NG 4660
History of the English Language

Time & Location: TR 8-9:15 205 Sanford
Instructor: Thomas McGowan

Course Overview: A study of national, regional, and social varieties of English with particular attention to phonological, morphological, and cultural development.

Course Description: This study of the history of the English language presents important backgrounds, ideas, and facts about how we and others speak and write and how members of English speech communities wrote and probably spoke in earlier times. It makes us look at language in new ways and at old texts in less remote ways. We’ll learn how English has changed over time and space (and is still changing). We’ll develop a new set of methods and models to look at language and work on our ability to write about it. We’ll form more informed and open attitudes about English and its regional, national, and social varieties. The state department of public instruction lists much of this knowledge and many of these skills as competences required for English teachers, and this knowledge also provides important backgrounds for the study of literature and language, especially in some graduate programs.

Thomas McGowan has organized the course into four main historical periods: Old English, Middle English, early Modern English, and Modern English. Linguists, literary scholars, and others often distinguish works, styles, language rules, and word forms using these terms; most dictionaries provide etymological entries showing word forms grouped by three of them. Recognizing the differences in these stages of the language and theorizing about their causes (and effects) are an important activity for educated citizens whose main system of communication is the English language. Barbara Fennell’s A History of English: A Sociolinguistic Approach will help us to learn basic facts, theories, and cultural and professional constructs used to analyze language historically; to appreciate the power of language, variation, and change; and to understand the role of English as a standard and world language. Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes’s Hoi Toide on the Outer Banks will apply some of the ideas and methods to one North Carolina dialect and encourage us to understand regional linguistic diversity, the topic of two presentations by Professor Wolfram as part of his campus visit.

Additional focuses of this course include using standard reference dictionaries in their book and electronic formats as research support and developing skills in computer and Internet analysis of language. This course also uses the distance learning capabilities of WebCT.

An ancillary text in our course will be Simon Winchester’s popular study of the relationship of James Murray and William Minor, The Professor and the Madman, which provides interesting background to the development of the Oxford English Dictionary, a basic reference resource in English language studies.

Objectives: By completing assignments and participating in classes and small group sessions, students will be able

• to describe the conventional and arbitrary nature of language forms and structures
• to recognize and describe central cultural influences on language change in the development of English
• to recognize basic grammatical and morphological structures in Old English, Middle English, and Modern English and their diachronic relationships
to recognize and describe the cultural implications of the development of “standard” English forms
• to interpret the relationships between spelling and pronunciation in historical stages of English
• to use linguistic symbols, terms, and methodologies to explain historical forms of English
• to demonstrate skills in writing and speaking about the stages and varieties of English
• to use the OED and other descriptive dictionaries to research historical information and apply the on-line version of the OED to such research
• to recognize and respect different regional and social varieties of English, including Vernacular Black English, and demonstrate their roles in social power and functional literacy
• to interpret texts providing historical linguistic descriptions and theories about English and its varieties

Texts
• webpages on the course’s WebCT site.
• electronic reserve texts and library readings.
• various handouts and Internet resources.
• videos from PBS series *The Story of English* and other programs.

Requirements and grading
• two section examinations (20% each)
• final examination with some comprehensive coverage (30%)
• writing exercises and on-line quizzes (30%)
  Letter grade evaluation of these activities conforms to the descriptors listed in the Undergraduate Bulletin 2005-2007, p. 46.

Instructor Information
Thomas McGowan
121 Sanford (first floor, back door), 262-2323.
Office hours: MW 8-11:45; TR 9:15-11; at other times by opportunity or appointment. Mr. McGowan is often in his office and is usually willing to talk even outside of official office hours. E-mail: mcgowanta@appstate.edu. Mr. McGowan checks his e-mail at the start and end of the workday. He tries to answer e-mail promptly. This service is an excellent way to ask questions and communicate with him.
Internet website: http://www1.appstate.edu/~mcgowant/4660.htm. This website includes some basic course information, but enrolled students should use our course’s WebCT website for full discussions of assignments, discussion forum participation, and study helps.
Myers-Briggs Type: ESFJ “Provider.”
Attendance Policy
Woody Allen has said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up”; Thomas McGowan adds, “The other twenty percent is following the directions.” Because this course studies difficult topics and much of its methodology builds on earlier concepts, you need to attend class faithfully. Often class becomes an opportunity to clarify and simplify (or at least specify) important concepts from the reading. The instructor picks up writing exercises at the start of class; late submissions receive penalty grades. Examinations cover material discussed in class. There are no “excused” cuts, just cuts taken, three of which are understood. Students cutting more than three classes enter a dangerous area of misunderstanding and possible punitive reactions. Mr. McGowan expects you to perform as responsible young humanists, and he is embarrassed by even having to discuss attendance problems generated by poor planning and commitment.

Plagiarism, Intellectual Dishonesty, & Collaboration
Passing off another person’s work as your own is unacceptable in college—and life, and in this course, such practices will receive grading penalties, usually an F or zero on the assignment, and appropriate applications of the Appalachian State University Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Code. Cheating on major writing assignments and examinations is a major violation of the trust among members of the academic community and will result in a course grade of no credit (F). Mr. McGowan will apply Appalachian’s review procedures to cases of intellectual dishonesty that he considers intentional and egregious. Don’t cheat or lie. (Kenneth Starr might catch you.)

You may work with others in doing writing exercises, but you must submit your own version of the assignment. Don’t let another person copy your work; do work with each other to make work more meaningful. If you borrow interpretive words from an outside source, document that use.

Course Organization
This listing gives major divisions of our course, exam dates, and other considerations; it doesn’t include specific class assignments. Developed reading and writing assignments are listed on the course’s WebCT website, which also includes pre-reading helps, notes, and topic self-tests. Assignment files are also included on the university’s computer S-drive and Belk Library electronic reserve.

23 August: Course introduction.
25 August-1 September: Linguistic backgrounds and Indo-European and Germanic.
6-22 September: Old English and Anglo-Saxon backgrounds.
22 September: Section I Examination.
27 September: Dictionary resources.
29 September-18 October: Middle English and its social backgrounds.
18 October: Section II Examination.
1-10 November: Early Modern English and its backgrounds.
15 November-6 December: Present Day English and World Englishes, dialects, and developments.
Wednesday, 14 December, Noon-2:30: Section III and Comprehensive Examination.