FROM OLD ENGLISH TO STANDARD ENGLISH

Other books by Dennis Freeborn

Varieties of English

A Course Book in English Grammar

FROM OLD ENGLISH TO STANDARD ENGLISH

A COURSE BOOK IN LANGUAGE VARIATION ACROSS TIME

Dennis Freeborn

M
MACMILLAN

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Preface

Language change

The English language, like all living languages, is in a continuous state of variation across time. The language of one generation of speakers will differ slightly from another, and at any one time there are 'advanced' and 'conservative' forms, whether they belong to regional, educational or class dialects. Change takes place at every level of language. New words are needed in the vocabulary to refer to new things or concepts, while other words are dropped when they no longer have any use in society. The meaning of words changes – *buxom* once meant *obedient*, *spill* meant *kill*, and *knight* meant *boy*. A word-for-word translation of some Old English will probably not read like grammatical contemporary English, because word order and grammatical structure have also changed. Pronunciation in particular is always being modified and varies widely from one regional or social group to another. Since the spelling of words in writing has been standardised, changes in pronunciation are not marked in the spelling, the orthography of the language.

Standard English

One variety of English today has a unique and special status – Standard English. Its prestige is such that, for many people, it is synonymous with the English language. This book sets out to show what the origins of present-day Standard English were in the past. It is concerned principally with the forms of the language itself, and makes reference to the historical, social and political background in the establishment of Standard English in outline only.

Levels of study

It is helpful to consider three levels of study which may be followed according to students' needs, or to the amount of time available for study. At the first, **observational** level, features of the language can be simply noted and listed as interesting or different; at the second, **descriptive** level, such features are identified more specifically, using appropriate descriptive terms from a model of language; at the third, **explanatory** level, they are placed in their relation to general processes of language change, and in their social, political and historical context.

The 'texts'

The core of the book is a series of 151 texts which exemplify the changes in the language from Old English to the establishment of Standard English. The texts have been selected for a number of reasons. The Old English texts are almost all from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and so provide something of the historical context of the language a thousand years ago. Some texts have aspects of language itself as their subject. As we have no authentic records of the spoken language before the invention of sound recording, letters and diaries of the past are included, because they are likely to provide some evidence of informal uses of English in the past. Some literary texts have been chosen, but the series does not constitute a history of English literature.

Activities

The activities are designed to encourage students to find out for themselves – to consider possible reasons for what they observe, and so to study data at first hand and to consider hypotheses, rather than to accept the answers to problems of interpretation that others have given. The process of analysing the texts demonstrates how our knowledge of earlier English has been arrived at. The surviving corpus of Old and Middle English texts is all the evidence we have about the language as it was then. There are no grammar books, descriptions of pronunciation, spelling books or dictionaries of English before the sixteenth century. The tasks in the activities are no more than suggestions, and teachers can omit, modify and add to them as they think useful.

Facsimiles

The facsimiles are an essential part of the book, not just decorative additions to the 'texts', for they are the primary sources of our knowledge of the language, and give students at least some idea of the development of spelling and writing conventions. Literary texts are generally printed with modern spelling and punctuation, and although editions of Old and Middle English retain the older spelling, they usually add present-day punctuation.

Commentaries

Analytic commentaries are provided for some of the texts in the book. Each commentary is a 'case study' based on the text itself, which provides some of the evidence for change in the language.

The *Text Commentary Book* and *Word Book*

Two supplementary books in typescript published by the author are available for teachers and advanced students. The *Text Commentary Book* contains detailed explanatory analyses of the linguistic features of many of the texts. The *Word Book* provides a complete word list, in alphabetical order, for each Old and Middle English text. The lists for the Old English texts give the base form of inflected words and a translation, so that you can refer to an Old English dictionary or grammar more easily. Those for the Middle English texts include the derivation of each word. The *Word Book* also contains selected lists of words in present-day English which are derived from Old English, Old French, Old Norse or Celtic.

Cassette tape

A cassette tape containing readings of some of the Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English texts is also available from the author. For details of the cassette tape and supplementary books write to: Dennis Freeborn, PO Box 82, Easingwold, York YO6 3YY.

Aims

The aims and layout of the book are therefore different from those of the established textbooks on the history of English, or Old and Middle English, which are listed in the bibliography. The empirical study of English which is exemplified in *Varieties of English* (Macmillan, 1986) is here applied to historical texts. The essential method is the same.

Dennis Freeborn
July 1991

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Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

Texts and facsimiles

The texts consist of extracts from the following sources:

Chapter 1

- 1 Peterborough chronicle for AD 443
- 2 Peterborough chronicle for AD 449
- 3 Peterborough chronicle for AD 455
- 4 Peterborough chronicle for AD 519
- 5 Peterborough chronicle for AD 611
- 6 Peterborough and Parker chronicle for AD 614
- 7 St Luke's Gospel 15: 11–13

Chapter 2

- 8 Peterborough chronicle for AD 628
- 9 Peterborough chronicle for AD 595
- 10 Peterborough and Parker chronicle for AD 601
- 11 Cædmon's hymn
- 12 Peterborough and Parker chronicle for AD 787
- 13 Peterborough chronicle for AD 793
- 14 Peterborough and Parker chronicle for AD 878
- 15 *The Phoenix*
- 16 The Battle of Brunanburh – Parker and Peterborough chronicle for AD 937
- 17 OE inscription, St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, N Yorks
- 18 Parker chronicle for 1066
- 19 Peterborough chronicle for 1066

Chapter 3

- 20 Short metrical chronicle (14th century)
- 21 Robert of Gloucester's chronicle (c.1300)
- 22 Peterborough chronicle for 1140
- 23 Peterborough chronicle for 1137
- 24 *Ormulum* (i) (late 12th century)
- 25 *Ormulum* (ii)
- 26 *The Fox and the Wolf* (early 13th century)
- 27 *Cursor Mundi* (c.1300)
- 28 The Eagle, from the *Bestiary* (13th century)

Chapter 4

- 29 John of Trevisa on the English language (i) (1385)
- 30 John of Trevisa on the English language (ii)
- 31 Michael of Northgate, *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (i) (1340)
- 32 Michael of Northgate, *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (ii)

Chapter 5

- 33 John Barbour, *Bruce* (i) (c.1375)
- 34 John Barbour, *Bruce* (ii)
- 35 York proclamation (1415)
- 36 York potters' 'Pentecost Play' (c.1470)
- 37 *The Lay Folks' Catechism* (1357)
- 38 John Wyclif's version of *The Lay Folks' Catechism* (c.1360)
- 39 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Reeve's Tale* (late 14th century)

Chapter 6

- 40 *Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Knyzt* (i) (late 14th century)
- 41 *Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Knyzt* (ii)
- 42 William Langland, *Piers Plowman* (i) (c.1370)
- 43 William Langland, *Piers Plowman* (ii)
- 44 William Langland, *Piers Plowman* (iii)
- 45 William Langland, *Piers Plowman* (iv)
- 46 Edited version of Text 45

Chapter 7

- 47 *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (i)
- 48 *The Boke of Mawndevice* (verse)
- 49 *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (ii)
- 50 Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Tale of Melibeus'
- 51 Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Parson's Tale'
- 52 Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Friar's Tale' (Harley MS)
- Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Friar's Tale' (Hengwrt MS)
- 53 Thomas Usk's appeal (i) (1384)
- 54 Thomas Usk's appeal (ii)

Chapter 8

- 55 *The Boke of Margery Kempe* (i) (c.1420)
- 56 *The Boke of Margery Kempe* (ii)
- 57 *The Boke of Margery Kempe* (iii)
- 58 *The Boke of Margery Kempe* (iv)
- 59 Agnes Paston's letter to William Paston (1440)
- 60 Margery Brews' letter to John Paston (1477)
- 61 John of Trevisa (1385)
- 62 William Caxton's printing of John of Trevisa (1482)
- 63 William Caxton on the diversity of English (1490)
- 64 William Caxton's advertisement (1478)
- 65 Sir Thomas Malory, *The Tale of King Arthur* (c.1460–70)
- 66 George Cely's letter to Richard Cely (1478)
- 67 Richard Cely's letter to his family (1479)
- 68 Memoranda by George Cely (1483)

Chapter 9

- 69 George Bassett's letter to Lord and Lady Lisle (1539)
- 70 Sir William Kingston's letter to Lord Lisle (1533)
- 71 Lord Lisle, draft of a letter (1536)
- 72 Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Governour* (i) (1531)
- 73 Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Governour* (ii)
- 74 Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Governour* (iii)
- 75 George Puttenham on inkhorn terms (1589)
- 76 Richard Verstegan on the borrowing of words (1605)
- 77 John Hart, *An Orthographie* (i) (1569), on spelling
- 78 John Hart, *An Orthographie* (ii), Hart's new alphabet
- 79 John Hart, *An Orthographie* (iii), on punctuation
- 80 John Hart, *An Orthographie* (iv), on the best English
- 81 George Puttenham on the best English
- 82 William Shakespeare, *The Life of Henry the Fifth*
- 83 Richard Verstegan on regional dialects (1605)
- 84 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedie of King Lear*

Chapter 10

- 85 Word stress, from Shakespeare's plays
- 86 Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (1642)
- 87 Sir Thomas Browne, *Vulgar Errors* (i), on the whale
- 88 Sir Thomas Browne, *Vulgar Errors* (ii), on the badger
- 89 *The Journal of George Fox*, on the name Quaker
- 90 George Fox, *A Battle-Door for Teachers*, on thou and you
- 91 *The Journal of George Fox*, on thee and thou (i)
- 92 *The Journal of George Fox*, on thee and thou (ii)
- 93 *The Journal of George Fox*, the steeplehouse
- 94 *The Journal of George Fox*, preaching in Yorkshire
- 95 John Milton, *Areopagitica* (i)
- 96 John Milton, *Areopagitica* (ii)
- 97 Dorothy Osborne's letter to William Temple (1653)
- 98 Dorothy Osborne's letter to William Temple
- 99 Dorothy Osborne's letter to William Temple
- 100 Martha Temple, *Life of Sir William Temple*
- 101 Dorothy Temple to her father (c.1680)
- 102 John Evelyn's diary (1657)
- 103 *The Publick Intelligencer* (1657)
- 104 John Evelyn's diary (1658), a whale in the Thames
- 105 Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society*
- 106 John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*
- 107 The language of *The Pilgrim's Progress*
- 108 John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*
- 109 John Aubrey, *Life of Richard Corbet*
- 110 Christopher Cooper, *The English Teacher* (i) (1687)
- 111 Christopher Cooper, *The English Teacher* (ii)
- 112 Christopher Cooper, *The English Teacher* (iii)
- 113 Christopher Cooper, *The English Teacher* (iv)
- 114 Christopher Cooper on 'barbarous dialects'
- 115 Christopher Cooper on words with the same pronunciation
- 116 John Dryden's letter to the Earl of Rochester (1683)
- 117 John Dryden on Chaucer's verse (i)
- 118 John Dryden on Chaucer's verse (ii)
- 119 John Dryden on Chaucer's verse (iii)
- 120 John Dryden's version of part of Chaucer's prologue
- 121 Modern edition of Text 120

- 122 John Dryden, couplets from *Aeneis*
- 123 William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- 124 George Meriton, *A Yorkshire Dialogue* (1683)

Chapter 11

- 125 Jonathan Swift, *The Tatler* (1710)
- 126 James Beattie, *Theory of Language* (1774)
- 127 Jonathan Swift, a proposal (1712)
- 128 Joseph Priestley, *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1769)
- 129 Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (i) (1762)
- 130 Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (ii)
- 131 Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (iii)
- 132 Thomas Hearne, *Remarks and Collections* (1715)
- 133 Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* (1750)
- 134 Various writers on the language of the common people
- 135a Petition to Parliament (1793)
- 135b Petition to Parliament (1810)
- 135c Petition to Parliament (1817)
- 136 Protest letter against enclosures (1799)
- 137 William Cobbett, *The Political Register* (1817)
- 138 William Cobbett, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine* (1796)
- 139 William Cobbett, *A Grammar of the English Language* (1817)

Chapter 12

- 140 Dean Alford on the Queen's English (1864)
- 141 Avoiding the split infinitive (1989)
- 142 Transcription of contemporary spoken English conversation
- 143 The Book of Genesis 3:1

Texts 144–151 for contrastive study: 'Your accent gives you away!', St Matthew's Gospel 26: 69–75

Symbols

OE	Old English	S	subject (in clause structure)
ME	Middle English	P	predicator
EMnE	Early Modern English	C	complement
MnE	Modern English	O	object
OF	Old French	A	adverbial
ON	Old Norse		
WW	Word-for-word translation	< >	e.g., <e>, refers to written letters of the alphabet
m	masculine (gender)	//	e.g., /e:/, refers to the spoken sound, using the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)
f	feminine		
n	neuter		
nom	nominative (case)		
acc	accusative		
gen	genitive		
dat	dative		
sg	singular (number)		
pl	plural		
n	noun		
vb	verb		
adj	adjective		
cj	conjunction		
neg	negative		
NP	noun phrase		
VP	verb phrase		
PrepP	prepositional phrase		

The IPA symbols can be found in:

Freeborn, D., French, P. and Langford, D.
Varieties of English
(Macmillan, 1986) Chapter 4, pp. 75–6.

Gimson, A.C.
An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English, 3rd edn
(Edward Arnold, 1980) pp. 328–9.