” and where did they originate?
2. How did Europeans come to posit the existence of an Indo-European set of tongues?
Lecture Four

Reconstructing Meaning and Sound

Scope: In this lecture, we will examine the ways in which historical linguists classify languages, study their particular history, and trace relationships of sound and sense. Our focus is the IE languages, and we will look closely at one of the most important relationships of sound among them: Grimm’s Law. This set of relationships helps us understand the ways in which words from different, modern European languages are related. It also helps scholars reconstruct the older forms of those words and, in the process, recover something of the history, culture, and social life of the IE peoples. In this and the following lecture, we explore the world of the IE peoples as revealed through these techniques of reconstruction.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the ways in which the IE languages have been classified, and more generally, describe the ways in which languages in general are classified.
2. Characterize the major features of the IE languages.
3. Explain the major sound relationships (or sound laws), especially Grimm’s Law, in the IE languages and why they matter to the study of English.

Outline

I. What did scholars of IE learn, and how did they study the languages?
   A. The surviving IE languages can be classified in two ways.
      1. Genetic classification implies the growth or development from a “root stock” and the branching into language groups or families. Genetic classification looks for shared features of vocabulary, sound, and grammar that enable scholars to reconstruct earlier forms. This is a historical, or diachronic, system of classification.
      2. Typological classification means comparing languages for larger systems of organization. For example, do the languages signal meaning in a sentence by means of inflectional endings (a so-called synthetic language), or do they signal meaning by word order patterns (an analytic language)? This is primarily a synchronic system of classification, in which what matters is not the historical descent but rather the present features of the languages. There is a wide variety of languages: agglutinating, isolative, etc.
B. Broadly speaking, the surviving IE languages can be classified into two groups defined by geography: eastern and western branches. These are distinguished, for practical purposes, by representative words for “hundred.”

1. The western languages that descended from IE are so-called “centum” languages. *Centum* is the Latin word for 100, and all these languages have a word for that number closely related to *centum* (the Germanic languages have the word beginning with *h-* , which is a later sound change).

2. The eastern languages are so-called “satem” languages; *satem* is the old Persian word for 100.

C. There are other ways of linking the languages together, most of them very technical. But we can make some general claims about the IE language for our purposes here:

1. It was a highly inflected language. It had eight noun cases, each of which signaled the noun’s place in a sentence.

2. It had six tenses, each of which was signaled with special verb endings.

3. It had grammatical gender for the nouns.

4. It had a special system of distinguishing words by changing the root vowel in certain patterns.

5. This descends into the Germanic languages, and into English, in what we will see later as certain kinds of verbs: *drink*, *drank*, *drunk*; *sing*, *sang*, *sung*.

6. These are “strong” verbs that signal change in tense by a shift in the root vowel of the word. “Weak” verbs, on the other hand, take a suffix.

II. The Germanic Languages and the Origin of English. One branch of Indo-European is known as the Germanic languages. We will explore their features in a subsequent lecture. But for now, it is important to recognize that the sound changes and patterns of meaning (what we call semantic changes) across Indo-European languages matter most to us for the Germanic languages, from which English descends.

III. By comparing surviving words in the IE languages, we can go back to their originals. Certain relationships of sound and pronunciation have been discovered that enable us to say with assurance that words are related (or cognate) in different languages. A cognate is a word shared by different languages whose relationship can be explained by precise sound laws.

A. By reconstructing sound (phonetic reconstruction), scholars compare the sounds of surviving languages and use sound laws to recover an IE original. In the process, we can learn much about how certain surviving words are related.
B. Perhaps the most important tool for reconstruction is the set of sound relationships known as Grimm’s Law. Discovered by the Grimm brothers (who also gave us the fairy tales) in the early nineteenth century, it is a set of relationships for words in the Germanic languages and non-Germanic languages of IE.

English *fish* ~ Latin *pisces*
English *tooth* ~ Latin *dentis*
English *hundred* ~ Latin *centum*

These kinds of correspondences, and many others, illustrate that Germanic f-, th-, h- correspond to the non-Germanic initials p-, t-, k-.

*Tooth* is important because it shows that non-Germanic d- corresponds to Germanic t-. Other examples from other languages generate the following set of correspondences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germanic</th>
<th>Non-Germanic (and thus, posited original IE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>~ b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>~ d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>~ g</td>
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<td>~ bh</td>
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<td>f</td>
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<tr>
<td>th</td>
<td>~ t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>~ k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. What does this mean in practical terms?

A. We can see the historical relationships of languages by looking at familiar things such as body parts. Our medical terms are derived from Latin. Our body parts are really from Old English. So look at *lip/labial; tooth/dental; heart/cardiac; gall/choleric; knee/genuflect; foot/pedal.*

B. But we can also use Grimm’s Law, and other sound relationships, to recover something of the world of the Indo-Europeans, the subject of the next lecture.

C. Calvert Watkins, translating a cuneiform tablet, went so far as to claim that he’d found a Trojan version of Homer’s *Iliad,* what seemed a startling example of linguistic sleuthing from the IE past.

Suggested Readings:


Questions to Consider:

1. What is the historical relationship between English and the Germanic languages?
2. Give examples of how Grimm’s Law accounts for differences in pronunciation among certain IE languages.
Lecture Five

Words and Worlds: Historical Linguistics and the Study of Culture

Scope: This lecture explores the ways in which we may reconstruct sounds and meanings of the older Indo-European languages and, in the process, learn something about the shared cultural and historical contexts from which the Germanic languages, and ultimately English, emerged.

IE reconstruction proceeds by statistically comparing the sound relationships of cognate words in surviving languages and then proceeding back to reconstruct an original IE form (we are identifying such forms as reconstructions by preceding them with an asterisk). The semantic values, or meanings, of the surviving words are then compared to attempt to reconstruct a field of meanings or references for the original term.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe some of the key elements of the social and belief systems of the IE peoples, and how we can know about them.
2. Identify some of the most important IE cognates that descend into Modern English words.
3. Describe the key features of the poetic and literary systems of the IE languages and how we can see them operating in familiar literary and mythological texts and stories.

Outline

I. We can infer something about IE belief systems. IE is rich in religious vocabulary. Scholars have reconstructed the following roots that correspond to words in known languages.
   A. *dyeu-pter: The first element is the root of the Latin word deus, a god, but also of the Greek word Zeus, chief of the gods. The second element is the root of Latin pater, Greek pitar, English father (remember Grimm’s Law: p~f). So here is a word meaning god-father. It becomes, in Latin, Jupiter (which is simply a reduction of these two elements spoken quickly together), as well as many other words in languages as diverse as those of India and Iran.
   B. *kred-dh: Heart (kerd) + to put (dh). Remember Grimm’s Law: the Germanic h- sound corresponds to the older k-sound. And the words that descend from the *dh- root are words for giving, or placing (like the Latin verb do, dare; our word donate). So to place in the heart
becomes in Latin the verb *cre + do, “I believe,” or etymologically, it is in the heart.

C. *sep-el-yo: A term made up of a set of roots meaning to venerate the dead. The Latin verb *sepelire means to bury; notice our word sepulchre. Such words give evidence that the IE peoples buried their dead (rather than cremated them, for example).

II. We can also speculate as to social organization and economic life.
A. The law is an important theme.
   1. *reg: A ruler or king; Latin rex, Sanskrit raj, Celtic rix, and German reich (meaning empire); our word rich.
   2. Words like Latin *jus (which give us justice) descend from roots meaning religious law. Words like bond, net, and law descend from roots meaning binding together, netting or tying, implying that social relationships were like bonds.

B. Also apparent are principles of exchange and reciprocal gift-giving.
   1. roots: *do becomes Latin donare, to give, but Hittite do, meaning to take or receive. *Nem gives us the Greek god Nemesis, the one who metes out justice, but it also becomes German nehmen, meaning to take.
   2. The IE root *ghosti descends into words meaning both host and guest: Greek xenos, stranger; Latin hostis, host; but also hostile. The seeming opposite meanings in descendant languages implies that the original root connoted a relationship between people in general, a sense of exchange or “foreignness.” We see here a constellation of concepts, of stranger as potential friend and enemy.

C. Agriculture is also important.
   1. cereals: *grčno, grain; *wrughyo, rye; *bhares, barley
   2. domesticated animals: *gwou, cow; *su, swine; *agwhno, sheep; *kwon, dog; *ekwo, horse.
   3. Notice the following words in modern languages:
      Latin, pecunia (wealth)
      Sanskrit, pasu (livestock)
      Old English, feoh (cattle)
      Old Norse, fé (possessions)
      modern German, Vieh (cow)
      Modern English, fee
   4. Linguists have reconstructed an IE root *peku behind all of these words. The idea is for movable goods, or wealth in the form of livestock. This reconstruction, along with many others, implies that the IE economic system was based on domesticated animal agriculture, a hypothesis borne out by the fact that all IE languages
share the word for “yoke”: the very thing that goes along with the cattle.

III. The literary imagination is a point of considerable interest. Scholars have reconstructed shared words for poet, for poetry, and for certain literary concepts. In addition, there are certain metrical similarities among the poetry of different surviving IE languages, as well as certain metaphors.

A. Certain phrases in Old English, Celtic, Balkan, and Greek languages suggest a shared literary inheritance. Conceptions of the poet and of poetry involve an oral tradition of performance.
   1. Poets are also seers or prophets; Latin vates (seer), Irish faith (bard), Old English wod (crazy), the Old Norse God Odin (in Old English Woden) all descend from the same IE root.
   2. The poet is a weaver of words: IE root *wek means to weave; the IE root *teks gives us the word for text, but also the word for textile. Poetry is a textile made of words.

B. Many IE languages share cognate words for heroic fame as preserved in poetry. The Greek phrase kleos aphthiton, “undying fame,” is an exact cognate with Sanskrit sravas aksitam.

C. The concept of the secret or the prophetic is also central to literary and religious thought. Greek kalypsein means “to hide.” It is cognate with English hull, meaning a shell or a covering. Kalypso is the figure in the Odyssey who is a sorceress, one who hides or conceals. Apocalypse is the Greek for taking away the covering; Latin simply translates this as re-velare, remove the cover or the veil: hence revelation.

Suggested Readings:


Questions to Consider:

1. How does the act of reciprocal gift-giving reveal itself in Indo-European root words?
2. What are some IE cognates from the world of agriculture that have been passed down into English?
Lecture Six

The Beginnings of English

Scope: English emerges out of a mix of Germanic languages and dialects in the period roughly around the sixth and seventh centuries. Our earliest recorded documents in the British Isles are from the late seventh and early eighth centuries, but they give us insight into the kind of language spoken and written up to a century earlier. This form of English, which we know as Old English (OE), was spoken and written by settlers from the Continent: the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. Their culture came to be known as Anglo-Saxon.

In this lecture, we explore the linguistic relationships of Old English to its earlier Germanic matrix. We look at key vocabulary terms, many of which are still in our own language, to trace patterns of migration, social contact, and intellectual change. We will also see how Old English was written down, what survives in the language, and how the study of these writings can help us reconstruct the world view of the Anglo-Saxon peoples.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Define just what OE is and when and where it was spoken.
2. Identify the major regional dialects and historical periods of OE.
3. Describe the major features of OE, especially as they descend into Modern English.

Outline

I. We may define the language known as Old English in four ways:
   A. geographically—as a language spoken by the Germanic settlers in the British Isles
   B. historically—from the time of the settlement in the fifth century until the Norman Conquest in 1066
   C. genetically—as a Lowlands branch of the West Germanic group of languages
   D. typologically—as a language with a particular sound system (phonology), grammatical endings (morphology), word order patterns (syntax), and vocabulary (lexis)

II. Old English is bounded by geography.
   A. The earliest inhabitants of the British Isles, whose language we can reconstruct, were Celtic speakers who migrated from Europe sometime in the second half of the first millennium B.C.
B. The Romans colonized England under Julius Caesar and kept it as a colony until the middle of the fifth century A.D. Latin became the prestige language of administration, education, and social life.

C. During the last decades of Roman colonial rule in England, groups of Germanic-speaking tribes and raiders began to settle portions of the British Isles. By the middle of the fifth century, raids and settlements became more frequent, and by end of the century, settlements began to spread from the south and southeastern coasts into the southwest (in the area known now as Wessex). By the year 547, a kingdom was established in the north of England, north of the Humber river, by groups descended from the Angles, a Germanic tribe (they became known as Anglians).

D. By the middle of the seventh century, small kingdoms were being established throughout England. Some of them were small outposts, really little more than extended farmsteads and small villages; others were larger, with rulers of great power and wealth.

E. As these settlements developed, Old English emerged as a distinctive language, but it also developed four major dialects. Each dialect here, as well as subsequent dialects in England, had both natural and man-made borders.

1. North of the Humber River was Northumbrian. This was the dialect that became the standard of a great religious and literary culture in the eighth and ninth centuries. The historian Bede, who completed his Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and Peoples in 731, was a Northumbrian (though he wrote in Latin). So, too, was Caedmon, perhaps the first known poet in the English language. The great gospel books and bibles of the A-S church were produced here, and their Latin texts were glossed in the Northumbrian dialect. The earliest written records in OE are in Northumbrian.

2. In the middle of the country, between the Humber river to the north and the Thames to the south, was Mercia, a loose collection of settlements and kingdoms.

3. Kentish was the dialect spoken in the southeastern corner of the country. Here, too, little survives in this dialect.

4. The most important dialect of OE was West Saxon (W-S), the form of the language spoken and written in the southwestern part of the country. This was the dialect of King Alfred (d. 899), of the seat of government of the A-S people that emerged in the late ninth and early tenth century, located in Winchester, and of the church. Most manuscripts of OE literature are in the W-S dialect, either because they were commissioned and read by individuals in this area, or because they took earlier documents from other dialects and, in effect, translated them into the W-S dialect. For all
ints and purposes, when we read “Old English” in modern editions, we are reading texts in the W-S dialect.

III. Just as the OE language may be divided into geographically bounded dialects, so the OE period may be divided into historically demarcated periods. England was probably the first place in Europe where people were considered literate if they could read and write in the vernacular.

A. Northumbrian efflorescence: As I’ve noted, this period from the seventh through the early ninth centuries was marked by a rich religious and literary culture. The monasteries of Northumbria produced beautiful manuscripts of the Bible, providing the contexts for the writing of historical and intellectual texts.

B. During the period of the ninth and early tenth centuries, Wessex became the seat of A-S intellectual, literary, and political life. King Alfred brought together many of the previously disparate groups into a single confederation. He also brought together scholars to begin a project of educational reform. He commissioned the translation of key works of Latin learning into OE.

C. During the eleventh century, a new set of teachers and scholars set up schools for educating students in English and Latin. By the end of the eleventh century, however, within a generation or two of the Norman Conquest, much of this literary and intellectual activity was gone. Anglo-Saxon bishops and priests were replaced by Norman French ones. By the middle of the twelfth century, OE was gone.

IV. Old English descends from a group of Lowland Germanic languages; its closest relatives are Dutch and Frisian. These languages shared certain sound patterns, different from the Highland Germanic languages (from which modern German descends), that made their pronunciation distinctive. But OE also shares many grammatical features with the older Germanic languages. Here are the most important features:

A. Verbs: OE, like all the Germanic languages, had two kinds of verbs—strong and weak.

1. Strong verbs are verbs that signal change in tense through the change in the root vowel of the word. Examples of strong verbs are *drink, drank, drunk; run, ran; and think, thought.*

2. Weak verbs are those that signal the past tense with a suffix ending in -d or -ed. Their vowel does not change. Thus: *walk, walked; love, loved; care, cared.*

3. Many strong verbs have been changed, over time, into weak verbs. For example, the word meaning to grow, *wax,* was once a strong verb; now it’s just *wax, waxed.* Some verbs still remain strong (*shine, shone*), but weak forms have developed along with them (*shine, shined*). Such verbs, (e.g., *hang, hung, hanged*) have developed over time to signal different kinds of verbal
relationships (e.g., transitivity: I shined my shoes, but the sun shone). Whenever we want to coin a new word in English, we make it weak: televise, televised.

B. Nouns: like all the Germanic languages, OE had noun declensions. Nouns were in different groups, or classes. If you wanted to signal relationships in a sentence—subject, direct object, indirect object, instrument of action—endings were placed on the ends of the words. These are known as case endings.

1. Moreover, like many other European languages, OE had full grammatical gender: nouns were masculine, feminine, or neuter. Concept nouns (ending in “ness”) were feminine.

2. OE often signaled the plural of nouns with a final -s, as we still do today. But there were groups of nouns whose root vowel changed between singular and plural. Thus, man, men; foot, feet; mouse, mice, goose, geese.

V. What is distinctive about OE is the way it made and used words.

A. OE made words by combining other words. By combining nouns, by adding prefixes, and by bringing together nouns and adjectives, OE created a rich vocabulary that, in effect, translated Latin religious and philosophical language into vernacular form, but that also gives voice to a distinctive literary world view for the Anglo-Saxon peoples themselves. Some of the Latin borrowings are “continental” (before breakaway of OE from Germanic), while others are “insular” (OE period in British Isles).

B. But OE, like the Germanic languages, borrowed words from Latin. Our next lecture begins with a description of how OE borrowed words and what the relationships are among the borrowed and the native vocabulary terms of the A-S people. Loan words were absorbed in the native Germanic vocabulary with changes (e.g., monk—minister). Thus, OE resisted outright borrowing by coining words of a new mint.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:

1. What were the major Old English dialects, and where were they spoken?
2. Explain some of the typical characteristics of noun and verb forms in Germanic languages.
Lecture Seven

Old English: The Anglo-Saxon Worldview

Scope: We left the Germanic peoples in our last lecture having separated from the IE root-stock of language, moving north and west, and ultimately splitting off again into various regional groups. One such group came to the British Isles in the fifth and sixth centuries. The history of this people—and thus of the earliest speakers of what we can now call the English language—is written in the words they used and the poetry and prose they wrote.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the differences among loan words and native words in OE.
2. Distinguish among words borrowed from the Continental period, and thus into the Germanic languages in general, from those borrowed in the Insular period, and thus distinctive to OE.
3. Explain how the first known poet in English, Caedmon, used the resources of his vocabulary and his literary inheritance to give vernacular expression to new Christian concepts.

Outline

I. There were two broad periods of word-borrowing.
   A. Continental: These are words borrowed before OE split off from the parent Germanic languages during the first centuries A.D. They were words from the old Roman Latin vocabulary, e.g., architectural and civic phenomena. For example, the word street is a loan-word from Latin strata. But more specifically:
      1. words for war: camp, wall, mile, pit
      2. words for trade: cheap (~Lat. caupo, small tradesman), wine, pound, mint
      3. words for food: cheese, pepper, butter, plum, prune, pea
      4. words for architecture: chalk, copper, pitch, tile
      5. words for rulership: the Latin Caesar gave words for political control in many languages: German Kaiser, Russian Tsar.
   B. Insular: These are words borrowed into OE during the period of Anglo-Saxon settlement in the British Isles. They are words from newer Latin religious concepts (the Church), older Celtic terms from the indigenous Celtic peoples living in the British Isles, and words from the Scandinavian languages of Viking and Danish raiders in England.
      1. words from Celtic/Latin Christianity (borrowed in the sixth-seventh centuries): cross, priest, shrine, rule, school, master, pupil
2. words from Scandinavian Germanic languages, borrowed during contact with the Vikings and the Danes during their raids on England in the eighth-ninth centuries. These words were distinguished by special sounds in the Scandinavian languages, in particular the sounds sk- and k-, that corresponded to the sounds sh- and ch- in Old English. Thus, words such as skirt, kirk, skipper, and dike are Scandinavian words whose OE counterparts are skirt, church, ship, and ditch. Words such as muggy, ill, ugly, egg, rugged, and the like have a distinctive Scandinavian set of sounds and were also borrowed during this time.

3. words from learned Latin, taken into English during the period of the so-called Benedictine reform of the English church in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, of complex meaning or reference: Antichrist, apostle, canticle, demon, font, nocturne, Sabbath, synagogue, accent, history, paper, etc.

II. OE made new words in four ways:

A. Determinative compounding: Common to all the Germanic languages, this kind of compounding forms new words by yoking together two normally independent nouns: e.g., earhring (earring); bocestaf (book-staff, i.e., letter); or an adjective and a noun, e.g., middangeard (middle yard, i.e., earth); federmaha (feather coat, i.e., plumage); banlocan (bone locker, i.e., body). Many of these words make up the unique poetic vocabulary of OE literature, especially in metaphorical constructions known as kennings: e.g., hronrad (whale road, or sea).

B. Repetitive compounding: bringing together words that are very nearly identical, or that complement and reinforce each other for specific effect. Thus, holtwudu (wood-wood, forest); gangelwaefer (going about one, swift moving one, in OE reserved as the word for spider); under this class is the later compound flutterby, which was transposed in Modern English into butterfly.

C. Noun-adjective formations: graesgrene (grass green); lafgeorn (praise eager); goldhroden (gold adorned). In Modern English, this form of compounding is revived in such phrases as king-emperor or fighter-bomber.

D. Prefix formations: here, as in other Germanic languages, the most common way of creating new words. OE had many prefixes that derived from prepositions and that altered the meaning of words in special ways.

III. There existed an Old English literary language.

A. For the most part, many of the words mentioned here are nouns. Indeed, as we’ll see later in the course, most of the words that survive into Modern English from OE are nouns and pronouns. OE seems to have a tendency to develop large classes of nouns—groups of
synonyms for clarifying concepts through repetition and restatement, rather than (as we do now) through progressively more distinctive adjectives or adverbs. OE literary diction is primarily nominal; that is, it hinges on forms of repetition and restatement, using synonyms to bring together various connotations of a thing or idea to enrich its resonance.

B. The earliest English poem and the nature of the OE poetic vocabulary. Caedmon’s Hymn, composed between 657 and 680, is the first example we have of OE verse. It appears in manuscripts from the early eighth century; it is purportedly oral in composition.
   1. It is alliterative in metrical organization. OE poetry, like all old Germanic poetry, uses alliteration (the repetition of an initial consonant or vowel sound), rather than rhyme, as its principle of organization.
   2. It is oral and formulaic; that is, it relies on set formulae or stock phrases to drive home its meaning and effect.

IV. Analyzing Caedmon’s Hymn provides an insight into literary Old English.
   A. In terms of vocabulary, we note the words for God. Caedmon adopts the older, mythological and pagan/secular words for rulership to a newer Christian purpose.
   B. As for compounds, Caedmon relies on the older OE compounding techniques to express traditional concepts traditionally.
   C. His idioms for creation recall the Old Norse creation myths, the building of the hall of the gods (Valhalla). By using familiar words, he depicts a diverse—but unified—portrait of God.
   D. Caedmon’s Hymn is the first example we have of an attempt to express Christian conceptions of creation in native Germanic form. Its use of language therefore tells us much about the interrelationships between pagan and Christian, between English and Latin, and between doctrine and poetry.
   E. We learn three things from this study.
      1. Caedmon translates Christian concepts into the older vocabulary of Creation myth and social rulership.
      2. He uses the forms of oral-formulaic, alliterative English verse to express new Christian ideas.
      3. His poem illustrates the principles of OE word formation by making compound words and, especially, new nouns.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. Explain several different ways that Old English created new words.
2. What were the chief characteristics of Old English as a literary language?
Lecture Eight

Changing Language: Did the Normans Really Conquer English?

Scope: It has been said that, had the Normans not invaded England in 1066, English might have retained more of its older inflectional structure. The Norman Conquest, it has been argued, changed the whole course of the English language. It marks the conventional transition from OE to Middle English (hereafter referred to as ME), the language spoken and written in England from roughly the end of the eleventh century to the end of the fifteenth.

This lecture seeks to understand and to qualify these ideas. First, it illustrates some ways in which English was changing on its own (i.e., ways that did not originate in the influx of French in the Norman conquest). Second, it shows how the impact of the Conquest was, at least in part, to accelerate some of these changes and, in particular, to have a great impact on vocabulary and word formation.

The larger purpose of this and the following lecture will be to see language change in action—to witness shifts away from older OE forms and see the precursors of Modern English. We will see English shift from an inflected to a relatively uninflccted language, as word order takes precedence over case endings as the determiner of meaning. We will also see shifts in the relationship of speech to writing and, in the following lectures, too, in the attitudes toward regional and social dialects. Finally, we will ask how a language builds and forms its vocabulary: by building new words out of old or by borrowing them.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the major differences between OE and ME.
2. Explain some of the possible reasons why the OE language was already changing at the time of the Norman Conquest, and how these changes can be seen in Modern English.
3. Describe some of the problems inherent in using written documents as evidence for changes in the spoken language (both specific to this period and more generally).
Outline

I. The Loss of Inflections. The term that describes the falling together of the old system of case endings is syncretism. During the period from about 1000 to 1200, the following things were happening to English:
   A. Noun case endings were simplified or lost.
   B. Adjective endings were lost.
   C. Verb endings were maintained, but simplified; Old English, like other Indo-European languages, had a dual pronoun—a pronoun that signaled just two people; this dual was lost.
   D. Grammatical gender was lost. Nouns were no longer masculine, feminine, or neuter.

II. Why did this happen? Some theories have been proposed, and they hinge on three problems: stress, form, and function.
   A. Stress: it has been argued that the insistent stress in the root syllable of OE words had a tendency to level out the sounds of unstressed syllables. This means that any sound or syllable that did not take full word stress—such as a grammatical ending—would not have been pronounced clearly.
   B. Form and function: As final endings became harder to distinguish, new ways of establishing meaning were necessary:
      1. OE had a fully developed set of prepositions. In ME they gradually came to be used in new ways, taking over the function of old case endings.
      2. Patterns of word order became regularized, as syntax became the way of expressing grammatical relationships in a sentence.

III. There exists a problem of written evidence.
   A. As endings lost their prominence in the spoken language, they were harder to reproduce in the written forms.
   B. An excellent example of lost endings comes from the Peterborough Chronicle, a prose history of England kept by monks in Peterborough Abbey in the Midlands of England. The annal was kept up until the mid-twelfth century, and it offers us a sequence of dated, localized texts that enable us to trace the changes in a language in a given speech community. Because Peterborough was somewhat geographically removed from the initial impact of the Norman Conquest, its records illustrated few effects of Norman French. Each chronicle entry is the set of events of a given year, and each one begins with the phrase meaning “in this year.” Consider the following:
      1. 1083: “on Pissum geare” (-um and -e signal a dative masculine singular)
2. 1117: “on Pison geare” (here, a leveling of adjectival ending to an indiscriminate vowel plus an indiscriminate nasal [i.e., an -m or -n]; perhaps the scribe’s attempt to preserve what he thinks is a grammatical ending)

3. 1135: “on Pis geare” (total loss of the adjectival ending; a fossilized final -e signaling a dative; concord in grammatical gender is obviously gone by this time)

4. 1154: “on Pis gear” (endings have completely dropped away)

IV. As these things were happening, several other changes were at work in English during—or better yet, in spite of—the Norman Conquest.

A. Word order patterns were regularized. The order of Subject/Verb/Object becomes the standard for the simple declarative sentence. Other word order patterns came to be used for special kinds of expression; for example, in asking a question or stressing a point, you would invert the order as Verb/Subject/Object.

1. Both Shakespeare and the King James Bible preserve this archaism in asking a question.

2. Other archaisms, like methinks, survived until the time of the Renaissance.

B. Over time, the sound of the language also changed. Here are a couple of the most important features:

1. OE began to lose some of the characteristic consonant clusters that gave it its distinctive sound.

2. Certain OE words underwent a special sound change called metathesis. This is the inversion of sounds in order. We hear this when we identify certain regional dialects by the pronunciation “aks” for “ask.” During the late OE and early ME period, certain words permanently metathesized their sounds: brid > bird; axian > ask; thurgh > through; beorht > bright.

C. Some strong verbs (need, help, wax) changed to weak ones.

D. The system of making meaning was changing at the same time newer French words were inflecting the language. Parts of the poem “The Owl and the Nightingale” (c. 1200) employed a Continental poetic structure with a vocabulary that was primarily Anglo-Saxon.

Suggested Reading:


Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways was Old English already changing before the Norman French arrived in England?

2. How were Old English word-endings evolving independent of Norman influence—and what is a plausible explanation of why?
Lecture Nine

Conquering Language:
What Did the Normans Do to English?

Scope: What the Normans did was bring a whole new vocabulary to the English language, and in the process, they changed radically the ways in which words were formed, stress patterns were made in sentences, and verbal constructions and idioms were produced. But it is also important to note that the Normans only initiated a series of borrowing periods from French. This lecture looks closely at the changes wrought by French in English during the period from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries. In the process, it raises questions about what we might call the sociology of language change and contact.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the kinds of words borrowed into English during the early ME period.
2. Explain how we can recognize those loan words in Modern English by looking at spelling.
3. Distinguish between words borrowed from Norman French and Central French, and explain how the differences among them still survive in modern English spelling and pronunciation.

Outline

I. Why do new words enter a language? What happens when two languages come into contact?
   A. Words are borrowed mainly for two reasons.
      1. If the donor language is of greater prestige in the field of borrowed words: French terms for government, political organization, high culture (especially cookery), and educated discourse came to be preferred.
      2. If there is a vacant slot for the word in the receiving language; in other words, if there is no native word for a concept or thing, and the new language community brings that thing or concept in, then it comes with the new word. But some languages resist loan words and coin their own. What changed English from resisting loan words to welcoming them?
   B. New words affected word stress. When new words enter a language, they can be subject to variable word stress. Most French words that came into English were polysyllabic, and the variable stress on the word leads in some cases to differences in meaning and use. For
example, *recórd* is a verb, but *récord* is a noun. We say *cánon*, but *canonización*. This variable word stress is a key feature of the Romance languages, and it affects the sound pattern of English.

C. Changes also occurred in poetry. OE poetry was alliterative in structure. Continental vernacular poetry worked through rhyme and quantitative verse forms (i.e., what mattered was the number of syllables in a line). By the year 1200, English writers could write poetry in rhymed couplets.

II. The borrowings from French came from two different areas. There are two periods of borrowing from French in Middle English, one associated directly with the Normans, the other with later Parisian or central French loans.

A. Norman French (eleventh-twelfth centuries):

1. religious terms: *prophet, saint, Baptist, miracle, paradise, sacrament*, etc.
2. social and political terms: *prince, dame, master, court, rent, poor, rich, prison, crown, purple, prove*, etc.
3. terms of architecture: in particular, the word *castle*. The Anglo-Saxons did not build monumentally in dressed stone (big buildings, such as they were, were made of timber or of flint cobble). The word *castle* comes from Latin, meaning an enclosed or fortified encampment. As soon as the Normans arrived, they built castles. In the *Peterborough Chronicle*, the first line of the poem on the death of William the Conqueror (died 1086) is “Castelas he let wyrcean,” “He had castles built”: a line that signals linguistically the imposition of a new structure on the English landscape. The poem makes a pass at rhymed couplets, probably the first such attempt in English.

B. Central French (thirteenth-fourteenth centuries): Many of the major concept words in administration and high culture come from the Central French period of borrowing. We can give many examples, but what is most interesting is to notice how we can tell when the words entered the language. There is a major difference in pronunciation between Norman French and Central French.

1. Why is this so? The Normans are really a Germanic people (*Norman* means Northmen) who invaded Normandy from Scandinavia in the ninth century. They learned the Romance language spoken there, but they maintained certain Germanic patterns of pronunciation.

2. Norman French words that begin with the k- sound (written as c) correspond to Central French words that begin with the sh- sound (written as ch). *castle-chateau; cattle-chattel; cap-chapeau.*
3. Norman French initial w- corresponds to Central French initial gu-: warden-guardian; ward-guard; wile-guile; war-guerr; William-Guillaume.

III. French loans in English are easy to spot:
A. Spellings with -ei-, -ey- or -oy.
B. Endings in -ion or -ioun
C. Endings in -ment
D. Endings in -encen or -aunce
E. Endings in -or or -our
   In Central French, words that end in -ous are adjectives; words that end in -us are nouns. Thus, callous is an adjective, callus is a noun. This spelling convention still works in Modern English.

IV. More than simply charting loan words, however, England must be seen in the Middle English period as a trilingual culture.
A. French had become the language of administration, culture, and courtiership. This is especially apparent in matters of cuisine: cow becomes beef; calf becomes veal; deer becomes venison.
B. Latin had become the language of church, education, and philosophy.
C. English had become the language of popular expression, regional dialect, and personal reflection.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Why does a perfectly healthy language adopt loan words from another language?
2. What are some of the major endings or clusters of letters that identify a word as French in origin?
Lecture Ten

Chaucer’s English

Scope: This lecture presents the central features of Chaucer’s English. Its goal is not only to understand a particular period in the history of the language, or even in the history of literature, but to recognize and appreciate the force of Chaucer’s poetry. Its impact on English linguistic and literary history lies in its deployment of the resources of the English language at the time. Chaucer’s poetry works at the level of linguistic choices, and the history of the English language has his writing, and his age, as one of its watersheds.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the major features of Chaucer’s English—in particular, the broad outlines of its pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and style.
2. Explain how Chaucer uses the resources of native and loan words to create powerful and moving poetic forms.
3. Recognize words that Chaucer brings into the English literary language for the first (or very nearly first) time, and how their meanings have changed.

Outline

I. Chaucer did his major work in English, though he, too, is “trilingual.” Showing close contact with French and Latin, his English synthesizes several regional dialects. The central features of Chaucer’s language are its pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and grammar, and attitude toward language.

   A. Pronunciation: Chaucer’s language is a dialect of Middle English made up of elements drawn from East Midland dialects to help form what would become a London standard.
      1. Consonants were pronounced in distinctive clusters.
      2. Vowels were pronounced according to the patterns of the dialect and we will hear their characteristic sounds.
      3. There were no silent letters in words. Final -e was usually pronounced. All syllables in a word were pronounced.

   B. Vocabulary: Chaucer deploys for the first time a whole range of new words from French and Latin.
      1. He draws on the learned vocabularies of the universities, courts, guilds, and European literary traditions.
      2. But he also relies on the native, older OE resources of his language, often, as we will see, for striking effect.
C. Syntax and grammar: Chaucer’s word order is often influenced by the order of words in the meter of his poetry. His Middle English syntax may seem to us to stand midway between the inflectional forms of Old English and the full, uninflected patterns of modern English.

1. In Chaucer’s language, one would have asked a question not by using the word do in the beginning of the sentence (this feature does not emerge until the mid-sixteenth century), but rather by inverting the order of subject and verb.
2. Similarly, you could reverse the word order for a command, or in claims of negation.
3. Finally, it is important to note that negation, in Old, Middle, and even early Modern English, is cumulative. Double negatives don’t cancel each other out; they reinforce each other.

D. Pronouns are important, too. The system of pronouns is complicated, and it maintains a distinctive singular and plural second person. In Middle English, the second person singular was thou (nominative), thee (dative and accusative), and thy or thine (genitive); the plural was ye, you, and your, respectively. The distinction between them later became one of class, not number. We must suspend our intuition in realizing that thou was once informal, not formal.

II. The opening sentence of the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales shows us how Chaucer makes meaning out of the linguistic resources of his time and place.

A. Vocabulary terms such as the words vertu and inspired come from the Latin and French lexicon. Together with other words, used either for the first time or in new ways, these words show us Chaucer’s opening as a kind of invocation. The rebirth of spring becomes the rebirth of poetry (now in English).

B. Chaucer exploits differences in dialect pronunciation, but also habits of French pronunciation, to make his poetry scan and rhyme. Liqueur rhymes with fleur in French.

C. But there are many OE words and forms in this poetry. It is an English landscape inflected with French words.

D. The final couplet in this selection illustrates how Chaucer juxtaposes OE and French terms, and traditional with Continental metrics, to show us the history of the language operating at the level of landscape, meter, and poetic form.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. Could Chaucer have read Caedmon’s Hymn as it was originally written?
2. What words in Chaucer’s vocabulary suggest that he was a cosmopolitan writer?
Lecture Eleven

Dialect Jokes and Literary Representation in Middle English

Scope: This lecture examines some of the major differences in Middle English speech and writing. Its goals are threefold: to look briefly at some of the linguistic features of the dialects themselves; to illustrate some of the recent methodologies of dialect study (a project that will bear fruit later on in the course when we look at American dialectology); and to appreciate the literary presentation of dialects in ME poetry and drama (a project, too, that we will see again when we examine the literary representation of American dialects).

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the major dialects of ME.
2. Explain why the historical study of dialects is relevant both to the study of Modern English and to the larger question of literary representations of spoken English.
3. Explain how literary writers use spelling devices to represent different dialects, and why ME is particularly useful for this study.

Outline

I. Middle English is, one scholar has written, “par excellence the dialectical phase of English, in the sense that while dialects have been spoken at all periods, it was in ME that divergent local usage was normally indicated in writing” (Strang, p.225, emphasis mine). This fact means that we can use written texts as indications of pronunciation, and no better set of texts is available than Chaucer and the medieval drama.

II. Middle English had five major regional dialects that roughly corresponded to the older OE dialect differences. The dialect boundaries were both natural and man-made. The major rivers of England made up boundaries of speech communities; so did the old Roman roads, which effectively divided the country and which, well into the Middle Ages, were still the central lines of transportation through the Island.

A. Northern: The northern dialect was the language spoken north of the Humber river in England. Its most distinctive features were a rich Scandinavian vocabulary and a set of sounds also keyed to certain Scandinavian habits of pronunciation. The sound of the language seems to us old-fashioned and not participating in the major sound shifts that make the transition to Modern English pronunciation.

B. East Midland: This dialect was spoken in the eastern central part of the

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country, broadly to the east of the Old Roman north-south road. It was an important dialect, as many Londoners came from that area, and it formed the basis of the major literary language of England at the close of the Middle Ages (esp. Chaucer).

C. West Midland: This dialect was spoken to the west of the old Roman road, and to the east of the border with the Celtic-speaking area of Wales. Its major distinctive feature is that it uses the older OE form for “she” as ha or heo, rather than the newer emerging form of she; and it also differed in pronunciation details from East Midland.

D. Southern: This dialect was spoken in the Southwestern part of England. Southern dialects sound more advanced from our perspective; that is, they undergo certain sound changes that pass into modern standard English pronunciation. Its distinctive feature was the pronunciation of initial s- and f- as z- and v-, respectively. Thus, for example, it preserves some distinctions that do pass into Modern English: e.g., the words for the male and female fox were vox and vixen; the latter is kept in Modern English.

E. Kentish: The language of the area of southeastern England, this was a distinctive form of speech well into the early Renaissance, preserving many OE forms, sounds, and distinctive words. Documents in Kentish also preserve the older OE case endings more than any other ME dialect.

III. Chaucer’s Reeve’s Tale is examined as a dialect joke.
A. We examine a selection from the Reeve’s Tale to see the literary representation of the northern Middle English dialect for humorous effect.
B. Chaucer makes an extended dialect joke in this sexually explicit tale.
C. The migration of peoples from north to south influences the London dialect of court and universities, affecting standard Modern English. Linguistically, the periphery thus moves to the center.

IV. The Second Shepherd’s Play is commentary on regional dialect variation and social status.
A. We read a brief episode from this mid-fifteenth century play to see how, in the north of England, southern English is a butt of humor and social satire.
B. In this, one of a cycle of plays, a sheep-stealer pretends to be a nobleman from the south. His lingo is a mix of several southern dialects, thus mocking a whole set of political and social relationships.
C. Such dialect renderings, it should be remembered, are not transcriptions but evocations.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. In the absence of mass media, would dialect variation likely have been greater in the Middle Ages than today?

2. What kinds of accents are caricatured in Middle English texts like The Canterbury Tales and The Second Shepherd’s Play?
Lecture Twelve

A Multilingual World: Medieval Attitudes Toward Language Change and Variation

Scope: This lecture examines some attitudes toward language change and variation in the Middle Ages to understand how writers of the past confronted many of the problems in the social status of language that we still deal with today. Beginning with a brief review of OE educational traditions, the lecture moves through a review of ME writers who wrote about problems of dialect variation, the relationship of French and English, and the social and class issues raised by languages and dialects in contact.

This lecture is a history of attitudes toward the history of language—a look at the problems of diachronic change and synchronic variation in previous contexts to provide a background for our own debates on the social function of language and language learning, the idea of a standard or official language, and the ways in which spoken and written forms define class and educational boundaries.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the attitudes toward language change and language variation in the medieval period.
2. Describe the key events in the early history of English education that bear on medieval attitudes toward the vernacular.
3. Explain the attitudes of English writers to dialect variation and language change.

Outline

I. During the OE period, the central issues for writers and educators were the relationship of Latin to the vernacular and the problem of educating students, and conducting the business of government and culture, in either of these languages. Moreover, as the A-S people became aware of the regional dialect differences among them, certain writers reflected on the specific dialect to use for official or learned writing. The West Saxon dialect (the dialect of King Alfred’s time and place) came to be developed as a standard.

A. King Alfred developed a program of translating the Latin classics into Old English.
   1. He imported writers and scholars from Europe and from elsewhere in England to help with the project.
   2. He came up with a canon of texts to read and study.
3. He also suggested methods of schooling the young in the study of the English language and the Latin classics.

B. While Alfred made no attempt to impose his own West Saxon dialect on other writers in other parts of the country, the notion of West Saxon as a prestige dialect became clearly articulated in the late tenth-century schools.
   1. Some manuscripts of OE were rewritten or recast into the West Saxon dialect.
   2. English schooling, as far as we can tell, was conducted in the W-S dialect; n.b.: it is not inherently better than any other dialect; it just happened to be the dialect of the teachers of the area (Winchester) where the schools were established.

C. Aelthelwold (d. 984) was bishop of Winchester and established a school in which English and Latin were the languages of instruction.
   1. He made English a primary aspect of English schooling for the first time (and for what would be the last time for nearly 500 years).
   2. His pupils learned their lessons in both English and Latin.
   3. He established a scriptorium at Winchester, where he personally supervised copying and writing of texts.
   4. He sought to regularize the spelling, vocabulary choice, and style of OE prose.

D. By the late OE period, there arose an awareness of dialectical variation in the language, and some institutions were established for the imposition of a standard prose for literate Anglo-Saxons.

II. After the Conquest, the teaching of language and literacy was compounded by a new set of linguistic problems: French, English, or Latin. A useful text to examine here is the treatise of Walter of Bibbesworth (mid-thirteenth century).

   A. Walter wrote for an English gentry desirous of bettering their French. French had become the prestige language of court and learning.
   B. Walter’s treatise teaches some important distinctions in sound, sense, and usage in English and French. It is, in essence, a treatise in linguistics (for example, he must reeducate English readers in the idea of grammatical gender, in certain sound differences, and in certain patterns of syntax).
   C. Walter’s treatise is also an education in culture as well as language. He offers an education in the social arts of conversation, courtiership, and intellectual discourse.
   D. It is directed at the landed gentry: an English group aspiring to social and economic prominence.
III. We consider medieval conceptions of language itself.
   A. “Man is a grammatical animal.” Medieval theologians believed that humans have a gift of language, but that we have, so to speak, fallen linguistically.
      1. First, in Eden, Adam’s fall signaled the loss of concord between word and object; words are now arbitrary denoters of things.
      2. Second, at Babel, human languages split apart.
      3. As St. Augustine put it, “the diversity of language alienates man from man.”
   B. Human language is thus something transitory, mutable, and ambiguous.

IV. Chaucer explored the mutability of language, both diachronically and synchronically.
   A. In his poem “Troilus and Criseyde,” he argued that languages change meaning over time. Semantic change, i.e., the meaning of a word, does not immutably reside in the word or expression but rather in the social act of communication.
   B. He was something of a linguistic relativist.
      1. He recognized that men and women could communicate successfully in any language they chose.
      2. He recognized that older languages are just as good as modern ones.
      3. He recognized that other contemporary languages were just as good as his own.
   C. Chaucer also feared for the miswriting and misreading of his own poetry by scribes and readers who do not speak his dialect. He was worried that his text, once recopied, may not rhyme or scan.

V. The historian John of Trevisa, a contemporary of Chaucer in the late fourteenth century, illustrated how diversity of dialect and languages becomes a social and political problem.
   A. John argued that linguistic contact causes corruption of the native language.
   B. He offered up some cutting remarks on speakers of Northern dialects on par with what we have seen earlier as other dialect jokes and social commentaries.
   C. John argued that there should be a prestige dialect of English in which social and political standards dovetail with geographical areas.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. Can you cite any examples of “corruption” in the English you speak, write, read, and hear?
2. What were John of Trevisa’s principle beliefs regarding dialect and native language?
Glossary

**alliteration**: The repetition of the initial consonant or vowel of words in sequence. Old English and Old Germanic poetry was alliterative in structure: the metricality of the poetic line was determined not by number of syllables, rhyme, or classical meter, but by the number of alliterative words in stressed positions.

**analogy**: The process by which certain grammatically or morphologically different words or expressions come to share the same form or pronunciation.

**analytic language**: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the order of the words in that sentence.

**anaphora**: A term used in rhetoric to describe the repetition of a word or phrase, usually at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses.

**Anglo-Saxons**: The Germanic peoples who settled the British Isles beginning in the fifth and sixth A.D. and who spoke Old English. Conquered by the Normans in 1066, they were gradually absorbed into the Norman French-speaking population.

**argot**: A distinctive way of writing or speaking, often characterized by a unique vocabulary, used by a particular class, profession, or social group.

**articulatory phonetics**: The study of how sounds are produced in the mouth and the technique of accurately describing those sounds by using special symbols.

**aureate diction**: A highly elaborate, Latinate vocabulary used by English writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to evoke a rarefied and highly educated tone in their language.

**calque**: A bit-by-bit, or morpheme-by-morpheme, translation of one word in one language into another word in another language, often used to avoid bringing new or loan words into the translating language (e.g., modern German Fernseher is a calque on television; Afrikaans apartheid is a calque on segregation; the modern Icelandic modorsik is a calque on hysterical).

**Chancery English**: The form of the English language developed in written documents of the fifteenth century in Chancery (the official writing center of royal administration). Many grammatical forms and spelling conventions of Chancery English have become part of standard written English.

**cognate**: Two or more words from two or more different, but related, languages that share a common root or original.
**comparative philology**: The study of different, but related, languages in their historical contexts, traditionally with the goal of reconstructing earlier, lost forms of words and sounds in the Indo-European languages.

**creole**: A new language that develops out of the sustained contact among two or more languages. Often, creoles develop when the language of a colonizing or economically dominant group is imposed upon a subordinate or colonized group. Thus, many creoles have elements of both European and non-European languages. Creoles may emerge over time from pidgins. The basic difference is that creoles are perceived by the language speakers as the natural or native language, whereas pidgins are perceived as artificial or ad hoc arrangements for communication (see *pidgin*).

**deep structure**: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the mental or genetically encoded pattern of language communication in human beings (see *surface structure*; *transformational-generative grammar*).

**descriptivism**: The belief that the study of language should describe the linguistic behavior of a group of speakers or writers at a given moment and should not be pressed into the service of prescribing how people should write or speak (see *prescriptivism*).

**determinative compounding**: The process by which new nouns are created in a language by yoking together two normally independent nouns (e.g., *earring*). A key feature of the Germanic languages, especially Old English, it is the process by which many poetic compounds were formed in poetry and prose (e.g., Old English *banlocan*, is bone-locker, or body).

**dialect**: A variant form of a language, usually defined by region, class, or socio-economic group, and distinguished by its pronunciation, its vocabulary, and, on occasion, its morphology.

**dialectology**: The study of different regional variations of a given language, spoken or written at a given time.

**diphthongs**: Vowel sounds that are made up of two distinct sounds joined together (e.g., the sound in the modern English word *house*).

**etymology**: The systematic study of word origins, roots, and changes. The etymology of a given word is its history, traced back through its various pronunciations and semantic shifts, until its earliest recorded or reconstructed root. A root is also known as an etymon.

**extension-in-function**: The increase in the range of grammatical functions that a given word carries over time.
**extension-in-lexis**: The increase in the range of meanings, often figurative, that a given word carries over time.

**eye-dialect**: A way of representing in writing regional or dialect variations by spelling words in nonstandard ways. Spellings such as *sez* or *wanna* are eye-dialect forms, as they do not actually record distinctions of speech but rather evoke the flavor of nonstandard language.

**grammar**: Generally used to refer to the system of establishing verbal relationships in a given language; often confused with standards of “good usage” or educated speech.

**grammatical gender**: The system by which nouns in a language carry special endings or require distinctive pronoun, adjective, and article forms. Described as masculine, feminine, and neuter.

**Great Vowel Shift**: The systematic shift in the pronunciation of stressed, long vowels in English, which occurred from the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century in England and which permanently changed the pronunciation of the English language. It effectively marks the shift from Middle English to Modern English.


**homonymy**: The state in which two or more words of different origin and meaning come to be pronounced in the same way.

**Indo-European**: The term used to describe the related languages of Europe, India, and Iran, which are believed to have descended from a common tongue spoken roughly in the third millennium B.C. by an agricultural peoples originating in Southeastern Europe. English is a member of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages.

**inkhorn terms**: Words from Latin or Romance languages, often polysyllabic and of arcane, scientific, or aesthetic resonance, coined and introduced into English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**lexicography**: The practice of making dictionaries.

**lexis**: The vocabulary resources of a given language.

**metathesis**: the reversing of two sounds in a sequence, occasionally a case of mispronunciation, but also occasionally a historical change in pronunciation.

**Middle English**: The language, in its various dialects, spoken by the inhabitants of England from roughly the period following the Norman Conquest (the late
eleventh century) until roughly the period of completion of the Great Vowel Shift (the early sixteenth century).

**modal verbs:** Helping verbs, such as shall, will, ought, and the like, that were originally full verbs in Old and Middle English and became reduced to their helping function in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**Modern English:** The language, in its various dialects, that emerged after the end of the Great Vowel shift, roughly in the middle of the sixteenth century.

**monophthongs:** Vowel sounds that are made up of only one continuously produced sound (e.g., the sound in the modern English word feet).

**morpheme:** A set of one or more sounds in a language which, taken together, make up a unique, meaningful part of a word (e.g., -ly is the morpheme indicating manner of action, as in quickly or slowly; -s is a morpheme indicating plurality, as in dogs).

**morphology:** The study of the forms of words that determine relationships of meaning in a sentence in a given language. Includes such issues as case endings in nouns, formation of tenses in verbs, etc.

**Old English:** The language, or group of related dialects, spoken by the Anglo-Saxon people in England from the earliest recorded documents (late seventh century) until roughly the end of the eleventh century.

**periphrastic:** A term that refers to a roundabout way of doing something; used in grammar to describe a phrase or idiom that uses new words or more words to express grammatical relationship.

**philology:** The study of language generally, but now often restricted to the historical study of changes in phonology, morphology, grammar, and lexis. Comparative philology is the term used to describe the method of comparing surviving forms of words from related languages to reconstruct older lost forms.

**phoneme:** An individual sound which, in contrast with out sounds, contributes to the set of meaningful sounds in a given language. A phoneme is not simply a sound, but rather a sound that is meaningful (e.g., b and p are phonemes in English because their difference determines two different meaningful words: bit and pit, for example).

**phonetics:** The study of the pronunciation of sounds of a given language by speakers of that language.

**phonology:** The study of the system of sounds of a given language.

**pidgin:** A language that develops to allow two mutually unintelligible groups of speakers to communicate. Pidgins are often ad hoc forms of communication,
and they are perceived as artificial by both sets of speakers. Over time, a pidgin may develop into a creole (see creole).

**polysemy**: The state in which one word comes to connote several, often very different, meanings.

**prescriptivism**: The belief that the study of language should lead to certain prescriptions or rules of advice for speaking and writing (see descriptivism).

**regionalism**: An expression in a given language that is unique to a given geographical area and is not characteristic of the language as a whole.

**semantic change**: The change in the meaning of a word over time.

**slang**: A colloquial form of expression in a language, usually relying on words or phrases drawn from popular culture, particular professions, or the idioms of particular groups (defined, e.g., by age or class).

**sociolinguistics**: The study of the place of language in society, often centering on distinctions of class, regional dialect, race, and gender in communities of speakers and writers.

**structural linguistics**: The discipline of studying language in America in the first half of the twentieth century, characterized by a close attention to the sounds of languages, by a rigorous empirical methodology, and by an attention to the marked differences in the structures of languages. The term is often used to characterize the work of Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield.

**surface structure**: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the actual forms of a given language, uttered by speakers of that language, which are produced by the rules of that language and which are generated out of the deep structures innately held by human speakers.

**syntax**: The way in which a language arranges its words to make well-formed or grammatical utterances.

**synthetic language**: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the inflections (for example, case endings) added to the words.

**transformational-generative grammar**: The theory of language developed by Noam Chomsky and his followers which argues that all human beings have the ability to speak a language and that deep structure patterns of communication are transformed, or generated, into surface structures of a given language by a set of rules unique to each language. Presumes that language ability is an innate idea in humans (see deep structure, surface structure).
Timeline

Fourth--third millennium B.C........An agricultural people originating in southeastern Europe is believed to have spoken a language which scholars consider the original Indo-European.

First millennium B.C...............The Germanic-speaking peoples separate out of the Indo-European group.

Fifth-Seventh centuries A.D.......The groups, or tribes, known as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes make incursions and ultimately settlements into the British Isles.


Late ninth century...............Reign of King Alfred (871-899); establishment of West-Saxon hegemony over Anglo-Saxon England and the foundation of schools and scriptoria for the teaching and writing of Old English; translations of classic Latin texts into the vernacular.


c.1000..........................Date of the Beowulf manuscript, text of the earliest major long poem in English.


1087.............................Death of William the Conqueror.
1154. Date of last entry in the *Peterborough Chronicle*, thus ending the sustained writing of Old English prose in England.

c. 1200. Probable composition of earliest poetry in Middle English (e.g., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, La3amon’s *Brut*, short lyrics).

1258. Proclamation of Henry III; first official text in English since the Conquest (but the English is actually a translation of the French original).

1362. Parliament is addressed for the first time in English (but records are still kept in French).

1380s. John Wycliffe supervises translation of the Bible into Middle English.

c. 1400. Death of Chaucer.
Biographies

Alfred, King of England (849-99): King of the Anglo-Saxons (r.871-99). Consolidated West Saxon political hegemony in Southern England; commissioned the translation of major Latin works into Old English; provided the political aegis for the establishment of the West Saxon dialect of Old English as a standard.

Bede the Venerable (c.673-735): Anglo-Saxon monk, historian, and grammarian. Best known for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People*, in which he records the poetry of Caedmon, the first known poet in the English vernacular.


Caedmon. (fl. late seventh century): First known poet in English; wrote a hymn about creation in Old English that was considered to be the first English poem.

Chaucer, Geoffrey (c.1340-1400): Major English poet of the 14th century. Wrote *The Canterbury Tales* and other poems in Middle English.

Grimm, Jakob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859): German linguists, lexicographers, and folklorists. Collected stories of the German people into well-known volumes of fairy tales; produced the major historical dictionary of the German language. Jakob Grimm formulated the sound relationships for Indo-European languages that have come to be known as Grimm’s Law.

William the Conqueror (c.1027-87): First Norman French King of England. The Norman Conquest (1066) initiated the cultural and linguistic changes that eventually helped transform Old English into Middle English.
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Professor Lerer has received many awards for his scholarship and teaching, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation, the Beatrice White Prize of the English Association of Great Britain (for *Chaucer and His Readers*), and the Hoagland Prize for undergraduate teaching at Stanford.
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The History of the English Language

Scope:

This course of thirty-six lectures introduces the student to the history of the English language, from its origins as a dialect of the Germanic-speaking peoples, through the literary and cultural documents of its 1500-year span, to the state of American speech of the present day. In addition to surveying the spoken and written forms of the language over time, the course also focuses on a set of larger social concerns about language use, variety, and change: the relationship between spelling and pronunciation; the notion of dialect and variation across geographical and social boundaries; the arguments concerning English as an official language and the status of a standard English; the role of the dictionary in describing and prescribing usage; and the ways in which words change meaning and, in turn, the ways in which English coin or borrows new words. Each of these issues, charged with meaning in the present day, had historical examples. People have puzzled over these problems throughout time, and it will be the purpose of this course to illustrate the many ways in which speakers and writers of English, and its antecedents, confronted the place of language in society and culture.

In the course of these lectures, too, we will be looking at some special problems in the study of language generally—for example: how we describe and characterize language change over time; how we can accurately describe differences in pronunciation and, thus, recover earlier pronunciation habits; and how we can use the study of literature not only to chart the different periods of the English language, but to recognize how literary writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Twain, and others used the fluid resources of their language to grant meaning to a changing world.

Some of the approaches of this course will touch on linguistics. There will be a little bit of literary criticism. And, at times, it will call attention to the material culture of the book (specifically, how people read and wrote and what materials they used to do so). These are all issues that could demand full courses of their own. Our goal here, however, is to understand the great impact that studying the history of English can have on our appreciation of social, cultural, literary, and linguistic change. With these lectures, the student can find the history of English embedded in the words we use, the literature we read, and the everyday lives we lead. We will learn about the past, but also see the making of our own present.

In Part 1 we focus on the development of Old English, precursor of the modern tongue we speak today. We trace Old English back to the beginning: from its position as one of the Germanic languages all the way back to its ultimate roots in the theoretical language known as Indo-European. We consider the specific qualities of Old English that have been lost to modern English speakers: grammatical gender, synthetic structure, the presence of “strong” verbs, and the
emphasis on poetic alliteration. We also examine the basic vocabulary of Old English that comprises a significant part of Modern English even today.

With the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, English was eclipsed as an official language by French and Latin. English, in fact, survived several centuries of inferior social status before it became, at the close of the Middle Ages, the primary language of the British Isles.

**Learning Objectives**

Upon completion of these lectures, you should be able to:

1. Recognize why we spell and speak the way we do today.
2. Identify words of early English origin, as well as words of more recent, non-English origin.
3. Use a dictionary, and other resources, to learn the etymologies of words and chart their changes in meaning and use.
4. Explain the ways in which major English authors used the resources of their language.
5. Summarize the relationship of English to other European languages.
6. Summarize the differences between Old English (OE) and Middle English (ME).
7. Describe generally the dialect boundaries in England.
Lecture Thirteen

The Return of English as a Standard

Scope: This lecture surveys the history of English from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries to illustrate the ways in which political and social attitudes returned it to the status of the prestige vernacular (over French). It also looks at some of the important institutions—the court, the law, and commerce, in particular—that helped effect the return of English as a standard. Finally, it examines some attitudes of the time to the status of English in relationship to French, but also to the question of English regional dialects. The importation of the printing press by William Caxton in the 1470s had an important effect on what kind of English came to be read and written, and in turn, what the relationships came to be between literary English and “official” English.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the key events in the reimposition of English as a standard or official language in the sixteenth century.
2. Characterize the major features of Chancery English and the impact they had on Modern English spelling.
3. Describe William Caxton’s attitudes toward language change and variation and the impact that his printing had on the standardization of English in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Outline

I. English returns.
A. Though English had, of course, not disappeared after the Norman Conquest, the official language of court and commerce gradually came to be French, while Latin remained the language of the church and of school and university learning.
1. The first “official” use of English after the Conquest was in the proclamation of Henry III from 18 October 1258. This document was issued in French and Latin as well; what is interesting is not just that Henry felt the need to prepare a text in English, but that the English text is obviously a translation of the French one.
2. Parliament was not addressed in English until 1362. Yet the records of the speeches remain in French. (The only way we know people spoke in English was that certain speeches are introduced with the phrase “dit en anglais.”)
B. During the fifteenth century, however, English came to predominate as the official language.
1. By 1423, Parliament’s records were kept virtually all in English.
2. Henry V (r. 1413-22) established English as an official language.
3. Statutes (laws based on petitions) are in the following languages:
in Latin to 1300; in French until 1485; in English and French, 1485-89; and solely in English after 1489.
5. Wills: In 1397, Earl of Kent made his will in English; in 1438, Countess of Stafford made her will in English. The wills of kings Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI are all in English.
6. Shakespeare went so far as to present Henry V as not even conversant in French, an example of rewriting history.
7. Some critics argue that Chaucer’s revival in the fifteenth century was itself the product of a nationalistic movement.

II. French undergoes a decline.
A. By the 1490s, William Caxton could write that the greatest number of people in the realm of England understood neither Latin nor French.
B. There is a growing body of evidence that by the end of the fifteenth century, French became less and less the language of culture and social prestige.

III. A standard English accompanies the rise of Chancery.
A. Chancery comes from the word chancel or chapel of the king, where the chaplains of the court originally spent their time between services writing the king’s letters.
B. By the end of the fourteenth century, Chancery came to be the place where official documents were produced. By the mid-fifteenth century, the term came to refer to the national bureaucracy as a whole (except for the Exchequer).
C. Chancery English is the language of the scribes charged with making the official documents of England from about the 1380s to the 1450s.
1. These documents illustrate a move toward standardization of spelling, usage, vocabulary, and (by implication) pronunciation.
2. What matters is not the use of an individual scribe, but an institutional, or official, set of uses here.
3. Royal clerks used English for official writing after 1417.
4. Chancery is located in Westminster, the administrative seat of government.
D. The most important point about Chancery English is that it developed a form of writing that was a standard, irrespective of the speech or dialect of the writer.
1. Spelling was standardized without regard for pronunciation.
2. The official language ceased to represent any living, spoken dialect.
3. Writing became truly conventional and arbitrary.
4. Chancery was the first standard of writing the vernacular in England since Aethelwold’s school at Winchester 400 or so years before.
5. The language of literature now derived from the language of politics.

IV. William Caxton unified print and the creation of a standard.
   A. There exist several myths of printing:
      1. Printing did not increase national literacy overnight.
      2. Printing did not democratize literacy across class boundaries; Caxton asserted himself as a printer for “clerks and gentlemen.”
      3. Printed books at first looked no different than manuscripts; even the typefaces were based on handwriting.
   B. Printing did, however, foster the rise of Chancery standard English.
      1. Because Caxton based his press in Westminster, and because he established himself as a printer with royal and aristocratic patrons (as well as with “gentle” potential buyers of his books), his work has an official cast to it.
      2. Caxton often chose to print his English books in the language of Chancery English.
   C. Caxton thus adopted a standard of official writing to the printing of literary texts; he made an official standard a literary standard.
   D. We will examine a selection from Caxton’s preface to his book *Eneydos* (1490) to see his attitudes toward language change, dialect variation, and the arbitration of English usage by the educated and the elite. In the process, we will see how he sustains many of the older, medieval attitudes toward these problems, but how he also looks forward to more modern usages and attitudes.
   E. Caxton’s preface is ultimately about diversity and alienation, about the making of the English self.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
   1. Why was English so slow to be adopted as the official language of England after the Norman Conquest?
   2. Did the rise of Chancery make English a more powerful language?
Lecture Fourteen

How We Speak: The Great Vowel Shift and the Making of Modern English

Scope: In this lecture, we will look at the major features of the so-called Great Vowel Shift (GVS). This phenomenon was a systematic change in the pronunciation of long, stressed vowels in English. It happened from about the middle of the fifteenth century and continued on until about the middle of the sixteenth. It changed radically the sound of spoken English, making its vowels unique in pronunciation among European languages. It also had an impact on attitudes toward dialect and usage, and it furthermore affected the way in which English verse was written (by changing radically the rhyming possibilities of the language). Finally, it was the key change in the language that transformed Middle English into Modern English. This lecture therefore marks an important transition from Middle English to Modern English. Study of the GVS also helps us explore briefly some of the methods by which scholars understand language change. In particular, we can look at written documents whose unsure spelling gives us evidence for the GVS as it was happening.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the key features of the Great Vowel Shift and their impact on the pronunciation of Modern English.
2. Summarize some of the theories as to why and how the GVS happened.

Outline

I. The Great Vowel Shift signals the single most important change from Middle to Modern English, and it separates English from other European languages.
   A. Only six vowels were affected. These are long, stressed monophthongs—that is, vowels in stressed positions in the word that were held long in pronunciation and that had a pure sound (i.e., were not made up of groups of sounds).
   B. The GVS was a systemic shift: that is, it was a change in a system of pronunciation, not a change in individual sounds.
   C. The GVS can be described in terms of articulatory phonetics:
      1. Front vowels were raised and fronted.
      2. Back vowels were raised and retracted.
      3. High vowels were made into diphthongs.
D. Here is one scholarly reconstruction of the order of the shift and perhaps how it happened:

1. The high front vowels represented by the letters i and u in ME became diphthongs: that is, they became pronounced differently, each as a cluster of two sounds. This change took time: In early Modern English of the sixteenth century, words like mice and mouse (in ME, pronounced “mees” and “moose”) would have been pronounced “moice” and “mohuse.” By the end of the seventeenth century, they were pronounced “mah-ees” and “mah-oose”—very close to our own pronunciations, which are diphthongs.

2. The mid vowels, in ME written as e and o, were raised. Thus ME feet, pronounced “fate,” came to be pronounced as Mod English “feet.” ME do, pronounced “dough,” came to be pronounced as Mod English “do.”

3. The low back vowel written in ME as a rose to fill the place left by the older ME e. Thus, a word like name, pronounced in ME as “nahme,” became pronounced “naim.”

4. Finally, the long, open o (pronounced like “aw”) was raised to the long o. Thus, the ME word so, pronounced like “saw,” came to be pronounced “so.”

II. More than one explanation exists for the GVS.

A. One explanation is that dialects in England were in contact in new ways.

1. Migrations from the north and the Midlands into London brought speakers into contact.

2. This mix of dialects created social pressures to develop or select a set of pronunciations that would have new social status or prestige.

3. The sounds that were chosen or developed appear, in retrospect, as the sounds of the GVS.

B. An additional explanation is that, with the change in the social status in English itself, and with the loss of French as the prestige language, the need was felt to fill the social gap with a new form of speech.

C. Of course, people did not consciously decided to change their pronunciation according to the GVS. These changes are recorded as happening. We can only look back and speculate on why.

D. “Pirate English” is actually an evocation of the GVS having only partly run its course.

III. We can chart the GVS in writing.

A. Alexander Pope, writing in the eighteenth century, reveals that the GVS still hasn’t completely run its course.
B. But there is much early written evidence for the GVS. There survives a large body of letters from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, mostly from family correspondence.
   1. Here we see somewhat educated people writing to each other.
   2. Their spelling forms were not learned in Chancery, but rather reflected their speech habits.
   3. They used older, ME spelling to record new sounds in their speech resulting from the GVS.

IV. The impact of the GVS on speech and writing was substantial.
   A. We need to understand the GVS in tandem with the rise in the standard forms of written English being developed in Chancery and used by Caxton and his successors in print.
   B. What we see is a growing gap between writing and speech.
      1. In educated and official writing, spelling was old-fashioned: it was, in effect, etymological. It did not reflect the newer sounds of speech in the GVS (nor did it reflect several other minor sound changes also going on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries).
      2. An added effect of this growing separation was a change in how punctuation was used. In the Middle Ages, punctuation was, in essence, ear punctuation: It signals breaks in reading aloud. By Caxton’s time, punctuation was moving toward eye-punctuation, which signals syntactic or clausal units of a sentence.
   C. The GVS took a long time to work through.
      1. There were many variations and intermediary stages in the shift.
      2. For a handful of words, like *steak* and *great*, the GVS did not even apply.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What are some of the reasons commonly given for the occurrence of the Great Vowel Shift?
2. How did the GVS contribute to the gap between writing and speech?
Lecture Fifteen

What We Say: The Expanding English Vocabulary

Scope: From the years 1500-1700, the vocabulary of English grew dramatically. New words were borrowed from the disciplines of experimental science, classical scholarship, and practical technology. New words were coined from Latin and Greek to express technical concepts, but also to enrich or beautify the English language. Imperial exploration also brought with it a host of words from New Worlds.

This lecture shows how to organize this increase in lexical material according to disciplines of entry into the language. It also illustrates how words, both new and old, were changing in meaning, and how the phenomenon of polysemy (the multiple meanings or connotations of words) affected English writing.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the ways in which the English vocabulary expanded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
2. Recognize words from this period in Modern English.
3. Summarize the major discussions of the period on linguistic change, especially with regard to the increasing vocabulary and the challenges to the nature of English as perceived by writers of the time.

Outline

I. The English of the Renaissance was voracious, omnivorous. There was a perceptible rise in new words.
   A. Inkhorn terms: These are words coined from Latin or Greek for educated effect and sonic power.
      1. Such words were perceived to come right from the inkhorn, or the inkwell.
      2. While they were often a mark of education by the user, they were sometimes the object of derision by those who felt they had little rational basis in the history of the language.
      3. Some examples of inkhorn terms still in the language include *allurement, anachronism, autograph, capsule, dexterous, disregard* (first used by Milton), *erupt*, and *meditate*.
   B. Aureate diction: In poetry, the corresponding use of new or unusual coinages or loans was called aureation because the words appeared glistening or golden in their latinity.
      1. Aureation uses a Latinate and Romance vocabulary modeled on Chaucer’s poetry and that of his heirs.
2. It is highly polysyllabic and often relies on metaphors of beauty, visual splendor, sweetness, and purification.
3. Thomas Wilson’s *Art of Rhetoric* (1553) offers an example of aureate diction. The extensive use of inkhorn terms sounds like double-talk.
4. Some inkhorn terms did not remain in the language: *addepted* [attained], *adnichilate* [reduced to nothing], *obstupefact* [to make unclear], *temulent* [drunk].

II. Words also entered the language from educated English travel, commercial contact, and science.

A. Commerce and contact with European countries brought new words into English. Some examples:
   1. France: e.g., alloy, bigot, bombast, duel, entrance, equip, essay, explore, mustache, progress, talisman, tomato, volunteer
   2. Italy: argosy, balcony, granite, stanza, violin, volcano
   3. Spain and Portugal: anchovy, armada, banana, cannibal, cocoa, embargo, maize, mulatto, potato, tobacco, yam
   4. Dutch: smuggler, cruise, jib, schooner, reef, walrus, blunderbuss, tattoo, knapsack

B. Notice how many of these words reflect colonial contact, especially in the Americas and Africa. These are not just words from different languages but words that enter into the register of colonialization and military engagement.

C. Words from non-European languages entered through travel, trade, and conquest.
   1. Arabic: sash, hashish, mohair, sherbet, sofa, henna
   2. Turkish: dolman, coffee, caftan, kiosk
   3. Chinese: ketchup
   4. African: zebra
   5. North American languages: raccoon, moose, skunk, hickory, totem, canoe

D. Words arrived from science, naturalist study, and technology.
   1. naturalism: vertebra, torpor, specimen, spectrum, mica, lens
   2. mathematics: chord, cylinder, prism, calculus
   3. philosophy: dogma, critic, curriculum, crux, propaganda, alibi

III. The growth of the English vocabulary prompted several discussions about whether loan words, or new coinages, of these kinds, were in keeping with what was called the “genius” of the English language.

A. What were the “wellsprings” of English?
B. Was English at its heart a Germanic language, and should it avoid perceived encroachments from the overly learned Latin or the affected and effeminate French?
C. Such questions were also part of a larger turn in education toward an understanding of the “excellence” of English; in other words, the study of language became a way of doing cultural politics by other means.

1. English schoolmasters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries frequently reflected on the nature of English.

2. Alexander Gill (1564-1635), headmaster of St. Paul’s School and Milton’s teacher, advocated (among things like spelling reform) the exclusion of new words and inkhorn terms from the language. His views are worth quoting at length, not only for their extremity, but also for their wide influence.

3. Compare Gill’s remarks with, e.g., those of Chaucer and Trevisa from earlier periods.

4. Literature, for Gill, bequeathed alien elements to language.

5. He imagined a diluted “bastard English,” yet another kind of linguistic Fall.

IV. Polysemy: As new words entered the language, and as science and technology began to inform the discourses of poetry and prose, words began to change meaning and connotation.

A. During the sixteenth century, the rise in the commercial vocabulary came to provide literary writers with new possibilities for metaphorical relationships: i.e., social relationships and personal desire came to be expressed in commercial terms. We will see this especially later in Shakespeare.

B. We will see in the subsequent study of dictionaries how the problem of the literal vs. the metaphorical use of a word comes to dominate the organization of word definitions, and how our dictionaries reflect not so much a record of actual speech as a system of definitional organization worked out by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century schoolmasters.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:

1. What are “inkhorn terms,” and are they still popular today?

2. What is “polysemy,” and how did it enrich—or merely confuse—the vocabulary of English?
Lecture Sixteen

The Shape of Modern English: Changes in Syntax and Grammar

Scope: In 1500, English syntax and grammar, while recognizable, still remained full of features which, to us, now seem odd and archaic. By 1700, the major patterns of word order and word endings, as well as the full modern system of pronouns, had crystallized into what we can see as virtually indistinguishable from our own. How did this happen?

This lecture traces the specifics of syntax and grammar in the period of early Modern English to show how, in many ways, the shape of our modern language depends on some very small elements—in particular, the rise of the verb *do* in new uses and the expansion of the forms of verbs and nouns ending in -ing. We look at what linguists call extension-in-function of these two small elements. But we also look at changes in the system of modal (or helping) verbs and the second- and third-person pronouns. Even such a small problem as the difference between its and it’s says a great deal about how English speakers make grammatical distinctions. It also says a great deal about how educated speakers of English sought to find vernacular equivalents for Latin grammatical constructions (such as the ablative absolute and the various perfect tenses).

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the history of the word *do* and forms of the verb ending -ing and how that history affects our modern idioms.
2. Explain the ways in which our pronouns were changing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
3. Explain how the system of modal verbs was changing during the period and why this is an important element in the making of the syntax and idiom of Modern English.

Outline

I. The shape and texture of our speech can be found in various developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One such example is the verb *do.* In Modern English, *do* has four uses dating from this period:

A. As a full verb, meaning to perform an action: “I did this.” Attested from earliest times; original OE sense and use.

B. As a replacement verb in such phrases as: “I went to the store, and having done that . . . .” Here, the verb *do* replaces the verb *go* in the second part of the sentence; this usage developed in the ME period.
C. As a periphrastic or place-holding verb in questions: “Do you know the way?” This is a recent form, which developed in the sixteenth century.

D. As an emphatic modal or helping verb: “I do know the answer.” Also developed in the sixteenth century.

II. There was a rise of verb forms ending in -ing.

A. OE had words that ended in -ing or -ung (as did all the Germanic languages) to indicate, in nouns, ownership or genealogy or to turn a verb into a noun.

B. In the ME period, -ing forms as participles were used only in Southern dialects.

C. In the sixteenth century, these dialectical forms entered into the standard:
   1. Expressions such as “the x being y, he did this.”
   2. Expressions such as “the x-ing of the y,” an idiom that did not appear until the late sixteenth century.
   3. Expressions such as “don’t blame me for having done it.” Shakespeare was really the first writer to use this form.
   4. New ways of expressing perfect tenses: “I have been waiting; I had been waiting.”
   5. New ways of expressing the future: “I am going to hit you.” While this form did appear by the late sixteenth century, it did not gain currency until the nineteenth.

D. Idiomatic Modern English is founded on changes such as these.

III. The system of pronouns changes.

A. Sixteenth-century English inherited the remains of the older ME system of second-person pronouns.
   1. Forms in y- (you, ye, etc.), which were the old plurals, came to be used to signal class distinctions. They were polite and formal.
   2. Forms in th- (thou, thee), which were the old singular, came to signal the informal, but they could also be used to indicate contempt, condescension, dismissal, or insult.

B. Our third-person neuter genitive, its, is a very late development.
   1. Chaucer consistently used his for both masculine and neuter.
2. Shakespeare and the *King James Bible* often use *his*, seemingly a personification, but really a grammatical throwback.
3. But Shakespeare sometimes just used the word *it* as the genitive.

**IV.** The system of verbs also changed.

**A.** Modal verbs are words like *shall*, *will*, *can*, *may*, *ought*, etc., which modify tense or mood of a main verb but which cannot by themselves be the only verb in a sentence. They cannot, in Modern English, be transitive verbs, for they cannot take an object alone.
   1. Originally, modals were full verbs.
   2. “I can music” (from the seventeenth century); “I shall to God and you” (from Chaucer); “Ic maeg wel” (OE, “I am in good health”).

**B.** In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these verbs change usage and meaning. We will trace their development.

**C.** *Shall/should, will/would, may/might, can/could* are distinctions that arose during this period to create a subjunctive mood in English comparable to Latin.

**D.** *Shall/will* came to be restricted for forms of the future; they lost full status by the end of the sixteenth century.
   1. In Bible translation, *will* was used to translate Latin *volo*, meaning desire or volition; *shall* came to be used for a general future tense.
   2. In everyday speech, the distinction came to be one of emphasis: *I shall, you will, he will* is normal; *I will, you shall, he shall* is considered emphatic.

**E.** The central question that emerges here is: Are we talking about grammatical or stylistic changes? Where do we draw the line between grammar and idiom?

**V.** This points to the rise of idioms in modern spoken English—sequences of words or a single word in which meaning is contextual or figurative rather than lexical.

**A.** Phrases such as “how is it going, how do you do,” became the idioms of everyday speech and relied on grammatical forms newly developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Spoken English after about the year 1600 became remarkably idiomatic, as these forms took on new functions and as the system of tense and mood markings changed.

**B.** The language of ritual—“I do” in the wedding service—derives from this idiom of the Renaissance. The famous words “to love, honor, and cherish,” while seemingly redundant, are Old English, Latin, and Central French in origin, suggesting again the trilingual basis of the culture.

**C.** From Henry IV, Part I, Prince Hal’s “I do. I will” purveys the new idiomatic flexibility of the language.
Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:

1. Give examples of how English grammar and syntax changed during the early Modern English period.
2. Give other examples of how the language of contemporary ritual reflects the historical roots of English.
Lecture Seventeen

Renaissance Attitudes Toward Teaching English

Scope: To a certain extent, the course thus far has tried to articulate the nature of a standard English throughout the history of the language, and to show the various ways in which standards were viewed over time. Having seen Chancery and Caxton create new institutional authorities for the standardization of English writing, we can turn now to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century developments to define the nature of English at this time and to discern contemporary attitudes of that nature.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the major changes in the English language in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
2. Explain how English spelling conventions changed during the period.
3. Describe the role of education, regionalism, and nationalism in the debate about standard English during the period and how that debate has influenced the spelling, sound, and form of English as we speak and write it today.

Outline

I. Before considering how institutions helped to shape English, we must review the three major changes in English of the period.
   A. The increasing vocabulary
      1. Science, philosophy, and technology led to the formation of new words (inkhorn terms.
      2. Contact through trade and exploration with non-English peoples introduced new terms.
      3. Contact with non-European peoples did the same.
      4. Literature prompted a wider, aureate vocabulary.
      5. Polysemy further contributed to this increase.
   B. Changes in syntax and grammar
      1. By 1700, the major patterns of word order, word endings, and grammar became recognizable as our own.
      2. English was becoming more idiomatic.
C. Spelling and pronunciation
   1. By 1700, the GVS had run its course, and pronunciation, with a few exceptions, probably differed little from that of three centuries later. But some words still rhymed in the eighteenth century that didn’t rhyme later.
   2. Spelling continued to reflect history rather than pronunciation; a growing gap between spelling and speech developed at this time.

II. The issue of spelling came to be a major problem for schoolmasters of the Renaissance.
   A. Under the influence of such teachers and scholars, literary writers and translators began to respell certain native or long-accepted loan words in new ways—ways that are not really etymological or historical, but pseudo-etymological.
      1. Words like debt and doubt never had a b in them, coming as they did directly from French forms into ME. But they came to be respelled to look like the Latin words, debitum and dubitare. Such silent letters are the “fantasies” of schoolteachers.
      2. Words such as adventure, perfect, and verdict also never had a d or c in them, coming directly from French forms into ME. But they, too, were respelled to look like Latin.
   B. Spelling came further to become a mark not of pronunciation—or in cases such as these, not even word history—but of learning itself.

III. The changes in English created a new response to the problem of a standard.
   A. Old criteria for standard formation such as region, class, or official affiliation gave way to a new criterion: education.
   B. Central to the arguments of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers on language was the assertion that educated people from whatever geographical region will use the same forms of speech and writing. This was a new idea.
   C. Furthermore, the implication was that the education itself confers a kind of class or status with which birth or wealth alone cannot compete.
   D. Thus, the notion of standard English became intimately linked with other products of education (knowledge, reasoning ability, moral elevation). Such education eradicated the boundaries of geography or birth.
   E. Education became a commodity, something that was bought and sold.
IV. We can examine the writings of several educators of the period to illustrate problems with the standard. We will look at extended selections from among the following:

A. Some propounded education as a factor.
   1. John Hart, writing in the 1560s, considered the best English as that of the “learned and the literate.”
   2. Alexander Gill, writing in 1619, claimed that words should be spelled as they were pronounced only by “learned or elegantly refined men in speaking and reading.”

B. For others, regionalism was critical.
   1. Thomas Puttenham, writing in 1589, recommended the best English as that of the Court and the region of England nearest to it (i.e., the southeast).
   2. Owen Price, writing in 1665, considered the speech of “London and our Universities” as the best standard. The meaning of vulgar—“of the people” —was being transformed into a pejorative.

C. Spelling reform was advocated.
   1. Richard Mulcaster (1530-1611), first director of Merchant Taylor’s School, Edmund Spenser’s teacher, and later head of St. Paul’s school, claimed that English spelling was fine as it was. He advocated not reform, but consistency.
   2. Alexander Gill, who succeeded Mulcaster, advocated spelling reform according to educated speech.

D. The “genius” of the language became a topic of discussion. These debates led to a new discussion, which we will see raised to a higher level in the eighteenth century, about just what was the essence, or the “genius” of English, and how speech, writing, and usage could be based on this essential quality.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How was English spelling influenced by the work of Renaissance schoolmasters?
2. Does English possess more “genius” than any other language?
Lecture Eighteen

The Language of Shakespeare (Part 1):
Drama, Grammar, and Pronunciation

Scope: This is the first of two lectures devoted to the language of Shakespeare. In both, we will see how Shakespeare deploys the lexical, grammatical, and sonic resources of his language, while at the same time offering some newer usages that, by virtue of his subsequent authority in English literature, become acceptable. Much of Shakespeare seems modern; a great deal seems old-fashioned. How does Shakespeare stand on the cusp of language change, and how does he fashion a literary language out of the fluid body of linguistic elements available at this time?

Our central text for this lecture will be a short selection from the play Richard III, which raises some important questions about pronunciation and grammatical usage at the time.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the major features of Shakespeare’s English.
2. Explain how Shakespeare deploys the resources of his language, (especially shifts in word meaning), the system of pronouns, and grammar and syntax, to fashion dramatic episodes.
3. Describe some of the impediments to reading Renaissance literature in print and how those impediments also give us information about language use and change in the period.

Outline

I. Shakespeare was the canonical writer of the language. But how much can we attribute to him?

A. Shakespeare employed the language of an educated professional, at least up through the grammar school level. His was the regional dialect of southern England.

B. He was very well read and conversant in the ideas of the age, both scientific and literary.

C. Shakespeare’s writings, together with the evidence we have from other contemporary sources, suggest that the pronunciation of his plays and poems generally corresponded to London English of the late sixteenth century.

1. The GVS had not completely run its course; certain vowel sounds are still not fully Modern English.
D. Grammar (morphology): The rise in usage of forms of the verb *do* and -ing endings, together with changes in the system of modal verbs, adjustments of syntax and word order, and the increase in the idioms of everyday English, as we have seen, had a great impact on Shakespeare’s language. There are still, however, many things about his grammar that may strike us as archaic.

1. He employed the use of multiple negatives and comparatives.
2. He used the third person neuter pronoun, *it* and *its*, in distinctive ways.
3. He used older endings for the second-person singular forms of verbs (-st) and third-person singular (-th).
4. He used two different pronouns for the second person (*thou* forms and *you* forms) to signal differences in number as well as class and status.

E. Vocabulary (lexis): Shakespeare deployed the growing resources of his vocabulary to increase markedly the lexical basis of literary English.

1. Many of these words came from commerce and trade
2. Many of them were coinages.
3. Many of them, too, represent metaphorical or figurative uses of words of technical meaning.
4. Some display a functional shift in their employment as different parts of speech.

F. Rhetoric: Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have been trained in the arts of rhetoric and oratory in school. These skills developed from Renaissance educational practice in reviving the older classical rhetorical traditions, and they had a great impact on the tone, sound, and organization of Shakespeare’s poetry, especially in the sonnets and the soliloquies of the plays.

II. We look in detail at a brief passage from *Richard III*, act I, scene ii, to examine these features of the language in action.

A. In this passage, Lady Anne is going to the funeral of her father-in-law, Henry VI, when she meets Richard, who has murdered both the old King and Lady Anne’s husband. Richard and Anne argue, and the passage we will read calls attention to many important issues.

B. We hear the passage in a reconstructed late sixteenth-century pronunciation, illustrating some features of the sound of Shakespeare’s language.

1. The pronunciation of “one hour” shows the changes of the GVS in action.
2. Second-person forms: The entire passage has at the heart of its drama the interchange of *thou* and *you* forms, signaling the shifting personal relationships between Richard and Anne.
III. Shakespeare in print offers many surprises. The passage can be seen in the First Folio edition of Shakespeare’s plays. In this book, published in 1623, we find just about all of the play’s texts. But seventeenth-century printing, especially of drama, was a very different enterprise than modern publication. Some of Shakespeare’s plays also circulated in different prints, probably from actor’s copies (the so-called Quarto texts).

A. The relationship of speech and writing in this period was complicated by the conventions of printing, especially printing drama.

B. But most importantly, several texts differed radically among print versions.

C. The next lecture begins with a text that challenges our understanding not just of Shakespeare’s language but of just what Shakespeare is: the so-called Bad Quarto text of Hamlet, in which famous speeches seem garbled in rhetoric, form, language, and diction.

Suggested Reading:


Note: Material in this lecture is adapted from John Algeo, Problems in the Origin and Development of the English Language. New York, 1972.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Shakespeare’s language reflect the evolving state of early Modern English?
2. Was the role of rhetoric in Renaissance education greater than it is today?
Lecture Nineteen
The Language of Shakespeare (Part 2):
Poetry, Sound, and Sense

Scope: Continuing from the previous lecture, we examine some texts that illustrate the verbal resources of Shakespeare’s language and the changing nature of the English literary vocabulary. But we will also look at some texts that challenge our assumptions about that language and about Shakespeare’s work itself.

The study of the history of the language can help us untangle some of our presuppositions about what is “good” and “bad” Shakespeare, and what may or not be representative texts of his work.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Compare and contrast the various versions of Hamlet’s soliloquy and explain what those versions tell us about attitudes toward language, printing, and drama in Shakespeare’s time.
2. Explain the ways in which Shakespeare used the resources of his vocabulary to make expressive poetry in the sonnets.
3. Describe some of the features of Renaissance English literature in early printed editions.

Outline
I. The medium of print was flexible in the Renaissance, almost as variable as writing itself. For an example of this, we begin with perhaps the most famous speech in English literature, Hamlet’s soliloquy, “To be, or not to be.”

A. The passage is organized rhetorically.
   1. There is a question-and-answer motif.
   2. Extended metaphors or conceits stretch the connotations of familiar terms.
   3. Shakespeare used unexpected juxtapositions of words.
   4. He consciously used repetition, or “anaphora.”

B. In the Quarto text of the play, published in 1603, the text is completely different. What is wrong with it?
   1. New and arresting verbal combinations have apparently been reduced to banality.
   2. The passage garbles rhetorical devices.
   3. There is a strong dose of late sixteenth-century clichés.
   4. The organization of the speech itself is changed.
C. By comparing these texts in detail, we can question several things about Shakespeare’s literary language in its own day.

1. Was it really so new and strange that, for the actors or the printers, it was difficult to parse or to remember? Thus, does the Quarto text represent a simplified version of a complex speech?

2. Was the status of the text so fluid that it changed from one performance to the next? Thus, do we have not two different scripts but two different records of performance traditions?

3. Do these two texts represent two different, perhaps authorial versions of the same scene? In other words, are we looking at Shakespearean revision, rather than actor’s or printer’s garblings?

4. And, finally, is the Quarto version so bad after all? What is there in this text that is linguistically interesting and significant? It is colloquial, more akin to daily speech.

II. In contrast to the fluid text of Hamlet, let us look at a seemingly secure text. Shakespeare’s Sonnets were printed only once in 1609, and while they were probably not published with the author’s authority or sanction, their texts seem, for the most part, pretty stable. What is “unstable,” perhaps, in this poetry is not text but language itself. In one sonnet in particular, number 87, Shakespeare used the vocabulary of commerce to express relationships of love. He also used the sonic resources of the language (and the printer used some odd typographical conventions) to make new associations of sound and sense.

A. Vocabulary: Shakespeare used a series of words which, in the sixteenth century, were shifting in meaning and connotation: e.g., dear, estimate, charter, misprison, patent, determinate, bonds.

1. These are words from an emergent fiscal and legal vocabulary.

2. They are used in new and unique ways here.

3. Their use helps extend their meaning into figurative senses in literature.

4. This is a poem about exchanges and commodification.

B. Syntax and rhetoric: The tension of this poem’s narrative lies in its order of words and the relationship of sentence structure to metrical patterns.

C. Pronunciation and rhyme: The sound of the sonnet helps us understand how certain words were pronounced and tells us something about the history of pronunciation generally at this time.

1. Note the use of possessing/releasing.

2. Note also the pair granting/wanting.

D. Spelling: Two words in particular, ritches and guift (riches and gift) indicate some special issues in the way spelling conventions were used to represent the sounds of speech in the late sixteenth century. The
printer spelled the first word according to pronunciation, the second by analogy with the French.

E. Finally, in Shakespeare we should hear not only the great quotations, but the “unquotable” things as well.

**Suggested Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Might Shakespeare be more accessible to some readers if the Quarto texts were used?
2. What features of value does the Quarto text retain that are missing in the Folio version?
Lecture Twenty

The Bible in English

Scope: From the time of King Alfred on, the Bible was translated into English. Each period of the English language produced its own distinctive versions of the Bible, and the study of these translations can tell us much not only about the history of the language, but about the ways in which biblical translation helped to shape the forms of speech.

Here, we will explore the history of biblical translation by examining closely a brief passage from four representative texts: the Old English version from the Late West Saxon period (tenth century); the translation made under the supervision of John Wycliffe in the 1380s; the translation published by William Tyndale in 1526; and the King James version, prepared by a group of scholars under the commission of James I of England and published in 1611.

Our passage is Matthew 17:13-15. The first three translations are based on the Latin Vulgate. The King James translators used other sources, including the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New, but they also incorporated many phrases from earlier English translations, especially that of Tyndale.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Compare and contrast different versions of the Bible in English.
2. Explain the impact of the history of Bible translation on the making of the King James Bible.
3. Describe the impact of the King James Bible on the shape of Modern English.

Outline

I. The history of Bible translation is the history of English. In the biblical texts of each period, we will attend to four areas of difference: vocabulary, syntax and grammar, sound, and style. We hear first the King James version because it will be the most familiar and will offer a point of comparison with the others.

II. Old English: The Bible was translated into Old English at various times during the Anglo-Saxon period. As far as we can tell, there was no real systematic attempt to translate the entire Old and New Testaments, but selections survive from the Alfrédian and the later periods.

A. Here, notice in particular the older poetic compounding vocabulary:
1. *learningcnihtas* (knights of learning = disciples); *fulluhtere* (wet completely); *fylle seoc* (falling sick).

2. Notice, too, the other general terms in the passage that bring together the traditional terms of social relations and feeling in a newer religious context.

B. As a fully inflected language, OE uses grammatical endings of words to express relationships within a sentence.

1. But notice also the way in which certain word order patterns make grammatical meaning, especially in expressing *when* and *then* by use of the same word, _Pa_.

III. Wycliffe: In the late fourteenth century, John Wycliffe was the founder of the heretical movement known as Lollardy. Some historians have seen it as a proto-Protestant reformist movement. Central to Lollardy was the reading and experience of the scriptures in the vernacular.

A. Right away, we see Latin and French loan words used in place of native OE coinages:

1. *disciples, company, mercy, people, lunatic, suffer*
2. Key concept words are where change in lexis occurred in ME.
3. But some native English formulations still remain: *understand, folded on knees*, and the maintenance of the OE form for *saying*, rather than as the later translators will have it, *speaking*.

B. Word order rather than case endings are the markers of meaning in the sentence.

1. *When* and *then* are the words used to signal temporal relationships, not the OE word order patterns with _Pa_.
2. The standard pattern of Subject Verb Object is the norm now.

IV. Tyndale: William Tyndale’s translation had to be produced in Europe and was published in Geneva. During the early sixteenth century, it was illegal to translate the Bible into English and publish that translation, as it violated the sanction of the King and the church to be the arbiters of belief and worship during the time. Only with the English reformation and the establishment of the new Church of England was it possible to publish an official English translation of the Bible.

A. Tyndale’s choices of vocabulary were very often the ones later used by the King James translators. Tyndale gave us, in fact, many of our idioms of biblical language: e.g., “Eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19).

1. Notice here the use of different words, which actually don’t make it into King James: *perceaved, franticke*.
2. But the phrase *sore vexed* does.
3. Why does Tyndale use the word *Master* for *Lord*?

B. Both new and old are present.
1. Notice the new use of the periphrastic there: “There came to hym.” This phrasing is pretty new.
2. Notice, too, the maintenance of an older strong verb form spake.

C. The sound of Tyndale is signaled in some ways by spelling: perceaved signals a pronunciation. But the spelling of saying is a convention from Chancery English of the fifteenth century. It is an example of how that institution chose to regularize spelling irrespective of pronunciation.

D. The style of Tyndale is a now familiar blend of the colloquial and the archaic. It seems archaic to us because many of its idioms and phrasings were adapted by the King James translators nearly a century later.

V. King James: The important point to note about the King James Bible is its conscious archaism. By reading it against Tyndale, we can see how the translators preserved deliberately many forms and expressions that were a century or so old. The King James constructs an elevated style.

A. The word choice represents now a heightened language, a blend of the colloquial and the technical—e.g., disciples understood; lunatike and sore vexed.

B. The most distinctive syntactic feature of this passage, and of Tyndale, too, is the phrasing were come. The idiom is come appears to be a uniquely biblical one, perhaps a conscious archaism (even in Tyndale) looking back to a time when (as in the modern Germanic languages) verbs of change of state take helping verbs or forms of the verb to be, whereas verbs not of change of state take forms of the verb to have (e.g., “he is come,” but “he has eaten”).

1. But the King James preserves verbal endings and some phrasings that, even in its own time, were explicitly recognized as archaisms.

2. By the early seventeenth century, people used forms of the third-person singular ending in -s, not in -th.

3. The maintenance, elsewhere, of the old thou/you distinction helped create the impression that thou was elevated (whereas in fact it was the old singular informal); thus, in later times, thou forms became the marker of elevated speech.

4. Note that in many European languages, God is addressed in the singular/informal (German du, French tu, early English thou).

C. The style of the King James here and elsewhere is governed by rhetorical parallelisms, by repetition, and by the use of paratactic structures (i.e., strings of clauses or sentences beginning with coordinate conjunctions and or but). The King James Bible consolidates the traditions of biblical translation to create a “biblical” style in vernacular Modern English.

Suggested Reading:
Bolton, W. F. *A Living Language*. New York, 1982 (from which material in this lecture is adapted).

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How does the vocabulary of various biblical translations into English change over time?
2. In what ways is the *King James Bible* superior—or inferior—to the more recent *Revised Standard Version*?

Lecture Twenty-One

Samuel Johnson and His Dictionary

Scope: In this and the following lecture, we examine the rise of lexicography in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a special focus on the great Dictionary of Samuel Johnson (1755). This dictionary stands as the culmination of nearly a century of responses to the growth and change in the English vocabulary. But it also has great impact on all subsequent English and American dictionaries, setting the principles of historical citation, literary quotation, and definitional hierarchy that will be later used in such influential works as the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) and Webster’s American Dictionary.

The central question raised in these two lectures is whether the study of language should be prescriptive or descriptive: should it be designed to look at how we speak and write and then offer guidelines for that practice; or should it simply describe, as best as possible, habits of speech and writing and leave it at that? More subtly, the question really is, as we will see, whether there is any difference between the two—is any act of description in an official or institutionally sanctioned area (a dictionary, a grammar book, a primer) in itself an act of prescription, simply by virtue of its authority?

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the early history of dictionaries in England.
2. Describe the achievement of Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary in relationship to its predecessors.
3. Describe the impact of Johnson’s Dictionary on later dictionaries, including the kinds we use today.

Outline

I. The origins of lexicography are relatively recent.
   A. The increases in vocabulary during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provoked the rise of handbooks of words.
   B. The early dictionaries offered lists of so-called “hard words.”
      1. Bullokar’s Expositor of 1616: words from “logic, law, physics and astronomy”
      2. Cockeram’s Dictionaire (1623): words for “Birds, beasts, boyes, cities, destinies,” etc.
      3. Phillips’s New World of Words (1658) (notice the title of this work): lists on its title page 41 arts and sciences from which its words are taken

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4. Bailey’s Dictionary (1736): “hard and technical words, or terms of art” taken from 62 listed “arts, sciences, and mysteries”

C. A characteristic of these early dictionaries was an attention to the details of technology. Bailey’s Dictionary soon established itself as the premier dictionary for educated use in England.

II. Samuel Johnson (1709-84) was lexicographer, literary critic, poet, and essayist.

A. As a great literary figure, he was tastemaker to his generation.

B. His views of language change.
   1. In 1747 he wrote a Plan of the Dictionary, in which he expressed the hope that, by registering usage, he will fix the language.
   2. But by 1755, when the Dictionary was published, Johnson realized that no one can standardize speech from above.
   3. Language, to Johnson, was mutable, in flux. As we saw in the quotation from Caxton, English lies under the “domyunanciou[n] of the moone.” For Johnson, language was “sublunary”: mutable and transitory.
   4. Thus, by 1755, Johnson recognized that his goal was “not to form but register the language.”

C. Johnson’s syntheses and innovations in lexicography are many.
   1. It was the first dictionary for the general reader rather than the specialist.
   2. It sought to bring together the best in the study of the history of the language to that date.
   3. It limited its selection to about 40,000 words of general usage.
   4. It used aphoristic definitions: A lexicographer is “a harmless drudge.”

D. Johnson had ambitious goals.
   1. This dictionary was written for that reader who would “aspire to exactness of criticism or elegance of style.” Rather than arguing really powerfully for a class-oriented diction, he established criteria for language use that are primarily aesthetic.
   2. Not just a synthesis, the dictionary is a work that articulates a distinctive eighteenth-century idea of synthesis itself: an ideal of discovering what had proved to be the most generally durable or characteristic quality in things and then to profit by using that quality as a standard working basis.
   3. Johnson thus attempted to find the best in English usage in his day, and to sanction or stabilize it.
   4. But Johnson rejected the idea of a national institution that would legislate language usage; he rejected the idea of a language academy on the model of the French Academie Francais or the Italian Accademia della Crusca.
III. Johnson held forth on language.

A. He developed definitions and a notion of language that is organic in imagery; languages grow and decay, they are living things.

B. He justified his purpose in registering, rather than fixing, the language, by stating that languages are like people who “grow old and die,” and we thus “laught at the elixer that promises to prolong life to a thousand years.” He thus derides lexicographers who would effectively “embalm” their languages “and secure [them] from corruption and decay.”

C. He adapted new terms as well as concepts of science and philosophy to explain human and linguistic phenomena.

D. He applied the notion of growth and decay to changes in word meaning, as well as to changes in pronunciation and grammar.
   1. In particular, Johnson stressed how certain words enter the language with a technical or physical meaning and then take on metaphorical senses.
   2. Indeed, Johnson took almost as a general principle of linguistic change that technical words become metaphorical over time.
   3. Examples: *ardent, flagrant, attraction*

E. He relied on historically organized, well-chosen examples from literary writings, thus canonizing certain writers.

F. Johnson located language change in two major areas:
   1. Change occurred in literature’s use of metaphorical or figurative diction.
   2. It occurred in slang, or low, terms: a lower strata of usage that affects semantic change.
   3. Johnson voiced an apparent chauvinism of class and dialect in marking language diversity and historical change.
   4. He favored simple syntax and minimal inflections.

G. Johnson thus applied the standards of quality and judgment drawn from literary criticism and English literature to standards of language performance in everyday, nonliterary circumstances. This was a major innovation in lexicography and in notions of language usage generally.

IV. Johnson’s achievements were many.

A. He regularized spelling.

B. He codified and sanctioned certain pronunciations.

C. He broadened the vocabulary of everyday speech.

D. He established the reliance on literature as a basis of linguistic usage.

E. He helped excise slang and colloquialisms from polite speech.

F. The influence of his *Dictionary* was so great that when the *Oxford English Dictionary* was published from 1888-1913, it was first called a
New English Dictionary, for the old one was Johnson’s from over a century before.

G. *Johnson’s Dictionary* was the first to be used as we use a dictionary today: as a source for everyday, individual questions on spelling, pronunciation, and grammatical usage. Because the work was widely printed in many editions, the dictionary made the idea of having a dictionary in the home a social, as well as a linguistic, necessity.

**Suggested Reading:**


**Questions to Consider:**
1. In what ways does Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* differ from previous lexicographies in English?
2. How does Johnson’s dictionary differ from most standard dictionaries today?
Lecture Twenty-Two

New Standards in English

Scope: The rise of lexicography and the success of *Johnson’s Dictionary* fed into the larger debate about prescriptivism and descriptivism in language study and teaching. In this lecture, we examine several influential writers from the later eighteenth century who crystallize the debate. In addition, we will look at several words that are changing meaning during this period and that reflect the larger cultural problem of linguistic usage and social behavior. Who we are and how we speak and write are questions asked at the close of the eighteenth century in ways that remarkably anticipate our own debates.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast the prescriptivist and descriptivist views of language study and education.
2. Describe the ways in which *Johnson’s Dictionary* engages with the problem of prescriptivism and descriptivism and, as a consequence, helps set standards of usage for later speakers and writers.
3. Explain how our own dictionaries bear the legacy of these eighteenth-century discussions, especially in their treatment of slang and colloquial English.

Outline

I. Robert Lowth and Joseph Priestley advanced two views on language.
   A. Robert Lowth was Bishop of London. Educated at Oxford, he was a key figure in the religious and educational establishment in England in the second half of the eighteenth century.
      1. He was the author of many works on language, including *Principles of English Grammar* (1762, revised 1787).
      2. He was a prescriptivist: “To teach what is right by teaching what is right and wrong.”
      3. He developed a notion of grammar that was essential to a language, based on established use and custom.
      4. He based English language teaching on the teaching of Latin.
   B. Joseph Priestley was a Scot, an empiricist and scientist, the discoverer of oxygen, and a founder of Unitarianism.
      1. He was the author of *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761, revised in 1772, and reprinted frequently thereafter).
      2. A descriptivist, he argued that language, like water, will seek its own natural level.
3. He considered grammar not an essential quality of language but “a collection of observations on the structure of it, and a system of rules for the proper use of it.”

4. As a scientist and empiricist, he favored simplicity in nature and language; thus, he favored the elimination of “gallicisms” from English.

5. He wrote of the “true idiom of the English language” and the “genius of our language.”

6. He considered the study of language a system of empirical observation.

7. He offered a political edge to language study: “I think it not only unsuitable to the genius of a free nation but in itself ill-calculated to reform and fix a language.”

II. The idea of “propriety” in linguistic and social behavior came to the fore.

A. This is a term that developed from a word of physical or commercial use, to one of linguistic use, to one of social action, an example of extension-in-lexis.

B. Look it up in Johnson’s Dictionary, and you get the following definitions:
   1. Peculiarity of possession, exclusive right
   2. Accuracy, justness, especially in a linguistic sense. Here Johnson offers a quotation from John Locke: “Common sense, that is the rule of propriety, affords some aid to settle the signification of language.”

C. Thus, for mid-eighteenth-century usage, propriety was a grammatical rather than a social issue (really an extension of the idea of property or belonging): accuracy of expression, proper grammatical forms or endings.
   1. Only by extension does the word take on a stylistic and social connotation.
   2. What is grammatically proper becomes socially acceptable.
   3. In Lowth’s Principles, the word is used in the phrase “the rule of propriety” to mean grammatical concord in making “the signification of Language” meaningful. Lowth wanted to develop the use of the subjunctive.

D. Thus, when Johnson wrote in the preface to the Dictionary of 1755 that the illiterate “forget propriety” in their speech or writing, he means that they write either awkwardly or ungrammatically.

E. By 1784, Fanny Burney, one of the great arbiters of late-eighteenth-century taste, could write: “Such propriety of mind as can only result from the union of good sense and virtue.”

F. Now propriety was a feature of the mind, an interior quality.
   1. Common sense became good sense.
2. Virtue was the moral basis of social behavior.

G. In late-eighteenth-century literature, propriety became the marker of exactly this nexus of linguistic, social, and moral behavior: Thomas Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* uses the term (but keeps it as if it were a loan word from French, *propriété*). And it became a central marker in the early-nineteenth-century novels of Jane Austen.

III. Slang and colloquialism are debated.

A. With the rise of linguistic usage as the marker of social bearing and educational achievement, it was the job of dictionaries and teachers (especially *Johnson’s Dictionary*) to identify certain expressions as “low” or colloquial.

B. Johnson used the term “low” to refer to words that were socially unacceptable:
   1. He included words such as *swap*, *twittle-twattle*, *wobble*, *budge*, *coax*, and *touchy*.
   2. These are monosyllables, reduplicating, or onomatopoetic terms.

C. Johnson also rejected what he saw as “affected” words: i.e., loan words especially from French that are not part of the “well” of English.
   1. An example—*chaperon*: “an affected word of very recent introduction.”

D. The legacy of examples such as these can be found in our own dictionaries.
   1. For example, not just in obvious words like *ain’t* or in obscene or vulgar terms, but in less obvious places.
   2. Look at the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* definition of *quiz* and *protocol* and you see, still with us, essentially eighteenth-century notions of linguistic propriety and the tendency to mark loan words or words of dubious social origin as not part of the English vocabulary.

E. Dictionaries have become narratives of social use and grammatical propriety.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. How did Robert Lowth and Joseph Priestley fundamentally differ in their beliefs about language?
2. What is the role of propriety in the debate over English usage today?
Lecture Twenty-Three

Semantic Change:
Dictionaries and the Histories of Words

Scope: Following up on the study of eighteenth-century language use and dictionary making, we can see the ways in which the Oxford English Dictionary chronicles the history of semantic change. But we can also see some of the political or ideological presuppositions behind the making of the OED (and all dictionaries generally) that may invite us to question the objectivity of modern lexicography.

This lecture does two things: first, it looks at some key words to illustrate how we can understand the ways in which words change meaning; second, it looks at another set of words to illustrate the politics of lexicography and the judgmentalism of the modern dictionary.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Explain the ways in which words change meaning over time.
2. Use a dictionary to chart the historical changes in meanings of words.
3. Recognize words in Modern English that have changed meaning over the past several centuries and thus read earlier literary texts more effectively.

Outline

I. How can a dictionary be used to trace changes in meaning? Here are some approaches to the cause and explanation of semantic change:

A. Ambiguity and limitation: If a form has two meanings so incompatible that they cause ambiguity, one of the meanings dies out, or more rarely, the form itself becomes obsolete.
   1. Homonymy: a general principle that speakers will try to avoid confusion and ambiguity in spoken language by limiting the number of possible homonyms. An extreme example: OE a (ever), ae (law), aeg (egg), ea (water), eoh (horse), ieg (island). Here, over time, new words were borrowed or existing words were adapted to avoid homonymy as the OE sounds merged together.
   2. Polysemy: where one word has several meanings, some of which overlap over time. An example is the word uncouth, charted by information from the OED:
      unknown (OE-1650)
      unfamiliar or strange (OE, now obsolescent)
      strange or unpleasant (1380-present)
uncomely, awkward, clumsy (1513-present)
rugged, rough (1542-present)
uncultured (1694-present)

B. Extension-in-lexis: where metaphorical meanings or figurative senses take over from older, technical, or literal meanings. Some examples:
clog fasten wood to (1398) encumber by adhesion (1528)
clap fasten (1386), enfold (1447) grip by hand (1583)
brazen of brass (OE) impudent (1573)
bristle stand up stiff (1480) become indignant (1549)
broil burn (1375) get angry (1561)

1. This is an important problem in semantic change. Johnson recognized it in making his dictionary, and he organized definitions so that the older, primary, or nonmetaphorical meaning came first—even if that meaning was no longer current.
2. The OED follows Johnson’s example, giving the older literal meaning first and then the later figurative or metaphorical ones.
3. Thus, lexicography creates the impression of hierarchies of meaning, even when those hierarchies do not reflect actual usage of the time.

C. Shift in class: meanings and usages might not change, but class affiliations or registers of meaning might.
1. The case of ain’t: In the eighteenth century, it was used by polite society, frequently in the form of ant; the OED considers ain’t a “later and more illiterate form of ant.” Yet it survived in the mouth of Lord Peter Whimsey in the Dorothy Sayers novels of the 1920s and 30s, even though Dickens, writing in the 1860s, used it as a “low” dialect word.

II. Words have a history of meaning change and class use. We will explore a few selected examples here:
A. cheap: a story of extension-in-lexis more than 2000 years old, from the Germanic languages to English.
B. diploma, protocol, collate: a story of extension-in-lexis, but also with definite class associations and notions, especially in the OED, of what constitute proper terms in English.
C. quiz: a word of dubious origin, where the OED has problems with etymology, but writes that etymology as a statement of linguistic politics, after the fashion of Samuel Johnson.

Suggested Reading:
M. L. Samuels. Linguistic Evolution. Cambridge, 1972 (from which material in this lecture is adapted).
Questions to Consider:

1. Define and give an example of “polysemy” and “extension-in-lexis.”

2. How do dictionaries reflect a hierarchy of meaning, and is this a problem?
Lecture Twenty-Four

Values and Words in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

**Scope:** How do we bear the legacy of earlier approaches to the study and teaching of English? In dictionaries such as the OED, in handbooks such as *Fowler’s Modern English Usage*, and in contemporary debates on language use, we may see the same terms and problems as we saw in the age of Samuel Johnson.

This lecture illustrates not only how we may place these arguments in historical contexts, but also how we may recognize the immense impact which these earlier discussions had, and still have.

**Objectives:** Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the events leading up to the publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
2. Describe the major features of language study in the nineteenth century and their impact on the making of dictionaries in general.
3. Explain the ways in which modern writers on language in the twentieth century still rely on earlier debates to frame discussions of language and style, grammar and usage, and education and class.

**Outline**

I. The OED and the “science of language” originated in the nineteenth century.

A. The origins of the OED are to be found in the philological inquiries of mid-nineteenth-century England.
   1. The Philological Society was founded in 1842, in London, to study the history of languages and institutionalize the work in Indo-European and comparative philology, which was coming to dominate language study in Europe by the mid-nineteenth century.
   2. Scholars of language by the mid-nineteenth century came increasingly to be located in schools and universities. This marks a shift from earlier eighteenth-century language study, which tended to be pursued by amateurs, journalists, poets, and professional men of letters (exemplified by Samuel Johnson).
   3. In 1864, the Early English Text Society was founded to recover, edit, and publish editions of early English writings. These editions came to be used as source materials for the OED.

B. Historical linguistics came to be pressed into the service of nationalist ideologies in the nineteenth century.
1. Max Müller (1823-1900) came to represent, in mid-nineteenth-century England, a certain ideal of the professional historical linguist.

2. Müller’s work raised questions about the power of language to confer identity on human beings and values in society.

3. Müller also represented the importation of German philological training into England, and he set the standard for the professional study of language for more than half a century.

4. Thus, words came to mean more than they ever had before.

C. The goals of the OED: nation and language

1. The OED was proposed to the Philological Society in 1857 as a way of establishing English etymology and usage on a firm, “scientific” basis.

2. It was presented, in the words of one critic, as “the great linguistic symbol of national development” (Dowling).

3. Richard Trench, the original editor of the OED, claimed a “true idea” of the dictionary. He said that a dictionary should be “an inventory of the language.”

4. The lexicographer is a historian of language, but also a historian of a people. Compare this sentiment with Samuel Johnson’s definition of lexicographer in his own dictionary: “a harmless drudge.”

5. Thus, the dictionary of a language becomes “an historical monument, the history of a nation contemplated from one point of view” (Aarsleff).

II. The OED provides not only lexicographical models but social, and indeed, moral models as well. We will look at selected statements by writers and editors that have been highly influential in the twentieth century and that represent, too, earlier debates generated by nineteenth-century linguistic science and lexicography. The main themes we will examine in these statements are as follows:

A. The relationship of language and society

B. The role of authority and education in articulating that relationship

C. The relationship between “style” and “grammar”

D. The relationship between describing linguistic behavior and prescribing linguistic standards

E. The ways in which they have become models of style in their own right

F. Here are our texts:

1. Henry Fowler, article on “grammar” from Modern English Usage. He defined “grammar” in a way that reflects the debate of the last three centuries.
2. *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 9th ed., from the Introduction, “Language and the Dictionary.” In Webster’s, we see the idea of the inevitable growth of language.


4. George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language.” Orwell contrasted the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary with imported Latinate diction. He signaled that euphemism is not just a form of politeness, but it can also be used to serve the ends of political deceit.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What historical developments of the nineteenth century led to the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*?
2. According to Orwell, why are polysyllabic words more likely to deceive than short, simple ones? Do you agree?
Glossary

alliteration: The repetition of the initial consonant or vowel of words in sequence. Old English and Old Germanic poetry was alliterative in structure: the metricality of the poetic line was determined not by number of syllables, rhyme, or classical meter, but by the number of alliterative words in stressed positions.

analogy: The process by which certain grammatically or morphologically different words or expressions come to share the same form or pronunciation.

analytic language: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the order of the words in that sentence.

anaphora: A term used in rhetoric to describe the repetition of a word or phrase, usually at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses.

Anglo-Saxons: The Germanic peoples who settled the British Isles beginning in the fifth and sixth A.D. and who spoke Old English. Conquered by the Normans in 1066, they were gradually absorbed into the Norman French-speaking population.

argot: A distinctive way of writing or speaking, often characterized by a unique vocabulary, used by a particular class, profession, or social group.

articulatory phonetics: The study of how sounds are produced in the mouth and the technique of accurately describing those sounds by using special symbols.

aureate diction: A highly elaborate, Latinate vocabulary used by English writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to evoke a rarefied and highly educated tone in their language.

calque: A bit-by-bit, or morpheme-by-morpheme, translation of one word in one language into another word in another language, often used to avoid bringing new or loan words into the translating language (e.g., modern German Fernseher is a calque on television; Afrikaans apartheid is a calque on segregation; the modern Icelandic modorsik is a calque on hysterical).

Chancery English: The form of the English language developed in written documents of the fifteenth century in Chancery (the official writing center of royal administration). Many grammatical forms and spelling conventions of Chancery English have become part of standard written English.

cognate: Two or more words from two or more different, but related, languages that share a common root or original.
comparative philology: The study of different, but related, languages in their historical contexts, traditionally with the goal of reconstructing earlier, lost forms of words and sounds in the Indo-European languages.

creole: A new language that develops out of the sustained contact among two or more languages. Often, creoles develop when the language of a colonizing or economically dominant group is imposed upon a subordinate or colonized group. Thus, many creoles have elements of both European and non-European languages. Creoles may emerge over time from pidgins. The basic difference is that creoles are perceived by the language speakers as the natural or native language, whereas pidgins are perceived as artificial or ad hoc arrangements for communication (see pidgin).

deep structure: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the mental or genetically encoded pattern of language communication in human beings (see surface structure; transformational-generative grammar).

descriptivism: The belief that the study of language should describe the linguistic behavior of a group of speakers or writers at a given moment and should not be pressed into the service of prescribing how people should write or speak (see prescriptivism).

determinative compounding: The process by which new nouns are created in a language by yoking together two normally independent nouns (e.g., earring). A key feature of the Germanic languages, especially Old English, it is the process by which many poetic compounds were formed in poetry and prose (e.g., Old English banlocan, is bone-locker, or body).

dialect: A variant form of a language, usually defined by region, class, or socio-economic group, and distinguished by its pronunciation, its vocabulary, and, on occasion, its morphology.

dialectology: The study of different regional variations of a given language, spoken or written at a given time.

diphthongs: Vowel sounds that are made up of two distinct sounds joined together (e.g., the sound in the modern English word house).

etymology: The systematic study of word origins, roots, and changes. The etymology of a given word is its history, traced back through its various pronunciations and semantic shifts, until its earliest recorded or reconstructed root. A root is also known as an etymon.

extension-in-function: The increase in the range of grammatical functions that a given word carries over time.
**extension-in-lexis:** The increase in the range of meanings, often figurative, that a given word carries over time.

**eye-dialect:** A way of representing in writing regional or dialect variations by spelling words in nonstandard ways. Spellings such as *sez* or *wanna* are eye-dialect forms, as they do not actually record distinctions of speech but rather evoke the flavor of nonstandard language.

**grammar:** Generally used to refer to the system of establishing verbal relationships in a given language; often confused with standards of “good usage” or educated speech.

**grammatical gender:** The system by which nouns in a language carry special endings or require distinctive pronoun, adjective, and article forms. Described as masculine, feminine, and neuter.

**Great Vowel Shift:** The systematic shift in the pronunciation of stressed, long vowels in English, which occurred from the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century in England and which permanently changed the pronunciation of the English language. It effectively marks the shift from Middle English to Modern English.

**Grimm’s Law:** A set of relationships among the consonants of the Germanic and non-Germanic Indo-European languages, first codified and published by Jakob Grimm in 1822.

**homonymy:** The state in which two or more words of different origin and meaning come to be pronounced in the same way.

**Indo-European:** The term used to describe the related languages of Europe, India, and Iran, which are believed to have descended from a common tongue spoken roughly in the third millennium B.C. by an agricultural peoples originating in Southeastern Europe. English is a member of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages.

**inkhorn terms:** Words from Latin or Romance languages, often polysyllabic and of arcane, scientific, or aesthetic resonance, coined and introduced into English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**lexicography:** The practice of making dictionaries.

**lexis:** The vocabulary resources of a given language.

**metathesis:** the reversing of two sounds in a sequence, occasionally a case of mispronunciation, but also occasionally a historical change in pronunciation.

**Middle English:** The language, in its various dialects, spoken by the inhabitants of England from roughly the period following the Norman Conquest (the late
eleventh century) until roughly the period of completion of the Great Vowel Shift (the early sixteenth century).

**modal verbs**: Helping verbs, such as *shall*, *will*, *ought*, and the like, that were originally full verbs in Old and Middle English and became reduced to their helping function in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**Modern English**: The language, in its various dialects, that emerged after the end of the Great Vowel shift, roughly in the middle of the sixteenth century.

**monophthongs**: Vowel sounds that are made up of only one continuously produced sound (e.g., the sound in the modern English word *feet*).

**morpheme**: a set of one or more sounds in a language which, taken together, make up a unique, meaningful part of a word (e.g., *-ly* is the morpheme indicating manner of action, as in *quickly* or *slowly*; *-s* is a morpheme indicating plurality, as in *dogs*).

**morphology**: The study of the forms of words that determine relationships of meaning in a sentence in a given language. Includes such issues as case endings in nouns, formation of tenses in verbs, etc.

**Old English**: The language, or group of related dialects, spoken by the Anglo-Saxon people in England from the earliest recorded documents (late seventh century) until roughly the end of the eleventh century.

**periphrastic**: A term that refers to a roundabout way of doing something; used in grammar to describe a phrase or idiom that uses new words or more words to express grammatical relationship.

**philology**: The study of language generally, but now often restricted to the historical study of changes in phonology, morphology, grammar, and lexis. Comparative philology is the term used to describe the method of comparing surviving forms of words from related languages to reconstruct older lost forms.

**phoneme**: An individual sound which, in contrast with out sounds, contributes to the set of meaningful sounds in a given language. A phoneme is not simply a sound, but rather a sound that is meaningful (e.g., *b* and *p* are phonemes in English because their difference determines two different meaningful words: *bit* and *pit*, for example).

**phonetics**: The study of the pronunciation of sounds of a given language by speakers of that language.

**phonology**: The study of the system of sounds of a given language.

**pidgin**: A language that develops to allow two mutually unintelligible groups of speakers to communicate. Pidgins are often ad hoc forms of communication,
and they are perceived as artificial by both sets of speakers. Over time, a pidgin may develop into a creole (see creole).

**polysemy**: The state in which one word comes to connote several, often very different, meanings.

**prescriptivism**: The belief that the study of language should lead to certain prescriptions or rules of advice for speaking and writing (see descriptivism).

**regionalism**: An expression in a given language that is unique to a given geographical area and is not characteristic of the language as a whole.

**semantic change**: The change in the meaning of a word over time.

**slang**: A colloquial form of expression in a language, usually relying on words or phrases drawn from popular culture, particular professions, or the idioms of particular groups (defined, e.g., by age or class).

**sociolinguistics**: The study of the place of language in society, often centering on distinctions of class, regional dialect, race, and gender in communities of speakers and writers.

**structural linguistics**: The discipline of studying language in America in the first half of the twentieth century, characterized by a close attention to the sounds of languages, by a rigorous empirical methodology, and by an attention to the marked differences in the structures of languages. The term is often used to characterize the work of Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield.

**surface structure**: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the actual forms of a given language, uttered by speakers of that language, which are produced by the rules of that language and which are generated out of the deep structures innately held by human speakers.

**syntax**: The way in which a language arranges its words to make well-formed or grammatical utterances.

**synthetic language**: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the inflections (for example, case endings) added to the words.

**transformational-generative grammar**: The theory of language developed by Noam Chomsky and his followers which argues that all human beings have the ability to speak a language and that deep structure patterns of communication are transformed, or generated, into surface structures of a given language by a set of rules unique to each language. Presumes that language ability is an innate idea in humans (see deep structure, surface structure).
Timeline

1258………………………………..Proclamation of Henry III; first official text in English since the Conquest (but the English is actually a translation of the French original).

1362………………………………..Parliament is addressed for the first time in English (but records are still kept in French).

1380s……………………………….John Wycliffe supervises translation of the Bible into Middle English.

c.1400……………………………….Death of Chaucer.

1417………………………………..Royal clerks use English for official writing.

1422………………………………..London Brewer’s Guild adopts English as official language by formal action.

1423………………………………..Parliament’s records kept virtually all in English.


1490……………………………….Caxton’s *Eneados*. In his preface, he reflects on language change and dialect variation in England.

C.1440s-1550s………………….The Great Vowel Shift takes place, changing permanently the pronunciation of long stressed vowels in English, and as a consequence determining the sound of Modern spoken English.


1609……………………………….Publication (unauthorized) of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*.

1611……………………………….Publication of the King James Bible.
1616………………………………..Death of Shakespeare.

1619………………………………..Alexander Gill’s *Logonomia Anglica* is published. Reflects on changes in English and the importation of new words from North America.

1624………………………………..First Folio edition of Shakespeare’s Works.

1619………………………………..Alexander Gill’s *Logonomia Anglica* is published. Reflects on changes in English and the importation of new words from North America.

1624………………………………..First Folio edition of Shakespeare’s Works.

1736………………………………..N. Bailey’s *Dictionary* is published, culminating a century of responses to the importation and coining of new words in the language.

1747………………………………..Samuel Johnson publishes *The Plan of a Dictionary*, setting out his goals for lexicography in English.

1755………………………………..Samuel Johnson publishes the first edition of his *Dictionary*, in two volumes. It quickly becomes the defining work for language use and dictionary making in England and America.


1762………………………………..Robert Lowth publishes first edition of the *Principles of English Grammar*.

1781………………………………..John Witherspoon coins the term “Americanism” in his writings on the English language in America.

1783………………………………..Noah Webster publishes the first edition of his *Grammatical Institute of the English Language*.

1799………………………………..Sir William Jones delivers his third-anniversary address to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, announcing his discovery of similarities among the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Celtic languages, thus inaugurating the study of Indo-European.
1822..............................Jakob Grimm publishes the revised edition of his comparative grammar of the Germanic languages, codifying the consonant relationships of the Germanic and non-Germanic Indo-European languages. This set of relationships came to be known as Grimm’s Law.

1888-1933......................Publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, originally called the *New English Dictionary* to distinguish it from Johnson’s.
Biographies

Caxton, William: (c. 1421-91): England’s first printer. Brought printing to England in the 1470s and published for the first time the works of Chaucer and many other important English writers. In the prefaces to his works, reflected on language-change and variation.

Gill, Alexander (1564-1635): English schoolmaster and grammarian. Master of St. Paul’s School in London; teacher of Milton. Published several works on the English language in which he responds to issues of spelling reform and the increase in the language’s vocabulary (notably Logonomia Anglica, 1619).

Johnson, Samuel (1709-84): English writer, poet, and lexicographer. His Dictionary (1755) set the standards for lexicography for more than a century.

Jones, Sir William (1746-94): English diplomat and philologist. His recognition that the languages of Europe and India share certain key features of grammar and vocabulary led to the development of Indo-European comparative philology in the nineteenth century.


Mulcaster, Richard (c. 1530-1611): English schoolmaster and grammarian. Head of Merchant Taylors’ School in London (where Edmund Spenser was a student); later head of St. Paul’s School. Wrote about English grammar and usage, recording many features of sixteenth century English.


Priestley, Joseph (1733-1804): English clergyman, scientist, and grammarian. Published several books on English grammar. Advocated a primarily descriptivist approach to the study of language.

Shakespeare, William (1564-1616): English dramatist and poet. In his plays and sonnets, he deployed the resources of a changing English language of his day to give voice to character, theme, and dramatic setting.
The History of the English Language
Part III
Professor Seth Lerner
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Professor Lerer has received many awards for his scholarship and teaching, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation, the Beatrice White Prize of the English Association of Great Britain (for *Chaucer and His Readers*), and the Hoagland Prize for undergraduate teaching at Stanford.
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The History of the English Language

Scope:

This course of thirty-six lectures introduces the student to the history of the English language, from its origins as a dialect of the Germanic-speaking peoples, through the literary and cultural documents of its 1500-year span, to the state of American speech of the present day. In addition to surveying the spoken and written forms of the language over time, the course also focuses on a set of larger social concerns about language use, variety, and change: the relationship between spelling and pronunciation; the notion of dialect and variation across geographical and social boundaries; the arguments concerning English as an official language and the status of a standard English; the role of the dictionary in describing and prescribing usage; and the ways in which words change meaning and, in turn, the ways in which English coins or borrows new words. Each of these issues, charged with meaning in the present day, had historical examples. People have puzzled over these problems throughout time, and it will be the purpose of this course to illustrate the many ways in which speakers and writers of English, and its antecedents, confronted the place of language in society and culture.

In the course of these lectures, too, we will be looking at some special problems in the study of language generally—for example: how we describe and characterize language change over time; how we can accurately describe differences in pronunciation and, thus, recover earlier pronunciation habits; and how we can use the study of literature not only to chart the different periods of the English language, but to recognize how literary writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Twain, and others used the fluid resources of their language to grant meaning to a changing world.

Some of the approaches of this course will touch on linguistics. There will be a little bit of literary criticism. And, at times, it will call attention to the material culture of the book (specifically, how people read and wrote and what materials they used to do so). These are all issues that could demand full courses of their own. Our goal here, however, is to understand the great impact that studying the history of English can have on our appreciation of social, cultural, literary, and linguistic change. With these lectures, the student can find the history of English embedded in the words we use, the literature we read, and the everyday lives we lead. We will learn about the past, but also see the making of our own present.

In Part 1 we focus on the development of Old English, precursor of the modern tongue we speak today. We trace Old English back to the beginning: from its position as one of the Germanic languages all the way back to its ultimate roots in the theoretical language known as Indo-European. We consider the specific qualities of Old English that have been lost to modern English speakers: grammatical gender, synthetic structure, the presence of “strong” verbs, and the
emphasis on poetic alliteration. We also examine the basic vocabulary of Old English that comprises a significant part of Modern English even today.

With the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, English was eclipsed as an official language by French and Latin. English, in fact, survived several centuries of inferior social status before it became, at the close of the Middle Ages, the primary language of the British Isles.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of these lectures, you should be able to:

1. Recognize why we spell and speak the way we do today.
2. Identify words of early English origin, as well as words of more recent, non-English origin.
3. Use a dictionary, and other resources, to learn the etymologies of words and chart their changes in meaning and use.
4. Explain the ways in which major English authors used the resources of their language.
5. Summarize the relationship of English to other European languages.
6. Summarize the differences between Old English (OE) and Middle English (ME).
7. Describe generally the dialect boundaries in England.
Lecture Twenty-Five

The Beginnings of American English

Scope: American English begins with the initial patterns of settlement in the early seventeenth century. In this lecture, we look at the nature of those settlements, the historical contexts of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonization, and the origins of dialect boundaries based in these early settlements. In addition, we will try to recover the sound and texture of early American English: how it was pronounced, what some distinctive features of grammar and vocabulary were, and how British and American English began to diverge. Finally, we will examine some representative attitudes to American English in the eighteenth century to sustain this course’s concern with the social history of language use and change.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the patterns of early American settlement and their relationships to the origins of American dialects.
2. Describe the key differences in the pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary of British and American English as they start to distinguish themselves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
3. Define the problems facing American writers of the late eighteenth century on American English and describe their attitudes toward just what makes up “American” language.

Outline

I. Where does American English begin? Early settlements were points of linguistic entry:
   A. New England:
      1. Boston, Massachusetts, Bay Colony (early seventeenth century)
      2. New London (early eighteenth century)
   B. Middle Atlantic:
      1. New York (founded as New Amsterdam; seized by the English from the Dutch in 1644)
      2. Pennsylvanina (Philadelphia founded by William Penn in 1681)
   C. South Atlantic:
      1. Virginia, Jamestown Colony (1607)
      2. Charleston, South Carolina (late seventeenth century)
      3. Georgia (1730s)
D. These areas of settlement are points of dialect origin. Each place was settled by speakers of distinctive English dialects, and the sounds and forms of the language descend from those earlier English regions.

E. Settlements at the mouths of rivers became points of linguistic change. Natural boundaries are more important in this sense than man-made ones.

II. The West is settled.

A. Louisiana Purchase, 1803
   1. Contact is established with French-speaking groups.
   2. Non-European language groups helped form a regional dialect.

B. California Gold Rush, 1849
   1. The pioneers came mainly from the northeast.
   2. A dialect boundary moved across the country, largely bypassing land travel for sea travel.

III. Early American English produced sounds that were different than in British.

A. Phonology:
   1. In American English, the short a is pronounced as the sound known as “aesch”; cat, hat; but remains a in father. In British English, a becomes a long vowel and extremely retracted (i.e., pronounced further back in the throat), a way of speaking that is sometimes attributed to eighteenth-century actor David Garrick.
   2. The r becomes variable in certain environments. American English preserves some sounds of early Modern English in the pronunciation of r at the ends of words (father) and in the middle (lord); British English tends to reduce this sound.
   3. Short o remains a rounded vowel in British English but is unrounded to more of an a sound in American (not, hop, hot).
   4. Changes in word stress: American English preserves full stresses and pronunciations of polysyllabic words; British English does not (secretary, necessary, etc.)

B. Grammar and morphology:
   1. American English preserves some old strong verbs in regional dialects.
   2. American regional dialects recreate a second-person plural form (y’all, youse).
   3. In American English, collective nouns take the singular; in British English, they take the plural.

C. Vocabulary: Many distinctions emerge in American and British English in vocabulary terms. The different groups used different words for the same thing; they also used the same word for different purposes.
1. Some examples of this problem can be seen historically, as American English preserves older uses of such words as *reckon* and *guess*. Phrases such as “I reckon” and “I guess” are obvious Americanisms, but they are really remnants of much older forms of English, lost by British speakers.

IV. Attitudes toward American English were mixed.

A. Early attitudes of British writers were often patronizing.
   1. Reactions to new North American vocabulary terms were often strong; for example, Alexander Gil (writing in 1621) condemns importation of words such as *maize* and *canoe* into the language.
   2. Travelers often recorded their responses to American English; we will look at examples from the diary of Mrs. Trollope, who visited in the 1830s.
   3. Such travelers often recorded not so much what they heard, but what they wanted to hear. Examples from journals and diaries and responses of modern linguists.

B. John Witherspoon (b. 1722/23 in Scotland; to America in 1769; writing here in 1781). A key figure in American politics and education, he argued that American education needed to tighten up on the teaching of grammar and style.
   1. He argued that Americans make errors and “improprieties” of grammar and usage.
   2. But he claimed that the “vulgar” in America speak better than the vulgar in Britain, given greater standardization of dialect in America.
   3. He coined the term “Americanism,” insisting it didn’t necessarily mean inelegant or ignorant.
   4. In spite of his efforts, he failed to reform and regulate the language.

   1. Webster wrote frequently in the late eighteenth century on American usage.
   2. His attitudes were similar to Priestley’s on the relationships between language and freedom and between language and national identity.
   3. He published the *American Dictionary* in 1828. It had as much influence on the American language as Johnson’s *Dictionary* had had in England for the previous half century.
   4. His dictionary defined and codified American English, and we begin the next lecture with a look at how it did so.

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. What are the major regional dialects of American English, and where are they spoken? Do they exist as much today as they did 100 years ago?

2. Why did America possess greater standardization of dialect than Britain?

* Erratum: On the tape, the professor says that New London, Connecticut, was founded at the mouth of the Connecticut River. New London is actually located near the mouth of the Thames River.
Lecture Twenty-Six

Making the American Language:
From Noah Webster to H. L. Mencken

Scope: The American language is developed and discussed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but two important figures stand at the poles of this story: Noah Webster and H. L. Mencken. Both concerned themselves with recording and assessing the state of American English. Both were deeply involved in lexicographical projects. And both set the tone, for their respective periods, for the way in which the American language was viewed and written about.

This lecture looks closely at Webster’s Dictionary in the light of this course’s concern with the practice of lexicography and the history of attitudes toward language change. It also examines the ways in which Mencken drew on this body of earlier nineteenth-century material to fashion his own history of American English.

Both writers offer us great information on how the language was spoken and written. They also offer us great narratives about that language—narratives that still affect our attitudes today.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Compare and contrast Webster and Mencken on the American language, its key features, history, and regionalisms.
2. Describe the central issues in American education and language study in the nineteenth century and how they bear on the definition of American English.
3. Define the impact of both Webster and Mencken on the study, teaching, and use of language in America.

Outline

I. For Webster, the American language uniquely reflected the American experience.
   A. Webster began his career by publishing grammar textbooks in the 1780s.
   B. In 1806, he published an early short dictionary.
      1. In both this little dictionary and his grammar textbooks, Webster sought to define what was characteristic of American English.
      2. He stressed the independence of America as both a political and a linguistic phenomenon.
3. He saw a “national language” as a “band of national union”; i.e., he wished to reinforce the union of the former colonies into a nation by showing how the American language unified those former colonists.

II. Webster’s *American Dictionary* was published in 1828.
   A. Webster argued that language is the expression of ideas.
   B. He made claims for the philosophical and political implications of language usage and theory.
      1. Webster made notable remarks about words for political bodies and how they expressed new ideas of democracy and representation.
      2. He argued that “No person in this country will be satisfied with the English definitions of the words congress, senate, assembly, court, etc., for, although these are words used in England, they are applied in this country to express ideas which they do not express in that country.”
      3. In ways that anticipated the makers of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), then, Webster advocated the writing of American history and national identity through lexicography. He created a dictionary of the people.
   C. The *American Dictionary* had many new features.
      1. Webster respelled words into what would become our modern American forms—e.g., honor, color, music, center, defense, etc.
      2. Webster argued that spelling should be more representative of pronunciation than British convention had it. Thus, he favored the elimination of certain silent letters or of letter clusters that are not pronounced.
      3. But this is a moderate proposal; it is not a radical reform of spelling as pronunciation, but rather a set of modest simplifications.
      4. Webster recorded newer American pronunciations. In the pronunciation guide to his dictionary, as well as in his earlier spelling manuals and grammatical books, Webster advised the pronunciation of full syllable counts in words.
   D. Webster was an American Johnson.
      1. His remarks on language change drew, like Johnson’s, on naturalistic, organic metaphors of growth.
      2. But he also developed a way of talking about American English drawn directly from the American language; e.g., he compared the power of American English to the Mississippi and argued that it would be as fruitless to alter the course of our language as it would be to alter the course of that river.
3. His influence, like Johnson’s, was vast. Our conventions of spelling and pronunciation are, in large part, due directly to Webster, much as British conventions are due largely to Johnson (both directly and as filtered through the OED).

E. Webster’s influence extended beyond spelling and pronunciation, however. He defined just what American language was.
   1. In fact, for many Americans, he defined just what language was.
   2. Many Americans learned to read from Webster’s spelling books and grammars. Frederick Douglass, for example, the ex-slave who became one of the great African-American writers of the nineteenth century, recorded how he learned to read from his master’s copy of Webster’s spelling books. Spelling became the mark of a person’s identity.

III. After Webster: American English study and teaching in the nineteenth century continues.
   A. There is a debate over “Americanisms.”
      1. John Pickering published the first dictionary of Americanisms in 1816, which Webster considered an attack on his position.
      2. John Bartlett published another dictionary of Americanisms in 1848. Here, the interest was not so much in vocabulary as in dialect.
      3. James Russell Lowell published, in 1866, a second series of the Bigelow papers. Here Lowell importantly argued, and provided evidence, that many features of American English are really features that survived from the earlier English of Britain.

IV. Mencken bestows on us the history of the American language.
   A. H. L. Mencken’s The American Language was published originally in 1919 and went through many revisions and expansions in the course of the next three decades.
      1. Mencken was primarily concerned with tracing the history of American English.
      2. But he also was concerned with defining just what distinguished American English from other forms.

   B. Mencken distinguished three features of American English that have long been noticed, but that came to influence the study and characterization of the language:
      1. “its general uniformity throughout the country”
      2. “its impatient disregard for grammatical, syntactical, and phonological rule and precedent”
      3. “its large capacity (distinctly greater than that of the English of present-day England) for taking in new words and phrases from outside sources and for manufacturing them of its own materials”
C. The impact of Mencken’s work on contemporary attitudes toward American English was vast, as were his scholarly approaches to the study of the language. Now the American self is also linguistic in nature, consisting as it does of “tall talk.”

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Was Noah Webster’s dictionary populist or nationalist—or both?
2. Is the “tall talk” of H.L. Mencken still in evidence today?
Lecture Twenty-Seven

The Rhetoric of Independence from Jefferson to Lincoln

Scope: As in the Renaissance in England, the study of rhetoric in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America had a profound effect on how people spoke and wrote and how literary and public language developed. In this lecture, we examine attitudes toward language and power in the political and literary arenas. Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence comes out of a particular constellation of late eighteenth-century attitudes toward expression and oration. Nineteenth-century American political language is also profoundly rhetorical, as it draws on the resources of American English as filtered through the powerful influences of the King James Bible and Shakespeare. The speeches of Abraham Lincoln exemplify public language at mid-century—a blend of the elevated and the colloquial, with an expanding vocabulary and a distinctive syntax and style that came to be defined as uniquely American.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the attitudes toward language and rhetoric in late eighteenth-century America.
2. Analyze the rhetoric of Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence, especially as it relates to late eighteenth-century attitudes toward language and performance.
3. Analyze the rhetoric of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

Outline

I. American language developed in the public sphere in the late eighteenth century.
   A. Late eighteenth-century American notions of language derived from British empirical philosophy.
      1. Relationships between words and ideas were conceived of as conventional.
      2. There was a stress on the “natural” qualities of language, as opposed to the artificial ornaments of earlier rhetorical traditions.
   B. American language and language study was pressed into the service of social and class formation.
1. The impact of Hugh Blair’s writings on rhetoric and literature of the 1780s lies in its ability to transform issues of language and verbal presentation into issues of class and aesthetics.

2. The teaching of language in American homes and schools came to be the instruction in class-based patterns of behavior. Education became a mode of class identification, or class advancement.

C. The idea developed of a natural language and the state of nature.

1. A new fascination with the origins of language in the late eighteenth century led to a special conception of America as a place of linguistic “naturalism”—that is, as the place where people may speak as they are, not as they pretend to be.

2. The attempts to associate empirical research in language origins and history with the story of the Fall and the memory of an Adamic language led to a fascination with etymology. In the eighteenth century, we did not have the scientific comparative etymologies of later Indo-Europeanists and philologists, but rather more imaginative etymologies that seek a kind of “fossil poetry” embedded in the word.

II. Jefferson develops his language.

A. Jefferson’s education and his life-long fascination with language history and study took three paths:

1. The close reading of Homer’s poetry; a deep engagement with the idea of oral, epic verse and the rhythm of public speechmaking in epic.

2. The study of Old English; a sustained interest in the history of the English language, its origins and etymologies, and in the natural speech of the English people.

3. The poetry of Ossian, the imagined ancient Celtic bard whose works were “translated” in a forgery perpetrated in the eighteenth century but had an immense impact nonetheless on Enlightenment and Romantic notions of poetic language and voice.

B. The Declaration of Independence is the verbal enactment of Jefferson’s ideals of language and political representation.

1. A close reading of the syntax and style of the Declaration illustrates some Jeffersonian ideals of language. His knowledge of etymology is apparent, and his alliterative lines even scan in pentameter.

2. But the vocabulary of the Declaration also informs us of the changing meanings of the key words in the American political lexicon and the mix of Old English and Latin that fused a new consciousness.
III. Lincoln develops his own unique poetics of prose.
   A. Abraham Lincoln has long been recognized as one of the masters of American public prose.
      1. Though largely self-educated, his writings reveal the clear influence of Shakespeare and the King James Bible.
      2. His public language also reveals close ties to the oratorical style of earlier American figures, especially Daniel Webster.
   B. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address is an excellent example of American public English at mid-century.
      1. The ringing echo of “four” strongly suggests “forefathers.”
      2. The Address’s vocabulary demonstrates a hearkening back to the earlier models of language in Shakespeare and King James.
      3. But there is also an older feel to the language: an elevated sense of style and grammar that looks back to Jeffersonian and other eighteenth-century models.
      4. Lincoln effectively created the elevated style in American public discourse.
   C. The Lincoln achievement is to synthesize newer phrasing and vocabulary with an older formal oratory.
      1. He brought new words into the American idiom.
      2. But he maintained a poetics of prose: a sense of the formal structure of public speech.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
  1. In what ways can the bedrock of Old English be seen in the Declaration of Independence?
  2. How does the Gettysburg Address recall the language of Shakespeare and the King James Bible?
Lecture Twenty-Eight

The Language of the American Self

**Scope:** Mid-nineteenth-century America saw the rise of the profession of public authorship as the vehicle for literary life and political commentary. The strong autobiographical turn in American writing—going back to the seventeenth-century Puritan preoccupation with the diary and journal and to the later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century proliferation of slave narratives—developed at this time into full-fledged prose and poetic expression. The autobiographical writings of Frederick Douglass illustrate the ways in which an African-American literary and linguistic tradition was taking shape at mid-century. The bardic voice of Walt Whitman illustrates the possibilities of an American poetry to change the language forever. The Shakespearean prowess and lexicographical obsessions of Melville’s *Moby Dick* demonstrate how the study of the history of the language contributes to the making of a unique voice of American social experience.

**Objectives:** Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the relationships among language learning and identity formation among dominant and African-American peoples in the colonial period.
2. Compare and contrast the ways in which Douglass, Whitman, and Melville used the resources of their language both to record current habits of speech and forms of literary rhetoric and to look back to older, especially Shakespearean, models of diction.

**Outline**

I. We begin with fictions of the self, going back to the seventeenth century.
   A. Puritan thinkers were fascinated with observing the self in growth and change.
      1. The diary or personal journal became a major genre of expression.
      2. Childhood education, especially in reading and writing, came to be the place where the self took shape.
      3. Language instruction, and a self-consciousness of instruction in an American language, became the mode of understanding the individual’s relationship to the world.
B. But the question of identity through reading, speaking, and writing was not confined to the dominant settler population. African-American slave narratives begin to proliferate at the close of the eighteenth century, and these raise many of the same questions about the English language and the self.
   1. Central to many of these narratives is the story of the slave learning to read and write.
   2. Often, the imagery is of the book (usually the Bible) “talking” to the reader.
   3. The African becomes American, in some sense, by engaging with the language of America through its books.

II. In the writings of Frederick Douglass, these images became central to the formation of an African-American linguistic self-consciousness.
   A. Douglass learns to read and write.
      1. On many occasions in his writings, Douglass told stories of how he learned to read and write.
      2. He noted in particular the impact of Webster’s spelling books in his own education, and in American education, generally.
   B. Douglass wrote in an elevated style drawing deeply on the Bible and Shakespeare.
      1. Selections from Douglass illustrate his rhetorical style drawing from both sources.
      2. They also illustrate the ways in which he recorded the American language as spoken and as changing.
   C. Douglass also offered evidence for the nature of African-American vernacular English in the nineteenth century, especially in his quotations from songs and poetry. Much as in Caedmon, there is a strong sense of oral, public poetry.

III. Walt Whitman takes an omnivorous view of American language.
   A. Whitman’s statements on the American language politicized vocabulary usage and linguistic choice.
   B. His poetry developed a whole new vocabulary of American speech. We will examine a brief selection from “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.”
      1. Through word choice, he expands the American lexicon.
      2. His use of exclamation and apostrophe evoke the sound of public oratory, as with Lincoln.
      3. His use of sustained metaphors and images is unique to American experience and has a profound impact on what came to constitute the sound and texture of American verse.
IV. Melville looks back to the resources of the Bible and Shakespeare to create an elevated literary rhetoric, but one no less American than Douglass’s or Whitman’s.

A. In *Moby Dick*, Melville offers a dissertation on lexicography itself.
   1. Here, we can see the traditions of Johnson and Webster transformed into literary narrative.
   2. The idea of etymology becomes a focal point of the novel: words contain their own histories; but each word is, in some sense, a fossil poem, a repository of images and ideas encoded in their etymologies. *Moby Dick* begins with the history of the language, not with Ishmael.

B. Melville also illustrated the ways in which languages came into contact in trade and exploration, enhancing the stock of American English.

C. Melville used set speeches of great rhetorical power to figure himself as an American Shakespeare.
   1. Ahab in *Moby Dick* became a Shakespearean tragic hero.
   2. Melville used rhetorical devices of Shakespeare to show how the language of the English literary past can be absorbed into an American political and literary present. Personification was the central figure of speech in the new American rhetoric.
   3. The development of pidgins and creoles: languages in contact gave rise to new languages used for purposes of mutual communication.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. How does the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass echo some of the great texts written or translated into English?
2. How do Melville, Whitman, or Douglass use personification?
Lecture Twenty-Nine

American Regionalism

Scope: By the middle of the nineteenth century, it had become clear that American English was not a unified form of speech and writing but a combination of regional dialects. In fact, what became clear was that the very nature of American English was regional and dialectical. The American language is built up of different geographical forms, different levels of professional attainment, educational achievement, and idioms. Region, class, race, and gender became the distinguishing marks of American English, and writers during the last century and a half have, in effect, redefined the American language as a mix, rather than as a standard with variants.

This lecture explores the history of the idea of regional American English, reviewing some of the differences in dialects and moving through writers that define American speech as distinguished by place, class, and race. It then moves to some modern linguistic approaches to the study of American regionalism, and to the idea of colloquialism as the new norm in the construction of American English.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Describe the major features of American regional dialects.
2. Use a resource such as the Dictionary of American Regional English to explain the meaning of words, or the nature of certain sounds, that are characteristic of the varieties of the language.

Outline

I. Settlement patterns affect the origins of American dialects.
   A. Six major regional dialects developed in the eastern part of America, descending from original settlement patterns.
      2. New York City
      4. Lower North: Mid-Atlantic states
      5. Upper South: West Virginia, mountain regions of Virginia and North Carolina, and into the northern Ozark area
      6. Lower South: Virginia Piedmont area, South Carolina coast, and “plantation” country
   B. There are, of course, many subdialects and smaller regional variants. But our goal here is to identify:
1. The major differences in these dialects by region
2. The points of contact with other languages in each region (e.g., Dutch and French in some areas; German and Irish English in others; Gullah and African languages in others still).

II. We consider the most general and obvious features of American regional dialects. We will explore some more detailed examples in later lectures on the literary representation of American dialects.

A. The North, especially eastern New England:
   1. does not retain the historical r sound in words;
   2. uses the a sound in such words as dance rather than the “aesch” sound;
   3. tends to contrast the sounds in the three words Mary, merry, and marry; and
   4. uses distinctive pronunciation of certain key words (e.g., creek, greasy).

B. New York City:
   1. frequently confuses -oi and -er sounds due to instability of r after a vowel (technically known as postvocalic r);
   2. loss of postvocalic r in some situations leads to rounding of vowels (e.g., the characteristic “aw” sound). But this sound is also apparent in words with -au and -al spellings; and
   3. shows marks of class and education difference. Many of the features we see as characteristic of the dialect are really parodies of uneducated speech. There are, in fact, many class and regional varieties of New York City speech.

C. Upper North:
   1. shares many features with Eastern New England; but
   2. retains postvocalic r and the “aesch” sound.

D. Lower North:
   1. has distinctive pronunciation of unrounded o sound in words such as forest and hot;
   2. tends to conflate the sounds in Mary and merry;
   3. tends to conflate the sounds in words like cot and caught.

E. In the Upper and Lower South: there are many similarities, though there are important differences of detail which we cannot go into. The general features are that:
   1. the long i becomes a long a (in words such as line, mile);
   2. the vowels in words such as gem and pin are pronounced the same way (short i);
   3. marry and merry are pronounced the same way;
   4. creek and greasy (with a short i and a z) are pronounced distinctly.

F. The study of these dialects is ultimately rooted in Middle English dialects.
III. The Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE) derives from the work of the American Dialect Society, founded in 1889.

A. How does DARE locate speakers by geographical area rather than by class?
   1. It classifies speech communities.
   2. It qualifies folk terms as dialect or colloquial.
   3. Regionalisms become part of colloquial American.

B. How does this dictionary compare to the historical dictionaries of Johnson and the OED?
   1. What happens when lexicographical scholarship is applied to regional English?
   2. What is the status of the literary quotation as evidence in the assessment of regional vocabulary?

C. How did the history of American English become the history of levels or subgroups of the language? Projects such as the DARE help to redefine the American language as composed of regionalisms, slang, and colloquialisms.

D. How does this new view of American English contrast with Mencken’s notion of American as a more stable and homogeneous language than that of Britain?

E. The literary response to the “folk” figure parallels the colonial figure of the “Noble Savage.”

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
   1. What would Samuel Johnson have said about American regionalisms?
   2. Does the folk figure in literature resemble the colonial figure of the Noble Savage?
Lecture Thirty

American Dialects in Literature

Scope: We have seen dialects in literature before, especially in the mocking versions of Southern and Northern Middle English in Chaucer and in the Medieval Drama. While we can isolate the key features of a dialect used by literary writers, it is important to note that these writers are not linguists. They do not attempt actual transcriptions of speech. Rather, they attempt to give an impression of the key features, tone, and qualities of the dialects. Often, their humorous or satiric purposes affect their representations of speech.

In this and the following lecture, we will examine several examples of how literary writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represent American dialects. In the process, we will discern not only the specific features of each regional dialect in each writer; we will also confront some larger issues about how regionalism works in American speech and society, about the nature of literary characterization as a whole, and about our own presuppositions about education, class, and race.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Describe the ways in which literary writers represent regional dialect.
2. Distinguish eye-dialect from empirical distinctions in pronunciation.
3. Describe the ways in which representative writers present regional dialects in their writings.

Outline

I. The study of literary dialectology has several general issues.
   A. In eye-dialect, there is an attempt to spell words phonetically but also to make words look different, even if they are not pronounced differently.
      1. Writing *sez* or *wanna* does not tell us anything really about pronunciation.
      2. Rather, such spellings tell us about what the writer thinks is the educational or social level of the speaker—in other words, how the speaker would write the words rather than say them.
   B. Dialect representation in literature, whether in American English or Middle English, depends on difference and exaggeration for its effects.
      1. Our notions of the comic often depend on making features exaggerated or wildly different.
      2. Dialect in literature is the verbal equivalent, at times, of caricature.
C. It has been said that, in literature, the folk speaker becomes a manifestation of the idea of the Noble Savage.
1. Dialect can be used, then, not just for satiric or comic effect but for moral or political usage.
2. The dialect speaker is the “natural” human, someone not affected by the corruptions of civilization.
3. Thus, the representation of dialect in literature has a distinctively American edge to it: it dovetails with earlier American rhetorical notions of natural expression and unadorned speech.

II. Literary dialects frequent the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
A. Mark Twain is perhaps the best known of American regionalist writers and perhaps the most conscientious recorder of different dialects.
1. In a selection from Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, we hear an oscillation between narrative past and present.
2. The apparent learning of Huck is undercut by dialect.

B. Joel Chandler Harris is best known for his Uncle Remus stories. Here he seeks to represent the language and the culture of the African-American slaves of the mid-nineteenth century, in particular of the Piedmont district.
1. Harris’s work has come under much criticism for its caricature and apparent racism.
2. But it is worth looking at a selection from one of his texts to see how he linguistically represents a speech community.
3. In “A Run of Luck,” we see how the use of “canebreak” locates the time and place of a particular area.

C. Sarah Orne Jewett lived in Maine, and her story “Andrew’s Fortune” illustrates the literary representation of the Eastern New England dialect, in particular the so-called “downeaster” variety of Maine.
1. Central to this passage is the elaborate use of eye-dialect to represent the vowels of the region (e.g., *Gre’t* for “great”; *stiddy* for “steady”).
2. In addition, there are several locutions that locate the speaker as a member of a class as well as a region (e.g., the use of such apparent ungrammatical expressions as “dreadful concerned” and “my boys was over”; of such locutions as “phthisic” to describe a physical ailment; and the eye-dialect spelling of “main-stay,” as if this is not just the way the word would be said but actually written by the speaker).

D. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings evoked the Florida “cracker” speech.
1. We will read a selection from the story “My Friend Moe.”
2. Here, there are some very elaborate uses of vocabulary to locate the language regionally: *cowpeas, done tried, thataway.*
3. We will rely on some information from *The Dictionary of American Regional English* to explore these lexical resonances.

4. There are several grammatical features, too, that locate region with class and level of education (e.g., confusion of case and number; so-called double plurals, for example “antses”).

5. These are all cases of how regionalisms overtake our everyday speech. We should see wit in such examples, not mockery.

**Suggested Reading:**

Algeo, John. *Problems in the Origins and Development of the English Language*. New York, 1972 [from which material for this lecture is drawn].


**Questions to Consider:**

1. How much do literary dialects accurately reproduce the sounds of regional speech?

2. Why have some people objected to teaching texts in the schools that use literary dialects?
Lecture Thirty-One

The Impact of African-American English

Scope: This lecture explores some of the key features of the impact of the speech of African-Americans on the American language generally. Linguists have long debated the nature and status of African-American English (hereafter, AAE), noting features of its history, its regional varieties, and its associations with perceived levels of class and education. While there are many approaches to this subject, and while the subject itself is not without controversy, it is the purpose of this lecture to present AAE as a language with grammatical rules and categories and with a precise history coming out of the contact with non-English languages (such as the African languages and the Caribbean creoles) and as a language with a rich and vital literature.

The impact of African-American English can be felt in many ways, and this lecture concludes with some approaches to appreciating the texture of modern American English.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:
1. Summarize the patterns of contact among European and African peoples and their linguistic implications.
2. Define the terms creole and pidgin.
3. Describe the main features of what linguists consider distinctive about African-American English.

Outline

I. The history of the languages of Africans and African-Americans in America is a long one.
   A. The European contact with Africans was a linguistic one.
      1. There is no single African language, but a whole range of differing languages and dialects.
      2. Early European explorers, colonists, and slave traders developed a series of pidgins and, later, creoles for purposes of general communication.
      3. Portuguese was one of the original European languages of the pidgin and creole base.
   B. As the slave trade moved to the English-speaking world, and to the American colonies, English became a new base for pidgin and creolization.
      1. A pidgin is a language that develops so that two mutually unintelligible groups of speakers may communicate. Pidgins are
often ad hoc forms of communication, and they are perceived as artificial by both groups of speakers.

2. Pidgins were developed in trade and commerce.
3. Creoles, however, developed over several generations as distinctive languages. Often, creoles develop when the language of the colonizing or economically dominant group is imposed upon a subordinate or colonized group. Thus, creoles may emerge from pidgins.

C. By understanding the origins of the speech patterns of Africans and African-Americans in America in these historical ways, we can see that certain forms of AAE have a recognizable grammatical structure and syntactic set of patterns.
1. AAE is not a debased or simplified version of American English.
2. AAE is not a general “black vernacular” shared by all African-Americans, but should rather be considered as a historically grounded linguistic phenomenon whose features may be shared by black and white speakers of English in America.

D. Some linguists have argued that the Gullah language—a creole based on African languages and English and spoken now on the islands off the coast of South Carolina—has had a great impact on AAE. Moreover, some have argued that in Gullah (still spoken by about 250,000 people) we may find something very close to the oldest forms of AAE.
1. Some key aspects of Gullah include certain grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms (e.g., Dem is the demonstrative adjective and signal of plurality in Gullah: “dem man” for men).
2. Going back to Joel Chandler Harris, we can see that some aspects of the language that Harris tried to reproduce may have Gullah elements (e.g., certain features of pronunciation, especially the instability of the sound r in words).

II. It is possible to talk in an informed way about some of the shared features of AAE, while at the same time recognizing that not all speakers share these features.

A. Grammar: AAE has a verbal structure that is less tense based than aspect based: i.e., verb forms are used to denote not just place in time (tense) but also duration in time (aspect). Some examples are action that occurs in a single point in time and action that extends over time.
1. Expressions such as “she sick,” “she go,” “she going” express point in time. What matters is not whether the action is in the present or the past, but that the action is not ongoing.
2. Expressions such as “she be sick,” “she be going,” and so on express duration: i.e., the action is extended in time; it began at one point and continues on.
3. Forms of the verb to be can signal special features of duration.
B. Negation: Much like earlier forms of English, AAE can use multiple negatives for cumulative effect.

C. Pronunciation: AAE is in many ways the language of region as well as the historical language of Africans in America. But there are some aspects of pronunciation that linguists consider general to AAE. These include:
   1. The pronunciation of what are called labio-dental sounds (sounds produced by combining the teeth and the lips. Such patterns of pronunciation lead non-AAE speakers to see apparent confusion in the pronunciation of the sounds th and f. It has been argued that the pronunciation of these sounds is not a result of an inability to speak “standard” English, but rather is the result of a different sound system to AAE.
   2. The omission of certain parts of speech. Are these issues of pronunciation or of grammar (or morphology)? For example, some have argued that such expressions as “She jump over the table,” or “brown-eye beauty,” are instances in which certain sounds in the language are elided in certain phonemic environments (i.e., certain situations in which sounds come together). The difference between “she jumps” and “she jump,” it is argued, is not a difference of grammar but of pronunciation: i.e., not a difference of the structure of verbal relationships but of the structure of sound patterns in the language.

III. African-American English has many discourses.
   A. African-Americans have been literary writers since the eighteenth century.
      1. Slave narratives constitute some of the earliest documents of American literature.
      2. Poets and song-writers also preserve many of the features of the language of African-Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
      3. Frederick Douglass, as we have seen, illustrates the ways in which the language of the Bible and of elevated political discourse inflected the discourses of African-Americans.
   B. The range of African-American literary expression is so vast that we cannot cover it here. But we can identify a few features of the discourses that have had an effect on our own English.
   C. Vocabulary:
      1. Old words from the world of the slaves, perhaps evidence of African or creole languages: goober, jazz, tote, gumbo, banjo, okra, yam.
      2. The verb bad mouth may be a translation of an African language expression day ngaymay (from the Vai language). Other expressions, such as the universal negation unh-unh may be based
on older African or creole expressions. So, too, may be the expression *look-see*.

3. Popular music and media have also given many words and phrases to modern American English. Perhaps more important than cataloguing such locutions is to stress the impact of African-American speech forms on the phrasal shape and rhythm of everyday speech.

4. We will note especially the impact of African-American spiritual devotion on the language of religion in America, and also the way in which the elevated language of the scriptures textured the performative voice of African-American religion.

D. Oratory: African-American oratory traces its origins back to the great pulpit preachers of the nineteenth century.
   1. We see it in the language of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, “I have a dream speech” of 1963.
   2. We see it in the patterns of rhyme, rhythm, and repetition that have textured legal and political discourse in our own day, echoing Frederick Douglass and the Bible.
   3. Just as Lincoln codified the language of elevated public speech for nineteenth-century America, so in many ways did King codify the comparable language for late twentieth-century America.

E. Linguistic play: The playfulness of popular music and speech patterns have bequeathed a wit and vigor to the American language. The language of jazz, in particular, is a good example.
   1. We will look at some examples of African-American jazz language, in particular the lyrics to Cab Calloway’s “Mister Hepster’s Jive Talk Dictionary” (from the 1930s). We see idiom, regionalisms, sexual innuendo.

F. American English has become more idiomatic because of African-American English. This notion of a coded, “signifying” language further suggests the versatility of English.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
   1. What is the difference between a creole and a pidgin and does African-American English qualify as either?
2. In what ways has African-American English influenced the standard of Modern English?
Lecture Thirty-Two

An Anglophone World

Scope: In many ways, the central feature of twentieth-century English is its status as a world language. In this lecture, we look at some distinctive features of the language outside Britain and America. Key features of pronunciation and vocabulary—idiom and style—are noted. But more generally, we will look at the social attitudes toward English in the former British colonial properties. The tensions between colonial dominance and local linguistic and social forms helps to create a distinctive literature of post-colonial English—an Anglophone literature—some of whose examples we will look at.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the major English colonial movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and their impact on the creation of new forms of the language.

2. Describe the distinguishing features of the English of Australia, South Africa, and India.

3. Describe some of the most important vocabulary terms coming into English from these colonial encounters.

Outline

I. English is a dominant language.

A. In tandem with the spread of English through trade, colonization, and political contact, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was some debate on the virtue of English itself.

1. Several writers argued that English was somehow the “best” language and that it should become the norm of speech and writing.

2. Such discussion took on not only a political chauvinism but also a gender chauvinism. Otto Jespersen argued in his *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (1905) that English was somehow more masculine than other languages.

3. Such an argument resonates with the colonialist enterprise that often saw the English as hypermasculinized figures in a soft, or feminized, native landscape.

B. The dominance of English was further established through the institution of schools, administrative structures, railroads, the postal system, and other institutions of colonial control in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
II. English spread around the world.

A. In the eighteenth century, English moved to Australia with the creation of penal colonies.
   1. The language of the original transportees, and ultimately settlers, was regional and class-based.
   2. Australian English thus represents the development of certain sound patterns that were prominent in the lower-class urban environments of England, as well as areas of the north and west.
   3. Perhaps the most distinctive Australianism is the raising of certain back vowels and the creation of diphthongs (and even triphthongs); e.g., the pronunciation of the word *day*.
   4. The argot of the convict and the prison has been seen as influencing the distinctive idiom of Australian English. This was known in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the “flash” language.
   5. But, of course, the landscape of Australia itself has had a profound impact on vocabulary. For example, “Waltzing Matilda” offers a lexicon of popular Australian English (*swagman*, *billabong*, *billy*, *jumbuck*, *tucker-bag*, etc.).
   6. Today, Australian English is noteworthy for its preservation of older English regional terms (e.g., *corker*, *dust-up*, *tootsey*), and also for its coining of newer terms of humor (e.g., *chunder*).

B. English speakers have lived in South Africa since the mid-seventeenth century, when there were English settlements along with the Dutch.
   1. English in South Africa contends with another European language, Afrikaans, as the language of colonial hegemony.
   2. The presence of a large non-European speaking population with many different African languages has also affected the idiom and tone of South African English.
   3. Here, too, there are some distinctive features of pronunciation that have to do with region and class dialects of original settlement populations. Pronunciation of certain vowels, especially the *a* sound in a word like *back* (more like a short *e*); the simplification of final consonant clusters (*text* is pronounced more like *tiks*) may be features of original dialect settlement patterns, or they may also, some have argued, be features of contact with African-language-speaking groups.
   4. The vocabulary of South African English has bequeathed such words as *spoor*, *trek*, and *veldt* into the modern English lexicon, as well as the highly charged term *apartheid* (from the Dutch, *apartness*).

III. The subject of English in India is a vast subject, rich with history and literary documentation. It is worth focusing on now because the presence of
Indian writers and intellectuals in the world has helped to shape the language of prose fiction and political debate in new and challenging ways.

A. The English have been in India since 1600, with the establishment of settlements by the East India Company.
   1. Anglo-Indian idioms came into British English early on.
   2. Words such as Brahmin, calico, curry, raja, juggernaut, bungalow, pundit, chintz, jungle, verandah, and many others were part of English by the end of the eighteenth century.
   3. The English presence in India also helped foster, as we saw, the rise of the historical philological study of language itself, with William Jones’ study of Sanskrit in the late eighteenth century.

B. The English language became the standard through a series of political events in the mid-nineteenth century.
   1. In 1813, the East India Company dissolved, and India was administered by the crown.
   2. In 1835, Thomas Macaulay proposed the establishment of a class of individuals as interpreters between Indians and Britons. English became the official language of government.
   3. In 1857 came the great Mutiny and the establishment of direct imperial rule. English-language universities, colleges, and schools were established.
   4. English became the language of Indian nationalism (and one should add Pakistani nationalism as well) and still functions as the lingua franca of the subcontinent (with Hindi in India and Urdu in Pakistan).

C. A unique blend of English and Indian languages created a distinctive English parlance.
   1. By the late nineteenth century, Anglo-Indian expressions had become so great and distinctive (by some estimates, more than 25,000 different words) that lexicographers developed dictionaries.
   2. The most well known is Hobson-Jobson, 1886, a glossary of Indian English.
   3. The distinctive features of Indian English may be thought of as tonal (i.e., the sound of the language influenced by the phonology and rhythm of Indian languages themselves), but also phrasal.
   4. Durative verbs become characteristic of the language: e.g., I am doing, I am doing it, when I will come.
   5. The use of elaborate detailed terms and strings of clichés has also been seen as characteristic of a certain level of Indian English.

D. Indian writers have had a great impact on literary English.
   1. Vikram Seth, author of The Golden Gate and A Suitable Boy, is representative of English- and American-educated Indian writers of the postwar generation. His novels demonstrate, above all, a
playfulness with language, a sense of the vast lexical and phrasal resources of Indian English.


3. Seth’s *Suitable Boy* is really a family history after the fashion of Anthony Trollope transported to 1950s India.

4. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is really a fantastic coming-of-age story, in which he took elements of Lawrence Sterne and Voltaire and rewrote the story of Indian independence from this mix. The use of a durative verb (“I am falling apart”) represents colloquial Indian English. The rhythm of Indian English is apparent in many passages, with the former colonies now influencing the language of the master.

**Suggested Reading:**


**Questions to Consider:**

1. In what ways have colonial versions of English from around the world enriched standard English?

2. Is the English of India primarily an imperialist legacy or an idiom of creative expression?
Lecture Thirty-Three

The Language of Science: The Changing Nature of Twentieth-Century English

Scope: The rise of experimental science in the twentieth century has given English not only a wealth of new words, but it has changed the very ways in which we coin and borrow words. This lecture illustrates the ways in which a scientific and a technical language has become part of both our everyday and literary expressiveness.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the impact of science and technology on the English and American vocabulary.
2. Describe the ways in which extension-in-lexis makes figurative expressions out of technical ones.
3. Describe the ways in which compounding, eponymy, and the language of current science create new words all the time.

Outline

I. A new scientific and technological vocabulary rises.
   A. In fact, the scientific vocabulary was not new. Dictionary makers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recognized the impact that technology and scientific discovery had on the language.
      1. Words such as attraction originally had meanings in electrical and magnetic theory.
      2. Whole classes of words for affect and emotional response originated in scientific language. Recall Johnson’s preference for putting literal or physical meanings before metaphorical or figurative ones, even when those literal meanings were no longer the primary connotations of the words.
      3. Nineteenth-century technology created a whole new vocabulary for describing the world.
   B. Science and technology are put to literary use.
      2. Various words were proposed to describe death by electricity; electrocution was eventually chosen.
   C. We consider an extended example of how this language not only changes the way we speak but challenges the social codes of language relationship: Hello.
1. The word was developed to find an appropriate, class-neutral form for answering the telephone, where class is invisible.
2. Edison, Bell, and others got involved in the debate.
3. In his *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain illustrated the problem of telephone conversation by imagining the Arthurian past with phones—what to say, how to say it.
4. Twain used *hello* as an important example of how language signals relationships between class and gender.
5. The rise of the “hello-girl” (or operator) in the 1880s also brought a challenge to linguistic decorum as she became an object of male fantasy.

D. Freudian psychoanalysis enters the fray.
1. Freud originally used, in his German, everyday German words for psychoanalytic concepts.
2. Only in his English translations were his German words (e.g., *ich* and *es*) transformed into Latinate, pseudo-scientific vocabulary (*ego* and *id*, respectively).
3. This habit of translating Freud bequeathed to English a language of psychology as a language of science: Latinate, newly coined, and seemingly learned. It is the early-twentieth-century equivalent of the old inkhorn terms of the Renaissance.

II. Extension-in-lexis, the ways in which terms of technical origin take on metaphorical or social contexts, was another important development.
A. Psychology: words such as *complex*, *schizophrenic*, *egocentric*, *fixate*, and so on are words that are now used almost wholly apart from their original technical and Freudian/psychoanalytic context. They describe general conditions, not specific disorders, in everyday speech.
B. Nuclear physics: Expressions such as *critical mass*, *meltdown*, *fission*, *fusion*, *ground zero*, *nuke* (now used to mean *microwave*), etc., have figurative, social, and emotional connotations. Even when they are misused, they work: i.e., to start from ground zero is, of course, a misnomer. We start from square one.
C. Cosmology: *big bang*, *cosmic*, *galactic*, *light-year*, *parsec*, etc.
D. Computers: the word *computer* itself, as well as *input*, *output*, *software*, *hardware*, *boot up*, *net*, etc. In computer language in particular, words are formed by using morphemes (individual word units) to make up new terms: e.g., *wetware* is used to describe living biological elements of cybernetic units. *Channel surfing* became *net surfing*.

III. Eponymy, the making of words after individuals’ names, is a key feature of modern English, representing the ways in which individuals, corporations, and brand names come to stand for general concepts or actions.
A. There exist older examples: *boycott*, *sandwich*, *maverick*, *chauvinism*.  
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B. Many brand names became generics: Kleenex, Thermos, Frigidaire, Victrola, Hoover, aspirin, zipper (the last two being brand names so old that they have lost their association with the corporations or individuals that discovered and manufactured them).

C. Thus, the technological and scientific vocabulary not only gives us new words; it gives us new models for forming new words, signaling the American penchant for novelty and invention.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. Has the world of science influenced Modern English for better or worse—or neither?
2. What does the word *hello* tell us about the role of technology in language change and the issue of class distinctions?
Lecture Thirty-Four

The Science of Language: The Study of Language in the Twentieth Century

**Scope:** This lecture traces some major developments in language study in the early twentieth century. Beginning with a review of nineteenth-century linguistic science, it looks at some major figures in American linguistics to explore how the study of language came to be associated with the study of mind, consciousness, and social organization.

American linguists and anthropologists challenged the older European models of language study, first and foremost, by coming into contact with non-European languages of radically different structures. The encounters with Native American languages, in particular, gave rise to some distinctive approaches to the study of language generally, and influenced the discipline of linguistics in American universities in the first half of the twentieth century.

**Objectives:** Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the key developments in the study of language in America in the first part of the twentieth century.
2. Compare and contrast the views of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf on the relationships of language, mind, and society.
3. Describe the nature of structural linguistics in America at mid-century.

**Outline**

I. Language is studied as a science.

A. By the end of the nineteenth century, scientific methodology had come to characterize the study of humankind itself.

B. Figures such as Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, and Ferdinand de Saussure stood together at the turn of the century as founders of the investigatory methods of human study—in particular, the study of human behavior within systems (i.e., the mind, the social group, the discourse, respectively).

C. Saussure (1857-1913) developed a system of linguistic analysis which raised problems that still influence modern linguistic study. It included:
   1. The relationship of the individual utterance to the system of discourse.
   2. The objectification of the object of study (i.e., defining what language itself is).
   3. The place of rules or conventions within the structures of meaningful communication.
4. In sum, he developed semiotics, the study of signs, a discipline central to twentieth-century linguistics.

D. The scientific study of language in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century sought to present itself as a science like any other. Thus, it developed:
   1. Laws: rules that explained grammatical forms, but also historical changes.
   2. Empirical observations: collections of data about languages, usually historical but, by the early twentieth century, anthropological.
   3. Theories: languages obey certain rules and language change works according to certain laws.
   4. Methods: languages can be studied, and language itself could be understood by closely examining the features of existing languages.

II. Language study in America continues in the twentieth century.
   A. By the early twentieth century, the academic study of language involved the study of observable phenomena (i.e., phonology and morphology).
   B. Early linguistics in America remains really a subspecies of anthropology.
      1. Beginning with Franz Boas and his student Edward Sapir, students of language began to find the old nineteenth-century paradigms being confounded by the rising awareness of languages such as those of Native Americans or Pacific Islanders.
      2. Leonard Bloomfield, whose book *Language* (1933) influenced a generation, tried to set a standard for the study of any language according to empirical methods:
         a. He proposed development of a rigorous methodology.
         b. He emphasized the analysis of sound systems.
         c. He set out to describe all languages by the same process.
   C. But a paradox arose in this structural model: If the methodology was supposed to be consistent throughout all languages, languages themselves were seen to be radically different. In other words, the student of language faced not simply different details of describing the world, but apparently, completely different linguistic worlds.
      1. Some examples from Native American languages that were first noticed were color words. The spectrum of color words in Hopi and Navaho, for example, are not frequency based but intensity based, just as in Old English.
      2. There are only two or three terms that are used to cover differences which, in modern science, are covered by many color words.
D. Edward Sapir recognized these features in his writings of the 1920s. We will examine a selection of his work.
   1. He argued that the “real world” is made up of the language habits of groups of speakers.
   2. The worlds in which different language groups live are, in essence, different worlds, “not merely the same world with different labels attached.”

E. Benjamin Lee Whorf argued for a more radicalized version of this position. The so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (that language shapes thought, rather than the other way around), finds expression in Whorf’s work on the Hopi in America.
   1. Whorf considers languages to be made up of “pattern-systems.”
   2. Experience, expression, and even consciousness itself are features of the language used by a group or society. They are not objective features independent of the forms of expression used.

F. In both Sapir and Whorf, notice the metaphorical language: Expressions such as “house of his consciousness” imply that, even in the most empirical seeming of linguistic approaches, there is still a profoundly figurative way of expressing language categories.

III. Sapir, Whorf, and their students represented what came to be known as structural linguistics in America by the mid-twentieth century.
   A. It proposed a methodological empiricism that focused on the collection of data.
      1. In particular, the collection of phonemic data was important.
      2. Inventories of the sounds of the languages studied needed to be made. Then, meaningful differences in sounds (phonemic differences) would be noted before a lexicon of the language could be constructed.
   B. It advocated a theoretical model that deduced linguistic structures from the mass of empirically collected data.
   C. Thus, American structural linguistics was a discipline of describing languages, rather than a theory of language as such—even though its early founders had developed large-scale notions of how language related to the world of experience.
   D. Whorf’s “house of consciousness” is the tale of the individual confronting the “Other.”

Suggested Reading:
Questions to Consider:

1. What is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and can you think of any examples that support it?
2. What does the “house of consciousness” represent in Whorf’s work, and what problems does it suggest?
Lecture Thirty-Five

Modern Linguistics and the Politics of Language Study

Scope: In this lecture, we look at the work of Noam Chomsky, the founder of modern linguistics, and the social, cognitive, and philosophical implications of his work. The legacy of Chomskyan linguistics goes beyond the technical terms of the discipline to embrace a politics to language study itself.

Just as the study of language was politically inflected in earlier periods, so in the second half of the twentieth century this inquiry came to be textured by ideologies of power and resistance. In turn, the theoretical work of Chomsky and his heirs have influenced a great deal of political and technological work (especially in the rise of Artificial Intelligence as a discipline—or a fantasy?).

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the key features of Chomsky’s theory of language in their basic form.
2. Define the key terms of transformational-generative grammar.
3. Explain the major differences between Chomsky’s view and those of the structural linguists, especially in their methodological and political implications.

Outline

I. Enter the Chomskyan Revolution.
   A. Chomsky published *Syntactic Structures* in 1957 and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* in 1965. There are central differences in method and theory that distinguish these works from earlier so-called structural linguists.
      1. He calls for the development of a formal deductive rather than an empirical inductive method of studying language.
      2. He focuses on syntax, rather than phonology, as the primary place for studying language.
      3. He posits the idea of deep structures, or mental categories.
      4. He develops the idea of transformation: the way in which deep structures become.
      5. He describes surface structures (the actual forms of speech).
   B. Chomsky develops what came to be called transformational-generative grammar.
      1. It was really a theory about language rather than a description of languages.
2. Its primary interest lay in the notion of “competence” that a speaker possesses, rather than in the individual “performance” of speakers.

C. Chomsky argued in 1965 that the “main task of linguistic theory must be to develop an account of linguistic universals.” He also argued that “the existence of deep-seated, formal universals . . . implies that all languages are cut to the same patterns, but it does not imply that there is any point-by-point correspondence between particular languages.”

II. Chomsky tried to explain much, and his impact on language theory and study is great.

A. All human beings, he argued, possess language.
   1. Language is a species-specific feature.
   2. No language is any more complicated than another, nor is any language simpler than another.
   3. An implication of this point is that no stage in a language is any simpler (or more complicated) than another.

B. All human beings can produce an infinite number of well-formed grammatical utterances in their respective languages. In fact, it is this observation that is really the goad to the development of Chomskyan linguistics. Why is it, we may ask, that we can do this?

C. All human beings can produce and comprehend an infinite number of unique and hitherto never-uttered sentences.
   1. Why can we do this? Language learning must be, Chomsky argued, something more than imitating things that have been previously heard.
   2. The capacity to make and understand an infinite number of sentences is at the heart of his theory of language.

III. What do these terms really mean?

A. “Deep structures” are patterns of linguistic communication, ideas, or even (in some accounts) genetically encoded mental phenomena that are common to all individuals. They represent not a universal language as such but rather relational conceptions that can be expressed linguistically.

B. “Transformations” are a set of rules, peculiar to each language, that turn deep structures into the well-formed patterns of utterance known as “surface structures.”

C. “Surface structures” are actual utterances. At the level of surface structure, languages appear to differ from one another.
   1. At the level of transformational rules, however, we can find those differences.
   2. At the level of deep structures lies a fundamental similarity among all human speakers.
D. “Competence” and “performance” are terms that really focus on the individual’s mind, in some sense.

1. Competence is the ability, innate in deep structures and articulated through acquired transformational rules, to produce an infinite number of well-formed utterances in a language.

2. Performance is the record of those utterances.

IV. What are the implications of this approach to language?

A. Children do not “learn” languages, according to Chomsky; they “acquire” language.

1. Chomskyan notions of language acquisition run counter to behaviorist notions of language as learned or as conditioned, and hence as imitative behavior.

2. The child, in effect, has skills or models already “programmed” in. All the parent does is provide the child with specific items for these slots.

3. In other words, the child has the deep structures; the child then learns the rules of transformation particular to a language in order to produce well-formed surface structures.

B. Chomsky replaces the idea of grammaticality with the idea of well-formedness.

1. The idea of focusing on syntax, rather than on phonology or morphology, argues that successful communication results in developing a system of transformations to express meaning, rather than imposing a pattern of “grammar” from above.

2. Thus, when we study such forms of expression as African-American English (AAE), we should pay attention to the criteria of well-formedness in expression rather than measure AAE against a standard “grammar” of English.

3. By focusing on syntax, scholars of AAE have been able to argue for the underlying categories of expression and communication in the language.

C. The philosophical notion of innate ideas is critical. This looks very much like a Platonic or Cartesian notion of idealism, which posits that human beings, at birth, have within them some innate abilities to acquire language. We are not blank slates at birth.

D. Language is thus a mental habit rather than a social fact.

1. The study of language is inseparable from the study of mind.

2. The study of mind is inseparable from the study of language.

E. The politics of linguistics: Innate ideas and linguistic deep structures transcend the boundaries of culture and time.

1. Some have argued that Chomsky’s own famously radical politics is, in part, a consequence of his linguistic theories.
2. The study of language also becomes fraught with political implications.

F. The possibilities or fantasies of artificial intelligence are, to some degree, grounded in this notion of transformational linguistics.
1. Mentalist linguistics can be applied to the idea of programming.
2. Researches into voice recognition, computer language technology, and artificial intelligence in general challenge our notions of language history and structure.

Suggested Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What would Chomsky likely say about Ebonics?
2. What, according to Chomsky, is the difference between “learning” language and “acquiring” it?
Lecture Thirty-Six

Conclusions and Provocations

Scope: This lecture reviews the major themes and approaches of the course. It brings together some of the details of the historical sweep of the course. But the central point of this lecture, as in the course as a whole, is the need for placing language in history and for understanding the relationships among language, society, and self in the historical formation of culture and communities.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the key periods in the history of the English language in reviewing the course as a whole.
2. Describe central methods and techniques available for the study of English and its history.

Outline

I. In reviewing this course, we might say that we have attended to three subjects, broadly conceived.
   A. First is the “facts” or observable information about language change.
      1. Such facts include the sounds of the language (phonology), the forms of words (morphology), the arrangement of words into grammatical units (syntax), and the collection of words deployed to describe the world of experience and imagination (lexis or vocabulary).
      2. Such facts have been gleaned from written documents, such as works of literature, history, and personal statement.
      3. But such facts may also be garnered by reconstructing earlier forms and by deploying such techniques as comparative philology to use surviving words and pronunciations as evidence for earlier, and no longer extant, usages.
   B. Second is the ways in which such “facts” of language were shaped by writers into styles, which, in turn, affected the subsequent history of English.
      1. The history of the language is also the history of literature. Caedmon, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Twain, Melville, and many other writers used the verbal resources available to them to make new and striking collocations of words and ideas to express their social and physical worlds as well as to express their personal and cultural imagination of those worlds.
      2. The impact of writers such as Chaucer and Shakespeare, or of texts such as the English translations of the Bible, can be felt in the
words, idioms, and even clichés that we still use today—often without recognizing that we are, in some sense, quoting such writers.

3. The printing and publication history of major writers, from Caxton’s first press to the present, helps to codify the language, be it in terms of spelling conventions, regional dialect, or literary expression. But, as we saw in the Shakespearean texts, print doesn’t always confer stability.

C. Third is the ways in which these “facts” were treated by those who wrote about language from the Middle Ages to the present.
   1. The history of the language is also the history of attitudes toward language.
   2. Language change and variation are always present, and educators, theorists, and literary writers often have reflected on the nature of a standard English, on differences among dialects, and on the impossibility of fixing language so that it cannot be changed by time or usage.
   3. Debates on the relationships of spelling to pronunciation, grammar to style, English to non-English words, regionalism to metropolitanism, the past to the present—all are debates that have gone on since the Middle Ages and will continue as long as people speak and write.
   4. Institutions have long sought to legislate language use and record its variations and its changes: the Church, the schools, the universities, the dictionary makers, the media.

II. We have reviewed several historical issues.
   A. First, we considered the origins of English, from the Indo-European language matrix, through the early Germanic dialects, to Old, Middle, and Modern English, and finally English in America and abroad.
   B. Second, we noted languages and dialects in contact and their effects on linguistic change.
      1. We have seen the ways in which new vocabulary terms were brought into the language.
      2. We’ve also considered the ways in which different sounds and forms could be borrowed from other regional dialects and could become accepted as “standard.”
   C. We are left with questions: What does it mean to be an “American”? A “regionalist”? A “nationalist”?
   D. The encounter with the “Other” shapes our sense of self, and English itself is infused with the words of other languages.
III. We conclude with some provocations.

A. Language is a human institution. It is a system of signs, used arbitrarily but conventionally both to describe and to give shape to a visible world.
   1. Should we consider language as a “reality”? That is, does language reside in some real structure, whether it be synaptic links or divine sparks (Chomsky or Plato)?
   2. While scientific and sociological disciplines have much to tell us about language, we may wish to consider that the study of language and its history remains a humanistic enterprise.
   3. Thus, in this course of lectures, the study of language has been intimately linked with the study of literature.

B. Such an attitude implies a certain view about language and literature in society.
   1. Many of the literary texts we have explored are about individual identity, ideals of creation, and social formation.
   2. Language—be it the Old English of Caedmon or the Missouri dialect of Twain’s characters—is the repository of culture.

C. We must not lose touch with language and its history, for within its current varieties, dead forms, and literary records lie the roots and flowers of culture. To know a language is to know its history, and to know its history is to know ourselves.

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain how the encounter with the “Other” informs our sense of linguistic self.

2. Does language reflect an absolute reality, or is it nothing more than a cultural construct?
Glossary

alliteration: The repetition of the initial consonant or vowel of words in sequence. Old English and Old Germanic poetry was alliterative in structure: the metricality of the poetic line was determined not by number of syllables, rhyme, or classical meter, but by the number of alliterative words in stressed positions.

analogy: The process by which certain grammatically or morphologically different words or expressions come to share the same form or pronunciation.

analytic language: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the order of the words in that sentence.

anaphora: A term used in rhetoric to describe the repetition of a word or phrase, usually at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses.

Anglo-Saxons: The Germanic peoples who settled the British Isles beginning in the fifth and sixth A.D. and who spoke Old English. Conquered by the Normans in 1066, they were gradually absorbed into the Norman French-speaking population.

argot: A distinctive way of writing or speaking, often characterized by a unique vocabulary, used by a particular class, profession, or social group.

articulatory phonetics: The study of how sounds are produced in the mouth and the technique of accurately describing those sounds by using special symbols.

aureate diction: A highly elaborate, Latinate vocabulary used by English writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to evoke a rarefied and highly educated tone in their language.

calque: A bit-by-bit, or morpheme-by-morpheme, translation of one word in one language into another word in another language, often used to avoid bringing new or loan words into the translating language (e.g., modern German Fernseher is a calque on television; Afrikaans apartheid is a calque on segregation; the modern Icelandic modorsik is a calque on hysterical).

Chancery English: The form of the English language developed in written documents of the fifteenth century in Chancery (the official writing center of royal administration). Many grammatical forms and spelling conventions of Chancery English have become part of standard written English.

cognate: Two or more words from two or more different, but related, languages that share a common root or original.
comparative philology: The study of different, but related, languages in their historical contexts, traditionally with the goal of reconstructing earlier, lost forms of words and sounds in the Indo-European languages.

creole: A new language that develops out of the sustained contact among two or more languages. Often, creoles develop when the language of a colonizing or economically dominant group is imposed upon a subordinate or colonized group. Thus, many creoles have elements of both European and non-European languages. Creoles may emerge over time from pidgins. The basic difference is that creoles are perceived by the language speakers as the natural or native language, whereas pidgins are perceived as artificial or ad hoc arrangements for communication (see pidgin).

deep structure: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the mental or genetically encoded pattern of language communication in human beings (see surface structure; transformational-generative grammar).

descriptivism: The belief that the study of language should describe the linguistic behavior of a group of speakers or writers at a given moment and should not be pressed into the service of prescribing how people should write or speak (see prescriptivism).

determinative compounding: The process by which new nouns are created in a language by yoking together two normally independent nouns (e.g., earring). A key feature of the Germanic languages, especially Old English, it is the process by which many poetic compounds were formed in poetry and prose (e.g., Old English banlocan, is bone-locker, or body).

dialect: A variant form of a language, usually defined by region, class, or socio-economic group, and distinguished by its pronunciation, its vocabulary, and, on occasion, its morphology.

dialectology: The study of different regional variations of a given language, spoken or written at a given time.

diphthongs: Vowel sounds that are made up of two distinct sounds joined together (e.g., the sound in the modern English word house).

etymology: The systematic study of word origins, roots, and changes. The etymology of a given word is its history, traced back through its various pronunciations and semantic shifts, until its earliest recorded or reconstructed root. A root is also known as an etymon.

extension-in-function: The increase in the range of grammatical functions that a given word carries over time.
extension-in-lexis: The increase in the range of meanings, often figurative, that a given word carries over time.

eye-dialect: A way of representing in writing regional or dialect variations by spelling words in nonstandard ways. Spellings such as *sez* or *wanna* are eye-dialect forms, as they do not actually record distinctions of speech but rather evoke the flavor of nonstandard language.

grammar: Generally used to refer to the system of establishing verbal relationships in a given language; often confused with standards of “good usage” or educated speech.

grammatical gender: The system by which nouns in a language carry special endings or require distinctive pronoun, adjective, and article forms. Described as masculine, feminine, and neuter.

Great Vowel Shift: The systematic shift in the pronunciation of stressed, long vowels in English, which occurred from the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century in England and which permanently changed the pronunciation of the English language. It effectively marks the shift from Middle English to Modern English.


homonymy: The state in which two or more words of different origin and meaning come to be pronounced in the same way.

Indo-European: The term used to describe the related languages of Europe, India, and Iran, which are believed to have descended from a common tongue spoken roughly in the third millennium B.C. by an agricultural peoples originating in Southeastern Europe. English is a member of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages.

inkhorn terms: Words from Latin or Romance languages, often polysyllabic and of arcane, scientific, or aesthetic resonance, coined and introduced into English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

lexicography: The practice of making dictionaries.

lexis: The vocabulary resources of a given language.

metathesis: the reversing of two sounds in a sequence, occasionally a case of mispronunciation, but also occasionally a historical change in pronunciation.

Middle English: The language, in its various dialects, spoken by the inhabitants of England from roughly the period following the Norman Conquest (the late
eleventh century) until roughly the period of completion of the Great Vowel Shift (the early sixteenth century).

**modal verbs:** Helping verbs, such as *shall, will, ought,* and the like, that were originally full verbs in Old and Middle English and became reduced to their helping function in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**Modern English:** The language, in its various dialects, that emerged after the end of the Great Vowel shift, roughly in the middle of the sixteenth century.

**monophthongs:** Vowel sounds that are made up of only one continuously produced sound (e.g., the sound in the modern English word *feet*).

**morpheme:** A set of one or more sounds in a language which, taken together, make up a unique, meaningful part of a word (e.g., *-ly* is the morpheme indicating manner of action, as in *quickly* or *slowly*; *-s* is a morpheme indicating plurality, as in *dogs*).

**morphology:** The study of the forms of words that determine relationships of meaning in a sentence in a given language. Includes such issues as case endings in nouns, formation of tenses in verbs, etc.

**Old English:** The language, or group of related dialects, spoken by the Anglo-Saxon people in England from the earliest recorded documents (late seventh century) until roughly the end of the eleventh century.

**periphrastic:** A term that refers to a roundabout way of doing something; used in grammar to describe a phrase or idiom that uses new words or more words to express grammatical relationship.

**philology:** The study of language generally, but now often restricted to the historical study of changes in phonology, morphology, grammar, and lexis. Comparative philology is the term used to describe the method of comparing surviving forms of words from related languages to reconstruct older lost forms.

**phoneme:** An individual sound which, in contrast with out sounds, contributes to the set of meaningful sounds in a given language. A phoneme is not simply a sound, but rather a sound that is meaningful (e.g., *b* and *p* are phonemes in English because their difference determines two different meaningful words: *bit* and *pit,* for example).

**phonetics:** The study of the pronunciation of sounds of a given language by speakers of that language.

**phonology:** The study of the system of sounds of a given language.

**pidgin:** A language that develops to allow two mutually unintelligible groups of speakers to communicate. Pidgins are often ad hoc forms of communication,
and they are perceived as artificial by both sets of speakers. Over time, a pidgin may develop into a creole (see creole).

polyseney: The state in which one word comes to connote several, often very different, meanings.

prescriptivism: The belief that the study of language should lead to certain prescriptions or rules of advice for speaking and writing (see descriptivism).

regionalism: An expression in a given language that is unique to a given geographical area and is not characteristic of the language as a whole.

semantic change: The change in the meaning of a word over time.

slang: A colloquial form of expression in a language, usually relying on words or phrases drawn from popular culture, particular professions, or the idioms of particular groups (defined, e.g., by age or class).

sociolinguistics: The study of the place of language in society, often centering on distinctions of class, regional dialect, race, and gender in communities of speakers and writers.

structural linguistics: The discipline of studying language in America in the first half of the twentieth century, characterized by a close attention to the sounds of languages, by a rigorous empirical methodology, and by an attention to the marked differences in the structures of languages. The term is often used to characterize the work of Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield.

surface structure: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the actual forms of a given language, uttered by speakers of that language, which are produced by the rules of that language and which are generated out of the deep structures innately held by human speakers.

syntax: The way in which a language arranges its words to make well-formed or grammatical utterances.

synthetic language: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the inflections (for example, case endings) added to the words.

transformational-generative grammar: The theory of language developed by Noam Chomsky and his followers which argues that all human beings have the ability to speak a language and that deep structure patterns of communication are transformed, or generated, into surface structures of a given language by a set of rules unique to each language. Presumes that language ability is an innate idea in humans (see deep structure, surface structure).
Timeline

1607………………………………. Jamestown Colony established in Virginia

1620………………………………. Pilgrims land at Plymouth.

1644………………………………. The English seize New Amsterdam from the Dutch and rename it New York.

mid-17th century………………….. Colonization of South Africa by English and Dutch settlers.

1783………………………………. Noah Webster publishes the first edition of his *Grammatical Institute of the English Language*.

late 18th century…………………… Settlement of Australia by released and escaped convicts from penal colonies.

1799………………………………. Sir William Jones delivers his third anniversary address to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, announcing his discovery of similarities among the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Celtic languages, thus inaugurating the study of Indo-European.

1822………………………………. Jakob Grimm publishes the revised edition of his comparative grammar of the Germanic languages, codifying the consonant relationships of the Germanic and non-Germanic Indo-European languages. This set of relationships comes to be known as Grimm’s Law.

1828………………………………. Noah Webster publishes the first edition of his *American Dictionary*.

1851………………………………. Publication of first edition of Melville’s *Moby Dick*.

1855………………………………. Publication of first edition of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*.
1857............................Great Mutiny in India; establishment of direct imperial rule in India.

1863............................Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address.

1886............................First publication of Hobson-Jobson, a guide to Anglo-Indian English.

1888-1933.......................Publication of the Oxford English Dictionary, originally called the New English Dictionary to distinguish it from Johnson’s.

1881............................Publication of the first volume of Joel Chandler Harris’s Uncle Remus stories.

1883............................Publication of Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

1905............................Publication of Otto Jespersen’s The Growth and Structure of the English Language.

1919............................First edition of H. L. Mencken’s The American Language.

1924............................Publication of Edward Sapir’s Language.

1933............................Publication of Leonard Bloomfield’s Language.

1940s............................Work of Benjamin Lee Whorf on Native American Languages and linguistic theory.

1957............................Publication of Noam Chomsky’s Syntactic Structures, revolutionizing the theoretical and ultimately political study of language, culture, and mind.
Biographies


Chomsky, Noam (1928--): American linguist. Revolutionized the study of language and the discipline of linguistics with the publication of his *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and other books. Founded the approach known as transformational generative grammar.

Douglass, Frederick (c.1817-95): African-American writer and politician of the nineteenth century. Wrote several autobiographical works that describe his experiences as a slave and record the varieties of African-American English of his time.

Harris, Joel Chandler (1848-1908): American writer and folklorist. Best known for his Uncle Remus stories, which seek to record the speech and the literary forms of African-Americans of the late nineteenth century.

Jefferson, Thomas (1743-1826): Third President of the United States. Author of the Declaration of Independence; student of the history of the English language (especially Old English). His writings influenced the rhetoric of American public discourse throughout the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.


Sapir, Edward (1884-1939): American linguist and anthropologist. Major contributor to the American school of descriptive, or structural, linguistics, especially through his work with Native American languages.

Twain, Mark [Samuel Clemens] (1835-1910): American writer, best known for his novels of mid-nineteenth-century life on and around the Mississippi River, especially *Huckleberry Finn* (1883), and his social satires, especially *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889). In his writings, he often recorded or sought to evoke the regional dialects of his characters.
Webster, Noah (1758-1843): American lexicographer and educator. His early spelling books of the 1780s were immensely influential on schoolroom education, and his *American Dictionary* of 1828 became the standard reference work for spelling and pronunciation in the United States.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee (1897-1941): American linguist and anthropologist, best known for the view that the language of a speech community shapes its perceptions of the world.
Comprehensive Bibliography

Essential:


**Suggested:**


