Bibliographic Essay

From Hwæt to What'up: A Bibliography of the History of English

By Edwin Battistella

English got its start in 449 CE when Germanic tribes of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes invaded post-Roman Britain. Their speech became Old English, or Anglo-Saxon, which lasted until the dust settled from the Norman Conquest of 1066. Norman French replaced English as the language of public affairs, and after two centuries a much different Middle English existed in the language of Chaucer. With the advent of movable type, Middle English gave way, and Modern English—epitomized by the language of Shakespeare and the King James Bible—prevailed from about 1500 forward. The language settled into a more fixed orthography and a more prescribed grammar, and it became the language first of empire, then of global commerce and culture. That is the history of English in a nutshell.1

Although commentary on the language has existed from the earliest times, modern scholarship finds its shape with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philologists. This essay surveys work from that point forward, focusing especially on philological and linguistic studies and resources. Those who are interested in a survey of earlier scholarship should look to Helmut Gneuss’s English Language Scholarship: A Survey and Bibliography from the Beginnings to the End of the Nineteenth Century. Allan Frantzén’s Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition situates the ideology of earlier work, in particular periods in which Anglo-Saxon origins were celebrated for religious or nationalistic purposes. Murray Cohen’s Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England, 1640-1785 discusses the work of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century orthoepists like John Hart and Alexander Gil, who were concerned with correct diction and spelling.

Indo-European Beginnings

The central insight of modern historical scholarship came from Sir William Jones, a British jurist posted to Calcutta in 1783. Jones noted similarities among Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek, proposing to the Asiatic Society in 1786 that “no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source.”2

A century of linguistic detective work followed, working out the correspondences among the sounds, words, and grammar of Indo-European languages. Donald Kroeger’s From Proto-Indo-European to Proto-Germanic gives a detailed account of the development of Germanic, including an extensive discussion of the famous Grimm’s Law, which states correspondences between Germanic consonants and those of other Indo-European languages. The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots, revised and edited by Calvert Watkins, lists more than 1,300 reconstructed Indo-European roots (such as “thē” “to warm”) and their reflexes in English (bath, bake, zwieback), and Orrin Robinson’s Old English and Its Closest Relatives surveys early Germanic languages and cogently describes the comparative method.

Nineteenth-Century Scholarship

In the nineteenth century, English scholars like Alexander Ellis, Walter Skeat, and Henry Sweet pioneered empirical work on English. Ellis had begun to investigate regional pronunciation as early as 1848, before the development of the International Phonetic Alphabet and sound recording, and he published his findings as On Early English Pronunciation, with Especial Reference to Shakespeare and Chaucer. Skeat wrote hundreds of short etymological pieces that eventually formed the basis of his four-part An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language (first published as Etymological English Dictionary). Henry Sweet, the phonetician who inspired George Bernard Shaw’s Henry Higgins (in Pygmalion), contributed the comprehensive A History of English Sounds from the Earliest Period, covering phonetics, writing, and the stages of the language.

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The earliest American scholar of Old English may have been Thomas Jefferson, who planned to write an Anglo-Saxon grammar but never did. Typical of nineteenth-century efforts was George Marsh’s *The Origin and History of the English Language, and of the Early Literature It Embodies*, which was devoted mostly to literary analysis from Norman times to the Elizabethan Age (which Marsh saw as the language’s pinnacle). Marsh’s work illustrates two misguided but common themes—that the only language worth studying is the literary language, and that the only language worth studying is British English.

By the late nineteenth century, more sophisticated works appeared, for example, Oliver Emerson’s *The History of the English Language* and Thomas Lounsbury’s *History of the English Language*, neither of which gave any attention to American English. Emerson focused on the details and mechanisms of change, with a good eighty pages on sound changes, grammatical analogy, and the leveling of word endings. Lounsbury divided his study into external and internal history, the former dealing with historical events (invasions, conquests) and the latter with the development of the grammatical forms of words. Emerson and Lounsbury emphasized the continuity of Anglo-Saxon with later English, in contrast to Marsh who saw it as primitive because of its lack of a literary standard.

**The New English Dictionary**

INTEREST IN PHILOL OGY WAS ALSO BEHIND A *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, edited by James A. H. Murray et al., known today as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The project was initiated by the Philological Society of London’s call for a new dictionary that would recalculate the language from its earliest days and replace Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1775). When the first edition was completed in 1928, the *New English Dictionary* (NED) documented more than 400,000 words with literary historical citations collected from readers around the English-speaking world. In 1933, a single-volume supplement appeared, and the NED was resubmitted as the now-venerable *Oxford English Dictionary*. The dictionary staff continues to revise and update entries, and a third edition, known as OED3, is in progress, though it remains to be seen if it will appear in print. With the OED3 revisions, the dictionary has expanded the resources used in definitions and citations to include more vernacular materials, continuing its tradition of description as opposed to prescription and moving away from strict literary tests.


**The Early Twentieth Century**

The twentieth century began to see OED scholarship mined, as in Henry Bradley’s *The Making of English*, which included a section on “profit and loss” in grammar. Henry Sweet’s influence was felt in the phonetically based studies of his colleague Henry Cecil Wyld, who produced several detailed studies of the history of the pronunciation of British English, including *A History of Modern Colloquial English* (which dealt with historical dialects). The Danish scholar Otto Jespersen contributed a study of word development, *Grammar and Structure of the English Language*, but he is best known for his seven-volume *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (the last volume was published posthumously). The latter reflects his then-novel view that language change was not to be equated with decay and that change is responsible for many now-standard concepts of historical grammar, including the term “Great Vowel Shift.”

**Beyond the OED**

Although the *OED* is the best-known historical dictionary, it is not the only one. Specialized dictionaries, some now online, examine particular chronological periods, registers, or geographical regions. Currently at the letter G, *Dictionary of Old English*, edited by Antonette diPaolo Healey, defines words for the period from 600 to 1150. To date, the largest complete dictionary of Old English remains that of Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, first published in 1898 with a supplement in 1921. The six-volume *English Dialect Dictionary* (EDD), edited by Joseph Wright, traces the history of dialect words in English from about 1700 to 1900. A project to digitize the EDD, with its 70,000 entries, is under way at Innsbruck University Library, and a nondigitized scan is available through the University of Toronto Library. *Middle English Dictionary*, edited by Hans Kurath and Sherman Kuhn, which took a half century to complete, covers the period 1100-1500, and is based on a collection of more than three million citation slips. It was released as a 15,000-page set of printed volumes, but since 2007 has also been available free in electronic format hosted by the University of Michigan.

Sir William Craigie, an OED editor, was the originator of the four-volume *Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles (DAE)*, which includes American English words from the settlement to the start of the twentieth century and was intended to complement the OED. The DAE was in turn one of the sources for a *Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*, edited by Milford Mathews, a two-volume work tracking 50,000 words and phrases and including both American coinages (like bifocal and ivory tower) and English words that took on new American meanings (like buffalo and refrigerator). The *Dictionary of American Regional English*, edited by Frederick G. Cassidy and Joan Houston Hall, is based on face-to-face interviews conducted between 1965 and 1970 and supplemented by a collection of vernacular written materials from the Colonial period to the present. Published in five volumes (over a period of twenty-seven years beginning in 1985) and now available in an electronic edition, DARE includes entries on fieldwork by region (often supplemented by maps), the earliest known usage of each word, and examples showing use over time. The history of the English language is also told in its slang. Jonathon Green’s three-volume *Green’s Dictionary of Slang* covers the slang of the entire English-speaking world from 1500 to the present: its 53,000 headwords define 100,000 words using more than 413,000 citations. *The Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, edited by Jonathan Lighter, offers an OED-like tracing of etymological development through dated citations and entries with **CHOICE** July 2014
Borrowed Words

The story of English is often told as a tale of borrowed words. Popular accounts celebrate the penchant of English for borrowing and tie that to its success as a world language. Anglo-Saxon English borrowed from Celtic, Latin, and Scandinavian. After the Norman Conquest, Middle English swelled with French borrowings. During the Elizabethan age, neology was unleashed by popular writers like Shakespeare and by innumerable scholars who coined neologisms. Colonization, immigration, global business, and technology continued to expand the borrowed vocabulary.

Drawing on the OED, Geoffrey Hughes's *A History of English Words* analyzes the English lexicon as a historical and cultural repository, showing how strata of vocabulary correlate with both social class and communicative function. Hughes explores the relationships among the various levels, discussing Renaissance experimental use of language, the bawdiness of the Restoration, and the restraint of the Victorian era. He draws on his earlier expertise as author of *Swearing: A Social History of Profane Language*, *Oaths, and Profanity in English*, which traced that particular genre from the ritual insults and oaths of Beowulf to imprecations of the present day.

Specific aspects or layers of the English vocabulary sometimes receive book-length expositions. Donald Ayer's *English Words from Latin and Greek Elements* is a straightforward vocabulary book identifying classical bases and affixes and their combining forms. Thus, for example, the base *sed* meaning "to sit or settle" (and its alternate forms *sed* and *set*) yields words like *sediment*, *sedativ*, *preside*, and *session*. John Geipel's *The Viking Legacy* discusses the Norse invasions of Britain and their effect on the vocabulary, and includes appendices of Scandinavian surnames and loanwords (including *skibby* and *næst*). D. Gary Miller's *External Influences on English: From Its Beginnings to the Renaissance* goes deep into the phonological properties of borrowings from the Celts, Vikings, and French, and shows how borrowed material has affected the morphology and syntax of English.

The collection *Spanish Loanwords in the English Language*, edited by Félix Rodríguez González, includes essays on both early and recent Spanish loanwords, Spanish loanwords in contemporary slang, and Spanish place-names, with an excellent bibliographic essay on Spanish borrowings. J. Alan Pfeffer and Garland Cannon's *German Loanwords in English* addresses the misconception that German contributed little to English. And Charles Cutler's *O Brave New Worlds: Native American Loanwords in Current English* offers a historian's approach to Native American loanwords from terms like *pawpaw* and *moose* to calques like *iron horse* and *whispering spirit* (for *telephonograph*).

Syntax

A number of studies focus on the evolution of English syntax. F. T. Visser's *An Historical Syntax of the English Language* classifies English grammatical constructions based on verbal types illustrated extensively with citations from the OED and later historical dictionaries. Period grammars include Bruce Mitchell's comprehensive two-volume *Old English Syntax*; Tauno Mustanoja's accessible but sometimes dated *A Middle English Syntax*; and Manfred Görlach's textbook *Introduction to Early Modern English*, translated from German. For modern English, the best resource is Richard Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum's nearly 1,900-page *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, which is both theoretically interesting and empirically rich.

David Denison's *English Historical Syntax: Verbal Constructions*, aimed at advanced undergraduates, combines detailed surveys of data with overviews of scholarly research. Denison discusses explanations for changes in chapters on word order, the loss of impersonal constructions, the modern prepositional passive with *by*, various types of subordination, and auxiliary verbs. The *Syntax of Early English* by Olga Fischer et al. treats the most significant grammatical changes that occurred from Old to Modern English—changes in word order, infinitival constructions, and processes by which content words become grammatical markers. Fischer and her fellow authors follow the path set by David Lightfoot's *Principles of Diachronic Syntax*, emphasizing the connection between generative linguistic theory, language acquisition, and grammar change. Other studies focus on particular changes; among these works is Anne Curtiss's *Gender Shifts in the History of English*, which analyzes the loss of gender distinctions and the shifts from grammatical to natural gender systems.

Phonology

English historical phonology aims at uncovering the systems of sounds at various stages of the language and at understanding the ways in which the different stages and regional variants are related. The first volume of Richard Hogg's two-volume *A Grammar of Old English* is devoted to phonology (volume two, written with R. D. Fulk, treats morphology and is discussed later in this essay). Hogg offers a richly detailed study that adopts the regularity of sound change as a guiding principle. He summarizes much previous work and balances traditional philology with modern generative phonology, including analysis of both Germanic and Old English dialects. Charles Jones's *A History of English Phonology* provides a period-by-period discussion of sound inventories and sound change in English, treating change as an ongoing, recurrent process and stressing the unity of past changes with ongoing ones. Jones brings in many technical concepts with a minimum of theoretical overkill, discussing vowel lengthening and diphthongization in Old English, fronting and raising of vowels, Middle English open syllable lengthening, and, of course, the Great Vowel Shift, the most famous sound change in the history of English.

The Great Vowel Shift refers to the series of changes affecting long vowels from about the middle of the fourteenth century to beginning of the eighteenth. The system of long vowels reorganized itself, with low and mid vowels raising a step to become mid...
The Queen's English

The development of literary and spoken standards is also a part of the history of the language, along with the topic of popular attitudes toward language variation. Most textbooks cover the history of standardization, discussing the influence of printing and publishing, the rise of a middle class and the spread of education, and the development of prescriptive and complaint traditions. John Fisher's The Emergence of Standard English explores the language policy of Lancastrian England and its development by William Caxton and the English Chancery. Henry Hitchings's The Language Wars: A History of Proper English presents the topic of prescription for the general reader, while Richard Bailey's Images of English: A Cultural History of the Language offers a more detailed exposition of popular attitudes about English as expressed by commentators and critics. The ideology of Standard English in the United Kingdom and (thoroughly so) the United States is explored in Standard English: The Widening Debate edited by Tony Bex and Richard Watts, and also (from a UK perspective) in Tony Crowley's Standard English and the Politics of Language, which provides an interesting assessment of the contributions of phonetician Daniel Jones and lexicographer/philologist Henry Wylk. For a readable discussion of the history of Webster's Third International Dictionary that also delves into the cultural history of language attitudes in twentieth-century America, see David Skinner's The Story of Ain't: America, Its Language, and the Most Controversial Dictionary Ever Published.

The American Language

The study of English in the United States fell to American scholars. Julie Tietel Aronsen's Linguistics in America, 1769-1924 gives a readable history of early American linguistics, paying attention to Native American languages and to the study of language by Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Noah Webster, John Pickering, and Albert Gallatin, among others. Webster's contributions to the study of the American language—including his "dictionary war" with lexicographer Joseph Worcester, his failures as an etymologist, and his attempts at spelling reform—are recounted in David Micklethwait's Noah Webster and the American Dictionary.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, American scholarship took a new direction; it began defending the American language. George Philip Krapp's two-volume The English Language in America drew on nineteenth-century dictionaries and dialect studies to describe the vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and grammar of American speech. Krapp's efforts were eventually overshadowed by H. L. Mencken's The American Language, first published several years before Krapp's work, but revised in 1921 before settling into a fourth edition, with two supplements, by the 1940s. (Two decades later Raven McDavid Jr., with David W. Maurer, released an abridged fourth edition, with annotations and new material.) A rare piece of good scholarship by an amateur, Mencken's work combined lively (sometimes scathingly opinionated) writing and detailed research. Mencken took aim at pedants and reveled in colloquial speech and slang. The American Dialect Society's journal American Speech, published since 1925, provides scholarly work about a wide range of American English in forms usually accessible to general readers. The society's long-running series "Publications of the American Dialect Society" (PADS), which has put out at least one monograph every year since 1944, features more specialized academic studies.

Dialectology and Sociolinguistics

The historical linguistic tradition dovetailed nicely with the emergence of modern dialect geography in the twentieth century. In England, Harold Orton initiated his Survey of English Dialects, collecting 404,000 items analyzed in The Linguistic Atlas of England, which he coedited with Stewart Sanderson and John Widdowson. In the United States, scholars also took to the field to develop a number of American linguistic atlases—books of data listing pronunciation features by speaker and location. More accessible to readers are the word geographies, for example, Hans Kurath's A Word Geography of the Eastern

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United States, which gives the settlement and linguistic history of the eastern states, along with 162 maps of regional usages. As one might expect, many of the words were farm terms but one also finds terms for such things as tracity (play book), hook school, hog school, lay out. Kurath and Raven McDavid followed this with The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States, which also nicely describes and maps the phonetic variation in the East, with 180 maps of such things as the pronunciation of Tuesday ("tuesday") and roof (with an OH or an UW sound). Craig Carver's American Regional Dialects describes the geography and settlement history of American English using data from several linguistic atlases and from Dictionary of American Regional English (discussed above), providing a glossary of regional words and region-by-region maps representing composite dialect boundaries.

Since the mid-twentieth century, research has increasingly shifted to the sociological aspects of dialect variation—or sociolinguistics. Those interested in the intersection of sociolinguistics and the history of English will want to consult William Labov, Sharon Ash, and Charles Bobberg's The Atlas of North American English: Phonetics, Phonology, and Sound Change (ANAE). The 300-page ANAE reports on ongoing changes in the English of the United States and Canada, includes 129 four-color maps, and comes with a CD-ROM containing data files and interactive maps with sound clips. Based on a series of telephone interviews conducted in the 1990s, the ANAE focuses on active sound changes and relies on acoustic measurements rather than phonetic transcriptions. Its overview of North American dialects reaffirms some of the boundaries established by earlier studies but also describes ongoing patterns of vowel shifts in different regions, supporting the conclusion that dialect differences are becoming amplified in some areas rather than leveled out.

Handbooks and Bibliographies

Books on the History of English face three challenges: what to include, whose English to study, and how to write competently about such a vast subject. The Cambridge History of the English Language, a six-volume, comprehensive reference work under the general editorship of Richard Hogg, approaches these problems by relying on multiple experts. Each volume of the Cambridge History gives a long section of what one might find in a short section of a standard textbook. The first three volumes provide in-depth analyses of phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, and the literary languages of Old, Middle, and Modern English through 1776. The final three volumes cover English in the United States and the British Commonwealth, with analysis of the language in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, South Africa, South Asia, and elsewhere. At 4,160 pages, the Cambridge History is extensive, well organized, and readable. Other encyclopedias and handbooks complement the Cambridge History. In just shy of 1,000 pages, The Oxford Handbook of the History of English, edited by Yeates Neilson and Elizabeth Closs Traugott, offers sixty-eight concise chapters that revisit and rethink issues of sociocultural and technological change, language contact, and the nature of historical evidence. The Oxford History of English, edited by Lynda Mugglestone, is a more manageable 485 pages but still manages fourteen excellent chapters emphasizing the heterogeneity of English and questions of contact, transmission, and competing norms. Finally, The Oxford Companion to the English Language, edited by Tom McArthur, is a straightforward glossary of terms and definitions.

The Handbook of the History of English, edited by Ans van Kemenade and Bettolou Los, is organized topically, with twenty-three state-of-the-art papers on such topics as pragmatics, dialectology, syntax, and prosody. Its aim is to bring scholars and students up to date on recent advances, presenting research in some depth. A Companion to the History of the English Language, edited by Haruko Momma and Michael Matteo, has fifty-nine articles on useful teaching topics, including the language of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Austen, Joyce, Faulkner, Rushdie, and Morrison, along with survey pieces on specific periods. Rounding out the handbooks is Legacies of Colonial English: Studies in Transported Dialects, edited by Raymond Hickey, with twenty-one articles on English in the commonwealth and postcolonial areas; the volume includes contributions on American dialects but also some on English-based creoles and English in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Africa, and Asia. Useful appendices provide lists of nonstandard features, time lines, and maps.

Several excellent bibliographies have been published. One of the earliest is Arthur Kennedy's A Bibliography of Writings on the English Language from the Beginning of Printing to the End of 1922. A Bibliography of Writings on the History of the English Language, compiled and edited by Jacke C. Fissak, which begins with a list of thirty-three other bibliographies and lists 3,641 entries characterized into fifteen broad topics and seventy-five subtopics. Gneuss's English Language Scholarship, mentioned at the beginning of this essay, also includes a bibliographic guide of about 700 items, through 1993. Finally, The Year's Work in English Studies, an annual, provides bibliographic coverage and critical commentary of scholarly work, and includes a section dedicated to the history of English linguistics, lexicography, onomastics, dialectology, and sociolinguistics.

Teaching the History of English

A course in the history of the English language is offered in most university English programs, and Albert Baugh's A History of the English Language, published in the 1930s, established the textbook format for such courses, beginning with the justifications of "English as a Cultural Subject" and moving on to a chronological exposition in eleven chapters leading up to "The English Language in America." Baugh discusses linguistic history, emphasizing the historical events and social forces that propelled changes in vocabulary, sound, meaning, and grammar. Now in its sixth edition, the textbook is still popular: Thomas Cable joined as coauthor for the third edition. In terms of longevity, the main competitor to A History of the English Language is Thomas Pyles's The Origin and Development of the English Language, first published in 1964. Pyles was more concerned with the internal history of sound changes, word endings, grammar, and spelling, and he treated the external history selectively. He also gave phonemic theory a bit more discussion than did Baugh, so his book also served as an introduction to linguistics. American English was still something of an afterthought, treated in chapter nine ("Recent British and American English"). This volume is now in its seventh edition, authored by John Algeo (who joined with the third edition) and Carmen Butcher.

C. M. Millward's A Biography of the
English Language, with Mary Hayes as the coauthor for the third edition, is also a popular textbook and includes a grammar review as an appendix. The book begins with an introduction to linguistics and ends with English around the world. Elly van Gelderen’s *A History of the English Language* includes discussion of genetic research on Indo-European origins and of the politics and ideology of reconstruction and has excellent exercises and texts incorporated into the chapters. Laurel Britton and Leslie Arnovick’s *The English Language: A Linguistic History* gives in-depth treatment of Canadian English as well as the English of Britain and the United States, and Stephen Grainger’s *The History of English: An Introduction* focuses on English in the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and Australasia.

*Baugh and Cable, Algeo and Butcher, and Millward and Hayes* all offer workbooks synchronized with their texts, allowing students and teachers to cover some topics in more detail and to practice such skills as transcription, comparative reconstruction, word analysis, and dictionary use; several offer companion web content, the best of which is Gelderen’s.

*Popular Works*

In the last several decades, scholars as well as journalists have written books that are useful outside the academy as well as inside. Bill Bryson’s *Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way* is an entertaining read—with chapters on names, swearing, and workday—but short on the linguistic details. And Bryson’s *Made in America* similarly tours American English cultural topics ranging from the language of revolution and national identity to the language of cooking, shopping, sex, and manners. Robert Calbourn’s *Our Marvelous Native Tongue: The Life and Times of the English Language* tells the reader what makes English great but bumbles at the end with too-dire warnings about the degradation of the language.


Seth Lere’s *Inventing English: A Portable History of the Language* considers English as being continually reinvented, taking up sometimes koinoicentric topics such as Cockney’s hymn, Chaucer’s borrowings, African American Vernacular, the language of war, and the etymologies of *sude* and *hells*. Robert Burchfield’s *The English Language* offers an overview of the language for general readers. A recent *OED* editor, Burchfield notes that the book is too brief (and this author thinks too selective) to be a text, but the lexicographic chapters “The Recording of English” and “Vocabulary” particularly stand out. John McWhorter’s *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English* breezily tackles the Celtic impact on the syntax of Old and Middle English, the Scandinavian influence on the loss of inflections, and the mysterious 30 percent of Germanic words unrelated to Indo-European cognates.

David Crystal has written several popular works, including *The Story of English*, which traces the development of standard English alongside that of nonstandard dialects with the idea of emphasizing that diversity has always been a feature of the language. The title of Crystal’s *The Story of English in 100 Words* does not imply that the book is brief, but instead refers to the hundred etymological essays he uses to tell the story of English, from *rue* (a runic inscription carved into a piece of bone) to *unfriend*, wicked, arse, wee, bloody, edit, and many more.

*Corpora and Databases*

Computer technology and corpora linguistics—the computer analysis of texts—have become increasingly central to English historical linguistics. A variety
of corpora and tools are available; these reveal the fine-grained, variable, and incremental nature of language change, and help to identify beginnings, endings, and social/stylistic variation. Corpus Linguistics by Tony McEnery and Andrew Wilson gives a book-length overview and history of corpus linguistics and places it in the context of historical research and functionalist linguistic theory. Two edited volumes discussed earlier in this essay, The Handbook of the History of the English and The Oxford History of English both include lists of corpora, and Momma and Matteo's edited volume A Companion to the History of the English Language (also mentioned previously) includes Anne Curzan's fine essay on using corpora, "Corpus-Based Linguistic Approaches to the History of English." A key electronic resource for historical research is the Helsinki Corpus of English, compiled by Matti Rissanen et al., and completed in 1992. The 1.5-million-word corpus contains a historical part with texts from 750 to 1750 and a dialect part based on transcribed interviews with speakers of British rural dialects made in the 1970s. Early English in the Computer Age: Explorations through the Helsinki Corpus, ed. by Matti Rissanen, Merja Kyro, and Minna Palander-Collin, discusses the principles of compilation and offers a number of pilot studies illustrating the use of the material. Coauthored with R. D. Fulk, volume two of Hogg's A Grammar of Old English (mentioned above) draws on data from the Helsinki Corpus to provide an in-depth analysis of Old English word structure. Christiane Dalton-Puffer's The French Influence on Middle English Morphology likewise uses the corpus in analyzing Middle English morphology and French-derived suffixes.

ARCHER: A Representative Corpus of Historical English Resources, a corpus developed by Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan in the 1990s, includes multigenera material from 1650 to 1990 and complements the Helsinki Corpus. Some of the findings from the ARCHER corpus are reported in Corpus Linguistics: Investigating Language Structure and Use, by Biber, Susan Conrad, and Randi Reppen. For historical research on American English, The Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), the work of Mark Davies, is an excellent free online resource. A collection of 400 million words covering the period from 1810 to 2009, COHA allows researchers to track the frequency of words and phrases and to identify words that have increased (like freak out and guys) or decreased (like breastuous and fellow) over time. COHA can also track parts of words (morphemes) so that researchers can follow the up and downs of plural verbs, prefixes and suffixes, and compounds. Davies also maintains The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which includes 450 million words from 1990 to 2012.

Anthony Kroch and his collaborators at the University of Pennsylvania have contributed the Penn-Helsinki Parsored Corpus of Middle English and the Penn-Helsinki Parsored Corpus of Early Modern English, a set of parsed historical corpora (now available together on CD-ROM as Penn-Helsinki Parsored Corpora of Historical English) in which the syntactic annotation allows searching not only for words and word sequences but also for syntactic structure.

Never-Ending History

Studying the history of English allows one to reflect on one's origins and on the myths and ideology surrounding language. English historical linguistics also allows one to interpret the details and theories of that history and of language change itself, from the Celtic substratum to the Great Vowel Shift to the emergence of the passive voice. English historical linguistics includes questions of standardization, diversity, social class, and global trajectory: Whose English is studied and accepted? How do varieties influence one another? Questions, debates, and plenty of mysteries remain, and the tools of sociolinguistic and corpus linguistics complement traditional philology, dialectology, and linguistic analysis to enable continual refinements. The history of the English language is an inexhaustible subject.

Notes


4. For Scottish, there is Dictionary of the Scots Language (DSL), http://www.dsl.ac.uk/, a free resource that starts in the twelfth century and continues to the 1970s. The DARE maps are quite unusual looking in that they are based on population density as of the 1960s and the number of interviews done in each state, thus skewing the size of the states while maintaining their geographical relationships.

5. These two volumes were published by Random House (as the Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang); however, in 2003 the project moved to Oxford University Press, which is publishing the two remaining volumes covering F-S and N-Z. For more on slang resources, see this author's essay "Grouping for Words: A Guide to Slang and Usage Resources," Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Librarians 44:8 (Dec. 2008), 619-31.


7. Many sources on the prescriptive-descrptive debate are also discussed in this author's bibliographic essay "Grouping for Words," cited above.

8. Worcester had worked as assistant on Webster's dictionary, but when he published an abridgment of Webster's work in 1827 and his own comprehensive dictionary in 1830 Webster accused him of plagiarism. The battle for market share of the dictionaries raged until about 1864, carried on (and won) after Webster's death by publishers George and Charles Merriam, who had bought the rights to Webster's work.

9. Early PDAs monographs include Lorenzo Dow Turner's Notes on the Sounds and Vocabulary of Gullah and Problems Confronting the Investigator of Gullah as well as studies of maple sugar language in Vermont, oil refinery terms in Oklahoma, hemp words, the argot of the racetrack, the vocabulary of marble playing, the language of jazz musicians, expressions from Herman Melville, and a word list of construction terms.

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