

TR 11:00-12:15  
Palmer 207

**Prof. S. Uselmann**  
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Palmer 310  
Office hrs: TR 3:30-5:00  
and by appt.

### English 315: The English Language

Debates about the English language range from questions about correct pronunciation (as at last year's Usage Panel of the American Heritage Dictionary) to those about correct grammar (consider the influence of Strunk and White on three generations of writers) to broader questions such as "should there be a standard English?" But although we think of these debates as only recent, they actually have a history and a context all their own – as do many questions and concerns about the nature of the English language.

This course traces the development of English, looking at the **concept of language** and the English language in particular (its sounds, structure, vocabulary and dialects) as well as the psychological, social, cultural and political forces that have influenced the language. We'll examine the **history** of English as it developed out of Indo-European, Germanic and other languages into a language now used by millions (billions?) of speakers, and characterized by hundreds of dialects from the U.K. to North America to the Caribbean, India, and Nigeria. Finally, we will explore the **diversity** of English, and how this diversity paradoxically has informed historical debates about "**correctness**," **standard English**, and even **conversational styles**.

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 WORK AND TEXTS:

In order to further these goals, we'll engage in various activities:

- class discussion of our course texts and readings
- primary research into language use (including a project in linguistics)
- short workbook assignments each week
- 2 exams (and quizzes at the beginning and/or end of class period)
- 1 independent research project

Each of the major requirements is discussed in detail below

#### **Textbooks:**

David Crystal, *The Stories of English*

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!*

#### **Other texts:**

- A good college desk dictionary (i.e. one that has etymologies)
- A recent handbook on documenting sources that covers citation practices and formatting.
- Handouts from class as well as presentation materials will be made available on WebCT.
- Selected Readings and supplemental helpful material will be on reserve at the library; I'll distribute a separate reserve reading list shortly.

#### GRADING:

Class Participation, Quizzes, and Reading Summary – 10 %

Homework/workbook – 20 %

Short project, presentation and response paper – 10 %

Exam #1 – 15 %

Exam #2 – 15 %

Final Research Project – 30 %

I've set up the grading for semester so that you have many chances to learn the material, and many chances to influence your semester grade. Note that the exams and shorter project are worth relatively little, which allows you a chance to get used to researching historical and linguistic material before the final project. The workbook assignments are worth a larger portion of your grade, and that grade is generated by many individual pieces of work. Your final project will give you a chance to explore some issues in more depth and to build on the skills you learn in your homework. If you're not sure what any given assignment requires, please ask your peers and talk to me about it.

#### SPECIFICS OF COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**Reading Summary, Presentation and Study Guide.** Each of you will be responsible for one summary of a week's assigned reading and FIVE sample study questions that grow out of this reading. This assignment consists of three parts: (1) Before class on Tuesday, you will make a one-page summary of the readings available. The best summaries isolate 4-5 major points or movements involving both "inner" and "outer" history, and which you saw as the most important or interesting (one of these can and should be a "wild card" – that is, an cool factoid or oddity that may not be important but struck you as just plain interesting). My preference is that you e-mail the summary to me. I will link your file to our WebCT site so that we can all use it for study and review purposes. (2) Choose study 5 questions from the workbook (or devise your own – though these must be approved by me) based on your summary. Choose them carefully, as these questions will become the basis of our exams. (3) Then, in the beginning of class on Tuesday, you take a few minutes to inform the class of the five observations/questions you have chosen (this part should not be written – no handouts, please).

**Workbook homework.** There are many workbook assignments listed on the syllabus, and 25 of these will be graded (on a standard scale of A-F). Those that will be graded are in **bold**. I will calculate your grade based on your highest 20 grades. You may choose not to do 5 homework assignments without penalty; if you do more than 20 workbook assignments, I'll only count the 20 highest grades. Because you have some choice of which homework assignments to complete, I will not accept late workbooks unless you have cleared it with me in advance.

The other workbook assignments on the syllabus (those *not* in bold) should also be completed, but need not be done thoroughly – only with an eye to discussing them in class or using them to prepare for exams.

**Projects in Linguistics.** In addition to your other work, each of you will be responsible for conducting primary research into language use. These are divided into eight areas of linguistics and are intended to give you – and the class – a feel for the many possible ways to study language. The assignment consists of 3 parts: (1) Conduct primary research on language in a chosen area of study (the different areas – as well as ideas for projects – are available on WebCT). (2) Present the study and its results to the class in a brief, 5 minute presentation; (3) write an essay (4 pp.) that analyzes the results of your study and draws some initial conclusions about the nature of language study in this area of linguistics. More details on this assignment to follow.

**Exams.** There are two (2) exams in this class, each of which will have a take-home component. The in-class exams will be comprised of the questions chosen by you and your classmates. The take-home portion will involve a short essay.

**Final Project.** This will be a project of your own choosing that can deal with virtually any aspect of the English language and which allows you to draw on and showcase what you have learned in the course. We'll discuss this in more detail later in the semester.

#### IMPORTANT POLICIES, ETC:

**Late Assignments Policy.** There will be NO extensions on any workbook assignments or projects in this class. **Instead, for the workbook assignments** I will automatically drop the lowest 5 grades on your homework assignments (as explained above). 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 two projects and the take-home midterm,** 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 12:15), 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*.

**WebCT.** This course is a WebCT course, and all the handouts, study questions, as well as presentation materials and useful internet sites, will be available here. Occasionally, there will be required assignments using WebCT, but for the most part it will be used as a useful vehicle for sharing important or relevant information.

**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.

**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

UNIT 1: WHAT IS LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE CHANGE?
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Week 1

R 1/11 Introduction

Week 2

T 1/16 Millward, Ch. 1  
**Workbook:** 1.11, 1.13

R 1/18 Millward, Ch. 2: Phonology  
**Workbook:** 1.3, 2.4, 2.5

**Week 3**

T 1/23

Millward, Ch. 2: Phonology

**Workbook:** 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.12, 2.13

R 1/25

Quiz on phonology

The discovery of Indo-European and the comparative method

<b>UNIT 2: HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE</b>
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**Week 4**

T 1/30

Millward, Ch. 4: Language Families and Indo-European

**Workbook:** 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8 (first four lines only)

R 2/1

Crystal, pp. 1-14 ("Introduction")

*\* Projects in Linguistics #1: Psycholinguistics (language and the brain)***Week 5**

T 2/6

Crystal, pp. 15-100 (Old English – origins, dialects, diversity and variation)

Millward, Ch. 5, pp. 82-95

**Workbook:** 5.3, 5.4, 5.5

R 2/8

Old English, c'tued

*\* Projects in Linguistics #2: Second-Language Acquisition***Week 6**

T 2/13

Millward, Ch. 5 (to understand the major changes discussed on p. 138)

Crystal, pp. 101-104

**Workbook:** 5.14, 5.15 (A,C), 5.19, 5.20, 5.21, 5.22, 5.23

R 2/15

Middle English

Crystal, pp. 105-43

*\* Projects in Linguistics #3: Structure and Meaning***Week 7**

T 2/20

Millward, Ch. 6 (to understand the major changes listed on p. 222)

Crystal, pp. 144-248

**Workbook:** 6.4, 6.5, 6.13

R 2/22

Middle English, c'tued

**Workbook:** 6.12 (a few sentences), 6.14, 6.15*\* Projects in Linguistics #4: Style in Spoken and Written Texts***Week 8**

T 2/27

Early Modern English (EMnE): Great Vowel Shift; Printing and its Consequences

Crystal, pp. 249-79

**Workbook:** 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.10

R 3/1

EXAM #1



<b>UNIT 3: THE RISE OF DICTIONARIES AND STANDARD ENGLISH</b>
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**Week 9**

T 3/6            Early Modern English, c'tued  
Crystal, pp. 280-364  
**Workbook: 7.16, 7.18, 7.19**

R 3/8            Early Modern English  
**Workbook: 7.21, 7.23, 7.24**

\* \* 3/13-3/15    NO CLASS –SPRING BREAK

**Week 10**

T 3/20            Early Modern English  
Crystal, pp. 365-418  
**Workbook: 7.22, 7.25, 7.26**

R 3/22            Early Modern English...moves beyond England  
Crystal, pp. 419-447  
Pidgins and Creoles (Millward, pp. 403-405)  
*\* Projects in Linguistics #5: The History of English*

**Week 11**

T 3/27            Present Day English (PDE)  
Millward, pp. 302-341  
**Workbook: 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8**

R 3/29            American English  
Millward, pp. 344-63  
**Workbook: 9.3, 9.6**  
*\* Projects in Linguistics #6: Sociolinguistics*

**Week 12**

T 4/3            American Regional Dialects  
African American English (Millard 360-63)  
Southern English (read Crystal, pp. 449-52)  
*\* Projects in Linguistics #7: Accents and Dialects of English*

R 4/5            NO CLASS – Easter Break

**Week 13**

T 4/10            English Around the World  
Millward, 363-403  
Crystal, 484-513  
Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language"  
Ngugi wa Thiong'o: "The Language of African Literature"  
**Workbook: 9.4, 9.5**

R 4/12            Language in Literature, Film, Media and Society  
Crystal, 514-534

Salman Rushdie, "Chekov and Zulu"  
Tannen, *That's Not What I Meant!*  
**Workbook:** 9.7  
*\* Linguistics Project # 8: Language and Gender*

**Week 14**

T 4/17

Tannen, c'tued  
George Orwell, "The Politics of the English Language"  
"Appendix to 1984: Newspeak"

R 4/19

EXAM # 2

**Week 15**

T 4/26

FINAL PROJECTS: poster presentations

R 4/28

FINAL PROJECTS: poster presentations

**\*\*\* Final Project due May 1 by 3:00 p.m.**