1 The Study of *English* Historical Linguistics

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Introduction

Students of English will find a wealth of textbooks on the history of the language, as well as a substantial number of textbooks introducing them to the principles of historical linguistics in general.[1] In the last ten years we have also seen a spate of "handbooks" on the history of English or English historical linguistics published.[2] How do all of these approaches to the history of English differ, and how is the following textbook distinguished?

In broad outline, textbooks on historical linguistics tend to be organized around linguistic levels of change – phonological change, morphological change, syntactic change, and semantic change. Of course, they also cover a variety of other topics, such as internal and external reconstruction, causes of change, language birth and death, language contact, language classification, and so on. In contrast, histories of the English language – with very rare exceptions – are organized chronologically, following the different "periods" of English (see below on "periodization"). Principles of linguistic change, if discussed explicitly at all in these textbooks, are subsumed to the overall presentation of a "narrative" of change from Old English to the present day. The more recent handbooks of English – all impressive works in their own right, collecting work by many of the best scholars in the field today – are typically organized by period (like histories of English) or by linguistic level (like introductions to historical linguistics), though again they may treat a myriad of other topics.

The linguistic study of the English language has a long history, as will be described briefly in the next section, and over time scholars have made different assumptions about the nature of language and language change, have adopted different theoretical perspectives, and have utilized different methodologies in studying the history of English. There is not one monolithic, coherent approach to the history of English. Some of the recent handbooks of English present discussions of these different approaches and perspectives,[3] but these handbooks are generally addressed to the scholarly researcher, not the student of English, and often focus on the "state of the art" in research rather than providing

descriptive information on methodology and approach. The range of advanced research articles published in academic journals, while utilizing many different approaches, typically do not supply the contextual information necessary for the student to understand where they fit within the broader framework of approaches.

This focus of this textbook, then, is the different **approaches** and **perspectives** taken in the study of English over time, ranging from more "traditional" approaches such as language contact and dialectology to the most contemporary approaches, including psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic ones. A basic knowledge of the history of the English language is assumed, and the textbook does not strive for comprehensive coverage of either the details of specific changes in the history of English or all principles of linguistic change, both of which are handled more ably by histories of English and historical linguistics textbooks. Rather, what is undertaken here is a description of eleven varied approaches to English historical linguistics: each chapter first describes the theoretical approach and its methodologies, challenges, and successes and then illustrates it with case studies that highlight the strengths and scope of the approach (see overview of chapters below). The overall goal of this textbook is to give you a sense of how English historical linguistic study is (and has been) undertaken over the years

A Short History of English Historical Linguistics[4]

English historical linguistics grew out of the philological tradition (with its focus on older stages of English and manuscript studies), but the discipline itself (as a scientific endeavor) can be traced most directly to the Neogrammarians (*Junggrammatiker*), a group of scholars originally working in Leipzig at the end of the nineteenth century. Their approach spread to other countries in Europe and to England as chairs in English linguistics were established at various universities. Great strides in understanding developments in English and the Germanic languages generally were made by assuming the "Neogrammarian hypothesis" (with its assertion of the exceptionlessness of sound change – see Chapter 2), despite the fact that it has ultimately been proven wrong. It is also during this period that large-scale dialect studies began to be undertaken, which although focused on contemporary dialects, were also inherently concerned with dialect change; such studies ultimately led to the development of historical dialectology in the twentieth century (Chapter 12).

The Neogrammarian approach was replaced by structuralism (of both European and American varieties) in the early part of the twentieth century. The focus of structuralism – as the name suggests – was on the overall structure of language systems and the systemic effects of language change, such as mergers or splits affecting the phonological system or analogy affecting the morphosyntactic system. The extent to which structural changes are functionally motivated was also investigated. It was proposed, for example, that certain

changes were consciously made to achieve some goal (for example, avoiding the development of "homonyms") or, on a larger scale, that languages could be seen as moving, unconsciously, in a particular direction, e.g., from synthetic (highly inflected) to analytic (less highly inflected). Although the notion of teleology in language change has been discredited to a large extent, this focus on both structure and function provided important insights into development of English.

The generative approach, which took hold in the mid-twentieth century, shifted attention from the history of individual languages to the study of more abstract principles of language; initially its focus was rigidly synchronic. But by 1970, generativists began to turn their attention to language change, seeing it as the result of sudden changes or reanalyses (later understood as changes in parameter settings) and to incomplete or imperfect transmission of grammatical structure during language acquisition. Generative approaches to change are described in detail in Chapter 3.

In reaction to the focus on the abstract system of language ("competence") in the generative approach, an alternative "usage-based" approach has gained strength. In it, usage (the forms speakers use) is understood as crucial for our understanding of language, and variation (an intrinsic part of "performance") is seen as the locus of change. Linguistic structures emerge as a result of frequently used forms, which, in appropriate contexts, invite reinterpretation, thus eventually leading to a change in the grammar. A strongly usage-based focus underlies grammaticalization studies (see Chapter 6), an approach which began to assume a significant part in English historical linguistics in the 1980s.[5] The study of standardization (Chapter 11) also views variation and usage as central to change.

What perhaps most obviously characterizes approaches to English historical linguistics in the latter part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century is the merger of historical linguistics with other fields whose focus was initially synchronic. These include corpus linguistics (Chapter 5), discourse studies (Chapter 8), sociolinguistics (Chapter 9), pragmatics (Chapter 10), and language contact as well as pidgin and creole studies (Chapter 13).

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 "The Scope of English Historical Linguistics" by Raymond Hickey provides a sweeping overview of what is covered by English historical linguistics. It begins with a comparison of the major approaches, exemplifying some of the fundamental principles of each: the exceptionless nature of sound change (Neogrammarian), sound shifts, mergers and distinctions, internal and external motivation, the force of analogy (structuralist), simplification and repair, avoidance of merger, functional load, gradual and discrete change, the notion of drift (functionalist), reanalysis by children, and sudden change (generative).

Grammaticalization and lexicalization (treated in detail in Chapter 5) represent newer approaches. The chapter then describes the techniques by which linguistic forms and processes are established: use of the comparative method, of internal reconstruction, of general knowledge of linguistic processes, and of the evidence of relative chronology. The transmission of change is shown to follow an S-curve, with remnants of older forms and processes continuing to exist. The chapter then provides five extended examples of changes in the sound system which exemplify many of the principles discussed: the Great Vowel Shift, the loss of /h/ (also discussed in Chapter 9), the replacement of interdental fricatives, the vocalization of /l/ and /r/, and the adoption of dialect forms. (Note that because most of the later chapters treat syntax, the focus of this chapter is phonology.)

Chapter 3 "Generative Approaches" by Cynthia L. Allen begins with a brief discussion of the development of generative grammar before turning to generative approaches to linguistic change. Lightfoot's study of the rise of the modal auxiliaries (1979) is presented as an example of the importance of child language acquisition as the locus of change, in which younger speakers construct new grammars based on contraints imposed by Universal Grammar. The chapter moves on to more recent generative views of change (within the "Minimalism Program") in which syntactic change happens when language learners reset one or more "parameters" in language. Changes in the expression of negation in the history of English are used as a case study of this approach. The treatment of variation as an instance of "competing grammars" in the generative approach is exemplified with the regulation of *do* in English (Kroch 1989); here, the declining frequency of one grammar (that allows verb-raising) is seen as regulating the increasing frequency of *do* at the same rate in different environments, but the ultimate loss of that grammar allows *do* to develop independently in different contexts. The chapter ends with a discussion of generative approaches to phonological change within Optimality Theory, in which historical change involves differences in the ranking of the constraints that generate linguistic forms. Originally introduced as an approach to phonology, it has been extended to other linguistic levels.

Chapter 4 "Psycholinguistic Perspectives" by Martin Hilpert presents a survey of some of the most important psychological processes that are thought to underlie linguistic change. "Categorization," or the ability to view things as belonging to the same group, may – on the linguistic level – be behind the modal auxiliaries as a distinct category and the rise of "emerging modals." "Analogy" (also discussed in Chapter 2) is the capacity to perceive identity in relations; it is the type of rule generalization that leads irregular verbs to become regular in the history of English. "Automatization" occurs when an action (or a linguistic string) is repeated often enough that it is processed as a single unit; it may be partially responsible for the development of complex prepositions (discussed in Chapter 5). "Reanalysis" happens when a hearer analyzes a speaker's utterance as a structure that deviates from what the speaker intended; it accounts for the development of the perfect periphrasis from an originally possessive

construction. "Metaphor" establishes a conceptual relation between two distinct ideas from different domains, while "metonymy" involves mapping within a single domain between things that tend to be experienced together. Both processes are prominent in semantic change, accounting for meaning changes in the modal auxiliaries. "Inferencing," the ability to read intended meanings into utterances, has been seen as a primary motivation in grammaticalization, Finally, "priming," or the cognitive activation of one element facilitating the subsequent processing of a similar element, may create an opportunity for speakers to extend the ways in which certain constructions are used. The chapter ends with a discussion of ways in which such a psycholinguistic approach relates (or does not relate) to the generative approach and to other usage-based approaches, such as Construction Grammar.

After defining what constitutes a corpus, describing different types of corpora, and cataloguing available historical corpora of English, Chapter 5 "Corpus-based Approaches" by Marianne Hundt and Anne-Christine Gardner provides an introduction to corpus linguistic methodology (how to conduct, and analyze the results of, a corpus search). The chapter includes two detailed studies of corpus studies, one grammatical and one lexical, which provide comprehensive illustrations of how to conduct corpus-based studies of language variation and change. The first study involves changes in the use of the inflected subjunctive in three contexts: in *if*-clauses, following suasive verbs (the "mandative subjunctive"), and in conditional clauses. Using a variety of corpora (including the Brown family of corpora, ARCHER, and COHA), the searches show that American and British English are developing differently, with American English reviving the mandative subjunctive and preserving the subjunctive in *if*-clauses and conditionals at a higher rate than British English. The second study involves the competition between a number of deadjectival suffixes in Middle English, *-ity, -ness*, and *-hood.* Using data from LAEME and other Middle English corpora, the study shows the introduction of the borrowed suffix *-ity* and the competition between *-ness* and *-hood*, ultimately leading to the decline of the latter.

Chapter 6 "Approaches to Grammaticalization and Lexicalization" by Lieselotte Brems and Sebastian Hoffmann begins by surveying the (often divergent) conceptualizations of grammaticalization and lexicalization in the field. The chapter argues that definitions of grammaticalization have moved from more formal (morpho-syntactic) to more pragmatic-semantic, with increasing emphasis placed on context. However, questions of what to subsume under the lexicon have led to a lack of consensus on how to define lexicalization. After discussing the corpus methodology utilized in grammaticalization studies – and some of the difficulties of obtaining adequate historical data – the chapter presents three case studies. The development of connective *while* is seen as a paradigm case of grammaticalization which exemplifies Hopper's (1991) principles of decategorialization, divergence, layering, and persistence as well as many of the other principles proposed by Lehmann (1985). The case of *methinks* emphasizes the

blurred distinction between grammaticalization and lexicalization since the fusion of two words into one and demotivation of the original impersonal construction suggest the latter, while the rise of a (fairly) closed-class adverb marking evidentiality with discourse functions suggests the former. The third case study reviews work on complex prepositions such as *instead of* or *in terms of* as cases of grammaticalization but notes that problems in this analysis (e.g., the lack of crucial data for transitional periods, the low frequency of these items, and for many, such as *with respect to* or *in relation to*, no known change from concrete to abstract) may point to a different explanation altogether. The chapter ends with a discussion of degrammaticalization, admitting that its existence does not invalidate grammaticalization research.

Chapter 7 "Inferential-based Approaches" by María José López-Couso discusses how pragmatic inferences arising in the context of speaker–hearer negotiations play a fundamental role in language change, specifically through the processes of subjectification and intersubjectification. After presenting Traugott's "Invited Inferencing Theory of Semantic Change," the chapter defines subjectification and intersubjectification, seeing the rise of (inter)subjective meanings as the result of the conventionalization of pragmatic inferences. These processes provide predictable paths for some (but not all) types of semantic change and may be found in some (but not all) types of grammaticalization. Four case studies exemplifying (inter)subjectification are given. The rise of epistemic meanings from deontic meanings in the modal auxiliaries shows an increase in meanings expressing speaker assessment, attitude, or viewpoint. For example, *must* originates in a modal expressing 'ability' or 'permission' and over time acquires a meaning of 'obligation,' out of which arises the meaning of 'deontic necessity' and finally the fully epistemic meaning of 'logical deduction.' In their development from matrix clauses, the parentheticals *(it) seems like*, *(it) looks like*, and *(it) sounds like* undergo (inter)subjectification as they come to serve as mitigators or hedges on the speaker's commitment to the veracity of the clause to which they are adjoined as well as a means of attending to the interlocutor's negative face. The rise of condition, contrast, and causal meanings from original temporal meanings in the connective *while* is the result of invited inferences in the context of use, some of which have been conventionalized, and shows clear signs of (inter)subjectification. Finally, the interjection *gee!* – as well as undergoing euphemistic phonological change from the religious invocation *Jesus!* – involves conventionalization of the invited inference of subjective surprise or annoyance arising in its use outside its original contexts.

Chapter 8 "Discourse-based Approaches" by Claudia Claridge provides a means of entering language history through the door of discourse. The importance of vernacularization and standardization in shaping the language, as well as that of multilingualism and the effects of genre, are described. The chapter identifies three ways in which the role of discourse in language change can be investigated and presents a case study of each. First, in *discourse-oriented diachronic linguistics*, the focus is on what role discourse plays in the

distribution of features, as well as in the origin and diffusion of changes. As an example, the increase in three syntactic structures – *there* sentences, *it*-clefts, and certain passive constructions – can be seen as filling discourse needs for expressing topics and linking brought about by the loss of verb-second word order in early Middle English. Second, *diachronic(ally oriented) discourse analysis* focuses on changes in discourse types as changing entities over time. The differentiation of texts into more informational, elaborate, and abstract as opposed to more involved and situation-dependent based on the presence or absence of certain linguistic features underlies studies of stylistic shifts toward a more literate style during standardization and an opposing shift toward more oral or colloquial style in the modern period. Third, *historical discourse analysis* is concerned with the linguistic form of texts or genres, their communicative aims, and their embedding in a sociocultural context at a certain point in time. Here, a detailed study of the changing form of letters is provided.

Chapter 9 "Sociohistorical Approaches" by Peter J. Grund defines a field which applies the tools and concepts of sociolinguistics to historical study. Within this field a diachronic approach, which focuses on the connection between various social factors and change over time, may be distinguished from a synchronic approach, which focuses on the social dynamics of language use at one point in time. The chapter discusses the problems of acquiring appropriate source material for sociohistorical study (the problem of "bad data," a problem also taken up in Chapters 7 and 10). Sufficient social information – on the gender, age, social rank of the interlocutors or on their social networks, communities, or practices – may also be difficult to access, though it becomes more readily available in the modern period. Two detailed case studies show sociohistorical research at work. The first involves the distinction of *you* and *thou* in Early Modern English. As a variety of works on this topic have shown, the choice between these pronouns is dynamic and fluid and is determined by a range of social, situational, and textual factors. The second case study involves *h*-dropping; here, the evidence of spelling and contemporary commentary shows that, whatever its origin, this phenomenon became strongly stigmatized by the early nineteenth century.

After defining the field of historical pragmatics, its three subfields, and the range of pragmatic units studied, Chapter 10 "Historical Pragmatic Approaches" by Laurel J. Brinton turns to questions of methodology. Historical corpus pragmatics – facilitated now with the existence genre-specific corpora containing more "speech-based" data – is seen as the primary means of addressing the "bad data" problem. The chapter then moves on to two case studies. The study of speech acts may be undertaken via a form-to-function approach through the study of performative verbs, but this approach is seen as minimally fruitful. Speech acts – as communicative acts expressed linguistically by a wide variety of linguistic means – require a function-to-form approach which, however, causes difficulties for corpus approaches (which typically require explicit search terms). A number of studies that have attempted to overcome these limitations are

summarized. The study of comment clauses (parentheticals usually formed with first- or second-person pronouns and simple present-tense verbs) is much more amenable to a corpus-linguistic approach. The chapter provides a detailed examination of the development of *you see* comment clauses. Whether this development is best understood as grammaticalization, or lexicalization (as discussed in Chapter 6), or pragmaticalization is examined.

Chapter 11 "Perspectives on Standardization" by Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade traces the path from codification to prescriptivism, the last two stages of the standardization process (Milroy and Milroy 2012). Interest in codifying English arose in the mid-seventeenth century when John Dryden revised Shakespeare's plays. Calls for the establishment of a language academy for English to produce grammars and dictionaries were ultimately unsuccessful. Rather, in the early eighteenth century, grammars codifying the language came to be written by individuals, including clergymen, schoolmasters (and mistresses), scientists and mathematicians, wealthy merchants and even publishers themselves. Competition among publishers was often fierce. The chapter provides guidance on how to study these developments using primary sources. The publication of grammars led to a next step in the process, the birth of the English usage guide, both in Britain and America, in response to a need among the people for linguistic guidance in an era characterized by social and geographical mobility. The legacy of the Fowler brothers on usage guides is described in detail. The HUGE (*Hyper Usage Guide of English*) database is presented as a tool for studying the history of usage guides. Finally, a number of studies comparing actual usage (gleaned from corpus data) with the dictates of usage guides are summarized.

Chapter 12 "Perspectives on Geographical Variation" by Merja Stenroos begins with a "thought experiment" imagining how future generations might be able to reconstruct Present-day English were all sound recordings lost and only written evidence remained. The chapter then briefly discusses variation in Old, Middle, and (Early) Modern English, focusing on the difficulties faced by scholars, who must rely solely on the evidence of the written form (spelling) and manuscripts whose history may be unknown or complex. The methodology of historical dialectology developed out of the large-scale dialect surveys of Britain and America in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (using informants), and was adapted to historical periods (using textual materials). Here, two approaches are possible, one which localizes texts on the basis of their language, the other which focuses on texts for which the provenance is known (so-called "local documents"). Changes in historical dialectology reflect a merger with sociolinguistics – the recognition that geographical variation cannot be studied in isolation but must be considered along with a host of (non-linguistic) variables. The chapter than presents three case studies. The first involves the distribution of forms of the third-person plural pronoun, "they," in the ME Kentish dialect. Here, what looks like a geographical spread of the innovative form outwards from London must be seen instead as a diachronic spread over the course of the

fifteenth century. The second case study uses local documents to trace the decline of four characteristic Northern ME forms over the course of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (pointing to the effects of standardization). The third case study examines the merger of the [ʍ] and [w] (as in the homophonous pronunciation of *whales* and *Wales* for many speakers). The textual evidence (based on variant spellings including <w>, <wh>, and forms like <qu>) is shown to be complex but suggests that the sounds had indeed already merged in some varieties of Middle English.

Chapter 13 "Perspectives on Language Contact" by Edgar W. Schneider sets out to explain how our conception of English as a single coherent language has given rise to recognition of a variety of "World Englishes," each with its own distinctive properties. Moreover, even Standard English itself is a language that has emerged from contact processes to a large extent. After a discussion of language contact effects in general, where it is argued that extralinguistic history predominates over internal processes of change and that a correlation exists between degree of contact and the range of contact effects, the chapter examines five case studies which illustrate important and typical contact scenarios. The first looks at vernacular contact during the Old English period, placing emphasis on Celtic and Scandinavian influence, both of which had significant effects. The second examines French contact in the Middle Ages, suggesting that its impact may not actually have been as far-reaching as traditionally assumed, and Latin influence during the Renaissance. New Zealand English, the third case study, represents a case of settler English, which often results in mutual dialect accommodation but involves minimal (exclusively lexical) effect from the indigenous language(s). The fourth case study discusses issues surrounding the rise of Singapore Colloquial English, or "Singlish," a product of language contact, with transfer phenomena from some varieties of Chinese and from the other local Asian languages. The last case study examines language attitudes in diglossic Nigeria, where Nigerian Pidgin (a contact language illustrating the fuzziness between "creole" and "pidgin") and Standard English evoke competing ideologies.

Excursus on Periodization[6]

The periods of English used in this textbook are those most commonly used today (with some minor differences in dating):

Old English (OE)	*c.* 450–1100
Middle English (ME)	1100–1500
Early Modern English (EModE)	1500–1700
Late Modern English (LModE)	1700–1920
Present-day English (PDE)	1920–today

Like all such schemas, this one includes a high degree of idealization, suggesting absolute boundaries between periods (perhaps based on the presence or absence of a particular linguistic feature), a single linguistic system with long periods of stability and then sudden (cataclysmic) changes from one stage to another, and a straight linear progression form one stage to another. However, we know that the transition from one period to another is continuous and gradient and that languages always contain variation and are in flux, with different components changing at different rates and subject to contact effects yielding mixed languages.

Despite the current acceptance of this periodization (or something like it), you should be aware that such a classification has not always been the accepted one. Early scholars proposed quite different periods, with categories such as "Anglo-Saxon" and "Semi-Saxon" for the earliest periods, with "Old English" beginning only in 1250. The present differentiation into "Old," "Middle," and "Modern" can be traced back to various works by Henry Sweet (1874) and James Murray (1879) (see Curzan 2012: 1237–1244). Sweet initially distinguishes "Old English" as the period of full inflections, "Middle English" as the period of leveled inflections, and "Modern English" as the period of lost inflections, but both Sweet and Murray later add external events to the mix (the Norman Conquest, the Proclamation of 1250, the Tudor dynasty, Caxton and the printing press, the King James Bible, the English Revolution, and literary productions).

The most important question raised by periodization concerns the criteria to be used in making period divisions. It is not intuitively obvious whether periods should be differentiated by internal linguistic criteria (by the retention of archaic features or the development of innovative ones, or both), by extralinguistic (political/historical/cultural) criteria, or by some combination of these criteria. Relying exclusively on linguistic features risks the possibility of arriving at different divisions, depending on the features selected. Reliance on external features alone emphasizes the (linguistically) artificial nature of the proposed periods. Therefore, more recent views favor considering a mix of internal and external criteria.

Curzan concludes that "the now canonical historical periods have been, since their inception, scholarly fictions [but t]hey are important and useful scholarly fictions" (2012: 1243).

Notes

1. To name just a few histories of English referred to in this textbook, we can cite Fennell (2001), Crystal (2004), Algeo (2010), Baugh and Cable (2013), and Brinton and Arnovick (2016). Some of these have gone through numerous revisions and iterations – Baugh's history, for example, was originally published in 1935 and is still in print today! We must, of course, not neglect to mention the monumental *Cambridge History of the English Language* (Hogg [general ed.] 1992–2001).

   A few general historical linguistics textbooks cited in the following text include McMahon (1994), Crowley and Bowern (2010), Campbell (2013), and Miller (2015).

   But textbooks showing the intersection of these two disciplines are very limited (however, see Smith 1996 and Jucker 2000).

2. These include Hogg and Denison (2006), van Kemenade and Los (2006), Bergs and Brinton (2012a, 2 volumes), Mugglestone (2012), Nevalainen and Traugott (2012), and Kytö and Pahta (2016).
3. See, especially, the second volume of Bergs and Brinton (2012a).
4. For a longer discussion, see Bergs and Brinton (2012b) and the contributions to section XI "History of English historical linguistics" in Bergs and Brinton (2012a).
5. On the history of grammaticalization studies, see Hopper and Traugott (2003: 19–38).
6. This section is based on Curzan (2012); see her discussion for a much fuller treatment of problems of periodization.