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978-1-107-69393-7 - The English Language: A Historical Introduction: Second Edition

Charles Barber, Joan C. Beal and Philip A. Shaw

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University of Oxford*

In the past twenty-five years, linguistics – the systematic study of language – has expanded dramatically. Its findings are now of interest to psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, teachers, speech therapists and numerous others who have realized that language is of crucial importance in their life and work. But when newcomers try to discover more about the subject, a major problem faces them – the technical and often narrow nature of much writing about linguistics.

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# The English Language A Historical Introduction

## Second Edition

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## Preface to the second edition

In revising and updating Charles Barber's *The English Language: a Historical Introduction*, we have tried to interfere as little as possible with the overall tone and design of what has been a very popular and successful introductory textbook. Some revision was needed because of the advances of scholarship and opening up of new fields of research in the last decade of the twentieth century. This is particularly evident in chapters 9, 10 and 11: the study of Late Modern English gained momentum in the 1990s, the diversity of world Englishes has received much more attention in this period; and, of course, we are now in a position to review the twentieth century as a whole. In studying pre-modern languages, we are increasingly aware of the difficulties of simplistic equations of ethnicity with language, and there is a renewed emphasis on direct study of the epigraphic and manuscript records of early languages, along with increasing use of electronic corpora and computational approaches.

There has been some debate in recent years about whether it is appropriate to publish a 'history of English', given that there are many Englishes and many histories. In our experience of teaching an introductory module on this subject to first-year undergraduates, they need and appreciate a narrative which 'tells a story' simply and clearly without 'dumbing down' or glossing over difficulties. This is precisely what Barber's *The English Language: a Historical Introduction* has provided for the past fifteen years, and we hope that this new edition will continue to do so.

We are very grateful to a number of friends and colleagues who have provided information and advice. Alan M. Kent brought us

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up to date with the Cornish language situation, and Anthea Fraser Gupta provided a great deal of help with chapter 10. Mary Swan gave valuable advice on Old English. It goes without saying that any defects, errors or imperfections should be attributed to us.

Joan C. Beal and Philip A. Shaw  
Sheffield, 2009



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## Preface to the first edition

Enormous numbers of ordinary people are fascinated by language, and have views about it, often strong. This book aims to provide material which will interest these general readers, and give them things to think about. Its central theme is the history of the English language, beginning with our remote Indo-European ancestors and working its way from Anglo-Saxon times down to the present day. Use is made of numerous short passages of English, to illustrate the varieties of the language in different times and places.

Many other languages are also given some attention. In the course of its history, English has been influenced by numerous languages, especially by Latin, by French and by the Scandinavian languages. In more recent times, colonization and worldwide trade have led to contributions to its vocabulary by the speech of many countries – from Greenland to South Africa, from India to Mexico. Something is therefore said about such languages, but nevertheless the main theme of the book is the English language.

But while there is widespread interest in language, there is also a good deal of prejudice and ignorance about it. Much of the ignorance is due to an absence of technical knowledge about such things as phonology and grammar: it is difficult, for example, to write coherently about pronunciation without some grasp of phonetics. I try to overcome this difficulty by giving a clear and simple introduction to the basic concepts of linguistics, which are not really difficult to grasp. Books written for specialists in the field are often obscure to the general reader. On the other hand, many popular books about language avoid technicalities, thus limiting their range and usefulness. This book tries to bridge the gap, by building

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on a basic theoretical structure while remaining easily accessible to the ordinary reader. As for prejudices about language, many of these arise from an absence of historical knowledge, and I hope that this history of English will help to clear some of them away.

But at the same time, you should try to enjoy language. English is extremely rich and varied, and it can be great fun just to listen to the speech of different groups and different individuals – to the speech of Australians, Scots, Irishmen, West Indians, to the speech of different social classes and different occupations, and to the latest modish inventions of the young. I hope that this book will help you to have fun!

In preparing this book, I have been fortunate to have the constant help and advice of Dr Jean Aitchison, the General Editor of the series. Without her penetrating and invariably constructive suggestions it would have been a much poorer work. Other friends and colleagues who have given valuable help include Karin Barber, David Denison, Stanley Ellis, Joyce Hill, Colin Johnson, Göran Kjellmer, Rory McTurk, Peter Meredith, Karl Inge Sandred and Loreto Todd. To all, my grateful thanks. For the errors and shortcomings which remain, I alone am to be held responsible.

I am also grateful to the publishers concerned for permission to quote the following copyright material: a passage of Nigerian pidgin from Loreto Todd's *Modern Englishes* (1990), by permission of Blackwell Publishers; two passages from G. N. Garmonsway's edition of Ælfric's *Colloquy* (1947), by permission of Methuen & Co.; a passage from the translation by B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (1969), two passages from Trevisa's translation of Higden's *Polychronicon* as reproduced in Kenneth Sisam's *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (1921), and a passage from D. F. Bond's edition of *The Spectator* (1965), all by permission of Oxford University Press; and a passage from *The New English Bible* ©1970 by permission of Oxford and Cambridge University Presses. In some cases the version given in the text differs in small ways from that of the source, for example by the insertion of length-marks over vowels or the adoption of emendations.

Throughout the work, use is made of the traditional division of England into counties, before the local government changes of the 1970s (see the map at the beginning of the book). This can hardly

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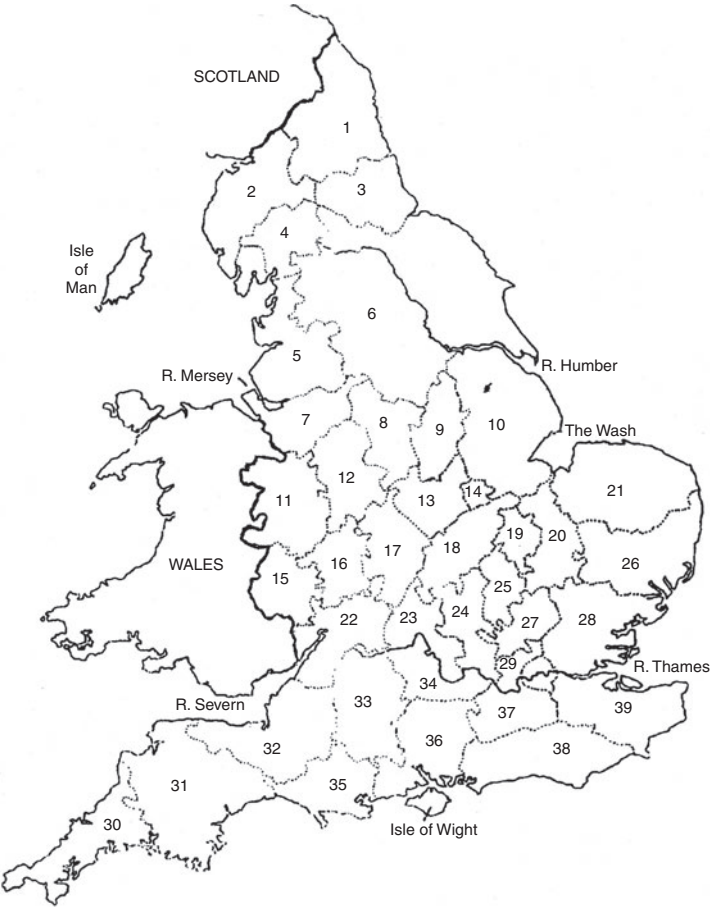
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be avoided, since the traditional county framework has been used by the majority of earlier works, including such major ones as the Survey of English Dialects and the publications of the English Place Name Society.

Charles Barber



The counties of England before 1974

- Bedfordshire 25. Berkshire 34. Buckinghamshire 24. Cambridgeshire 20.  
Cheshire 7. Cornwall 30. Cumberland 2. Derbyshire 8. Devon 31. Dorset 35.  
Durham 3. Essex 28. Gloucestershire 22. Hampshire 36. Herefordshire 15.  
Hertfordshire 27. Huntingdonshire 19. Kent 39. Lancashire 5.  
Leicestershire 13. Lincolnshire 10. Middlesex 29. Norfolk 21.  
Northamptonshire 18. Northumberland 1. Nottinghamshire 9. Oxfordshire  
23. Rutland 14. Shropshire 11. Somerset 32. Staffordshire 12. Suffolk 26.  
Surrey 37. Sussex 38. Warwickshire 17. Westmorland 4. Wiltshire 33.  
Worcestershire 16. Yorkshire 6