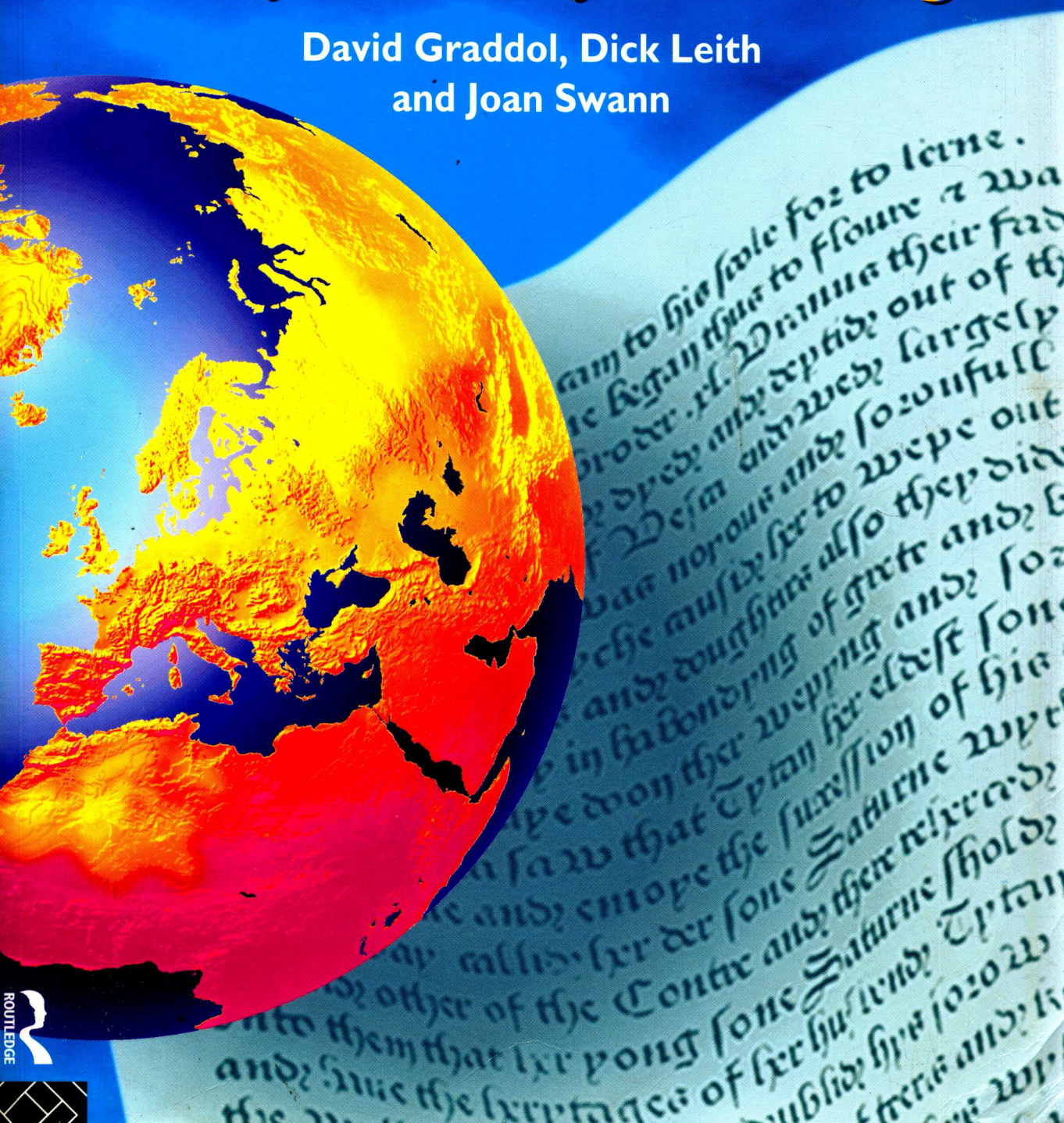# English

history, diversity and change
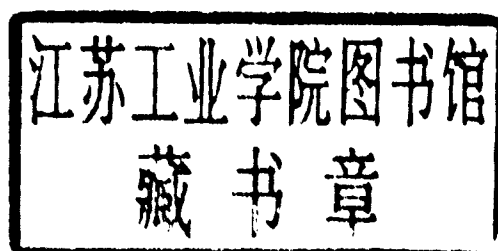
**David Graddol, Dick Leith
and Joan Swann**

English
history, diversity and change

Edited by
David Graddol, Dick Leith
and Joan Swann

The Open
University

ROUTLEDGE

LONDON AND NEW YORK

A representation of English in the world

This map distinguishes between three different types of English-speaking country: those in which English is used predominantly as a 'mother tongue'; those in which it is a second language with official or semi-official status; and those in which mother-tongue use co-exists with one or more additional languages. The map provides a useful context for discussion in the chapters that follow, but the information needs to be interpreted with caution: for instance, countries categorized as 'mother-tongue' will also have speakers of additional languages. You will see from Chapter 1 that categorizing different groups of speakers, or different English-speaking contexts, is by no means straightforward.

(Adapted from Crystal, 1988, pp. 8–9)

English

history, diversity and change

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Joan Swann

This book, as the title suggests, is about history, diversity and change in English. We examine the development of English from the Old English period through to the present day, the characteristics and use of different contemporary varieties, and what the language means to its speakers in different parts of the world.

- Chapter 1 takes diversity as its main theme, and raises issues and questions that recur in later chapters. How do varieties of English differ from one another? How is the language used in different parts of the world? Is diversity increasing, and do we need an international standard English?

- Chapter 2 traces the visual history of English from early runic engravings through medieval illustrated manuscripts to contemporary texts.

- Chapter 3 provides an outline history of the English language within England up to the end of the Middle Ages. It raises some of the problems involved in writing such a history; for instance, what constitutes evidence and how this has been interpreted by different authorities.

- Chapter 4 begins with the introduction of printing in England in 1476. It examines processes of linguistic standardization as well as the cultural debates that surrounded English during its development as a 'national' language.

- Chapter 5 traces the spread of English throughout the British Isles and in various parts of the world in relation to colonialism. It explores the accounts that have been given of this spread, and the subsequent development of new varieties of English.

- Chapter 6 examines some of the grammatical characteristics of varieties of English. In what ways does English grammar vary? What are the sources of contemporary variation? Are different varieties actually as distinct as their names suggest?

- Chapter 7 asks what distinguishes one English accent from another; it looks at patterns of variation and change in English, and how these have been studied by linguists; and it considers the (often ambivalent) social meanings different accents convey.

- Chapter 8 turns to the language use of individual speakers: how speakers routinely switch between different varieties of English, or between English and other languages, to represent different aspects of their identity.

- Chapter 9 is the only chapter not written by a linguist. It examines aspects of diversity and change from a philosophical perspective. What counts as 'good' and 'bad' English? Is it reasonable to worry about 'political correctness'? Do notions of correct and incorrect English still have any validity?

Throughout the book we are concerned with processes of variation and change, and with how these have been represented by linguists in order to construct certain stories of English. We have tried to set linguistic processes and events, and their representations, within wider intellectual, social, political and cultural contexts.

The book is designed for readers who have an interest in English, but who do not necessarily have any detailed knowledge of linguistics or other forms of language study. It can be read independently but it is also the first in a series of

four books (listed on the back cover) designed for an Open University under-graduate course: U210 *The English language: past, present and future.* We occasion-ally refer interested readers to these books, as well as *Describing Language* (Graddol et al., 1994), for further discussion of topics touched on here.

English: history, diversity and change has been prepared mostly by linguists who live and work in Britain. This inevitably affects the research traditions and ideas we draw on, in addition to our own experiences of, and familiarity with, different varieties of English. We have, however, tried to ensure that the chapters are accessible to readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. We have selected examples of research and other evidence from different contexts, per-spectives and experiences of English. In particular, the readings that accompany each chapter are wide-ranging. They include accounts of research, reviews of certain topics, arguments for or against certain positions; some are extracts from existing books or articles, others have been specially commissioned for this book. They are presented not as definitive statements on an issue, but as texts that are open to critical evaluation – as of course are the main chapter texts themselves.

Features of each chapter include:

- *activities*: these provide guidance on the readings or suggestions for tasks to stimulate further understanding or analysis of the material;
- *boxed text*: boxes contain illustrative material or definitions or alternative viewpoints;
- *marginal notes*: these usually refer the reader to further discussion in other parts of the book, or to other books in the series, or to *Describing Language*; where necessary, they are also added to explain conventions used in the text;
- *key terms*: key terms in each chapter are set in bold type at the point where they are explained; the terms also appear in bold in the index so that they are easy to find in the chapters.

A note on the description of English sounds

Several chapters in this book refer to the sounds that characterize English accents. We use special sets of symbols, adapted from the Roman alphabet, to represent these sounds systematically in writing:

- *Phonemic* symbols represent the distinctive sounds (or phonemes) of English accents. These are placed between slashes: for instance, /kat/ represents the three phonemes in the word *cat.*

  The term 'phoneme' is defined and explained more fully in Chapter 2. Chapter 7 compares the phoneme systems of different English accents.

- The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) contains a much larger set of *phonetic* symbols; these are used to provide an accurate transcription of speech sounds (from potentially any language) and they allow comparison of subtle differences in pronunciation between different accents or different speakers. IPA symbols are placed between square brackets. We use some phonetic transcription in this book, but we try to keep this to a minimum and to explain different symbols as they arise. For readers with some familiarity with the IPA but who wish to check their understanding of particular symbols we reproduce part of the IPA consonant and vowel charts on page 386. Graddol et al. (1994) provide one source of further information on pho-nemic and phonetic transcription.

1 ENGLISH VOICES

Joan Swann

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since you are reading this book, the chances are that you are quite fluent in English, though it may not be the only language you speak and it may not be your first language. Different readers among you will speak, or be familiar with, different varieties of English; you will have different experiences of using English, and maybe different feelings about the language.

Such diversity is a major theme running through this chapter, and in fact through the whole of this book. Here, I look at some of the ways the English language varies and changes, at the diversity of speakers of English, and at how English is used and what it means to its speakers in different parts of the world.

Diversity and change have often been seen as problems in English as in other languages. I look also then at the debate surrounding an appeal by a prominent linguist for a single standard variety of English to be used throughout the international community.

1.2 WHAT COUNTS AS ENGLISH?

Only a few centuries ago, the English language consisted of a collection of dialects spoken mainly by monolinguals and only within the shores of a small island. Now it includes such typologically distinct varieties as pidgins and creoles, 'new' Englishes, and a range of differing standard and nonstandard varieties that are spoken on a regular basis in more than 60 different countries around the world …

(Cheshire, 1991, p. 1)

… our *Grammar* aims at … comprehensiveness and depth in treating English irrespective of frontiers: our field is no less than the grammar of educated English current in the second half of the twentieth century in the world's major English-speaking communities. Only where a feature belongs specifically to British usage or American usage, to informal conversation or to the dignity of formal writing, are 'labels' introduced in the description to show that we are no longer discussing the 'common core' of educated English.

(Quirk et al., 1972, p. v)

The language I speak
  becomes mine
Its distortions, its queernesses
  all mine, mine alone.
It is half English, half Indian
  funny perhaps, but it is honest
It is human as I am human
  Don't you see?

(Das, cited in Verma, 1982, p. 178)

If you consult a descriptive grammar of English, such as the famous grammar quoted above produced by Randolph Quirk and his colleagues, this may give the impression that English is relatively fixed, something unified and discrete. This grammar, the first in a series produced by Quirk et al., emphasizes commonality (a 'common core') and it plays down difference (the different forms that English takes, and the different ways it is used in different English-speaking countries). This is hardly surprising because such grammars provide a model that can be consulted, that will tell the reader what structures are possible in English and what are not possible. In this case, although the grammar is meant to cover 'the world's major English-speaking communities' it focuses, in practice, on 'educated' British and American usage. A later grammar in the series, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et al., 1985), discusses different varieties of English but it essentially deals with 'the common core that is shared by standard British English and standard American English' (p. 33). Such usage has frequently been taken as a model for teaching and learning. If you learned English in school as a foreign language, this is the kind of model you will probably have encountered.

Jenny Cheshire, on the other hand, is a sociolinguist, interested in the way language varies and changes. Her book, *English around the World* from which the first quotation is taken, contains chapters on the types of English used in several parts of the world (with one chapter on 'The UK and the USA'). The chapters are concerned with differences in the *forms* of English (pronunciation, as well as the grammar that mainly concerns Quirk et al.). There is also discussion of how English is used and what it means to its speakers in different contexts: factors that might lead speakers to *wish* to establish their own variety as distinct from others. So in this case it's not surprising that Cheshire emphasizes the diversity of English rather than seeking a 'common core'.

The meanings of English – in this case one variety of English – are also emphasized in the third quotation from the poem 'Summer in Calcutta'.

I want to look further at change and diversity below. I return to the notion of a 'common core' towards the end of the chapter.

❖   ❖   ❖   ❖   ❖

Activity 1.1   Old English   *(Allow about 5 minutes)*

Below is an extract from the glossary of an Old English reader (*Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*), a collection of texts designed for students. Which words do you recognize? How many seem to be in current use, in some form or other?

fremde, fremþe   strange, foreign; foreigner

fremi(g)an   advance, benefit

*(ge)***fremman**   do, commit, effect, bring about

fremsumness   benefit

fremu   benefit, profit, good action

frēo(h)   free

frēod   peace (poetic usage)

frēolic   noble (poetic usage)

frēols-brice   non-observance of church festivals

frēols-tīd   festival

frēond   friend, lover

frēondlēas   friendless

frēondlīce   in a friendly manner

frēondscīpe   friendship
frēorig cold   (poetic usage)
frēo-riht   rights of freemen
frēot   freedom [the term **frēodom** is also found]
(Adapted from Whitelock, 1967, p. 329)

Comment

It may be that all of these words look rather strange! On the other hand, there is some similarity between *frēo* and *free*, *frēodom* and *freedom*; and between *frēond* and *friend*, *frēondlēas* and *friendless*, *frēondscipe* and *friendship*. The spellings have changed, but the Old English and modern words do look as though they may be related. Old English formed many compound words and some suffixes (such as *-lēas*) have survived as productive forms in modern English

In *frēo-riht*, *riht* also looks similar to modern *right*; in *frēols-tīd*, compare *-tīd* to the slightly old-fashioned but still recognizable *-tide* found in compounds such as *Yuletide* and *eventide* (*tīd* actually means 'time' in Old English). In *frēols-brice*, if we allow for a spelling change the similarity between *brice* and modern *breach* becomes clearer. The word *frēorig* looks unfamiliar, but compare modern *freeze*. *Fremman* is related to the modern word *frame* which can be used in a variety of senses in contemporary English.

If you know German you may be struck by the similarity between *fremde* and German *fremd*. Many other words also resemble modern German: English is termed a 'Germanic' language, related to languages such as Dutch as well as German, but the relationship looks less clear in modern English than in Old English (the changes to the language that have brought this about are discussed in Chapter 3). In fact, *fremd* (or *frem, fremt, fremmit*) still exists in some varieties of Scots.

❖   ❖   ❖   ❖   ❖

Old English is the name normally given to the English spoken in England between the fifth and twelfth centuries. It differs from modern English in terms of its vocabulary, word meaning and spelling (it also contains letters, such as þ in *frempe*, that are not found in modern English). It also differs in other ways that are not so apparent from the reader extract – such as its pronunciation and grammar, and the ways it was used. The end result is that modern English now looks and sounds strikingly different. It is unlikely that a contemporary speaker and a speaker of Old English would be able to understand one another. This raises the question of whether Old English and modern English actually count as the same language. How different do language varieties have to become before we recognize them as distinct? David Crystal (1988) notes that the term 'Anglo-Saxon' has been used to refer to Old English, emphasizing its distinctiveness from contemporary English. And the very existence of a reader, designed for students learning the language, suggests that it has now become like a foreign language. 'Old English', by contrast, emphasizes continuity: a sense of continuing development from Old, through Middle, to modern English. You can get some sense of this development, in terms of word usage, if you look at a dictionary entry for *free* which gives examples of the use of this word at different points in its history (Figure 1.1).

Old English is sometimes felt to constitute the 'essence' of English. In *The Story of English*, for instance, McCrum et al. write:

Anyone who speaks or writes English in the late twentieth century is using accents, words and grammar which, with several dramatic modifications,

go all the way back to the Old English of the Anglo Saxons. There is an unbroken continuity from *here* to *there* (both Old English words). When, in 1940, Winston Churchill wished to appeal to the hearts and minds of the English-speaking people it is probably no accident that he did so with the plain bareness for which Old English is noted: 'We shall fight on the beaches; we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.' In this celebrated passage, only *surrender* is foreign – Norman French.

(McCrum et al., 1992, p. 58)

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free /friː/ *a., n., & adv.* [OE *frēo* = OFris., OS, OHG *frī* (Du. *vrij*, G *frei*), Goth. *freis*, f. Gmc f. IE, repr. by Skt *priya* dear, f. base meaning 'to love'.] **A** *adj.* **I 1** Of a person: not or no longer in bondage, servitude, or subjection to another, having personal rights and social and political liberty as a member of a society or State. OE. †**2** Noble, honourable, of gentle birth and breeding. Also, (of character and conduct) noble, honourable, generous, magnanimous. OE–M17. **3** Of a State, its citizens, and institutions: enjoying national and civil liberty, not subject to foreign domination or despotic or tyrannous government. ME. **b** *spec.* Designating (freq. w. cap. initial) a political or racial group actively opposed to an invading, occupying, or hostile power; *esp.* denoting those who continued resistance to Germany in the war of 1939-45 after the capitulation of their respective countries. M20.
1 B. RUSSELL Sympathy not only for free Greeks, but for barbarians and slaves. *Country Life* She wanted to be an artist and a free woman, refusing to be called 'Mrs'. *fig.*: J. DENHAM Who .. free from Conscience, is a slave to Fame. **2** SHAKES. *Oth.* I would not have your free and noble nature Out of self-bounty be abus'd. MILTON Thou Goddess fair and free. **3** SHAKES. *Cymb.* Till the injurious Romans did extort This tribute from us, we were free. S. SMILES Holland .. became the chief European centre of free thought, free religion, and free industry. **b** C. GRAVES The scattered remnants of the Free French, Free Dutch, Free Polish, and Free Norwegian fleets.
II 4 Acting from one's own will or choice and not compelled or constrained; determining one's own action or choice without outside motivation. OE. **5** Ready to do or grant something; acting willingly or spontaneously; (of an act) done of one's own accord; (of an offer or agreement) readily given or made, made with good will. ME. **b** Of a horse: ready to go, willing. L15. **c** Ready *to do* something; eager, willing, prompt. *obs. exc.* in *free to confess* below, where the adj. is now understood as sense 16b. M17. **6** Ready to give, liberal, lavish. Foll. by *of.* ME. **b** (Of a gift) given out of liberality or generosity, not in return or requital for something; unrequested, unsolicited. LME. **7** (Of speech) characterized by liberty in the expression of sentiments or opinions; uttered or expressed without reserve; plain-spoken. ME. **b** Not observing due bounds, licentious, loose. M19. **8** Acting without restriction or limitation; allowing oneself ample scope *in* doing something. L16. **b** Unstinted as to supply or quantity; coming forth in profusion; administered without stint; abundant, copious. M17. **9** Frank and open in conversation or dealings; ingenuous, unreserved. Also, forward, familiar, impudent. M17.
4 E. A. FREEMAN The choice of the electors would

be perfectly free. **5c** J. CLARE Mark .. his generous mind; How free he is to push about his beer. **6** S. BUTLER For Saints themselves will sometimes be Of Gifts that cost them nothing, free. **7** H. NELSON Gave Lord Hood my free opinion that 800 troops .. would take Bastia. L. J. JENNINGS Men used rather free expressions to each other .. in the days of the Regency. **b** TENNYSON Earl Limours Drank till he jested with all ease, and told Free tales. **8** POPE How free the present age is in laying taxes on the next. H. BRACKEN He gives us a Caution not to be too free with such Preparations. G. BERKELEY The free use of strong fermented liquors. **b** S. BARING-GOULD A monthly rose that was a free bloomer. **9** DEFOE I pressed him to be free and plain with me. R. B. SHERIDAN Not so free, fellow!
III 10a Usu. foll. by *from*, *of*: released or exempt from, not liable to (a rule, penalty, or payment). OE. **b** Exempt from, having immunity from, not subject to (something regarded as hurtful or undesirable). ME. **11** Exempt from, or not subject to, some particular jurisdiction or lordship. Also, possessed of particular rights and privileges. ME. **12** Of real property: held without obligation on rent or service, freehold. *arch.* ME. **13** Given or provided without charge or payment, gratuitous. Also, admitted, carried, or placed without charge or payment. ME. **14** Invested with the rights or immunities of or *of*, admitted to the privileges of . or *of* (a chartered company, corporation, city, or the like). LME. **b** Allowed the use or enjoyment *of* (a place etc.). L17. **15** Exempt from restrictions with regard to trade; not subject to tax, toll, or duty; allowed to trade in any market. M17.
10a LD MACAULAY Free from all the ordinary rules of morality. **b** J. FERRIAR Our own writers are not free from this error. N. LINDLEY The point .. appears to me .. free from any real difficulty. **13** DRYDEN Lazy Drones, without their Share of Pain, In winter Quarters free, devour the Gain. **14** J. LOCKE Is a Man under the Law of England? What made him Free of that Law? J. ENTICK The shop-keepers are obliged to be free of the city. **b** KEATS And I was free of haunts umbrageous.
IV 16 Not impeded, restrained, or restricted in actions, activity, or movement; unhampered, unfettered. ME. **b** At liberty, allowed, or permitted *to do* something. LME. **c** Unbiased, open-minded. Long *rare* or *obs.* M17. **17** Clear of obstruction; not blocked; open, unobstructed. ME. **18** Clear of something regarded as objectionable or an encumbrance. Foll. by *of, from.* ME. **19** Guiltless, innocent, acquitted. Now *rare* or *obs.* ME. **20** At liberty; able to move about or range at will; *esp.* not kept in confinement or custody, released from confinement or imprisonment; liberated. LME. **21** Of a material: yielding easily to operation; easily worked; loose and soft in structure. E16. **b**

Of wood: without knots. L17. **22** Not fixed, fastened, or held in one particular place. L16. **23** Released from ties, obligations, and restraints. L16. **b** Released or exempt from work or duty; clear of engagements; (of a room, table, etc.) not occupied or in use. E17. **24** Allowable or allowed (*to* or *for* a person *to do* something); open or permitted *to. arch.* L16. **b** *Ling.* Designating a form that can occur in isolation. E20. **c** *Phonet.* Of a vowel: occurring in a syllable not ended by a consonant. M20. **25** Disengaged from contact or connection with some other body or surface; relieved from the pressure of an adjacent or superincumbent body. E18. **26** Of a literary or artistic style: not observing strict laws of form. Of a translation: not adhering strictly to the original, not literal. E19. **27** *Chem.* Not combined. E19. **28** *Physics.* Of a source of power: disengaged, available to do work. E19. **29** *Naut.* Of the wind: not adverse. M19.
16 A. RADCLIFFE Her dress .. was loosened for the purpose of freer respiration. B. JOWETT The various passions are allowed to have free play. **b** DICKENS She was free to come and go. **17** J. NARBOROUGH They did meet with no Ice, but a free and open Sea. SIR W. SCOTT And quickly make the entrance free. **18** R. HOLME A Woman all Hairy, no part of her Face free. C. LUCAS There is hardly any mine .. free from pyrite. **20** LD MACAULAY Deer, as free as in an American forest. J. MORLEY Calvin .. set free all those souls. *Times* He wanted the accused to be allowed to go free. **21** J. SMEATON This stone was capable of being thus wrought, and was so free to the tool. **22** MILTON The tawny lion, pawing to get free His hinder parts. **23** SHAKES. *Ant. & Cl.* Free, madam! no .. He's bound unto Octavia. **b** G. BURNET Coleman had a whole day free to make his escape. E. WAUGH There is no table free. K. AMIS What about lunch today? Are you free? **24** J. JACKSON It was free to everyone to bastinado a Christian where he met him. **25** R. KNOX At the free surface of the mucous membrane. **29** R. H. DANA We had the wind free .. sail after sail the captain piled on her.

Phrases: be free with: see *make free with* below. *for free* (*colloq.*, orig. *US*), provided without payment. *free and easy a., adv., & n. phr.* (*a*) *adj. phr.* unconstrained, natural, unaffected; unceremonious, careless, slipshod; morally lax, permissive: *free and easiness* a state or manner of being free and easy; (*b*) *adv. phr.* (*rare*) in a free and easy manner; (*c*) *n. phr.* (*arch. slang*) a convivial gathering. *free on board*, rail, etc. without charge for delivery to a ship, a railway wagon, etc. *free to confess* ready and willing to make a confession. *free warren:* see WARREN *n.*¹ 1b. *free, white, and over twenty-one colloq.* not subject to another person's control or authority, independent. *give or have a free hand* give or have complete liberty of action in an undertaking. *it's a free country colloq.* the (course of) action proposed is not illegal or forbidden. *Land of the Free:* see LAND *n.*¹ *make* or *be free with* take liberties with. *set free:* see SET *v.*¹ *the Wee Free Kirk:* see WEE *a. Wee Frees:* see WEE *a.*

Figure 1.1   *Dictionary entry for 'free'*

OE = Old English (– 1149); LOE = late Old English (1000–1149); ME = Middle English (1150–1349, sometimes 1469); LME = late Middle English (1350–1469); otherwise numbers refer to centuries and are preceded by E, M or L which refer to periods (of years) within the century: early (0 –29), mid (30 –69) and late (70 –99) respectively.

(Brown (ed.),1993)

The 'dramatic modifications' mentioned are important ones and you will see in later chapters how contemporary English is as much the product of its subsequent history as its Old English 'roots'. Much of the story of English is one of **contact** with other languages and resultant **borrowing** (e.g. of words such as *surrender*). It may seem odd to see a word like *surrender* described as foreign (the *Oxford English Dictionary* records its first use around six centuries ago). But attitudes towards borrowings have always varied: they may be seen as foreign or 'unEnglish', they are sometimes unwelcome, but equally they have been described as enriching the language. A later chapter in *The Story of English* refers to the 'golden age' of English from the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in 1558, during which English achieved a 'richness of vitality of expression', men of letters 'embellished their prose with Latinate words' and Shakespeare 'filled a universe with words' (McCrum et al., pp. 90–8). One of the readings for this chapter ('*Franglais*') shows that attitudes towards borrowings from English by other languages are just as variable.

Anglo-Saxon attitudes

I don't like the word *liberation*. The word *liberation* is a foreign word, and that doesn't mean it's necessarily a bad one, but it's very inappropriate to our own context. It's associated with notions of revolutionary change, of a notion or rights being completely separate from responsibilities, which I find very unattractive. I actually believe in a good English word, and it's called *freedom*. And once upon a time Englishmen … were very proud about being free. And they were proud about being free because they had a sense of two sorts of freedom: political and judicial freedom, but also a freedom over their own, over their own property. And with their own property came a freedom over their lives, that extraordinary self-reliant independence that you see most strongly marked in those Englishmen overseas, those semi-foreign Englishmen the Americans. I would like to undo so much of what has been done in the name of liberation in the twentieth century: those awful dead blankets of collectivism, of groups, of structures that have been put upon us and have trodden us under. Too often, as we all know, liberty – crimes are committed in its name; in liberation, the name of liberation, crimes are committed too. Fewer crimes are committed in the name of that good, English thing, freedom.

(Starkey, unpublished, BBC Radio 4 *Question Time*, 10 June 1994)

So far I have talked about Old English and modern English as though these were homogeneous entities with a direct and continuing line linking the two, but in fact there were several varieties of Old English which changed, gradually and unevenly, over the years. These have given rise to a range of contemporary varieties. Even the term 'variety' is an idealization: there are not really neat dividing lines between different historical varieties of English, nor are there clear cut-off points that separate different contemporary varieties.

❖   ❖   ❖   ❖   ❖

Activity 1.2   English(es) today   *(Allow up to 10 minutes)*

Please read through the extracts which follow. Which look to you like recognizable varieties of English? How many do you understand?