

TR 12:30 – 1:45  
Palmer 210

**Prof. S. Uselmann**  
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Palmer 310  
Office hrs: MW 3-5

## English 315: The English Language

This course traces the development of English, looking at the concept of language in general and the English language in particular (its sounds, its vocabulary, its dialects) as well as the psychological, social, cultural and political forces that have influenced the language. Three basic themes provide the structure for our semester: history, diversity, and change. We'll examine the history of English as it developed in England, the United States, and other parts of the world. We'll explore the diversity of English, a language now used by millions (billions?) of speakers, yet paradoxically viewed by some in the US as a language so threatened that it needs government protection in the form of English-Only laws. We'll learn about ways American English differs from the English spoken in the United Kingdom, Canada, the Caribbean, India, Nigeria, and other countries where English is either an official language or a common second language. In short, we'll explore the ways in which English, like any language, has evolved.

By the end of the semester, if you've successfully completed this course, you will understand:

- what is language, and what are key terms linguists use to describe language
- what significant changes have occurred in English sounds, vocabulary, word-formations, and sentence structure in the past 1000-1500 years
- how standardization has affected writers and speakers over time
- how language variation affects writers and speakers over time
- ways to research the history of language and attitudes about language
- how some of your own questions about English and its history can be answered or explored

### Required Texts

C.M. Millward, *A Biography of the English Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

———. *Workbook to Accompany A Biography of the English Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

Deborah Tannen, *That's Not What I Meant!*

Coursepack on Language Variation

### On Reserve at Burrow Library:

Supplemental readings for presentations

Jean Aitchison, *Words in the Mind*

Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand*

Because you will be doing some writing during the term that requires documenting sources, you will also need a handbook that covers citation practices and formatting. Any recent handbook will do.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

***Class Participation, Quizzes.*** This class comes with a heavy workload and will be run lecture/ discussion format. It goes without saying that I expect you to come prepared with your book and having done the assigned homework for the day. Regular, active participation is also required. I will also periodically give quizzes in class that cover necessary material.

**WebCT postings:** This is a WebCT course. As part of your class participation, you will be required to respond to the readings and hone your ability to analyze the language by posing a question(s) or observation to the class at least TEN (10) times over the course of the semester. In a twice-a-week class, I expect you to have both observations and questions--our reading will introduce you to new terminology and concepts, and as we rush through thousands of years of language history, you will doubtless find some material challenging at first. I suggest that you find a way to keep track of questions that come up during the week, and that you take advantage of the course's structure to practice new skills. The postings are due by **3:00 p.m. on the Monday before class.** At times I will offer prompts to help guide your responses, but I encourage you to explore your own reactions.

**Group Presentation and Response Paper on Supplementary Readings.** In addition to the required readings, each member of the class (together with a partner[s]) will be responsible for reading and presenting on ONE supplementary topic to the class. The readings are available on reserve at the library, and address the broader field of language study as it is practiced in the world. This assignment is 10% of your final grade, and consists of three parts:

1. Reading the assigned supplementary article and posting a brief summary (250 words or so) to the class e-mail list **by the Tuesday before your presentation.** You and your partner(s) will write this summary together.
2. 15-minute presentation. Here, you will want to focus on *teaching* what you have learned to your classmates. Do not just stand up and summarize the essay(s) with note cards. Help the class see what's at issue, why this is important, etc. Make it come alive. The purpose of these presentations is to open up the discussion and provide ideas for the projects that will guide the semester. Be sure to email me to let me know your plans **by the Tuesday before your presentation.**
3. Writing a 1-2 pg. response paper on the article. This is your own work, to be done apart from your group work. The essay is not intended to be formal, but it will count as part of your grade for this assignment, and so should be clearly written and organized around a core question, observation or set of questions – even if you decide not to provide an answer to these questions (i.e. a central thesis). The essay is **due by the Thursday following your presentation.**

All three parts must be completed in order to receive a passing grade on the assignment. If you have any questions, about the readings, the assignment, or just want to run some ideas past me, please don't hesitate to email or come by to see me.

**Homework assignments.** Each week you will have several assignments from the workbook to complete. It is your responsibility to read the syllabus and complete these pages from the workbook – I will collect some (though probably not all) of them each week. These are a large part of your grade, so do not fall behind in them (see "late assignments policy").

**Late Assignments Policy.** There will be NO extensions on any homework assignments in this class. Instead, I will automatically drop the lowest 5 grades on your homework assignments. If you fail to hand in homework, this will count as one of the 5. If you fail to hand in five or more, you risk failing the course. If you must miss class, it's your responsibility to have read the syllabus and turn in the necessary assignments by the time of class.

For the projects, you will be allotted three (3) "free" days at the beginning of the semester, which you may use when and as you wish. Each day is worth 24 hours (e.g. a project due on Thurs. may be handed in by Fri. at 1:45), and you are free to use them up all at once or space them throughout the semester. It's up to you, but be aware that once these three days are used up, your letter grade on any given essay will drop 1/3 grade *for each day it is late.*

**Absences.** Regular, punctual attendance is required. Arriving more than 15 minutes late three times counts as an absence. Failure to bring your book to class or to pass the day's quiz also counts as an absence. Absences for extracurricular activities, religious holidays, or illness may be excused as long as you have contacted me in advance and completed the necessary homework/make-up work on time. You are allowed two (2) absences free-of-charge; each additional absence will cost your *final course average* two tenths of a point. If you miss more than 6 classes, you will fail the course.

**Grading.**

Homework – 30 %

Project #1 – 15 %

Midterm – 10 %

Class Participation, Quizzes, WebCT postings – 10 %

Presentation on Supplementary Reading and Response Paper – 10 %

Final Research Project – 25 %

**Honor Code.** All work must adhere to the honor code.

**Questions, problems, or concerns?** Please always feel free to contact me. Most difficulties can be prevented from becoming serious problems fairly easily -- if the professor knows about them in advance.

## Syllabus

### Week 1

R 1/13 Introduction

### Week 2

T 1/18 Ch. 1: Introduction to linguistics and HEL (wkbk 1.3, 1.5, 1.10-13)

R 1/20 Ch. 2: Phonology  
Presentation # 1: Malapropisms

### Week 3

T 1/25 Phonology c'tued (ex. 2.3-2.13)  
Ch. 3: Writing, Invention of (ex. 3.3-3.9)

R 1/27 Language and the Brain: why study grammar?  
Presentation # 2: Language and Problems of Knowledge

### Week 4

T 2/1 Language and the Brain c'tued  
Ch. 4: Language forms and Indo-European Families (ex. 4.3-4.9)  
**Draft of Project # 1 DUE**

R 2/3 Indo-European, c'tued  
Presentation # 3: Semantics (a psycholinguistic approach)

### Week 5

T 2/8 Ch. 5: Old English (ex. 5.3-5.11)

R 2/10 Old English, c'tued  
Presentation # 4: How does the mind store words?  
**PROJECT #1 DUE**

Week 6

T 2/15

Ch. 5: Old English (ex. 5.12-5.23)

R 2/17

Old English, c'tued  
Presentation # 5: Language and Literary Style

Week 7

T 2/22

Ch. 6: Middle English (ex. 6.3-6.10)

R 2/24

Middle English, c'tued  
Presentation # 6: Newcomers and Neologisms

Week 8

T 3/1

Ch. 6: Middle English (ex. 6.11-6.17)  
Presentation # 7: Language in Action

R 3/3

**MIDTERM EXAM**

3/8-3/10

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 9

T 3/15

Ch. 7: Early Modern English (ex. 7.3-7.15)

R 3/17

EMnE, c'tued  
Presentation # 8: Language, Thought and Reality, I

Week 10

T 3/22

Ch. 7: Early Modern English, c'tued (ex. 7.16-7.26)  
Presentation # 9: Language, Thought and Reality, II

R 3/24

No class – Easter Break

Week 11

T 3/29

Ch. 8: Present Day (ex. 8.3-8.8)  
**Proposal for Final Project DUE**

R 3/31

Ch. 9: English Around the World (ex. 9.3-9.9)  
Presentation # 10: Language Change, I

Week 12

T 4/5

Regional and Social Variation  
*Language*, Part 6  
Presentation # 11: Language Change, II

R 4/7

NO CLASS

Week 13

T 4/12

Deborah Tannen, *That's Not What I Meant!*

R 4/14

Tannen  
Presentation # 12: Gender

Week 14

T 4/19 Final Projects

R 4/21 Final Projects

Week 15

T 4/26 Final Projects

R 4/28 Final Projects

\* \* \* Final Project due May 2 by 9:00 a.m.