

E326 Development of the English Language

Dr Wm P Marvin, 356 Eddy Hall, wmarvin@colostate.edu
TR 12:30pm to 1:45pm, Natural Resources 108, Spring Semester 2015
Office Hours TR 2 & by appt.

§1 Now the dominant language of global trade, education, and entertainment, “English” has a remote origin in the tongue of sea-raiders and migrant tribes who conquered part of Britain pursuant to its evacuation by the Roman army in the 6th century C.E. These people—barbarians in the eyes of the Romans and Celts who were displaced by invasion—spoke with a voice from the same matrix that gave speech to the German, the Visi-Goth and Viking. This language was immemorially cognate with Latin and Greek, even Sanskrit, and other languages already long vanished before English established itself as dialectically distinct.

The Church made the English literate in Latin, but invasion and collapse almost wiped out literacy again. In the reconstruction, English soon stood forth as the first literary vernacular in Europe to be normed and cultivated on the scale of Latin literacy. Then another invasion—this time resulting in a regime change and purge—crowned French above English as the speech of power. So English lapsed from official discourse after the Norman Conquest while it nonetheless thrived and adapted under pressure of accommodating French, till English literacy was re-cultivated during the long coalescence of the British nation state. The shimmering grandiloquence attained in Elizabethan English remains still today of immense export value for placing English among arts-and-culture titans of far older civilizations—enabling a global peer identity that can’t

be bought with money. But nation building meant war with Europe, from which Great Britain’s conquest of the oceanic seaways gave rise to a world-wide colonial empire of commerce and law. Therefore the basis for English to act as a global medium of exchange was well founded before it became magnified by the prestige and geopolitical power of Britain’s erstwhile colonies and provinces, the United States foremost among them.

So much for why English is a big deal.

How we shall go about studying the development of the English language inside this seemingly triumphalist framework is another question altogether. Upon inspection we shall find that no such “triumph” of authority spares a language from change. Nor shall we find that English consists, nor has ever consisted, of “one” language exactly, because non-standard forms of speech and grammar have thrived alongside standard forms, and still do, with equal intelligibility. In any event, upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to (1) rehearse the main threads of English-language history in its linguistic, political, and cultural dimensions beginning with the prehistory of its Indo-European roots; (2) work with linguistic concepts to address trends and questions in historical phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics; (3) and use historical pronunciation to read Shakespeare, Middle English, and Anglo-Saxon aloud.

§2 TEXTS : The following texts are required for this course. They have been ordered for the course in the CSU Bookstore.

1585677191	Crystal, David	<i>The Stories of English</i>	Overlook
0618082506	Watkins, Calvert	<i>American Heritage Dict. of Indo-European Roots</i>	Houghton Mifflin
9781592404940	McWhorter, John	<i>Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue</i>	Gotham

§3 **Course Grade** : Your final course grade will be determined from a combination of 2 exams and 2 essays (25% each). Grading shall be plus-minus.

NOTE : This is a resident-instruction course whose meetings you must attend in order to meet the learning goals. Excessive absences not only impede your comprehension of what we are doing; they annoy your peers and abuse the trust that must prevail for a good learning relationship. More than 5 absences shall give cause to override the above-cited percentages and to put your overall course grade entirely at the mercy of my professional discretion of your performance in the course.

§4 **Expectations vis à vis writing** : You are expected to know the techniques of thesis argumentation; to understand the revision process and to practice it. You are expected to proofread your work before submitting it for evaluation. You will need to know how independently to search for books and articles, and read them and organize

your notes so as to assemble these for an annotated bibliography.

§5 **Course Policies** : The work you submit for this course must include the CSU Honor Pledge, attended by your signature. The wording for this pledge is “I have not given, received, or used any unauthorized assistance.” What it means is that your work completely adheres to CSU standards of academic integrity, and that all outside intellectual property in your writing has been credited with citation, and authorized by the assignment. Penalties for late work will be determined at my discretion on a case-by-case basis. Failure to complete all assignments shall warrant an F for the course. Intentional plagiarism shall warrant an F for the course. As for failing to attend class, see §3, NOTE.

If you should have an accommodation issue or think there is something I should know about regarding yourself, please let me know soon in the beginning of the term. If you anticipate multiple absences, please notify me in advance.