

Department of English and Writing Studies  
University of Western Ontario

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

M.J. Toswell

Mondays 12:30-2:30, Wednesdays 12:30-1:30

#### **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 short summary history of the English language, in order to wrap our brains around the quite different thinking required for focus on language first, literature and other manifestations of that language second. Thereafter we'll be 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, and Canadian English.

Course 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 Wednesdays, we will engage in classic History of the English Language analyses of texts and their linguistic elements, from phonology to morphology to syntax to lexical usage to the other basic elements of linguistic analysis of literary texts. We will use the workbook by Culpeper (supplemented by texts in the OWL materials), and (though not a required text) the standard HEL textbook by Brinton and Arnovick. This approach will be diachronic, as we move from Indo-European through Old and Middle English to modern English and its vagaries of usage. Over the year there will be 15 assignments worth 3% to be submitted on OWL at specific dates. A few of these assignments, with due dates, are already loaded in the system and can be completed at any time, though they will be marked after the due date. A few more are scheduled in the course outline and will pop into view on the relevant date on OWL. About a third of the assignments will be announced in class and will be due the next day. The best 10 of these assignments will count for 30% towards the course grade. Note that because there is so much choice in these assignments that students who choose not to do the first five and find themselves in difficulties as they are obliged to tackle the last ten should be aware that when this much choice is built into

the course, I am significantly less inclined to develop yet more new assignments. In no case will a student be permitted to submit one of these assignments after the marking for that assignment is complete and the work returned to other students. These are intended to be short and fun explorations of HEL texts and issues.

On Mondays 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 subject. We'll read Simon Horobin's very short consideration of the issues in September, and come back around to Richard W. Bailey's approach through cultural analysis of the English language in 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. We will also, twice during the year, look specifically at the language of poetry (two optional texts included in the course outline, but there will also be a list of other poems that could be analysed from the perspective of the language). 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 global Englishes that are rapidly supplanting the English of the so-called "British Empire."

The final examination, scheduled by the Office of the Registrar during the April examination period, will be worth 30%. There will be five longer written assignments of about one thousand words each (some less) based on the Monday classes, and the best four will each count 10% for the grade.

**Course Evaluation (summary version):**

Short assignments best 10 of 15 @ 3%	30%
Longer assignments best 4 of 5 @ 10%	40%
Final Examination	30%
Bonus marks for participation: up to 3%	

**Course texts:**

Required:

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

Richard W. Bailey, *Images of English: A Cultural History of the Language*. Cambridge UP, 2009. 978-0521105699

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

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

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

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

One of the following three books of poetry, for the poetry analysis:

Olive Senior, *Pandemic Poems: First Wave* (Toronto, 2021). Pbk. 978-1777452308.

Canisia Lubrin, *The Dyzgraphxst* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2020). Pbk. 978-0771048692

Don McKay, *Lurch*. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2021). Pbk. 978-0771057854