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I The transmission of English
1. Dictionaries in the history of English (John Considine)
2. Writing grammars for English (Ingrid Tieken)
3. Speech representation in the history of English (Peter Grund)
4. The history of English in the digital age (Caroline Tagg and Melanie Evans)
5. Teaching the history of English (Mary Hayes)
6. Internet resources for the history of English (Ayumi Miura)

II Tracing change in the history of English
7. The history of English style (Nuria Yáñez Bouza / Javier Perez Guerra)
8. The system of verbal complementation (Hendrik de Smet)
9. Tense and aspect in the history of English (Teresa Fanego)
10. Development of the passive (Peter Petré)
11. Adverbs in the history of English (Ursula Lenker)
12. The story of English negation (Gabriella Mazzon)
13. Case variation in the history of English (Anette Rosenbach)
14. The noun phrase the history of English (Wim van der Wurff)
15. Relativisation (Cristina Suárez Gómez)
16. The development of pragmatic markers (Laurel Brinton)
17. Recent syntactic change in English (Jill Bowie and Bas Aarts)
18. Semantic change (Justyna Robinson)
19. Phonological change (Gjertrud Stenbrenden)
20. The history of R in English (Patrick Honeybone)
21. Reconstructing pronunciation (David Crystal)
22. Spelling practices and emergent standard writing (Juan Camilo Conde Silvestre and Juan Manuel Hernández Campoy)
III Ideology, society and the history of English

23. The ideology of standard English (Lesley Milroy)

24. English dictionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries (Charlotte Brewer)

25. The emerging phonological standard (Lynda Mugglestone)

26. The discourse of prescriptivism (Don Chapman)

27. Early urban vernaculars (Anita Auer)

28. Networks, coalitions and language change (Marina Dossena)

29. Communities of practice in the history of English (Joanna Kopaczyk)

30. Historical enregisterment (Joan Beal and Paul Cooper)

31. Mythologisation and the history of English (Richard Watts)
1

Dictionaries in the history of English

John Considine

I propose an historical account of dictionaries (broadly defined) in the transmission of English as records of education, of multilingualism, and of invention.

As records of education, their history falls into three overlapping phases. In the first, from Anglo-Saxon England to the seventeenth century, a young native speaker’s first encounter with a document which codified English would be in the form of a bilingual dictionary of Latin and English. In the second, from the sixteenth century to the present day, elementary monolingual wordlists of English would often be encountered before bilingual wordlists. In the third, from the seventeenth century to the present day (but with particular dynamism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries), monolingual wordlists of English were targeted with increasing precision at L2 learners.

As records of multilingualism, their history falls into two moieties, again overlapping. From the first Latin-Old English wordlists to the end of the early modern period, other languages were perceived as the measure of English, so that the lexicographer’s task was to find English equivalents for the rich vocabularies of Latin and the prestigious European vernaculars. Thereafter, English started to be perceived as equal to, or the measure of, other languages: there was little sense of a lexical deficit in English, and bilingual dictionaries might indeed be constructed by adding translation equivalents to English dictionaries.

As records of invention, their history is again bipartite. From at least the fifteenth century (the early medieval evidence is hard to interpret) to the eighteenth and beyond, dictionaries included entries for unattested and poorly attested words which exploited the morphological possibilities of English. From the sixteenth century onwards, they included entries for new borrowings and formations which were definitely attested, and which demonstrated what had been achieved by the inventiveness of writers and, latterly, speakers of the language.
2

Writing grammars for English

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“Where do the rules of grammar come from?” This is how Nick Lowndes, a.k.a. Johnson, opened his column “Original sins” in The Economist of 13 February 2020. A topical question these days, when more usage guides are published than ever and online usage advice proliferates. Just how to formulate such rules was a topical question around the mid-eighteenth century, when English grammar writing took off in a serious way. The first grammar of English dates from 1586, but it is during the 1760s that we see a major increase of new titles, and also a growing interest in grammar books among the publishers.

A central figure in all this was the clergyman Robert Lowth (1710–1787), whose Short Introduction to English Grammar (1762) became unexpectedly popular, setting a standard for many grammars of English subsequently. The grammar, and Lowth with it, eventually developed into a scapegoat in the fight against prescriptivism. Lowth’s case, however, is unique in that the structure of his grammar, as well as his correspondence with contemporaries like the philosopher James Harris (1709–1780), allows us to study his working method as well as his reasons for writing the grammar in the first place.

This chapter will place Lowth and his Short Introduction into the context of the codification of English grammar, starting with the frequently heard – but ineffective – call for an English Academy in the early eighteenth century. Rather than leading to a formally imposed set of rules for the language, grammar writing became a process from below, supported by the publishers, who were aware of the growing need for a standard of linguistic correctness. Topics to be discussed are the interdependence of the grammars (plagiarism), variability in the rules formulated, the role of female grammarians, and the influence of Lowth’s grammar and its eventual eclipse, leading to general criticism of the normative grammatical tradition.

Selected background literature:


3

Speech representation in the history of English

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Representing other people's voices and speech is a central concern for communication in a range of present-day contexts, situations, and genres, fulfilling various textual, pragmatic, and social functions (e.g., Bakhtin 1981; Tannen 1989; Baynham and Slembrouck 1999; Semino and Short 2004; Holt and Clift 2007). Research into the history of English is starting to show that speech representation was similarly ubiquitous and multivalent in historical periods (for an overview, see Grund and Walker forthcoming). At the same time, while continuity and stability in some features and functions are evident, we also see significant differences over time in the forms and uses of speech representation. This chapter reviews our current understanding of speech representation phenomena in the history of English, covering both synchronic-historical and diachronic patterns in forms and functions. I focus on three broad areas: 1) speech representation mechanisms (including reporting expressions, such as I said, They replied, and speech markers, such as quotation marks; Moore 2011; Cichosz 2019); 2) speech representation modes (e.g., direct speech, indirect speech, etc.; McIntyre and Walker 2011; Walker and Grund 2017); and 3) social, pragmatic, and textual functions of speech representation (such as marking evidentiality, organizing voices, etc.; Claridge 2017; Evans 2017). In addition to reviewing existing literature on these topics, I also push the boundaries of current research by adding new corpus-based analyses of selected features. In my discussion of speech representation modes, I address the much-debated issue of what the “filtering mechanisms” of speech representation mean for our use of represented speech as evidence of the spoken language of the past (e.g., Culpeper and Kytö 2010).

References


The history of English in the digital age

Caroline Tagg and Mel Evans

The digital age foregrounds the mutually transformative relationship between language and society, with technological affordances enabling (new) forms of social interaction, whilst impeding or remediating (older) communication practices. A history of English in the digital age is thus one in which pre-digital ideas and practices inform, and are transformed by, the distinctive technological, social and ideological parameters of the digital. Early internet forum users sought to maximise meaning-making with available linguistic resources, e.g. pre-digital typographical and respelling practices (Shortis 2016), in an emergent ‘interactive written discourse’ (Ferrara et al. 1991). Today, within the diversity of digital Englishes, many strategies typical of early digital interaction remain, reconfigured for users’ local language ideologies and community norms (e.g. Hinrichs 2012) and expanded to incorporate multilingual practices and new semiotic modes (e.g. Androutsopoulos & Juffermans 2014; Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2019; Danet & Herring 2008). Meanwhile, digital technologies reproduce and perpetuate the bias and inequalities of offline society (Lumsden & Harmer 2019), seen in practices such as trolling (Donarth 1999; Brabazon 2012) and prevailing media ideologies (Thurlow 2006; Thurlow et al. 2019).

The history of English in the digital age, like all histories of English(es), is thus one of continuity, variation and change, anchored in the social lives of its users. This chapter explores the sociopragmatic practices of identity and belonging across digital spaces, from Usenet in 1980s to Twitter in 2020. Self-reference and address terms represent a repertoire of sociopragmatic resources that are both distinctively “digital” (e.g. hashtags, usernames), whilst also a continuation of interactive English language practices in non-digital (and pre-digital) spaces (vocatives, pronouns). Our investigation explores how such features show stability and change in light of evolving digital contexts, including the diversifying user-base and technological resources, and the shift from anonymous, dispersed subject-interest groups (e.g. forums) to social network sites with connections to their users’ wider social worlds. Overall, our analysis highlights the enduring importance of continuity, as well as change. As the focus on sociopragmatic markers of identity indicates, the history of English in the digital age involves a complex interplay between new opportunities and long-established sociopragmatic practices originating in the offline world.

References

Androutsopoulos, J. & K. Juffermans (2014) Digital language practices in
Teaching HEL through renewed philology

Mary Hayes

This essay will offer an account of how the History of English Language (HEL) was taught in the nineteenth century and then a prospectus for a renewed curriculum. An original course in burgeoning “English Language and Literature” departments, HEL was based in the scholarly discipline of philology. For this, HEL is perceived as a conservative course that perhaps better belongs to a curriculum erstwhile. Given how early HEL educators enthused about the cultural value of the English language’s “Anglo-Saxon” roots, it’s understandable how some departments and instructors regard it today: at best, it’s a relic, and at worst, an academic endorsement for retrograde politics. Recall, however, that nineteenth-century philology was itself a controversial field. It no longer pertained strictly to biblical exegesis. For its inquiry into the origins and families of various languages, it smacked of Charles Darwin’s provocative geological work. Thus, I inquire: How can HEL courses in the twenty-first century capitalize on strategies that are academically and even politically progressive?

In proposing new directions for teaching HEL, this essay explains pedagogical methods that draw on the “new philology.” If “old philology” had posited texts as scholarly editions, “new philology” finds most value in a network of textual forms: variants, marginalia, visual components, status as a material object, digitization, and authorial circumstances. This variety of textual media suggests how the new philology could be—and has been—profitably adapted to the HEL classroom. This essay will offer practical examples of assignments and activities that incorporate the methods of new philology.

I’d like to consider the full implications of this pedagogical approach by attending to “new philology” in its original conception: a branch of Mexican ethnohistory that drew on native-language texts to construct a history of colonialism from the indigenous point of view. The textual techniques used in new philology are in fact a means for a corrective end: recuperating the voices of peoples put under erasure. This essay will explore the implications of bringing this essential component of the new philology to HEL pedagogy. At the very least, students would recognize that studying HEL does not entail the discovery of discrete linguistic origins that recommend a certain hegemonic tongue.

Working Bibliography

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6

Internet resources for the history of English

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Since the appearance of the last volume of CHEL (Hogg 1992-2001), one of the most remarkable changes in the study of the history of the English language – or arguably any subject area – has been the global spread of the Internet and its application to transform old resources while creating new ones. The latest academic environment is inextricably connected with the ongoing development on the online space. To give a few examples, the push for ‘open access’ has encouraged dissemination of various scholarly products on the web and free of charge. It is now an established practice for print textbooks to be enhanced with a companion website offering additional resources (e.g. van Gelderen 2014, Johnson 2016, Brinton and Arnovick 2017, Gramley 2019) and for advanced handbooks to include a chapter focusing on online resources (e.g. Busse 2012, Traxel 2012, López-Couso 2016). The Internet is also acknowledged to be highly effective for student engagement and public outreach (Gerber 2017, Seargeant 2017, West Brown 2019), and the field of the history of English has been successfully promoted on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter as well as other free online services aimed at the public audience, like YouTube.

This chapter will provide an overview of online resources for the study of the history of the English language which have been developed in the last two decades. It will cover materials which used to be ready only in print or physical format, such as manuscripts, texts, dictionaries and concordances; corpora and databases which are accessible from the web; research projects whose outputs involve Internet access; multimedia learning tools and modules which supplement traditional classroom teaching; as well as (often informal) communication platforms which help develop the field beyond academia. The chapter will also discuss some desiderata in the currently available resources.

(299 words)

References


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The history of English registers

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The study of change in style in the history of English has received a great deal of attention from various perspectives, amongst them the multi-dimensional approach (MDA) to linguistic analyses of register variation à la Biber. The MDA has served as the analytical framework of a wide-range corpus studies since the late 1980s (Biber 1988, 1995), covering both speech-based and written textual dimensions, and it is still thriving over thirty years later, as evinced, for instance, in the development of methodological tools (Nini 2013, Egbert & Staples 2019). While early research paid special attention to the historical drift of English registers, largely based on ARCHER (Biber & Finegan 1989, 1992; see Kytö 2019 for an overview), more recent work has turned towards synchronic variation in university language, online media, World Englishes, and other new registers (cf. Berber Sardinha & Veirano-Pinto 2019, Biber 2019).

In this chapter we revisit the first wave of MD studies in the history of English in the light of Biber & Conrad’s (2019[2009]) approach to register/genre/style, recent work on the socio-historical context of the Late Modern English period (1700-1900), and newly developed diachronic corpora. The empirical basis of our research consists of textual sources pertaining to the domains of natural (Astronomy, Life Sciences) and social sciences (Philosophy, History), sampled from the Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing (Moskowich & Crespo-García 2007) and the Late Modern English Medical Texts corpus (Taavitsainen & Hiltunen 2019). In an attempt to describe the evolution of scientific language during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we discuss the selection of an inventory of linguistic features leading to the (statistical) recognition of a number of factors, and account for the factors’ dimensional interpretation and the subsequent scaling of (sub-)registers across the dimensions. The quantitative and the qualitative analysis of the most representative features per (sub)register and dimension will reveal trends of on-going variation as regards registers and style in a key period for the linguistic development of scientific registers.

References


The system of clausal complementation

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This chapter addresses the history of the English system of clausal complementation. An introductory section is devoted to explaining what complementation is and briefly listing the major changes in this domain (the decline of that-clauses and the loss of the subjunctive, the loss of bare infinitives, the rise of to-infinitives, gerunds, participles and other clause types). The bulk of the text is then to be devoted to four major questions. First, **where do complement clauses (or CCs) come from?** The history of English suggests at least three recurrent pathways: (i) adverbial clauses turn into CCs (e.g. lest-complements); (ii) phrasal units undergo clausalization (e.g. the gerund, the to-infinitive); (iii) subject-like and predicate-like elements are welded together into a CC (e.g. ECM constructions, for...to-infinitives, secondary predicates). The development from paratactic structures (posited for the that-clause) is more questionable. Second, **how do CCs spread?** The characteristic pattern is one of lexical diffusion, though the speed of diffusion can vary greatly from one change to the next. A tentative generalization is that diffusion runs from predicates with meanings situated in the external world to predicates with more internal meanings (emotion, thought representation, perception). Third, **how does the system change as a whole?** Though the term ‘Great Complement Shift’ is perhaps a misnomer, English sees an unmistakable trend towards more non-finite complementation, perhaps reflecting a growing preference for backgrounding structures. This leads to a number of variation hotspots, where finite CCs compete with non-finite alternatives, or non-finite alternatives compete among themselves. Fourth, **what becomes of CCs?** At least two pathways of change are open to CCs, with the CC in both cases becoming more main-clause like: (i) the matrix clause develops into an operator, either as auxiliary or as parenthetical; or (ii) the matrix clause disappears altogether, leading to insubordination.

References


Tense and aspect in the history of English

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The verbal system of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) was based primarily not on distinctions of tense, “a deictic category that locates situations in time” (Comrie 1976: 5), but rather on distinctions of aspect, which “is not concerned with relating the time of the situation to any other time-point, but with the internal temporal constituency of the one situation” (ibid.). The shift from the three aspect system (imperfective, perfective, retrospective) of late PIE to the binary tense system (past vs. non-past) of Germanic involved, on the one hand, the reinterpretation from perfective and retrospective to a past tense coding complete events in the past; on the other, the reinterpretation from imperfective to a non-past capable of expressing both present and future time, as in the Old English clauses his lic liþ on Hreapadune ‘his body lies in Repton’ (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 755) and ic arise of deaðe on þam priddan dæge ‘I [will] arise from death on the third day’ (ÆCHom I, 10.152.7).

These changes “explain why there is a complete lack of aspectual forms in the older forms of Germanic” (Hewson & Bubenik 1997: 210; see further Hewson 2012) and why in historical times the various Germanic languages have developed analytic aspectual patterns of various kinds. In the case of English, these include several periphrases to code the prospective future (e.g., She will show you your room, You’re going to become a great artist, I’m about to sell the house, etc.; cf. Hilpert 2008, Petré & Van de Velde 2018, etc.), a retrospective perfect to mark past events relevant to the present (I have seen her twice; cf. Macleod 2014, 2019, Hristov 2020), and a fully grammaticalised be-progressive (She is reading a book; Kranich 2010, Rautionaho & Fuchs 2020). Alongside these we find a variety of other periphrases, some of which have now disappeared from the standard language, as happened with the be-perfect (Jenny & James are walked to Charmouth this afternoon, 1804 Austen, Letters) that alternated with the have-perfect until about 1900 (Kytö 1997), while others, by contrast, are currently becoming grammaticalised, as is the case of the progressive sequence exemplified by Bill went whistling down the street, consisting of a deictic verb of motion (come, go) followed by an -ing participle and an oblique complement (Goldberg 2006: 50–52; Fanego forthcoming).

The history of the English verb phrase is thus “a story of gradual complexification” (Fischer, De Smet & van der Wurff 2017: 107), from the limited inflectional system of OE into the far more elaborate and largely periphrastic system of Present-day English. The proposed chapter will examine this course of development and how it has impacted the functional range of the inflectional past
and non-past tenses. Also considered is the rise of the do-periphrasis as a tense carrier in both questions (Does she like it?) and negatives (She did not like it), and the possibility that its meaning might at first have been perfective and completive, “focus[ing] on what happened” (Denison 1985: 53; see further Denison 1993: 255–291, 446–468; Garrett 1998; van der Auwera & Genee 2002).

References:


Developments in the passive construction

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English, as most other languages, can topicalize ('bring attention to X as a topic') either the agent or the patient of an event. The first, more neutral option is realized as the active construction (A cat broke the vase), the second as the passive, which can omit the agent (because it is unknown or irrelevant), or include it (to introduce it), as in The vase was broken (by the cat). This chapter discusses the complex history behind this deceptively simple role of the passive. In Old English, passives were not primarily event-oriented (Petré 2014, Smirnova et al. 2018), but instead referred to the event's outcome (e.g., The cat knocked over the vase, and now it is broken), a resultative meaning still common today. Unambiguously event-oriented passives (e.g., they were tortured for hours) only developed in Middle English, after which they closely followed the active verb paradigm, as seen in the appearance of a progressive passive in the eighteenth century (the house is being built) (Hundt 2004). Additionally, Old English grammar marked participants through case inflections, which allowed topical non-subjects to appear pre-verbally. In Middle English case was lost, preverbal position became restricted to subjects, and topics had to be coded as subjects. As the passive could cater for non-agentive subjects, it started to expand to a number of cross-linguistically uncommon forms such as the prepositional (he was laughed at) and recipient passives (he was given a book) (Dreschler 2015), as well as constructions that are neither active nor passive (e.g., get fired, where the patient is partly responsible, or middle constructions like this tent sleeps four). Special attention is devoted to the complex timing of and connection between these developments, as well as to the question if these constructions are/were also related in the minds of actual speakers (Anthonissen 2020).

References


11

Adverbs in the history of English

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Adverbs are the ‘mixed bag’ among the word classes, comprising such diverse items as time, space or manner adverbs (PDE now, here, quickly), intensifiers (PDE very, terribly) or stance (PDE surely, frankly) and linking adverbs (PDE however, therefore). Because of this heterogeneity, adverbs are often thought to defy systematality. After a rough sketch of the various types of adverbs and their developments, four case studies will show, however, how adverbs nicely illustrate systematic patterns of semantic and morpho-syntactic change in English.

First, changes in the inventory of English intensifiers will exemplify regularities in semantic change: As also attested cross-linguistically, adverbs in intensifier function commonly come from a very restricted number of source domains, namely place/dimension (PDE highly), quantity (ME ful), quality (OE swlke), truth/factuality (OE sôplice; PDE really) or taboo or swear words (PDE damned).

Two further test cases will demonstrate how adverbs have been affected by wider typological changes: This applies to the history of de-adjectival adverbs in -ly, the now (in standard Englishes) obligatory adverbial suffix, re-analyzed from the adjective ending OE {lic} plus adverbial suffix {e}. This process, which seems to run counter to the loss of inflectional endings in English, will be shown to be precisely a consequence of this loss of endings, specifically in adjectives. Also, the loss of case (and thus deictic force) in demonstratives has led to significant changes in the morphological make-up and the inventory of linking adverbials. Instead of pronominal deixis (dative þæm or instrumental þy in OE for þæm/þy), means of spatial (hence) and temporal deixis (after all) are now employed for anaphoric reference.

In its concluding section, the chapter will focus on adverbial placement. While speakers of earlier English could use various word order patterns for marking their information-structural choices, adverbial(s) are now the only flexible constituent in the rigid SV(O) pattern of un-marked declaratives. Today, certain placement options, in particular of linking adverbs, are exploited for information-structural purposes, though highly dependent on register and medium (e.g. medial however in written academic prose or final though or however in the spoken mode).

Selected Literature

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The story of English negation

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University of Innsbruck

Even after many decades of incessant research, the system of negation in English still has a story to tell, especially as concerns its diachronic development. The present chapter will try to tell this story by reviewing a few of the main strands and occasionally delving into peculiar details.

The chapter will follow a thematic, rather than a chronological, progression, and will mostly focus on sentential negation, which is still being discussed in its diachronic development more than a century after Jespersen’s suggestion of a “negative cycle”.

After a short Introduction, the chapter will review Major changes and continuities in English sentential negation, looking at studies on negative placement and on the scope of English negators, as well as reviewing the “negative cycle” (Wallage 2012, Blanchette 2013, Ingham 2013, Burke 2014). This will be followed by sections on The rise, fall and persistence of Negative Concord and on Word order and the pragmatics of negation, which will examine phenomena such as Negative Raising, inversion and meta-linguistic negation, taking into account pragmatic principles (e.g. Neg-First or End-Weight) concurring to characterising negation as a markedness-related phenomenon (Ingham 2007).

In the ensuing section, substantial space will be devoted to Negation in the lexicon, reviewing local negation phenomena such as affixal negation (Chapman & Skousen 2005) and Negative Polarity Items (Blanchette & Nadeu 2018, Burnett et al 2018), both still present in present-day English, but also historically relevant phenomena such as negative contraction (Jack 1999, Mazzon 2004: 29-33). A final section, preceding a succinct Conclusion, is devoted to Variation and changes in progress, in order to highlight the dynamic character of the negation system both in standard English and in other varieties.

Although formal approaches will be mentioned (Horn 2010), the chapter will give greater prominence to sociolinguistic and socio-pragmatic angles of research on English negation from a diachronic point of view (Nevalainen 2006, Campoy 2013, Childs et al 2013, Walkden & Morrison 2017).

Selected References


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13

Case variation in the history of English

Anette Rosenbach
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Along the typological change of English from a more synthetic to a more analytic language grammatical relations that used to be coded by case-marked forms in Old English got increasingly expressed by prepositional constructions from the Middle English period, without however completely replacing the former. The present chapter focuses on two prominent grammatical alternations that arose as a result of this development, i.e. genitive and dative variation:

(1) Genitive variation: the king’s horse vs. the horse of the king
(2) Dative variation: John gave Mary a book vs. John gave a book to Mary.

Variation is constituted by the variable expression of a possessive (1) and a ditransitive relation (2), respectively, that differs in the marking and the position of the possessor (1) / the recipient (2). In genitive variation (1) the possessor can be either in prenominal position, marked by possessive ’s (the king’s horse), or be expressed by a postnominal prepositional of-phrase (the horse of the king). In the dative alternation (2) the recipient can be realized either by an NP in postverbal position (John gave Mary a book) or by a prepositional to-phrase following the theme (John gave a book to Mary).

This chapter gives an overview on genitive and dative variation in the history of English, tracing their origin and development. Note that genitive variation will receive more attention as its history has been better researched than the development of dative variation. The following issues will be addressed:

1. Variants: How do the Present-day English genitive and dative constructions emerge over time?
2. Method: How can we determine the quantitative distributions of genitive and dative constructions and study them over time?
3. Constraints on variation: What are the factors that condition the choice of genitive and dative constructions? And how do these constraints operate over time?
4. Theoretical implications: How does linguistic theory (e.g. sociolinguistics, psycho- and cognitive linguistics, probabilistic grammar) inform the study of genitive/dative variation and change (and vice versa)? And how do quantitative studies modify what has been perceived as ‘received wisdom’ in traditional handbooks?
Selected references


The noun phrase in the history of English

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This chapter will present a descriptive account of the changes that the noun phrase (NP) has undergone in the history of the language. The overall model of NP structure used to identify areas of change will be that of Quirk et al. (1985), which provides a well-known and well-articulated descriptive template for the NP. In discussing developments in Old English, the model will be supplemented with the further categories used in Fischer et al. (2000). The main sections of the chapter will each be devoted to one specific structural element or property of the NP that has undergone significant change. Within these sections, the various changes will be discussed in chronological order, with cross-connections between properties being pointed out where appropriate. After a basic introduction to NP structure and a preview of the most prominent historical changes within the NP, the first main section will address the system of case, gender and number, tracing its evolution from Old English to Late Modern English. This will be followed by a section dealing with further developments that have affected the determiner system, including the emergence of the in/definite article, the use of quantifiers as central determiners and changes in pre-determiners. The next element to be discussed will be adjectives, with developments in their positioning, their formal marking – including adjective comparison –, the expansion of adjective stacking and also the development of certain adjectives into post-determiners. The final section will focus on developments in the head noun of the NP, in particular in the use of nominal compounding. Special attention will also be devoted here to changes in NPs without an (overt) noun, as in present-day the rich and the inevitable, for which new historical data from recent research will be presented and compared with data from Dutch, drawing on Barbiers (2005).

References

Relativisation

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The chapter begins with an overview of the research on relative clauses and relativisation processes from Old English to present-day varieties of English around the world (e.g. Denison 1998; Biber et al. 1999; Rissanen 1999; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2002; Leech et al. 2009; Suárez-Gómez 2006, 2014, to mention a few). This first section is followed by a data-driven quantitative account of the main changes observed in the distribution of relative markers over the centuries. The chapter uses a historical sociolinguistics approach, which interprets syntactic change as a gradual evolution in response to linguistic and sociolinguistic constraints.

Down through its history, English has exhibited three relativisation strategies: pronominal, invariable and zero. Traditionally, the choice of relativisation strategy has been determined by the animacy of the antecedent and the type of relative clause (animacy and information parameters), although distribution has also been influenced by other variables such as style or syntactic function of the relative gap. The historical account chronicles the replacement of the OE pronominal paradigm *se-seo-that* by *wh-* forms from ME onwards, the specialisation of *that* as the only invariable relativiser from the thirteenth century onwards, the recent emergence of new invariable relativisers (e.g. *in which*, Radford 2019), and the change in clauses introduced by zero relativiser from paratactic structures to hypotactic ones.

The second, data-driven part of the chapter highlights the changing frequency of each relativiser over time, and the changing weight of the different predictors used. It also includes a micro-analysis of recent changes in relation to relative constructions and individual relativisers, especially in less formal language, such as the demise of *which* in favour of *that*, and the specialisation of *who* with human antecedents in subject function. Already widely reported in both standard and World Englishes, these innovations seem likely to become part of the grammatical core of standard English.

References


16

The development of pragmatic markers: Pathways and processes

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Pragmatic markers, extra-sentential forms occurring preferentially at the clause boundary, have procedural meaning and serve a range of “pragmatic” ((meta)textual, (inter)subjective) functions (Brinton 2017: 2–11). They can be traced back to the earliest English, e.g. the much-discussed *hwæt* of Old English (Brinton 1996, 2017, Stanley 2000, Walkden 2013, Cichosz 2018). While pragmatic functions remain constant, the forms are transitory. It is now possible to trace the histories of many different pragmatic markers, given the rich diachronic research conducted over the past twenty-five years.

After discussing difficulties involved in the historical study of these characteristically oral forms, the chapter presents an overview of pragmatic forms found in the history of English (Brinton 2010). The remainder of the chapter focuses on two issues: the origins of pragmatic markers and syntactic pathways they follow, and the diachronic processes responsible for their development.

Pragmatic markers arise from a variety of sources (Fraser 1988, 1990). Adverbs are one common source (Traugott 1982, 1995). A second source is declarative main clauses, which become demoted to parenthetical “comment clauses” (Thompson & Mulac 1991; Brinton 2006); imperative main clauses follow the same route. Many pragmatic markers can also be traced back to adverbial clauses. Finally, some pragmatic markers derive from nominal relative clauses. The chapter discusses prototypical examples following all of these syntactic pathways.

A debate has arisen about how best to account for the processes responsible for the formation of pragmatic markers. Views have focused on lexicalization (Wischer 2000; Fisher 2007) and grammaticalization (Traugott 1995, Brinton 1996), as well as “pragmaticalization” (Erman & Kotsinis 1993, Claudige & Arnovick 2010). Recently, a process called “cooptation” has been proposed (Heine 2013, Heine et al. 2019, in prep). The chapter does not resolve this debate, though it suggests that grammaticalization may be maintained (see Degand & Evers-Vermeul 2015) if a broader view of “grammar” is adopted (Diewald 2010, 2011).

References


Recent syntactic change in English

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The chapter opens by discussing what is meant by ‘recent syntactic change’. We first look at Saussure’s distinction between diachronic and synchronic studies, and how it is difficult to maintain in the face of changes continuously taking place. While much of historical linguistics has focused on long-term changes, such as the Great Vowel Shift, we need to recognise that changes are always happening, even over short periods of time. This means that any cut-off point for ‘recent change’ is somewhat arbitrary. In this chapter we focus on syntactic change over the last 50 to 100 years, but make links to longer-term trends where relevant.

We then survey the findings of current research in this field, considering the following questions:

- Which areas of English syntax are currently undergoing change? For example, researchers have looked at changes in the areas of modality, tense and aspect, quotatives, non-finite complementation, and nominalization.
- To what extent do the changes identified relate to longer-term trends of change in English?
- How do the changes vary between spoken and written language, and across different genres?

We go on to discuss methodological issues that arise in researching recent change. We will consider the different kinds of corpora available for investigating recent change in English, and the strengths and weaknesses of different types of research drawing on these corpora. For example, grammatically parsed corpora allow precise searching for grammatical structures but are typically small, given the high costs of achieving accurate parsing of a corpus. This means that it is hard to search for less frequent phenomena. Although they are sometimes tagged (though seldom parsed), the multi-million-word mega-corpora now available provide more limited searching options in terms of syntactic structures, but their larger size allows for detailed investigation of the lexical patterning of syntactic changes.

As a case study, we consider several aspects of recent change in the English perfect. In previous research we have reported a steep decline in the frequency of the infinitival perfect (as in *would like to have seen that*), in spoken British English and in written American English (Bowie and Aarts, 2012; Bowie, Wallis, and Aarts, 2013; Bowie and Wallis, 2016). We here report new research (a) showing a steep
decline in the use of the -ing perfect (as in **having made the mistake three times**) in written American English, based on COHA (Davies, 2010–) and other corpora, and (b) investigating current trends in the use of past tense forms instead of past participle forms in the perfect (e.g. *has went, have began, had broke*), with numerous examples to be found in the 14-billion-word iWeb Corpus of material taken from the Web (Davies, 2018–).

**References**


18

Semantic change

*Justyna Robinson*

Semantic change (meaning shift) traditionally involves shifts in the meaning of words. In a wider sense, changes in meaning apply to any linguistic construction, not just to a word. For example, there are changes in the meaning of *going to* + verb construction, changes in the meaning of suffix *-wise*, changes in the meaning of high rising terminus. Changes in meaning can be considered from the onomasiological perspective, i.e. words that are used to express a given concept, or semasiological perspective, i.e. meanings that a given word has. In the current chapter I focus on semasiological change in words. However, many social and cognitive processes that I present here are applied to explain meaning changes of units that go beyond the level of a word.

Development of a new meaning leads to disappearance of the older meaning or a situation of coexistence of the newer and older meaning (polysemy). The processes of semantic change are usually discussed from the perspective of outcomes of the change (narrowing, generalisation, pejoration, amelioration) or cognitive processes that lead to change (metaphor, metonymy) (Geeraerts 2010). The social contexts of change are less typically accounted for in established accounts of semantic change (e.g. McMahon 1994). Therefore, this chapter provides a more detailed discussion of social processes in semantic change.

Firstly, I show how semantic change is motivated by socio-cultural changes (e.g. amelioration of *aggressive*). This brings in the consideration of semantic change at the level of denotation and connotation. Secondly, I outline new areas of research which show how semantic changes progress through social categories of generation, gender, social class, as well as style. Here I bring in the distinction between changes in usage and changes in meaning. I also account for semantic change as a process revealing individual and group identity. Finally, I show how changes in the meaning of words reflect ideologies of a nation (example of Cornwall). I touch on distinction between linguistic and social/indexical meaning and methods used to investigate semantic change (Allan and Robinson 2011). The discussion is mainly based on examples from the present day English and current pop culture.

**Selected references**


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19

Phonological change

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Phonology is concerned with the system of distinctive sounds (phonemes) in a language (Cruttenden 2008), and how these phonemes may be combined (phonotactics). Phonemes are frequently established through minimal pairs, e.g. pet /pet/, bet /bet/. Phonological changes may thus be defined as innovations that bring about a change in phoneme inventories and phonotactics, and may be divided into splits, mergers and losses, shifts, cluster changes and phonotactic changes.

In keeping with the title of the second part of this volume, this chapter will first outline the means by which it is possible to trace sound-change in the history of English, from spellings and alliterations in Old English, rhymes and foreign loans in Middle English, via phoneticians’ transcriptions in early Modern English, to machine recordings in Present-Day English. However, phonemic changes may be hard to trace, since distinctiveness in historical stages may be difficult to establish: the evidence is often ambiguous, and minimal pairs may be hard to find (e.g. for breaking diphthongs); commonly, the loss or birth of a distinctive sound may be established only after a considerable time has elapsed from the inception of the change.

Secondly, this chapter will examine instances of splits (e.g. the phonemicization of voiced fricatives, Minkova 2014), mergers and losses (e.g. OE ȳ/y > i/i, Ringe & Taylor 2014), shifts (e.g. the Great Vowel Shift, Stenbrenden 2016), cluster changes (e.g. OE hn > n) and phonotactic changes (e.g. non-rhoticity, Wells 1982) in the history of English, assessing the types of evidence found for these changes, as well as their phonological consequences. Causes and explanatory models (e.g. language contact, ‘naturalness’) will be suggested if and where relevant, and theoretical frameworks (e.g. gestural and articulatory phonology, Browman & Goldstein 1989, 1992) will be considered to the extent possible within the limitations set by the volume’s format.

References


20

The history of R in English

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Certain aspects of the history of the English rhotic have been much discussed in previous work, and are relatively well understood. Other aspects of the changes that the rhotic has undergone are less well studied. In this chapter, I aim to say something about both well-known and lesser-discussed developments, offering a broad overview of changes that have affected and involved the segment throughout its history in English, informed by historical, theoretical, dialectological and sociolinguistic research. The loss of rhymal-r (and the connected rise of a linking-r-type sandhi process and phonemicisation of new vowel contrasts) which began in parts of England in the 17th and 18th century has been tracked through direct and indirect evidence in some detail (e.g., Lass 1997, 1999, Minkova 2014), and the related development of intrusive-r has also been subject to considerable discussion in the literature, with accounts invoking various mechanisms, including rule-inversion (Vennemann 1972) and analogy (Sôskuthy 2013). I will discuss this material, but will also show that there is more to consider, including (i) evidence (from both theoretical phonology, such as McCarthy 1993, and sociophonetics, such as Foulkes 1997) that some varieties have developed both synchronic r-deletion and r-insertion, and (ii) evidence from other r-related phenomena, such as pre-r dentalisation (Maguire 2012), which is informative as to whether a variety still has underlying rhymal rhotics (even if they are missing on the surface). The rise of non-rhoticity and associated patterns of r-sandhi (and their spread through varieties of English around the world) will thus take up a major portion of the chapter (along with the associated questions of whether the rhotic has been lost at the underlying and/or surface level, and of whether the new vowel contrasts are necessarily underlying - see Giegerich 1992). The other main issue, which is much less discussed in existing literature, and which I will address first in the chapter, concerns the changes that have occurred in the realisation of the rhotic in varieties of English around the world (irrespective of phonological context). This has led to the current vast dialectological variety in English 'r-sounds', taking in such articulations as post-alveolar approximants, bunched and retroflex approximants, labiodental approximants, coronal taps and trills, and uvular fricatives. This will require some engagement with the question of 'what counts as a rhotic?', connecting to work such as Wiese (2001) and Navarro (2018).

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Reconstructing pronunciation

David Crystal

This chapter identifies a different focus from the earlier chapters that deal with phonological change, as it is it is an exercise in applied historical phonology. The notion of original pronunciation (OP) has arisen because of the interest in this process that has come from people who are not themselves phonologists, but who want to know how an earlier period of English sounded in order to add a fresh dimension to their performance. Following a discussion of the kinds of evidence available at different periods, I focus on Early Modern English, reviewing five constituencies: early music, bible translations and liturgy, heritage projects, non-dramatic poetry, and theatre. The primary interest has been in relation to Shakespeare, where OP takes its place alongside other 'original practices' as part of an ethos where the intention is to get as close as possible to how the plays would have been performed and heard during his lifetime. I describe several specific ways OP has been used by practitioners, with particular reference to rhyme, wordplay, phonaesthetics, and characterisation. I briefly review the history of the OP movement, beginning with the work of 19th-century phoneticians, and continuing throughout the 20th and into the present century with the 2004 initiative at Shakespeare's Globe, which launched a new era of interest. I illustrate some of the challenges of working with OP by a case study of the options surrounding the phonetic character of /r/, with particular reference to its description in Ben Jonson's English Grammar. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the extent to which OP projects can achieve authenticity.

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Spelling practices and emergent standard writing

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Standardisation is a key and complex issue in the history of languages. The process is triggered by language or dialect contact and widespread awareness of variation; it also relates to a discursive (ideological) project emphasising the desirability of uniformity (and correctness) in language use (Deumert 2004; see also: Joseph 1987; Armstrong and Mackenzie 2013). The achievement of uniformity proceeds through the reduction of variation by means of dialect levelling and koineisation—the emergence of a new variety from the selection, recombination and simplification of features from various related dialects. Two key aspects in the sociolinguistic study of standardisation are focusing and supralocalisation. Focusing involves processes of linguistic micro-accommodation between speakers negotiating identity who change their verbal behaviour to adopt those features of the group(s) they wish to identify with; it necessarily entails the engagement between individuals sharing aims and resources to build a common identity, which means that the ‘community of practice’ construct is useful to explore the initial stages of (proto-)standardisation. As a combination of inter-speaker linguistic changes, standardisation also involves social and geographical diffusion; the supralocalisation of variants being determined in this case by the usual sociolinguistic (age, gender, social class, professional background, social network, etc.), stylistic (addressee, audience design, context and situation) and geolinguistic (distance, demography, etc.) constraints (Nevalainen and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006; Beal 2016).

In the history of English, a large-scale process of normalisation leading to the formation of present-day written standard English developed in late Middle and early Modern English (1400-1600), once the prevalence of Latin and French started to decline and in parallel to the progressive use of the vernacular in the complex administration of a centralised state (Wright 2000; Nevalainen 2003; 2012). In this stage, standardisation affected mainly spelling and grammar and the selection (levelling, koineisation) and acceptance (diffusion, supralocalisation) of variants from these two levels can systematically be studied in the light of the sociolinguistic principles described above.

References


The ideology of standard English

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Public discussions of linguistic issues are generally carried out with reference to an assumed ideal form of English, other varieties often by comparison being judged as inadequate. Discourses of this sort were first elaborated in the work of eighteenth century scholars such as Joseph Addison and Samuel Johnson, forming part of a long process of the standardization of English (Milroy and Milroy 2012). Language standardization is generally associated with political imperatives such as claims to national distinctiveness and autonomy, and the construction of internal social cohesion. Modern nation states have regularly developed nationalist ideologies whereby linguistic and other differences are viewed as undesirable, and even dangerous, while the ideal society is identified as socially and linguistically homogeneous.

Standard language ideologies, i.e. beliefs about language with reference to notions of correctness in relation to an ideal standard form, vary considerably not only over time (Curzan 2014), but in different nation states, and are generally articulated by powerful social groups. While US and British concepts contrast sharply with each other (Lippi-Green 2012), in both nations standard language ideologies have the effect of disadvantaging specific social groups. Rather than being dismissed as examples of ill-informed misunderstanding of the nature of language promoted by powerful speakers for their own purposes, they can be considered more broadly as part of a larger set of perspectives on language articulated by native speakers, intimately connected not only with vested interests but with with attempts to explain connections between language and the social world. The very large community of non-native users of Standard English as a lingua franca do not orient to these nationally distinctive ideologies (Peterson 2020).

References


English dictionaries from the 18th century onwards

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The earliest monolingual dictionaries in English were deliberately limited in their coverage of the language - for example, in treating 'hard words' only - but from the early eighteenth century onwards the tradition of more general dictionaries of the language became established. Heavily influenced by Johnson's dictionary (1755), this tradition set out to represent and to support 'best usage' - often, the usage of the 'best writers' - and to suppress or condemn less polite or acceptable vocabulary.

Nineteenth-century dictionaries widened the range of usage covered but still harked back to Johnson as an exemplar. This tradition was largely swept away by the OED (1884-1928), which committed itself to a descriptive and objective methodology. Revolutionary as this was, the OED could not wholly realise its new aims. In representing the history and development of the language, it continued to favour the usage of 'great writers', while social, cultural and technological constraints affected its choice of which words to include, and how to define and describe them once included. With hindsight (and electronic searching), it is easy to identify the OED's exclusions and biases as well as their ideological bases, for example in the treatment of vocabulary related to race, sexuality, gender, politics and nationalism.

Social, cultural and technological developments in English-speaking societies have since brought about enormous changes to the general English dictionary, most now based on corpuses. But decisions about which existing words and senses to update and which new ones to record, and about how and whether to identify their register and other features of usage, remain subject to ideologically inflected decisions and sensibilities now as formerly. And in societies increasingly conscious of the rights and preferences of racial, ethnic, sexual and other minorities, it remains a question as to whose usage a general dictionary of vocabulary in English should include and/or prioritise.

My proposed contribution to CHEL will discuss these and related matters in a roughly chronological sequence.
This chapter will examine the consolidation of attitudes and praxis in relation to the emergence of a supra-regional accent of English. Engaging in detail with the challenges of recovering phonological history, it will document the increased salience of both localisation and delocalisation in representations of speech from the later eighteenth century, alongside the shifting complex of social and cultural attitudes to identity as articulated in public and private texts, and widely replicated in popular culture, whether in advertising, magazines, or literary texts. Particular attention will be given to the intersection between formal prescription and private practice, as well as manifestations of language anxiety. By the late nineteenth century, for example, there was an abundance of primary texts on the need for, and claimed existence of, a normative model of speech, while an emerging national education system likewise claimed – and addressed -- desiderata of this kind. What individuals do, and their own processes of convergence -- or divergence -- nevertheless remains vital in assessing the extent to which the persuasive rhetoric of delocalised speech filtered into everyday use, and the diverse patterns of modification that might emerge.

Important, too, within historical investigation of this kind is the advent of changing processes by which normative models of speech might be fostered. Early pronouncing dictionaries might, for example, represent a new genre within the history of lexicography, complete with detailed transcription systems which, at least intentionally, set out regulative norms for a national accent. The advent of broadcast English offered, however, other avenues by which paradigms of ‘received’ English might be implemented and encouraged. Across the chapter, the aim will be do engage with the shifting imaging of identity, and the social and cultural pressures this reveals, alongside the patterns of vernacular and pragmatic resistance which remain part of the conflicted history of RP.

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Discourse of prescriptivism

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The history of the English language includes changes in English’s status and speaker attitudes, and among the most important domains for those areas is the prescriptive tradition. This chapter will examine the changes in the discourse of the prescriptive tradition over time. Social and correctness evaluation of variation are central concepts in this discourse, and for such evaluation three conditions are needed (cf. Algeo 1991): a recognition of variation, an evaluation of the variation, and promotion of certain variants over others. The nature of prescriptivist discourse has changed in subtle ways as those conditions have come together.

We have record of social and correctness evaluation of language in the Old English period, but largely for Latin, not English (see Ælfric’s Grammar and Colloquy) (Chapman forthcoming a). In Middle English, we see an awareness of sociolinguistic variation, especially among regional dialects. (See Higden’s translation of Trevisa’s Polychronicon and Caxton’s preface to Eneydos) (Chapman forthcoming b), and perhaps a few hints of evaluation, but not much promotion of variants. Those hints of social valuation become much more frequent and direct in the Early Modern English period, which saw the rise of standardising forces like printing. Scholars self-consciously studied spelling, pronunciation, word meaning, punctuation, and grammar (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011). As they encountered variation, they increasingly, though not uniformly, promoted certain variants over others. As English became an important school subject, the authority of the pedagogical tradition increased, and correctness and evaluative claims were made with increasing confidence in the 1800s. Challenges that arose in the early 1900s led to two tracks in prescriptivist discourse: prescriptivism and descriptivism. Two major developments in the late 20th century—the maturing of variationist sociolinguistics and of corpus linguistics—has led to more modulated evaluative judgments, and to a much lesser degree, correctness judgments.

References

Early standardisation and urban vernaculars

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The emergence of a more uniform and supra-local variety of written English during the Late Middle English and Early Modern English periods has already received much scholarly attention. To date, the variety of English used in administrative texts from London is often perceived as the source of what developed into written Standard English (cf. Fisher 1977; Fisher et al. 1984). Even though this ‘traditional’ account has been convincingly challenged (e.g. Wright 2000; Benskin 2004), the processes involved in the uniformisation of written English, e.g. the conditioning factors for changes on different linguistic levels, are not fully understood yet. One way of shedding new light on the complex processes involved in the early development of written Standard English is to systematically investigate and compare data sources (various text types; ideally manuscript and print) from important regional centres in England over the period 1400-1700. Literacy rates were significantly higher in these cities, and so was therefore text production (cf. Kermode 2000: 442).

The current chapter will focus on early supralocalisation processes and the role of written urban vernaculars in England. First, an overview of relevant databases and studies will be given that are significant for the investigation of the topic (e.g. A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English, A Corpus of Middle English Local Texts, The Emerging Standards Corpus, The Corpus of Early English Correspondence; Wright ed. 2000, Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2003, Auer et al. 2016). Second, relevant findings on the variation and diffusion of selected linguistic variables such as (a) the third person singular inflections and plural markers and (b) orthographic variation will be presented. Third, the role of the printing press in the diffusion of supralocal forms will be discussed. All in all, the urban focus allows us to gain a better understanding of the processes involved in the development of written Standard English.

References:


Variation and change in and through social networks

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Important studies in historical sociolinguistics have stressed the significance of social network investigations – see, for instance, Fitzmaurice (2010), Laitinen & Auer (2014), and Conde-Silvestre (2016). Not only do social networks contribute to the maintenance of norms, but they also contribute to the onset of change: innovations are introduced by subjects with weak ties with certain members of one network as they develop instead stronger ties with members of another network. This is the case, for instance, of emigrants, whose links with the ‘old country’ may get weaker and whose linguistic uses therefore reflect less and less the innovations that are taking place there, while instead they begin to participate in the usage of new, perhaps less homogeneous contexts, and therefore contribute to the establishment of new norms (see Hickey 2019: passim).

However, in spite of the interest that social networks elicit in terms of their linguistic vivacity, their intrinsically dynamic and often unique characteristics make them difficult sources for the identification of overarching linguistic phenomena. In every network, membership may be more or less consistent in terms of age and gender; moreover, there may also be a significant class bias in studies that only take into consideration one specific network in a relatively restricted time frame. In order to map phenomena beyond the specificity of individual networks, it would be useful to investigate network clusters, so as to see what neighbouring networks have in common and what specific features they display.

In this contribution I intend to focus on Late Modern English materials, to present new resources through which network contiguities can be studied; this is the case, for instance, of the exchanges of political activists (such as suffragists) and business correspondents. After an overview of the materials at hand, I will outline how the roles that informants are observed to play in the different networks to which they participate contribute to their definition as central or peripheral nodes, and in what ways this has an impact on the linguistic uses of other participants who share their goals, but whose status is not necessarily comparable.

References


Communities of practice in the history of English

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The community of practice (CoP) is a recent addition to the historical-sociolinguistic theoretical frameworks aiming to capture the conditions in which language change occurs and explain why it produces particular outcomes. The framework stems from the 20th-century realisation that language variation and change depend on the characteristics of the community and the ways in which it interacts, and it adds an important element of practice – a set of behaviours and choices shaped by a joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared tools (Wenger 1998). CoP thus complements other concepts taken over from present-day sociolinguistics and sociology, such as speech communities, social networks and discourse communities, all of which have been applied to the study of the history of English. This chapter will address the similarities and differences between these concepts at the start, and focus on the CoP and its relevance to various communicative contexts throughout the history of English.

Jucker and Kopaczyk (2013) brought dimensions of practice into historical linguistics: a joint enterprise might be, for example, manuscript production; mutual engagement - family and business relationships; and shared tools - spelling and typographic conventions. Because CoP is a framework developed in the context of learning and apprenticeship (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998), it helps to capture the idea of passing practices from one generation to the next. It also helps to understand how linguistic practices are shaped and sustained to enable communicative endeavours happening in a particular community.

This chapter presents the most prolific contexts where the concept of a CoP has been employed: letter writing, manuscript production, the production of early prints, and professional discourse, including multilingual practices. In line with Holmes and Meyerhoff’s (1999) observation that “[a] CoP requires quality of interaction”, the studies informing this chapter engage with the sociohistorical and cultural context of communication in which language change - or, indeed, resistance to change - may be observed.

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Indexicality, enregisterment and the history of English

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Indexicality and enregisterment are terms introduced by Silverstein (2003) and Agha (2003, 2007) as part of an ideological approach to linguistic variation and change. Such an approach belongs within what Eckert (2012) calls the ‘third wave’ of sociolinguistics: an approach characterized by a focus on the active agency of communities of practice in constructing social meaning via linguistic variation. Conde-Silvestre (2016) notes that “historically-oriented approaches within the third wave are, at the moment, scarce”. Such studies are becoming increasingly common, however, as this chapter demonstrates.

The chapter starts by explaining two concepts that are essential to understanding the construction of social meaning from linguistic signs: indexicality and enregisterment. Indexicality is used by Silverstein (2003) to account for different levels of awareness of the association between linguistic features and social characteristics on the part of speakers and hearers. Agha describes enregisterment as the identification of a set of linguistic norms as “a linguistic repertoire differentiable within a language as a socially recognised register” which has come to index “speaker status linked to a specific scheme of cultural values” (2003: 231).

Johnstone succinctly expresses the key research question for studies of indexicality and enregisterment: “How do particular words, ways of pronouncing words, grammatical patterns, and patterns of intonation come to point to particular identities and activities?” (2016, 632). Agha’s (2003) study of the enregisterment of Received Pronunciation will be discussed as foundational research within this framework.

We then discuss what evidence can be found for indexicality and enregisterment in historical texts and the challenges involved for the historian of English working within this framework. We focus on three types of evidence:

1. Metalinguistic and metapragmatic comments
2. Dialect literature and literary dialect
3. Ego-documents, including letters, memoirs and autobiographies.

We discuss case studies using these types of evidence, including Cooper (2013, 2020) and Beal (2020). The chapter concludes with a summary of the advantages and limitations of indexicality and enregisterment as tools for historical linguistic research.
References


Deconstructing myths in the history of English

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In Watts (2011: 11), language myths were defined as ‘communally shared narratives told in the construction of an ideological set of beliefs about the structure of language and/or the functional uses to which language is put ...’ Myths that form part of hegemonic discourse archives – as I have adapted the term from Foucault (1972) – tend to have long lives, so much so that they become orthodox explanations of the historical development of a language that brook no opposition. In Watts (2011), I located a wide range of ‘language myths’ and attempted to reveal the ways in which they ‘defined’ the assumed ‘facts’ about the history of English. In most cases, the ‘facts’ were challenged by empirical evidence to show that, to all intents and purposes, what they revealed were discursive expressions of ‘faith’, not ‘fact’. As Daniel Dennett says in Darwin’s Dangerous Idea (1996: 23), ‘there is no future in a sacred myth’ simply because ‘one of the things we deem precious is the truth’. Dennett implies that there are such things as ‘non-sacred myths’, but I argue in this chapter that the major feature of a myth is that it is always ‘sacred’ to whatever ideology is being promoted in the discourse archive that makes use of it. In this sense, myths are very different from stories. I shall illustrate the danger of sticking to myths by looking at new evidence from archaeology and historical population genetics to show that English may ultimately derive from a form of Germanic that we might want to call ‘Island Germanic’, and may have been in place along the eastern seaboard of southern Scotland and England from the time of the Storegga Slide on, when the tsunami that it caused inundated the northern reaches of ‘Doggerland’ (or as Jim Leary[2015] calls it ‘Northsealand’). The myth that is still offered, even by such distinguished archaeologists as Barry Cunliffe in Britain Begins (2013), is that prior to the Roman occupation of Britain, the inhabitants of England and southern Scotland spoke varieties of Brythonic Celtic. This, in turn, only consolidates Gildas’s myth of the ‘Anglo-Saxon blitzkrieg’ (a memorable but highly ironic term by Stephen Oppenheimer [2007]). Unravelling the Gildas myth has its effects on a new analysis of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People, and that, in turn, provides a refreshing new approach to the story, not the myth, of the Beowulf manuscript (Kiernan 1997; Watts 2011: Chapter 2).

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