

The Cambridge History of the
English Language

剑桥英语史

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(1776—1997)

Edited by Suzanne Romaine

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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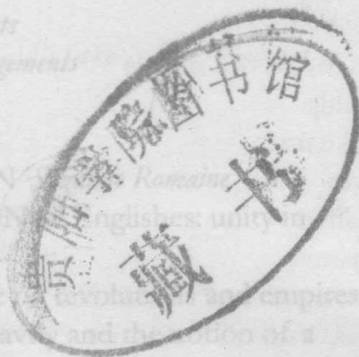
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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

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 the 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. One crucial principle which guides *The Cambridge History of the English*

Language is that synchrony and diachrony are intertwined, and that a satisfactory 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 compared with other languages, has some rather infrequent or unusual characteristics. 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 languages; in phonology the number of diphthongs as against the number of vowels in 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 divisions between volumes are based upon the former type of events (the Norman Conquest, the spread of printing, the declaration of independence by the USA), 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 evolution was disrupted by the Norman Conquest, but with the development of printing together with other more centralising tendencies, the emergence of a standard form became once more, from the fifteenth century 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 one of which, namely 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 within 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 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. As General Editor I owe a great debt to my 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 of 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 many views and exchange opinions with colleagues one rarely meets face-to-face, I must thank Roger Eaton, Olga Fischer, Willem Koopman and Federike van der Leek.

With a work so complex as this, an editor is faced with a wide variety of problems and difficulties. It has been, therefore, a continual comfort and solace to know that Penny Carter of Cambridge University Press has always been there to provide advice and solutions on every occasion. Without her knowledge and experience, encouragement and good humour, this work would have been both poorer and later. After the work for Volume I was virtually complete, Marion Smith took over as publishing editor, and I am grateful to her too, not merely for ensuring such a smooth change-over, but for her bravery when faced with the mountain of paper from which this series has emerged.

Richard M. Hogg

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Given the long time this volume was in preparation, it has passed through the hands of more than a few editors at Cambridge University Press. I would like to thank, in particular, Penny Carter, Judith Ayling and Kate Brett for their help during their respective tenures as editor in charge of the Cambridge History of the English Language project. I am grateful to Richard Hogg for comments on my introduction.

Suzanne Romaine

Oxford, 1997

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Richard M. Hogg

ABBREVIATIONS

~	contrasts with/	ME	Middle English
	corresponds to	ModE	Modern English
ø	zero form or site of gap	NP	noun phrase
AmerE	American English	OE	Old English
AP	adjective phrase	<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
ARCHER	A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers	p.c.	personal communication
BrE	British English	PDE	Present-Day English
<i>CHEL</i>	<i>Cambridge History of the English Language</i>	PL	plural
CV	Cardinal Vowel	PP	prepositional phrase
e	early	ppl	participle
<i>EPD</i>	<i>English Pronouncing Dictionary</i>	PRES	present tense
Gen.Am.	General American	SAI	subject-auxiliary inversion
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet	SG	singular
l	late	1, 2, 3	first, second third person
Lat.	Latin	s.v.	<i>sub voce</i> , <i>sub verbo</i> 'under the/ that word'
<i>LPD</i>	<i>Longman Pronunciation Dictionary</i>	VP	verb phrase
		WWP	Women Writers Project, Brown University

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I INTRODUCTION

Suzanne Romaine

1.1 From Old English to new Englishes: unity in diversity?

The final decades of the eighteenth century provide the starting point for this volume – a time when arguably less was happening to shape the **structure** of the English language than to shape **attitudes** towards it in a social climate that became increasingly prescriptive. Baugh and Cable (1993) appropriately entitle their chapter on the period from 1650 to 1800 ‘The Appeal to Authority’, characterising the intellectual spirit of the age as one seeking order and stability, both political and linguistic. This so-called Augustan Age was one of refinement. After two centuries of effort to remedy the perceived inadequacies of English to enable it to meet a continually expanding range of functions, the eighteenth century was a time for putting the final touches on it, to fix things once and for all. In the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth the success of England as an imperial nation combined with romantic ideas about language being the expression of a people’s genius would engender a triumphalist and patriotic attitude to English. The language was now not so much to be improved but preserved as a great national monument and defended from threat in a battle over whose norms would prevail. As the demographic shift in the English-speaking population moved away from Britain, the twentieth would be declared the American century, and the Empire would strike back.

The most radical changes to English grammar had already taken place over the roughly one thousand years preceding the starting year of this volume. Certainly MacMahon’s chapter makes clear how in our own period the phonology of English underwent nothing like the series of changes called the Great Vowel Shift (see Lass, volume III). It is noteworthy too that changes affecting morphology are insignificant by comparison with those of previous periods. Hence, there is no separate chapter devoted to them

here. English is currently undergoing the final stages of changes begun centuries earlier, e.g. the loss of case marking in *wh*-pronouns. The use of *who* in the objective case occurs sporadically even as early as the sixteenth century among writers such as Marlowe. Even though *who* has become increasingly accepted in written English and Sapir (1921: 167) predicted the demise of *whom* within a couple of hundred years, it is still with us.

The immediately preceding period dealt with in Volume III (1476–1776) of this series, the Early Modern Period, has often been described as the formative period in the history of Modern Standard English. By the end of the seventeenth century what we might call the present-day ‘core’ grammar of Standard English was already firmly established. As pointed out by Denison in his chapter on syntax, relatively few categorical innovations or losses occurred. The syntactic changes during the period covered in this volume have been mainly statistical in nature, with certain construction types becoming more frequent. The continuing expansion of the progressive, in particular, its use in passives such as *the house is being built*, is a product of the late eighteenth century. By the time it appeared, the prescriptive spirit was so well established that it was condemned as an inelegant neologism and consciously avoided by many writers. As Baugh and Cable (1993: 287–8) note, the origin of the construction can be traced back to the latter part of the eighteenth century, but its establishment and ultimate acceptance required the better part of a century. The so-called *get* passive, e.g. *the vase got broken*, is also largely a nineteenth-century development.

Other changes such as the spread and regularization of *do* support began in the thirteenth century and were more or less complete in the nineteenth. Although *do* coexisted with the simple verb forms in negative statements from the early ninth century, obligatoriness was not complete until the nineteenth. The increasing use of *do* periphrasis coincides with the fixing of SVO word order. Not surprisingly, *do* is first widely used in interrogatives, where the word order is disrupted, and then later spread to negatives.

The part of the language probably most affected by change in our period is its vocabulary. Baugh & Cable (1993: 292) draw our attention, in particular, to the great increase in scientific vocabulary and the large number of new terms in common use among modern English speakers, e.g. *bronchitis*, *cholesterol*, *relativity*, *quark*, etc. Under James Murray’s editorship of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), scientific and technical vocabulary fell outside the range of ‘common words’ to which the dictionary was committed (see 1.3.1). Murray, for instance, rejected *appendicitis* as too technical only to have it quickly become part of common usage after the coronation