

The Emergence and Development of English

An Introduction

This textbook provides a step-by-step introduction to the history of the English language (HEL), offering a fresh perspective on the process of language change. Aimed at undergraduate students, *The Emergence and Development of English* is accessibly written, and contains a wealth of pedagogical tools, including chapter openers, key terms, chapter summaries, end-of-chapter exercises, and suggestions for further reading.

A central theme of the book is “emergence,” the key term from the study of complex systems, which describes how massive numbers of random verbal interactions give rise to regularities that “emerge” without specific causes. This unique approach encourages readers to incorporate complex systems into the mainstream coverage of HEL. Additional resources include examples of language from each period as well as appendices on terminology, online resources, and audio samples.

BILL KRETZSCHMAR is the Harry and Jane Willson Professor in Humanities at the University of Georgia, and also has an appointment at the University of Oulu (Finland). He is Editor of the American Linguistic Atlas Project, the oldest and largest national research project surveying how people speak differently across the country, and has provided American pronunciations for the online *Oxford English Dictionary* and other dictionaries in the Oxford US Dictionaries program. In 2014 he held an ACLS Digital Innovation fellowship, during which he developed a computer simulation to model language change. Recent works include the *Routledge Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English* (2017) with Clive Upton, and *Exploring Linguistic Science: Language Use, Complexity, and Interaction* (2018) with Allison Burkette.

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Acknowledgments

This book has emerged from my own attempts over recent years to integrate complex systems in the History of the English Language (HEL) course I teach at my university. While I admire the rigorous analysis of traditional historical linguistics, which I learned at the hands of people like Sherman Kuhn and Fred Robinson, I have thought that it was time for a change in how we present HEL to our students today. We should not abandon traditional ideas and methods, but we need to explain our findings more comprehensively, more scientifically, for students who need information about English today. Some students will be teachers, some researchers in English language or literature, some in all kinds of careers – HEL regularly attracts all kinds of students. My first acknowledgment is to my students, who have put up with my efforts to teach them in a different way and who have made many suggestions for how to do it better.

Next, I am grateful to many anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press who offered a great many excellent suggestions. Of course, any problems that remain in the book are not their responsibility but my own. This book is supposed to be the “short” book on HEL, so it cannot compete in terms of the details of HEL with the many larger books in the area. And every teacher of HEL will have special interests not treated here. The CUP readers made me very aware of these facts, and I hope that I have found a middle path between the need for a brief treatment of HEL and the readers’ expectations based on larger books.

Finally, I would like to thank my many friends from SHEL (the Studies in the History of the English Language conference), who have shown me a great deal about the English language that has shaped my views, among them the late Bob Stockwell and Dick Bailey, and Donka Minkova, Michael Adams, Anne Curzan, and Laura Wright.