THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY
OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GENERAL EDITOR Richard M. Hogg

VOLUME III 1476 to 1776

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VOLUME III   *1476–1776*

EDITED BY

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

Although it is a topic of continuing debate, there can be little doubt that English is the most widely-spoken language in the world, with significant numbers of native speakers in almost every major region – only South America falling largely outside the net. In such a situation an understanding of the nature of English can be claimed unambiguously to be of world-wide importance.

Growing consciousness of such a role for English is one of the motivations behind this History. There are other motivations too. Specialist students have many major and detailed works of scholarship to which they can refer, for example Bruce Mitchell's *Old English Syntax*, or, from an earlier age, Karl Luick's *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*. Similarly, those who come new to the subject have both one-volume histories such as Barbara Strang's *History of English* and introductory textbooks to a single period, for example Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson's *A Guide to Old English*. But what is lacking is the intermediate work which can provide a solid discussion of the full range of the history of English both to the anglicist who does not specialise in the particular area to hand and to the general linguist who has no specialised knowledge of the history of English. This work attempts to remedy that lack. We hope that it will be of use to others too, whether they are interested in the history of English for its own sake, or for some specific purpose such as local history or the effects of colonisation.

Under the influence of the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, there has been, during this century, a persistent tendency to view the study of language as having two discrete parts: (i) synchronic, where a language is studied from the point of view of one moment in time; (ii) diachronic, where a language is studied from a historical perspective. It might therefore be supposed that this present work is purely diachronic. But this is not so.

General Editor's preface

One crucial principle which guides The Cambridge History of the English
Language is that synchrony and diachrony are intertwined, and that a sat-
isfactory understanding of English (or any other language) cannot be
achieved on the basis of one of these alone.

Consider, for example, the (synchronic) fact that English, when com-
pared with other languages, has some rather infrequent or unusual charac-
teristics. Thus, in the area of vocabulary, English has an exceptionally high
number of words borrowed from other languages (French, the
Scandinavian languages, American Indian languages, Italian, the languages
of northern India and so on); in syntax a common construction is the use
of *do* in forming questions (e.g. *Do you like cheese?*), a type of construction
not often found in other languages; in morphology English has relatively
few inflexions, at least compared with the majority of other European lan-
guages; in phonology the number of diphthongs as against the number of
vowels in English English is notably high. In other words, synchronically,
English can be seen to be in some respects rather unusual. But in order to
understand such facts we need to look at the history of the language; it is
often only there that an explanation can be found. And that is what this
work attempts to do.

This raises another issue. A quasi-Darwinian approach to English might
attempt to account for its widespread use by claiming that somehow
English is more suited, better adapted, to use as an international language
than others. But that is nonsense. English is no more fit than, say, Spanish
or Chinese. The reasons for the spread of English are political, cultural and
economic rather than linguistic. So too are the reasons for such linguistic
elements within English as the high number of borrowed words. This
History, therefore, is based as much upon political, cultural and economic
factors as linguistic ones, and it will be noted that the major historical divi-
sions between volumes are based upon the former type of events (the
Norman Conquest, the spread of printing, the declaration of independ-
ence by the U.S.A.), rather than the latter type.

As a rough generalisation, one can say that up to about the seventeenth
century the development of English tended to be centripetal, whereas
since then the development has tended to be centrifugal. The settlement
by the Anglo-Saxons resulted in a spread of dialect variation over the
country, but by the tenth century a variety of forces were combining to
promote the emergence of a standard form of the language. Such an evo-
lution was disrupted by the Norman Conquest, but with the development
of printing together with other more centralising tendencies, the emer-
gence of a standard form became once more, from the fifteenth century

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on, a major characteristic of the language. But processes of emigration and colonisation then gave rise to new regional varieties overseas, many of which have now achieved a high degree of linguistic independence, and some of which, especially American English, may even have a dominating influence on British English. The structure of this work is designed to reflect these different types of development. Whilst the first four volumes offer a reasonably straightforward chronological account, the later volumes are geographically based. This arrangement, we hope, allows scope for the proper treatment of diverse types of evolution and development. Even within the chronologically oriented volumes there are variations of structure, which are designed to reflect the changing relative importance of various linguistic features. Although all the chronological volumes have substantial chapters devoted to the central topics of semantics and vocabulary, syntax, and phonology and morphology, for other topics the space allotted in a particular volume is one which is appropriate to the importance of that topic during the relevant period, rather than some pre-defined calculation of relative importance. And within the geographically based volumes all these topics are potentially included with each geographical section, even if sometimes in a less formal way. Such a flexible and changing structure seems essential for any full treatment of the history of English.

One question that came up as this project began was the extent to which it might be possible or desirable to work within a single theoretical linguistic framework. It could well be argued that only a consensus within the linguistic community about preferred linguistic theories would enable a work such as this to be written. Certainly, it was immediately obvious when work for this History began, that it would be impossible to lay down a 'party line' on linguistic theory, and indeed, that such an approach would be undesirably restrictive. The solution reached was, I believe, more fruitful. Contributors have been chosen purely on the grounds of expertise and knowledge, and have been encouraged to write their contributions in the way they see most fitting, whilst at the same time taking full account of developments in linguistic theory. This has, of course, led to problems, notably with contrasting views of the same topic (and also because of the need to distinguish the ephemeral flight of theoretical fancy from genuine new insights into linguistic theory), but even in a work which is concerned to provide a unified approach (so that, for example, in most cases every contributor to a volume has read all the other contributions to that volume), such contrasts, and even contradictions, are stimulating and fruitful. Whilst this work aims to be authoritative, it is not prescriptive, and the

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final goal must be to stimulate interest in a subject in which much work remains to be done, both theoretically and empirically.

The task of editing this History has been, and still remains, a long and complex one. One of the greatest difficulties has been to co-ordinate the contributions of the many different writers. Sometimes, even, this has caused delays in volumes other than that where the delay arose. We have attempted to minimise the effects of such delays by various methods, and in particular by trying to keep bibliographies as up-to-date as possible. This should allow the interested reader to pursue very recent important work, including that by the contributors themselves, whilst maintaining the integrity of each volume.

As General Editor I owe a great debt to many friends and colleagues who have devoted much time and thought to how best this work might be approached and completed. Firstly, I should thank my fellow-editors: John Algeo, Norman Blake, Bob Burchfield, Roger Lass and Suzanne Romaine. They have been concerned as much with the History as a whole as with their individual volumes. Secondly, there are those fellow linguists, some contributors, some not, who have so generously given their time and made many valuable suggestions: John Anderson, Cecily Clark, Frans van Coetsem, Fran Colman, David Denison, Ed Finegan, Olga Fischer, Jacek Fisiak, Malcolm Godden, Angus McIntosh, Lesley Milroy, Donka Minkova, Matti Rissanen, Michael Samuels, Bob Stockwell, Tom Toon, Elizabeth Traugott, Peter Trudgill, Nigel Vincent, Anthony Warner, Simone Wyss. One occasion stands out especially: the organisers of the Fourth International Conference on English Historical Linguistics, held at Amsterdam in 1985, kindly allowed us to hold a seminar on the project as it was just beginning. For their generosity, which allowed us to hear a great many views and exchange opinions with colleagues one rarely meets face-to-face, I must thank Roger Eaton, Olga Fischer, Willem Koopman and Frederike van der Leek.

The preface to the earlier volumes acknowledged the considerable debt which I owed to my editors at Cambridge University Press, firstly, Penny Carter, and subsequently Marion Smith. Since then the History has seen two further editors, firstly Judith Ayling and now Kate Brett. Both have stepped into this demanding role with considerable aplomb, and the project has been extremely fortunate in obtaining their help and advice. I am very grateful to both.

Richard M. Hogg

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All of us, authors and editor, are indebted to the many colleagues who read and commented on chapters; to each other, to other series editors, and various people outside our little world who read chapters, or parts of chapters, and commented generously. And not least, our thanks to three generations of Cambridge University Press editors, Penny Carter, Judith Ayling and Kate Brett. It has been a privilege and a pleasure for all of us to work with the Press.

Roger Lass

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Abbreviations

acc.	accusative
AF	Anglo-French
CED	*Chronological English Dictionary*
CHEL	*The Cambridge History of the English Language*
cl.	class
dat.	dative
EETS es	Early English Text Society, extra series
EETS os	Early English Text Society, old series
EL	English Linguistics 1500–1800, Alston (1970. Menston: Scolar Press)
EModE	Early Modern English
F	French
fem.	feminine
gen.	genitive
Gk	Greek
GSR	Germanic Stress Rule
GVS	Great Vowel Shift
IE	Indo-European
imp.	imperative
ind.	indicative
Lat.	Latin
masc.	masculine
ME	Middle English
MEG	*Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*
N	northern; noun; number
neut.	neuter
nom.	nominative
NP	noun phrase
num.	number
obl.	oblique
OE	Old English
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
OF	Old French

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List of abbreviations and symbols

OFris.	Old Frisian
OHG	Old High German
OS	Old Saxon
past pple	past participle
PDE	Present-Day English
pers.	person
pl.	plural
pres.	present
RP	(Standard English) Received Pronunciation
RSR	Romance Stress Rule
S	strong
sing.	singular
SOED	*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*
subj.	subjunctive
v	verb
W	weak

Symbols

>	becomes
<	is derived from
σ	syllable
//	phonemic representation
[ ]	phonetic representation
{ }	morphemic representation
< >	graphemic representation