

Department of English and Writing Studies  
University of Western Ontario

September 2023 - April 2024

### **English 3300: History of the English Language**

#### **Course Description:**

The history of the English language is fascinating, fun, and complex. In most years it requires really detailed study of sound change and pronunciation over two millennia, the spelling and writing of words and lexicon, and notably tracing the language from the Indo-European origins of many languages to the Germanic origins of English to the changes from Old to Middle to early Modern to Modern (and now to the many global Englishes, including creoles and pidgins). We're going to do some of this in this year, and students with a linguistics background will enjoy themselves enormously on the days that we focus on this kind of diachronic study of the language and its development. Our focus in this year, however, will be on the cultural history of English. To get there we'll start with a month on dictionaries, notably the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in order to wrap our brains around the quite different thinking required for a focus on language first, literature and other manifestations of that language second. Thereafter we'll turn to a short summary history of the English language, before looking more deeply at some of the major issues swirling around English: linguistic imperialism, the detailed history of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, issues of class, Canadian English, and World Englishes.

Courses in History of the English Language tend to bifurcate into those that depend on mid-terms and a final examination, with maybe one or two short assignments along the way, and those that invite students, after opening discussion of the issues, to develop and pursue a long project, often a series of nested shorter assignments, through the length of the course. We're going to upend both plans. This will be a tripartite course. The final examination, as scheduled by the Registrar's Office, will bring together the other two parts of the course.

On Mondays, we will have fairly traditional classes with lecture and discussion on the classic issues of HEL courses, studied through three quite different basic texts and at the end of the course some online material concerning Canadian and global Englishes. We will be reading and studying a variety of texts, with several goals in mind. The first is to find our feet in thinking about the English language, and to that end we will be cycling through several basic works on the

come back around to the more classic approach of Jan Svartvik and Geoffrey Leech in October and November, and do a third run with Tim Machan's more polemical *What is English and why Should we Care?* in late February and early March. That way, we'll have three cycles around thinking about English as a language first (and a literary culture as a secondary matter). In January we will spend a significant amount of time on the question of English dictionaries, especially the *Oxford English Dictionary*, here looking specifically at the memoir of John Simpson, former editor of the dictionary. I am also hoping to have some classes on creoles and pidgins, on Canadian English, on the language of advertising, on the language of texting (since I do not text, this one might not develop unless I can get up to speed on this quickly), on issues of class, and on the g

**Course texts:**

## Required:

Horobin, Simon. *How English became English*. Oxford UP, 2016. 978-0198754275.

Culpeper, Jonathan. *History of English*. Routledge Language Paperback Workbook. (London: Routledge, 2015). Pbk. 978-1138891753

Machan, Tim William. *What is English? And Why Should we Care?* Oxford UP, 2013. 978-0198736677

Simpson, John. *The Word Detective*. New York: Basic Book, 2016. 978-1541697218

Svartvik, Jan and Geoffrey Leech, with contributions from David Crystal, *English: One Tongue, Many Voices*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

## Optional:

Laurel J. Brinton and Leslie K. Arnovick, *The English Language: A Linguistic History*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2016). Pbk. 978-0199019151

**Course elements:**

Final Examination: Scheduled by the Registrar in April, the final examination of a History of the English Language course generally has eFÀÕTIBnts:

Quizzes: There will be seven in-class quizzes during the year, some of them signalled in advance, some not. The best five of these will count at 2% each. These will test your knowledge of the concepts in the readings for the day. Obviously, you will need to be in class in order to accomplish this quiz.

Longer Assignments: The due dates and details of these will be posted to the course website by the end of the first week of classes. One will concern an issue arising from John Simpson's book on the *OED*, and one each will address the books of Horobin, Svartvik/Leech, and Machan. One will be a linguistic analysis of a poem chosen from a selection posted to the course website. The best three of these assignments, all a maximum of a thousand words and all due online, will count at 12% each for the final grade.

Bonus marks: These are for attendance to every minute of every class in the course, and for good participation. Good participation is asking good and clear questions, or providing good and clear answers in a way that is respectful of everyone in the classroom (and, come to think of it, the world).

### **OWL Website, Email, and Technological Issues:**

This course will run from the OWL website. I frequently will be posting information for the next day's class on the site on Sundays and Tuesdays, and all work will be submitted and graded through the site. Because I am providing you with the assignments and deadlines for the vast majority of this course in the first week of classes, I take a very dim view of students who miss the deadlines. If the OWL site closes as you are submitting, I will accept a submission over email from each student once, up to fifteen minutes after the deadline, but not more than once.

I do not do social media, and I have disabled the email function through OWL (it works so poorly).

Email with a professor is not the same as a text message with a friend. It is an issue of register. If you email me with a question, I will provide one answer. This is not an invitation to an exchange; if you do not like my answer, do not email me back explaining my shortcomings to me. Come to my next office hour and discuss. Try not to ask questions in emails that short perusal of the course outline would resolve (this is for those of you who email on Monday morning asking me where the class will be).

Your laptop or your internet will invariably fail just as you are submitting a paper one minute before the deadline. Submit from the library where the wifi works better, or from one of the buildings on campus with upgraded technology. We are counting the best 3 of 5 of the longer papers, and the best 6 of 8 of the short assignments; pace yourself and think about when you will have time to do a particular assignment. Getting the work done in the time provided is your responsibility.

**Office Hours:**

I will be holding inperson office hours.

**The “Official” Course Outline:**

The official course outline is on the OWL website and is labelled as such. This is not the official course outline, as it is missing a bunch of elements the department, the faculty, the senate, and the associate deans (undergraduate) want us to include in our course outlines.

**Drafty Course Plan:**

September: Simon Horobin

Jonathan Culpeper chapters 1-3

October: Introduction to poetry and language

Indo-European

Old English

Svartvik and Leech

Culpeper chapters 4-6

November: Svartvik and Leech

Culpeper chapters 8-11

December: Poetry and language

Culpeper chapter 12

January: Dictionaries month

John Simpson

Analysis of passages from Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English

February: Tim Machan

Phonology, Lexicology, Orthography

March: Tim Machan

Syntax, Grammar, new Englishes

April: Review and reconsideration

(Also catch-up)