

## SENSORVEILEDNING

### Course

ENG4156 – History of the English Language

### Course content

The course offers an introduction to English language history, paying attention to language changes, language contact, and the development into a modern national language in particular. An introduction is also given to the main characteristics of Old English and Middle English.

### Learning outcome

Upon completion of this course, the student will:

- have a fair knowledge of the main lines of development of written English from approximately 700 AD to modern times.
- know the most important changes in the fields of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.
- know the basic structure of Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English grammar; to this end, the student will have studied the most central characteristics of the language of the syllabus texts.
- be able to describe and date linguistic changes.

### Examination

Written paper approximately ten standard pages in length and prepared over the course of at least a month.

### Textbook

Richard Hogg & David Denison, eds. *A History of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

A compendium containing notes on Old English and Middle English, as well as select texts with glossaries, compiled by G.F. Stenbrenden.

### Spring 2021

In the instalment of the course that has run in the spring term of 2021, classes have covered chapters 1–5 of the Hogg & Denison book and every Compendium text. The chapters address phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary (including semantic change), and standardisation. The focus has been on interactively reading the Compendium primary texts rather than the convener lecturing on the contents of the chapters. The students have primarily used the textbook as a reference work

The students have written two papers. Both papers have consisted of two parts. Part 1 has asked for a description of a major development in the history of the English language and part 2 has asked the students to date two shorter, previously unseen, passages on linguistic grounds. For the first paper, the Part 1 development was the levelling of the inflectional marking of subjunctive mood and the concomitant rise of the modals; for the second paper, the Part 1 development was the Great Vowel Shift. For Part 2, the short texts were respectively, late Old English, early Middle English and two times Early Modern English (early seventeenth century).

The examination format will be a written paper approximately ten standard pages in length prepared over the course of at least a month. The student will be offered the possibility to submit drafts and receive feedback; it is to be expected that not every student will make use of this possibility and it is not a requirement that they do. The students will be free to write on a topic of their own choosing, although they will be strongly encouraged to seek the convener's approval of their proposed topic. In addition, the convener will make available a range of ideas for topics. This year's range will be as follows:

1) If there is a topic you have identified that you are dying to write about, pass your suggestion by your convener.

2) Discuss one of the major phonological developments in the history of English on the basis of secondary sources only. Examples of such developments are: Loss of final -e; homorganic lengthening; rhoticity.

*Disallowed: the Great Vowel Shift since your second mandatory assignment dealt with this topic.*

3) Discuss one of the major syntactic developments in the history of English on the basis for secondary sources only. Examples of such developments are: The decline of Verb-Second; the rise of DO-periphrasis/support.

4) For a more descriptive topic, write about *prescriptivism* in the history of the English language. This is an 18-19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon in particular, with efforts to "fix" (prevent from changing) the language and a call (by Jonathan Swift) for an Academy to serve this end. The period sees the appearance of very many usage guides with rules of the kind "don't open a sentence with *because*", "you cannot end a sentence with a preposition", "it is you and I, not you and me", etc.

5) Scandinavian loanwords. How can you tell whether a loan-word is Scandinavian or not?

6) What is the "Celtic Hypothesis"? Cf. Hogg & Denison, 8ff, 136ff, 154, 225ff, and references there cited. Is it a reasonable hypothesis?

7) Describe an unseen text in terms of phonology, morphology, dialect, etc. Your convener can provide you with such texts—contact your convener if you want to pursue this kind of enquiry.

8) Find a corpus of historical English, e.g. from this list:

[http://martinweisser.org/corpora\\_site/historical\\_corpora.html](http://martinweisser.org/corpora_site/historical_corpora.html). Then use the corpus to trace a development you would like to discuss. Examples could be the shift from strong to weak verbs in OE and ME (Note: A handful of verbs show the opposite development); present indicative versus progressive in Early Modern English; competition between derivational suffixes in ME and Early Modern English such as *-ship* vs *-ness*.

9) Go to the Historical Thesaurus of English (<https://ht.ac.uk/>) and the Oxford English Dictionary (<https://www.oed.com/>). For the OED you need a licence to get full functionality; to get full functionality, access it via the UiO Programkiosk.

a) Identify a semantic field as interesting, and discuss the words used within that field over the course of the history of the language. You may want to consider collocations too.

b) Identify a word as interesting. Discuss the semantic changes the word has undergone since its first occurrence, identifying the changes as amelioration, pejoration, narrowing, or widening. You may want to consider collocations too, or find illustrative examples in a corpus to support your account; a list of corpora of historical English is available from

[http://martinweisser.org/corpora\\_site/historical\\_corpora.html](http://martinweisser.org/corpora_site/historical_corpora.html).

c) Pick four years, e.g. 1020, 1320, 1620, and 1920. Find out what words entered English for the first time in each of those years. Compare and contrast.

A strong paper will not be merely descriptive but will contain an element of comparison, contrast, and evaluation of views presented in literature. A strong paper will, in addition, be formatted and referenced in conformity with standard academic practice.