Introduction

Merja Kytö and Päivi Pahta

I.1 Aims, background, and rationale for the handbook

The aim of this handbook is to provide an up-to-date account of the methodology used and results obtained in English historical linguistics, and to identify what has characterized the field in terms of previous and current research interests. This includes surveying the main developments in the field of English historical linguistics itself as well as specifying connections to the study of language change in general, to history, cognitive studies, and other related areas. Of key importance are the language-theoretical positions that have informed research into the history of English.

Research in English historical linguistics is firmly anchored in evidence drawn from texts. Up until quite recently, listing and classifying data drawn from often haphazardly collected datasets was considered sufficient, and conclusions were drawn on impressionistic generalizations based on the data. Since the 1980s, there has been a growing interest in the systematic use of structured collections of texts, which have become increasingly available in computerized format. With the publication of the Helsinki Corpus of English Texts (1991), this trend continued to consolidate and gain further ground. There has also been an increasing interest in statistical tools and the quantitative approaches characterizing fields of study such as corpus linguistics and sociohistorical linguistics (or historical sociolinguistics). Within these frameworks, attention is often paid to the role of linguistic and extralinguistic factors in processes of change. Since the 1990s, there has also been a growing interest in qualitative analyses (e.g. historical pragmatics) and in combining quantitative and qualitative approaches at the macro-level (groups of language users) and micro-level (individual language users). The contributions to this handbook address important advances in all these areas, including, for instance, the variationist approach, frequency studies, typology, construction grammar, and processes of change, among them grammaticalization and subjectification. The handbook also

addresses approaches to the study of past 'written' and 'spoken' language at different levels of formality and from the perspective of different levels of language (phonology, morphology, syntax, morphosyntax, semantics, pragmatics).

I.2 Structure of the handbook

When deciding what to include in the handbook, one of our principles was to allow room for what has been, on the one hand, central and of long-term interest, and, on the other hand, fresh and innovative in English historical linguistics. We also found it important to consider the long diachrony from Old English to Modern English, and pay attention to recent change within Present-day English. The history of transoceanic varieties of English has emerged as an area of increasing interest to scholars over the past two decades and receives attention in the handbook, although no systematic or exhaustive accounts of the history of individual varieties have been considered for inclusion owing to space limitations. In its organization of the subject matter, the handbook moves from the more general to the more specialized and specific, paying attention to the interplay of language theory and empirical data throughout. Among the novelties of this handbook is the attention paid to practical insights and hands-on work within the methodologies available to researchers of the history of English as well as to the research process in linguistic inquiry (see Section 4, in particular).

In addition to this general introduction, the handbook comprises twenty-eight chapters. The chapters are presented in interconnected sections as follows:

- Part I is devoted to research frameworks, including theories and methodology (Section 1), and material and data (Section 2);
- Part II is devoted to linguistic analyses, including discussion of central processes of change (Section 3) and illustrative accounts of hands-on research (Section 4).

The chapters in each of the four sections were designed to respond to a number of specific questions so as to lend coherence to the discussion. In what follows, we start by describing the section on theories and methodologies adopted in English historical linguistics (Section 1) and then proceed to the section on evidence (Section 2). We subsequently move on to describe the section on processes of change (Section 3), and continue by commenting on the section devoted to highlighting the research process (Section 4). After a brief survey of related handbooks, we conclude by exploring some possible future avenues.

I.3 Frameworks

During the twentieth century, interest in language-theoretical and methodological considerations became a characteristic of much of the work carried out in English historical linguistics, and this has continued to the present time. Additionally, diverse data sources, which have become increasingly available in electronic form, have supplemented traditional manuscript and printed material, allowing the discipline to develop important new areas of study.

I.3.1 Theories and methodologies (Section 1)

The chapters in Section 1 of the handbook provide surveys of theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in studying the history of English, highlighting both traditional and more recent methods in the field. The contents are as follows: in Chapter 1, Suzanne Romaine examines variationist approaches, including historical sociolinguistics, historical dialectology, and historical genre analysis. Chapter 2, by Martin Hilpert and Stefan Th. Gries, addresses quantitative approaches with a specific focus on diachronic corpus linguistics. In Chapter 3, Gabriella Mazzon turns to historical pragmatics. Chapter 4, by Graeme Trousdale, deals with the application of construction grammar to historical questions. In Chapter 5, Elly van Gelderen discusses generative approaches from a historical-linguistic perspective, focusing on two recent approaches, the Principles and Parameters (P&P) model and the Minimalist Program. Finally, in Chapter 6, Robert D. Fulk, examines the role of philological methods in English historical linguistics.

In addition to discussing the theoretical positions that have informed research in English historical linguistics, the chapters in Section 1 provide information on the connections of the field with other disciplines, including history, social sciences, cognitive studies, and other related areas. The chapters also provide insight into the historiography of the field. The philological study of earlier stages of English, discussed in Chapter 6, lies at the roots of English historical linguistics; the field originally grew from the neighbouring fields of English philology and historical-comparative linguistics. The role of philological methods can be traced from the first views into the history of English offered by sixteenth-century studies of Old English to the most recent contributions. These advances make new textual material available for scholarship in the form of digital editions of manuscripts and provide extralinguistic information about the contextual aspects of historical texts and the communicative settings in which they were produced and used. Since the evidence for the early history of English depends critically on philological scholarship, philological methods retain an important status at the primary level of providing data in the field.

Philological studies originally derived from motivations such as religious exegesis and the study of early literature (see Chapter 6). Later approaches have been inspired by a specific interest in language, its formal and functional characteristics in earlier periods, and its development over time. As a sub-discipline of linguistics, English historical linguistics has obviously been influenced by trends and developments in contemporary linguistic science, and the approaches addressed in this section tend to have their non-historical counterparts, including Chomskyan generative theory (Chapter 5) and the more recent cognitive approaches, such as usage-based construction grammar (Chapter 4) and synchronic pragmatics (Chapter 3). Similarly, the historical variationist and sociolinguistic approaches (Chapter 1) were inspired by broad paradigm shifts and innovations in linguistics, demonstrating an increasing interest in the correlation of language-external factors with the forms and functions of language and with language change. The rise of the variationist approach, like other frameworks of English historical linguistics, has benefited greatly from the increasing availability of different kinds of historical corpora since the 1990s. The arrival of corpora and the subsequent growth in their size have also facilitated the use of quantitative approaches and increasingly refined statistical tools in the analysis of historical language data (Chapter 2). Simultaneously, the interest in the impact of language-external factors, including the communicative context, has given new impetus to qualitative analyses focusing on language use and meaning-making. This has resulted in the emergence of new fields of inquiry, such as historical pragmatics and historical discourse analysis (Chapter 3). The picture that emerges from the chapters in Section 1 shows a theoretically informed, broad field of empirical research where different theoretical perspectives contribute to our understanding about the history of the language in different ways; a single approach could hardly have yielded the body of knowledge obtained within the field to date.

The theoretical and methodological approaches adopted for studying the history of English also reflect the research questions that have driven and continue to drive research in the field. Both synchronic and diachronic interests have had an impact on the field from the very beginning. Some overarching themes or shifts in mainstream interests can be identified. For example, an urge to understand language change and its mechanisms has inspired research within various theoretical frameworks, focusing on the process of change from different perspectives, as can be seen in the chapters of Section 3 in this handbook. Thus, research in historical generative grammar reflects an interest in, for example, changes in word order and information structure, or evidence for recurring patterns of change which provide a window on the acquisition process (see Chapter 5). Construction grammar, which conceptualizes language in terms of conventionalized non-modular form–meaning pairings at different levels of granularity, considers both the form and function side of linguistic change, and can reveal several successive small-scale changes in form and function leading to a change

on a more general or abstract level (see Chapter 4). Finally, variationist approaches like sociohistorical linguistics pay special attention to the role of language-external factors in language change, aiming at an account of how language change diffuses, i.e. an account of how particular functions, uses and kinds of variation develop within particular language varieties, speech communities, social networks, individuals, texts, and genres (see Chapter 1).

A major turning point in the methodological and theoretical development of the field was the arrival of electronic corpora, allowing automated extraction of data from large amounts of text (see Chapter 8 in Section 2). Diachronic corpora spanning several centuries facilitate systematic analysis of long-term diachronic changes and allow quantitative analyses, aiming at generalizations, patterns, and mappings, often with the help of fine-grained statistical analyses (see Chapter 2). More recently, the corpus-based study of recent change has become a thriving field (for examples, see Chapter 8). Structured corpora have also facilitated the study of language history from the perspective of genres, and inspired domain-specific analyses of linguistic and textual features (see Chapter 16 in Section 3).

In some approaches, the analytical procedure is entirely based on the manual extraction of data from the texts. For such studies, corpora can nevertheless provide research material in a conveniently accessible format. An example of this approach in the present handbook is seen in a case study of ambisyllabicity in the history of English (see Chapter 25 in Section 4). There is, of course, research beyond corpora as well, seen in a number of important and thriving subfields of English historical linguistics that do not essentially rely on corpus linguistic methods. These include, for example, various analytical approaches that require direct access to original handwritten documents and their physical features, illustrated in the handbook by a case study of the visual pragmatics of Middle English manuscripts (Chapter 28 in Section 4).

I.3.2 Evidence: material and data (Section 2)

The availability and status of the linguistic evidence that has been preserved for us from past centuries have always been crucial to research in historical linguistics. The further one goes back in history, the fewer – and less varied – the extant sources tend to be. Linguistic evidence is available to us only in written form before the invention of audio-recording devices in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Words, sentences or full texts are preserved in such forms as coins, manuscripts, or early printed books. Both written and spoken language can serve as loci for change, and recently it is spoken face-to-face interaction and colloquial contexts that have started to attract scholars' attention. In this respect, the fact that we only have written evidence from past periods poses a major challenge to historical linguists (see Chapter 9). English had a millennium of written records behind it before

audio-recordings became possible, and developing methods that will help to deal with this and other data problems is one of the foci of current work in the field. Access to computerized texts has facilitated data collection in ways that would have made English linguists gasp only a little more than fifty years ago; for instance, it is possible to search electronic texts for words and phrases which the data retrieval programme can list in contexts (so-called concordances) that have been conveniently sorted out for further analyses. Such sources of material have also given rise to new challenges that have given impetus to interdisciplinary collaboration between historical linguists and corpus and computational linguists; an example of such collaboration is work on software intended to help to deal with spelling variation in early texts.

The topics of the chapters in this section of the handbook have been chosen to give glimpses into the many-faceted data sources that English historical linguists nowadays have at their disposal, and to highlight both traditional and modern approaches to data collection and other aspects of methodology. While Chapter 7, by Simon Horobin, focuses on manuscripts and, to some extent, early printed books, electronic resources are in focus in Chapter 8, by María José López-Couso. In Chapter 9, Christian Mair turns to historical sound recordings, and Chapter 10, by Nuria Yáñez-Bouza, deals with the evidence yielded by historical grammars. In Chapter 11, Erik Smitterberg discusses the constraints that are inherent in the use of historical material, and the ways of arriving at definitions of linguistic variables which are necessary for valid data collection.

In terms of chronology, the chapters in this section cover the entire history of English, especially Chapters 7 and 8 on manuscripts, early printed books, and electronic resources. For historical reasons, Chapter 9 on historical sound recordings has a starting point in the 1870s, with a pioneering stretch of half a century leading to the advent of radio and sound films in the 1920s when advances in technology improved the quality of recordings to such an extent that research on the data became possible. Chapter 10 places some emphasis on the Late Modern English period, after Early Modern English grammar writing had become emancipated from Latin traditions. In Chapter 11 on data collection, most examples are drawn from the Early and Late Modern English periods.

Understandably, there have been shifts in the interest felt for different aspects of English historical linguistics, as in any academic field. From the times of philologically dominated approaches (see Chapter 6 in Section 1), research on the history of English is now open to various degrees of philological and/or linguistic engagement depending on the aims of a study. Regarding linguistic periods, research on Old and Middle English dominated up until the 1980s, while over the past few decades, interest in the early and late modern periods has exploded. The increasing availability of data in electronic form from these periods, notably the late modern period, has undoubtedly contributed to the boom. Indeed, corpus linguistic approaches

are currently perhaps the most conspicuous trend in English linguistics, with significant efforts invested in making new data sources available and in enhancing the techniques of how to make the best use of them (see Chapter 8). Following this trend, manuscript studies have been energized by recent demands on editors to produce text editions, preferably in electronic form, which are faithful to original manuscripts and thus permit linguistic research based on reliable renderings of early texts.

Of the types of language use studied, genres conveying degrees of 'spoken' or 'colloquial' language of the past have become an object of vibrant study. As discussed in Chapter 9, with reference to Hermann Paul's (1880) views, the sources we have from past stages of language use tend to be 'written, edited, standardized, and monologic' while what historical linguists would like to consult are 'spoken, spontaneous, vernacular and interactive/dialogic' texts. As a consequence, over the past two or three decades, there has been a notable rise in interest for the use of texts approximating informal, conversational, or vernacular usage, conveyed in sources such as private letters, drama comedy, quoted speech in fiction, and direct speech cited in witness depositions. Interestingly, a genre at the opposite end of the stylistic continuum has also started to attract researchers' attention, i.e. the study of early grammars (see Chapter 10). This revival of interest has been fortified along with access to online resources such as *Early English Books Online*, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, and the *Eighteenth-Century English Grammars* database, and has allowed scholars to discover the potential of early grammar writing as a source of evidence for the study of the history of English. It should also be pointed out that other written texts representative of various genres (e.g. science, history writing, law, religious treatises) have continued to interest researchers. These texts are essential components in most historical corpora, providing material for empirical investigations of language variation and change.

As asserted above, the use of large-scale electronic resources has profoundly influenced the work done in English historical linguistics. Corpus-linguistic approaches have been most successful in the study of morphosyntactic phenomena (see Chapter 8), while the corpus-based study of, for instance, phonological features is still in its beginnings. Electronic dictionaries such as the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (OED), the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), and the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (HTOED) have meant a great boost for the study of word meanings and semantic fields (see Chapter 23 in Section 4). Electronic linguistic atlases have also been subject to rapid advances, allowing interactive use whereby scholars are now able to e.g. draw dialect maps for the medieval period. A recent development is the introduction of the first English historical mega-corpora, which provide access to hundreds of millions of words and are particularly useful, for example, for studying low-frequency phenomena (see Chapter 8). While the use of corpus-linguistic techniques mostly saves time in data collection, automated searches can also be constrained by their being based on strings of characters or coded entities; the spelling variation mentioned above can

also hamper the use of search programs on material that has not been annotated by normalizing the word forms or by adding grammatical or semantic tagging (see Chapter 11 and Chapter 27 in Section 4).

Although research on early audio-recordings is still in its infancy, there have already been encouraging results in the use of early audio data in, for instance, the study of changes in British RP in the latter part of the twentieth century and in the study of early New Zealand English (see Chapter 9). Regarding early regional or transplanted varieties of English, the survey of the electronic sources included in Chapter 8 highlights corpora of early Scottish and Irish English, and corpora representative of historical periods of such international varieties as American English, Canadian English, and Australian and New Zealand English.

Despite the advances in automated data collection, the ultimate challenges of linguistic research still remain. The question of how to define a linguistic variable and how to verify the validity and reliability of one's research design still requires careful consideration. Some of the central issues involved are considered in Chapter 11, where examples are given of ways of proceeding. The question of whether quantitative or qualitative approaches or – as is increasingly the case – a combination of both these approaches would serve the researcher best also needs consideration (see Chapter 8). Regarding the amount of data, even small amounts of data can be of value for qualitative approaches.

I.4 Analyses

The history of English covers more than a millennium and offers unique opportunities for studying linguistic change and stability. Identifying, documenting and analysing processes of change, and seeking out factors catalyzing or underlying them, is a thriving area of English historical linguistics. Accounts of hands-on work in these and other types of investigation provide valuable insights into how scholars can formulate and solve research questions on developments in the history of English.

I.4.1 Perspectives on processes of change (Section 3)

Change is a constant feature of all living languages, and one of the key interests of English historical-linguistic research. The nine chapters included in Section 3 of the handbook focus on this topic. Together the chapters provide a concentrated, yet multifaceted view of changes that have taken place in the history of English and the processes by which they have come about. At the same time, the chapters provide an overview of research exploring change in English. Four chapters examine change at different levels of language. Chapter 12, by Raymond Hickey, focuses on phonological change in English. In Chapter 13, Christian Kay and Kathryn Allan discuss lexical

change. Morphosyntactic change is the focus of Chapter 14, by Olga Fischer, while Chapter 15, by Susan M. Fitzmaurice, examines the sphere of semantic and pragmatic change. Approaches focusing on language variation are foregrounded in two chapters: Chapter 16, by Irma Taavitsainen, deals with genre dynamics in the history of English; and Chapter 17, by Minna Nevala, discusses sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic change. Standardization is the focus of Chapter 18, by Joan C. Beal. Finally, the last two chapters explore contact-related processes of change. In Chapter 19, Peter Trudgill examines the impact of contact in the earlier history of English, while Chapter 20, by Marianne Hundt, investigates the role of contact in the global spread of English.

The chapters address key issues in language change from various perspectives. Sources of language change receive attention throughout, including both internal factors, active from within the language, and external factors, operating from outside. Internal motivations, i.e. language-systemic causes of change, are seen at work, for example, in phonological and morphosyntactic changes (Chapters 12 and 14). External motivation, such as sociocultural change, is highlighted, for example, in genre dynamics, as cultural expectations concerning the construction of texts in individual genres change over time (see Chapter 16). Sociocultural change, creating new concepts and new cultural practices and making others redundant, also has an important role in the two broad and related strands of lexical change: innovation, when a language acquires new words or existing words acquire new senses; and obsolescence, when existing words drop out of use or lose senses (see Chapter 13). External motivation originating from contact is another important source of lexical change, although the lexicon is by no means the only level of language bearing witness to contact-induced change (see Chapters 19 and 20). However, in many cases multiple causation or a mixture of motivations can be recognized. For example, changes involving standardization are externally motivated, but specific features within the standard repertoire may originally have evolved as a result of system-internal factors (see Chapter 18). Thus, while it is important to understand the role of different motivations for change and their impact on the directions and results of change, the chapters also underline the importance of considering *both* internal *and* external factors in individual cases of change, while pointing out that linguistic reality is too complex to be captured by a simple binary division of change types into internal and external ones. As Fischer notes, it is important for the historical linguist, 'who wants to describe as well as understand the beginning *and* the endpoint of the change, to analyse the data as much as possible with a mind open to all frameworks relevant for linguistic processing' (Chapter 14, p. 241).

The principles and mechanisms of language change on different levels of language receive detailed scrutiny in the handbook, and are illustrated with examples of individual linguistic features that have been affected by the relevant changes. Some mechanisms mainly operate on one level; for

example, metaphorization or metonymization are mechanisms of semantic and pragmatic change (see Chapter 15). Other mechanisms can affect linguistic items on several levels, and are discussed from different perspectives in different chapters of the handbook. For example, grammaticalization, whereby lexical elements lose their concrete meanings and adopt grammatical functions, is examined in the handbook from the perspectives of phonological, morphosyntactic, and semantic and pragmatic change (see Chapters 12, 14, and 15). Some processes of change consist of several micro-steps involving various mechanisms. Such sequences of micro-changes are illustrated in Section 4 of the handbook in a case study tracing steps in subjectification, a pragmatic-semantic process by which meanings become increasingly based on the speaker's perspective (see Chapter 22).

The study of the role of social factors in mechanisms of language change is discussed in the handbook from various angles. These include, for example, sociolinguistic approaches, concerned with the impact of social categories like gender, class, age, or education, or the influence of social networks on the diffusion or propagation of language change (see Chapter 17). In addition, the handbook considers sociopragmatic, interactional processes, examining the dependence of linguistic phenomena on issues such as communicative situations and speaker–hearer interaction, including social hierarchies and roles, and identity work (see Chapters 15 and 17). The important role of language ideologies and attitudes in language change is also highlighted in the handbook, particularly in the processes of standardization, including the notions of prestige, normativity, and prescriptivism (see Chapters 10 and 18).

Finally, several chapters of the handbook discuss research on processes of language contact and contact-induced change. Contact-related changes are examined in two chapters, spanning the whole history of the English language and providing a broad coverage of temporal and regional varieties of English with two foci: the period from the prehistory through the earliest dialectal varieties of Old English to the Middle Ages (Chapter 19); and the spread of English beyond the British Isles since the early modern period, which has resulted in a large number of post-colonial varieties of English, the so-called outer-circle Englishes (Chapter 20). In his discussion of the earlier period, Peter Trudgill adopts a sociolinguistically informed point of view, examining those language-contact events involving English which have had structural consequences for mother-tongue English as a whole. In Chapter 20, which concerns language contact in post-colonial contexts of the modern period, the focus of attention is on the impact of processes like koinéization, nativization, and the relationship of language and dialect contact.

The concentration on language change in this section of the handbook is not intended to imply that stability in language would be uninteresting, although it has received less attention in research to date. Recent research shows that the dynamics of diachronic variation may range from relative