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The History of the English Language, 2nd Edition

Course Guidebook

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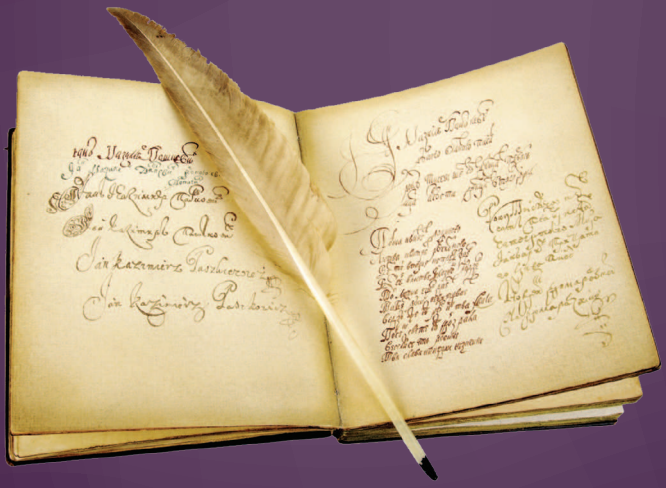

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Professor Lerer has received many awards for his scholarship and teaching, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation, the Beatrice White Prize of the English Association of Great Britain, the Harry Levin Prize of the American Comparative Literature Association, and the Hoagland Prize for Undergraduate Teaching at Stanford. ■

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

The History of the English Language, 2nd Edition

Scope:

This course of 36 lectures surveys the history of the English language, from its origins as a dialect of Germanic-speaking peoples, through the literary and cultural documents of its 1,500-year span, to the state of American speech of the present day. In addition to surveying the spoken and written forms of the language over time, the course also focuses on larger social concerns about language use, variety, and change; the relationship between spelling and pronunciation; the notion of dialect and variation across geographical and class boundaries; the arguments concerning English as an official language and the status of standard English; the role of the dictionary in describing and prescribing usage; and the ways in which words change meaning, as well as the manner in which English speakers have coined and borrowed new words from other languages.

The course is in three parts. Part I focuses on the development of English in its earliest forms. We begin with the study of Indo-European, the posited 5,000-year-old original from which the modern and classical European, Iranian, and Indian languages emerged. From Indo-European, the lectures move to the Germanic branch of languages and to the Anglo-Saxons who settled the British Isles beginning in the 5th century. Old English emerges as the literary vernacular of the Anglo-Saxons and flourishes until the Norman Conquest in the mid-11th century. The interplay of English, French, and Latin from the 11th to the 15th centuries generates the forms of Middle English in which Chaucer, among others, wrote, and gives us a sense of a trilingual medieval British culture.

Part II begins with the reemergence of English as an official language after the decline of French in the 15th century. This set of lectures charts the changes in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary that distinguish Middle English from Modern English (in particular, the Great Vowel Shift). It looks closely at the rise of an English literary vernacular, especially in Shakespeare, Milton, the King James Bible, and the dictionary of Samuel Johnson, and it

suggests some ways in which we can trace changes in word meanings by using the resources of historical dictionaries.

Part III focuses on American English and the modes of studying the history of the language today. The lectures explore the rise of American dialects, differences between American and British pronunciation and usage, and the emergence of distinctive American voices in literature, social criticism, and politics. The languages of African-Americans and the place of English as a world language texture our appreciation of the varieties of what English has become, and the course concludes with some provocations on the scientific study of language, the rise of linguistics as an academic discipline, and the possible future of English in society. ■

Introduction to the Study of Language

Lecture 1

When we come to the study of the history of English, we see many debates today that are at work in the past. These debates have a history and they have a context. … Those debates bequeath to us not just larger arguments about language, but the very literary texts we read.

The purpose of this course is to trace the development of the English language from its earliest forms to the present. To do so, we need a working notion of what language is and how it changes—we need to know the subject of our study. We also need to develop certain tools for studying that subject—we need a method. And we need to know what questions to ask about the English language, both in its historical forms and in its current usages—we need a point of view. In this lecture, we will defer for the moment the larger questions of subject and method and concentrate on point of view.

Many of us are interested in the history of language because it may help us answer questions we have about language and society today. Questions about the standardization of English, about English as an official language, and about the relationships among spelling, pronunciation, grammar, and style are all ones we may have asked since grade school. This lecture surveys the content and approaches of the course as a whole by framing these questions historically. It anticipates many of the issues we will explore in detail in later lectures. It also provides a set of reference points for recognizing that, even in the welter of technical detail sometimes necessary to the historical study of English, issues of language and behavior vital to our lives are always behind this study.

What is English? Where did it come from? Where is it going? In these lectures, we will look at some of the ways in which the English language developed from Old to Middle to Modern English and how the study of language in the 19th–21st centuries has affected the ways in which we think of ourselves as speakers of the language. Among the many questions we must ask in this study is, Precisely what is the English language? Let's begin

by looking at some passages from different periods in English. The first selection we hear is in the Northumbrian dialect of Old English, the poetry of Caedmon, from about the year 680. The second selection is the famous opening lines from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written in Middle English at the end of the 14th century. Finally, we hear Hamlet's famous soliloquy, written by Shakespeare in the late 16th century. In this course, we will not simply trace how the language changed from Old to Middle to Modern English, but we will explore methods for the study of language. We will also look at problems that motivate the historical study of English, as well as texts and contexts that may help us understand the origins of English, its literary and cultural artifacts, and the future of the language.

Many debates in the study of English today have also been at work in the past. The first of these is, Should there be a "standard English"? As early as the 10th century, teachers in the church schools of Anglo-Saxon England argued about this same issue. Some claimed that rules should be established for spelling, pronunciation, dialect, and usage. In the later medieval period, from the 13th to the 15th centuries, questions arose about what constituted a standard. Should it be the speech of London or another region? Should it include French words? In the 16th and 17th centuries, pedagogues and pedants debated whether a standard should be grounded in university education. In the 18th and 19th centuries, these debates were played out in the courts, schools, and official loci of royal administration. American English also invites us to ask questions about a standard: Should we use a regional standard as a model, or should we take standards from learning and education?

Questions about standards lead us to another central question of this course: Should the study of language be prescriptive or descriptive? A dictionary ostensibly records certain aspects of a language, such as spelling, meaning, pronunciation, and usage. But by recording such descriptions of words, we are also codifying them, and thus, the descriptions become prescriptions. In other words, they become statements of how we *should* speak and write rather than information about how we actually *do* speak and write. From the Anglo-Saxon period to the present, people have asked whether or not language behavior should be prescribed. When we look at the history of dictionaries, we are looking at the ways in which particular authors, editors, and scholars adjudicate between the need to describe a language as they

perceive it and their positions as regulators or legislators of a language. As we will see in later lectures, the dictionary of Samuel Johnson (1755) became, in many ways, the fulcrum on which previous and subsequent lexicons have balanced.

Very often, what dictionaries or other authorities prescribe are not just habits of pronunciation or forms of spelling but categories of grammar. Many people wonder why English grammar is seemingly so simple. Modern European languages have grammatical gender, case endings, and so on. Why did English move from a highly inflected language in Old English to a relatively uninflected language in Modern English? The answer to this question dovetails with other narratives about pronunciation and spelling. Grammar and case endings reflect the ways in which people at one time spelled and pronounced words. Later in the course, we'll see that habits of pronunciation and spelling may have changed grammar; in other words, people stopped pronouncing case endings or stopped spelling words as they were spoken, and started spelling them according to convention.

Anyone who comes to English as a child in school or as an adult who speaks another language is invariably confronted by the strangeness of its spelling.

Anyone who comes to English as a child in school or as an adult who speaks another language is invariably confronted by the strangeness of its spelling. English has many "silent" letters and clusters of consonants or vowels that seem to be mutable, giving us different sounds in different contexts. Why is that the case? English spelling has remained historical and etymological. In other words, English, by and large, preserves older forms of the language by using conservative spelling. The result is such words as *knight*, *knee*, *knife*, *marriage*, and *enough*. We will also see how pedagogues in the 17th and 18th centuries sought to regulate and control spelling by what they imagined to be etymology—respelling words as if they were Latin words. Examples include *debt* and *doubt*. The history of English shows a gradual separation between spelling and speech.

The topic of speech brings us to another question: Why do we pronounce words as we do? The history of English pronunciation is the history of sound changes. How do we know how Old English or Middle English was pronounced? As we'll see, a variety of resources are available to us, including spellings, textbooks, poetry, and the work of scholars from the 16th century forward. As we know, English also sounds different in different regions. One theme of this course will be the nature of regional dialects. These existed in the British Isles from the very beginning. Later in the course, we'll look at how we recover dialect sounds, at the relationship between regional dialects and a national standard, and at the impact of regional dialects on the development of a standard.

What happens when contact occurs between different dialects or languages? Speakers of Old English came in contact with the French during the Norman Conquest. That contact irrevocably changed the sound, sense, vocabulary, idiom, and structure of the vernacular. In the 15th–18th centuries, explorers from England and elsewhere in Europe came in contact with speakers of other languages. New words were introduced into English, bringing with them changes in the structure and idiom of the language. Such changes could also affect pronunciation. The Great Vowel Shift of the 15th and early 16th centuries, for example, may have resulted from a variety of different dialects coming into contact with each other, from the loss of French as the prestige language in late-medieval England, and from the need to recreate among an educated, literate elite a form of pronunciation that would replace French as a prestige form of language. When we look at languages and contact, we also need to look at translation. Is translation the word-for-word mapping of one language onto another, or is it something else? One of the key texts in the study of translation is the Bible.

The translation of the Bible into Old English, Middle English, and Modern English brings us to yet another phenomenon—archaism. This term relates to the circumstances in which a writer would want the language to look and feel old, in which a translation can give us evidence of the history of language embedded in it, and in which a text of a given time reflects the teaching of an earlier time. In the case of the King James Bible in particular, we'll see the impact this highly formal and archaizing form of English prose had on later

writers, especially American writers of the 19th century, such as Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Herman Melville, and Joel Chandler Harris.

What we see in the history of English is a collection of texts and influences and a story of contacts, but we also see a history of our own speech and the literature we read and remember. One of the arguments of this course is that to understand the history of English is to understand, in many ways, the history of our own culture and society. Whatever we may believe about the relationship between language and mind, language and society constitute a bond of personal expression. Many of the texts that we will look at in this course concern creation, including the creation of the world in "Caedmon's Hymn," the creation of spring in the opening lines of Chaucer, and the possibility of un-creation in *Hamlet*. We always create ourselves in language. We will see in this course that attention to the history of the English language through literary texts focuses our attention on the imaginative space of self-creation.

Let's embark on this study with a roadmap of the remainder of the course.

- We'll begin with issues of method—how language is studied and how we define the discipline of historical linguistics. We will look at how sounds are produced in the mouth (articulatory phonetics), how earlier forms of language are reconstructed by scholars (comparative philology), and at the study of language in society (sociolinguistics).

- We will also delve into the prehistory of English, the period of Indo-European, probably 4,000 or 5,000 years in the past. The words of this culture passed into the languages that descended from it, such as the classical languages Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit, as well as modern languages, ranging from Hindi and Farsi in the east to Celtic, Germanic, and Romance languages in the west. The study of Indo-European will introduce us to scholars of language, who began to recognize in the 18th and 19th centuries that links existed among living languages. We will also see that the study of Indo-European is a study of society; we can reconstruct, through the study of language, the social environments that gave rise to the Europeans and Western Asians.

- Out of this Indo-European matrix emerged Germanic-speaking peoples in the north of Europe who developed the languages of Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, and England. We'll learn how the Germanic languages spawned English and how the relationship between the Germanic peoples and the Roman *imperium* gave rise to certain attitudes toward language and culture and to certain words that still survive in English today.

- Old English will be the next component that we look at, the world of the Anglo-Saxons—of Caedmon, the historian Bede, and *Beowulf*. In particular, we'll see how Old English applied the techniques of older Germanic poetry to create a vivid, imaginative framework for the expression of religious and mythological poetry.

- With the Norman Conquest, we'll explore the contact between English and French, the rise of Middle English, and the emergence of French as a prestige language. For much of the Middle Ages, the British Isles was a trilingual culture of English, French, and Latin.

- With trade, commerce, and colonialism, we will see the origins of Modern English—the ways in which the sound of English changed and the vocabulary structure altered, and the fact that English became an omnivorous consumer of new words and new cultures.

- In lectures on America and the Anglophone world, we will see how each culture looks back to the history of its language to invoke and evoke its origins.

- In the final lectures of this course, we'll look at the future of English. How will the Internet, e-mail, and text messaging change our language? What is the impact of English-language literature abroad? Is English being debased and corrupted or enlivened and enriched through these influences?

As you encounter language in this course, keep in mind that the history of English lives today in our own reading and experience. We must understand the history of English to understand contemporary debates on language and

society. We also need to understand the regional diversity and richness of English to understand the building blocks of imaginative narrative. The resources used in studying the history of the English language are, in many ways, the resources we can use to study the history of ourselves. In our next lecture, we'll look at some specific technical methods of analysis that will enable us to begin the great journey of discovery that will take us from the Indo-Europeans to the Internet. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Hogg, gen. ed., *The Cambridge History of the English Language*.

Questions to Consider

1. What effect did the creation of dictionaries have on the history of English spelling?

2. How has English changed over time with regard to inflected endings?

The Historical Study of Language

Lecture 2

Samuel Johnson is in his own way a sociolinguist. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, that great work of historical dictionary-making, that many of us use in school or at home or in the class, this is a product of the sociology of language. And so when we think about sociolinguistics, we need to think about the ways in which what we are doing [is] a kind of field work of the historical imagination.

Our study of English can be informed by our own experience of language and by our reading. This lecture presents some technical ways of studying language historically. Keep in mind that our primary goal in this course is to construct a historical narrative; we begin with origins and end with the future.

Scholars have three tools for studying language historically: articulatory phonetics, sociolinguistics, and comparative philology.

- Articulatory phonetics is the representation of the sounds of a language using symbols developed for that purpose or the description of sounds according to where and how they are produced in the mouth.

- Sociolinguistics is the study of how language operates in society and brings people into communities of culture. This study also encompasses social attitudes toward language variation, use, and change.

- Comparative philology is the technique of reconstructing earlier forms of a language by comparing surviving forms in recorded languages.

With these tools, we will examine four specific areas of language change throughout this course: pronunciation, grammar and morphology (endings of words), meaning (semantic change), and attitudes toward language change.

Let's return to the first tool mentioned above, articulatory phonetics. Phoneticians have developed a technical vocabulary for describing how and where sounds are produced in the mouth. Sounds that are produced only with the lips are known as labial sounds. These include the sounds made in producing the consonants *p* and *b*. Dental sounds are those produced with the teeth. The sounds of *f* in *file* and *v* in *vile* are produced with the teeth and the lips. These are labial-dental sounds. The sounds of *th* in *thin* or *that* are interdental sounds. The alveolar ridge is located behind the upper teeth. We touch it with the tip of the tongue in pronouncing the sound of *t* or *d*. These are known as alveolar sounds. Other examples include the beginning sounds in *cheer*, *jeer*, *red*, and *net*. Palatal sounds, in which the arch of the tongue touches the soft palate, include those heard at the beginning of *plush* or *pleasure*. Velar sounds include those heard in *cut* and *gut*. Glottal sounds appear in many languages, although they are not meaningful sounds in spoken English. Glottal stops do make a difference in meaning in languages such as Danish.

Meaning, or *semantics*, is at the heart of language.

Vowels are classified according to where and how they are produced in the mouth. They can be high or low, front or back. The difference between a consonant and a vowel can be described in terms of sound production. A vowel is a continuously produced sound. A consonant is a sound that interrupts the production of a vowel. Such an interruption may be a stop (the *p* sound in *lip*), a glide (the *l* sound in *love*), or an interdental (the *th* sound in *thin*).

The second of our tools for the study of language is sociolinguistics, which embraces social attitudes toward language change and variation. This discipline involves a kind of fieldwork—the search for informants; in the study of the history of language, such informants are the written records of past speakers. It may be anachronistic to call Isaac Newton, Geoffrey Chaucer, or the 13th-century courtier Walter of Bibbesworth sociolinguists, but these are all individuals who thought and wrote about language in its social contexts. Samuel Johnson, who produced his great dictionary of 1755, was in his own way a sociolinguist.

Our third tool is comparative philology. The word *philology* comes from Greek and means *a love of language* or *a love of the word*. Since the middle of the 19th century, the word has come to connote the historical and empirical study of language change and the rules of individual languages and how we can use surviving words to reconstruct earlier forms of languages. Comparative philology was developed at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, when many scholars and scientists were involved in the comparison of fossils and anatomical structures to understand the development of animals. Early figures in science, such as Carl Linnaeus, Georges Cuvier, and Ernst Heackel, stand side by side with the Grimm brothers as pioneers in comparative studies.

As we said earlier, the objects of our studies with these tools are fourfold: pronunciation, grammar, meaning, and attitudes toward language change. Pronunciation is, of course, the way people speak, but how can we recover the sounds of past speakers? As a related question, we might ask: How is the history of pronunciation linked to the history of spelling and grammar? Grammar is a complex phenomenon. Another term used in the study of grammar is morphology, which means the study of the shapes of things. In linguistics, it is applied to the study of word endings; thus, it relates to grammatical cases in nouns, verb endings, and singular and plural forms.

Meaning, or *semantics*, is at the heart of language. Let's look at an example of semantic change with the word *silly*. In Old English and Modern German, the root of this word means *blessed, touched by the spirit of the Lord*. Over time, the word came to describe, not an inner spiritual condition of someone, but the outer and physical manifestations of silliness. By the 15th and 16th centuries, the word moved from a description of an interior condition to an exterior condition, and in Modern English, it has completely lost its sense of being blessed.

Finally, we will look at how attitudes toward language change. What do people think of language? What are the metaphors and images used to describe language and language change? What is the evidence for language change? Surviving written evidence is important, but it is not definitive. Language is not writing. Linguists do not look for beautifully written or

printed texts. Instead, they seek handwritten letters, marginalia, or diary entries. The writers should be just educated enough to be able to write but not so educated as to use learned spelling conventions. In other words, the best evidence for the history of pronunciation is the writing of the barely literate. Scribes in the Middle Ages often wrote texts in their own regional dialects, and they tended to spell as they spoke. Thus, before the development of spelling conventions, these written texts can be used as evidence for pronunciation. A modern example of this might be found in the "eye dialect" of Mark Twain or other regionalist writers. These writers evoke the sound of a speaker through spelling: *sez* for *says*, *wanna* for *want to*, *gonna* for *going to*. The eye dialect of early writers gives us a window into early pronunciation. When we look at speech sounds, the historical study of language gives us certain rules and conventions of sound change. We can work backward from these conventions to reconstruct the sounds of earlier languages.

One final way of learning how earlier people spoke is through writing about language, such as manuals of Latin for schoolroom teaching, glosses, and dictionaries.

Let's close this lecture by looking at four myths about language.

- The first of these is the myth of universality. There is, as far as we can tell, no universal language—no single living language that is comprehensible to all speakers—and no way to reconstruct a language that would be comprehensible to all speakers. Nor is there any single word or expression that is the same in all living languages. In the language of the Republic of Georgia, *mama* means *father* and *dada* means *mama*.

- The second myth is that of simplicity. No language is harder or easier for its own speech community to learn. Six-year-olds in every culture have the same relative ability to speak or write their languages. As a corollary, no language was simpler in an earlier form. Languages neither decay nor evolve.

- The third myth is that of teleology: Language change does not move toward a goal. Languages do not evolve from lower to higher forms.

- Finally, there is the myth of gradualism. Languages do not change at a steady rate. The Great Vowel Shift took place in the space of about 150 years, but the history of pronunciation has been relatively stable for the 400 years since the shift ended. Radical semantic change took place during the Renaissance and is taking place now, but semantics has been stable over other periods of time.

When we look at Indo-European languages in the next few lectures, we will look not simply at the methods of study but at the practice of those methods and at how the history of the study of language has been affected by these myths. Indo-European languages are the origins of the languages we see today, and it is here that we will see the methods for language study worked out in context. ■

Suggested Reading

Bolton, *A Living Language: The History and Structure of English.*

Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution with Special Reference to English*.

Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*.

Questions to Consider

1. For the speakers of a given language, are some languages inherently more difficult to learn than others?

2. Do most languages gradually evolve toward a higher or lower form?

Indo-European and the Prehistory of English

Lecture 3

How can we know anything about a group of people who lived 3,000 to 5,000 years ago and left no written records and very little archeological remains? The evidence is in the surviving languages.

The very term "Indo-European" conjures up images of a deep past. Who were the Indo-European speakers? What language did they speak? Why should we study this language in the history of the English language? In this lecture, we'll answer those questions and see how the study of Indo-European languages can help us understand the historical study of language in general and some particular aspects of English in detail.

We ended the last lecture with the four myths of language: universality, teleology, simplicity, and gradualism. These have inflected our understanding of how language works and how language has been studied. These myths have controlled many of the ways in which scholars have studied language in the past, and we will see them in operation in this lecture when we look at the work of 18th- and 19th-century scholars who discovered Indo-European. Also recall the four subjects of inquiry in language studies: pronunciation, grammar or morphology, semantics, and attitudes toward language change. Our three tools for studying these aspects of language are articulatory phonetics, sociolinguistics, and comparative philology. Most of this lecture will deal with the techniques of comparative philology. Let's begin by defining some of the key terms for the comparative philological study of Indo-European.

The term "Indo-European" refers to a postulated language or group of dialects out of which the Western and Eastern European, Indian, and Iranian languages developed. These languages are believed to have descended from a common language spoken by a group of people who lived in the 4th or 3rd millennium B.C. in southeastern Europe, probably in the area around the Black Sea. The Indo-European languages that survive today are the languages of Iran, Greece, the Romance languages that are descended from Latin, the language of Albania, the Germanic languages, the Baltic languages, and the

Slavic languages. Two Indo-European language groups no longer survive, the language of the Hittites and a group of languages called Tocharian. Their discovery played an important role in developing the idea of the Indo-European language. The languages in the Indo-European group share certain sound relationships, words, and grammatical forms.

It is generally believed that the Indo-Europeans were an agricultural population living in southeastern Europe in the 4th and 3rd millennia B.C. Recent archaeological discoveries suggest that they buried, rather than cremated, their dead. This is important from a linguistic standpoint because one of the key words for *burial, sepulcher*, must descend from a group who buried their dead (inhumators). The Indo-Europeans moved into central Europe and central Asia, then engaged in a series of later migrations.

We have many shared words and concepts in the languages that descended from Indo-European. Almost all of these languages have similar-sounding words for *snow*, which of course, prompts scholars to posit that the Indo-Europeans came from an area where they experienced snow. Similar words for *beech tree* that also mean *book* or *letter* lead us to believe that these people may have written on beech bark. Other words shared among languages descended from Indo-European include *corn*, *wolf*, *bear*, *yoke*, and *honey* or *mead*. By looking at these surviving words, scholars can place the Indo-Europeans geographically and culturally.

Indo-European languages also have similar words for *heart*, *lung*, *foot*, *hand*, *head*, *star*, *sun*, and *moon*. What's interesting here is that these languages share a core vocabulary. The Indo-Europeans developed a vocabulary for the basics of the body and the concepts of the cosmos, and these words traveled with them in their migrations.

Why spend time studying Indo-European? In tracing the origins of words back through time, we are reconstructing a social and intellectual structure. We can see how words of seemingly different sound and sense can go back to shared origins. In later lectures, we'll look in more detail at how comparative philology allows us to recover historical context through words. As we'll see, certain names of gods and goddesses, places, plants, and other objects have about them the "aura" of the Indo-European.

Who discovered Indo-European? At the close of the 18th century, scholars posted to colonial positions in the British Empire began to notice something recognizable in the exotic languages they encountered. At the end of the 18th century, the English scholar and diplomat William Jones, working in India, noticed certain features in the vocabulary and grammar of Sanskrit (the ancient classical language of India) that were shared with Latin and Greek and the modern European languages. In particular, he noticed certain words, such as Sanskrit *raj*, Latin *rex*, German *Reich*, and Celtic *rix*, that seemed similar in sound and meaning (they were all words relating to a kingdom or ruler). He also noticed certain grammatical features, such as forms of the verb *to be* and certain case endings, that were shared in the different languages.

Jones believed that the Indo-European languages descended from an original, and that the original must be more perfect than the later languages.

Jones publicized his work in his third-anniversary address to the Asiatic Society in 1799. This address brings together many of the myths of language, but it is also an important document in the history of language. Jones believed that the Indo-European languages descended from an original, and that the original must be more perfect than the later languages. In other words, he seemed to subscribe to the myth of linguistic decay. His descriptions of Sanskrit are not descriptions of the language but of his attitude toward antiquity and language change. Jones's discovery of Indo-European is as much a product of his time, and phrased as much in the rhetoric of his age, as the discovery of the ruins of Pompeii.

In the 19th century, following up on Jones's discovery, language scholars began to develop the study of comparative grammar. Scholars, particularly in Germany, began to codify relationships of sounds among different languages. They also proposed lines of descent among the different languages, introducing the metaphor of the "language tree," modeled on biological or evolutionary trees. At this time, the development of language was the sole subject of linguistics. This is very different from what a linguist does today; in the 19th century, however, the study of language was the historical study of comparative philology.

By the 1870s, scholars had formulated a series of sound relationships among the languages that were recognized as having historical meaning; that is, they showed not only relationships among living languages but also lines of descent from earlier forms of the languages. The neo-grammarians of the 1870s formulated laws of language change, which we will explore in subsequent lectures. One of these laws was formulated by the Brothers Grimm and provides us with valuable empirical evidence, in spite of its imperfections, for reconstructing words and sounds.

The Indo-European languages also preserve certain words that are clearly not from Indo-European. Any word that ends in the sound *-inth* is not Indo-European; examples include *plinth*, *labyrinth*, *Corinth*, and *hyacinth*. Scholars have shown that these words come from the pre-Indo-European inhabitants of the Greek peninsula and were later absorbed by Indo-European conquerors and settlers. Interestingly, many of these words are related to myth. Is the myth of the labyrinth or the hyacinth more ancient than the Greeks themselves? It's also interesting to note words that Indo-European languages do not have in common. For example, Indo-European languages do not have a common word for the sea. Thus, scholars believe that groups of Indo-Europeans discovered the sea separately in their migrations. In contrast, all Indo-European languages have words beginning with the "nav-" sound, such as *navigate* and *navy*. This unit of language connotes *boat* or *ship.* All these languages also have a unit of language that means *to row.* Thus, we can hypothesize that these peoples must have known water in the form of lakes or rivers.

In the next lecture, we'll look at ways of using both the shared and the unshared words of the Indo-European languages to reconstruct the society, the culture and, most important, the poetic imagination of these early people. ■

Suggested Reading

Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860*.

Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*.

Questions to Consider

1. Who were the Indo-Europeans, and where did they originate?

2. How did Europeans come to posit the existence of an Indo-European set of tongues?

Reconstructing Meaning and Sound

Lecture 4

When we look at the surviving Indo-European languages, what we're looking at are provocations to describe them genetically or to describe them typologically. In other words, do we want to go back in the past to see where they came from—recreate the tree of language—or do we want to look at them as they exist today, or as they survive in written documents, by comparing their key features?

In this lecture, we'll continue our inquiries into Indo-European language and culture by bringing to bear the study of historical linguistics on the emergence of the Germanic languages from Indo-European. As we'll see, the study of Indo-European was closely related to the study of the Germanic languages. As mentioned in the last lecture, the discovery of Indo-European depended on the transplanting of English scholars to non-European postings. William Jones, for example, found similarities among Sanskrit, living Indian languages, and European languages, which suggested to him that an earlier language root must have existed from which the modern languages emerged.

Scholars after Jones built on his theories and developed the edifice of Indo-European, recognizing that the surviving languages of Iran, northern India, and Europe all shared a common historical origin. At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, these scholars calibrated their researches to the reconstruction of older forms. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, other scholars discovered languages that had been lost, including Hittite and Tocharian. In this lecture, we'll look closely at some of the technical devices of comparative philology to see how scholars work to reconstruct languages today.

Linguists have developed two broad approaches to classifying languages. Genetic classification implies the growth or development from a "root stock" and the branching into language groups or families. Genetic classification looks for shared features of vocabulary, sound, and grammar that enable scholars to reconstruct earlier forms. This is a historical, or diachronic,

system of classification. Typological classification means comparing languages for larger systems of organization. For example, do the languages signal meaning in a sentence by means of inflectional endings (a so-called synthetic language, such as Latin), or do they signal meaning by word order patterns (an analytic language, such as Modern English)? In this synchronic system of classification, what matters is not the historical descent but the current features of the languages.

Some languages, such as Modern Turkish and Georgian, are typologically classified as agglutinizing. In these languages, individual words or word elements are combined into a single word that constitutes a sentence. Many of the Chinese languages are typologically classified as isolative. In these languages, each individual word or unit of meaning in a sentence is a single syllable—isolated—and strings of these syllables constitute meaningful sentences. Broadly speaking, the surviving Indo-European languages can be classified into two groups defined by geography: eastern and western branches. These are distinguished, for practical purposes, by representative words for 100.

The reconstruction of sound here leads to a reconstruction of society.

The western languages that descended from Indo-European are so-called centum languages. *Centum* is the Latin word for 100, and all these languages have a word for that number closely related to *centum*. (The Germanic languages have the word beginning with *h*, which is a later sound change.) The eastern languages are so-called satem languages; *satem* is the Old Persian or Avastan word for 100. The centum-satem distinctions indicate a historical geographical split in Indo-European, as well as a larger sound change.

We can also make some general claims about the Indo-European language. It was a highly inflected language. It had eight noun cases, including the evocative, locative, and instrumental cases. It had six tenses, each of which was signaled with special verb endings. It had grammatical gender for the nouns. It had a special system of distinguishing words by changing the root vowel to indicate changes in tense, location, or aspect. In linguistics, the term “ablaut” is used to designate this kind of system. This phenomenon

descends into the Germanic languages in the form of strong verbs, that is, those that signal change in tense by a shift in the root vowel of the word: *drink*, *drank*, *drunk*; *sing*, *sang*, *sung*; *bring*, *brought*. Weak verbs in the Germanic languages simply take a suffix to indicate the past tense: *walk*, *walked*; *talk*, *talked*. We will explore the features of Germanic languages in detail in subsequent lectures, but for now, it is important to recognize that the sound changes and patterns of meaning (what we call semantic changes) across Indo-European languages matter most to us for the Germanic languages, from which English descends.

By comparing surviving words in the Indo-European languages, we can go back to their originals. Certain relationships of sound and pronunciation have been discovered that enable us to say with assurance that words are related (or cognate) in different languages. A cognate is a word shared by different languages whose relationship can be explained by precise sound laws. By reconstructing sound (phonetic reconstruction), scholars compare the sounds of surviving languages and use sound laws to recover the Indo-European originals. In the process, we can learn much about how certain surviving words are related.

Perhaps the most important tool for reconstruction is the set of sound relationships known as Grimm's Law. Discovered by the Grimm brothers (who also gave us the fairy tales) in the early 19th century, it is a set of sounds characteristic of the Germanic languages that correspond to the sounds of non-Germanic Indo-European languages. In other words, certain consonants in the Germanic languages correspond to consonants in the non-Germanic Indo-European languages, and these point to cognates. Below are some examples:

- English *fish* ~ Latin *pisces*
- English *tooth* ~ Latin *dentis*
- English *hundred* ~ Latin *centum*

These correspondences illustrate that the *f* sound in a Germanic language corresponds to a *p* sound in a non-Germanic Indo-European language. Words that indicate this relationship include *fish*, *pisces*; *foot*, *pedal*; *father*, *pater*. *Tooth* is important in this context because it shows that non-Germanic *d* corresponds to Germanic *t*. Other examples from other languages generate the following set of correspondences:

Germanic	**Non-Germanic**	**Type of Speech Sound**
p	*b*	Stop
t	*d*	Stop
k	*g*	Stop
b	*bh*	Aspirated stop
d	*dh*	Aspirated stop
g	*gh*	Aspirated stop
f	*p*	Aspirated stop
th	*t*	Aspirated stop
h	*k*	Aspirated stop

What do these correspondences mean in practical terms? We can see historical relationships by comparing, for example, certain English and Latin words: *lip/labial*, *tooth/dental*, *heart/cardiac*, *gall/choleric*, *knee/genuflect*, *foot/pedal*. We can also use Grimm's Law, and other sound relationships, to recover something of the world of the Indo-Europeans. All the surviving Indo-European languages have a word, *fee* (meaning a certain amount of money), that corresponds to an *f* word in Germanic languages and a *p* word in non-Germanic languages.

In Modern German, *Vieh* means *cattle* or *cow.* This corresponds in Latin to *pecos* or *pecuniary*, words for money. What do these cognates (one meaning *cow* and one meaning *money*) tell us about the root language from which they descended? Scholars hypothesize that wealth was measured in terms of livestock in the early Indo-European world. The reconstruction of sound here leads to a reconstruction of society. Another example is found in the Latin word *cara*, which means *dear one.* The *k* sound at the beginning of this word should correspond to an *h* sound at the beginning of a Germanic word, and it does—*whore*. In Old English, the word *whore* meant *dear one*. It later came to mean *one who is dear,* that is, expensive.

When we look at historical relationships among languages, we see how languages have changed and how they have borrowed words from other languages. The Greek word *kleos* means *fame that has been transported by sound or song.* The Greek *kl* sound originally corresponded to a Germanic *hl* sound. This sound cluster has been lost to us, but we retain the early relationship to *kleos* in our words *listen* and *loud*. The name of the Greek hero *Herakles* (whom we call Hercules) is made up of *Hera*, the goddess, and *kleos*; thus, he is someone who has fame on account of Hera. About 25 years ago, Calvert Watkins, perhaps the greatest Indo-Europeanist of our time, was able to apply these techniques of language study to a tablet inscribed in Hittite. According to Dr. Watkins, this tablet was a Trojan version of Homer's *Iliad*, the epic tale told from the point of view of the losers. ■

Suggested Reading

Algeo, *Problems in the Origins and Development of the English Language*.

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*.

Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the historical relationship between English and the Germanic languages?

2. Give examples of how Grimm's Law accounts for differences in pronunciation among certain Indo-European languages.

Historical Linguistics and Studying Culture

Lecture 5

***Pantheon* means "all the gods." *Pan* means *all*, but it is also the Indo-European root for *five*. Look at your hand; I have five fingers. That's all the fingers on my hand. And so the root for *five* and the root for *all* is the same—a fascinating way in which the bodily condition of life generates a verbal condition of description.**

In this lecture, we'll extend our use of the techniques of comparative and historical philology to understand the social and imaginative world of the Indo-European peoples. In particular, we'll see how the relationship between the real and the imagined in Indo-European culture informs some of the great themes and genres of the Western literary tradition.

Scholars have reconstructed a belief system for the Indo-Europeans based on a pantheon, a collection of many gods. The word *pantheon* itself is made up of Indo-European roots. The word *theos* in Greek comes from the same reconstructed Indo-European root as *deus* or *Zeus*: **dyeu*. This root means *light* or *shine*. Over time, this root also gave us the Latin word *dies*, meaning *day*. Thus, scholars assume that the chief deities of the Indo-European peoples were gods of sky, sun, or light. The *pan* in *pantheon* means *all,* but it is also the Indo-European root for *five*. Scholars draw a connection here between the five fingers on one hand (all the fingers) and the whole number or sum of something.

At the top of the pantheon would be the **dyeu-pȯter*; that is, a *deus*, *god*, and *pater*, *father*. This suggests a paternalistic structure to the pantheon, and indeed, the idea of god the father appears in several Indo-European languages, including Latin. Spoken quickly together, the words *deus pater* became *Jupiter*. The scholar Calvert Watkins found another "father god" in the Hittite language. The word *credo* (in Latin, the verb meaning *I believe*) comes from the Indo-European root **kred-dhȯ*. *Cred* or *kerd* is the root for *heart*, and *dhȯ* is the root for *to put*, *to donate*, or *to give*. Thus, *credo* comes from an ancient Indo-European expression that means *to place in the heart*. The Indo-European root for *to bury* is **sep-el-yo*, which is related to a verb

meaning *to venerate the dead*. In Latin, this root became *sepelire*, *to bury*, which became, in English, *sepulcher*.

In addition to theological terms, the Indo-European languages are rich with legal terms. Our words *law* and *legal* come from the same words that give us *ligature*, *to link*. A law is a practice or custom that links or binds the community. As mentioned in a previous lecture, among the earliest correspondences identified in languages that descended from Indo-European roots were words for *rule*. Interestingly, such words also survive in languages on the geographical peripheries of Indo-European culture, such as *rix* in Celtic and *raj* in Indic. This suggests that the Indo-Europeans carried their notions of rulership with them in their migrations.

Scholars have reconstructed shared words for *poet* and *poetry* and for certain literary concepts.

Indo-European peoples were also bound by habits of exchange, that is, gift-giving and hosting. However, Indo-European roots for *giving* and *taking* often descend into later languages with opposite meanings. For example, the Indo-European root **dh∂* became *donare*, meaning *to give*, in Latin but *do*, meaning *to take* or *to receive*, in Hittite. The root **nem*, *giving*, became *Nemesis* in Greek, the god who metes out justice, but it also became German *nehmen*, meaning *to take*. The root **ghosti* descends into words meaning both *host* and *guest*, suggesting a shared social ritual. This root gives us *xenos*, *stranger*, in Greek and both *hostis* (*host,* as in "host of enemies") and *hostile* in Latin. We see here a constellation of concepts relating to strangers as both potential friends and enemies.

Reconstruction also gives us information about the physical environment and the economy of the Indo-Europeans. Many of the surviving Indo-European languages have root/word pairs that tell us they cultivated grain: **gr∂no*, *grain*; **wrughyo*, *rye*; **bhares*, *barley*. The Indo-Europeans also domesticated animals, as evidenced by such root/word pairs as **gwou*, *cow*; **su*, *swine*; **agwhno*, *sheep*; **kwon*, *dog*; **ekwo*, *horse*. Interestingly, all Indo-European languages share a word for *dog* or *hound*, but they do not share a word for *cat*.

The reconstructed root **peku* descends to the following words in modern languages:

- Latin, *pecunia* (wealth)
- Sanskrit, *pasu* (livestock)
- Old English, *feoh* (cattle)
- Old Norse, *fé* (possessions)
- Modern German, *Vieh* (cow)
- Modern English, *fee*

These words give us evidence that livestock was a form of wealth in Indo-European culture. The fact that many of the descendant Indo-European languages share a word for *yoke* also tells us that the Indo-European economic system was based on domesticated animal agriculture.

As you recall, the *p* sound in Germanic languages corresponds to an *f* sound in non-Germanic Indo-European languages. Germanic languages have a set of words, including *flow*, *fly*, and *feather*, that seem to suggest movement through a medium. These can be traced to a reconstructed Indo-European root, **pluo* from which the French phrase *il pleut* (*it is raining*) is descended. *Pluto*, the name of the ancient god of the underworld, also comes from the same root as *flow*. The underworld would have been associated with mining and smelting ore, and when metal becomes molten, it flows. Thus, Pluto is the god of such wealth buried in the underworld.

The literary imagination is a point of considerable interest. Scholars have reconstructed shared words for *poet* and *poetry* and for certain literary concepts. The Latin word *vates* (*seer*) is cognate with a set of other Indo-European words: Old Irish *faith* (*bard*), Old English *wod* (*crazy*), and the name of the Old Norse god *Woden* or *Odin*, who was a master of runes. The Indo-European root for these words is **wek*, which relates to the image of a crazed seer, a figure who is both a poet and a madman. The Indo-European

roots **wek* and **teks* also mean *weaving*. In Latin, the verb *texere* means both *to weave with words*, which gives us *text*, and *to weave with threads*, which gives us *textile*. Many works of literature in the Western tradition use the image of poets as weavers of words. The Indo-European root **degh* means *to build from mud or clay.* The root **para* means *around*; thus, *para degh* means *to encircle with a mud wall*. From this derives the word *paradise*, which is simply an enclosed space or garden.

As mentioned earlier, *kleos* is the Greek word for *spoken fame*, and from this word we get the name of the hero *Herakles*, which means *redounding to the praise of Hera*, as well as the name *Sophocles*, who was famous for wisdom. Scholars in the 19th century discovered that the Greek phrase *kleos aphthiton* (*undying fame*) was an exact cognate with the Sanskrit phrase *sravas aksitam,* and that both phrases scanned poetically in the same way. This discovery led to the idea of formulae in Indo-European poetry and its descendants, as we see in such Homeric phrases as "wine-dark sea," "cow-eyed Penelope," and "rosy-fingered dawn."

The concept of the secret or the prophetic is as central to Indo-European literary and religious thought as is the idea of fame or renown. The Greek word *kalyptein* means *to hide*. It is cognate with English *hull*, meaning a shell or a covering. In turn, Calypso is the figure in the *Odyssey* who is a sorceress, one who hides or conceals. *Apocalypse* is the Greek for *taking away the covering*; Latin translates this as *revelare*, which means *to remove the cover or veil, to reveal*; hence, early biblical translators used *revelation* for the last apocalyptic book of the Bible. ■

Suggested Reading

Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*.

Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*.

Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does the act of reciprocal gift-giving reveal itself in Indo-European root words?

2. What are some Indo-European cognates from the world of agriculture that have been passed down into English?

The Beginnings of English

Lecture 6

English has regional dialects almost from the very beginning that there is an English, and these dialects are really bounded by natural and human-made structures—rivers and roads. … This is important because these dialect boundaries will correspond to some important historical moments in the narrative of Old English language and Anglo-Saxon history.

The language known as Old English can be defined in four ways: geographically—as a language spoken by the Germanic settlers in the British Isles; historically—as a language spoken from the time of the Germanic settlement in the 5th century until the Norman Conquest in 1066; genetically—as a Lowlands branch of the West Germanic group of languages (in other words, it is a branch of the Germanic languages that emerged from languages spoken in what are now Holland, northern Germany, and Denmark); and typologically—as a language with a particular sound system (phonology), grammatical endings (morphology), word order patterns (syntax), and vocabulary (lexis).

Old English is bounded by geography. The earliest inhabitants of the British Isles were a group of Paleolithic peoples who constructed Stonehenge and other stone-circle monuments. However, we have no linguistic, literary, or verbal remnants of their lives. The earliest inhabitants whose language we can reconstruct were Celtic speakers who migrated from Europe sometime in the second half of the 1st millennium B.C. Modern Celtic languages include Irish, or Gaelic; Welsh; Cornish; Manx, the language of the Isle of Man; and Erse, a language of the Scots. The Celtic speakers brought with them an Indo-European pantheon, along with skills in iron working and certain key vocabulary terms.

The Romans colonized England under Julius Caesar and kept it as a colony until the middle of the 5th century A.D. Latin became the prestige language of administration, education, and social life. Some Celtic words seem to have entered Roman Latin during the occupation, especially words for geographical

places and phenomena. The fact that England has three rivers named Avon, for example, can be traced back to the Celtic word for *river*. During the last decades of Roman colonial rule in the 5th century A.D., groups of Germanic-speaking tribes and raiders began to settle portions of the British Isles. By the middle of the 5th century, raids and settlements became more frequent, and by end of the century, settlements began to spread from the south and southeastern coasts into the southwest (in the area known now as Wessex). By the year 547, a kingdom was established in the north of England, north of the Humber River, by groups descended from the Angles, a Germanic tribe that became known as Anglians.

By the middle of the 7th century, small kingdoms were being established throughout England. Some of these were minor outposts, little more than extended farmsteads or small villages. Others were larger, established on the site of older Roman fortified camps. The word *camp*, in fact, comes from the Latin *campos*, meaning *a fortified enclosure*. As these settlements developed, Old English emerged as a distinctive language, but it also developed four major dialects. Each dialect had both natural and manmade borders. North of the Humber River in England was Northumbria, the first real center of English speaking, writing, learning, literature, and culture. In the central part of England were the kingdoms of Mercia and Anglia; in the southeast was Kent; and in the southwest was Wessex. The central part of England, from the Roman period to the present, was bifurcated by the Old Roman Road, which ran from what is today London to York. Different cultures and dialects developed to the west and east of the road.

Northumbria was the first area of Anglo-Saxon efflorescence. The historian known as the Venerable Bede, who completed his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and Peoples* in 731, was a Northumbrian (though he wrote in Latin). So, too, was Caedmon, perhaps the first known poet in the English language. The great Bibles and Gospels of early English life were produced in Northumbria, enormous hand-made manuscripts, rich with illumination and color. The earliest written records we have in Old English are interlinear glosses or translations of these Latin texts written in the Northumbrian dialect. As we said, in the middle of the country was Mercia, a loose collection of settlements and kingdoms, but the real heart of later Anglo-Saxon culture was Wessex.

The most important dialect of Old English was West Saxon, the form of the language spoken and written in the southwestern part of the country. This was the dialect of King Alfred (d. 899), who established schools and courts of translation to teach the classics in Old English. The influence of King Alfred was so great that both Latin texts and Old English works in other dialects were translated into West Saxon. In publishing works on Old English, scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries edited them into West Saxon forms even if those forms were not the original.

By the middle of the 12th century, Old English was virtually gone.

Just as the Old English language may be divided into geographically bounded dialects, so the Old English period may be divided into historically demarcated stages. As we've noted, the period from the 7th through the early 9th centuries was the era of Northumbrian efflorescence, marked by a rich religious and literary culture. The monasteries of Northumbria produced beautiful manuscripts of the Bible and other literary texts. During the 9th and early 10th centuries, Wessex became the seat of Anglo-Saxon intellectual, literary, and political life. During the so-called Benedictine Revival in the 11th century, new schools were established for educating students in English and Latin. By the end of the 11th century, however, within a generation or two of the Norman Conquest, much of this literary and intellectual activity had disappeared. Anglo-Saxon bishops and priests were replaced by Norman French ones. By the middle of the 12th century, Old English was virtually gone.

Let's now turn to some of the major linguistic features of Old English. In an earlier lecture, we saw that Indo-European ablaut, or vowel gradation (changes in the root vowel of a word), was used to indicate changes in tense or aspect. In the Germanic languages, this inherited Indo-European phenomenon came to be used in the development of the verbal system. Strong verbs are those that signal change in tense through a change in the root vowel of the word. Examples of strong verbs are *drink*, *drank*, *drunk*; *run*, *ran*; and *think*, *thought*. Old English is distinctive among the Germanic languages for the number and class organization of its strong verbs. Weak verbs are those that signal the past tense with a suffix ending in "-d" or "-ed." Their root vowels do not change. Thus: *walk*, *walked*; *love*, *loved*; *care*, *cared*. Any new

verb that enters the English language will enter as a weak verb, for example, *televise*, *televised*. Furthermore, many strong verbs have been changed, over time, into weak verbs. For example, the word meaning *to grow*, *wax*, was once a strong verb; now it has become *wax*, *waxed*. Some verbs remain strong (*shine*, *shone*; *hang*, *hung*), but weak forms have developed along with them (*shine*, *shined*; *hang*, *hanged*) to indicate different aspects or different relationships. For example, you might say, "I *shined* my shoes," but "The sun *shone*."

Like all the Germanic languages, Old English had noun declensions. Nouns were in different groups or classes. To signal relationships in a sentence—subject, direct object, indirect object, instrument of action—endings were added to the words. These are known as case endings. All the Indo-European languages had such case endings; we see them, for example, in Latin and Greek and in masculine, feminine, and neuter nouns in many modern European languages. Note that this is grammatical gender, not natural gender. The Old English word for *woman*, *wif*, became our modern word *wife*, but it was a grammatically neuter noun in Old English. All concept nouns (those ending in *-ness*) were feminine in Old English. The wonderful Old English word *witherweardnesse*, meaning *stress, exhaustion, irritation*, is a feminine concept noun.

Old English often signaled the plural of nouns with a final -s, as we still do today, but Old English also had mutated plurals; these are nouns whose root vowels changed between singular and plural: *man*, *men*; *goose*, *geese*; *foot*, *feet*. These nouns are the result of a complicated sound change that took place in the early Germanic period, that is, while the Germanic-speaking peoples were still on the Continent and had not yet come to the British Isles. The sounds in certain suffixes influenced preceding vowels. For example, the word *dom* meant *doom*; its verb form, *to judge*, was *domain*. Over time, the "e" sound in the verb influenced the preceding "o," changing the pronunciation of the word to *demean* or *deem*.

This sound change shows us how words entered the language, primarily from Roman Latin, when the Germanic tribes were still living on the Continent and had not yet broken up. Words that came into the language that early would change as the Germanic languages split up, and words that came that early

into English would change according to this sound change. For example, Latin had the word *monita* for *money*; the place where money was made was a *monetarium*. With the sound change in the Germanic languages, the "o-" in *monetarium* was altered to give us the word we have today, *mint*. The Latin word *monestarium* (the place where a monk lives) gives us another example. With the sound change, this word eventually became *minister*. The Latin word *unicius* (meaning one-twelfth of something) changed pronunciation in Old English to become *inch*.

The Old English vocabulary is immensely rich in compounds, new words coined by combining existing words. Old English created words by combining words, by adding prefixes, and by bringing together nouns and suffixes. In this way, Old English speakers transformed the Latin of the church and the Latin of the Roman government into their own form. When we look at the Old English vocabulary, we're looking at a tension between words that are borrowed and words that are coined—between words that come from outside and words that are used to express foreign concepts in native ways. In our next lecture, we'll look at an extended example of perhaps the most sublime case of such word formation—"Caedmon's Hymn," the earliest surviving poem in any form of English. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Cassidy and Ringler, *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader*.

Hogg, ed., *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Vol. 1: The Beginnings to 1066*.

Questions to Consider

1. What were the major Old English dialects, and where were they spoken?

2. Explain some of the typical characteristics of noun and verb forms in Germanic languages.

The Old English Worldview

Lecture 7

This relationship between dialect and power, dialect and culture, will become one of the central themes of this course, not simply for the Anglo-Saxon period, but for the Middle Ages, Renaissance, modern Britain, and America as well.

When we look at Anglo-Saxon culture, we're looking primarily at verbal artifacts; we need to explore how these artifacts built structures in the mind. The Anglo-Saxon speakers of Old English tended to resist importing words, in favor of coining words based on their own root stock. However, scholars have identified two broad periods of borrowing in Old English, known as continental and insular.

The continental period of borrowing took place during the first centuries A.D., while the Germanic peoples were still situated on the European continent and had contact with a living Roman imperial and cultural presence. Words that came into the Germanic languages at this point survive in Modern English. As we know, the Romans were famous for their roads, and the Latin word *strata*, meaning *street*, appears in virtually every language that the Romans came into contact with. We might think that such words as *street*, *strasse*, *stratum*, and *strada* are cognates (that is, they all descended from an original shared Indo-European root) but, in fact, they descend from a Latin word that was consciously borrowed into the Germanic and other European languages. The Romans built roads to move their armies, and thus words for war are among the earliest borrowings from Latin into the Germanic languages. These include such words as *camp*, *wall*, *mile*, and *pit*.

Latin words for trade also entered the Germanic languages. For example, the Latin word *caupo* means a *small tradesman*; this entered the Germanic languages as *cheap* in English or *kaufen* in German. In Scandinavian languages, a tradesman was a *kaupmann*, and his haven or port was a *kaupmannhofen*. This would later become the name for the city of Copenhagen. Such words as *wine*, *pound*, and *mint* were also Latin loan words that entered the Germanic languages during the continental period,

along with words for specialty foods (*cheese*, *pepper*, *butter*, *plum*, *prune*, *pea*) and words for architecture (*chalk*, *copper*, *pitch*, *tile*). The Latin *Caesar* gave words for political control in many languages, such as German *Kaiser* and Russian *tsar*.

By the time the Anglo-Saxons came to the British Isles, the Roman Empire had been Christian for about a century and a half. During the 6th and 7th centuries, missionaries from Rome were sent to northern Europe and the British Isles to convert the Germanic peoples. During this insular period, Latin loan words for newer religious concepts, older Celtic terms from the indigenous Celtic peoples living in the British Isles, and words from the Scandinavian languages of Viking and Danish raiders in England came into the Germanic languages. Words from Celtic and Latin Christianity borrowed in the 6th–7th centuries include *cross*, *priest*, *shrine*, *rule*, *school*, *master*, and *pupil*.

In terms of vocabulary, "Caedmon's Hymn" offers us a lexicon for the divine.

Words from Scandinavian Germanic languages were borrowed after contact with the Vikings and the Danes during their raids on England in the 8th–9th centuries. These words were distinguished by special sounds in the Scandinavian languages, in particular, the sounds *sk* and *k* which corresponded to the sounds *sh* and *ch* in Old English. Thus, Scandinavian *skirt*, *kirk*, *skip*, and *dike* have Germanic family cognates in Old English *shirt*, *church*, *ship*, and *ditch*. Scandinavian languages also had a hard *g* sound that was not present in Old English; the words *muggy*, *ugly*, *egg*, and *rugged* are Scandinavian borrowings; certain words with the *ll* sound, such as *ill*, were also borrowed. In the 10th and 11th centuries, during the period of the Benedictine Reform, more elaborate and learned Latin words came into Old English, including *Antichrist*, *apostle*, *canticle*, *demon*, *font*, *nocturne*, *Sabbath*, *synagogue*, *accent*, *history*, *paper*, and so on.

Old English also made new words with distinctive approaches to compounding. Determinative compounding is common to all the Germanic languages and involves forming new words by yoking together two normally

independent nouns or a noun and an adjective. Examples of determinative compounding with two nouns include *earhring* (*earring*) or *bocstæf* (*bookstaff*, meaning "letter"). Examples with an adjective and a noun include *middangeard* (*middle-yard*, "Earth"), *federhoma* (*feather coat*, "plumage"), and *bonlocan* (*bone locker*, "body"). Many of these words make up the unique poetic vocabulary of Old English literature, especially in metaphorical constructions known as kennings. A kenning is a noun metaphor that expresses a familiar object in unfamiliar ways. The sea, for example, could be known as the *hronrad*, *whale road*.

Repetitive compounding brings together words that are nearly identical or that complement and reinforce each other for specific effect. Thus, *holtwudu* meant, essentially, *wood-wood*, in Old English, or forest; *gangelwæfre* meant the *going-about weaver* or the *swift-moving one*, that is, a spider. Noun-adjective formations constitute another approach to compounding, giving us *græsgrene* (*grass green*), *lofgeorn* (*praise-eager*, or *eager for praise*), and *goldhroden* (*gold-adorned*). In Modern English, this form of compounding is revived in such phrases as *king-emperor* or *fighter-bomber*.

Prefix formations were the most common way of creating new words in Old English and other Germanic languages. Old English had many prefixes that derived from prepositions and altered the meanings of words in special ways. For example, the prefix *and-* meant *back* or *in response to*. Thus, one could swear in Old English or *andswar*, meaning *to answer*. The prefix *with-* meant *against*. One could stand or *withstand* something in Old English, meaning *to stand against*.

Old English poets and scholars used the resources of their language, in particular its ability to make nouns through compounds and prefixes, to create an elaborate metaphorical and literary language. Most of the words mentioned in this lecture are nouns, and most of the words that survive into Modern English from Old English are nouns and pronouns. Old English seems to have a tendency to develop large classes of nouns—groups of synonyms for clarifying concepts through repetition and restatement, rather than (as we do now) through progressively more distinctive adjectives or adverbs.

Old English literary diction is primarily nominal; that is, it hinges on forms of repetition and restatement, using synonyms to bring together various connotations of a thing or an idea to enrich its resonance. Thus, when we read an Old English poem, we find the metaphorical or imaginative aspects of it in the nouns and repetitions, rather than the modifiers (adjectives and adverbs).

The earliest English poem and the first example we have of the nature of Old English poetic vocabulary is "Caedmon's Hymn," composed between 657 and 680. Bede tells us the story of Caedmon, a cowherd living in Northumbria, in his *Ecclesiastical History*. According to Bede, Caedmon was embarrassed because he was unable to sing and thus couldn't take part in socializing among the cowherds. One evening he was visited by an angel, who asked him to sing of the creation—and, miraculously, he sang this hymn:

Nu sculon herigean heofonrices Weard,
Meotodes meahte ond his modgeþanc,
weorc Wuldorfæder swa he wundra gehwæs
ece Drihten, or onstealde.
He ærest sceop eorðan bearnum
heofon to hrofe halig Scyppend;
þa middangeard moncynnes Weard,
ece Drihten, æfter teode,
firum foldan, Frea ælmihtig.

Now we shall praise heaven-kingdom's Guardian,
the Creator's might, and his mind-thought,
the works of the Glory-father: how he, each of us wonders,
the eternal Lord, established at the beginning.
He first shaped for earth's children
heaven as a roof, the holy Creator.
Then a middle-yard, mankind's Guardian,
the eternal Lord, established afterwards,
the earth for the people, the Lord almighty.

The first thing we notice about this poem is that it is alliterative. Old English poetry, like all old Germanic poetry, uses alliteration (the repetition of an initial consonant or vowel sound), rather than rhyme, as its principle of organization. The poem is also formulaic; that is, it relies on set formulae or stock phrases to drive home its meaning and effect. It is profoundly repetitive and full of synonyms.

In terms of vocabulary, "Caedmon's Hymn" offers us a lexicon for the divine. God, for example, is the *heofonrices Weard*, *the warden of the reich (kingdom) of heaven.* He is also the *Meotodes*, the *meter-out* (one who delivers judgments); the *Wuldorfæder*, *father of glory*; *Drihten*, a secular or political lord (here adapted to a religious sense); the *Scyppend*, *shaper, creator*; and *Frea ælmihtig*, *Almighty Freya*. "Caedmon's Hymn" takes a set of words for divinity, rulership, control, and authority and applies them to God. There is only one God, but many linguistic resources for naming him. Caedmon adapts the older pagan words for rulership to a newer Christian purpose. The idea that God created the world by putting a roof on heaven, for example, is drawn from Old Norse creation myths of building a roof for Valhalla. In this way, "Caedmon's Hymn" gives us a sense of the newness of Christianity. The Anglo-Saxon peoples had been converted for only a few generations when this poem was composed.

"Caedmon's Hymn" is the first example we have of an attempt to express Christian conceptions of creation in native Germanic form. Its use of language tells us much about the interrelationships between English and Latin and between doctrine and poetry. The poem appears in marginal annotations (written in Old English) to Bede's Latin manuscript of the *Ecclesiastical History* and in a West Saxon translation of the *History* as a whole. This fact tells us that it was important in Anglo-Saxon culture as a document of origin.

We learn three things from studying "Caedmon's Hymn."

- Caedmon translates Christian concepts into the older vocabulary of creation myth and social rulership.

- He uses the forms of oral-formulaic, alliterative English verse to express new Christian ideas.

- His poem illustrates the principles of Old English word formation in the compounds, nouns, and repetitions he uses.

To see "Caedmon's Hymn" in context is to see the Old English language pressed into the service of Christian imagination. As we'll see in future lectures, that combination would be subsumed by the conquest of the Normans, the importation of French, and radical changes in politics, culture, idiom, and ideology. ■

Suggested Reading

Barney, *Word-Hoard: An Introduction to Old English Vocabulary*.

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Godden, "Literary Language."

O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*.

Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*.

Questions to Consider

1. Explain several ways that Old English created new words.

2. What were the chief characteristics of Old English as a literary language?

Did the Normans Really Conquer English?

Lecture 8

I'd like to disabuse us of the notion that on some blustery day in the fall of 1066, the English language and English culture irrevocably changed—that one day Anglo-Saxons were a group of pipe-toting, mead-swilling barbarians who overnight were transformed into a group of fops eating *champignons* in a *beurre-blanc* sauce.

The year 1066, the date of the Norman Conquest of England, is shrouded in mystery and mythology. What did the Norman Conquest do to English? Did the Normans really conquer the English language? How can we see the effects of this political upheaval on the history of English and in our own study of the language today? In this lecture, we'll review some of the major effects that the Norman Conquest had on the English language, but we'll also see that the language was changing long before the conquest and continued to change throughout the British Isles in spite of the influence of the French-speaking Normans.

Let's begin with some of the natural changes in Old English that took place from its earliest times. Recall that our best evidence for language change is the writing of the barely literate. In several texts from the 10th and 11th centuries, we can see that the complex system of noun case endings was gradually being lost. As mentioned earlier, Old English had an inflectional system, in which special endings were used to distinguish whether a noun was the subject of a sentence, the direct object, the indirect object, the object of possession, or the instrument of an action. The term that describes the falling together of the old system of case endings is "syncretism." In this process, endings collapse into smaller and smaller groups, until a limited collection of sounds comes to represent a larger set of grammatical categories.

In addition to noun endings, adjective endings (such as those that delineated number or gender) were lost in this period of Old English. Verb endings were maintained, but simplified. Old English, like other Indo-European languages, had a dual pronoun in addition to the singular and plural (*I* and *we*). This third pronoun signaled two people, but this distinctive feature of the language was

also lost in this period. Grammatical gender disappeared, to be replaced by natural gender. Nouns were no longer masculine, feminine, or neuter.

Why did these changes take place? Some theories have been proposed that hinge on stress, form, and function. Old English, like all Germanic languages, had fixed stress on the root syllable of the word. In other words, regardless of what prefixes or suffixes were added to the word, the stress remained on the root syllable. Examples include *come*, *be**come***; *timber*, *be**timber*** (*to build*); *swerian*, *an**swerian*** (*answer*). Some scholars believe that this insistent stress tended to level out the sounds of unstressed syllables. Any sound or syllable that did not take the full word stress, such as a grammatical ending, would not have been pronounced clearly.

Theories that focus on form and function assert that as final endings became harder to distinguish, new ways of establishing meaning were necessary. Let's walk through an example. Old English had a fully developed set of prepositions: *of*, *with*, *before*, *on*, and *to*. These were used to signal relationships among words in various kinds of phrases, but case endings still served the same function. Thus, a noun in the dative case did not need a preposition. A line from *Beowulf* reads: *Him tha yldesta wordhord unleac*, or *To him, the eldest unlocked his word hoard*, meaning *he unlocked his words* or *spoke*. The line contains no preposition, but *him* is in the dative case so the sentence should be understood to mean *The oldest one spoke to him.* In Late Old English and Middle English, these grammatical categories lost their distinctions and prepositions took over. Patterns of word order also became regularized as syntax (rather than case endings) became the way of expressing grammatical relationships in a sentence. Certain patterns, such as subject-verb-object, became standard.

What is the evidence for this kind of change? As we've noted, linguists look for written evidence showing a level of literacy high enough to record sounds and forms but not so well-developed as to use conventions of writing apart from speech. Linguists also look for texts that can be dated and localized to a particular region. During the Anglo-Saxon period, monks, teachers, and scribes kept year-by-year histories in prose called "annals." An excellent example is the *Peterborough Chronicle*, kept by monks until the year 1154. This document records language change in ways that are at times subtle and

significant. Because Peterborough was somewhat geographically removed from the initial impact of the Norman Conquest, its records illustrate few effects of Norman French. Each chronicle entry is the set of events of a given year, and each one begins with a phrase meaning *in this year.*

It's important to note that the chronicle was not necessarily kept year by year. Instead, our evidence tells us that every 20 years, or 10, or five, a scribe would copy out what had happened in the preceding years. In this way, blocks of text highlight—in gross form—the ways in which the English language was changing during the transitional period right after the Norman Conquest.

Let's look at the following examples:

Year	**Phrase**	**Notes**
1083	*on þisum geare*	The endings "-um" and "-e" signal a dative masculine singular. This is classic Old English.
1117	*on þison geare*	The "-um" ending has been replaced with "-on." The adjectival ending seems to have been replaced with an indiscriminate vowel plus an indiscriminate nasal ("-m" or "-n"). This may be the scribe's attempt to preserve a grammatical ending or preserve the sound of speech.
1135	*on þis geare*	The adjectival ending of this has been lost, but the "-e" at the end of geare still signals a dative. Concord in grammatical gender is obviously gone by this time.
1154	*on þis gear*	The endings have completely disappeared. We are no longer in the world of inflected Old English.

We can trace several other changes in the period after the Norman Conquest. As mentioned earlier, word order patterns were regularized. The order of subject-verb-object became the standard for the simple declarative sentence. Other word order patterns were used for special kinds of expression; for example, in asking a question, the standard word order would be inverted to verb-subject-object: *Know I the way?* Both Shakespeare and the King James Bible preserve this archaism in asking questions. Other archaisms, such as *methinks*, meaning *it seems to me*, survived until the time of the Renaissance.

In asking a question, the standard word order would be inverted to verb-subject-object: *Know I the way?* Both Shakespeare and the King James Bible preserve this.

Over time, the sound of the language also changed. Again, let's look at a few examples: Old English began to lose some of the characteristic consonant clusters that gave it its distinctive sound. The *hl-*, *hr-*, *hn-*, and *fn-* clusters leveled out to *l-*, *r-*, *n-*, and *sn-*. Compression of syllables occurred in such terms as *hlaf weard*, *guardian of the loaf*, which was shortened to become *Lord*. Certain Old English words underwent a special sound change called "metathesis." This is the inversion of sounds in order. We hear this when we identify certain regional dialects by the pronunciation "aks" for *ask*. During the Late Old English and Early Middle English periods, certain words permanently metathesized their sounds: *brid* → *bird*; *axian* → *ask*; *thurgh* → *through*; *beorht* → *bright*. Some strong verbs (*need*, *help*, *wax*) changed to weak ones.

The system of making meaning was changing at the same time that newer French words were inflecting the language. Let's close again with poetry. As we saw when we looked at "Caedmon's Hymn," Old English poetry was constructed with a certain number of strong alliterative stresses in each line. The number of total syllables in the line was not relevant, nor was rhyming important. In France, however, the organization of the poetic line was determined by the absolute number of syllables in the line. An eight-syllable iambic line would have four beats or stresses (iambic tetrameter). A 10-syllable iambic line would have five stresses (iambic pentameter). The French brought this new structure for poetry to the British Isles.

"The Owl and the Nightingale," written about the year 1200, is the earliest English poem composed in sustained octosyllabic rhymed couplets. It is essentially a French poem written in English:

Ich was in one sumere dale;
*In one suþe di**ȝ**ele hale*
Iherde ich holde grete tale
*An Hule and one Ni**ȝ**tingale.*

I was in a summery dale;
In one hidden, pretty dark nook,
Where I heard there being held a great tale [or discussion]
Between an Owl and a Nightingale.

As we'll see in subsequent lectures, this poetic structure informs the English architectural, idiomatic, cultural, and political structures, as well. How will French and a French vocabulary affect the speech and the sensibility of the conquered peoples? ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Bennett and Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*.

Clark, ed., *Peterborough Chronicle*.

Lerer, "Old English and Its Afterlife."

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways was Old English already changing before the Norman French arrived in England?

2. How did Old English word endings evolve independent of Norman influence—and what is a plausible explanation for this phenomenon?

What Did the Normans Do to English?

Lecture 9

What the Norman Conquest did in altering the vocabulary structure of English was not simply increase the raw vocabulary—the raw number of words—it changed conceptually or systematically the vernacular in the British Isles. It changed it from one that resisted the acceptance of loan words to one that accepted almost voraciously new loan words.

In the last lecture, we saw some ways in which Old English, the language of the Anglo-Saxons, was changing even before the influx of the Norman French. For example, grammatical gender and case endings that signaled relationships among nouns in sentences were beginning to disappear before the Norman Conquest. However, the Normans did bring new words, concepts, and social and institutional structures to the British Isles that had an impact on the language and literature.

Why do new words enter a language? What happens when two languages come into contact? Words are borrowed mainly for two reasons. The first reason for borrowing is that the donor language is of greater prestige. After the Norman Conquest, French terms for government, political organization, high culture (especially cookery), and educated discourse came to be preferred. The second reason for borrowing is that a vacant slot for a borrowed word exists in the receiving language; in other words, if there is no native word for a concept or thing and the new language community brings that thing or concept in, then it comes with the new word.

But some languages, including both ancient and modern Germanic languages, resist bringing in loan words and prefer to coin their own. One Modern German word for *television*, for example, is a bit-by-bit translation of that word that means *far seer*: *Fernseher.* In altering the vocabulary structure of English, the Norman Conquest did not simply increase the raw number of words, but it changed the vernacular in the British Isles from one that resisted the acceptance of loan words to one that accepted them almost voraciously.

New words brought into a language can affect word stress. In the Germanic languages and Old English, in particular, word stress was fixed on the root syllable of a word, but this was not true for the Romance languages, including French and Norman French. The idea of variable word stress can be seen in Modern English. For example, the word *record* (pronounced "re-CORD") is a verb, but *record* (with the accent on the first syllable) is a noun. Here, different stress patterns on different syllables change the meaning and grammatical function of the word. We see another example in *canon* (an accepted set of texts, values, or individuals), pronounced "CA-non," and *canonization* (the act of making a canon), with the stress on the "a" before "tion."

Changes also occurred in poetry. Old English poetry was alliterative in structure; that is, the principle of organization was the repetition of an initial consonant or vowel in the words, combined with the number of strong stresses in a line. Recall from our last lecture the poem known as "The Owl and the Nightingale." This poem was probably composed around the year 1200, and it seems to be the first sustained poem in English written in octosyllabic rhymed couplets (rhymed verse in which each line has eight syllables and four stresses). Even though the structure is continental, however, the vocabulary is largely Old English.

The influence of French is especially apparent in matters of cuisine.

The fifth line of this poem is as follows: ... *plait was stif and starc and strong*. The word *plait*, used to describe the debate between the owl and nightingale, is from Norman French, and is at the heart of our word *complaint*. It's a technical term from French rhetoric meaning *discussion* or *argument*. The end of the line, *stif and starc and strong*, however, almost seems to be Old English alliterative poetry struggling to release itself from the constraining French octosyllabic line. In this one line of poetry, we see the way in which contact changes the texture, stress, and literary structure of languages, in addition to their vocabulary.

The borrowings from French into Middle English came during two periods, one associated directly with the Normans; the other, with later Parisian or Central French loans. The Norman French loans came in the 11th–12th centuries from the original group of conquerors, their families, and their lineal descendants. Both religious terms, such as *prophet*, *saint*, *Baptist*, *miracle*, *paradise*, and *sacrament*, and words of social and political control, such as *prince*, *dame*, *master*, *court*, *rent*, *poor*, *rich*, *prison*, *crown*, *purple*, and *prove*, entered the English language.

Terms from architecture also came into the language, in particular, the word *castle*. The Anglo-Saxons did not build monumentally in dressed stone; large structures were built of timber or in flint cobble. As soon as the Normans arrived, however, they built castles. The word *castle* comes from Latin, meaning an enclosed or fortified encampment. In the *Peterborough Chronicle*, the first line of a poem on the death of William the Conqueror (d. 1087) is "*Castelas he let wyrcean*," "He had castles built." This line signals linguistically the imposition of a new structure on the English landscape.

The poem about William the Conqueror also makes an awkward attempt at rhymed couplets, probably the first such attempt in English. The Anglo-Saxon writer tries to evoke not just the architectural change to the landscape but the prosodic change in the language:

Castelas he let wyrcean,
7 earme men swiðe swencean.
Se cyng wæs swa swiðe stearc,
7 bena of his underþeoddan manig marc
goldes 7 ma hundred punda seolfres.

He had castles built
and [poor] men terribly oppressed.
The king was very severe,
and he took from his underlings
many marks of gold and hundreds
of pounds of silver.

After the Norman Conquest, a new wave of speakers came to the British Isles, bringing with them what is known as Central or Parisian French, in the 13th–14th centuries. Note that the Normans ("Northmen") were originally a Germanic people from Scandinavia. Thus, the pronunciation of Norman French has some similarities to that of the Germanic languages, whereas the pronunciation of Central French has sounds that are far closer to those of the Romance languages.

Norman French words that begin with the "k-" sound (written as "c") correspond to Central French words that begin with the "sh-" sound (written as *ch*): *castle-chateau*; *cattle-chattel*; *cap-chapeau*. Norman French initial "w-" (a glide) corresponds to Central French initial "gu-" (a stop): *warden-guardian*; *ward-guard*; *wile-guile*; *war-guerre*; *William-Guillaume*. French loan words in English are easy to spot:

- Words spelled with *ei*, *ey*, or *oy*: *cloy*, *joy*.
- Endings in *-ion* or *-ioun*: *extension*, *retention*.
- Endings in *-ment*: *emolument*, *condiment*.
- Endings in *-ence* or *-aunce*: *existence*.
- Endings in *-or* or *-our*: *color*, *honor*.

In Central French, words that end in *-ous* are adjectives; words that end in *-us* are nouns. Thus, *callous* is an adjective, while *callus* is a noun. This spelling convention still works in Modern English.

The influence of French is especially apparent in matters of cuisine, itself a French word. Sir Walter Scott noted in his novel *Ivanhoe* that words for animals are Old English and words for meats are French. We might imagine an Anglo-Saxon peasant raising a cow on his land, but when that cow appeared as meat on a Norman Frenchman's table, it became *boeuf* (*beef*). The same transformation is seen in *calf-veal*, *deer-venison*, and *sheep-mutton*. These kinds of pairings show us how French became the language of high culture, while English remained the language of the land.

Medieval England was a trilingual culture. Latin had become the language of the church, education, and philosophy. French was the language of administration, culture, and courtiership. English was the language of popular expression, regional dialect, and personal reflection. *The Harley Lyrics*, a collection of literature written probably in the 1330s in Hertfordshire, gives us clear evidence of writers and readers who were, in a broad sense, trilingual. One poem in the manuscript (#2253) ends with this quatrain:

Scripsi hec carmina in tabulis;
Mon ostel es en mi la vile de Paris;
May y sugge namore, so wel me is;
3ef hi de3e for loue of hire, duel hit ys.

I have written these verses on my tablets;
My dwelling is in the middle of the city of Paris;
Let me say no more, so things are fine;
But if I die for love of her, it would be a pity.

The first line here is in Latin, the second is in French, and the third and fourth are in Middle English. This poem shows us the brilliance of medieval trilingual culture, to be found in the stratification of languages. An English schoolboy would write on his tablet in the language of learning—Latin. When he went to the university, he would have traveled to Paris and learned French. But when he wanted to express himself and his love, he would have done so in his own Middle English.

In this lecture and the previous one, we've seen how the Norman Conquest and the importation of the French language had an impact on the structure, sound, spelling, and vocabulary of English, as well as on the imaginative world of the British Isles. In the next lecture, we'll continue our exploration of this imaginative world by turning to the poetry of Chaucer, a writer who was as deeply trilingual as the poet of *The Harley Lyrics*. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Bennett and Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*.

Blake, ed., *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, vol. 2, p. 1066–1476.

Questions to Consider

1. Why does a perfectly healthy language adopt loan words from another language?

2. What are some of the major endings or clusters of letters that identify a word as French in origin?

Chaucer's English

Lecture 10

Chaucer's English. I'm going to look at the ways in which he develops out of the matrix of regional dialect—English, French, and Latin—and the history of the language as he experienced it … a supple poetic form, vocabulary, and idiom. But I also want to look at the ways in which Chaucer's language reflects the culture and experience of its time.

As we noted in the last lecture, the languages of Latin, French, and English coexisted in medieval England as strata of verbal expression and experience. Latin was the language of the church and of intellectual and philosophical inquiry; French was the language of the court, the government, and high culture; while English belonged to the street and the farm—the language of personal expression and intimate communication. These three languages coexisted for more than 200 years, and, in their coexistence, gave rise to a form of the vernacular that reached its literary apogee in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer did his major work in English, though he, too, was trilingual, in a sense. He had close contact with French and Latin, and his English synthesizes several regional dialects. In this lecture, we'll explore the history of the language as Chaucer experienced it and how he developed, out of that matrix of English, French, and Latin, a supple poetic form, vocabulary, and idiom. We'll also look at the ways in which Chaucer's language reflects the culture and experience of its time.

Chaucer was born probably around the year 1340. As a young man, he entered aristocratic service, rising high in the circles of court and the city of London. He served in Parliament, and in the 1380s–1390s he was clerk of the King's Works, with the job of staging events for King Richard II. Chaucer's English, therefore, was the language of an educated public servant in late-14th-century London. He had probably been schooled in Latin and gained familiarity with French in his service to the court. We know that he made some diplomatic forays into Italy in the 1370s, where he may have met the great Italian poets Petrarch and Boccaccio. Note that in this trilingual world, there were some authors who wrote in all three languages, notably John Gower, Chaucer's friend and lawyer. In Chaucer himself, we find a writer who knows other

languages and cultures and who synthesizes vocabulary, syntax, form, and idiom into a unique literary expression of the cosmopolitan life of his time.

The central features of Chaucer's language are its pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and grammar, and attitude toward language. In looking at the first of these features, pronunciation, we know that Chaucer's language was a dialect of Middle English made up of elements drawn from East Midland dialects to help form what would become a London standard. The vowel system Chaucer used would have been very much like the southern Old English vowel system and similar to the vowels of the modern spoken European languages. The characteristic consonant clusters of Old English were disappearing in Chaucer's time. For example, Old English *hring* became *ring*; *hwat* became *what*. There were no silent letters in words. Final *-e* was usually pronounced, as were all the syllables in a word such as *marriage* ("ma·ri·ag·e").

Chaucer's vocabulary deploys for the first time a whole range of new words from French and Latin. He draws on the learned vocabularies of the universities, courts, guilds, and European literary traditions. But he also relies on the native Old English resources of his language, often, as we will see, for striking effect.

Under the heading of syntax and grammar, Chaucer's word order is often influenced by the metre of his poetry. *The Canterbury Tales* is written in iambic pentameter (five-beat, 10-syllable lines), and the lines rhyme in couplets; obviously, these constraints sometimes affected the poet's choices in word order. Nonetheless, it's fair to say that Chaucer's word order patterns seem to stand midway between the inflected forms of Old English and the full, uninflected patterns of Modern English. Chaucer used the standard subject-verb-object word-order pattern for a declarative sentence. To ask a question in Middle English, however, the order of subject and verb was inverted. (We do not see the addition of the word *do* at the beginning of a sentence to ask a question until the mid-16th century.) Similarly, word order could be reversed for a command, in claims of negation, or for emphasis: *Gave you the ball? Gave the ball, you? I, the ball gave*. It is important to note that negation, in Old, Middle, and even Early Modern English, was cumulative. Double negatives didn't cancel each other out; they reinforced each other. Chaucer's description of the knight, for example, in the General

Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* is as follows: *He nevere yet ne vylanye ne saide unto no maner wight*, (*He never yet, in no way, said anything bad, nohow, to nobody*).

Pronouns were also important in Chaucer's Middle English. In Old, Middle, and Early Modern English, as in many modern European languages, two sets of pronouns were used. In Middle English, the second-person singular and informal pronouns were *thou* (nominative), *thee* (dative and accusative), and *thy* or *thine* (genitive); the corresponding plural and formal pronouns were *ye*, *you*, and *your*, respectively. The distinction between these two sets of pronouns was one of class, not simply number. We must suspend our intuition in realizing that *thee* and *thou* were once informal, not formal.

The opening sentence of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* shows us how Chaucer makes meaning out of the linguistic resources of his time and place. If we think of this famous 18-line sentence cinematically, we see the camera of the poet's eye panning down from the imperium to the surface of the Earth, and we move from the sky—the zodiac, the winds—to the treetops and the land itself. We then move from the periphery of England to the focal point in Canterbury.

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heath
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages),
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,

The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

When it happens that April, with his sweet showers, has pierced the drought of March to the root, and bathed every vein in that fluid from whose power the flower is given birth; when Zephyr also, with his sweet breath, has inspired the tender crops in every wood and heather, and the young sun has run half of his course through the sign of the Ram, and little birds make melody who sleep all night with their eyes open (so Nature stimulates them in their hearts), then people desire to go on pilgrimages, and professional pilgrims desire to seek strange shores; and they wend their way, especially, from the end of every county in England to Canterbury, in order to seek the holy, blissful martyr who had helped them when they were sick.

These opening lines juxtapose new words of French and Latin origin with roots and forms of Old English or Anglo-Saxon origin. We see French, for example, in *perced*, *veyne*, *licour*, and *flour* (*fleur*, *flower*). The word *vertu* comes from Latin *vir*, meaning *man*; here, we interpret it as *power*. Combined with *engendred*, we get a sense of the power of regeneration in the spring. Referring to the wind as *Zephirus* invokes a world of classical mythology. Note, too, that with his sweet breath, Zephirus inspires. This is perhaps the first use of *inspire* as a verb meaning *to breathe into*. In addition to French and Latin words, Chaucer uses English vocabulary. Zephirus's breath, for example, inspires into the *holt* and *heeth*. The *smale foweles* come from Old English, while *melodye* is ultimately a Latin term for music. Note, however, that the birds are sleeping with their eyes open (having sex) because nature has pricked their *corages*, from the French *coeur* (*heart*). In Chaucer's time, as in our own, it seems that the language of love was French.

These opening lines juxtapose new words of French and Latin origin with roots and forms of Old English or Anglo-Saxon origin.

To summarize, the words in this poem for high-culture concepts—intellection, sexuality, courtliness, poetry, and imagination—are French, while the words for the landscape are English. In the final couplet, we see the French word *martir* (*martyr*) enter the English language as an imported concept word, but the alliterative *hem hath holpen* seems to be a reassertion of English forms. The rhyming of the same word with two different meanings (*seke* [*seek*] and *seeke* [*sick*]) gives a sense of profound closure at the end of this first sentence of *The Canterbury Tales*.

In these opening lines, Chaucer has written the history of the English language to his time as we have sought to trace it: French and English jockeying for position, alliterative poetry reasserting itself, and an evocation of a larger classical way of thinking. Chaucer wrote in English, yet he brings the vocabulary of his trilingual world together in a profound synthesis of landscape and culture. ■

Suggested Reading

Benson, ed., *The Riverside Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*.

Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer's English*.

Lerer, ed., *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*.

Questions to Consider

1. Could Chaucer have read "Caedmon's Hymn" as it was originally written?

2. What words in Chaucer's vocabulary suggest that he was a cosmopolitan writer?

Dialect Representations in Middle English

Lecture 11

When I was a child growing up in Brooklyn, I thought everybody spoke in dialect. There were the peppery Yiddishisms of my own family, the mellifluous Italian of the people down the block, the Russian in the recesses of the subways. I grew up in a world of dialects. … When I was a graduate student at Oxford University, I became aware of the fact that dialect was not simply a matter for the child in New York, but it was a historical problem as well.

Middle English is, one scholar has written, "*par excellence* the dialectical phase of English, in the sense that while dialects have been spoken at all periods, it was in Middle English that divergent local usage was normally indicated in writing." Scribes in the medieval period in England invariably copied texts in their own regional dialects, giving scholars today valuable indications of pronunciation. As we saw in earlier lectures, regional dialect variation in the Anglo-Saxon period provoked national standardization. The Northumbrian dialect of "Caedmon's Hymn," for example, disappeared in the West Saxon forms of the translators in King Alfred's court. Middle English had varieties of dialects, many of which had their own literary traditions. In looking at dialect in the works of Chaucer and other texts, we can see not simply how dialect is transcribed but how it is evoked—that is, the way in which dialect humor and representation can be used to express social satire or philosophical claims.

Middle English had five major regional dialects that roughly corresponded to the Old English dialect differences. The dialect boundaries were both natural and manmade. The major rivers of England made up boundaries of speech communities, as did the old Roman roads, which effectively divided the country and, well into the Middle Ages, were still the central lines of transportation through the island. The Northern dialect of Middle English was the language spoken north of the Humber River, in Northumbria. Its most distinctive features were a rich Scandinavian vocabulary and a set of sounds keyed to certain Scandinavian habits of pronunciation. The predominance of *sk-* and *k-* sounds in Scandinavian (*sh-* and *ch-* in Old English) became

distinctions between Northern and Southern English. Thus, in Northern English, we have *kirk* and *skirt* instead of Southern English *church* and *shirt*. A set of vowel shifts was also important in marking the difference between Northern English and the dialects spoken in the south and the Midlands. The Old English long *a* vowel sound eventually become a long *o* sound in Southern and Midlands Middle English but was retained as a long *a* in the north. This distinctive difference would have been noticed by all readers and writers.

The East Midland dialect was spoken in the eastern-central part of the country, broadly to the east of the old Roman north-south road that linked York and London. It was an important dialect because many Londoners came from the area. This dialect formed the basis of the major literary language of England at the close of the Middle Ages; much of Chaucer is written in the East Midland dialect.

Studying such technical details enables us to draw dialect boundaries.

The West Midland dialect was spoken to the west of the old Roman road and to the east of the border with the Celtic-speaking area of Wales. Intellectual and literary activities in this region were centered in Chester, near modern-day Liverpool, and the Wirral Peninsula. The West Midland dialect had both different sounds and different morphology. One distinctive feature was that it used the Old English form for *she* as *ha* or *heo*, rather than the emerging form of *she*. Studying such technical details enables us to draw dialect boundaries.

The Southern dialect was spoken in the southwestern part of England, roughly corresponding to Wessex. Southern dialects sound more advanced from our perspective; that is, they undergo certain sound changes that pass into standard Modern English pronunciation. The dialect's distinctive feature was the pronunciation of any initial *s-* and *f-* as *z-* and *v-*, respectively. Thus, the Southern dialect preserves some distinctions that pass into Modern English: For example, the words for the male and female *fox* were *vox* and *vixen* in Southern English; the latter word is kept in Modern English. The Kentish dialect spoken in the southeast of England was a distinctive form of speech well into the early Renaissance, preserving many Old English forms,

sounds, and words. Documents in Kentish also preserve the Old English case endings more than any other Middle English dialect. These Middle English dialects would have been recognizable as such in the Middle Ages.

How did literary writers represent regional variation in speech for purposes of humor or social commentary? Let's explore Chaucer's "Reeve's Tale" as an example of a dialect joke. Chaucer's reeve, a medieval overseer of seigniorial land, is a mean-spirited, slender, choleric man, who is also a carpenter. In *The Canterbury Tales*, he is responding to a story told by the miller about a carpenter. "The Reeve's Tale" is about two students from the north of England who go to Cambridge University. In Cambridge, they buy their grain from a corrupt local miller and wind up sleeping with the miller's wife and daughter. Chaucer emphasizes the fact that these scholars are from the north and speak in the Northern dialect. Chaucer evokes what his London audience would have recognized as Northern English with such words as *na* instead of *no* and *boes* instead of *best*. The students' use of the phrase *til and fra* for *to and fro* highlights the absence of the vowel change (long *a* to long *o*) and the holdovers from Scandinavian mentioned earlier. The cacophony of *I is as ill a millere as ar ye* ("I am as bad a miller as you are") would have painted the students as bumpkins.

The Northern English dialect influenced standard English with the migration of people from the north to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and to the great city of London. One of Chaucer's contemporaries, John of Trevisa, wrote that Northern English was *scharp, slyttyng and frotyng, and unschape*, that is, *sharp, slitting, frotting* ("scratching")*, and unshapely*. The proverb spoken by one of the students in "The Reeve's Tale" emphasizes the sounds of the north once again: *I have herd seyd, "Man sal taa of twa thynges/ Slyk as he fyndes, or taa slyk as he bringes.*" (*I have heard it said, "Of two things, one should take/Such as he finds, or take such as he brings."*) Note the long *a* instead of long *o* and the *k* sound so characteristic of the north in *slyk* (*such*).

In *The Second Shepherd's Play*, we see that if the south could make fun of the north, the north could certainly make fun of the south. This play is the second of two about the shepherds who attended the birth of Jesus. Mak, a sheep-stealer, pretends to be a messenger from the king, using exaggerated Southern

dialect. In speaking to the northern shepherds, Mak uses the Southern *Ich be*, rather than the Northern *I is,* which would have been humorous to the northern English audience. He mixes in French words, such as *presence* and *reverence*, to emphasize his connection to the court in London. Ultimately, one of the northern shepherds tells Mak, *Now take outt that Sothren to the / And sett in a torde!* (Now take out your Southern tooth / And stick it in a turd!). In using a francophone vocabulary and recognizably Southern forms and pronunciations, Mak, the impersonator, serves as a commentary on southern pretense, as well as the Southern dialect.

Keep in mind that these dialect renderings are not transcriptions of actual speech but evocations of what a given audience would expect certain people to sound like. They give us as much evidence about attitudes as they give us about sound. We'll look further at attitudes toward language change and variation in the medieval world in our next lecture. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Benson, ed., *The Riverside Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*.

Milroy, "Middle English Dialectology."

Strang, *A History of English*.

Questions to Consider

1. In the absence of mass media, would dialect variation likely have been greater in the Middle Ages than today?

2. What kinds of accents are caricatured in such Middle English texts as *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Second Shepherd's Play*?

Medieval Attitudes toward Language

Lecture 12

Walter of Bibbesworth … was a 13th-century aristocrat who wrote for a group of English aristocrats and gentry who desired to make their French better. You'll remember that French had become the prestige language of the court and of learning, and Walter wrote a treatise in verse which was designed to teach them French. What he's doing is he's teaching them more than just French—he's teaching them ideas about the language of French.

As we saw in the last lecture, dialect variation in the Middle English period had many levels of effect and many strata of impact. In this lecture, we'll develop some of the issues raised in that lecture into a larger set of analyses and descriptions of medieval attitudes toward language variation and change.

During the Old English period, the central issues for writers and educators were the relationship of Latin to the vernacular and the problem of educating students and conducting the business of government and culture in either of these languages. Moreover, a central issue in Anglo-Saxon schools was the way in which the vernacular was used as a vehicle for instruction. Recall that the West Saxon dialect (the dialect of King Alfred's time and place) came to be developed as a standard. Alfred launched a program of translating the Latin classics into Old English: He imported writers and scholars from Europe and elsewhere in England to help with the project. He came up with a canon of texts to read and study. He also suggested methods of schooling the young in the study of the English language and the Latin classics.

While Alfred made no attempt to impose his own West Saxon dialect on other writers in other parts of the country, the notion of West Saxon as a prestige dialect became clearly articulated in late-10th-century schools. Some manuscripts of Old English were rewritten or recast into the West Saxon dialect. English schooling may have been conducted in the West Saxon dialect. We should note, however, that this dialect was not inherently better

than any other; it just happened to be the dialect of the teachers of the area (Winchester) where schools were established.

Aelthelwold (d. 984), bishop of Winchester, established a school there in which English and Latin were the languages of instruction. He made English a primary aspect of English schooling for the first time, with pupils learning their lessons in both English and Latin. He established a scriptorium at Winchester, where he personally supervised the copying and writing of texts. He sought to regularize the spelling, vocabulary choice, and style of Old English prose. By the Late Old English period, there arose an awareness of dialectical variation in the language, and some institutions, such as Aelthelwold's school, were established for the imposition of a standard prose for literate Anglo-Saxons.

Some institutions, such as Aelthelwold's school, were established for the imposition of a standard prose for literate Anglo-Saxons.

After the Norman Conquest, the teaching of language and literacy was compounded by a new set of linguistic problems: the choice of French, English, or Latin. A useful text to examine here is the mid-13th-century treatise of Walter of Bibbesworth. Walter wrote for an English gentry desirous of bettering their French, because French had become the prestige language of court and learning. Walter's treatise teaches some important distinctions in sound, sense, and usage in English and French. He reeducates his English readers in the idea of grammatical gender, in certain sound differences, and in certain patterns of syntax. Walter's treatise also serves to illustrate the idea that the study of language is an education in culture as well as grammar. He offers an education in the social arts of conversation, courtiership, and intellectual discourse.

Walter distinguishes among the French words for the lip (*la levere*), the hare (*le levere*), the pound (*la livre*), and the book (*le livre*): "The lip surrounds the teeth, / The hare hides in the woods, / The pound is used in trade, / The book teaches us clergie." In these four words, he distills the primary worlds of social aspiration: discourse, hunting, commerce, and knowledge. Walter also gives his readers four words for *red*, each of which has a different social

valence or register. Interestingly, Walter interlineated his text with English words to enable his readers to build up their vocabularies. This text offers a fascinating case study of teaching across languages and cultures.

What are the philosophical implications of this crossing of linguistic boundaries? Medieval scholastics and theologians believed "Man is a grammatical animal"; in other words, humans have a gift of spoken language, specifically a spoken language with rules. These scholars also believed that humans had, so to speak, "fallen" linguistically. In Eden, before the fall, there was a unique concord between word and object. The names Adam gave to the animals carried within them the essential idea of each particular creature. After the fall, there was a split between word and thing, and words became arbitrary. For attempting to build the Tower of Babel, humans were punished by being granted mutually incomprehensible languages. We get a sense of estrangement in these stories. In Eden, language is estranged from the world; in Babel, we are estranged from each other. As St. Augustine wrote in his 5th-century text *The City of God*, "The diversity of languages alienates man from man." Elsewhere he said, we live "in a land of unlikeliness, in a place of dissimilar things." For the medieval theological mind, the world is transitory, mutable, and ambiguous, and the same is true of human language.

Chaucer explored the mutability of language, both diachronically (across time) and synchronically (across space). In his poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, he argued that languages change meaning over time: "You know, too, that the forms of speech have changed over a thousand years, and words that had meaning then now seem to us remarkably odd and strange. … " Chaucer feared the miswriting and misreading of his own poetry by scribes and readers who did not speak his dialect. He was worried that his text, once recopied, might not rhyme or scan. Chaucer was something of a linguistic relativist in his understanding that language changes over time and varies across regions.

Perhaps the greatest medieval commentator on the mutability of English was a contemporary of Chaucer's, the historian John of Trevisa. In 1385, John of Trevisa prepared a translation in English of a Latin work of history called *The Polychronicon* by Ranulf Higden. Included with the translation were some of Trevisa's own commentaries on the state of English life and

language. Trevisa argues that English began with three kinds of speech, Southern, Northern, and Middle, but contact with the Danes and Normans had resulted in corruption of the native language. The result was regional English that sounded, to educated London ears, like "*wlaffyng*, *chyteryng*, *harryng* and *garryng grisbittyng*." Part of the reason for this corruption was that schoolchildren were compelled to give up their native language and learn their lessons in French. Further, socially ambitious men taught their children to speak French and spoke it themselves in an effort to enhance their status.

Trevisa notes that there are many different regional dialects of English but only one form of French spoken in England. He further finds that the Northern dialect is "so sharp, cutting, scratching, and unshapely that we Southern men may scarcely understand it." He believes the Northerners speak this way "because they live near strange people and aliens that speak strangely." The use of the word *alien* returns us to St. Augustine's idea that the diversity of languages alienates man from man. Trevisa also says that the kings of England avoid the north; it is a land of linguistic and political otherness. Trevisa brings up issues that resonate with our own attitudes toward English today: the fact that dialect variation can be a source of humor; the philosophical speculation provoked by diversity of language over time and space; and the idea that the challenges for describing language are invariably the challenges of prescribing.

Let's pause here, at the end of Part I of this course, for a brief review of where we have been and where we are going. We began with an exploration of the methods of studying the English language by looking at Indo-European and the emergence of Old English from a mix of Germanic languages. We saw that Old English was a highly inflected language that gradually became an uninflected one, and we looked at the changes brought by the Norman Conquest in vocabulary, syntax, grammar, sound, and poetry. In the world of the Middle Ages, we learned that English men and women lived multilingually; that is, they lived in a world in which language had changed and in which there was great diversity of dialect and strata of speech. They lived as grammatical animals in an alien world. In the coming lectures, we'll see how this sense of alienation itself brought on radical changes in pronunciation, the spread of English across the globe, and the evocation by Renaissance and modern writers of a land of unlikeliness on the written page. ■

Suggested Reading

Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*.

Mossé, *A Handbook of Middle English*.

Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290−1340*.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you cite any examples of "corruption" in the English you speak, write, read, and hear?

2. What were John of Trevisa's principal beliefs regarding dialect and native language?

The Return of English as a Standard

Lecture 13

Magna Carta was that great document that had been signed by King John in 1215. … The document was originally written in French … but there is an effort—or, if you like, a rhetorical gesture—towards the English barons and towards the realm of England as a whole, to have the document in English. So my point is that the publication or the presentation of this English document is less about language than it is about politics.

As we've seen, throughout the Middle Ages, there were three languages used in the British Isles, with Latin and French as the prestige languages of court and culture, education, and economy. During the late 14th and early 15th centuries, however, English seemed to return as a prestige language. In this and the next few lectures, we will discuss how English reasserted itself after the decline of French in the late Middle Ages, and what is different about English in its reemergence. We'll also chart some changes from the English of Chaucer to the time of Shakespeare, and we'll explore in detail how Modern English finally emerged.

English did not, of course, disappear after the Norman Conquest. Even though French became the official language of court and commerce and Latin was used in the church and university, English remained the vehicle for imaginative expression. How did it return as the language of official proclamation, economic control, and political and social order? The first "official" use of English after the conquest was in the proclamation of Henry III from 18 October 1258, in which he swears to observe the dictates of the Magna Carta (1215). This document was also issued in French and Latin. What is interesting is not just that Henry felt the need to prepare a text in English, but that the English text is obviously a translation of the French one. French was Henry's language and still the official language of the court. A comparison of the French and Middle English versions of the document reveals that the translators deliberately used archaic-sounding English words and phrases for political effect.

Parliament was not addressed in English until 1362, and even after that time, the records of speeches were still kept in French. We know that some people spoke in English because certain speeches were introduced in the *Rotuli Parlementorum* (*The Rolls of Parliament*) with the phrase *Monstre en Englois*, "announced in English." We don't know whether transcriptions of the speeches were made in English and then translated to French, or whether the scribes were bilingual and were able to take dictation in French while English was being spoken.

At the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th, English came to predominate as the official language of record. By 1423, Parliament's records were kept virtually all in English. Henry V (r. 1413–1422) established English as an official language. Statutes (laws based on petitions) were in the following languages: in Latin to 1300; in French until 1485; in English and French from 1485 to 1489; and solely in English after 1489. The London Brewer's Guild adopted English as its official language of record in 1422. In 1397, the Earl of Kent made what we believe was the first major noble English will after the Norman Conquest. In 1438, the Countess of Stafford made her will in English. The wills of kings Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI were all in English. Shakespeare went so far as to present Henry V as not even conversant in French, an example of the rewriting of history.

Caxton exhibited a self-consciousness about the kind of language that should be standard.

Some critics argue that Chaucer's revival in the 15th century was itself the product of a nationalistic movement. As the prestige of English rose, French underwent a decline. By the early 1490s, the printer William Caxton (c. 1430–1492) could write that the greatest number of people in the realm of England understood neither Latin nor French. There is a growing body of evidence that by the end of the 15th century, French became less and less the language of culture and social prestige.

A standard form of English accompanied the rise of the institution known as "Chancery." *Chancery* comes from the word *chancel*, or chapel of the king, where the chaplains of the court originally spent their time between

services, writing the king's letters. By the end of the 14th century, Chancery was the production house for official government documents. By the mid-15th century, the term came to refer to the national bureaucracy as a whole (except for the Exchequer, the economic side of administration). Chancery established special forms of spelling and handwriting that were taught to scribes for the production of official documents. William Caxton opened his print shop in Westminster, the site of Chancery and the administrative seat of government, to establish the idea that his documents were printed in "official" English (Chancery English).

Chancery English contributed to the development of a form of writing that was a standard, irrespective of the speech or dialect of the writer. Spelling was standardized without regard for pronunciation. The official language ceased to represent any living spoken dialect. Writing became truly conventional and arbitrary. Chancery was the first standard of writing in the vernacular in England since Aethelwold's school at Winchester 400 or so years before.

Chancery English survives for us today in a set of petitions, such as the one from the royal orator William Walsby written to King Henry VI in 1437, asking to be appointed Dean of Hastings Cathedral. In this petition, we see that some spellings, such as those of *benign* and *said*, were regularized regardless of dialect. We also see the emergence of *you* and *your* as the standard second-person pronoun forms, as opposed to the earlier use of two sets of pronouns (informal and singular: *thee*, *thou*, *thine*; formal and plural: *ye*, *you*, *your*). By using Chancery English, William Caxton established a national literary standard in print based on the written standard of official documentation. This was a radical change in the notion of a standard and in the standard's relationship to regional dialect and official forms.

Let us review several myths that surround the early history of printing. Printing did not create or increase national literacy overnight. Printing did not democratize literacy across class boundaries. Early printed books were expensive, did not appear in large quantities, and were designed for a readership of clerks and gentlemen. Printed books at first looked no different from manuscripts; the typefaces were based on handwriting. Printing did, however, foster the rise of Chancery standard English.

Because Caxton based his press in Westminster and because he established himself as a printer with royal, aristocratic, and "gentle" patrons, his work had an official cast. Caxton exhibited a self-consciousness about the kind of language that should be standard and, as we said, adapted the standard of official government writing to the printing of literary texts. Caxton was aware of the problems associated with standards, which he discussed in a preface to his book *Eneydos*, a translation into English of a French version of Virgil's *Aenid* (1490). Here, he reflects on attitudes toward language change, dialect variation, and the arbitration of English usage by the educated and the elite. Caxton relates a story in which a merchant from London knocks on the door of a Kentish farm and asks for eggs. The farm wife who answers the door doesn't understand the merchant's request for *eggs* (the Northern or Scandinavian form of the word) rather than *eyren* (the Old English and Southern form) and tells him that she doesn't speak French. "*What sholde a man in thyse dayes now wryte, egges or eyren*?" asks Caxton. "*It is harde to playse euery man by cause of dyersite and change of language*."

Caxton's preface is an allegory of linguistic alienation that reminds us of St. Augustine and other earlier commentators. The English language has become so mutable and diverse that it is not only Northern barbarians but Kentish housewives, as well, who cannot understand what a Londoner is saying. At the same time, Caxton reflects on the relationship between language and the self. What is the English language? What makes someone "English"? Is a merchant from London any more or less "English" than a housewife from Kent? ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Fisher, *The Emergence of Standard English*.

Fisher et al., *An Anthology of Chancery English*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why was English so slow to be adopted as the official language of England after the Norman Conquest?

2. Did the rise of Chancery make English a more powerful language?

The Great Vowel Shift and Modern English

Lecture 14

The Great Vowel Shift, if you like, has become not just a fact, but something of a myth of English linguistic history. It may not be too much to say that the Great Vowel Shift is the single most important change that separates Middle English from Modern English.

The Great Vowel Shift (GVS) was a relatively simple phenomenon, but it had a significant impact on the sound and shape of the English language between the time of Chaucer and the time of Shakespeare. Indeed, it is because of the GVS that the language of Chaucer was largely opaque by Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare's language, in contrast, is still accessible to us because no change in pronunciation as systematic or as radical as the GVS has taken place since his time.

During the period of the GVS, from roughly the middle of the 15th century to the end of the 16th century, changes in vocabulary and word meanings, syntax, and attitudes toward language use, regional variation, and public idiom took place in English. Together with the change in pronunciation effected by the GVS, these features of the language transformed Middle English into Early Modern English. In this lecture, we'll work through the details of the sound changes that took place during the GVS and look at the ways in which scholars are able to use written documents to provide evidence for changes in sound. We'll also see how the GVS has become something of a myth in English linguistic history.

The GVS signals the single most important change from Middle to Modern English, and it separates English from other European languages. Only six vowels were affected. These are long, stressed monophthongs—vowels in stressed positions in the word that were held long in pronunciation and that had a pure sound (that is, were not made up of groups of sounds). A monophthong is a single sound made by keeping the mouth in the same position. Examples include /ɛ/ ("eh" as in *bet*), /i/ ("ee"), /o/ ("oh"), /u/ ("oo"), and /ɔ/ ("aah" as in *mop*). In speaking these sounds, the mouth stays in the same position. In contrast, "I" is a diphthong, a sound made up of

two sounds, and when this sound is spoken, the mouth moves from one position to another. Examples include the "i" sound in *mice* and the "au" sound in *house*.

The sounds affected by the GVS are shown in the following table:

Sound	Written Representation	Example Word and Middle English Pronunciation
/a/	a	name, "nahme"
/e/	e	feet, "fayt-eh"
/i/	i	bite, "beet-eh"
/o/	o	do, "dough"
/u/	u	mus, "moose"
/ai/	i	myn "mine"

The GVS can be described in terms of articulatory phonetics; as you may recall from one of our early lectures, articulatory phonetics is used to describe how vowels and consonants are produced in the mouth. Vowels are described according to their height and their position in the mouth. Thus, they can be low, middle, or high, and back, mid, or front.

Old spelling conventions are often used in these letters to indicate new sounds.

Keep in mind that linguists do not use the terms "long" and "short" to describe a qualitative difference in vowel sound, as most people are taught in school (e.g., *beet* versus *bit*). From a linguistic point of view, the terms "long" and "short" relate to quantitative vowel length, that is, the period of time through which the vowel sound is held. This length of time made a difference in meaning in Old and Middle English. For example, in Old English, the word *god* could be pronounced "gode," meaning *God*, or "gooade," meaning *good*. The length of time the vowel was held signaled a different meaning for the word. This distinction was lost to Modern English during the GVS. There is no difference in meaning if *sat* is pronounced "sat" or "saat."

The GVS can be summarized as follows:

- Front vowels were raised and fronted.
- Back vowels were raised and retracted.
- High vowels were made into diphthongs.

The following represents a scholarly reconstruction of the changes. The two high front vowels represented by the letters *i* (/i/, pronounced "ee") and *u* (/u/, pronounced "oo") in Middle English became diphthongs. In other words, they were pronounced differently, each as a cluster of two sounds: /i/ became /ai/, pronounced "i", and /u/ became /au/, pronounced "ow." In Middle English, *mice* would have been pronounced "meese," and *house* would have been pronounced "hoose." By the end of the 16th century, these sounds probably would have been pronounced "moice" and "hause," and by the end of the 17th century, they would have been close to our modern pronunciations.

The mid vowels represented by the letters *e* (/e/, pronounced like the *a* in "ace") and *o* (/o/, pronounced "oh") were raised. Thus, Middle English *feet*, pronounced "fate," came to be pronounced as Modern English "feet." Middle English *do*, pronounced "dough," came to be pronounced as Modern English "do." The low back vowel written in Middle English as *a* (/a/, pronounced "aw") rose to fill the place left by the older Middle English "e." Thus, a word such as *name*, pronounced in Middle English as "nahme," became pronounced "naim." Finally, the long, open *o* (/ɔ/, pronounced like the *o* in "cost") was raised to the long *o*. Thus, the Middle English word *so*, pronounced "saw," came to be pronounced "so."

More than one explanation exists for the GVS. Dialects in England during the 15th and 16th centuries were in contact in new ways. Migrations from the north and the midlands into London brought speakers into contact. This mix of dialects created social pressures to develop or select a set of pronunciations that would have new social status or prestige. The sounds that were chosen or developed appear, in retrospect, as the sounds of the GVS. Of course, people did not consciously decide to change their pronunciation according to the GVS. There were many ways of pronouncing vowels, some regional and

some historical, but over time, a particular system of pronunciation arose as an accepted standard form. An additional explanation is that, with the change in the social status in English itself and with the loss of French as the prestige language, the need was felt to fill the social gap with a new form of speech.

Returning for a moment to the diphthongs, we noted that /ai/ and /au/ from /i/ and /u/ didn't become full diphthongs overnight. The word *my*, for example, would not have been pronounced as Middle English "me" but "moy"; *bite* would be "boyte"; *fight* would be "foyt." These interim pronunciations seem to be the origin of "pirate English." In other words, we might say that pirate English is a form of the language in which the GVS hadn't fully run its course, and the high front monophthongs of Middle English hadn't fully diphthongized.

It's also true that the GVS had not fully run its course as late as the early 18th century. Alexander Pope, writing in the 18th century, reveals that the GVS wasn't complete, through his rhyming of such words as *join* ("joyn") and *line* ("loyn"). There also survives a large body of letters from the 15th and 16th centuries, mostly family correspondence, that provides evidence of the GVS in process. In this correspondence, we see people with varying degrees of education writing to each other. Some of them used Chancery forms; some used older Middle English spellings; and some used spellings that reflected their speech habits. Old spelling conventions are often used in these letters to indicate new sounds. For example, *meet* would have been pronounced "mayt" in Middle English but is spelled *myte* or *mite* in 15th- and 16th-century writing to reflect its new pronunciation, "meet." Other examples include those in the following table. Many of these created spellings indicate changes in the vowels to diphthongs.

Example	Middle English Pronunciation	Spelling to Reflect Pronunciation after the GVS
hear	"hare"	hyre, hire
abide	"abeed"	abeyd
our	"uurr"	aur
out	"oot"	owt
house	"hoos"	hows

We need to understand the GVS in tandem with the rise in the standard forms of written English being developed in Chancery and used by Caxton and his successors in print which we discussed in the last lecture. We see a growing gap between educated writing and speech. As you recall, Chancery had set up a system of spelling for official documents which could be learned by scribes regardless of their regional backgrounds. Thus, spelling was gradually becoming conventionalized and divorced from speech; it no longer represented pronunciation. An added effect of this growing separation was a change in punctuation. In the Middle Ages, punctuation was, in essence, ear punctuation—it signaled breaks in reading aloud. By Caxton's time, punctuation was moving toward eye punctuation; that is, it was designed for the silent reader, signaling syntactic or clausal units of a sentence.

A small group of words spelled with *ea*, such as *steak*, *great*, *break*, and *yea*, did not undergo the GVS. If they had, they would have been pronounced "steek," "greet," "breek," and "yee." As with other linguistic anomalies, we have no explanation for the fact that these words didn't change, while similar words did. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Giancarlo, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Vowel Shift?"

Lass, "Phonology and Morphology."

Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution, with Special Reference to English*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some of the reasons commonly given for the occurrence of the GVS?

2. How did the GVS contribute to the gap between writing and speech?

The Expanding English Vocabulary

Lecture 15

The *New World of Words* evokes the sense that English drew its vocabulary from the globe, and just as the search for a new world brought economic riches to the old, so it brought linguistic riches to the old.

During the period of the GVS, the English language vocabulary was also changing dramatically, with words coming in from science, colonial exploration, and philosophy, and from all languages of the world. In this lecture, we'll look at the raw increase in words in the English vocabulary, as well as how English came to be omnivorous in its verbiage. In the mid-15th century, we see what are known as "inkhorn terms" coming into the language. These are words coined from Latin or Greek for "educated" effect and sonic power. Such words were perceived to come right from the inkhorn, or inkwell, and thus were a mark of reading and writing rather than of speech. Although inkhorn terms also identified the user as educated, they were sometimes the object of derision by those who felt they had little rational basis in the history of the language. Some examples of inkhorn terms still in the language include *allurement*, *anachronism*, *autograph*, *capsule*, *dexterous*, *disregard* (first used by Milton), *erupt*, and *meditate*.

In poetry, the corresponding concept for inkhorn terms is "aureate diction," a term that depicts new or unusual coinages as "glistening" or "golden" in their Latinity. As we've seen thus far, Chaucer, Caxton, and other writers saw English as a mutable language; John of Trevisa went so far as to say that the English language had been *apeyred*, that is, watered down or corrupted. Many early writers held the parallel view that Latin or the Romance languages were somehow immutable and, thus, of a higher level than English. For this reason, poets used an aureate diction that was highly polysyllabic and often relied on metaphors of beauty, visual splendor, sweetness, and purification. In the *Art of Rhetoric* (1553), Thomas Wilson uses terms from aureate and inkhorn diction to mock the affectation of writers of his day. His parody of a letter of application from a subordinate to a superior sounds like double-talk. Some inkhorn terms did not remain in the language, including *adepted*

(*attained*), *adnichilate* (*reduced to nothing*), *obstupefact* (*to make unclear*), and *temulent* (*drunk*).

Words also entered the language from travel, commercial contact, and science. Commerce and contact with European countries brought new words into English. Examples include the following:

- France: *alloy*, *bigot*, *bombast*, *duel*, *entrance*, *equip*, *essay*, *explore*, *mustache*, *progress*, *talisman*, *tomato*, *volunteer*.

- Italy: *argosy* (itself an Italian coinage based on the Greek epic *The Odyssey*), *balcony*, *granite*, *stanza*, *violin*, *volcano*.

- Spain and Portugal: *anchovy*, *armada*, *banana*, *cannibal*, *cocoa*, *embargo*, *maize*, *mulatto*, *potato*, *tobacco*, *yam*.

- Dutch: *smuggler*, *cruise*, *jib*, *schooner*, *reef*, *walrus*, *blunderbuss*, *tattoo*, *knapsack*.

Notice how many of these words reflect colonial contact, especially in the Americas and Africa. These are not just words from different languages, but words that enter into the register of colonization and military engagement.

Words from non-European languages entered through travel, trade, and conquest. Examples include the following:

- Arabic: *sash*, *hashish*, *mohair*, *sherbet*, *sofa*, *henna*.

- Turkish: *dolman*, *coffee*, *caftan*, *kiosk*.

- Chinese: *ketchup*.

- African: *zebra*.

- North American languages: *raccoon*, *moose*, *skunk*, *hickory*, *totem*, *canoe*.

Words also arrived from science and other intellectual pursuits, including:

- Natural sciences: *vertebra*, *torpor*, *specimen*, *spectrum*, *mica*, *lens*.
- Mathematics: *chord*, *cylinder*, *prism*, *calculus*.
- Philosophy: *dogma*, *critic*, *curriculum*, *crux*, *propaganda*, *alibi*.

The growth of the English vocabulary prompted several discussions about whether loan words or new coinages of these kinds were in keeping with what was called the "genius" of the English language. In the 16th–18th centuries, many writers were concerned with the question of whether these new words were diluting the language. English was known to be a Germanic language, and some scholars believed that the perceived encroachments from overly-learned Latin or from the affected (even effeminate) French were changing the overarching structure of the language.

Alexander Gil … rails against Chaucer as a corrupter of language. According to Gil, "feral monsters of words" are being brought into English daily.

Such questions were also part of a larger turn in education toward an understanding of the "excellence" of English; in other words, the study of language became a way of reinforcing cultural politics by other means. English schoolmasters of the 16th and 17th centuries frequently reflected on the nature of English. Alexander Gil (1564–1635), headmaster of St. Paul's School and Milton's teacher, was interested in pronunciation and developed a system of phonetic transcription with an eye toward spelling reform. He also advocated the exclusion of new words and inkhorn terms from the language. In his *Logonomia Anglica* (*The English Language*) of 1619, Gil rails against Chaucer as a corrupter of language. According to Gil, "feral monsters of words" are being brought into English daily, so that the language is no longer a peaceable kingdom of Eden but a horrific zoo of the linguistic imagination. Note the degree to which Gil's language seems Miltonic. Gil writes of "horrid, evil-sounding magpies," while Milton speaks of Satan's "horrid crew" and the "horrid silence of the

fallen." For Gil, English now represents a bastard tongue, and in Book II of *Paradise Lost*, Satan discovers his own bastard progeny, sin. The paradise that has been lost for Gil is a paradise of language, while Milton sees the loss of ethics and morality.

The changing vocabulary of English was affected not simply by this new world of words but also by a phenomenon known as "polysemy": As new words entered the language and as science and technology began to inform the discourses of poetry and prose, words began to change meaning and connotation. During the 16th century, the rise in commercial vocabulary offered literary writers new possibilities for metaphorical relationships; in other words, social relationships and personal desire came to be expressed in commercial terms. We will see this later, especially in Shakespeare. As you may recall, the word *cheap* (meaning *exchange*, a place of commerce) originated as a borrowing from Latin into the Germanic languages during the continental period. But during the 15th–17th centuries, writers also discovered that the word could be used for punning or wordplay. The same is true of such words as *flagrant* or *ardent* (originally meaning *on fire*), which gradually acquired emotional meanings associated with love. Polysemy made possible greater ambiguities in vocabulary and a wider range of figurative or metaphorical diction in poetry and prose. We will see in the subsequent study of dictionaries how the problem of the literal versus the metaphorical use of a word comes to dominate the organization of word definitions, and how our dictionaries reflect not so much a record of actual speech as a system of definitional organization worked out by 17th- and 18th-century schoolmasters. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Dobson, *English Pronunciation, 1500−1700.*

Nevalainen, "Early Modern English Lexis and Semantics."

Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution, with Special Reference to English*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are "inkhorn terms," and are they still popular today?

2. What is polysemy, and how did it enrich—or merely confuse—the vocabulary of English?

Early Modern English Syntax and Grammar

Lecture 16

The history of the English language is a history of little words. Three little words like *do;* like *will*; and like, well, not even a word, the suffix *-ing*. These are forms that are so radically changing their function and their meaning in the 16th and 17th centuries that we might say that the very shape of Modern spoken idiomatic English hinges on their changes.

Our last lecture was essentially the story of "big words" in English: aureate and inkhorn vocabulary terms; new words from the worlds of science, technology, exploration, and colonization; and words from European and non-European languages. In this lecture, we'll deal with two little words, *do* and *will*, and a suffix, "-ing," that so radically changed their function and meaning in the 16th and 17th centuries that we might say the very shape of modern spoken idiomatic English hinges on their changes.

Although the GVS had changed pronunciation from Middle English, and the influx of words in the 16th and 17th centuries is still represented in our vocabulary today, the English of this period is not Modern English. That said, however, the highly idiomatic quality of Modern spoken English is a legacy from the time of Shakespeare. The term "idiom" relates to expressions that are, in a sense, more than the sum of their constituent parts. For example, the dictionary meanings of *get*, *over*, *under*, *into*, and *out of* would not tell us the meaning of such expressions as *get over*, *get under*, *get into*, *get out of*, or *get up on*. A large part of the idiomatic quality of English comes from developments in the 16th and 17th centuries, including changes in the verb *do*.

As a full verb, *do* means to perform an action: "I did this." This usage appears in Old English; it is the oldest and most sustained use of the verb. *Do* can also be used as a replacement verb: "I went to the store, and having done that …" Here, the verb *do* replaces the verb *go* in the second part of the sentence; this usage developed in the Middle English period. In the Early Modern English period, *do* also came to be used as a periphrastic, or place-holding

verb, in questions: "Do you know the way?" This represents a change from the earlier inversion of word order to ask a question: "Know you the way?" Finally, *do* emerged in the 16th century as an emphatic modal, or helping, verb: "I do know the answer."

In addition to these changing forms of *do*, we can also see changes in the forms of the suffix *-ing*. Old English had words that ended in *-ing* or *-ung* (as did all Germanic languages) to indicate, in nouns, ownership or genealogy, or to turn a verb into a noun. For example, *Hrunting* is the name of a sword; in *Beowulf*, the *Scyldings* are a clan or a family. Further, in Modern German (as in Old and Middle English), the *-ung* ending is used to signal a verb turned into a noun, or a concept noun. In the Middle English period, *-ing* forms as participles (e.g., *going*, *having*, *doing*) were used only in Southern dialects. In Northern and Midland English dialects, participles were formed with *-ende*" or *-ande* (e.g., *lovande*, loving). In the 16th century, some of these dialectical forms entered into the metropolitan standard, as follows:

- Expressions such as "The *x* being *y*, he did this" ("The house being on fire, he ran out").

- Expressions such as "the *x*-ing of the *y*" ("the mowing of the grass," "the growing of the grain"), an idiom that did not appear until the late 16th century.

- Expressions such as "don't blame me for having done it." Shakespeare was really the first writer to use this form.

- New ways of expressing perfect tenses: "I have been waiting; I had been waiting." Note that these examples express the past in different ways. In the first, the action began in the past and continues into the present. In the second, the action began in the past, continued for some time, then ended in the past.

- New ways of expressing the future: "I am going to get something to eat." Although this last form appeared by the late 16th century, it did not gain currency until the 19th.

Idiomatic Modern English is founded on changes such as these. They do not simply alter the way we speak, but they become characteristic of the way we speak.

New forms of pronouns also took shape in the same period. Sixteenth-century English inherited the remains of the older Middle English system of second-person pronouns. The plural and formal forms were *you*, *ye*, and *your*. The singular and informal forms were *thou*, *thee*, and *thine*. The third-person pronoun, *it*, signals the neuter. As you recall, grammatical gender began to disappear in the Late Old English period, to be replaced by natural gender. In the 16th and 17th centuries, gender and grammatical relationships played themselves out in the words *it* and *its*. Even as late as Shakespeare and the King James Bible, grammatical gender was still used, although perhaps as an archaism. In *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, Shakespeare writes, "How far that little candle throws his beams!" We can see the possessive of *it* (*its*) sorting itself out in *King Lear*: "That nature which condemns it origin." When we note such cracks and fissures in grammar, we're really seeing the language in flux.

In the 17th century, for example, it would be grammatical to say, "I can music," meaning "I have a certain skill in music."

We can also point to changes in the system of verbs during this period. Modal verbs, or helping verbs, include *shall*, *will*, *can*, *may*, and *ought*. These verbs can modify the tense or mood of a main verb but cannot by themselves be the only verb in a sentence. In Modern spoken English, they are not transitive verbs because they cannot take an object alone. Originally, these modals were full verbs. In the 17th century, for example, it would be grammatical to say, "I can music," meaning "I have a certain skill in music." In the 14th century, Chaucer wrote, "I shall to God and you," meaning "I am indebted to God and you."

In the 16th and 17th centuries, these verbs changed usage and meaning. The distinctions between *shall/should*, *will/would*, *may/might*, and *can/could* arose during this period to create a subjunctive mood in English comparable to that in Latin. The subjunctive in Latin was used to express the

counterfactual (something that hadn't happened) and the optative (desire): "O, that she would love me." This usage was deliberately designed in the 16th and 17th centuries to evoke a Latin grammatical category. *Shall/will* came to be restricted for forms of the future, losing their full verbal sense by the end of the 16th century. *Shall* was no longer used as a form of obligation, and *will* no longer expressed an individual's will or desire. In Bible translation, *will* was used to translate Latin *volo*, the verb meaning desire or volition; *shall* came to be used for a general future tense. In everyday speech, the distinction came to be one of emphasis. Schoolchildren were once taught that *I shall*, *you will*, *he will* were the standard, non-emphatic forms of expressing futurity; *I will*, *you shall*, *he shall* were considered emphatic.

The central question that emerges here is, are we talking about grammatical or stylistic changes? Where do we draw the line between grammar and idiom? Changes such as the ones we've seen in this lecture seem to have made Modern spoken English more idiomatic than it once was.

A different kind of colloquialism seems to have emerged with these changes that has an important relationship to the language of ritual. Such phrases as "How's it going?" or "How do you do?" have become idioms of everyday speech, but they rely on grammatical forms newly developed in the 16th and 17th centuries. A scene from Shakespeare's play *Henry IV, Part I*, shows us the language of ritual evoked in a new way at a time when the changes in forms of *do* and *will* would have been palpable and pointed. Prince Hal replies to a plea from Falstaff not to be banished with "I do, I will," using *do* in the new sense of a replacement for Falstaff's verb, *banish*.

In 1549, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer compiled the *Book of Common Prayer*, which served, over the next five decades, in various revisions, as the base text for English Protestantism. We're all familiar with the marriage ceremony in this book and its affirmation: "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?" "I will." In the scene from Shakespeare's play and the ritual from the *Book of Common Prayer*, we see that *do* and *will* have become the new loci of English understanding and identity. In the comic scene of power in Shakespeare, Hal uses these words in profound ways. His pledges to Falstaff are not promises of unity but of divorce.

As we'll see in subsequent lectures, Shakespeare and some of his contemporaries were masters of the new world of words, the expansion of vocabulary, and polysemy; Shakespeare, too, was a master of the little words *do* and *will*, whose changes radically affected the rituals of power and desire in early modern England. ■

Suggested Reading

Matti Rissanen, "Syntax."

Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution, with Special Reference to English*.

Questions to Consider

1. Give examples of how English grammar and syntax changed during the Early Modern English period.

2. Give other examples of how the language of contemporary ritual reflects the historical roots of English.

Renaissance Attitudes toward Teaching English

Lecture 17

Spelling becomes a social accomplishment—that is, for the first time being a really good or really a proper speller is a mark of literacy; it is a mark of learning and education. If you do not spell well, you are considered illiterate. Our pedagogical preoccupations with good spelling, therefore, are the lineal descendants of these attitudes of Renaissance schoolmasters.

The idea of "correct spelling" is an invention of the pedagogues and pedants of the 16th and 17th centuries. In this lecture, we'll explore issues in the teaching of spelling to learn how English spelling was regularized and to identify the ideology behind the idea of spelling "correctly." In the course of the Renaissance, an attitude toward language keyed to education emerged in the English schoolroom and university. This attitude grew out of the provocations of new vocabulary terms and changes in syntax and pronunciation that we have looked at in the past few lectures.

Before considering how institutions helped to shape English, we must review the three major changes that took place in English during the period 1500–1700. The first major change we noted was the enormous increase in vocabulary—the rise of inkhorn terms and aureate diction, as well as the entrance into the language of words and coinages from science, philosophy, and technology. Contact with non-English-speaking peoples through trade and exploration also introduced new terms and provoked philosophical questions about the origins of language. The phenomenon of polysemy, in which older words took on new meanings, sometimes figurative meanings, further contributed to the increase in English vocabulary. The period from 1500 to 1700 also saw changes in syntax and grammar. By the end of this period, the major patterns of word order, word endings, and grammar would be recognizable as our own. The changes we noted in the verb *do*, the use of modal verbs as helping verbs, and the rise of verbal forms ending in "-ing' all contributed to the greater idiomatic flavor of English. By 1700, the GVS had run its course, and pronunciation, with a few exceptions (some words

still rhymed in the 18th century that didn't rhyme later), probably differed little from that of our own time.

In addition to these three major changes, the 16th and 17th centuries also saw a central change in spelling to reflect history rather than pronunciation. With the emergence of Chancery in the late medieval period, scribes began to use standard spellings as opposed to spellings that reflected their regional origins. William Caxton applied the official documentary standard of Chancery to literature. He respelled earlier works of Middle English literature, notably Chaucer's, when he printed them in the 1470s and 1480s.

The issue of spelling was a major problem for schoolmasters of the Renaissance. Under the influence of teachers and scholars, literary writers and translators began to respell certain native or long-accepted loan words in new ways—ways that were not really etymological or historical but pseudo-etymological. Let's look at some examples.

- Such words as *debt* and *doubt* came into Middle English from French forms and were never spelled with what we might call a silent "b." But these words came to be respelled to look like the Latin words *debitum* and *dubitare*. Such silent letters are the "fantasies" of schoolteachers.

- The word *adventure* came into Middle English as *aventure* (with no "d" in the spelling), also by way of French. The "d" was later added to reflect an imagined etymology from the Latin *ad venire*, "to enter into," "to journey into."

- The same is true of the words *perfect* (from French *parfait*) and *verdict* (from French *voir dit*); in Middle English, neither was spelled with a "c." Both were respelled to resemble Latin.

Spelling became a mark not of pronunciation—or in cases such as these, not even of word history—but of learning itself. Those who could not spell well were considered illiterate. The equation of spelling with a moral or ethical, as well as an educational, level of accomplishment is the legacy of the Renaissance schoolroom.

If spelling represented an ideal of education, the idea of "educated speech" also emerged at this time. Old criteria for a standard form of speech, such as region, class, or official affiliation, gave way to a new criterion: education, which effaced regional and class boundaries. The idea that an individual's birth did not determine uniquely or irrevocably his or her class was an important change in the court and diplomatic life of Renaissance England. The result can be seen in the figure of Shakespeare, the son of a glover, who rose in society through education and verbal accomplishment.

Spelling became a mark not of pronunciation—or in cases such as these, not even of word history—but of learning itself.

To trace this new idea and the development of a standard, let's look at some selections from Renaissance schoolmasters, theorists, and pedagogues. John Hart, writing in the 1560s, represents those who focused on education as a factor. Hart considered the best English to be that of the learned and the literate, "which every reasonable English man, will the nearest he can, frame his tongue thereunto." Hart's phrasing is interesting because for much of the Middle Ages, the concept of literacy was associated with an individual's command of Latin. That ability is now extended to the command of English. In speaking of "every reasonable English man," Hart refers to an intellectual quality of reason. In other words, rationality requires one to write and speak according to the standards of the learned and the literate. Hart's notion of good reading and writing seems to be class-based or education-based.

In 1619, Alexander Gil, also focusing on education, wrote that all spelling is to be accommodated to the sound not used by "plowmen, maidservants and porters, but by learned or elegantly refined men in speaking and writing." That is, English spelling should be keyed to forms of pronunciation, and the arbiters of pronunciation should be men of the upper classes, men like Gil himself. For other writers, regionalism was critical. George Puttenham, writing in 1589, recommended the best English as that of the court and the region of England nearest the court, a radius of about 60 miles around London in the southeast. It's possible, Puttenham says, that some people outside this area speak Southern educated English, but the common people do not. He

advocates a regional standard keyed to the locations of the institutions that arbitrate good usage (the court and universities). Owen Price, writing in 1665 in *The Vocal Organ*, considered the speech of "London and our Universities" as the best standard. Interestingly, we see in Price's writing a semantic shift in the word *vulgar*; once meaning simply "of the people," by the 17th century *vulgar* had been transformed into a pejorative.

In the course of these debates, the issue of spelling reform also arose. Some writers advocated retaining the system of spelling historically and developing systems of pronunciation apart from spelling. Others argued that spelling should be radically reformed to represent pronunciation. Isaac Newton became so fascinated with the idea of representing speech in written form that he developed a phonetic alphabet. Richard Mulcaster (1530–1611), first director of Merchant Taylor's School, was Edmund Spenser's teacher, and later head of St. Paul's School. He claimed that English spelling was fine as it was, and advocated not reform but consistency. Alexander Gil held the opposite view, advocating a new system of spelling that would make the sound of English clear to anyone. Through such writings, the "genius" ("essence") of the language became a topic of discussion that would be raised to an even higher level in the 18th century in the work of Samuel Johnson and his contemporary lexicographers and critics. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England, 1640–1785*.

Dobson, *English Pronunciation, 1500–1700*.

Samuels, *Linguistic Evolution, with Special Reference to English*.

Questions to Consider

1. How was English spelling influenced by the work of Renaissance schoolmasters?

2. Does English possess more "genius" than any other language?

Shakespeare—Drama, Grammar, Pronunciation

Lecture 18

There is a famous anecdote about a playgoer in the modern period who goes to see a Shakespeare play and when he's asked about it, he says, "Well, it was okay, but it was full of quotations."

Shakespeare was the canonical writer of the English language. He is believed to have contributed, perhaps more than any other writer, new words and idioms to English; he created character and concept; and in his plays and poems, he gave birth to what many believe to be the first modern individuals on the stage or in the fictional imagination. In this lecture and the next one, we'll look in detail at some features of Shakespeare's language; in particular, how it might have sounded to his contemporaries, what his lexical resources may have been, and what grammatical features existed uniquely in his time that separate his language from our own. We'll also talk about the contexts in which Shakespeare's work comes down to us, such as on the stage and in the world of performance; in rhetoric and the habits of schoolroom education; and in printing, typesetting, and bookselling.

Shakespeare employed the language of an educated professional, at least up through the grammar school level. He was clearly well read and conversant in the ideas of the age, both scientific and literary. Shakespeare did not have a university-level education, but it seems clear from his plays and poems that he knew the great works of history; the work of his own English literary forebears, including Chaucer and Spenser; and the works of Plutarch and Seneca. Shakespeare can be read as a textbook on various subjects of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. His phrase "humorous night," for example, accords with the theory of humors in Renaissance psychology. In *The Tempest*, he takes his audience to "the Far Bermoothes," that is, Bermuda, a place only recently visited at the beginning of the 17th century.

We're familiar with any number of quotations from Shakespeare, but there are some aspects of his work that may seem unfamiliar or alien. Using the resources of historical linguistics, the sound of Shakespeare's language has been reconstructed. Given that the GVS had not completely run its course in

the 17th century, certain vowel sounds would not be pronounced as they are in Modern English. The rise in usage of forms of the verb *do* and *-ing* endings, together with changes in the system of modal verbs, adjustments in syntax and word order, and the increase in the idioms of everyday English, as we have seen, had a great impact on Shakespeare's language. Nonetheless, there are many aspects of his grammar that may strike us as archaic. He used, for example, multiple negatives and comparatives: "The most unkindest cut of all." He used the third-person neuter pronoun, *it* and *its*, in distinctive ways. He used older endings for the second-person and third-person singular forms of verbs (*-st*, "thou doest"; *-th*, "he doth"). He used two different pronouns for the second person: *thou* forms for the singular and informal and *you* forms for the plural and formal.

Shakespeare bequeaths to later writers the idea of poetic use of the language.

Shakespeare deployed the growing resources of his vocabulary to increase markedly the lexical basis of literary English. Many of his words came from commerce and trade, and many were coinages. At the same time, we see frequent metaphorical or figurative uses of words of technical meaning in Shakespeare's poetry and plays. In some cases, Shakespeare's words display a functional shift in their employment as different parts of speech. For example, the noun *spaniel* becomes a verb in the following line: "The harts that spanieled me at heels." In this, Shakespeare bequeaths to later writers the idea of poetic use of the language. Shakespeare also left a legacy of memorable and outstanding cursing. We see in a passage from *King Lear* his origination of the phrase *lily-livered*.

Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have been trained in the arts of rhetoric and oratory in school. Rhetoric is the disciplined and creative use of words for the purposes of persuasion. The job of the rhetorician was to evoke an emotional response in the listener or reader. We earlier referred to Thomas Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric*, one of the first major textbooks in the middle of the 16th century that dealt with ways of organizing speech according to formal models for poets, courtiers, orators, and writers. When we look at Shakespeare's poetry, especially the sonnets and the soliloquies in the plays, we can readily see these patterns of rhetorical organization.

Let's now turn to a passage from *Richard III*, act I, scene ii, to examine these features of Shakespeare's language in action. In this passage, Lady Anne is going to the funeral of her father-in-law, Henry VI, when she meets Richard, who has murdered both the old king and Lady Anne's husband. Richard and Anne argue, and the passage calls attention to several important issues relating to sound and sense. In listening to the passage read with a late-16th-century pronunciation, we note again that the GVS was not complete. The Middle English long, high vowels /u/ and /i/ had not yet become the modern diphthongs /au/ and /ai/. Thus, *thou* and *my* would have been pronounced "tho" and "moy." The Middle English long vowel /o/ had not fully moved up to its modern position /i/. The word *undertake* would have been pronounced "oondertaak." Some words, such as *cause* and *haunt*, were probably still pronounced as they had been in Middle English: "cowse" and "hount." The pronunciation of other words, such as *world* and *Mary*/*merry*/*marry*, is more difficult to pin down, because the sounds of the letters "w" and "r" affect the pronunciation of vowels that follow them. This instability in pronunciation is reflected in Modern English in such words as *person/parson*, *vermin/ varmint*, and *university/ varsity*, which share the same roots.

The passage from Richard III can be read as an essay in second-person forms. The heart of its drama is the interchange of *thou* and *you* forms, signaling the shifting personal relationship between Richard and Anne. Richard is trying to woo Anne, but she spurns him. She opens the scene with a contemptuous and condescending *thou*, as if Richard were a servant. Richard responds with a socially correct and formal *you*. In the final line, however, when Richard seeks to make clear that he wants her sexually, he calls Anne *thee*. In this passage, Shakespeare manipulates resources of the language that are now lost to us. Here is the paradox of Shakespeare for modern readers: The sound and grammar of his language seem transparent to us, but they still hinge on particular details of his time and place.

In addition to the contexts of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, another important context for understanding Shakespeare is that of print, where we find many surprises. The passage we just read can be found in the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays. In this book, published in 1623, we find the texts of almost all the plays, but 17th-century printing, especially of drama, was a very different enterprise from modern publication. For example,

Shakespeare's plays circulated in various versions before the First Folio printing, including as actors' copies (the *quarto* texts) and pirated editions. Some aspects of the visual appearance of Shakespeare's early printed texts seem to alienate us from the author. Almost all readers, for example, have noted the similar appearance of the letters "f" and "s," but close inspection reveals that the two letters are written differently. In some early editions, the word *that* appears to be written as a "y" followed by a superscripted "t" (y^t). This appearance is a holdover from the earlier borrowing of a letter from the runic alphabet (the thorn—þ) to represent the interdental sound "th." In our next lecture, we'll look at some of the ways in which the stage and the page work in tandem and in tension to give us a Shakespeare who is, at once, remarkably familiar and radically alien. ■

Suggested Reading

Bertram and Kliman, eds., *The Three-Text Hamlet.*

Hinman, ed., *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare*.

Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*.

Orgel and Braunmiller, *The Pelican Shakespeare*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does Shakespeare's language reflect the evolving state of Early Modern English?

2. Was the role of rhetoric in Renaissance education greater than it is today?

Shakespeare—Poetry, Sound, Sense

Lecture 19

What Hamlet does in this soliloquy is he takes the *questio* of the schoolroom and he turns it into an inner discussion. … These are the extended metaphors, the figurative forms, these are the schemae and the tropes that Shakespeare would have learned from the rhetorical manuals of his time. So I want to begin with the great soliloquy by showing you that it is generated not simply out of the imagination of the playwright or the despondency of the character, but really out of the assignments of the classroom.

The medium of print was flexible in the Renaissance, almost as variable as writing itself. Books were often proofread in the course of production, and individual texts might be corrected or left uncorrected. Shakespeare's plays and poems are documents of Renaissance bookmaking and, as such, reflect the variations of the print shop from the stage or the mind of the author. *Hamlet*, one of Shakespeare's most famous and distinctive plays, comes down to us in several versions, including that in the First Folio (1623) and two earlier quarto versions. The First Quarto was printed in 1603. In it, *Hamlet* is short and seems garbled, the language is remarkably different, and much of the structure and idiom of the play are almost unrecognizable. The Second Quarto was printed in 1604. In this version, the speeches, the organization of the play, and the arc of the tragedy are far more familiar to us. Most modern editions of *Hamlet* are based on the Second Quarto and the First Folio. In this lecture, we'll look at what is perhaps the most famous speech in all of English literature, Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy.

The familiar lines of this speech give us the sense and shape of Shakespeare's rhetoric. In the medieval and Renaissance schoolroom, posing problems or presenting questions to students was one approach to education. A topic of debate would be presented, and students would be expected to argue one side or the other. In this soliloquy, Shakespeare removes this approach from the schoolroom and transforms it into an inner discussion in which Hamlet takes both sides of the question. Shakespeare also uses extended metaphors and

figurative forms that he would have learned from rhetorical manuals of the time. Hamlet's soliloquy works through *anaphora*, that is, the repetition of an initial word or phrase at the beginning of a line, a sentence, or a clause. We note, for example, the repetition of the phrase "To die, to sleep." Keep in mind that Shakespeare was writing in unrhymed iambic pentameter. The anaphora fits into the metrical scheme of the speech.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

In comparison, the First Quarto text of the speech seems garbled, improvised, and far more colloquial, without the precision of anaphora and balance:

To be, or not to be, I there's the point,
To Die, to sleepe, is that all? I all:
No, to sleepe, to dreame, I mary there it goes,
For in that sleepe of death, when wee awake,
And borne before an euerlasting Iudge,
From whence no passenger euer retur'nd,
The vndiscouered country, at whose sight
The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd.
But for this, the ioyfull hope of this,
Whol'd beare the scornes and flattery of the world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich curssed of the poore?
The widow being oppressed, the orphan wrong'd,
The taste of hunger, or a tirants raigne,

And a thousand more calamities besides,
To grunt and sweate vnder this weary life,
When that he may his full Quietus make,
With a bare bodkin, who would this indure,
But for a hope of something after death?
Which pusles the braine, and doth confound the sence,
Which makes vs rather beare those euilles we haue,
Than flie to others that we know not of.
Aye that, O this conscience makes cowardes of vs all,
Lady in thy orizons, be all my sinnes remembred.

Notice also the use of enjambment in the "good" version of the soliloquy. "Enjambment" is the technique of allowing a line to run on so that the end of a line is not the end of a sentence. Many people believe that enjambment is the mark of sophisticated poetry. In the "bad" version of the soliloquy, almost every line ends with the end of a clause or a sentence. The result is a sequence of broken-up lines rather than a flow of sentences. Compare, for example, "To Die, to sleepe, is that all?" in the First Quarto with "To die, to sleep; to sleep: perchance to dream" in the First Folio. The first line seems like a colloquialism. The phrase "For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come" (First Folio) seems far more poetic and imaginative than "For in that sleepe of death, when wee awake." The First Quarto uses some phrasings that were relatively new to colloquial English in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. For example, "The widow being oppressed" makes use of the new "-ing" form that would become characteristic of idiomatic spoken English.

The First Quarto, or "bad" Quarto, raises a number of questions. Is the "bad" Quarto a first draft that Shakespeare later rewrote? Is it a badly printed version of *Hamlet*? Or is it, as some scholars have maintained, a version that was reconstructed by an actor from memory? The lines given to the character Marcellus in the "bad" Quarto are almost the same in the Second Quarto and the First Folio. One theory is that the actor who played Marcellus reconstructed the play from memory—knowing his own part perfectly but the other parts imperfectly—to earn some extra money. The bad Quarto seems more akin to everyday speech than the elevated, organized rhetoric of the Second Quarto and the First Folio.

In contrast to the fluid text of *Hamlet*, let's look at a seemingly secure text, Shakespeare's Sonnet 87. The sonnets were published, most likely without the author's permission, in 1609. In Sonnet 87, Shakespeare uses the vocabulary of commerce to express relationships of love.

> Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
> And like enough thou know'st thy estimate,
> The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
> My bonds in thee are all determinate.
> For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
> And for that riches where is my deserving?
> The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
> And so my patent back again is swerving.
> Thy self thou gavest, thy own worth then not knowing,
> Or me to whom thou gav'st it else mistaking;
> So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
> Comes home again, on better judgement making.
> Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
> In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

Like all of Shakespeare's sonnets, this one is organized into three quatrains, that is, three sets of four lines, and a concluding couplet. The governing figurative language relates to love and economy. New words, and old words used in new contexts, express the idea of love as a kind of investment. The word *dear* gives us an example of polysemy. It can mean either *beloved* or *costly*. Thus, "thou are too dear for my possessing" might mean that Shakespeare's love is too wonderful for him or too expensive for him. *Charter* and *estimate* are words of the new economy. A *charter*, for example, is a contract. Is love a contractual relationship? The line "My bonds in thee are all determinate" means that the investment of love has matured. In the 16th century, *determine* also meant to understand the terms in which something was written. Thus, polysemy creates a double meaning in every line.

Many of the important words in this sonnet use the *mis-* prefix: *mistaking*, *misprision*. Shakespeare says, in effect, that his love gave herself to him because she didn't know her own worth. *Misprision* means to wrongly value something. The word *prise* in Middle English meant *value* or *reputation*.

Chaucer, for example, notes that the knight had a "sovereign price," meaning perhaps both an estimable reputation and a price in sovereigns.

This sonnet seems to be about both exchanges and language itself. To read the poem in Shakespeare's time is to be sensitive to the fact that in a polysemous world, all utterances are ambiguous. The line "Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter, / In sleep a king, but waking no such matter" recalls the longstanding association of dreaming and sleep with the imaginative world of poetry. We see here, too, another form of exchange—exchanging oneself in sleep for a role in dreams.

To read the poem in Shakespeare's time is to be sensitive to the fact that in a polysemous world, all utterances are ambiguous.

What can we learn about pronunciation and spelling in this sonnet? Several rhymes in Sonnet 87 no longer seem to work in Modern English. Consider, for example, *possessing* and *releasing*. These two words probably rhymed on the sound /ɛ/: "possessing" and "relessing." The vowels of these two words had different origins, but for a period of time in the history of English pronunciation, their sounds fell together and enabled Shakespeare to rhyme them. We see another example of two words that no longer rhyme in *granting* and *wanting*. As mentioned in an earlier lecture, the *w* sound has a tendency to affect the sound of the vowel following it in everyday speech. A vowel in a position after *w*- is usually rounded: *war*, *want*, *was*. In Shakespeare's time, this tendency to round the vowel had not yet formed, which enabled him to rhyme these two words *granting* and *wanting*.

With regard to spelling, two words are of particular interest: *ritches* and *guift* (*riches* and *gift*). *Ritches* was almost never spelled with a "t," either in French or in English. Linguists would call the insertion of the "t" a case of "articulative intrusion," that is, the habit of intruding into the pronunciation of a word a sound that isn't there because the mouth is in a position to produce certain sounds. A modern example can is the *p*- sound that can sometimes be heard in the pronunciation of *something*. The spelling of *guift* reflects a convention adopted from French spellings by Renaissance printers

to indicate a hard *g* sound. The *g* of *gift* was to be pronounced in the same way as in the French *Guillaume* or *guerre*.

In this lecture and the previous one, we've seen both the familiar and the alien in Shakespeare, and we've learned that we should hear not only the great quotations in Shakespeare but also the unquotable features of the language of his time. ■

Suggested Reading

Bertram and Kliman, eds., *The Three-Text Hamlet.*

Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*.

Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*.

Orgel and Braunmiller, *The Pelican Shakespeare*.

Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*.

Questions to Consider

1. Might Shakespeare be more accessible to some readers if the quarto texts were used?

2. What features of value does the quarto text retain that are missing in the Folio version?

The Bible in English

Lecture 20

What the King James Bible does is it brings together a history of Bible translation—that is, the King James translators were not simply going back to original texts in Greek, in Hebrew, in Syriac, in Latin, and in Aramaic—the King James Bible translators were also charged with reviewing the history of Bible translation.

Next to Shakespeare, the King James Bible, printed in 1611, was perhaps the most important influence on subsequent speakers, readers, and writers of English. In this lecture, we'll look at the history of Bible translation, attending to four areas of difference: vocabulary, syntax and grammar, pronunciation, and style. The passage we'll explore is Matthew 17:13–15, which illustrates some of the changes we're concerned with most pointedly. We begin with the version from the King James Bible. One of the main features that marks this passage as "biblical" is its paratactic structure—a structure of repeated sentences or clauses joined together by conjunctions. This structure is characteristic of biblical narrative from its origins and was continued by the translators of the King James Bible.

13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.
14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying:
15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

The King James Bible also brings together a history of Bible translation. The translators were charged with going back to original texts in Greek, Hebrew, Syrian, Latin, and Aramaic and with reviewing earlier translations of the Bible. We can note, in the King James version, a difference between Old English or native vocabulary and Latinate, French, or Romance vocabulary.

The Bible was translated into Old English at various times during the Anglo-Saxon period. We see our text in a West Saxon version, probably from the early 11th century.

13 *Þa on geton hys leorningcnihtas þæt he hyt sæde be Iohanne am fulluhtere*

14 *And þa he com to þære menegu, him to genealæhte sum mann, gebig edum cneowum toforan him and cwæð,*

15 *Drihten, gemiltsa minum suna, for þam þe he ys fylle seoc, and yfel þolade; oft he fylð on fyr, and gelomlice on wæter*.

One of the first things we notice about this passage is that the word *disciples*, which will be the word used throughout later biblical translation, is *leorningcnihtas* ("knights of learning"). This is one of those magnificent Old English noun compounds known as kennings. In this passage, *John the Baptist* is *Iohanne am fulluhtere*, the latter word meaning *to put fully under water*. *Multitude* is *menegu* (*the many*) and the phrase *on bended knees* is *gebig edum cneowum*. These examples remind us that Old English was a profoundly inflected language; meaning was determined not by word order but by case endings. In such terms as *Drihten* (*Lord*) and *fylle seoc* (*falling sick*), we can see the common core of Old English vocabulary used to describe experience and translate Scripture. The verb *to suffer* in Old English is *tholian*. Seamus Heaney in his recent translation of *Beowulf* remembers this as a dialect word of the English spoken in Northern Ireland during his childhood. The word also appears in an episode of *Star Trek*, in which the Enterprise is attacked by an evil empire of Tholians.

Again, word order was not the primary bearer of meaning in Old English, but word order was regularized to signal temporal or conditional clauses. In Old English, such clauses were signaled not by *when* and *then* but by *þa* or *ðone*. The two words in Old English could mean either *then* or *when*. The only way to signal meaning was through the word order pattern that followed the word. When *þa* or *ðone* was followed by a verb, then the subject, the meaning was "then": *Þa on geton hys leorningcnihtas* (*Then understood the knights of learning*). When either word was followed by the subject, then the

verb, the meaning was *when*: *And þa he com to þære menegu* (*And when they came to the multitude*).

Our Middle English text is a translation prepared by the disciples of John Wycliffe. In the late 14th century, Wycliffe founded the heretical movement known as Lollardy, which some historians have seen as a proto-Protestant reform movement. Central to Lollardy was the idea that the reading and experience of the Scriptures should be in the vernacular. With this version, we immediately see Latin and French loan words used in place of native Old English coinages: *disciples*, *company*, *mercy*, *people*, *lunatic*, *suffer*.

13 Thanne disciplis vndurstoden, that of Joon Baptist he hadde seide to hem.

14 And whanne he cam to the cumpanye of peple, a man cam to hym folded on knees byfor hym, seying, Lord, haue mercy on my sone; for he is lunatyke, and suffrith yuel, for why oft tymys he fallith in to the fijr, and oft tymys in to the water.

Lunatic, meaning *under the domination of the moon*, replaces *falling sick* in the Old English version. To be *lunatic* was to be subject to the variable phases of the moon. Note that Wycliffe not only enhances the vocabulary of biblical English, but he also provides a model for later translators.

The next major figure to offer a Bible in English was William Tyndale, working in the 1520s. During this period, just before the English Reformation under King Henry VIII, it was against the law to write and publish a Bible in English. Thus, Tyndale's version of the New Testament was published in Geneva. Here, we note several differences in vocabulary.

13 Then his disciples perceaved, that he spake vnto them of Jhon baptist.

14 And when they were come to the people, ther cam to hym a certayne man, and kneled doune to hym, saying:

15 Master, have mercy on my sonne; ffor he is franticke, and ys sore vexed, and oft tymes falleth into the fyre, and oft into the water.

Tyndale retains the word *disciple*, for example, but he replaces *understood* with *perceaved*. *Understand* is, essentially, an Anglo-Saxonism, but Tyndale prefers the more complex, Latinate *perceive*. He may have been placing an emphasis on the interiority of the disciples. The switch from *lunatic* to *frantic* and from *suffereth evil* to *sore vexed* gives the text a feeling of heightened, portentous rhetoric. Tyndale is not simply translating the Bible but creating a biblical idiom in English. Such phrases as *spake unto them* or *were come to the people* foster the impression of something memorable and important. In the latter phrase, the use of the verb *to be* rather than *to have* as the modal verb, or helping verb, may be a conscious archaism. Old Germanic and Old English grammar used forms of the verb *to be* to indicate a change of state, and Tyndale seems to call on these forms for special effect in his translation.

Just before the English Reformation under King Henry VIII, it was against the law to write and publish a Bible in English.

We can see something of the sound of Tyndale in his spellings. For example, the spelling of *perceaved* signals a contemporary pronunciation. But the spelling of *saying* maintains an older convention from Chancery English. We might characterize the style of Tyndale as "Bible-talk"—a familiar blend of the colloquial and the archaic. Many of Tyndale's idioms and phrasings were adapted by the King James translators nearly a century later. Thus, when we look at the King James, we see not simply a translation from original scriptural texts but a translation that is conscious of the history of English Bible translation.

The King James Bible is not a translation into the everyday speech or written communication of 1611 but a deliberately archaic form of the language that maintains distinctive syntactic and verbal features that can be traced back to earlier translations. In some cases, the King James translators rejected Tyndale's phrasings in favor of earlier ones; Tyndale's *perceived*, for example, is returned to Wycliffe's *understood*. In other cases, Tyndale-isms

are retained: "spake *unto* them," "when they *were come*." Many of these choices were probably made for poetic effect. Even for readers of the King James Bible in its own time, *falleth* and *doest* would have been perceived as archaic or heightened grammatical forms.

It's interesting to note that whether the Bible is written in English or any other European language, God is addressed informally. But in using the form *thou*, which was probably just on the cusp of archaism at the time this Bible was produced, the King James may have contributed to the illusion that *thou* and *thee* are formal or heightened forms. These forms of the King James Bible would have a great impact on English and American writing throughout the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Such writers as Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Joel Chandler Harris will evoke the sounds of the King James and bits and pieces of biblicism to create a narrative form.

Both Shakespeare and the King James Bible not only look back to earlier grammatical forms and pronunciations, but they also look ahead to the kind of impact they will have on the English language in the future. As we leave the world of Shakespeare and King James, we enter the beginnings of Modern English. ■

Suggested Reading

Bolton, *A Living Language*.

Lawton, "Englishing the Bible."

Questions to Consider

1. How does the vocabulary of various biblical translations into English change over time?

2. In what ways is the King James Bible superior—or inferior—to the more recent Revised Standard Version?

Samuel Johnson and His *Dictionary*

Lecture 21

In the title pages of these dictionaries, what we see are, if you like, the lexicographical equivalents of the great journeys of exploration and colonization. The language of colonial enterprise is going to inform the language of lexicography.

In previous lectures, we've seen the remarkable rise in the vocabulary of English in the period from 1500 to 1700, as well as a change in attitude of English speakers to become voracious in their appetite for new words. In this lecture and the following one, we'll explore the ways in which scholars, critics, readers, and writers responded to this increase by developing tools, guides, or interpretive matrices for that vocabulary. The earliest dictionaries in English were lists of what were called "hard words," that is, guides to the new vocabulary of science, trade, and exploration.

- John Bullokar published his *Expositor* in 1616, listing words from "logic, law, physics and astronomy."

- In 1623, Cockeram's *Dictionarie* included definitions for "hard words" in numerous areas.

- Phillips's *New World of Words* (1658) lists on its title page 41 arts and sciences from which its words were taken. The title of this work seems to be the lexicographical equivalent of the great journeys of exploration and colonization taking place at this time.

A characteristic of these early dictionaries was an attention to the details of technology. In 1736, Nathaniel Bailey published his *Dictionary* of "hard and technical words, or terms of art" taken from 62 listed "arts, sciences, and mysteries." Bailey set out to organize his definitions in hierarchical form. He was interested in etymology and in the relationship between figurative and literal expression. One question that emerged for lexicographers in the 18th century was whether one should privilege the figurative meaning over the literal meaning, even if the literal meaning has passed out of use.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) was a lexicographer, literary critic, poet, essayist, and tastemaker to his generation. In addition to his famous work on the *Dictionary*, Johnson wrote a variety of critical, interpretive, and poetic works that give voice to his psychological and aesthetic vision of the world. Johnson was preoccupied with notions of transitoriness and mutability. One of his poems was titled "The Vanity of Human Wishes," and one of his works of prose fiction, *Rasselas*, was keyed to the idea of the mutable and the vain. Johnson was also concerned with the question of whether or not particular works of literature and particular texts in the English language would have an afterlife.

For Johnson, the idea of the *Dictionary* began in the 1740s. He found a patron for the work in Lord Chesterfield and, in 1747, published a *Plan of the Dictionary*. Johnson expressed the hope that, by registering usage, he could fix the language. The *Plan* uses military imagery, painting the lexicographer as a Caesar who will conquer Britain and regulate its language. The *Dictionary* took longer to produce than the three years Johnson had predicted in the *Plan*.

When it was published in 1755, the *Dictionary* included a preface in which Johnson explained that his plan to fix the language was unrealizable. He had come to recognize that language was mutable, in flux. As we saw in the quotation from Caxton, English lies under the "domyunancioun of the moone." For Johnson, language was "sublunary": mutable and transitory. Thus, Johnson recognized that his goal was not to fix but "to register" the language. Johnson also recorded in his preface his recognition of the immensity of his project. The job of the lexicographer is not so much colonial and imperial as it is mythical: " … to persue perfection was, like the first inhabitants of Arcadia, to chace the sun, which, when they had reached the hill where he seemed to rest, was still beheld at the same distance from them."

What were Johnson's innovations in the *Dictionary*? How is the *Dictionary* a testament to this Johnsonian sense of linguistic mutability and flexibility? How is it as much a work of autobiography as it is a work of lexicography? Johnson's syntheses and innovations in lexicography are many. His was the first dictionary for the general reader rather than the specialist. It was not a

list of "hard words" from new sciences; rather, it sought to bring together the best in the study of the history of English to date in a book designed for the literate individual. In typical 18th-century fashion, Johnson surveyed and synthesized what he considered to be the best and most representative about his subject, limiting his selection to about 40,000 words of general usage. The challenge, of course, was in defining "words of general usage."

One of the great achievements of Johnson's *Dictionary* is the use of aphoristic definitions. Examples include the following:

- *Network*: "Anything reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections." Is the use of such complex words here a case of Johnsonian humor or irony, or is it meant to give the reader a sense of the infinite regress of language—the idea that word provokes word?

- *Cough*: "A convulsion of the lungs, vellicated by some sharp serosity."

- *Oats*: "A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland appears to support the people."

- *Lexicographer*: "A writer of dictionaries; a harmless drudge that busies himself in tracing the original and detailing the signification of words."

Johnson, however, was more an aesthetician of the word than a harmless drudge, and his *Dictionary* was written for the reader who would aspire to "exactness of criticism or elegance of style."

Unlike his predecessors, Johnson did not argue for a class-oriented diction or, necessarily, for education as the primary criterion for language use. Rather, he argued for aesthetics—for judgment of the beauty, exactness, and elegance of language. Not just a synthesis, the *Dictionary* is a work that articulates the distinctive 18th-century idea of synthesis itself: an ideal of discovering what had proved to be the most generally durable or characteristic quality in things, and then to profit by using that quality as a standard working basis. Johnson thus attempted to find the best in English usage in his day and to sanction or stabilize it. But Johnson rejected the idea of a national institution

that would legislate language usage on the model of the French Académie Française or the Italian Accademia della Crusca. He repeatedly said that language is mutable.

In the *Dictionary*, we can see Johnson's interest in the debate concerning the use of figurative versus literal definitions. Should such words as *flagrant* or *ardent* be defined literally as "on fire" or "burning," or should their definitions encompass their figurative meanings of "emotionally charged" or "excited"? Even though he does not highlight class explicitly as a marker of linguistic usage, Johnson was conscious of class and register in language. His definitions often signal whether a word is "low" or affected. For example, his definition of *chaperone* reads: "An affected word of very recent introduction." Johnson didn't like the word because it is French. The words Johnson considers "low" include those that sound bad to his ear, are repetitive, or are evocative of the social class from which they emerge: *swap*, *wobble*, *budge*, *coax*, *twittle-twattle*. In this way, Johnson provides his readers with a guide to usage in addition to his definitions.

Johnson's syntheses and innovations in lexicography are many. His was the first dictionary for the general reader rather than the specialist.

Let's turn to some of Johnson's attitudes toward language and the way in which these attitudes inform some of the technical accomplishments of the dictionary. As we've said, Johnson learned in the course of his project that it would be impossible to fix the language. He derides those lexicographers who would "embalm [the language] and secure [it] from corruption and decay." For Johnson, the arbiters of language were literary and aesthetic writers rather than scientific writers. When he quotes from scientific or nonfiction writers, such as Locke, Newton, or Hume, he selects quotations for their rhetorical or aesthetic value. Everywhere in the *Dictionary*, we find Shakespeare and Milton; Johnson applies the standards of quality and judgment drawn from literary criticism and English literature to standards of language performance in everyday, nonliterary circumstances.

Johnson's *Dictionary* ran through four editions in his own lifetime and many afterward. At the end of the 19th century, when scholars in England set out to create a new dictionary (which would eventually become the *Oxford English Dictionary*), they originally called it *The New English Dictionary* in deference to Johnson's, which was the Old. Johnson's *Dictionary* regularized the spellings of words, ordered words alphabetically, codified the spelling reforms of the 17th and 18th centuries, and broadened the vocabulary of everyday speech. Johnson also established the reliance on literature as a basis for linguistic usage. For Johnson, great authors are linguistic innovators, and the history of literature is, therefore, the history of the language. Johnson sought to excise slang and colloquialism from polite speech by distinguishing classes of words that he called "low." This, in turn, made it possible for individuals to educate themselves using the *Dictionary*. Johnson's was the first dictionary used in the home and the first to be reprinted in smaller versions to make it affordable for personal use. The idea of the dictionary as a social necessity, as well as a linguistic one, originated with Johnson. As we will see in future lectures, the dictionary will, in fact, become both an arbiter of language and a guide to life. ■

Suggested Reading

DeMaria, *Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning*.

Reddick, *The Making of Johnson's Dictionary*.

Wimsatt, *Philosophic Words*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways does Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* differ from previous lexicographies in English?

2. How does Johnson's *Dictionary* differ from most standard dictionaries today?

New Standards in English

Lecture 22

The paradox of description … is the paradox of recognizing that whenever you describe something—depending on your authority or your position, or your rhetorical control—you will almost invariably prescribe something. If you are of enough power or authority, or if you put it in a memorable way, your description becomes a prescription.

As we saw in the last lecture, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* had an immense impact on the scholarship of the English language. It also participated in a larger set of debates about the nature of language study and teaching. We've touched on the issue of prescriptivism and descriptivism at several points in this course. The central question here is: Should we study language in order to provide instruction in what we should say and write, or should the goal be simply to describe existing forms of language behavior? The paradox, of course, is that in describing language, almost any authority invariably prescribes language behavior, as well.

Two figures of the 18th century who exemplify the debate on prescriptivism versus descriptivism are Robert Lowth and Joseph Priestley. Lowth was bishop of London. Educated at Oxford, he was a key figure in the religious and educational establishment in England in the second half of the 18th century. He was the author of many works on language, including *Principles of English Grammar* (1762, revised 1787). Lowth was clearly a prescriptivist. In *Principles*, he remarked that his goal was "To teach what is right by teaching what is right and wrong." In another work, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, he defined grammar itself as "The art of rightly expressing our thoughts in words." Lowth held that whatever difficulties may exist in communication are the fault of "practice," not of the language itself. What makes Lowth a prescriptivist is his strict notion of right and wrong. Grammar, for Lowth, is not a universal category of making or marking relationships among syntax and meaning, but it is the art of right expression. Lowth was also interested in using Latin as a template for English grammar.

Joseph Priestley was a Scot, an empiricist and scientist, one of the discoverers of oxygen, and a founder of Unitarianism. As an experimental scientist, he was a follower of David Hume and was interested in deducing general principles from observation. Priestley was the author of *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761, revised in 1772, and reprinted frequently thereafter). He considered grammar not an essential quality of language but "a collection of observations on the structure of it, and a system of rules for the proper use of it." One of the key features of British empiricism in the 18th century was a belief in simplicity; that is, that nature at its most natural was simple. Thus, Priestley favored eliminating those aspects of the English language that were not simple, including "Gallicisms" (French words). Priestley wrote of the "true idiom of the English language" and the "genius of our language." Although these terms might seem loaded, what Priestley is really looking for is the heart of the language, the features that make English most characteristically English. He considered the study of language as a system of empirical observation, but given his involvement with the religious and political controversies of his day, he also offered a political edge to language study: "I think it not only unsuitable to the genius of a free nation but in itself ill-calculated to reform and fix a language."

What is grammatically proper becomes socially acceptable.

The idea of propriety in linguistic and social behavior came to the fore at around the same time as this debate. The word *propriety* comes from the same Latin root as the word *proper*. Both of them are related to the idea of "belonging to." The term developed from a word of physical or commercial use, to one of linguistic use, to one of social action. In this, it serves as an example of *extension in lexis*, the movement of a word from a highly technical and specific definition to a set of larger, more figurative, and social definitions.

Johnson's *Dictionary* offers two definitions of *propriety*: first, "peculiarity of possession, exclusive right," and second, "accuracy, justness, especially in a linguistic sense." Here, Johnson also offers a quotation from the philosopher John Locke: "Common sense, that is the rule of propriety, affords some aid to settle the signification of language." Thus, in mid-18th-century usage, propriety was a grammatical rather than a social issue. The term could mean

accuracy of expression, but it also referred to the use of proper grammatical forms or endings. Only by extension does the word take on a stylistic and social connotation, but this was an important cultural shift: What is grammatically proper becomes socially acceptable.

In Lowth's *Principles*, the word is used in the phrase "the rule of propriety" to mean grammatical concord in making "the signification of language" meaningful. Lowth uses the term only in its relation to grammar in his highly technical discussions of the subjunctive mood. In the preface to his *Dictionary* of 1755, Johnson wrote that the illiterate "forget propriety" in their speech or writing, meaning that they write awkwardly or ungrammatically. Over time, however, these grammatical issues became social issues. By 1784, Fanny Burney, one of the great arbiters of late-18th-century taste, could write: "Such propriety of mind as can only result from the union of good sense and virtue." Good sense and virtue are now matters of propriety, and in turn, grammatical performance is associated with social accomplishment.

In late-18th-century literature, propriety became the marker of exactly this nexus of linguistic, social, and moral behavior. Thomas Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* of 1762 uses the term precisely in its modern social sense. In the novels of Jane Austen, we see how verbal performance becomes the marker of social accomplishment and, in turn, generates "the union of good sense and virtue."

Along with this debate on proprietary, a larger debate took place on slang and colloquialism. As mentioned in the last lecture, Johnson identified some words as "low" or improper in his *Dictionary*, largely because they had a certain aesthetic cacophony. *Swap*, *twittle-twattle*, *wobble*, *budge*, *coax*, and *touchy* are examples. Johnson also objected to *chaperone*, which he described as "affected." The legacy of such examples can be found in our own dictionaries today, where we see the arbitration of linguistic use in the details of definitions. Examples include obvious words, such as *ain't*, which most of us have been taught is inappropriate. We find a less obvious example in the emphasis placed on the French origin of the word *protocol* by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Even in this modern dictionary, we see the 18th-century tendency to mark certain words as alien or un-English.

The definition of *quiz* in the Oxford English Dictionary is even more emphatic in highlighting that word's dubious linguistic propriety: "Of obscure origin, possibly a fanciful coinage, but it is doubtful whether any reliance can be placed on the anecdote of its invention by Daly, a Dublin theatre-manager." *Quiz* and *protocol* represent words that have entered everyday speech in almost transparent ways, but their history and lexicography show the legacies of prescriptivism and descriptivism. ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

DeMaria, *Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning*.

Mack, "The Historicity of Johnson's Lexicographer."

Murray, et al., *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Robert Lowth and Joseph Priestley fundamentally differ in their beliefs about language?

2. What is the role of propriety in the debate over English usage today?

Dictionaries and Word Histories

Lecture 23

Why does language change? Why do words change meaning? Why did the Great Vowel Shift happen, and so on. Linguists, and historical linguists in particular, shy away from offering explanations for why particular changes happened. We can document them in great detail, but what the relationship is between social pressure or class involvement or the anatomy of the mouth or contact among languages and dialects, all of these, what the precise relationship is among them, is invariably doubtful and debatable.

In the past two lectures, we've explored a number of topics related to dictionaries, including the origins of dictionaries; Samuel Johnson, the great dictionary maker; the emergence of the dictionary as a book for the home and as an arbiter of behavior; and the tensions between prescriptivism and descriptivism. In this lecture, we'll look at some words and some aspects of change in meaning to show how we can use a historical dictionary, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), to give us insight into principles of semantic change.

Linguists tend to shy away from offering explanations for why particular changes, such as the GVS, took place. Although we can document such changes in great detail, the causes—social pressure, the anatomy of the mouth, contact among languages, and so on—are invariably debatable. We can, however, provide some contexts for explaining how certain words change their meaning and, perhaps, look forward to how words might change meaning in the future. Let's begin with a set of principles related to semantic change drawn from recent works of linguistic theory and the history of language.

The first of these principles involves the relationship of ambiguity and limitation: If a word or form has two meanings so incompatible that they cause ambiguity, one of the meanings dies out, or more rarely, the form itself becomes obsolete. Homonymy and polysemy are subheadings in this category. *Homonymy* relates to the idea that speakers will try to avoid confusion and ambiguity in spoken language by limiting the number of

possible homonyms. An extreme example is found in the following Old English words: *a* ("ever"), *ae* ("law"), *aeg* ("egg"), *ea* ("water"), *eoh* ("horse"), *ieg* ("island"). The similarities in pronunciation of these words may have been so great that new words were borrowed or existing words were adapted to avoid homonymy. We've talked about *polysemy* several times, the phenomenon of one word having several meanings, some of which eventually come to overlap. An example is the word *uncouth*, the history of which we can chart with information from the OED. The word *couth* comes from a Germanic root meaning "known."

Meaning of *Uncouth*	**Dates of Usage**
unknown	Old English–1650
unfamiliar or strange	Old English, now obsolete
strange or unpleasant	1380–present
uncomely, awkward, clumsy	1513–present
rugged, rough	1542–present
uncultured	1694–present

Note how the meaning of *uncouth* moves from a particular condition to a description grounded in that condition. Something that is unknown becomes alien, strange, weird, rugged, rough, and finally, uncultured. *Couth* has since taken on an imagined status, as in the phrase "He's got no couth." The usage here is completely ahistorical. Future lexicographers may record *couth* as a word emerging in the late 20th century to mean "propriety, ability, culture, knowledge, or skill."

Another way in which words change their meaning is through *extension in lexis*, in which metaphorical meanings or figurative senses take over from older technical or literal meanings. Some examples include those shown in the following table.

Example	**Original Meaning**	**Current Meaning**
clog	fasten wood to (1398)	encumber by adhesion (1528)
clasp	fasten (1386), enfold (1447)	grip by hand (1583)
brazen	of brass (Old English)	impudent (1573)
bristle	stand up stiff (1480)	become indignant (1549)
broil	burn (1375)	get angry (1561)

These new figurative meanings constitute an important problem in semantic change. Johnson recognized it in making his dictionary, and he organized definitions so that the older, primary, or nonmetaphorical meaning came first—even if that meaning was no longer current. The OED follows Johnson's example, recording word definitions historically. Thus, lexicography creates the impression of hierarchies of meaning, even when those hierarchies do not reflect the actual uses of the time. The dictionary gives us, then, a history of words told through the history of semantic change.

As we saw with *ain't*, words can also experience *shifts in class*; in other words, meanings and usages might not change, but class affiliations or registers of meaning might. In the 18th century, *ain't* was used by polite society, frequently in the form of *ant*; the OED considers *ain't* a "later and more illiterate form of *ant*." Yet the word survived in the mouth of Lord Peter Whimsey in the Dorothy Sayers novels of the 1920s and 1930s, even though Dickens, writing in the 1860s, used it as a "low" dialect word.

Dictionaries also frequently offer narratives of how words came into the language.

Let's now turn to a set of words that illustrate issues of power and control, politics and paper. When we look at a definition in a dictionary, we are looking at a narrative. As we'll see in a subsequent lecture, the makers of the OED borrowed the idea that words told stories from German philologists and dictionary makers of the 19th century. One famous German classicist said that every word should tell the *Lebensgeschichte* of a language—the "life history" of a language. In addition to giving us a sequence in linear form of historical word use and word change, dictionaries also frequently offer narratives of how words came into the language. For example, at the end of the last lecture, we noted the OED's narratives for *protocol* and *quiz*.

Let's look at a specific word as an example of the historical narratives provided by the OED: The word *cheap* is a story of extension-in-lexis more than 2,000 years old, from the Germanic languages into English. The word is a product of the period of continental borrowing, the time before the Germanic tribes (and languages) split up, when many words for commerce, warfare,

architecture, and social control were borrowed from Latin. All the modern Germanic languages have a word that comes from the Latin *caupo*, meaning "small merchant." In Modern German, *kaufen* is a verb meaning "to buy and sell"; a *Kaufmann* is a "merchant." The name of the city Copenhagen can be traced back to an older Norse word that meant "merchant's harbor or haven." In Old and Middle English, the word *cheap* underwent extension-in-lexis to refer to the thing bought or sold, the quality of the purchase. The result was such idioms as *good cheap*, meaning a good buy, and *dear cheap*, a seeming oxymoron meaning something scarce and expensive. Throughout London, there still exist place names and street names, such as Cheapside, that refer to market areas. As we saw in Shakespeare's Sonnet 87, the language of commercial exchange could also be applied to a love relationship. In the 17th century, the word *cheap* took on its modern sense, that is, something that is inexpensive or easy to obtain and, thus, likely to be of low quality. What we see in this narrative history of the extension-in-lexis of *cheap* is a history of the economy of the British Isles and the relationship between scarcity and value that came to control the market and credit economy.

The words *protocol*, *diploma*, and *collate* also illustrate changes in meaning from the specific to the general and pose problems for the lexicographer. These three words all ultimately relate to pieces of paper. *Diploma*, for example, is a 16th- or 17th-century coinage from the Greek *diplos*, meaning "to fold over." A diploma is, quite simply, a folded piece of paper. In Medieval Latin, a *diploma* was a charter or a document, an important state paper folded over and sealed with wax. Thus, *diplomacy* became the practice of conducting state business through folded pieces of paper. It was not until the early 18th century that the word *diploma* was first used to refer to the documentation associated with a university degree. In this word, we see the transference of meaning from textual to political phenomena, that is, from the material of organization to the behavior surrounding that material.

The word *collate* comes from Latin and means simply "to compare or confer." In the 17th century, it acquired the meaning of bringing texts together to make certain kinds of comparisons. In Greek, the *colophon* is similar to a title page, on which the scribe wrote his name and information about the document. The *proto-colophon* was what came before the colophon, the first sheet of a manuscript. From this, we get the word *protocol*, which like

diplomacy, relates to the business of paper. Even today, the OED maintains the judgmental 19th-century definitions of *protocol* as a word that was not fully part of the English vocabulary. The most recent edition of the OED dates the earliest use of the word in its modern sense to 1952.

Once again, we'll conclude with the word *quiz*. As we saw in the last lecture, the OED writes out the etymology of this word as a statement of linguistic politics.

Dictionaries are not simply objective or empirical recorders of meaning. They are narrative documents imbued with the politics of nationhood and identity, concerned with describing—but invariably prescribing—language. Furthermore, they are documents that are enmeshed in their own histories. ■

Suggested Reading

Murray, et al., eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

Samuels. *Linguistic Evolution with Special Reference to English*.

Questions to Consider

1. Define and give an example of polysemy and extension in lexis.

2. How do dictionaries reflect a hierarchy of meaning, and is this a problem?

Values, Words, and Modernity

Lecture 24

During the 18th century and before, people who studied language were largely learned amateurs. They were, if you like, country-house philologists. They were journalists, poets, or they were people like Samuel Johnson, who was a professional man of letters, who—even though he had training and eventually was to receive an honorary doctorate—was not someone who spent his life in a university. This is beginning to change in the first decades of the 19th century.

The OED remains one of the great monuments of historical lexicography, and its own history is, in many ways, the history of the discipline of historical linguistics and of many political, economic, and institutional developments of England in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this lecture, we'll explore the origins of the OED and learn something about its makers; we'll also look at some of the legacies of the OED in representative writers of the 20th century on language use and its arbitration.

The origins of the OED can be found in the philological inquiries of mid-19th-century England. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, inquiries into language shifted from the philosophical and metaphysical to the empirical and the historical. By the middle of the 19th century, the discipline of philology became something of a historical science on a par with geology, anatomy, and biology. The Philological Society was founded in 1842, in London, to study the history of languages and institutionalize the work in Indo-European and comparative philology that was coming to dominate language study in Europe by the mid-19th century. By this time, scholars of language were increasingly located in schools and universities. This marks a shift from 18th-century language study, which tended to be pursued by amateurs (exemplified by the character Mr. Casaubon from George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*), journalists, poets, and professional men of letters (such as Samuel Johnson). In 1864, the Early English Text Society (EETS), which still exists today, was founded to recover, edit, and publish editions of early English writings. These editions were used as source materials for the OED.

Historical linguistics was pressed into the service of nationalist ideologies in the 19th century. To paraphrase Karl von Clausewitz's famous statement about war, philology was politics by other means. Competing scholars in the various European and classical languages—English, German, French, Italian, and others—made claims for the legitimacy and value of national vernaculars in a larger European context. A fascinating figure in this debate was Max Müller (1823–1900), the ultimate arbiter of language in mid-19th-century England. Müller's work raised questions about the power of language to confer identity on human beings and values in society. He was fascinated with mythology, in particular by the idea of a sun god in Indo-European mythology. Much of Müller's work has come in for criticism by later linguists, but it is interesting in its investment of words with narrative meaning. As he put it, "Words mean more than they have ever meant before."

Once one knows the etymology of a word, it acquires another layer of meaning. What, we might ask, does a word refer to? Does the meaning of a word lie in its representational ability or in its history over time? This is one of the most philosophically profound issues in Victorian philology—the way in which words come to refer more to their own histories than to their objective status in the world.

In 1857, the Philological Society proposed to create a new English dictionary to establish English etymology and usage on a firm "scientific" basis. The original editors were Herbert Coleridge and Richard Trench. Trench claimed a "true idea" of the dictionary, which he said should be "an inventory of the language." The job of the dictionary maker was not to hierarchize words—not to keep some out and privilege others—but to make an account of language. Thus, the lexicographer was no longer Samuel Johnson's "harmless drudge" but a historian of language and of a people, as well as a kind of overseer in the great factory of language.

In the 1870s, when Sir James A. H. Murray was appointed general editor of the OED, he set up the Scriptorium, indeed, a word factory. In the words of the modern historian and critic of the OED Hans Aarsleff, the dictionary of a language, in this case the OED, became "an historical monument, the history of a nation contemplated from one point of view."

The OED provides not only lexicographical models but social and, indeed, moral models, as well. In the remainder of this lecture, we'll look at selected statements by writers and editors that have been highly influential in the 20th century and that represent earlier debates generated by 19th-century linguistic science and lexicography. Some of the main themes in these statements include the following:

- The relationship between language and society: Is language the reflection of social behavior? What is the relationship between linguistic propriety and social propriety? How is the study of the history of language the study of the history of the people?

- The role of authority and education in articulating the relationship between language and society: Whose job is it to study language and to teach it? Is the institution of language study to be compared, as Johnson did, to the institution of imperial control? Is it to be compared with a factory or a university seminary?

- The relationship between style and grammar: Where do we draw the line between grammatical correctness and stylistic choice?

- The relationship between description and prescription: What is the goal of linguistic study—to describe behavior or to prescribe standards? And how does a writer on language exemplify language itself?

In Henry Fowler's article on grammar from *Modern English Usage*, we can hear the key idioms of the debates that we have seen at work from the beginning of this course: Does the history of English reflect a move from an inflected to uninflected language? Is that history still in process? Is that history moving toward a goal? Consider Fowler's aesthetic vocabulary, which includes such phrases as "ease and grace," "clearly and agreeably," and the equation of good grammar with "good manners." Like others before him, he seems to phrase the question of grammaticality as a question of sociability. For Fowler, aesthetic judgment is the primary criterion of assessment of linguistic performance.

In the introduction to *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (9th ed.), entitled "Language and the Dictionary," we note again the discussion of prescriptivism versus descriptivism. We also hear the organic metaphors of the 18th century and Samuel Johnson: "A good dictionary can promote order in inevitable growth." Here, a "good" dictionary performs a service for society. Fowler, too, discusses the "good work" a dictionary can perform in helping to purge the language of its sins, in this instance, case inflections. The role of the dictionary is akin to that of a pastor.

"Words mean more than they have ever meant before."

—Max Müller

In a 1972 article in the journal *The American Scholar*, Douglas Bush of Harvard University asserts that change in language should be "inaugurated from above by the masters of language, … not from below." A kind of modern Alexander Gil, Bush goes beyond linguistic prescriptivism to embrace social prescriptivism.

We close with a famous excerpt from George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language," in which he tells us that euphemism is not just a form of politeness, but it can also be used to serve the ends of political deceit. Our next set of lectures will look at these discussions in the American trajectory, beginning with colonial expansion and moving on to our present time. ■

Suggested Reading

Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860*.

Dowling, "Victorian Oxford and the Science of Language."

Mugglestone, *Lost for Words*.

Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words*.

Questions to Consider

1. What historical developments of the 19th century led to the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*?

2. According to Orwell, why are polysyllabic words more likely to deceive than short, simple ones? Do you agree?

The Beginnings of American English

Lecture 25

It has been long argued that American English preserves some old forms in regional dialects, in particular strong verbs. There's a very famous story of the baseball player who became a sportscaster, Dizzy Dean, who in a moment of excitement calls a game about an individual who slides into third, and he said, "He slud into third." This is not a regional pronunciation or an illiterate form; this is an old strong verb that is still preserved in regional pockets of American English.

In this last third of the course, we will focus on the language of America and, more broadly, the transition of English from the British Isles to the colonies and to the world. One of the central questions we will ask is: What is the relationship between language and national identity? Further, how did the legacies of colonial expansion and British education inform the idioms and ideologies of America, India, Australia, South Africa, and Canada? As we study the English language in America, we will look at vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and style. As we'll see, the differences between British and American English were noticed relatively early in the life of the American nation. We will also return to the issue of dialects, dialectology as a discipline, and the literary representation of dialects. Again, we'll look at the relationship between regionalism and a "standard."

Where did American English begin? Early settlements were points of linguistic entry, and many of the seeds of American dialects and regional forms come from these original settlement points. In New England, settlement occurred in Boston and the Bay Colony in the early 17th century and in New London, Connecticut, in the early 18th century. The Middle Atlantic region saw settlement in New York (founded as New Amsterdam and seized by the English from the Dutch in 1644) and Pennsylvania (with Philadelphia founded by William Penn in 1681). In the South Atlantic region, points of settlement included the Jamestown Colony in Virginia (1607); Charleston, South Carolina (late 17th century); and Georgia in the 1730s. These areas of settlement are points of dialect origin. Each place was settled by speakers of distinctive English dialects, and the sounds and forms of the language

descended from those earlier English regions. Many of these settlements were at the mouths of rivers, which became points of linguistic change. As we saw in earlier lectures, natural boundaries often serve as dialect boundaries.

The West was settled beginning in the 19th century with the Louisiana Purchase (1803). Contact was established with French-speaking groups in New Orleans and throughout the Northwest. Non-European language groups helped form a regional dialect, and the contact between English speakers and speakers of Native American languages brought new words into the language. The California Gold Rush (1848–1851) brought to the West a pioneering group mainly from the Northeast. Many of the original settlers came to California by ship, and speech forms in California came to resemble those of the Northeast.

For Witherspoon, the American language was as distinctive as the American landscape.

Early American English produced sounds that were different from British English. One of the key features of the sound of American English is the short "a" (known to phoneticians as the "aesch" sound). This is the mid-front vowel heard in *cat* and *hat*. In British English, this sound tended to be pronounced as "ah," a sound that remains in the American pronunciation of *father*. Some scholars have suggested that this was not a true linguistic change, but a way of speaking that can be attributed to the pronunciation of the great 18th-century actor David Garrick.

As we've noted in earlier lectures, the "r" sound becomes variable in certain environments and often affects preceding vowels. Thus, we have variant pronunciations in England and America of, for example, *clerk* (British "clark," American "clerk") or the name of the British philosopher *Barclay* and the American university *Berkeley*. American English retains the pronunciation of "r" at the ends of words (*father*) and in the middle (*lord*); British English tends to reduce this sound. Short "o" remains a rounded vowel in British English but is unrounded to more of an "a" sound in American (*not*, *hop*, *hot*). American English preserves full stresses in pronunciations of polysyllabic words, while British English tends not to (*secretary*, *necessary*, *literature*).

What differences can we find in grammar and morphology? American English preserves some strong verbs in regional dialects. Recall that strong verbs signal change in tense by altering meaningfully the root vowel. This tendency gives us sportscaster Dizzy Dean's great line, "He slud into third." American regional dialects recreate a second-person plural form in *you* and *y'all*, as well as *your* and *youse*. In American English, collective nouns, such as "the company" or "the public," take singular verbs; in British English, they take the plural.

Many distinctions emerged in vocabulary in American and British English. In some cases, the Americans and the British use different words for the same thing: *truck/lorry*, *trunk/boot*, *elevator/lift*. Interestingly, American English preserves older uses of such words as *reckon* and *guess*. Phrases such as "I reckon" and "I guess" are obvious Americanisms, but they are really remnants of much older forms of English, lost by British speakers.

Mixed attitudes toward American English began to take shape as soon as individuals returned to England from America. Alexander Gil, writing in 1621, condemned the importation of such words as *maize* and *canoe* into the language. Travelers often recorded their responses to American English. Mrs. Frances Trollope, who visited in the 1830s, commented, "How very debased the language has become in such a short period in America." Certain words and phrases were classified early on as Americanisms: *right away*; *to admire*; *to fix* (meaning *to prepare*).

Let's turn now to the writings of two major figures in early America to help us understand the nature of Americanisms and the relationship between British English and the emerging language of the Americas.

John Witherspoon (1722/23–1794) came to America from Scotland in 1769 and became a key figure in American politics and education. Writing in 1781, he argued that American education needed to tighten up on the teaching of grammar and style. He asserted that Americans committed frequent errors and "improprieties" of grammar and usage. For Witherspoon, "improprieties" were differences in grammar and usage from British English among the literate and educated classes in America. What he called "vulgarisms" were terms from the lower classes that had percolated up into the vocabulary of

the educated. But Witherspoon claimed that "the vulgar" in America speak better than "the vulgar" in Britain, a fact explained by the greater mobility and, thus, greater standardization of dialect in America.

Witherspoon coined the term "Americanism," insisting that it didn't necessarily mean "inelegant" or "ignorant." He used the word "growth" in relation to the language as an aesthetic term. For Witherspoon, the American language was as distinctive as the American landscape. Americanisms constituted a new discourse for a new country.

Another important figure writing about the language at this time was Noah Webster (1758–1834), born in Hartford, Connecticut, and educated at Yale University. He is best known today, of course, as the eponymous creator of the dictionary. Before Webster published his famous *American Dictionary* in 1828, he wrote frequently on American usage and the ideals of American language. His attitudes were similar to Joseph Priestley's on the relationships between language and freedom and between language and national identity. In his *Dissertations on the English Language* (1791), Webster wrote, "A national language is a band of national union." Webster argued that certain words for political or social institutions in Britain, such as *congress* or *senate*, meant something radically different in America. Clearly, he sought to sustain the notion of American independence and of an American language independent from that of Britain.

In this sentiment and in the *American Dictionary of the English Language* as a whole, we see a profound debt to Samuel Johnson and his philosophical inspirations. Johnson noted in one of his essays that difference of thought produces difference of language. He also felt strongly that a relationship existed between the source of ideas and of sensation. When Webster wrote, "Language is the expression of ideas," he was looking back toward a Johnsonian empirical position that was keyed to the way in which the particular experience of place generates new ideas. In his *Dictionary*'s preface, Johnson wrote about the futility of trying to fix the language: "To enchain a syllable and lash the wind are equally the undertakings of pride." Such vocabulary could not but resonate in the minds of Johnson's American readers, wrestling with the ideas of control and colonization. In the same vein, in the preface to his *American Dictionary*, Webster compared the project of

fixing a language to an attempt to stop the course of the Mississippi, which he says, "possesses a momentum quite irresistible."

The American language is itself irresistible, and in subsequent lectures, we'll look at how it grows, develops, and offers us new ways of understanding the variety and experience of our unique culture. ■

Suggested Reading

Algeo, ed., *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Vol. 6: English in North America*.

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Mencken, *The American Language*.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the major regional dialects of American English, and where are they spoken? Do they exist as much today as they did 100 years ago?

2. Why did America possess greater standardization of dialect than Britain?

American Language from Webster to Mencken

Lecture 26

"It is quite impossible to stop the progress of language—it is like the course of the Mississippi, the motion of which, at times, is scarcely perceptible; yet even then it possesses a momentum quite irresistible."

—Noah Webster

In the last lecture, we touched on the writings of Noah Webster from the 1790s and in the preface to his great *American dictionary of the English Language* of 1828. As we saw, the relationship between locution and the nation was central to Webster's ideas. In this lecture, we'll return for a more detailed look at some of the quotations from Webster and end with an exploration of the work of H. L. Mencken, the journalist and public commentator who published *The American Language* in 1919. This discussion moves from the late 18th century to the beginning of the 20th, and it hinges on relationships between grammar and style, culture and commerce, and idiom and identity.

Noah Webster began his career by publishing grammar textbooks in the 1780s; in 1806, he published a short dictionary. His project was to define the characteristics of American English, highlight the differences between American and British English, and stress the independence of America as both a political and a linguistic phenomenon. As we saw in the last lecture, Webster had an idea of a national language as a "band of national union." In other words, the former colonies were forged into a nation not simply by sharing political or geographical experience but by sharing linguistic experience.

As a lexicographer, Webster was aware that at the heart of words for law and legalism were older terms for binding: *ligature*, *ligare*. The laws, quite literally, bound Americans into a national union. The job of Webster's lexicography was to forge similar linguistic bonds. "Language is the expression of ideas," Webster wrote, and he made it clear that the words of the English language were keyed to the experiences of its speakers. These philosophical and political implications of language use and theory were central to his work.

Webster noted that such words as *congress*, *senate*, *assembly*, and *court* were used differently in America than they were in England. The two languages can be distinguished by these high-concept terms of political identity. In a sense, Webster anticipated the work of the OED in writing a national history through lexicography. He created a dictionary of the people.

The *American Dictionary* had many new features. Webster was concerned with issues of spelling and advocated a moderate spelling reform. He respelled British words into American forms that are still with us, for example, simplifying *honour* to *honor* and *colour* to *color*. He also advocated dropping the "k" at the end of such words as *music*, *logic*, and *physic*. To reflect pronunciation, he spelled such words as *theater* and *center* with "er" at the end rather than "re" and *defense* with an "s" rather than a "c." In general, Webster argued that spelling should be more representative of pronunciation than British convention had it. He favored the elimination of certain silent letters or of letter clusters that are not pronounced. Indeed, Webster bequeathed to generations of American students the very idea of the "silent letter." In earlier lectures, we distinguished between two kinds of silent letters: those that were originally pronounced (as in *knight*, *knee*, or *through*) and those that were introduced by 17th- and 18th-century spelling reformers to reflect what they imagined to be Latin etymologies (*doubt* and *debt*).

Lowell argued that many of the features we think of as characteristic of American speech are really holdovers from earlier British speech.

Webster, a moderate reformer, argued that spelling should represent the sounds of speech and aim toward economizing the number of letters in a given word. Webster also recorded newer American pronunciations. In the pronunciation guide to his dictionary, he advised pronouncing full syllable counts in words.

Webster was, in many ways, an American version of Samuel Johnson. In his eyes, his job was threefold: to create a dictionary that (a) was an arbiter of language use; (b) ostensibly described but at the same time, of course,

prescribed; and (c) framed itself with a preface keyed to organic metaphors of language and language change.

As we saw in the last lecture, Webster drew parallels between the landscape of America, specifically the Mississippi River, and the new nation's language—both of them natural, unchainable, and uncontrollable. Beginning with the age of Webster, the image of the Mississippi will become central to the American literary imagination and an exemplary aspect of American identity. Writers from Mark Twain to T. S. Eliot have seen the Mississippi as emblematically American.

Webster's influence extended beyond the middle- and upper-class readers who were able to buy his books. Frederick Douglass, the ex-slave who became one of the great African-American writers of the 19th century, recorded how he learned to read from his master's copy of Webster's *Spelling Book*.

Let's now review some of the legacies of 19th-century remarks on linguistics as we wend our way from Webster to Mencken.

After Webster, a debate ensued on what constituted "an Americanism." In 1816, John Pickering published *A Dictionary of Americanisms*, which Webster considered an attack on his position. Pickering argued that Americanisms are individual locutions rather than the building blocks of American social and linguistic consciousness. In 1848, John Bartlett published another book of Americanisms. This work was primarily about regional dialects. What emerged in the course of the 19th century was a recognition of the American language as the sum of American regional dialects. The term "Americanism" came to connote not just a word or a locution different from one used in Great Britain, but a word or locution that was fundamentally regional or folk in origin; that is, something that distinguished everyday local speech from a learned or inherited literate standard.

In 1866, James Russell Lowell, one of the great arbiters of language and literature of the late 19th century, published the second in his series known as "The Bigelow Papers." In these essays, Lowell argued that many of the features we think of as characteristic of American speech are really holdovers from earlier British speech. To some extent, Lowell was interested

in locating American English in a larger historical trajectory. The American language was not simply made up of regional differences or differences from the language of the British Isles, but it had its own history as deep as that of the English of Britain.

These earlier writers led up to the work of H. L. Mencken (1880–1956), whose *American Language*, published originally in 1919, went through many revisions and expansions in the course of the next three decades. Mencken was primarily concerned with tracing the history of American English, but he was also interested in defining just what distinguished American English from other forms.

Mencken identified three "hallmarks" of American English:

> First, its general uniformity throughout the country; second, its impatient disregard for grammatical, syntactical and phonological rule and precedent: and third, its large capacity … for taking in new words and phrases from outside sources, and for manufacturing them of its own materials.

Similar claims can be traced back to Witherspoon, who noted that American English was generally more uniform than British English, largely because of patterns of movement and migration in America. Witherspoon also argued that Americans speak "without propriety" and have a voracious appetite for new words.

In writing about the capacity of American English to acquire or "manufacture" new words, Mencken was responding to the burgeoning presence of American industry at the beginning of the 19th century. The American language was like a factory, where the raw materials of experience were shipped in to be transformed into new words.

Mencken had an important impact on contemporary attitudes toward American English, which can be attributed less to his detailed philological scholarship than to his attention to the American rhetorical persona. We'll explore this impact in more detail in the next lecture, but we'll close here by looking at a brilliant passage that encapsulates this idea. Mencken tells us

that Americans are "the most ardent of recorded rhetoricians," deliberately choosing the word *ardent* to remind us of the history of language—the move from the literal to the metaphorical. Mencken goes on: "His [the American's] politics bristle with pungent epithets." Here, the words seem to have about them the smoke and reek of Milton's hell. "His whole history [note the alliteration] has been bedizened with tall talk." Mencken could only have found the word *bedizened* (meaning *ornamented*) in Johnson's *Dictionary*. The polysyllables of the Latinate and the learned are juxtaposed against the Anglo-Saxon monosyllabic "tall talk."

Mencken gives us an example of the American's "incomparable capacity for projecting hidden and often fantastic relationships into his speech" in the word *rubber-neck* (which he hyphenates), in which he sees a complete treatise on American psychology. We see in this word a commentary on the American language, as well, for what better way to describe Mencken, Witherspoon, and Webster than as the linguistic rubberneckers of the world? ■

Suggested Reading

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Marckwardt, *American English*.

Mencken, *The American Language*.

Simpson, *The Politics of American English, 1776–1850*.

Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*.

Questions to Consider

1. Was Noah Webster's *Dictionary* populist or nationalist—or both?

2. Is the "tall talk" of H. L. Mencken still in evidence today?

American Rhetoric from Jefferson to Lincoln

Lecture 27

"The American is the most ardent of recorded rhetoricians."

—H. L. Mencken

Thus H. L. Mencken summarized the relationship between language and public identity in American national history. Mencken recognized that the hallmarks of American literary and linguistic culture were rhetorical, performative, and personal. In this lecture, we'll look at some selections of American public rhetoric in this light. We'll also locate these selections in the larger context of the teaching of rhetoric in America, which was one of the central disciplinary activities in schools and colleges throughout the 19th century and into the 20th.

American language developed in the public sphere in the late 18th century. The notion of a rhetorical environment in America was keyed to both public service and to a set of philosophical positions. Indeed, late-18th-century American notions of language derived, in many ways, from British empirical philosophy, particularly the work of John Locke. Locke raised questions about the relationships between words and ideas. For Noah Webster, language and ideas went hand in hand. But empiricists asked: Did words really express ideas in the mind? Did words represent things in the world, or was language more of a self-contained system of representation? The relationship among events in the world, the mind's response to events, and the spoken word was central to the philosophical underpinnings of the teaching of rhetoric.

The new interest in the state of nature at the end of the 18th century also led to observations on the relationship of language to nature. American rhetoricians and scholars used the landscape to discuss the interaction of language with the larger world. In many ways, rhetoric is an ornamental way of speaking; that is, it catalogs and codifies through the use of figures of speech, such as schemes, tropes, metaphors, and so on. Rhetoric is also, however, a principle of organization, and one of the central questions for American readers and writers at the end of the 18th century was: Is it possible to be "naturally

rhetorical"? Should speaking and writing reflect the ornaments of learning, or should they reflect something about the self?

The writing of Scotsman Hugh Blair on rhetoric and literature in the 1780s had a vast impact on American education and attitudes toward language. Blair was interested in language and literature as matters of class and aesthetics. We saw in Johnson, for example, that issues of aesthetics settled linguistic discussion. Johnson also developed the principle of using literary works to illustrate words and their histories. With Blair, the teaching of language in American homes and schools came to serve as instruction in class-based patterns of behavior. Education became both a mode of class identification and a mode of class advancement. The universities of the 19th century were places where gentlemanly (and, later, gentlewomanly) values were taught. In this context, the teaching of language became the expression of a particular natural state.

The impact of Ossian remained significant because he represented the idea of bardic nationalism—the notion that national identity was embodied in the oral poetry of the past.

In an earlier lecture, we discussed the medieval idea of the fall from Eden as a falling-away from the essentialist notion of the word—that is, the idea that words have in them unique and essential meanings. The 18th century saw a renewed fascination among scholars with this earlier notion of an Adamic language. By the 19th century, however, with the work of William Jones and his successors, linguists were asking questions about the relationships among languages and the reconstruction of earlier forms.

Thomas Jefferson, the great scholar, American president, founder of the University of Virginia, and author of the Declaration of Independence, was fascinated with language history, and stood on the cusp of this change in the focus of linguistic study. Jefferson studied Old English, Homer, ancient Greek, rhetoric, and the fictitious poet Ossian of the 18th century. The Scottish poet James Macpherson invented Ossian as an ancient Celtic bard. Even when Macpherson's pretense was exposed, however, the impact of Ossian remained significant because he represented the idea of bardic nationalism—

the notion that national identity was embodied in the oral poetry of the past. The fascination with Ossian and actual early works of literature stirred in the minds of late-18th- and early-19th-century speakers and writers a sense of poetic language and voice. In this context, we turn to the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence is not simply a political document; it is also a document of language, a document informed by Jefferson's understanding of the history of English and by his education in, and engagement with, rhetoric. At the same time, the Declaration is informed by the legacy of British empiricism and by a fascination with bardic nationalism. The opening paragraphs of the first draft of the Declaration not only articulate American independence but actually declare it. We get the sense here that language is a vehicle for action. The Declaration is a rhetorical performance. The philosophy of language behind it is that by saying, one is doing; with the writing of the words, the American people become independent. Let's explore the syntax, style, etymology, and poetry of this excerpt.

> When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.
>
> We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; for they are endowed by the Creator with inherent and certain inalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness; that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Note the use of the phrase *political bands*, recalling Webster and the etymology that energizes the word *bands*: Behind the law is ligature, a binding together. The phrase *assume among the powers of the earth* is written in perfect iambic pentameter. Jefferson's metre also reminds us of Alexander Pope, who wrote: "Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night./ God said, 'Let Newton be,' and all was light." This couplet seems to stand behind Jefferson's phrasing and evokes the thinking of the Enlightenment. Jefferson harkens back to the idea that it might be possible to speak and, in the speaking, cause something to come to exist. Just as God separated light from darkness, so, too, Jefferson is separating American light from British darkness. The root *alien* in the phrase *certain inalienable rights* has been with us throughout the history of language, in the writing of St. Augustine, John of Trevisa, and Shakespeare. Here, Jefferson speaks of those rights that are not alien to us, that is, those that are natural. The phrase *life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness* combines words from Old English and imported Latin; Jefferson would have been sensitive to these origins.

Let's now turn to another American president, master of language, historian of culture, and great reader of the self—Abraham Lincoln. Just as the Declaration of Independence may be seen as a prose document with poetic features, so Lincoln's Gettysburg Address may be seen as an essay in the poetics of prose. Lincoln has long been recognized as one of the masters of American public prose. Though largely self-educated, he reveals in his writings the clear influence of Shakespeare, the King James Bible, and the culture of American reading and writing at the beginning of the 19th century.

H. L. Mencken argued that many of the phrases in the Gettysburg Address can be traced back to an earlier American rhetorical period—that of Jefferson at the end of the 18th century and of Daniel Webster in the 1830s. Mencken also said that the Gettysburg Address was more poetry than prose.

> Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

> Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.
>
> But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

In the first line, the repetition of *four* and *forth* calls to mind our *forefathers*. The vocabulary looks back to earlier models of language in Shakespeare and the King James Bible. In using the phrase *four score and seven years ago*, Lincoln alludes to the phrasing of the Bible, creating a kind of heightened biblical idiom. The phrase also allows Lincoln to remind us that the events of the past are just outside of the lifespan and memory of a single individual; therefore, remembrance must be evoked. The word *dedicate* appears six times in this short text. It comes from the Latin *dedicare*, meaning "to speak in the presence of." Thus, the Gettysburg Address is a dedication in all senses of the word. The word *here* also appears frequently, as if Lincoln is locating us precisely in the place of dedication. Just as Jefferson gave us "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," so Lincoln gives us "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Moments of great rhetorical prowess are often marked by groups of three statements.

We see in the Gettysburg Address the idea that American public rhetoric always looks backward. Even though Lincoln may seem to be an innovator in language, he gives us many phrases and terms that recall his earlier sources. In our next lecture, we'll continue our exploration of the making of the American self by looking at defining works of 19th-century American literature. ■

Suggested Reading

Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860*.

Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*.

Mencken, *The American Language*.

Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways can the bedrock of Old English be seen in the Declaration of Independence?

2. How does the Gettysburg Address recall the language of Shakespeare and the King James Bible?

The Language of the American Self

Lecture 28

The education of the child was central to the Puritan experience. Horn books—that is, sheets with alphabets and prayers; primers—introductions to the language—and readers were all part of the Puritan home and the Puritan classroom. These alphabets were not just linguistic, but … spiritual. Just think for a minute about what it means to live in a world in which A is … for *Adam* … where B is for *Bible*, where J is for *Jesus*, where S is for the *serpent*. … The learning of the letters becomes the learning of the spiritual and religious life.

The American language may have been a band of national union, but it was also a mark of individual identity. In previous lectures, we've seen some of the ways in which writers and thinkers of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries associated distinctive forms of American English with features of American cultural and social experience. We've also look at figures of public oratory, such as Jefferson and Lincoln, who drew on the past resources of the English language to give voice to national expression. In this lecture, we'll turn our focus to individuals, highlighting the creative relationship between the individual and language in American cultural, literary, and linguistic history. As we'll see, language, in some sense, creates the self; we become who we are through reading and writing. This lecture will concentrate on three writers of the 19th century in particular: Frederick Douglass, Walt Whitman, and Herman Melville.

Let's begin by reviewing some of the earliest origins of this relationship between language and the individual identity. The idea of introspection was central to much of Puritan intellectual and literary life—reading the signs of the self was thought to give one a sense of what would happen in this life and the next. The Puritan self was articulated in language through tales of personal experience and allegories, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, journals, and diaries. Puritan children were educated from hornbooks and primers. The lessons they learned were not just linguistic

but also spiritual. *The New England Primer*, which first appeared at the end of the 17th century and was reprinted numerous times until the 19th, taught generations of Americans how to read, and included lessons in moral and social values.

In an earlier lecture, we noted that Frederick Douglass learned to read and write using a speller from Webster. As you may recall, he noted that he copied out words in italics from the speller, perhaps as a way of adding emphasis to the moment in his life of becoming literate. Throughout his writings, Douglass illustrates the texture of both African-American and traditional English rhetoric in the 19th century. We see in his description of the experience of runaway slaves echoes of Shakespeare, the Bible, and allegory. Recall from our lecture on the Bible the use of parataxis, repetition, and anaphora. Note, too, how each sentence in the passage seems to build, giving us a sense of the journey as both a geographical and a spiritual narrative.

> We raise de wheat,
> Dey gib us de corn;
> We bake de bread,
> Dey gib us de crust;
> We sif the meal,
> Dey gib us de huss.

The excerpt ends with a quotation from Hamlet's soliloquy: "Rather bear the ills we had / Than flee to others which we knew not of." The world of the African-Amerian slave is now filtered in Douglass's writing through canonical English high culture.

In other passages, Douglass gives us African-American language directly, represented in eye dialect to evoke certain features of pronunciation. Such excerpts of African-American poetry recall for us Caedmon and the idea that the oral poet is at the heart of nationhood. In African-American identity, the oral poet is the slave. Just as "Caedmon's Hymn" was, this poem, too, is a narrative of eating and drinking.

Earlier, Douglass told us that he wrote between the lines in his master's copybook. Is African-American literature also written between the lines? Is the African-American literary experience the crust to the bread of standard English? Douglass develops a series of images here to describe African-American linguistic and cultural experience, and the images are of the periphery, the interlinear.

As we'll see in a later lecture, much early African-American writing tells of encounters with the Bible. The Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has written eloquently of what he calls the trope of the "talking book" in African-American culture—the idea that slaves imagined the Bible (or other books) speaking directly to them. The place of the book in African-American culture and Douglass's use of the Bible and Shakespeare show us the double strain of African-American literary narrative—the profoundly rhetorical, public, Shakespearean, biblical, and oratorical on the one hand (Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech) juxtaposed with the bardic, the orally performed, the dialectical, and the sensual on the other.

Douglass develops a series of images here to describe African-American linguistic and cultural experience, and the images are of the periphery, the interlinear.

Let's now turn to Walt Whitman (1819–1892), whose poems in *Leaves of Grass* seem omnivorously to absorb the vocabulary of American experience and spew it out, not in the language of the pulpit but in the language of song. Just as Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was a eulogy for the dead and the past, so Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is a eulogy for Lincoln. The alliteration, emphasis, and repetitions in the opening tell us that we are in the presence of poetry, even though this poem is written in unrhymed free verse. With this poem, Whitman reinvents American public discourse. He offers us sound and image, and like Lincoln, gives us the impression of public speech used for the expression of personal feeling. In many ways, our modern sense of what constitutes American public rhetoric can be traced to Whitman and Lincoln.

Whitman's poetry also returns us to the idea of the bardic. *Sing*, one of Whitman's key verbs, recalls "Caedmon's Hymn" and gives us the sense that his work might be orally performed. Many of the writers we have looked at thus far are "singing of creation" in some sense: the creation of a nation in the Declaration of Independence, the creation of a racial or ethnic identity in Douglass, and the creation of the self in Whitman.

Let's turn now to Herman Melville (1819–1891), who gives us, in *Moby Dick*, a story of language. In fact, even before the book begins, *Moby Dick* has many pages of front matter, including the first section, titled "Etymology." The figure we first see in "Etymology" is a schoolmaster, dusting off his grammar books with a handkerchief embellished with flags. Thus, the novel begins amid the history of language. Next, Melville treats us to a set of etymologies for the word *whale*. Indeed, throughout *Moby Dick*, we see whole passages of dictionary writing as part of the narrative, as if we must learn the story of the whale from the Hebrew and Greek through Latin to modern languages.

Ahab, much like the slave figure of Frederick Douglass, is a creature of Shakespeare and the King James Bible. In one scene on the quarterdeck, we see in Ahab a kind of tragic figure, complete with a soliloquy and a Shakespearean theory of epistemology. In Ahab's personification of the sun, Melville shows us one of the central features of rhetorical life; we might even say that the story of American rhetoric and language is, at heart, a story of personification. We've seen repeatedly in American literature the image of the natural landscape as being alive. We also personify the history of language when we say that languages are living and growing. Melville shows us, as Jefferson did, that language is as much act as it is substance. Throughout *Moby Dick*, we see all the languages of the world, and we see examples of language change in use and process.

We're moving close to the end of this course in our quest for meaning and resonance. Lexicography, etymology, dialectology, and linguistic theory will all come together in the next group of lectures. ■

Suggested Reading

Douglass, *Autobiographies*.

Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*.

Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*.

Melville, *Moby Dick*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does the slave narrative of Frederick Douglass echo some of the great texts written or translated into English?

2. How do Melville, Whitman, or Douglass use personification?

American Regionalism

Lecture 29

Labov noted that the floor walkers at Saks Fifth Avenue—the great store—pronounced the *r* in *fourth floor* very precisely, whereas the people at Macy's pronounced the *r* in *fourth floor* a little less precisely, and the haberdashers at S. Klein's on the Square in Union Square … virtually no *r* in *fourth floor*. … We may have, in the case of New York English, and instability of *r* in certain sounds, but also … that instability is characterized not just by region, but by class stratification.

In this lecture and the next two, we will explore American regional speech, writing, and literature by examining some of the technical details of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and style, and by looking at literary and imaginative evocations of regional dialect. This set of lectures looks back to the lectures on dialects in Middle English and to earlier representations of regionalism. It also speaks to a larger theme of this course—the relationship between the region and the center, as well as the standard and the personal. In this and subsequent lectures, we'll also explore some of the lexicographical resources for the study of American regional English. This exploration speaks to another theme of the course—the history of lexicography.

Certain settlement patterns were the origins of American dialects. Six major regional dialects developed in the eastern part of America, descending from original settlement patterns in the following regions:

- Eastern New England, east of the Connecticut River
- New York City
- The Upper North, including western New England, upstate New York, and the Great Lakes
- The Lower North, made up of the Mid-Atlantic states

- The Upper South, including West Virginia, the mountain regions of Virginia and North Carolina, and into the northern Ozark area

- The Lower South, including the Virginia Piedmont area, the South Carolina coast, and "plantation" country.

There are, of course, many subdialects and smaller regional variants, but our goal here is to identify the major differences in these dialects by region, and the points of contact with other languages in each region that affected speech and pronunciation (for example, Dutch and French in some areas; German and Irish in others; Gullah and African languages in others still).

Let's look at some of the most general and obvious features of American regional dialects. We begin in the North, focusing on eastern New England. The traditional New England dialect does not retain the historical "r" sound in words (e.g., "ahrange" versus "orange"). This dialect also uses the "a" sound in such words as *dance*, rather than the "aesch" sound (e.g., "dahnce" versus "dance"). The New England dialect tends clearly to contrast the pronunciation of the three words *Mary*, *merry*, and *marry*, and uses distinctive pronunciation of certain key words that are touchstones of regionalism (e.g., *creek*, *greasy*).

Moving down the coast, we reach New York City, a fascinating area for dialectology. The dialect that we think of as typically stemming from Brooklyn confuses "oi" and "er" sounds, leading to such pronunciations as "Toity-Toid Street." William Labov, an American scholar of dialect and language, reported in the 1960s that social stratification in New York may be keyed to the pronunciation of the "r" sound, with upper-class speakers pronouncing "r" very precisely and lower-class speakers tending to lose the "r" sound. Similarly, there is a loss of postvocalic "r" (the "r" sound after a vowel) in some situations, which leads to rounding of vowels (e.g., the characteristic "aw" sound rather than "er").

The dialect of the Upper North shares many features with New England but retains the postvocalic "r" and the "aesch" sound. Here, we hear "orange" and "dance," rather than "ahrange" and "dahnce." The Lower North has a distinctive pronunciation of the unrounded "o" sound in such words as *forest*

("farest") and *hot*. This dialect also tends to conflate the sounds in *Mary* and *merry* and in such words as *cot* and *caught*.

In the Upper and Lower South, we find many similarities, though there are important differences of detail. General features include the following:

- The long "i" becomes a long "a" in such words as *line* ("lahne") and *mile* ("mahle").

- The vowels in such words as *gem* and *pin* are pronounced in the same way (as a short "i").

- *Marry* and *merry* are pronounced in the same way.

- *Creek* and *greasy* (with a short "i" and a "z") are pronounced distinctly.

The study of dialect is concerned with much more than this kind of phonological variation. In America, the study of dialect began in the 19th century, but it can be traced back to the earlier philological study of Middle English dialects. In 1889, the American Dialect Society was founded, bringing together a range of resources and research for the study of American regional speech. The publication of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE), begun in the 1980s and finished at the beginning of the 21st century, is the culmination of more than a century of work in American dialectology.

DARE looks back to a time when the discussion of American regional dialects was keyed to the definition of America itself.

DARE begins with a quotation from William E. Mead, a philologist, a scholar of Old and Middle English, and an early president of the American Dialect Society. We notice immediately in this quotation the use of the word *ardent*, which we have seen repeatedly in writings about language. Mead's "ardent" admiration must lead to a "systematic investigation." In other words, the study of language requires a rigorous methodology, and the product of that study will be "an adequate dialect map of our vast country."

The study of American dialects and dialectology often takes as its goal the production of cartographic representations of speech use. Maps are used in DARE, in textbooks, and on websites concerned with linguistics to demarcate shifts in pronunciation and vocabulary among speakers of American English. DARE looks back to a time when the discussion of American regional dialects was keyed to the definition of America itself. Such discussions lead to the subject of literature and the idea of dialect and literary regionalism as central to American speech and identity. We'll cover this topic in greater detail in the next lecture.

How can we locate DARE in the traditions of lexicography, language discussion, and language ideology that we've seen throughout this course? The primary job of DARE is to classify speech communities. DARE also tries to distinguish between dialect and colloquialism, and among regional dialect and slang, jargon, argot, folk terms, vulgarity, and so on. For example, there are many regionalisms that may be slang, and regional speech may become part of colloquial American English, but not every slang term is a regionalism. Words or phrases included in DARE must meet the following criteria:

- Any word or phrase not used generally in American speech; that is, words or phrases that have currency region by region but do not necessarily have currency across regions.

- Any word or phrase "whose former meaning is folk in usage, regardless of region." Folk usage is not bounded by geography but by strata, or levels of community.

DARE has several examples of folk usage or terms. One such usage is the idea of multiple plurals (e.g., *ants* versus *antses*). DARE identifies this usage not simply as a unique feature of the speech of a region but as an example of a grammatical characteristic of folk speech. Another characteristic of folk speech is the handling of verbs. For example, the phrase "outen the light" is used in certain areas of Pennsylvania. Past tense and present participle forms are often confused in western Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia (e.g., "Your hair needs washed" versus "Your hair needs washing").

How does DARE compare to the historical dictionaries of Johnson and the OED? In particular, what constitutes evidence in DARE? Both Johnson's *Dictionary* and the OED are, in one sense, anthologies of quotations, from both literary works and other forms of writing. DARE attempts to blend this textual historical and literary material with a body of fieldwork, but this must be handled with care. Scholars try to design neutral questions to elicit information on pronunciation and vocabulary choice from native informants. Projects such as DARE help to redefine the American language as the aggregate of regionalisms, slang, and colloquialisms. In this way, the history of American English becomes the history of levels or subgroups of the language.

In the beginning of the 21st century, we need to ask: Is American English uniform, or is it the sum of region, class, and local forms? How does this view contrast with Mencken's notion of American English as more stable and homogeneous than British English? When we look at literary representations and at the history of African-American English in later lectures, we must ask: Are we privileging the folk over the educated? Are we saying that the heart of American speech and culture lies in the language of the folk? These questions lead into our study in the next lecture of literary representations of dialect. ■

Suggested Reading

Algeo, *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Vol. 6: English in North America*.

Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*.

Cassidy, ed., *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

Labov, *The Atlas of North American English*.

Questions to Consider

1. What would Samuel Johnson have said about American regionalisms?

2. How does the DARE compare in usefulness, in accuracy, and in historical literary overview to the OED?

American Dialects in Literature

Lecture 30

As soon as you make the association that there's enough water in the state of Mississippi to float Noah's ark, what you're doing is you are associating your story with biblical narrative. You are giving this story now not simply the flavor of folk narration, but the flavor of pulpit oratory—that this is, in effect, a sermon. … The African-American experience is so frequently an experience of alienation; an experience of being lost. The swamp, or the river, or the disasters that are represented here are figures for the swamp in which the African-American experience in the 19th century was represented.

In the last lecture, we identified some of the features of American regional dialects and called attention to the way in which original settlement patterns spawned different dialect areas. We also saw that the resources of contemporary dialectology and lexicography, including DARE, still ground their projects in the 19th-century debates about national linguistic identity, and still try to strike a balance between amateur fascination with language and the need to create a systematic, historical methodology. In this lecture, we'll explore those issues further by looking at the literary representation of American dialects. As we read several excerpts, we'll look for evidence of the historical pronunciation and grammar of certain regions in America and the survival of certain forms of folk speech or folk idiom in American culture. Note, too, that regional or folk speech is not simply the sum of funny words or strange pronunciations; it is a form of narrative—a way of telling a story. What we're examining in this lecture are the ways in which American regional experience tells a story.

Representations of dialect in literature often make use of "eye dialect." In eye dialect, there is an attempt to spell words phonetically but also to make words look different, even if they are not pronounced differently. Examples include writing *sez* for *says* and *wanna* for *want to*. These forms of eye dialect are designed to evoke regional affiliation or level of literacy or class—in other words, how the speaker would write the words rather than say them. In some ways, the representation of dialect is keyed to nostalgia. In looking

at dialect, we are going back to something that is original or authentic in America; we are going back to the childhood of America. We might ask, then: Does regional dialect stand in relation to Standard English as childhood speech stands to adult speech?

Mark Twain is probably the most famous figure in the literary representation of dialect in America. He is best known for his attempts in such books as *Huckleberry Finn* to represent white and African-American speech in Missouri in the mid-19th century. In looking at a selection from *Huckleberry Finn*, we see that Huck has more eye dialect than Tom. Such spellings as *warn't*, *nother*, and *wrapt* are designed to evoke the flavor of pronunciation. Such words as *drownded* and *knowed* make use of the multiple past instead of the participial form, a characteristic of regional or folk speech. Note, too, the oscillation in verb tenses, another characteristic of folk narration. Huck switches between using the past tense (*cleared out*) and present tense (*We see it warn't no use*) in telling his story. The vocabulary in this passage is also interesting. *Smouch*, for example, means to *steal*; *nation tough job* is a euphemism for *damnation tough job*. Hypercorrection or vocabulary that is exceedingly learned can also be a landmark of regionalism, for example, *Tom could out-superintend any boy I ever see*.

Is dialect itself comparable to "antses in the sugar"? Is the American language the sugar and dialect something that gets into and ruins it?

Another important writer of the 19th century who is well known for his representation of regional English is Joel Chandler Harris. In his *Uncle Remus* stories, Harris sought to represent the language and culture of slaves in the Piedmont region. In a passage from "A Run of Luck," note the characteristic dropping of the final *r* sound with the spelling of *sir* as *suh*. The *r* sound intrudes in the word *master*, which is spelled *marster*. We see in this passage various grammatical forms that scholars have subsequently recognized as characteristic of African-American English, such as the use of the durative in the phrase *I done been*. These examples evoke grammatical features of the language, rather than the illiteracy of the speaker. Here and elsewhere in Harris's stories, *Mississippi* is spelled *Massysip*; the *th* sound

is consistently written as *d* (*der* and *dem* instead of *their* and *them*); and the *g* is dropped in some words ending in *-ing* (*burnin* instead of *burning*). The word *canebrake*, which refers to vegetation growing on the banks of the Mississippi River, evokes a particular time and place and fits in with this African-American narrative. With the line "Dey's nuff water in de State er Massysip fer ter float Noah's ark," Harris associates his story with biblical narrative. As we saw in Frederick Douglass's story of the runaway slave, here, too, the African-American experience is one of alienation and disorientation in a literal or figurative swamp.

Moving north, we turn to passages that are representative of different regions in American English. Sarah Orne Jewett, a late-19th-century writer from Maine, gives us the literary representation of the eastern New England dialect—the so-called "downeaster" form—in her story "Andrew's Fortune." Jewett's eye dialect indicates the characteristic vowels of her region of New England; *great*, for example, is spelled *gre't*, and *steady* is spelled *stiddy*. Several vocabulary terms and expressions in the passage locate the speaker as a member of a class as well as a region; examples include the apparently ungrammatical expressions *dreadful concerned* and *my boys was over*. Just as *canebrake* was emblematic of the language of Joel Chandler Harris, *phthisic* is emblematic of the Maine dialect. The word refers to a respiratory ailment; its spelling is designed to evoke a technical term from Greek science. The entry in DARE for *phthisic* from 1975 seems to suggest that the word lives on in the world of the spelling bee.

Finally, in a passage from "My Friend Moe" by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, we hear an evocation of "cracker" speech. We note, of course, the multiple plural with *antses* and the multiple past tense with *throwed out in the back yard*. Note, too, the elisions in regional speech, such as the use of *o* for *of*. These features come together to evoke not just a particular region, but the very idea of regionalism.

The passages we've read have in common a focus on the place of the regional in American literary culture. They prompt a number of questions concerning dialect and "standard" forms of the language. Is dialect itself comparable to "antses in the sugar"? Is the American language the sugar and dialect something that gets into and ruins it? In the same way, is the study

of language like putting up blackberries, a careful undertaking that winds up with the blackberries spoiled and the sugar contaminated? As Samuel Johnson said, trying to record or fix a language is like trying to lash the wind. We've also seen how the Mississippi River in the writing of Noah Webster, Mark Twain, and Joel Chandler Harris stands as an emblem of language itself—constantly flowing, constantly changing, constantly mutating.

When we think about regional dialects and the various social, ethnic, and linguistic strata in our country, we need to ask ourselves if the sugar of our tongue has been tainted by antses, or if in fact, what really makes American English so tasty are those blackberries in the glass jars of our imagination. ■

Suggested Reading

Algeo, *Problems in the Origins and Development of the English Language*.

Cassidy, ed., *The Dictionary of American Regional English*.

Jones, *Strange Talk*.

Questions to Consider

1. How much do literary dialects accurately reproduce the sounds of regional speech?

2. Why have some people objected to teaching texts in the schools that use literary dialects?

The Impact of African-American English

Lecture 31

By understanding the origins of speech patterns of Africans and African-Americans in historical ways, we can see that certain forms of African-American speech have recognizable grammatical structures and recognizable patterns of syntax, or word order. Let me stress the following: African-American English is not a debased or simplified version of American English. … We should consider African-American English as a historically grounded linguistic phenomenon whose features may be shared by black and by white speakers of English in America.

This lecture calls attention to some of the political, social, literary, and imaginative issues that relate to the history of the African-American peoples in America and the impact of that history on both the American language and English as a world language. The history of the languages of Africans and African-Americans is a long one. The European contact with Africans was, in many ways, a linguistic one; that is, it was mediated by a variety of languages spoken in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

There is no such thing as a single African language. There are many African languages and many African-language families, each of which had an impact on the vocabulary, grammar, and sound of what was to become African-American English. In the course of the European periods of exploration, colonialism, and slave trading, "pidgins" and "creoles" developed. Some pidgins and creoles were based on English, but others were based on Portuguese, French, Arabic, and other languages.

A pidgin is a form of communication that enables two mutually unintelligible groups of speakers to communicate. Pidgins are ad hoc forms of communication, often developed in particular trade sectors (such as the slave trade, whaling industry, or opium trade), and they are perceived as artificial by both groups of speakers. An individual speaker of a pidgin does not generally transmit that form of communication to his or her children.

Creoles, however, develop over several generations as distinctive languages. Creoles often emerge when the language of the colonizing or economically dominant group is imposed upon a subordinate or colonized group. Creoles may emerge from pidgins, but speakers of creoles think of them as languages. It can be argued that Middle English is a pidgin or a creole, emerging from the contact between speakers of Old English and speakers of Norman French after the Norman Conquest.

By understanding the origins of the speech patterns of Africans and African-Americans, we can see that certain forms of African-American speech have recognizable grammatical structures and recognizable patterns of syntax, or word order. African-American English is not a debased or simplified version of American English, nor is it a general vernacular shared by all African-Americans. Rather, African-American English is a historically-grounded linguistic phenomenon whose features may be shared by black and white speakers of English in America. Some linguists have noted that African-American speakers speak differently from one another as a result of regional variations, differences in ancestry, and differences in cultural and social experiences.

Let's now turn to some recent work in African-American English by contemporary linguists and scholars. One of the primary scholars of African-American English for the past half-century is William Labov, a linguist who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. Instead of African-American English, he prefers the term Black English Vernacular. Labov considers Black English Vernacular to be a subsystem of English with a distinctive set of phonological and syntactical rules. In other words, there exists an English vernacular, spoken by individuals of African ancestry, which may be seen as sharing certain pronunciation and grammatical features, in spite of regional, class, or social differences. Many of these forms of pronunciation, syntax, and grammar originate in southern American dialects, but there are also aspects of the Black English Vernacular that derive from the old slave creoles of the Caribbean and the Carolina coastline.

Let's look at a specific creole, known as Gullah, that might have had an impact on African-American English. Gullah is keyed to certain African-American languages and is still spoken on some islands off the coast of South

Carolina. Some scholars have argued that Gullah may, in fact, be very close to the original form of African-American English. One key feature of Gullah is the use of *dem* as the demonstrative adjective and a signal of plurality. In Gullah, the phrase *dem man* is the grammatical plural form for *men*. Some aspects of the language that Joel Chandler Harris sought to represent with eye dialect may share certain features with Gullah, such as the instability of the *r* sound.

Verbal structures in African-American English may also be traced back to earlier creoles and may have certain regional forms. In linguistics, the term "aspect" refers to certain verbal structures that allow speakers to express duration of actions. In English, which is a tense language, we do not have grammatical categories that allow us to make precise distinctions between, for example, actions that began and ended in the past and actions that began in the past and continue into the present. Some languages, including African-American English, have specific grammatical categories to express these aspects. Such expressions as *she sick*, *she go*, or *she going* express point-in-time actions. What matters is not whether the action is in the present or the past but that the action is not ongoing. In contrast, such expressions as *she be sick* or *she be going* express duration. *She be sick* means that she got sick in the past and continues to be sick. Forms of the verb *to be* can signal special features of duration. This verbal structure is one of the key grammatical features shared by the vernacular speech of many individuals of African ancestry, almost regardless of their geographical origins.

In African-American English, as in earlier forms of Standard English, negation can be cumulative or multiple; the double negative is not ungrammatical. In terms of pronunciation, African-American English is, in many ways, the language of a region as well as the language of individuals of African ancestry in America. Speakers of Standard American English often perceive confusion on the part of African-American English speakers in the pronunciation of labio-dental sounds (e.g., "f," "th"). This is not an issue of the inability of individuals of African ancestry to pronounce certain sounds. In fact, African-American English may be said to have a different phonemic inventory from that of Standard English.

Certain parts of speech seem to be omitted in African-American English, and we may question whether this is an issue of pronunciation or grammar. Consider the sentence: *She jump over the table*. Some have argued that the difference between *she jumps* and *she jump* relates to grammar rather than pronunciation. The issue here is that in certain phonemic environments, the *s* is elided. Similarly, the difference between a *brown-eyed beauty* and a *brown-eye beauty* may be more a matter of pronunciation than grammar.

To this point, we have discussed African-American English as if it had simply one register, but African-American English has had, and continues to have, many discourses. African-Americans have been literate and literary writers since the 18th century. The range of African-American literary expression is so vast that we cannot, of course, cover it in a single lecture. But we can identify a few features of the discourses that have had an impact on more "standard" English. Beginning with vocabulary, some words from the world of the slaves are, perhaps, evidence of African or creole languages; *goober*, *jazz*, the verb *tote*, *gumbo*, *okra*, *banjo*, and *yam* are obviously from African-inflected cultures. Other examples include the expression *bad mouth* used as a verb. This may be a translation of the expression *day ngaymay* from the Vai language of Africa. The universal negation *unh-unh* and the expression *look-see* (as in *take a look-see*) may be based on older African or creole expressions.

The universal negation *unh-unh* and the expression *look-see* (as in *take a look-see*) may be based on older African or creole expressions.

Perhaps more important than cataloguing such locutions is to stress the impact of African-American speech forms on the phrasal shape and rhythm of everyday speech. Note, for example, the impact of African-American spiritual devotion in America and the way in which the elevated language of the scriptures textured the performative voice of African-American oratory. African-American oratory traces its origins to the preachers of the 19th century. We can see this strain together with the language of the slave and the language of popular culture. One could, in fact, argue that there is as much high culture as pop culture in African-American speech.

African-American popular speech and culture calls to mind Cab Calloway's hepster talk of the 1930s and the scat songs of Ella Fitzgerald from the 1950s–1960s. We might also think of the contemporary rapper Tupac Shakur, who says in one song, "but I don't think they knowin / Straight to the depths of hell is where those cowards goin." This line evokes the phantasmagoric experience of Frederick Douglass's runaway slave.

In what he calls the phenomenon of "signifying," the scholar Henry Louis Gates has noted that the words of white experience radically change meaning and inheritance when put into the mouths of African-Americans. In Ralph Ellison's brilliant novel, *Invisible Man*, the blind reverend Homer Barbie transforms the language of the Old Testament to the slave and post-slave experience. He concludes one sermon by saying, "Let me people go," uttering the language of Moses.

Perhaps the single greatest African-American to transform the language of Moses into the experience of liberation was, of course, Martin Luther King, Jr. In his "I Have a Dream" speech, King brings together all the images and idioms of African-American experience and speech that we have seen in this lecture. The repetition of "I have a dream" drives home the desire for freedom, and the phrase "every valley shall be exalted," again, transforms the language of the Bible, filtered through the music of Handel, into the speech of an African-American. One of the great moments of "signifying" in this speech is King's recitation of the lines from "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." King juxtaposes the language of prayer with a heightened vocabulary in such words as *prodigious* and *curvaceous*. In the final words of the speech, "Free at last! Free at last!" slave culture and the Bible are synthesized.

We've seen in this lecture that the African-American experience has changed irrevocably the speech, writing, and imaginative structure of English in America and throughout the world. ■

Suggested Reading

Dillard, *Black English*.

Marckwardt, *American English*.

Mufwene, "African-American English."

Rickford and Rickford, *Spoken Soul*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the difference between a creole and a pidgin, and does African-American English qualify as either?

2. In what ways has African-American English influenced the standard of Modern English?

An Anglophone World

Lecture 32

The argument of English linguistic superiority, vacuous though it may have been, resonates with the colonialist argument that sees the English themselves as, perhaps, masculine or even hyper-masculinized figures in a soft or feminized native landscape.

Is English the dominant language of world commerce, culture, and literature at the beginning of the 21st century? One theme of this course is the way in which language travels, as we've seen with the movements of Indo-European peoples, Germanic-speaking peoples, and later English speakers. This lecture analyzes the impact of this spread of English-speaking peoples around the globe.

When someone says that English is a world language, we often think of the extent to which our popular culture, commerce, and technology have made people speakers, readers, and writers of English. But the idea of English as a world language is, in fact, much older than we might suppose. The historical activities of trade and colonization from the British Empire, long before America, fostered the development of English in different parts of the world. This development, in turn, has given rise not simply to different pronunciations, vocabulary words, or grammatical forms, but to different forms of imaginative expression.

Let's begin by looking at some of the early attitudes toward English before or in tandem with conquest and colonization. One of the themes of writing about English is the idea that English is somehow the "best" language. For example, in 1905, the great Danish philologist and linguist Otto Jespersen argued in his book *The Growth and Structure of the English Language* that English was "more masculine than other languages." Surprisingly, such mythologies of language remain a part of the legacy of English around the world. This view of English linguistic superiority resonated with the colonialist argument that the English themselves were somehow hypermasculinized figures in a soft, feminized native landscape, seen in the writing of Kipling and others. The dominance of the English language was further established through the

institution of schools, administrative structures, railroads, postal systems, and other forms of colonial control in the 19th and 20th centuries. Through these institutions, English spread around the world.

In the 18th century, English moved to Australia with the creation of penal colonies there. Australian English was originally a regional and class-based language. It shares some similarities with the urban dialects of Britain, including certain sound patterns, such as the raising of some back vowels and the creation of diphthongs. Recall that a diphthong is a vowel sound made up of two sounds, such as we hear in the pronunciation of *day*: /dɛi/ (*a-e*). In Australian English, the diphthong is more extreme, perhaps even a triphthong: /daɛi/.

Australian English also exhibits the argot of the convict and prison, known in the 18th and 19th centuries as "flash" language. This argot gave rise to several locutions that many people think of as characteristic of Australian culture and language. Of course, these locutions were augmented with the language of the aboriginal peoples. The song "Waltzing Matilda" offers a lexicon of popular Australian English: *swagman*, *billabong*, *billy*, *jumbuck*, *tucker-bag*, and so on. Australian English is also noteworthy for its preservation of regional terms, such as *corker*, *dust-up*, and *tootsy*, and terms of humor that may have come from the original Australian migratory experience. Some scholars have asserted that the verb *chunder* (*to vomit*), for example, originated as *watch under*, a phrase shouted to those below by seasick prisoners retching from above.

English speakers have been living in South Africa since the mid-17th century, when both English and Dutch settlements were founded. Just as there were points of contact between English and aboriginal languages in Australia, so there was contact in South Africa with other languages, including Afrikaans, a variety of Dutch that emerged in the 19th century as a language of colonial experience. The presence of a large population speaking many different African languages, together with Afrikaans or Dutch, affected the idiom and tone of South African English. There are also some distinctive features of pronunciation that may have to do with region and class dialects of the original settlement populations. For example, one of the characteristics of South African pronunciation is the "a-" sound ("ah") in a word such as

back, which has been raised and fronted to a short "e-" ("bek"). This is true also perhaps in the word *black*. Consonant clusters are distinctive in South African English: For example, *text* is often pronounced "teyks." These may be features of original dialect settlement patterns or evidence of contact with African-language-speaking groups. The distinctive vocabulary of South African English has given us such words as *spoor*, *trek*, and *veldt*, as well as the highly-charged term *apartheid*, Dutch for *apart-ness*.

The topic of English in India is vast, rich with history and literary documentation. Indeed, much contemporary prose fiction has been uniquely shaped by writers from India and Pakistan. The English people and their language have been in India since about 1600. The establishment of settlements by the East India Company created a mix of Indian and English environments, with a great deal of intermarriage, social stratification, and social interpenetration. Anglo-Indian idioms came into British English early on. By the end of the 18th century, we find such words as *Brahmin*, *calico*, *curry*, *raja*, *juggernaut*, *bungalow*, *pundit*, *chintz*, *jungle*, and *veranda*, which were perceived in England as words of subcontinental Indian origin. As we saw earlier in the course, the English presence in India helped foster historical philology with William Jones's study of Sanskrit.

The English language became the standard in India through a series of political events in the 19th century. In 1813, the East India Company dissolved, and India was administered by the Crown. In 1835, Thomas Macaulay, the great English legislator, proposed the establishment of a class of individuals as interpreters between the Indians and the British. Thus, English became the official language of government in the subcontinent. In 1857, the Great Mutiny took place, followed by the establishment of direct imperial rule. India was now administered by Queen Victoria herself as Empress, and English-language universities, colleges, and schools were established. English became the language of Indian nationalism in the wake of the Great Mutiny, when the British administrative colonial culture disempowered the Islamic Mughal rulers of India and placed greater power in the hands of a newly educated, English-literate, Hindu middle and upper-middle class. The legacy of that shift can be seen in such figures as Gandhi and Nehru—that is, individuals who aspired to an English-language form of education and were,

by religion or by ethnicity, associated with the Hindu peoples rather than with the peoples descended from the older Mughal/Islamic rulers.

By the late 19th century, Anglo-Indian expressions had become so numerous that dictionaries were developed to track them. The most well known of these was *Hobson-Jobson*, a dictionary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and expressions first published in 1886. Its original editors were Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell. In the introduction to the first edition, the editors note, "Words of Indian origin [such as *calico*, *chintz*, and *gingham*] have been insinuating themselves into English ever since the end of the reign of Elizabeth." We get the sense that these words are like parasites. *Hobson-Jobson* is not simply a guide to popular expressions—it's not simply descriptive—it is prescriptive. The editors ask: What words have come into the English language, and which of these have been accepted as English? Consider, for example, the treatment of *curry* in *Hobson-Jobson*, a word that many of us think of as distinctly representative of Indian culture. Yule and Burnell essentially rewrote the history of the word, tracing it to Greek, Roman, and medieval culinary habits to give it a more European etymology.

We might think of the entrance of new words into the language as a kind of curry, a meal that allows us to choose words that will spice up our language.

Yule and Burnell devote a good deal of space to words for food, such as *curry*, and words for architecture, such as *veranda*. Their attention to these words is, in many ways, a metaphor for the history of language itself. We might think of the entrance of new words into the language as a kind of curry, a meal that allows us to choose words that will spice up our language. Chaucer was thinking of language in this sense when he used the phrase "to saffron his tongue." In a similar vein, a *veranda* was not just a porch but a place of commixture, the place where the English met with the Indian. Language, too, may be a safe space for the mixing of cultures.

The distinctive features of Indian English may be characterized as both tonal (relating to the rhythm and sound of the language) and phrasal. Durative verbs are characteristic of Indian English (*I'm doing* versus *I do* or *when I*

will come versus *when I come*) to express verbal condition and experience. The use of elaborate, detailed, and older terms and clichés has also been seen as characteristic of a certain level of Indian English. For example, the term *brolly* is still used to mean *umbrella*, although the word is no longer part of the idiom in British English.

Let's close with some aspects of Indian-English literary culture. Vikram Seth, author of *The Golden Gate* and *A Suitable Boy*, is in many ways representative of English- and American-educated Indian writers of the postwar generation. His novels demonstrate a sense of the vast lexical and phrasal resources of Indian English. *A Suitable Boy* is a 1,000-plus-page family history written in verse in the same vein as some of the 19th-century novels of Dickens or Anthony Trollope. Like other writers, Seth uses the England language and the legacy of such writers as Dickens to express the Indian experience.

Salman Rushdie may be the most well-known Indian writer working in English today; among his many works are *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Rushdie's work is representative of Indian fiction's reworking of the traditions of the European novel. *Midnight's Children* is a kind of phantasmagorical reimagination of the world of Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, Voltaire's *Candide*, or Dickens's *David Copperfield*. It takes as its premise the birth of a child at midnight on August 15, 1947, the date on which India and Pakistan became separate nations. In a selection from this novel, we hear the lilt of Indian English in, for example, the use of durative verbs: "I am falling apart," "speaking metaphorically." Note, too, the use of repetition and the appropriation of a high-culture British vocabulary to express emotional distress—"melodramatic, riddling, grubby appeal for pity"—which takes us from the polysyllabic Latinate to the vernacular, to the gross. We see here the rhythm of a language put into the service of writing what is on the surface a very traditional European novel. We can see the language of the master influencing and shaping the language of the servant, but we can also see Rushdie dismantling the language and rebuilding it with his own tools. ■

Suggested Reading

Kachru, *The Indianization of English*.

McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil, *The Story of English*.

Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways have colonial versions of English from around the world enriched Standard English?

2. Is the English of India primarily an imperialist legacy or an idiom of creative expression?

The Language of Science

Lecture 33

What I'm calling attention to is the way in which the innovation of the telephone created a vocabulary, a social structure, and a new way of dealing with language. … When we lament the ways in which new technologies of communication have debased society, all we are doing is we are replaying narratives of over a century before.

In these lectures, we've learned that the history of the English language is a history of travel and exploration, of intersections between imagination and technology, and of words coming into and leaving the language. We know, too, that new worlds of words come, not necessarily from places but from spaces of the virtual imagination. The computer, the Internet, and text-messaging have changed and may continue to change the nature, structure, and composition of the English language. This lecture also looks at some historical issues in the relationship between science and language, not simply as a matter of vocabulary but as a matter of idiom. Finally, we'll conclude with some provocations and speculations about the ways in which contemporary technology may affect the English language in the United States, in Britain, and around the world.

Scientific and technological vocabulary has changed English almost from the beginning. Dictionary makers in the 17th and the 18th centuries recognized the impact of new technologies and advancements in science on language. In the 18th century, for example, the word *attraction* referred to a specific phenomenon in electrical and magnetic theory. Through extension in lexis, this word eventually came to refer to an emotional or physical pull between people. Whole classes of words for affect and emotional response originated in scientific language. Recall Johnson's preference for putting literal or physical meanings before metaphorical or figurative ones, even when those literal meanings were no longer the primary connotations of the words. The key examples for Johnson were such words as *ardent* and *flagrant*.

Science and technology were called into literary use early on. For example, the observation and description of electrical shock in the course of the 19th

century gave rise through extension in lexis to the idea of shocking news or events or even shocking language. At the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, one of the central debates in the technology, science, and economy of electrification was precisely whether it was moral or legitimate to use *electrocution*, the word proposed to describe death by electricity, not just as a word but as a concept.

Some words that seem perfectly transparent today were controversial in the past. Consider the word *hello*, for example, which brings together technology, society, and decorum. When the telephone was developed in the 1870s and 1880s, society needed a gender- and class-neutral word that could be used to answer it. A debate on this issue took place between Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison. Edison's choice won out, and in the 1880s, *hello* became the marker of a new understanding of human relationships. Mark Twain was the first literary writer to use the word *hello* in his great novel of 1889, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Twain's protagonist, Hank Morgan, is transported back to Arthur's court, where he installs electricity and telephone communications. Twain also mentions the "hello girl," or telephone operator. In the 1880s, hello girls served as private alarm clocks for businessmen and became objects of erotic male fantasy. We see here that the innovation of the telephone created a vocabulary, a social structure, and a new way of dealing with language. The same can be said of the new technologies of communication we use in the early 21st century.

In the late 19th, 20th, and early 21st centuries, new terms have entered the language from a number of sciences. The impact of Freudian psychoanalysis on English was immense at the turn of the 20th century. Freud originally used everyday German words for psychoanalytic concepts, such as *ich* (*I*) for *ego* and *es* (*it*) for *id*. In early English translations of Freud's works, his vernacular German was given a Latin scientific gloss with the words *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. This is the early-20th-century equivalent of the inkhorn terms of the Renaissance, new words coined on Latin and Greek models to heighten the illusion of learning. Other psychological terms offer examples of extension in lexis. Such words as *complex*, *schizophrenic*, *egocentric*, *fixate*, and so on are now used almost wholly apart from their original technical and Freudian analytic context.

More recently, biological conditions have come under increasing study in psychology; thus, a biological vocabulary has displaced the older psychological vocabulary. Highly technical terms, such as *obsessive-compulsive disorder*, *syndrome*, and *bipolarity*, are now applied socially.

Just as biology has taken over our understanding of the mind, so physics has taken over our understanding of the world. The natural philosophy of the Renaissance, the philosophical scientific approaches of the 18th century, and the bench-top laboratory experiments of the 19th century have been displaced by the world of nuclear physics. Words that originally came from nuclear physics, such as *critical mass*, *meltdown*, *fission*, *fusion*, *ground zero*, and the verb *to nuke* (meaning "to cook in the microwave") now have figurative social and emotional connotations. It's not surprising that we sometimes use these terms incorrectly. The phrase *ground zero*, for example, was originally used to refer to the site of the explosion of a nuclear weapon. By extension in lexis, it has come to mean the moment of beginning.

Over the past three decades, we have tended to privilege the ungrammatical over the grammatical in public culture.

Cosmology, too, has given us a range of terms that have become metaphors, including *Big Bang*, *cosmic*, *galactic*, *light years*, and *parsecs*. In turn, metaphorical uses of cosmic terms have given rise to new uses for such words as *awesome*, which used to mean *awe-inspiring* but now means simply *good*.

Of course, the world of computers has also taken over the language. The word *computer* itself originally referred to individuals who calculated the trajectories of ballistic weapons for military purposes. Eventually, the computer became the autonomous object of calculation. The language of computers has since become metaphorical, as we see in such words as *input*, *output*, *software*, *hardware*, *boot up*, and *net*. Computer terms are often formed by combining individual word units, called "morphemes." The morpheme *ware*, for example, is used to refer to things that are bought and sold, such as *hardware*. The term *computer hardware* gave rise to *software*, to refer to the intellectual property that accompanied computers. Computer scientists now are studying the relationship between computers and living

biological elements of cybernetic units. The term used to describe the ways in which we will relate the individual to the computer is *wetware*. To go even further, plans or ideas in the world of high technology marketed to venture capitalists are called *vaporware*, because they don't actually exist.

Other examples of extension in lexis from the computer world include the verbs *to google* and *to wiki*. The latter term refers to looking something up on the Web site Wikipedia, which itself may have been formed from a combination of *wiki* (Hawaiian, *happy* or *engaged*) and *pedia*, appropriated from the word *encyclopedia*.

Eponymy, the coinage of words from names or products, is a key feature of modern English, representing the ways in which individuals, corporations, and brand names come to stand for general concepts or actions. Older examples of eponymy, from the 18th and 19th centuries, include *boycott*, *sandwich*, *maverick*, and *chauvinism*. Many brand names have become generic terms, such as *Kleenex*, *Thermos*, *Frigidaire*, *Victrola*, *Hoover*, *aspirin*, and *zipper*. The last two terms, from the 1890s, are so old that they have lost their association with their originators. Recall that H. L. Mencken wrote about the American penchant for "manufacturing" words. This idea is central to American culture at the beginning of the 21st century.

Let's conclude this lecture with reflections on how the digital world has changed our forms of discourse. The most obvious innovation in electronic communication is e-mail, developed in the 1980s. Today, one could argue that e-mail has replaced standard postal mail, or "snail mail." In many ways, e-mail creates the illusion of intimacy. The salutation *dear*, used to begin letters, is now seen as distancing rather than engaging. The form of salutation used in e-mails is often *hi* or *hey*, followed by a first name. The body of the e-mail text is a rhetorical construct of a "natural" persona. In the past few decades, rhetoric has gotten a bad reputation. Rather than being a tool for public and private expression, rhetoric is now associated with illusion or fakery. To be natural is to be un-rhetorical, but to be natural is also, in some sense, to be incorrect. Over the past three decades, we have tended to privilege the ungrammatical over the grammatical in public culture. Adherence to grammatical rules is seen as artificial or affected, while ungrammaticality is viewed as "natural." One of the key features of

e-mail is precisely its ungrammaticality. The "creative" spelling, the lack of capitalization, and the emoticons used in e-mail are not marks of sloppiness, or decline, or corruption in language, but are signals of faux simplicity. The e-mail persona has had a profound impact on our understanding of the relationship between rhetoric and grammar, on the one hand, and authenticity or individuality, on the other.

Text-messaging has also had an impact on language that has dovetailed with certain forms of popular culture, in particular, rap and hip-hop. In text-messaging, we see the revival of the rebus, a word puzzle that hinges on using pictures, letters, or abbreviations to evoke the sounds of words and, thus, to create meaningful utterances. Text-messaging has established a structure of such abbreviations, such as the letter "c" used to represent the word *see*. This trend has emerged in rap and hip-hop in the development of a rebus and phonetic vocabulary. The result can be seen, for example, in the name of the musical group Boyz II Men. The use of the rebus also dovetails with the belief that correct spelling, much like rhetoric or grammar, is an affectation. Again, in popular culture, we see this in the name of the performer Ludacris.

"Up-talk" is a form of speech rather than writing; it too, though, is a product of the digital world. Up-talk, in which all sentences are questions, developed, it is argued, from the speech of teenage girls in the San Fernando Valley in the 1970s. This form of speech seems to ask for approval with every sentence. The emoticon is the visual equivalent of up-talk, a signal in e-mail or other forms of written communication of the need for approval. Hamlet's "To be or not to be, that is the question" was a matter of Renaissance rhetoric; the *quaestio*—the inquiry into things—was decided by arguing both sides of an issue. Now we live, it seems, in an interrogative world where every statement is a question in need of an approving answer.

In our final lectures, we'll turn from science in language to the science of language. The issues that we've seen in this discussion of technology have provoked linguists and neuroscientists to ask new questions about the relationship between how we speak and how we think. ■

Suggested Reading

Lerer, "Hello, Dude: Philology, Performance, and Technology in Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*."

Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New*.

Questions to Consider

1. Has science influenced Modern English for better or worse—or neither?

2. What does the word *hello* tell us about the role of technology in language change and the issue of class distinctions?

The Science of Language

Lecture 34

Freud, Durkheim, and Saussure, along with other 19th-century figures such as Karl Marx and Charles Darwin, were great system-builders—that is, they were concerned not simply with explaining human nature or the experience of the world, but they were concerned with building a system of analysis such that any subsequent or hitherto undiscovered form of behavior, or any hitherto undiscovered creature, or any hitherto undiscovered object or social form, could be fit into and explained systematically.

As we've seen, contemporary debates often have historical antecedents. The debates that we explored in the last lecture about technology and culture, about changes in vocabulary, and about the social reality of linguistic communication can be seen at work in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Similarly, there are many debates today about the nature of language. Is language a form of social behavior? Is it a habit of mind? Does it inhere uniquely in human beings, or can it be learned or acquired by non-human animals? Is language simply the vocal production of meaningful sounds, or does it embrace all forms of symbolic behavior?

These questions motivate scholars and critics today, but they were also raised in the 19th century as the discipline of historical philology provoked discussion of the nature of language and its place in society. By the end of the 19th century, scientific methodology had come to characterize the study of humankind, specifically, of the mind and society. Freud sought to understand the workings of the human mind and its relationship to linguistic and cultural expression. Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) developed the discipline of studying human beings in groups. He sought to understand the ways in which forms of communication brought individuals together into meaningful shared experiences. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) sought to understand human relationships in terms of speech and language. Freud, Durkheim, and Saussure were great system-builders. They were concerned with constructing systems of analysis such that new forms discovered later could also be explained systematically.

In the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, language itself became a system. In his youth, Saussure was a student of Indo-European philology and published his dissertation on the structure of sounds in Indo-European. He claimed to have discovered a set of laryngeal sounds in Indo-European that had disappeared from modern languages. Saussure's theory explained certain features of sound change that were postulated by Indo-European grammarians of the time. In the first decade of the 20th century, scholars learned that Hittite must have had these laryngeal sounds. With his work, Saussure did for language what Dmitri Mendeleev did for the chemical elements: He predicted the existence of features of language that hadn't yet been discovered.

Saussure was associated with the Neogrammarians, or in German, the *Junggrammatiker*, a group that was concerned with the historical understanding of sound change. Saussure himself began to question the fundamental principles of 19th-century comparative philology. He became interested in understanding the relationship between individual utterances and the system of discourse. He asked, for example, what is the place of a word in a system of representation? Saussure believed that the first task of linguistics was not to discover the origins of language or to learn how language is acquired but to define language. To accomplish that, linguists needed to understand the rules or conventions within the structure of meaningful communication. He called his work "a study of signs."

Saussure argued that languages are made up of signs, which are meaningful verbal, gestural, or written representations. He further said that each sign has two parts, the signifier and the thing signified. In Modern English, the sound "door" is the signifier, and the thing signified is the object represented by *door*. The union of the signifier and the signified constitutes a sign. Saussure's work had a significant impact on later linguistic theory and literary criticism and exemplified the 19th- and early-20th-century approach to the study of language as a scientific system. After his death, his students put together his lecture notes to create the famous *Course in General Linguistics*, which first appeared in 1916.

Out of the 19th- and 20th-century developments in the systematic study of language, four features emerged. The first of these is a focus on laws. Do laws exist in language? Are there rules that explain grammatical forms and

historical changes? For example, Grimm's Law posits inviolate relationships between the consonants of Germanic and non-Germanic Indo-European languages. The second feature is the grounding of the study of language in empirical observation and the collection of data. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, historical data were collected, but by the early 20th century, the discovery of a range of non-European languages made language the object of anthropological inquiry. The development of theories is the third feature of recent linguistics. The idea that language obeys certain rules or that language change works according to certain laws constitutes a theory about language. The fourth feature is the development of methods of study. For instance, examining the features of existing languages to reconstruct earlier forms is the method of comparative philology. The method of anthropological linguistics in the early 20th century was to create inventories of sounds, words, and signs in order to imagine the cultural world that other languages represented.

Sapir and Whorf shifted the focus of the study of language from understanding it as a system of sounds and signs into understanding it as a system of cognition—a system of mind.

By the early 20th century, especially in America, the academic study of language came to involve the study of observable phenomena. For early linguists, what constituted data were sounds and morphology (grammatical case endings or forms of words); they were less concerned with syntax (the order of words in sentences). Anthropology and linguistics came together in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America with the work of Franz Boas (1858–1942) and his student Edward Sapir (1884–1939). For these scholars, 19th-century approaches to Indo-European philology were confounded by the encounter with languages of Native Americans and Pacific Islanders. These seemed radically different in sound system, grammatical structure, and syntax and form from European languages. Could a methodology for language study be developed that embraced all languages, even those yet to be discovered? Linguistic study took on a variety of positions to understand the provocations raised by non-European languages for European-trained linguists.

Leonard Bloomfield, who is associated with Sapir and Boas, published *Language* in 1933, a book that included a set of standards for the study of any language according to empirical methods. Bloomfield believed in a rigorous methodology that centered on the analysis of sound systems and that would enable the description of all languages by the same process. This was the origin of what came to be called "structural linguistics." At the heart of the structural model was fieldwork; the first task here was to record the phonemic inventory of any new language encountered.

Consider an example in modern spoken English: The words *bit* and *pit* give us two meaningful sounds, "b-" and "p-," that are pronounced in the same way, except the "b-" is voiced (the vocal cords move in pronouncing "b-"). Thus, voicing is phonemic in modern spoken English; it is a meaningful distinction. Even though the methodology of the structural model was supposed to be consistent for all languages, linguists soon saw that languages were radically different. The student of language faced not simply different details of describing the world but completely different worlds. It was not the case that Native Americans and Europeans, for example, saw the world in the same way but used different words to describe it. In fact, European and American linguists discovered that such features of a language as systems of tense, descriptions of color, and methods for organizing vocabulary were radically different in Native American languages. For example, in modern European languages, our words for color are keyed to different frequencies. A vibrant red and a red that is less vibrant are both seen as "red." In the Hopi and Navajo languages, however, words for color are keyed to the intensity of the color rather than simply to the basic color itself. Such discoveries led 20th-century scholars of language to ask: What does language do? Does it describe the world as it exists, or does it create the world as the speaker experiences it?

Edward Sapir is best known for his view that there is a relationship between language and the imagination of the world. According to Sapir, "The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group." This was a radical view of the relationship among language, the world, and the mind, and it introduced new problems in the study of language. Is translation, for example, simply a matter of creating inventories of words and slotting one into another, or is translation a matter

of cultural or even cognitive displacement? Sapir argued that language is not a collection of labels for the world; it is the articulation of a worldview.

Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941), an amateur linguist of the mid-20th century, argued for an even more radicalized view than Sapir's. Whorf spent time studying the Hopi language in America in an attempt to understand this relationship among language, thought, and reality. In what came to be known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Whorf argued that language is a "pattern-system" that shapes thought. Language determines how a member of a certain community reasons about the world.

The figurative language used by Sapir and Whorf is, in some ways, as important as what they say. Whorf's phrase "a vast pattern-system" calls to mind the patterns and abstractions in Native American art. His phrase "culturally ordained" recalls the Bible and medieval discussions about language and action. For Whorf, the language of a culture in some ways creates the culture. Through language, Whorf says, the individual builds a "house of consciousness." This idea brings us to the dominant theory of language study in mid-20th-century America, structural linguistics.

By the mid-20th century, structural linguistics proposed a methodological empiricism that focused on the collection of data, particularly sounds or phonemic data. It also advocated a theoretical model that deduced linguistic structures from the mass of empirically collected data. This focus gained great importance with the work of the linguist Noam Chomsky. Linguists asked: Do we deduce the structure of language from collected data, or do we posit a theoretical model of language from which we induce what living or actual language must be? Whorf's "house of consciousness" is extended from the story of a linguist inquiring into languages to a story of an individual confronting the "other." Linguists will come to ask not just what language is but what humanity is. In the next lecture, we'll see how the work of Noam Chomsky in the second half of the 20th century radically changed the study of language and, in turn, the study of the relationship of language to mind, society, and technology. ■

Suggested Reading

Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure*.

Darnell, *Edward Sapir*.

Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and can you think of any examples that support it?

2. What does the "house of consciousness" represent in Whorf's work, and what problems does it suggest?

Linguistics and Politics in Language Study

Lecture 35

"The main task of linguistic theory must be to develop an account of [the] linguistic universals that, on the one hand, will not be falsified by the actual diversity of languages and, on the other, will be sufficiently rich and explicit to account for the rapidity and uniformity of language learning and the remarkable complexity and range of the generative grammars that are the product of language learning."

—Noam Chomsky

In the end, what is language? Is it a habit of social behavior, a way of representing the world, an articulation of cognitive principles? Do we study language by observing phenomena and recording data, or do we study language by positing universal theories, then finding ways in which living languages correspond to, or represent aspects of, those theories? In the last lecture, we looked at the development of structural linguistics in the 20th century in America. With Sapir and Whorf, we explored the idea that language somehow shapes thought and that different speech communities view the world in radically different ways. The discipline of structural linguistics and its relationship to anthropology was firmly ensconced in mid-20th-century American universities when Noam Chomsky (1928–) came on the scene with his first book, *Syntactic Structures*, in 1957. Chomsky has since become a figure of controversy; here, we'll look at some of the details of his work to see how his notion of language study differs from that of his predecessors, and what implications it might hold for us today.

Chomsky's theories of language have, in some ways, initiated a revolution. In his work of the 1950s–1960s, Chomsky called for a formal deductive, rather than an empirical inductive, method of studying language. In other words, Chomsky was interested in setting up formal theories of language, then determining how living languages correspond to these theories. His focus was on syntax rather than phonology and morphology. According to Chomsky, the study of language is the study of syntax; that is, the ways in which words are organized into meaningful utterances and the ways in which

those utterances convey meaning at the level of the sentence. To study syntax, Chomsky developed a notion of mental categories called "deep structures."

Deep structures are patterns in the mind from which humans generate utterances. All human beings have a capacity, Chomsky argued, for language, and the human mind shares patterns for communicating linguistically. What distinguishes one language from another is the set of transformational rules, by which deep structures become what Chomsky called "surface structures." Surface structures are the actual forms of language. Chomsky's project was to distinguish the rules that enabled the transformation of something that every human being had in his or her mind to something that was distinctive about the forms of expression of language groups. Chomsky's approach was known as "transformational-generative grammar" because it was concerned with the transformations that generated surface structures from deep structures.

The theory of deep structures takes us back to Platonic ideas that human beings are not blank slates at birth.

Along with deep structures and surface structures, Chomsky developed a parallel set of categories called "competence" and "performance." All of us possess a certain competence, Chomsky argued, in language. What differentiates us as individuals is our performance as speakers. Ferdinand de Saussure, in his *Course in General Linguistics*, posited something similar with his idea that language encompassed both *langue* (the system of a language as a whole) and *parole* (the way in which individuals learn the language, know it, and articulate things from it). Chomsky replaced Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* with *competence* and *performance*, because he was interested in the underlying system of rules that a speaker has mastered. In studying competence, linguists break down language into its elements and the rules for combining those elements.

Chomsky argued that language rules were recursive processes; we form sentences by applying rules back to the structures in the mind. "The boy hit the ball" is an instance of linguistic performance. In order to "perform" that sentence, the speaker needs a certain competence in English, which is

grounded in the transformational rules of the language. In this case, the rules include the word order pattern of subject-verb-object, the lack of case endings, and so on. Different languages have different sets of transformational rules.

What are some of the implications of this theory, and how can we understand Chomsky himself in these categories? In his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, published in 1965, Chomsky wrote, "The main task of linguistic theory must be to develop an account of [the] linguistic universals." In other words, the task of linguists is to understand what language is across the board—what deep structures are—and the features that all languages share. To do this, linguistics must posit a set of universals, then test that theoretical proposition to determine whether it can explain all the features of living languages.

In addition to explaining, Chomsky said, this theory must be rich enough to account for the language behavior of a community speaking an as-yet-undiscovered language and one seemingly unrelated to any other language. Chomsky's ideas led to several conclusions:

- All human beings (and only human beings) possess language; therefore, language is a species-specific feature in its original formulation.

- No language is any more complicated or simpler than any other. Some languages may have more complex tense systems, or richer vocabularies, or simpler patterns, but in the aggregate, no language is simpler or more complex than any other.

- By extension, no stage in the historical development of a language is simpler or more complicated than another.

Chomsky argued that all human beings can produce an infinite number of well-formed grammatical utterances in their respective languages. In fact, it's this observation that prompted the development of Chomskyan linguistics.

If language learning is imitative, then we shouldn't be able to produce an infinite number of grammatical sentences. We are able to do so, however, because we generate sentences from the deep structures of our linguistic

competence. The capacity to make and understand an infinite number of sentences is at the heart of this theory of language. Languages are generated out of the deep structures, with transformation providing the rules for generation but not the actual sentences. Deep structures are patterns of linguistic communication; some people have even argued that they are genetically encoded mental phenomena that are common to all individuals. They do not represent a universal language as such; rather, they represent relational concepts that can be expressed linguistically. The transformations are a set of rules peculiar to each language that turn deep structures into the well-formed patterns of utterance known as surface structures. And it's only at the level of surface structure that languages appear to differ from one another.

Chomsky also wrote, "The existence of deep-seated, formal universals … implies that all languages are cut to the same pattern[s], but [it] does not imply that there is any point-by-point correspondence between particular languages." In other words, all human beings possess language as a concept and all human beings express themselves linguistically, but the rules used to generate surface structures can be so different from one language to another that languages themselves are not simply inventories of things for the world. The differences are found at the level of transformational rules; surface structures articulate those differences, but a fundamental similarity among speakers exists at the level of deep structure.

What are the implications of this approach to language for learning? Children, according to Chomsky, do not learn language; they acquire language. Given that we have competence—the innate deep structures, an inborn ability to possess language—then as we mature and speak, we acquire a set of rules that will transform deep structures of thought into surface structures of articulation. This idea challenged 20th-century notions of behaviorism. B. F. Skinner and his followers had argued that language was a form of human behavior that was learned or conditioned and was, therefore, imitative. Many philosophers in the past had asked: What is the human mind at birth? Is it a blank slate, as John Locke might say, on which sense impressions and experience could be written? Or, as Plato would argue, are we born with innate ideas that we later transform into behavior?

The "well-formed" structures that Chomsky speaks of replace the idea of grammaticality. The idea of focusing on syntax rather than on phonology or morphology argues that successful communication between individuals results in developing a system of transformations to express meaning, rather than imposing a pattern of grammar from above. Saying "It's me" as opposed to "It is I" may be ungrammatical, but it is a perfectly well-formed utterance because it conveys an idea to a certain speech community in understandable fashion. The theory of well-formed structures has also influenced research into African-American English. Scholars here are concerned less with particulars of sound, dialect, or vocabulary than they are with the observation that the syntax of African-American English seems different from the syntax of standard or hegemonic white English.

How can we sum up the impact of Chomsky's ideas? As we said, the theory of deep structures takes us back to Platonic ideas that human beings are not blank slates at birth. We have within us some innate abilities to acquire language. Language is, therefore, a mental habit rather than a social fact, and the study of language is inseparable from the study of mind. The politics of linguistics, in turn, leads us to see issues of innate ideas and deep structures that transcend the boundaries of culture and time.

Some people have argued that Chomsky's own famously radical politics is in part a consequence of his linguistic theories. He saw such broad affiliations among the peoples of the world that such events as the Vietnam War or the conflicts in the Middle East seemed to him to violate a fundamental principle of the shared humanness of humanity. Chomsky's work has also been applied to the development of artificial intelligence and the computer programming of language. Is it possible to program a computer with a deep structure? The work of such individuals as Steven Pinker, Ray Kurzweil, and Jerry Foder—individuals who hold differing views about specifically what is in the mind, and about the relationship between innate ideas and the words we speak—nonetheless shares the idea that the study of language is the study of mind and the study of mind is the study of language. These implications will find their articulation throughout the 21st century as we find ways, not simply of programming data, but of imagining a world in which the deep

structures of linguistic ability are transferable to non-biological entities and where, someday, we will find ourselves talking not only to one another but to machines. ■

Suggested Reading

Bolton, *A Living Language*.

Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*.

Newmeyer, *The Politics of Linguistics*.

Questions to Consider

1. From your knowledge of African-American English, how does Chomsky's theory of language explain its differences from modern "standard" English?

2. What, according to Chomsky, is the difference between "learning" language and "acquiring" it?

Conclusions and Provocations

Lecture 36

Contemporary discussions have historical antecedents, and that we can study the history of the English language, not simply for the fascinations of its own material, but for its explanations for our own time. Therefore, the study of the history of the English language is, I believe, central to our understanding and appreciation of the history of literature, the history of the nations that have spoken and written English, and, in many ways, the history of ourselves as individuals.

We've explored a number of important questions: What is the nature of language? What is the relationship between English and the languages to which it is related? How is the study of language associated with the study of society, linguistic form, literature, and the study of mind? And how do changes in contemporary technology, culture, and science affect our understanding of the history of English? The study of the history of the English language is central to our understanding and appreciation of the history of literature, the history of the nations that have spoken and written English and, in many ways, the history of ourselves as individuals.

Throughout this course, we have attended to three broad subjects. First, we have discussed facts, or observable information, about language change. The objects of our study here have included the sounds of a language (phonology), the forms that words take in grammatical categories (morphology), the arrangement of words into grammatical units (syntax), and the collection of words deployed to describe the world of experience and the imagination (vocabulary, or, more technically, lexis). Such facts have been gleaned from written documents, including works of literature, history, and personal statement. They may also be garnered by reconstructing earlier forms, and by deploying such techniques as comparative philology to use surviving words and pronunciations as evidence for earlier and no-longer-extant usages.

In addition to these facts about language, we have discussed styles—the ways in which writers of literature have taken the resources of their language

and transformed them into individual forms of imaginative expression. The history of the language is also the history of literature. Writers from Caedmon, Chaucer, and Shakespeare to Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Tupac Shakur have used the verbal resources available to them to make new and striking collocations of words and ideas to express their social and physical worlds, as well as their personal and cultural imagination of those worlds. The impact of such writers as Chaucer and Shakespeare or of such texts as the King James Bible can be felt in the words, idioms, and even clichés that we still use today—often without recognizing that we are, in some sense, quoting these texts. The printing and publication history of major writers, from the work of scribes to Caxton's first press to the present, helps to codify the language in terms of spelling conventions, regional dialect, and literary expression. But as we saw in the Shakespearean texts, print doesn't always confer stability.

The object of study for the history of language remains the study of the imagination.

The third object of our study has been the way in which the facts or the styles are treated by those who have written about language from the Middle Ages to the present. The history of language is also the history of attitudes toward language. Language change and variation are always present, and educators, theorists, and literary writers have often reflected on the nature of a Standard English, differences among dialects, and the impossibility of fixing language so that it cannot be changed by time or usage.

We looked at a variety of early writers, including Walter of Bibbesworth, Chaucer, and Caxton, who weighed in on various aspects of language change—the loss of grammatical gender in English, historical change in word meaning, regional variation among dialects, and the development of a literary standard. These debates on spelling, pronunciation, grammar, and style provoked a larger range of pedagogical inquiries in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, as we saw in the writings of Gil, Johnson, and others. Indeed, these debates have taken place since the Middle Ages and will continue as long as people speak and write. The institutions that legislate our language include the church in the Anglo-Saxon period, the universities

in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the dictionary-makers of the 17th and 18th centuries, and the journalists of the 18th–20th centuries. Such writers as Samuel Johnson, H. L. Mencken, John Witherspoon, and Henry Fowler have sought, sometimes in vain and sometimes with vivacity, to regulate or comment on the language.

In addition to these major themes, we've explored the ways in which the English language has emerged historically. First, we looked at the matrix of the Indo-European languages, that is, the postulated original set of languages that eventually moved out into Europe and into western Asia. The Indo-European speakers were agricultural peoples who lived probably in the 4th millennium B.C. They had a variety of social, religious, economic, and geographical experiences that are preserved and recoverable in the surviving languages that descend from Indo-European. One of the descendent language groups was the Germanic languages, from which English emerged as Germanic speakers came to the British Isles in the 5th and the 6th centuries. What we call Old English emerged from a range of regional dialects, a distinctive form of pronunciation, a distinctive habit of vocabulary formation, and a highly inflected syntax, with a morphology in which word order patterns were not the primary bearers of meaning.

With the Norman Conquest and the influx of French, Old English changed to Middle English. Characteristics of this language included the gradual elimination of grammatical gender in nouns, the emergence of word order over case ending as the determiner of meaning in a sentence, a heightened Latinate and Romance vocabulary, changes in word stress and patterns of intonation, and changes in literary structure. Early Modern English emerged from Middle English in the 15th and 16th centuries through a variety of changes, in particular the Great Vowel Shift, which brought about a significant change in the sound of English. Early Modern English also saw changes in syntax and word usage, the rise of forms of the verb *do*, the advent of "-ing," an increasing idiomatic quality to the language, and the rapid acquisition of new words into the vocabulary.

As English moved into America and across the world, it faced new challenges: contacts with new cultures and other languages, changes in the ideologies of English, and differences in dialects. This course has focused a

great deal on dialect and region. From the Old English period to the American period, we've seen a debate on the relationship between regional dialect and a national standard. We looked at the ways in which dialect writers of the 19th and 20th centuries used forms of spelling to evoke the sound and sense of regional speech in their literary fictions. In the course of this activity, they raised fundamental questions about the nature of Americans and the nature of a national language. At the beginning of the 21st century, questions about the relationship between nation and language have reemerged as we encounter the languages of Hispanophone peoples and emigrants from Asia, as well as the issue of English as a world language through the Internet, through the legacies of colonialism, and through popular culture.

The encounter with the "other," that is, with someone who is different from ourselves, shapes our sense of self. English is not simply infused with the words of other languages, but the discipline of language study itself is grounded in the encounter between the self and the "other." We would not have the discipline of Indo-European studies were it not for William Jones and his contemporaries, who encountered the languages of the Indian subcontinent as English colonial officers and agents. We would not have, in turn, questions about 20th-century linguistics were it not for such individuals as Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir, who encountered the languages of the Southwestern American Indians and, in those encounters, raised questions about what language was and how it may be described. The encounter with the "other" is not simply a matter of bringing in new words; it is the occasion for reflecting on the nature and history of language itself. As we enter the 21st century and encounter hitherto unknown peoples, scholars must ask fundamental questions about the relationship between mind and word, word and world.

Let's conclude this course with some provocations. It can be argued that language is strictly a human institution. There may be forms of communication that extend beyond humans to animals, but certain features distinguish the human relationship to language: the use of language as a vehicle of communication, the use of language to define groups, and the property of language that it is a system of signs used arbitrarily but conventionally to describe the visible world. Should we consider language as a reality? In other words, does language reside in some real structure?

Plato would have us believe that there was a divine spark—a scintilla of knowledge with which we were born. Chomsky, too, talks about innate ideas. Is there something physical in our minds that is the locus of language, or is language the sum of patterns of behavior? Recent scholarship on the origins of humankind has suggested that language needed to develop with particular anatomical structures. In other words, we needed certain anatomical structures in the throat, tongue, mouth, not simply to speak but to be linguistic creatures. Is there a relationship between dexterity and language? Did the development of facility with the hands free humans to use words or to record signs that were symbolic?

For me, the object of study for the history of language remains the study of the imagination, found, in part, in literature and the range of writers in English. We've seen in this course the many ways in which literary history and linguistic history dovetail. We've explored many texts that exemplified the English language in detail at given moments, but they were also concerned with individual identity, ideals of creation, or notions of social formation. "Caedmon's Hymn" may very well be the earliest surviving text in English. It is a poem of creation in which the poet also creates himself in language. That idea of creation, both of the world and of the individual, has been a central theme for all our texts. What does it mean to call the universe into existence? What does it mean to utter and, in uttering, to make things be? "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." This notion stays with us—a fundamental idea of language as itself the creating thing.

We've stressed throughout this course that literary writers are always readers and that even when it would appear that they are giving us the unmediated expression of experience, we can always find structures of allusion to earlier texts. We are meant to recall a history of literature and a history of language in each word. No matter who we are, we have ways of expressing ourselves that are grounded in experience and history. If we are sensitive to the history of the language, we can also be sensitive to the roots and flowers of our culture. To know a language is not simply to know how to speak but to know the history of the language. And in the end, to know the history of our language is to know ourselves. ■

Suggested Reading

Bryson, *The Mother Tongue*.

Burgess, *A Mouthful of Air*.

Crystal, *The Stories of English*.

Lerer, *Inventing English*.

Nunberg, *The Way We Talk Now*.

Questions to Consider

1. Explain how the encounter with the "other" informs our sense of linguistic self.

2. Does language reflect an absolute reality, or is it nothing more than a cultural construct?

Timeline

B.C.

4th–3rd millennium	An agricultural people originating in southeastern Europe is believed to have spoken a language that scholars consider the original Indo-European.
1st millennium	The Germanic-speaking peoples separate out of the Indo-European group.

A.D.

5th–7th centuries	The groups known as the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes make incursions and, ultimately, settlements in the British Isles.
Late 7th century	Foundation of monasteries in Northumbria in northern England. Period of Northumbrian religious and cultural efflorescence. Age of Caedmon and Bede.
Late 9th century	Reign of King Alfred (871–899). Establishment of West Saxon hegemony over Anglo-Saxon England and the foundation of schools and scriptoria for the teaching and writing of Old English. Translations of classic Latin texts into the vernacular.

Late 10th–early 11th centuries ..... Period of Benedictine monastic revival in Anglo-Saxon England. Production of sermons in Old English by Bishop Aelfric and others. Teaching done in English and Latin in Anglo-Saxon schools.

c. 1000 ..... Date of the *Beowulf* manuscript, text of the earliest major long poem in English.

1066 ..... Norman Conquest. Invasion of England by Norman French-speaking noblemen and soldiers.

1087 ..... Death of William the Conqueror.

1154 ..... Date of last entry in the *Peterborough Chronicle*, thus ending the sustained writing of Old English prose in England.

c. 1200 ..... Probable composition of earliest poetry in Middle English (e.g., "The Owl and the Nightingale," Layamon's *Brut*, short lyrics).

1258 ..... Proclamation of Henry III, first official text in English since the conquest (but the English is actually a translation of the French original).

1362 ..... Parliament is addressed for the first time in English (but records are still kept in French).

1380s ..... John Wycliffe supervises translation of the Bible into Middle English.

c. 1400 ..... Death of Chaucer.

1417 ..... Royal clerks use English for official writing.

1422 ..... London Brewer's Guild adopts English as its official language by formal action.

1423 ..... Parliament's records kept virtually all in English.

c. 1440s–1550s ..... The Great Vowel Shift takes place, changing permanently the pronunciation of long stressed vowels in English and, as a consequence, determining the sound of modern spoken English.

1474–1475 ..... William Caxton begins printing books in England.

1490 ..... Caxton's *Eneydos*. In his preface, he reflects on language change and dialect variation in England.

1526 ..... Publication, in Geneva, of William Tyndale's English translation of the Bible.

1607 ..... Jamestown colony established in Virginia.

1609 ..... Publication (unauthorized) of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

1611 ..... Publication of the King James Bible.

1616 ..... Death of Shakespeare.

1619 ..... Alexander Gil's *Logonomia Anglica* is published. Reflects on changes in English and the importation of new words from North America.

1620 ..... Pilgrims land at Plymouth.

1624 ..... First Folio edition of Shakespeare's works.

1644 ..... The English seize New Amsterdam from the Dutch and rename it New York.

mid-17th century ..... Colonization of South Africa by English and Dutch settlers.

1736 ..... N. Bailey's *Dictionary* is published, culminating a century of responses to the importation and coining of new words in the language.

1747 ..... Samuel Johnson publishes *The Plan of a Dictionary*, setting out his goals for lexicography in English.

1755 ..... Samuel Johnson publishes the first edition of his *Dictionary*, in two volumes. It quickly becomes the defining work for language use and dictionary-making in England and America.

1761 ..... Joseph Priestley publishes the first edition of the *Rudiments of English Grammar*.

1762 ..... Robert Lowth publishes the first edition of the *Principles of English Grammar*.

1781 ..... John Witherspoon coins the term "Americanism" in his writings on the English language in America.

1783 ..... Noah Webster publishes the first edition of his *Grammatical Institute of the English Language.*

late 18th century ..... Settlement of Australia by released and escaped convicts from penal colonies.

1799 ..... Sir William Jones delivers his third-anniversary address to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, announcing his discovery of similarities among the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Celtic languages, thus inaugurating the study of Indo-European.

1822 ..... Jakob Grimm publishes the revised edition of his comparative grammar of the Germanic languages, codifying the consonant relationships of the Germanic and non-Germanic Indo-European languages. This set of relationships came to be known as Grimm's Law.

1828 ..... Noah Webster publishes the first edition of his *American Dictionary*.

1851 ..... Publication of the first edition of Melville's *Moby Dick* (as *Moby-Dick)*.

1855 ..... Publication of the first edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

1857 ..... Great Mutiny in India; establishment of direct imperial rule in India.

1863 ..... Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

1881 ..... Publication of the first volume of Joel Chandler Harris's "Uncle Remus" stories.

1883 ..... Publication of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

1886 ..... First publication of *Hobson-Jobson*, a guide to Anglo-Indian English.

1888–1933 ..... Publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, originally called the *New English Dictionary* to distinguish it from Johnson's.

1905 ..... Publication of Otto Jespersen's *The Growth and Structure of the English Language*.

1919 ..... First edition of H. L. Mencken's *The American Language*.

1921 ..... Publication of Edward Sapir's *Language*.

1933	Publication of Leonard Bloomfield's *Language*.
1940s	Work of Benjamin Lee Whorf on Native American languages and linguistic theory.
1957	Publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*, revolutionizing the theoretical and, ultimately, political study of language, culture, and mind.

Glossary

alliteration: The repetition of the initial consonant or vowel of words in sequence. Old English and Old Germanic poetry was alliterative in structure: The metricality of the poetic line was determined not by the number of syllables, rhyme, or classical metre but by the number of alliterative words in stressed positions.

analogy: The process by which certain grammatically or morphologically different words or expressions come to share the same form or pronunciation.

analytic language: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the order of the words in that sentence.

anaphora: A term used in rhetoric to describe the repetition of a word or phrase, usually at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses.

Anglo-Saxons: The Germanic peoples who settled the British Isles beginning in the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. and who spoke Old English. Conquered by the Normans in 1066, they were gradually absorbed into the Norman French-speaking population.

argot: A distinctive way of writing or speaking, often characterized by a unique vocabulary used by a particular class, profession, or social group.

articulatory phonetics: The study of how sounds are produced in the mouth, and the technique of accurately describing those sounds by using special symbols.

aureate diction: Use of an elaborate Latinate vocabulary used by English writers of the 15th and 16th centuries to evoke a rarefied and highly "educated" tone in their language.

back vowels: Continuous sounds produced at the back of the mouth (see **front vowels**, **high vowels**).

calque: A bit-by-bit, or morpheme-by-morpheme, translation of one word in one language into another word in another language, often used to avoid bringing new or loan words into the translating language (e.g., Modern German *Fernseher* is a calque on *television*; Afrikaans *apartheid* is a calque on *segregation*; the modern Icelandic *moðorsik* is a calque on *hysterical*).

Chancery English: The form of the English language developed in written documents of the 15th century in Chancery (the official writing center of royal administration). Many grammatical forms and spelling conventions of Chancery English have become part of standard written English.

cognate: Two or more words from two or more different but related languages that share a common root or original.

comparative philology: The study of different but related languages in their historical contexts, traditionally with the goal of reconstructing earlier, lost forms of words and sounds in the Indo-European languages.

creole: A new language that develops out of the sustained contact among two or more languages. Often, creoles develop when the language of a colonizing or economically dominant group is imposed upon a subordinate or colonized group. Thus, many creoles have elements of both European and non-European languages. Creoles may emerge over time from pidgins. The basic difference is that creoles are perceived by the language speakers as the natural or native language, whereas pidgins are perceived as artificial or ad hoc arrangements for communication (see **pidgin**).

deep structure: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the mental or genetically encoded pattern of language communication in human beings (see **surface structure**; **transformational-generative grammar**).

descriptivism: The belief that the study of language should describe the linguistic behavior of a group of speakers or writers at a given moment and should not be pressed into the service of prescribing how people should write or speak (see **prescriptivism**).

determinative compounding: The process by which new nouns are created in a language by yoking together two normally independent nouns (e.g., *earring*). A key feature of the Germanic languages, especially Old English, it is the process by which many poetic compounds were formed in literature (e.g., Old English *banlocan*, is *bone locker*, or body).

dialect: A variant form of a language, usually defined by region, class, or socioeconomic group and distinguished by its pronunciation, vocabulary, and on occasion, morphology.

dialectology: The study of different regional variations of a given language, spoken or written at a given time.

diphthongs: Vowel sounds that are made up of two distinct sounds joined together (e.g., the sound in the Modern English word *house*).

etymology: The systematic study of word origins, roots, and changes. The etymology of a given word is its history, traced back through its various pronunciations and semantic shifts, until its earliest recorded or reconstructed root. A root is also known as an *etymon*.

extension in function: The increase in the range of grammatical functions that a given word carries over time.

extension in lexis: The increase in the range of meanings, often figurative, that a given word carries over time.

eye dialect: A way of representing in writing regional or dialect variations by spelling words in nonstandard ways. Spellings such as *sez* or *wanna* are eye dialect forms; they do not actually record distinctions of speech but, rather, evoke the flavor of nonstandard language.

front vowels: Continuous sounds produced at the front of the mouth (see **back vowels**, **high vowels**).

grammar: Generally used to refer to the system of establishing verbal relationships in a given language; often confused with standards of "good usage" or "educated" speech.

grammatical gender: The system by which nouns in a language carry special endings or require distinctive pronoun, adjective, and article forms. Described as masculine, feminine, and neuter.

Great Vowel Shift: The systematic shift in the pronunciation of stressed, long vowels in English, which occurred from the middle of the 15th century to the middle of the 16th century in England and permanently changed the pronunciation of the English language. It effectively marks the shift from Middle English to Modern English.

Grimm's Law: A set of relationships among the consonants of the Germanic and non-Germanic Indo-European languages, first codified and published by Jakob Grimm in 1822.

high vowels: Continuous sounds produced at the top of the mouth (see **front vowels**, **back vowels**).

homonymy: The state in which two or more words of different origin and meaning come to be pronounced in the same way.

Indo-European: The term used to describe the related languages of Europe, India, and Iran, which are believed to have descended from a common tongue spoken in roughly the 3rd millennium B.C. by an agricultural peoples originating in southeastern Europe. English is a member of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages.

inkhorn terms: Words from Latin or Romance languages, often polysyllabic and of arcane scientific or aesthetic resonance, coined and introduced into English in the 16th and 17th centuries.

lexicography: The practice of making dictionaries.

lexis: The vocabulary resources of a given language.

metathesis: The reversing of two sounds in a sequence, occasionally a case of mispronunciation but also occasionally a historical change in pronunciation.

Middle English: The language, in its various dialects, spoken by the inhabitants of England from roughly the period following the Norman Conquest (the late 11th century) until roughly the period of completion of the Great Vowel Shift (the early 16th century).

modal verbs: Helping verbs, such as *shall*, *will*, *ought*, and the like, that were originally full verbs in Old and Middle English and became reduced to their helping function in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Modern English: The language, in its various dialects, that emerged after the end of the Great Vowel Shift, roughly in the middle of the 16th century.

monophthongs: Vowel sounds that are made up of only one continuously produced sound (e.g., the sound in the Modern English word *feet*).

morpheme: A set of one or more sounds in a language that, taken together, make up a unique, meaningful part of a word (e.g., "-ly" is the morpheme indicating manner of action, as in *quickly* or *slowly*; "-s" is a morpheme indicating plurality, as in *dogs*).

morphology: The study of the forms of words that determine relationships of meaning in a sentence in a given language. Includes such issues as case endings in nouns, formation of tenses in verbs, and so on.

Old English: The language, or group of related dialects, spoken by the Anglo-Saxon people in England from the earliest recorded documents (late 7th century) until roughly the end of the 11th century.

periphrastic: A term that refers to a roundabout way of doing something; used in grammar to describe a phrase or idiom that uses new words or more words than necessary to express grammatical relationship.

philology: The study of language generally but now often restricted to the historical study of changes in phonology, morphology, grammar, and lexis. Comparative philology is the term used to describe the method of comparing surviving forms of words from related languages to reconstruct older, lost forms.

phoneme: An individual sound that, in contrast with other sounds, contributes to the set of meaningful sounds in a given language. A phoneme is not simply a sound but, rather, a sound that is meaningful (e.g., "b" and "p" are phonemes in English because their difference determines two different meaningful words: *bit* and *pit*, for example).

phonetics: The study of the pronunciation of sounds of a given language by speakers of that language.

phonology: The study of the system of sounds of a given language.

pidgin: A language that develops to allow two mutually unintelligible groups of speakers to communicate. Pidgins are often ad hoc forms of communication, and they are perceived as artificial by both sets of speakers. Over time, a pidgin may develop into a creole (see **creole**).

polysemy: The state in which one word comes to connote several, often very different, meanings.

prescriptivism: The belief that the study of language should lead to certain prescriptions or rules of advice for speaking and writing (see **descriptivism**).

regionalism: An expression in a given language that is unique to a given geographical area and is not characteristic of the language as a whole.

semantic change: The change in the meaning of a word over time.

slang: A colloquial form of expression in a language, usually relying on words or phrases drawn from popular culture, particular professions, or the idioms of particular groups (defined, for example, by age or class).

sociolinguistics: The study of the place of language in society, often centering on distinctions of class, regional dialect, race, and gender in communities of speakers and writers.

strong verb: In the Germanic languages, a verb that indicates change in tense by changing the root vowel: e.g., *think, thought; drink, drank, drunk; bring, brought; run, ran* (see **weak verb**).

structural linguistics: The discipline of studying language in America in the first half of the 20th century, characterized by close attention to the sounds of languages, by a rigorous empirical methodology, and by awareness of the marked differences in the structures of languages. The term is often used to characterize the work of Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield.

surface structure: In the linguistic theory of Noam Chomsky and his followers, the actual forms of a given language, uttered by speakers of that language, that are produced by the rules of that language and are generated out of the deep structures innate in the minds of humans.

syntax: The way in which a language arranges its words to make well-formed or grammatical utterances.

synthetic language: A language in which grammatical relationships among words in a sentence are determined by the inflections (for example, case endings) added to the words.

transformational-generative grammar: The theory of language developed by Noam Chomsky and his followers which argues that all human beings have the ability to speak a language and that deep-structure patterns of communication are transformed, or generated, into surface structures of a given language by a set of rules unique to each language. Presumes that language ability is an innate idea in humans (see **deep structure, surface structure**).

weak verb: In the Germanic languages, a verb that indicates change in tense by adding a suffix, usually in "-ed": e.g., *walk, walked; love, loved* (see **strong verb**).

Biographical Notes

Alfred, King of England (849–899). King of the Anglo-Saxons (r. 871–899). Consolidated West Saxon political hegemony in southern England; commissioned the translation of major Latin works into Old English; provided the political aegis for the establishment of the West Saxon dialect of Old English as a standard.

Bede the Venerable (c. 673–735). Anglo-Saxon monk, historian, and grammarian. Best known for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People*, in which he records the poetry of Caedmon, the first known poet in the English vernacular.

Bibbesworth, Walter of (b. in or before 1219–d. in or after 1270). Thirteenth-century writer of a treatise on French for English aristocrats and gentry.

Bloomfield, Leonard (1887–1949). American linguist and author of *Language* (1933), a highly influential text in the American school of structural linguistics (stressing empirical observation of spoken language).

Caedmon (fl. late 7th century). First known poet in English; wrote a hymn about creation in Old English that was considered to be the first English poem.

Caxton, William (c. 1421–1491). England's first printer. Brought printing to England in the 1470s and published for the first time the works of Chaucer and many other important English writers. In the prefaces to his works, he reflected on language change and variation.

Chaucer, Geoffrey (c. 1340–1400). Major English poet of the 14th century. Wrote *The Canterbury Tales* and other poems in Middle English.

Chomsky, Noam (1928–). American linguist. Revolutionized the study of language and the discipline of linguistics with the publication of his *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and other books. Founded the approach known as transformational generative grammar.

Douglass, Frederick (c. 1817–1895). African-American writer and politician of the 19th century. Wrote several autobiographical works that describe his experiences as a slave and record the varieties of African-American English of his time.

Gil, Alexander (1564–1635). English schoolmaster and grammarian; master of St. Paul's School in London; teacher of Milton. Published several works on the English language in which he responds to issues of spelling reform and the increase in the language's vocabulary (notably, *Logonomia Anglica*, 1619).

Grimm, Jakob (1785–1863) and **Wilhelm** (1786–1859). German linguists, lexicographers, and folklorists. Collected stories of the German people into well-known volumes of fairy tales; produced the major historical dictionary of the German language. Jakob Grimm formulated the sound relationships for Indo-European languages that have come to be known as Grimm's Law.

Harris, Joel Chandler (1848–1908). American writer and folklorist. Best known for his "Uncle Remus" stories, which seek to record the speech and literary forms of African-Americans of the late 19th century.

Jefferson, Thomas (1743–1826). Third president of the United States; author of the Declaration of Independence; student of the history of the English language (especially Old English). His writings influenced the rhetoric of American public discourse throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Jespersen, Otto (1860–1943). Danish linguist. Wrote extensively on the history and structure of the English language, in particular in his influential *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (1905).

Johnson, Samuel (1709–1784). English writer, poet, and lexicographer. His *Dictionary* (1755) set the standards for lexicography for more than a century.

Jones, Sir William (1746–1794). English diplomat and philologist. His recognition that the languages of Europe and India share certain key features of grammar and vocabulary led to the development of Indo-European comparative philology in the 19th century.

Lowth, Robert (1710–1787). English scholar, bishop of London, and author of several influential books on English grammar. Advocate of prescriptivism in the study of language.

Mencken, H. L. (1880–1956). American journalist and critic. Best known for his cultural criticism and for his book *The American Language* (first published in 1919, then reissued with supplements and revisions over the following 30 years).

Mulcaster, Richard (c. 1530–1611). English schoolmaster and grammarian. Head of Merchant Taylors' School in London (where Edmund Spenser was a student); later head of St. Paul's School. Wrote about English grammar and usage, recording many features of 16th-century English.

Müller, Max (1823–1900). German-born philologist, professor of linguistics and Oriental languages at Oxford, and arbiter of scholarship in historical linguistics in mid-19th-century Europe.

Murray, J. A. H. (1837–1915). English lexicographer and primary editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary* from 1879 until his death.

Priestley, Joseph (1733–1804). English clergyman, scientist, and grammarian. Published several books on English grammar. Advocated a primarily descriptivist approach to the study of language.

Sapir, Edward (1884–1939). American linguist and anthropologist. Major contributor to the American school of descriptive, or structural, linguistics, especially through his work with Native American languages.

Shakespeare, William (1564–1616). English dramatist and poet. In his plays and sonnets, he deployed the resources of a changing English language of his day to give voice to character, theme, and dramatic setting.

Twain, Mark (Samuel Clemens, 1835–1910). American writer, best known for his novels of mid-19th-century life on and around the Mississippi River, especially *Huckleberry Finn* (1883), and his social satires, especially *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). In his writings, he often recorded or sought to evoke the regional dialects of his characters.

Webster, Noah (1758–1843). American lexicographer and educator. His early spelling books of the 1780s were immensely influential on schoolroom education, and his *American Dictionary* of 1828 became the standard reference work for spelling and pronunciation in the United States.

Whorf, Benjamin Lee (1897–1941). American linguist and anthropologist, best known for the view that the language of a speech community shapes its perceptions of the world.

William the Conqueror (c. 1027–1087). First Norman French king of England. The Norman Conquest (1066) initiated the cultural and linguistic changes that eventually helped transform Old English into Middle English.

Witherspoon, John (1723–1794). Scottish-born American clergyman; signer of the Declaration of Independence; president of Princeton University. Wrote extensively on the American version of English; coined the term "Americanism."

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