

# The Story of English

Fall 2011  
Kara Becker

Linguistics 221  
M/W 3:10 – 4:30 pm  
Psych 102

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Office Hours: M/T/W 11-12  
and by appointment (Vollum 306)

## Course Description

Full course for one semester. A linguistic history of the English language. This course presents an introduction to diachronic linguistics in tracing the story of English across approximately 1,500 years, from its Germanic and Anglo-Saxon roots to its current presence as a global *lingua franca*. Students will gain experience with linguistic methods of analysis, and be able to describe and explain structural properties of English at different periods, mechanisms of linguistic change, and the sociocultural forces that have come to bear on the development of English. Students will work with audio and other primary source material, and write a language sketch about a non-standard variety of Modern English. Conference.

## Texts

- Millward, C.M. and Mary Hayes. 2012. *A Biography of the English Language* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Boston: Wadsworth. (I refer to this text here in the syllabus as MH)
- Watts, Richard J. 2011. *Language Myths and the History of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (LM)
- The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online. Access through the Reed library, databases.

## Course Requirements

\*\* I reserve the right to give pop quizzes in this course, and will use them as part of your evaluation. If you are not in the class the day of a pop quiz, you will need to come to my office hours for a make-up. The make-up will no doubt be harder than the in-class pop quiz in order to serve as further encouragement for you to attend class regularly \*\*

### **Participation. 30%**

Participation in conference is critical to the success of our course. Come prepared with thoughts, questions, and comments about our readings, and be an active participant in the work we do.

1. Leading Discussion: Each of you will serve as a discussion leader/presenter for some topic. A successful discussion leader comes prepared to lead us through the material and to present critical questions to the class for discussion. As the material we are covering is rich with terms and facts, the discussion leader/s should be prepared to walk us through a summary of the material at hand, covering key topics and defining terms, as well as to present us with a number of discussion questions. A handout is strongly encouraged. Discussion Leaders will

be responsible as well for posting any materials and updating the glossary on our course blog (see 2).

2. Blog. This course has a blog, one that starts empty at the beginning of the course. <http://blogs.reed.edu/ling221/>

Your job is to add content throughout the semester, so that we have a central location for our discussions and a way to compile information over the course of the class. You will be evaluated on the extent to which you make weekly contributions to the site. Our starting point for pages:

Glossary. A place for us to document the terms and concepts we discuss in class and from the readings. The discussion leader/s will be responsible for updating the glossary in the few days after discussion is led; the rest of the class should feel free to edit, update, and add to this glossary each week.

Discussion Forum. A place for questions, thoughts, and writings, as well as for you to upload artifacts. Crucially, you should not only post here, but engage with the posts of others by commenting.

Etymologies. We'll never speculate on the history of some word or set of semantically related words in class – if you wonder about it, or it comes up, you'll look it up and submit the etymology to our course blog, so that we build up a list over the semester. I expect you to submit at least one of these per week, if not more, and to draw directly from the OED and any other sources.

#### **Problem Sets.** 50% (12.5% each)

4 Problem Sets will be distributed (see dates of distribution and due dates on the course outline below), covering roughly 1) The comparative method; 2) Old English; 3) Middle English; and 4) Early Modern and Modern English, although there will be some bleed of these topics across the sets. There is no set length for your problem set submissions, and each will vary in terms of task and time.

You may casually discuss the material on our problem sets, but the work and write-up cannot be collaborative.

Problem sets are due in class in hardcopy, or emailed to me before the start of class. I will accept late assignments but they will be penalized 10% of total possible points for each day they are late, unless you receive an extension from me, in advance, for a serious issue. I will not accept a late problem set if it is turned in on or after I have returned that problem set to the class with comments.

#### **Final Project.** 20%

Your final project will be to submit a language sketch of a contemporary variety of English. This variety should not be a standard or national variety, but rather a non-standard or in some marginalized variety. Your language sketch should:

- 1) Draw from source material to provide a history, both linguistic and social, of the variety
- 2) Provide an overview of the linguistic structure of the variety (focus on its distinctive phonology, morphology, syntax, and any discursive phenomena)
- 3) Provide information on any documented diachronic change
- 4) Cite in-text and include a bibliography
- 5) Not exceed a strictly enforced page limit of 15 pages. Due Tuesday of Finals Week, December 13, 5pm, hard copy preferred, PDF to my email is ok.

\*Please note that if you would like to receive written feedback on your final paper, you must indicate this on your paper itself, and provide your box number.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### Week 1. Aug 29/31. Linguistic Facts of Life

Aug 29: Introductions

Aug 31: MH Chapter 1

### Week 2. Sep 5/7. Phonology

Sep 5: No class

Sept 7: MH Chapter 2,3

### Week 3. Sep 12/14. Language Families and the Comparative Method

Sep 12: MH Chapter 4

Sep 14: Check moodle for reading; Problem Set #1 Distributed

### Week 4. Sep 19/21. Old English

Sep 19: MH Chapter 5, Part 1

Sep 21: LM Chapter 1; Problem Set #1 DUE

### Week 5. Sep 26/28. More Old English

Sep 26: MH Chapter 5, Part 2

Sep 28: LM Chapter 2; Problem Set #2 Distributed

### Week 6. Oct 3/5. Middle English

Oct 3: MH Chapter 6, Part 1

Oct 5: MH Chapter 6, Part 2

### Week 7. Oct 10/12. More Myths

Oct 10: LM Chapter 3

Oct 12: LM Chapter 4; Problem Set #2 DUE, Problem Set #3 Distributed

## **Fall Break Oct 17/19**

### Week 9. Oct 24/26. Early Modern English

Oct 24: MH Chapter 7, Part 1

Oct 26: MH Chapter 7, Part 2; Problem Set #3 DUE

### Week 10. Oct 31/Nov 2.

Oct 31: LM Chapter 6

Nov 2: MH Chapter 8, Part 1

### Week 11. Nov 7/9. More Modern English

Nov 7: MH Chapter 8, Part 2; Problem Set #4 Distributed

Nov 9: LM Chapters 8, 9

### Week 12 Nov 14/16. English as a global language

Nov 14: MH Chapter 9

Nov 16: Problem Set #4 DUE

Week 13 Nov 21/23. (24: Thanksgiving).

Nov 21: LM Chapter 11

Nov 23:

Week 14: Nov 28/30. More on English today

Nov 28:

Nov 30:

Week 15: Dec 5. Last Day of Class

Tuesday, December 13: Final Project Due, 5pm.

\*if you want written comments on your final project, please note this in writing on pg. 1 of your final