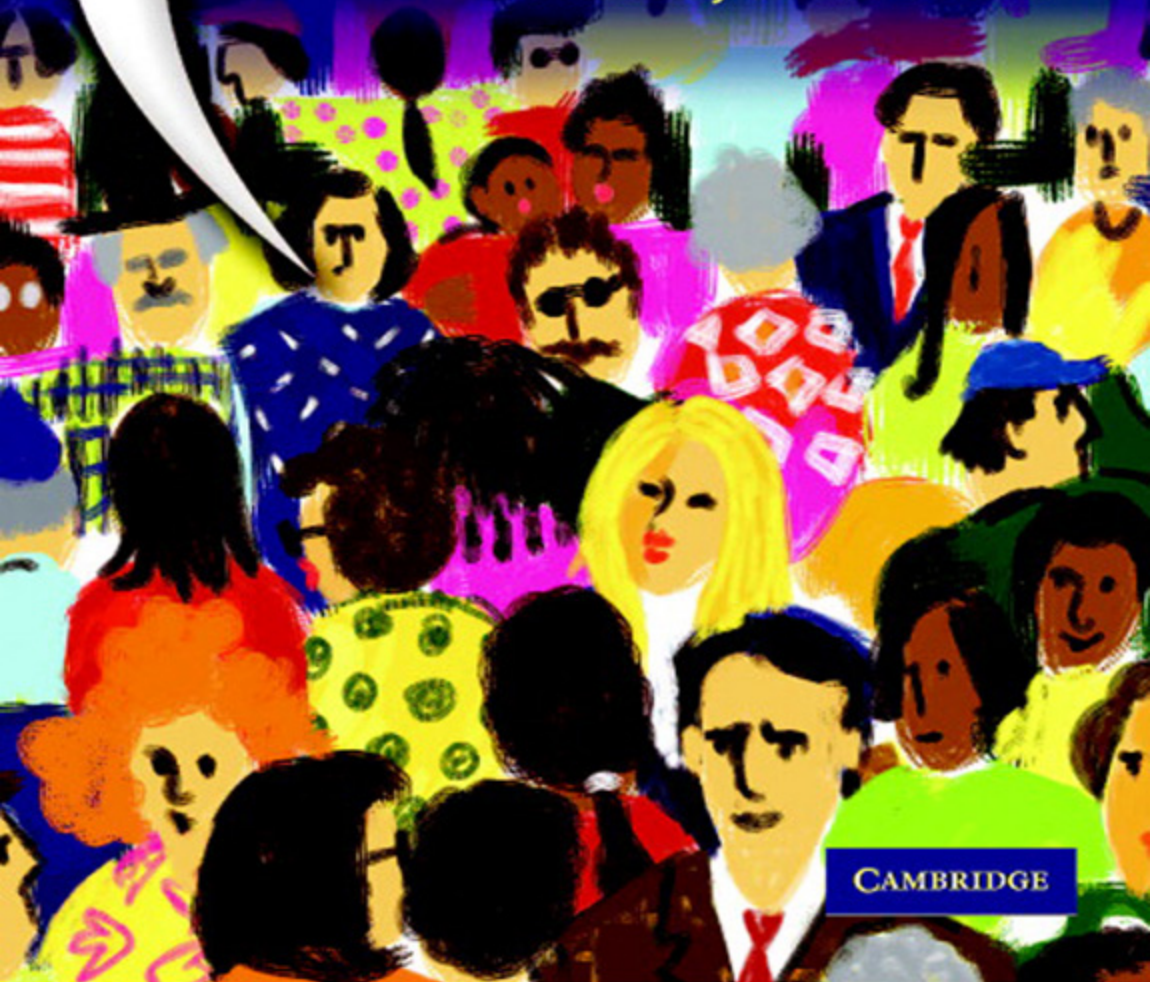


Language in the British Isles

Edited by **David Britain**



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Language in the British Isles

The British Isles are home to a vast range of different spoken and signed languages and dialects. Language continues to evolve rapidly, in its diversity, in the number and the backgrounds of its speakers and in the repercussions it has had for political and educational affairs. This book provides a comprehensive survey of the dominant languages and dialects used in the British Isles. Topics covered include the history of English, the relationship between Standard and Non-Standard Englishes, the major non-standard varieties spoken on the islands, the history of multilingualism, and the educational and planning implications of linguistic diversity in the British Isles. Among the many dialects and languages surveyed by the volume are British Black English, Celtic languages, Chinese, Indian, European migrant languages, British Sign Language, and Anglo-Romani. Clear and accessible in its approach, it will be welcomed by students in sociolinguistics, English language and dialectology, as well as anyone interested more generally in language within British society.

David Britain is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Essex. His recent publications include the books *Social Dialectology: In Honour of Peter Trudgill* (2003, edited with Jenny Cheshire) and *Linguistics: An Introduction* (1999, with Andrew Radford, Martin Atkinson, Harald Clahsen and Andrew Spencer, published by Cambridge University Press).

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Map of the British Isles



Introduction

David Britain

Over twenty years have passed since Peter Trudgill's first edition of *Language in the British Isles* (Trudgill 1984a). A great deal has happened in those years, both to the British Isles in ways which have had fundamental linguistic consequences, and in terms of the research which has been conducted on issues concerning the way people on these islands use language. This volume attempts to provide a snapshot both of the languages and dialects spoken and signed here, and of some of the implications for education of that linguistic diversity.

At the beginning of the century, almost 60 million people lived in the UK¹ and almost 4 million in the Irish Republic.² In the UK, around 4.6 million people claimed an ethnicity other than White³ (and the White category included a large number of people claiming White Irish ethnicity and 1.3 million people who claimed an 'Other-White' ethnicity, of which only 20% were born in the UK (Gardener & Connolly 2005:7)), or roughly 7.9% of the total, representing an increase of 53% since the previous census in 1991.⁴ Since the last British census in 2001, the non-White population has continued to increase. There has been a net inflow of population of at least 100,000 per annum in every year since 1998, and in 2004 the net inflow was 223,000.⁵ The Irish Republic didn't ask questions about ethnicity in its 2002 census,⁶ but 5.8% of the population had a nationality which was not Irish. These islands are, therefore, increasingly multiethnic. This volume consequently includes chapters which survey the histories and current sociolinguistic status of some of the larger ethnic minority languages of the islands: the Indic languages, Chinese, the

¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=6>. This, and all other websites listed in this chapter, were last accessed on 11th April 2006.

² http://www.cso.ie/census/prelim_press_release.htm

³ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=455>

⁴ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=273>

⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1311>

⁶ Though its 2006 census did.

Englishes and creoles of the British Black community and the languages of European immigrants. Perhaps surprisingly, we know especially little about this latter European language group. Many Europeans have the automatic right to travel, live and work in the UK and Ireland because of their home countries' EU membership, but many are classed as 'White' in the census and so headline figures often misleadingly underestimate the size of the non-White British, non-anglophone community. A case in point here is the Portuguese community of the largely rural Norfolk district of Breckland, which most estimates put at around 15,000–20,000 strong (roughly 12–16% of the total population in a district of 124,000). The 2001 census data for the district, however, appear unaware of the Portuguese community⁷ there because most of its members claim 'White' ethnicity.

Frustratingly for linguists, and surely for policy makers too, the British and Irish censuses do not collect information about language use (other than use of the indigenous Celtic languages in Wales, Scotland and Ireland), so our understanding of the numbers of speakers of spoken and signed languages other than English and the Celtic languages is actually extremely limited and often based on relatively crude calculations based on the size of the ethnic minority population.⁸ Furthermore, and unlike in the USA and New Zealand in particular, we know very little indeed about the varieties of English spoken by the ethnic minority population (apart from that spoken by the British Black community), though a few studies are beginning to appear which address this issue (Fox 2007, A. Khan 2007, Khattab 2002a, 2002b).

The size and linguistic practices of one of Britain's longer resident ethnic groups is perhaps even less well understood. Unlike in Ireland,⁹ the British census and the British authorities in general make little serious attempt to put an accurate figure to the traveller/Gypsy community,¹⁰ and it is recognised as being one of the most deprived ethnic groups in the UK on a wide range of measures, such as health indicators and educational achievement, largely because of its invisibility and isolation. Yet in a number of parts of Britain it is claimed to be the largest ethnic minority

⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/33UB-A.asp>

⁸ On 8 March 2006, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the UK produced a news release saying that a 'strong case' had been made for a language question in the 2011 census to enable equality legislation to be properly monitored and for service provision to ethnic minority groups to be improved – <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/cenew0306.pdf>

⁹ The Irish Census of 2002 finds 23,000 Irish Travellers, and provides detailed coverage of their employment, health and housing status – see http://www.cso.ie/census/documents/vol8_entire.pdf

¹⁰ The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister commissions twice-yearly 'Caravan counts' which, of course, ignore those of Gypsy/traveller ethnicity who are settled.

group, for example, in Cambridgeshire.¹¹ This lack of information is all the more surprising given that this community has felt the brunt of a swathe of recent government legislation which directly impacts it, such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003), the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994). Consequently we know very little indeed about their linguistic behaviour, including, for example, whether or not there exists a distinctive traveller/Gypsy variety of English (see Britain 2003). Included in this volume is a chapter on their ancestral language, Angloromani.

Angloromani as a living language is in a somewhat precarious position. Some languages of the British Isles which did fall into obsolescence are now undergoing attempted revivals (e.g. Cornish – see Sayers 2005). French in the Channel Islands clings on to life. The 2001 census for Jersey, for example, makes the seriousness of the decline of Jèrriais quite clear: ‘Jersey French was spoken by a total of 2,874 people (3.2% of the population). Of this total, two-thirds were aged 60 and over. The number of Jersey French speakers in 2001 was half the number recorded in 1989’ (Etat Civil Committee 2002:23). Of this 2,874, just 113 claimed it as their first language.

In 2003, British Sign Language was recognised by the British government, alongside English and the Celtic languages Welsh, Gaelic and Irish. Woll and Sutton-Spence in this volume put the number of signers at between 30,000 and 60,000. It will be interesting to see what effect recognition has on the status and visibility of signed languages, and how resources and infrastructure will be targeted for a speech community that is not concentrated in clustered geographical locales.

The censuses of 2001 in the UK provided mixed news for the surviving Celtic languages. Overall figures for Welsh show a small increase in the number of speakers, but this hides quite considerable fluctuations. H. Jones (2005:7), comparing the 1991 and 2001 censuses, shows a marked increase by 2001 in the numbers of school-aged children claiming to be able to speak Welsh, but also a decline in the numbers of retired people who speak the language. Worryingly, in comparing the number of 15-year-olds who claimed to be able to speak Welsh in 1991, with the number of 25-year-olds a decade later, who also claimed to speak the language, he found that the number had dropped by a third (2005:5). He proposes a number of reasons for this decline, including inaccurate completion of questionnaires by parents on behalf of the 15-year-olds, and loss of confidence in the language. These comparisons are both useful and important, because they

¹¹ <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/community/travellers/>

show the extent to which educational provision in Welsh is triggering (or not) long-term acquisition and maintenance of the language. The number of people in Scotland claiming to speak Gaelic was down by 11% in 2001 and the only areas showing an increase in speakers were those areas outside the traditional heartlands (Registrar General for Scotland 2005). The Northern Irish Census reports 75,000 people who can read, write and speak Irish, and a further 92,000 with a more limited competence in the language.¹² In the Irish Republic, approximately 40% of the population claimed to be able to speak Irish, but as Ó Riagáin warns in this volume, most of this number have but a moderate command of the language and their 'ability did not typically express itself in active use of Irish in conversation, but in passive, non-reciprocal activities'.

The British Isles also constitute a mobile population. One in every nine people had moved in the year before the 2001 census in the UK,¹³ and the gradual population shift out of the large conurbations towards the suburbs and the countryside continues. Of all the English counties in the 2001 census, those which were growing the most were Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Wiltshire, all with population increases of over 7% since 1991,¹⁴ with Merseyside, Tyne and Wear, Cleveland and the West Midlands all shrinking in population terms over the same period. This mobility has linguistic repercussions (see, for example, Trudgill 1986) and a number of the chapters on varieties of English in this volume point to mobility-induced linguistic changes such as dialect levelling. The book contains chapters on the Englishes of each of the main states and islands/island groupings of the British Isles, as well as one for standard varieties of English, and these contributions highlight ongoing changes, the social embedding of non-standard varieties, and the consequences, for example, of language contact on the grammars and phonologies of our Englishes.

The volume concludes with three chapters on applied sociolinguistic concerns. Given the rapid demographic change that was mentioned earlier, the final section begins with a chapter on language policy and planning, which tracks how policy makers have addressed the language issues that have arisen from large-scale immigration, commitments under Human Rights and other EU legislation and the call for increased educational provision to meet the needs of a diverse and multicultural population. The final two chapters address educational issues – of English speakers who do not speak Standard English as their first variety – a solid majority of the

¹² <http://www.nicensus2001.gov.uk/nica/common/home.jsp>

¹³ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1310>

¹⁴ <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=10605>

Anglophones in the British Isles – and of those residents of these islands whose first language is not English.

Language in the British Isles has evolved rapidly since 1984, and continues to do so, in its diversity, in the number and the backgrounds of its speakers and in the repercussions it has had for political and educational affairs. This volume, I hope, provides a brief glimpse at some of the notable landmarks in this ongoing journey.

Part I

English

1 The history of English

James Milroy

Introduction

Typological change

During the past nine centuries, English has undergone more dramatic changes than any other major European language in the same period. Old English was moderately highly inflected for case, number, gender, tense, mood and other grammatical categories. Present English, however, has a vastly simplified inflectional morphology with total loss of inflections in, for example, adjectives and the definite article, and very considerable inflectional losses in other word classes. There have also been many phonological changes, and the lexicon has been altered from mainly Germanic to a mixed Germanic–Romance type. In syntax, a mixed SVO–SOV word order has become mainly SVO, and there have been great changes in the tense, mood and aspect systems of the verb. These changes, taken together, amount to a typological change from mainly synthetic to mainly analytic, and to considerable modification of the Germanic character of English. As a result, OE (Anglo-Saxon) is not immediately accessible to the modern native reader and can be acquired only through intensive study – as though it were a foreign language.

Origins and geographical spread

English is descended from the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Within this it is assigned to the West Germanic group, and its nearest relative is Frisian (still spoken by a few thousand people on the coasts and islands of northern Germany and the Netherlands), with which OE shared some common developments (for example, raising of Germanic (Gmc) /a/ to /æ/: ‘Anglo-Frisian brightening’). It is also closely related to Dutch and Low German, and slightly less closely to High (standard) German.

The beginnings of English as a distinct language are conventionally placed at AD 449, at which date Angles, Saxons and Jutes from the

north-west European continent are reputed to have begun their settlement in Britain. They brought with them a series of related West Germanic dialects, which at this time could hardly have differed significantly from those that remained on the Continent. Thus, this conventional date depends on geography and politics, rather than on internal structural distinctiveness of Anglo-Saxon as a separate language. Those Germanic dialects that were spoken on British soil are retrospectively known as Old English (also as Anglo-Saxon). The first appearance of the name 'English' (*englisc*) for the language is in the late ninth century in King Alfred's writings.

By the seventh century, Anglo-Saxon dialects had been established in the several kingdoms in east and central Britain as far north as Edinburgh, while dialects of Celtic (Cymric) were still in use in the west from Cornwall to Cumbria and Strathclyde. Since then, English has continued to displace the Celtic languages, to the extent that some have disappeared, and there are now probably no monoglot speakers of those that remain.

Chronology

Scholars have traditionally distinguished three periods in the history of English. The OE period lasts from the first Anglo-Saxon settlements in Britain until just after the Norman Conquest, i.e. 1100–1150. The transition from OE to Middle English (ME) appears in the texts to be abrupt, even in the earliest extensive ME text (the final Peterborough continuation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, c.1154), although some areas retained more OE features than others. The break between ME and Modern English (ModE) is less clear. The conventional date for the transition (c.1500) is dictated, not by any substantial shift in linguistic form, but by cultural factors such as the introduction of printing in the late fifteenth century.

There is difficulty in assigning precise dates to specific changes. This is because most changes in spoken language occur first in specific speech communities, and not in the entire 'language' as represented by the written form. They may then diffuse more or less widely and may ultimately become changes in 'English' and recorded in writing. Traditionally, historians of English have tended to assign a late date to any attested change – the date at which it is completed in the whole language or well-defined dialect area. Work in sociolinguistics in recent years (see Milroy 1992) suggests that such a date is often the endpoint of the diffusion of a change that may have been completed considerably earlier in some specific speech community or locality. Therefore, many changes detected in written English at some particular date could well have originated much earlier. We shall bear this difficulty in mind.

Old English as a Germanic language

Phonology

OE, like other Germanic languages, usually has its main stress on the root syllable of words. This results from a very early change known as Germanic accent shift, and it has some consequences for the general phonology. A series of Indo-European (IE) vowel-shift rules, known collectively as *ablaut*, are preserved more systematically in Gmc than in other IE languages, particularly in the ‘strong verb’ system. Thus OE:

Infinitive	Pret. sing.	Pret. pl.	Past part.
<i>drīfan</i>	<i>drāf</i>	<i>drifon</i>	<i>ȝedrifēn</i> ‘drive’
<i>singan</i>	<i>sang</i>	<i>sungon</i>	<i>ȝesungen</i> ‘sing’

The vowel variations are ascribed to the effects of variable pitch accent and stress accent in IE. In IE the preterite plural/past participle forms had stress on the suffix with a ‘zero’ vowel in the root syllable; in Germanic the stress was shifted to the root syllable, and a short vowel then appeared in that syllable. Ablaut variation is well represented in the strong verb. It also affected other parts of the lexicon, as in present-day English (PresEng) *ride* (v.), *road* (n.).

In the consonant system, OE shares with other Gmc languages the reflexes of the ‘First Consonant Shift’, which stipulates that certain series of Gmc obstruents correspond to related series in IE. For example, the IE voiceless stop series: /p, t, k, kw/ (as in Latin *piscis, tres, cornu, quando*) correspond to Gmc /f, þ, x, xw/ (as in PresEng *fish, three, horn, when*). When one of these fricatives, or /s/, had occurred in IE in syllables that did not bear the main stress and in voiced surroundings, they were additionally subject to voicing in Germanic, by the operation of ‘Verner’s Law’. OE preserves many of the reflexes of this, for example in the accent-shifted preterite plural/past participle of strong verbs such as *weorþan* ‘become’ (pret. sing. *wearþ*, pret. pl. *wurdon*: the voiced fricative in the latter is presumed to have developed to /d/). Verner’s Law alternations have been almost completely levelled out in PresEng, but with occasional residues such as *was/were; seethe/sodden* (< OE *sēoþan* ‘boil’).

Of the various vowel changes that took effect within the OE period, the most important is *i-umlaut* or ‘front mutation’. This operated when, in Gmc, [i] or [j] followed in the succeeding syllable: under these conditions a low or back vowel in the root syllable was raised and/or fronted. The process can be thought of as vowel harmony or anticipatory assimilation in height and/or frontness. It was pre-literary in date and had, amongst other things, the effect of creating new vowel alternations within noun and

verb paradigms: thus, OE *mūs* ‘mouse’, *mȳs* ‘mice’; *fōt* ‘foot’, *fēt* ‘feet’. All other extant Gmc languages except Gothic have i-umlaut, but they appear to have implemented it independently.

OE is also affected by common West Gmc changes, for example, consonant gemination before original [j] (cf. OE *sittan* < **sitjan*, but ON *sitja* ‘sit’), and rhotacism, whereby [z] > [r]: thus, OE *wāron* < Gmc **wāzun* ‘were’.

Various specifically OE changes, such as breaking and back mutation, have few consequences at the present day; however, there was a general tendency towards palatalisation of [k, sk, g] (under various conditions) which gives the following contrasts: PresEng *choose, cheese, edge, fish* (OE *cēosan, ciēse, ecg, fisc*); cf. Gothic *kiusan*, German *Käse, Ecke*, Danish *fisk*.

Morphology

OE was rather highly inflected with, for example, three genders, four cases (with residues of a fifth – instrumental), inflected determiners and adjectives and many different conjugations of verbs and declensions of nouns.

The Germanic features not shared with other IE languages affect chiefly the adjectives and verbs. OE distinguishes between the ‘strong’ (definite) and ‘weak’ (indefinite) declensions of adjectives, the weak declension being used when some definite element (e.g. the definite article or demonstrative) precedes the adjective, and the strong declension otherwise. The distinction was lost at varying dates in ME dialects.

Verbs are divided into two inflectional types, also known traditionally as ‘strong’ and ‘weak’. Strong verbs form their preterite and past participle by undergoing change of the root vowel (by ablaut), whereas weak verbs add a suffix containing a dental (or alveolar) consonant. Whereas the strong verb vowel alternations are descended from IE, the dental preterite weak verbs are peculiar to Gmc. They are of less ancient origin and can often be shown to be derivatives of strong verbs or of other parts of speech. The relation between the following pair, for instance, is causative, and the weak verb is derived in Proto-Gmc from the preterite of the strong:

	Infinitive	Pret. sing.	Pret. pl.	Past part.	
Strong:	<i>liczan</i>	<i>læz</i>	<i>lāzon</i>	<i>zelezen</i>	‘lie’
Weak:	<i>leczan</i>	<i>lēde</i>	<i>lēdon</i>	<i>zeled</i>	‘lay’ (i.e. ‘cause to lie’)

The strong and weak verbs remain in PresEng, with some tendency for strong verbs to transfer to the weak system, but with some transfers in the opposite direction. Thus:

	OE	PresEng
<i>help</i>	strong	weak
<i>weep</i>	strong	weak
<i>wear</i>	weak	strong

Some weak verbs like *hide/hid*, *sell/sold* owe their ‘strong’ appearance to various conditioned sound changes in pre-OE, OE, ME and Early Modern English (EModE), and not to IE ablaut.

Syntax

Some of the syntactic differences between OE and PresEng reflect the typological difference between a highly inflected and weakly inflected language. Thus, OE had many more surface rules of agreement, concord and government than PresEng has.

OE *word order* was also noticeably different from PresEng (see further Traugott 1972). Although variable, it generally conformed to rules similar to those of modern German. Single main clauses normally had SVO order. Embedded or subordinate clauses had SOV order. VS order occurred in interrogatives and in declaratives introduced by adverbials or object noun phrases. Thus, in the following sentence the italicised noun clause has SOV order:

- (1) Ōththere sǣde his hlāforde . . . *þæt hē ealra Norðmanna norðmest būde*
 ‘Othere said to his lord . . . *that he of all Northmen northmost lived*’

SOV order is also generally found in OE relative clauses and in subordinate clauses of time, place, result, condition, etc. As the subordinate clause is the object in (1), the sentence as a whole has SVO order. SOV order, however, is also found in a second or subsequent co-ordinate clause, as in:

- (2) Hē fōr on Bretanie . . . *and wið þā Brettas gefeaht*
 ‘He went to Britain . . . *and against the Britons fought*’

The VS order in negative declaratives is demonstrated in:

- (3) Ne con ic nōht singan
 ‘I cannot sing’ (lit. ‘Not can I not at all sing’)

While the subordinate temporal clause in the following example is SOV, the italicised main clause demonstrates the Gmc ‘verb-second rule’, which is still usual in Gmc languages (except for English).

- (4) Ðā ic ðā ðis eall gemunde, *ðā gemunde ic . . .*
 ‘When I then this all remembered, *then remembered I . . .*’

The inverted VS order after adverbials is usual in OE, but the order becomes more variable in ME. In EModE it remains mainly in more

formal literary styles, especially poetry. In spoken PresEng, the main residues of VS order in statements are after certain negative or quasi-negative adverbs, as in:

- (5) Never have I seen such a thing
Scarcely had he arrived . . .

Lexicon

It is clear from the above examples that the grammar of OE was that of an older Gmc language. The OE lexicon was also predominantly Gmc, although some everyday words had been borrowed into West Gmc (before the Anglo-Saxon migration to Britain) from Latin (or from Greek through Latin) and are therefore common to West Gmc languages. These include OE *cīse* 'cheese', *strāt* 'street', *cyrice* 'church', *biscop* 'bishop' and *cealc* 'chalk'. Borrowing from Latin and Greek in the OE period is often ecclesiastical in type and includes *candel* 'candle', *mynster* 'monastery' and *reogol* 'rule'.

There are few borrowings from the indigenous Celtic: examples are *brat* 'apron' and *brocc* 'badger'. Scandinavian influence on the lexicon was very heavy in many areas in late OE, but does not become evident in surviving texts until after the breakdown of the West Saxon scribal and literary tradition; i.e. after the Norman Conquest.

The Germanic character of the OE lexicon is again clear in its methods of word formation. Abstract, technical and intellectual terms were derived by compounding and affixation from the basic word stock. Examples are: *þrīnes* 'trinity' (lit. 'three-ness'), *rīmcraft* 'arithmetic' (lit. 'rime-craft': skill in numbers), *þrōwung(e)* 'suffering', 'passion' and *ārfastnesse* 'piety' (lit. 'fastness', i.e. firmness, in reverence). The later English preference for borrowing abstract terms from French, Latin and Greek (and Arabic) came about not because the OE language was incapable of expressing the ideas in its own terms, but because of the sociopolitical and linguistic consequences of the Norman Conquest. These borrowings have displaced most of the OE abstract vocabulary.

Dialectal variation in OE

The Germanic peoples who settled in different parts of Britain appear to have spoken slightly divergent dialects from the beginning, and their approximate geographical distribution is evident in the four main literary dialects. Reputedly, the Angles settled in the Midlands and east between the Thames and the Forth. The main Anglian dialects are conventionally

known as Northumbrian (north of the Humber) and Mercian (from the Humber to the Thames). The Jutes settled in Kent and along the south coast to the Isle of Wight: the OE dialect of that area is Kentish. Among the Saxons, the West Saxon dialect proved dominant and was used in the rest of the OE-speaking area to the south and west of the Thames.

After the Viking invasions and wars of the eighth and ninth centuries, most Anglian-speaking areas came under Danish rule (the *Danelaw*). West Saxon, the language of Wessex, which was not in the Danelaw, became the main OE literary language, and, unlike Anglian, it was only trivially influenced by Norse. Fewer records remain of Anglian dialects (Mercian and Northumbrian), but these, and not West Saxon, are the direct forebears of Standard English.

The development of Modern English

Divergence of Middle and Modern English from Old English

It is clear from the above citations from OE, and from the heavily Germanic nature of OE vocabulary and syntax, that it was very different from PresEng. Not only is PresEng a weakly inflected language, it is also a less ‘Germanic’ language than OE. Other Germanic languages have reduced inflections, but none except Afrikaans has lost grammatical gender, and no other Germanic language is as un-Germanic as English in vocabulary and syntax. The change started early. Already in the twelfth century, we can detect substantial divergence from late eleventh-century written OE. By the mid-thirteenth century, ME texts are beginning to look like ‘English’ as we know it today. This thirteenth-century lyric is an example (first two lines cited):

When þe nyhtegale singes þe wodes waxen grene.

Lef ant gras ant blosme springes in Aueryl, Y wene . . .

[Bennett & Smithers 1966:126]

Conventional histories of English have tended to present the transition from OE to ME as smooth and uninterrupted. This opinion is encouraged by a strong tradition which asserts that English is a very ancient language, and that, despite appearances to the contrary, OE is the ‘same’ language as PresEng. In the nineteenth century, much of the underlying purpose of this was to give the language a long and glorious history and a noble lineage, as befitted the mighty nation-state in which it had developed. One effect of this ideological stance was to overstate the similarities between OE and PresEng.

These overstatements continue to appear. Kaufman (Thomason & Kaufman 1988:263–331), in a highly eccentric case study, declares that

English has changed more since c.1600 than it did in the years 900–1300 (from OE to ME). This claim is not defensible by any competent internal analysis, and the case study is best regarded as a latter-day attempt by a non-anglicist to support the traditional position. The internal changes between 900 and 1300 are vastly greater than the (admittedly considerable) changes between 1600 and 2000.

The traditional view was that the sharp break between OE and ME is more apparent than real. First, many orthographic changes may be purely scribal, not reflecting phonological changes. For example, the substitution of *a* for OE *æ* does not necessarily indicate lowering and/or retraction of OE /æ/ (ME *sat*, OE *sæt*). Second, the conservative West Saxon scribal tradition may well have concealed the presence of changes already beginning in spoken OE by the tenth century or so. Indeed, some changes are already detectable in our scanty records of Old Northumbrian (Smith 1996:94).

Despite this necessary caution, it is clear that these medieval changes were by any standards considerable. The first substantial ME text, the final Peterborough extension to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (c.1154), already shows many changes from late OE. As the West Saxon scribal tradition had been disrupted, the orthography is variable, already much influenced by French conventions, and there is French influence on vocabulary. Nielsen's (1998:210) summary of changes mentions 'conspicuous' changes in accented and unaccented vowels, loss of most of the noun stem-classes of OE (with generalisation of the *-as* plural) and simplification of the case and gender systems. OE inflections are drastically reduced and grammatical gender has actually disappeared. Nielsen also notes the loss of the aspectual prefixes of OE: *a-*, *be-*, *ʒe-* and *of-*, which has consequences for syntax. Subsequently, texts dating from c.1200–1300 show considerable variation in orthography and dialect, with varying degrees of lexical influence from French and Scandinavian and varying simplification of inflections.

The degree of conservatism in Early ME texts correlates with their geographical provenance. South-west and south-west Midland texts (*Ancrene Wisse*, Caligula MS of *Lazamon's Brut*) are conservative in that they maintain, among other things, relatively full inflection and grammatical gender. Early texts from counties south of the Thames are also quite conservative. The more innovative texts (e.g. *Havelok*) tend to be from the east Midlands and East Anglia. There are few northern records of early ME, but the following fragment from York, dated 1272, is well advanced towards modern Scottish and northern English dialects:

Wel, qwa sal thir hornes blau
Haly Rod thi day

Nou is he dede and lies law
Was wont to blaw thaim ay

[‘Alas, who shall blow these horns, Holy Cross (on) thy day? Now is he dead and lies low, (who) was wont to blow them always’] ([Dickins & Wilson 1951:118])

The traditional view has been that the structural changes between c.900 and c.1300 would have taken place anyway, even if there had been no contacts with Old Norse and Norman French. However, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the ‘conservative’ texts (those most like OE) are from areas in which the invaders had little immediate influence, while the ‘advanced’ texts come from areas where both influences were strong. In the West Midlands, as Bennett & Smithers (1966:ix) note, ‘the saintly Saxon Wulfstan was left on his episcopal throne’, and Norman influence was slow to penetrate there. The above ‘advanced’ northern text, on the other hand, contains a demonstrative, personal pronoun and verb inflection that are all from Scandinavian (*thir* ‘these’, *thaim* ‘them’, 3rd sg. pres. *-es*). Although the traditional view is that the structural differences between OE and ME were internally triggered, many of them are probably due to, or accelerated by, language contact.

Some scholars have claimed that language contact was so intimate that it led to creolisation of the language. C.-J. Bailey (1996) has argued that ME is so radically altered that it is no longer a Germanic language, but a mixed language built on a French-based creole. This emphasises the importance of French. Pat Poussa (1982), on the other hand, has argued that ME is based on an Anglo-Danish creole that arose in late OE times in the Danelaw, before the arrival of the Normans. Very little is directly known about the details of mixing of populations during the Scandinavian settlements, but the traditional view was that the settlers were numerous and the two populations roughly equal in social status. Scandinavian placenames are very numerous in the east Midlands, North Yorkshire and elsewhere, and many traditional dialects in these regions have a heavily Scandinavian everyday vocabulary. It is possible, however, that some Danish settlers formed an aristocracy, as their influence on administrative matters is very clear; thus many Scandinavian borrowings may have been prestige borrowings. However this may be, the languages were similar, and the settlers seem to have been rapidly assimilated. Thus, the contact with Old Norse is more likely than the contact with French to have triggered in OE spoken usage the kind of structural changes that become apparent in ME.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that late OE actually went through a creole stage – unless ‘creole’ is loosely defined. A number of general tendencies observed in creoles are also found in bilingual and multilingual

situations, such as those that existed during contact with Norse and Norman French. These include loss of inflections and development of an analytic structure and fixed word order, and these tendencies can result from the need for communication, in times of rapid social change, between speakers who do not have reliable knowledge of each other's languages.

The contact with Norman French differed in important ways from the contact with Norse. The Norman settlers were few in number, but they immediately seized positions of national political power. Contact with Normandy was maintained until 1204, and until that time Anglo-Norman was being spoken and had prestige as a literary language and the language of government. During the thirteenth century, however, Anglo-Norman as a spoken language became sharply recessive. It survived until the later fourteenth century as an official language of administration and law. Laura Wright (1996) has shown how much Anglo-Norman also contributed to the mixed or 'macaronic' written codes that were used in London business dealings in these centuries.

The *structural* effect of these contacts was not, in general, direct borrowing from the grammatical apparatus of Scandinavian and French, although Old Norse did supply some pronouns, determiners and inflections. The structural simplifications did not chiefly result from any particular characteristics of Norse and Norman French, but from the contact situation itself, in which speakers in daily use abandon distinctions that might be considered redundant or inessential to everyday communication. Although OE and Old Norse were related, there were substantial morphological differences, and neither could have been *easily* intelligible to speakers of the other (Milroy 1997). Some 'accommodation' (Trudgill 1986:1–38) was certainly necessary on a large scale, and the structural simplifications in ME could have arisen from these efforts at accommodation.

The development of Standard English

Even though there were several major social upheavals in the centuries after 1300, English in Britain was never again subjected to the cataclysmic effects of invasion followed by bilingualism and language mixing. The language has, however, been subjected to other important influences, chiefly that of Central French from about 1250 to 1500 and the classical languages (Latin and Greek) from 1500 onwards. These effects have come about through formal and literary, rather than everyday spoken, channels and are largely lexical (see pages 31–2). Their importance has been to increase the vocabulary available for formal and technical uses of the language and hence to contribute to the *functional elaboration* (Haugen 1966) that is involved in progress towards a national *standard* language.

Although late West Saxon had developed a near-standard literary form, English after the Conquest was cut off from any immediate possibility of developing into a national standard language. There were many reasons for this, including immense variability in written forms (Smith (1996:68) points out that about 500 spellings of the word *through* are recorded in ME), but the chief reason was that Norman French, rather than English, was used for official and administrative purposes, and so English could not acquire the status associated with official languages. A second reason for the low status of English was that Latin was the language of learning, and this continued to be the case until about 1700. In one sense the history of English since 1200 is one of rising 'respectability' and the gradual acquisition of a wider range of functions, including administrative and learned functions.

From the Middle Ages onward, there is a literature of complaint about the low status and inadequacies of English. Robert of Gloucester (c.1300) complains that a man must know French if he is to be well thought of. In the late fifteenth century Caxton is faced with the problem of devising a normalised language for use in printed books. He is perplexed by the variability of English and complains that the language is like the moon ... 'which is neuer stedfaste/but euer Wauerynge/wexynge one season/and waneth and dycreaseth another season'.

Sixteenth-century writers regard the language as lacking in eloquence and seek to 'improve' it by large-scale lexical borrowing from Latin and Greek (Jones 1953). Seventeenth-century writers can still think of English as ephemeral and unimportant: it is not until the eighteenth century that the status of English is finally assured. Swift in 1712, while continuing the complaint tradition ('I do complain to your lordship . . . that our language is extremely imperfect. . .'), is confident enough of the importance of English to propose that the language should be fixed and standardised ('ascertained') by an academy. However, the task of codifying and standardising was in fact carried out by private persons: the lexicon and orthography are codified in Dr Johnson's Dictionary of 1755, and the grammar is codified in a spate of grammar books, the most influential of which was Bishop Lowth's *Introduction to English Grammar* (1762).

The chief linguistic symptom of a standardised language is *invariance*, which comes about from the suppression of optional variants at all levels of language structure. In this (strict) sense, standardisation has been fully achieved only in the written channel: English speech is still extremely variable, especially in phonology but also in other ways. It is also clear that standardisation has come about as a result of commercial, political and social needs rather than for purely linguistic reasons or through the direct influence of literary works, but it is implemented largely through the

written medium. Technological advance, starting with the invention of printing and the commercial need to disseminate printed documents, has been instrumental in diffusing knowledge of standard forms.

Some movements towards a national written standard are retrospectively discernible around 1400. Samuels (1963) distinguishes four types of ‘incipient standards’, including the London-based language of Chaucer and, especially, the *Chancery Standard* – the language of legal and administrative documents – which showed similarities to Central Midland dialects and is seen by some as the main forerunner of the PresEng written standard. These pre-standards were not invariant, but the variation exhibited was within stricter limits than that of earlier ME documents. Conventional approaches to the rise of the standard have, however, been selective, neglecting early commercial and business writing (Wright 1996:3). It may no longer be as important as it used to be to trace the origin of standard English to any single regional ‘dialect’. A standardised language has multiple origins – both linguistic and social, and it is susceptible to deliberate planning.

Phonological change since 1100

Interpreting the evidence

Progressive standardisation of written records from about 1500 has led conventional histories of English to concentrate from that period almost exclusively on the history of Standard English (SE). Thus, Southern British SE sound changes, such as rounding of [a] after labials (as in *swan*, *quart*), are described in the handbooks as changes in ‘English’, even though many varieties do not have this rounding. Regional and low-status changes, on the other hand, such as loss of initial [h], are either dismissed or not mentioned, although they are also unquestionably sound changes. The very diverse dialects of PresEng in the British Isles have their own histories, greater knowledge of which would increase our knowledge of the nature and processes of linguistic change.

Our sources for reconstructing EModE pronunciation are: (1) the testimony of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers on pronunciation – the ‘orthoepists’ (Dobson 1968); (2) casual and informal spellings in personal letters and diaries (Wyld 1936); (3) the evidence of rhymes and puns; (4) ‘the use of the present to explain the past’ – reconstruction of past uses from forms preserved in PresEng dialects. Advances in dialectology in recent years suggest that the fourth type of source has much to offer (Labov 1994, Milroy 1992). Using the findings of the *Survey of English Dialects* (Orton *et al.* 1962–71), Ogura (1990) has thrown light on the

geographical diffusion of vowel changes in the history of English. Stockwell & Minkova (1997) have made impressive use of the same source to illuminate the history of the ‘Great Vowel Shift’ – to which we now turn.

The Great Vowel Shift

If we compare a selected set of OE words with their PresEng equivalents, it is clear that there have been many phonological changes since OE times. Consider OE *ī*s [i:s] ‘ice’, *fēt* [fe:t] ‘feet’, *hām* [hɑ:m] ‘home’, *gō*s [go:s] ‘goose’ and *hūs* [hu:s] ‘house’. In these instances, the spelling suggests that the consonants have not changed; however, the vowels certainly have. For example, the long high vowels [i:] and [u:] as in *ī*s ‘ice’; *hūs* ‘house’ have become diphthongs with the first element of the diphthong having been lowered in each case to a vowel as low as [a] in many dialects. Thus, we have [ai, au] in *ice*, *house*. In general, consonants have not changed as much as vowels, and ME long vowels (as in the forms cited) have changed much more than ME short vowels.

The series of changes that brought about the present reflexes of the earlier long vowels is known collectively as the ‘Great Vowel Shift’ (GVS). This appears retrospectively as a ‘chain shift’ in which the low and mid long vowels were each raised one height, and the two high vowels diphthongised. Thus, by about 1600 in the London area, it is likely that ME /a:/ had been raised to /ɛ/, as in [nɛ:m] ‘name’, ME /ɛ:/ to /e:/, as in [me:t] ‘meat’, ME /e:/ to /i:/, as in [mi:t] ‘meet’ and ME /i:/ diphthongised to /ei/, as in [beit] ‘bite’. In the back vowel series ME /ɔ:/ had been raised to /o:/, as in [hɔ:m] ‘home’, ME /o:/ to /u:/, as in [gu:s] ‘goose’ and ME /u:/ diphthongised to /əʊ/, as in [əʊt] ‘out’.

There is dispute about how the GVS was implemented (e.g. which vowel moved first), whether it is a unitary phenomenon or not, how far the ME input vowels were monophthongs or diphthongs and what was the EModE pronunciation of the affected vowels. It is usually assumed that in the shift, the vowel contrasts had to be maintained; thus, as one vowel shifted, a second also shifted in order to remain distinct from the first (‘push-chain’) or to fill a gap left by the first (‘drag-chain’) – and so on. Some argue that it started with diphthongisation of the two highest vowels /i:/ and /u:/, as prior movement of /e:/ and /o:/ would have brought about merger with the highest vowels; however, some occasional spellings from before 1400 suggest a very early movement of the mid-vowel /o:/ towards a higher vowel (see Lass 1999:75). Therefore, it is also argued that it started with the mid-vowels. It is unlikely that the ME input vowels were all monophthongs, although this is what is usually assumed: the distribution of centring diphthongs (such as [eə] or [ɛə] in, e.g. *gate*) in present-day

northern dialects suggests that some were centring diphthongs (see especially Stockwell & Minkova 1997). It is difficult also to see the GVS as a unitary phenomenon, as the dialects of ME were grossly divergent from one another, and the outcomes of the shift differed widely in different places. Furthermore, the vowel changes did not all take place simultaneously (raising of /a:/ in London was noticed much later than raising of /e:/ and /o:/, for example). The EModE pattern described above may represent a coming together of changes originating in different varieties and at different times. It is an idealisation that greatly simplifies a complex situation. Furthermore, conventional descriptions of the GVS apply mainly to what is now viewed as *standard* English.

In southern England, the vowels of 1600 have undergone subsequent changes. In EModE there was much variation between [e:] and [i:] in the *meat* set; this is now effectively merged with the *meet* set. There has been a marked tendency towards development of closing glides – notably EModE /e:/ and /o:/, which are now [ei, əʊ] (as in *name, home*) in RP. The first elements of the EModE diphthongs have been considerably lowered: thus EModE [ei, əʊ] in, e.g. *ice, house* are now (approximately) [ai, aʊ] in RP.

London urban speech, together with other southern and Midland (and southern hemisphere) dialects, has carried the GVS a stage farther than RP has. For example, PresEng /ei/ (< EModE /e:/) has been lowered to [ai]: thus, *mate* becomes almost identical to RP *mite*. The diphthong [ai], as in *pint*, has undergone rounding to [ɔi]. Merger with /ɔi/ is avoided by raising [ɔi] to [oi]; thus, *pint* and *point* remain distinct. If the GVS is regarded as a unitary phenomenon, then it is plainly still in progress in these dialects.

The patterns so far described above apply mainly to the south of England. Other British English dialects have either implemented a similar pattern at different rates or implemented a somewhat different pattern of shift. Dialects in many rural areas or in towns remote from London have implemented the shift more slowly than RP. In some dialects, for example Northumbrian and Ulster English, the diphthong arising from ME /i:/ has not categorically lowered its first element beyond the EModE stage: thus, *ride*, for example, is [reid]. Some dialects, e.g. north-west England, maintain [e:] in words of the *name, make* class, and others, notably Irish English, maintain (variably) the EModE distinction between the *meet* class and the *meat* class (/i:/ vs. /e:/).

In dialects derived from Old Northumbrian, the GVS took a different form. The main differences are in the ‘original’ back vowels, and the results can be seen in Lowland Scots. In these dialects ME /u:/ was not diphthongised, but remained in, e.g. *oot, hoose* ‘out, house’. Thus, ME /o:/ could not be raised to /u:/, as in *boot*, without merger. It was fronted to a vowel near /y:/ or slightly lower, and is unrounded in many Scots dialects: thus [bit]

'boot'. OE /ɑ:/ in *ham* 'home', was not raised to /ɔ:/ in northern ME, but was front-raised and unrounded; thus, Scots *hame*, *stane* 'home, stone'.

Restructuring and alternations

While the ME long vowels have been massively changed in quality, the short vowels have changed much less. In RP, ME short *i*, *e* and *a* have changed relatively little, although they have probably been subject in the past to fluctuation, sometimes being raised or diphthongised, sometimes lowered or backed. ME short *u* was lowered and unrounded in older Scots, and in southern varieties of English except after labials (cf. *sup/pull*, both from ME *u*). In northern and many Midland dialects, *u* failed to lower and unround; in these *look* and *luck* can be homophones. In southern England ME, *a* and *o* were lengthened before /s, θ, f/, and in some dialects they were also backed: hence RP has a contrast between *pat* ([æ]) and *path* ([ɑ:]), and between *cot* ([ɒ]) and (conservative) *cloth* ([ɔ:]). In many varieties, as noted above, *a* was not rounded after [w]. In these, *wasp*, for example, has [a].

Failure of the short vowels to change dramatically (while the long vowels were subject to raising and diphthongisation) has resulted in a configuration of the vowel system that is very different from OE. In some dialects, e.g. Scots, these changes have led to a large-scale loss of phonemic length. In OE, it is believed, long and short *i*, for example, were distinguished mainly by length. In modern Scots, however, the vowels in *bead* and *bid* are about the same length, but are markedly different in quality. Scots vowel length is usually allophonic and does not distinguish phonemes; thus, /i/ in *seed* is a short vowel, but in *seize* a (very) long one. Most other varieties have a phonemic contrast between long and short vowels, but the lexical distribution of these has been greatly altered since ME.

The ME vowel system presumed as a basis for the GVS already showed phonetic and structural differences from the OE system. OE long and short /y/ had merged, in the east Midlands, with /i:/ and /i/ respectively, and the West Saxon (long and short) diphthongs spelt *io*, *eo* and *ie* were monophthongal in most of ME. New diphthongs /ai, au, oi/ arose in ME from various sources. Short vowels in open syllables were subject to 'open syllable lengthening' (MEOSL), and the products of this (examples are: OE /a, ε/ > ME /a:, ε:/ > PresEng *make*, *steal*) later participated as long vowels in the GVS. OE /ɑ:/ was raised and rounded to /ɔ:/ quite early in the south and Midlands, and this /ɔ:/ also subsequently participated in the GVS. This example suggests that some tendency towards raising of long vowels was already present around 1200. The GVS may therefore be regarded not as a particular change with a determinate beginning and

end, but as a manifestation of a general tendency to raise long vowels, which was accelerated in late ME/EModE, but which may have been in progress long before in some dialects. In this view, it is the acceleration of this tendency during a particular time span that historical linguists must try to explain. Smith (1996) argues that earlier contact with Old Norse was a triggering factor.

The redistribution of long and short vowels referred to above has greatly complicated the outcomes of the GVS. In the history of English there have been a series of lengthenings of original short vowels and shortenings of original long vowels under specified conditions. Original long vowels that have been shortened have from that point failed to participate in the GVS. Not only have lexical items with an original long vowel become short vowel items (as in *foot*, *deaf*), but also derivationally related pairs in PresEng may now be seen to alternate between the reflexes of the original 'long' and 'short' vowels, as in, e.g. *serene*/*serenity*.

Alternations generally arise from variation in syllable structure and syllabification. Thus, an alternation such as /i:/ vs. /ɛ/ in *steal*/*stealth* arises from MEOSL. As ME [ɛ] in *stelen* 'steal' was in an open syllable, it was lengthened, whereas [ɛ] in *stelpe* was not – and could not therefore participate in the GVS. Alternations such as *keep*/*kept* and *five*/*fifty* arise from late OE shortening before consonant clusters (other than sonorant consonant + homorganic voiced stop, e.g. [-nd, -ld]) and geminates. Pairs such as *south*/*southern*, *sheep*/*shepherd* arise from late OE/early ME shortening in trisyllabic words (see e.g. Fisiak 1968 for further details). These and other quantitative changes give rise to complex vowel-shift networks in related words in PresEng.

For some later shortenings affecting RP, the phonetic conditioning factors are not always clear, and in these cases different dialects exhibit widely varying patterns. ME [o:] in *flōd*, *blōd* should give *[flu:d], etc. by the GVS, but these items together with others underwent shortening early enough to participate in the southern English change of short /u/ to /ʌ/ (from about 1550). Other items from the same source, ME /o:/, (e.g. *good*, *foot*) underwent later shortening in EModE, and their vowel fell together with ME short /u/ when it remained rounded (i.e. after labials, as in *push*, *full*, etc.). Thus, the RP /ʊ/ class today (*good*, *foot*, *full*, etc.) is largely composed of ME /o:/ items that underwent late shortening and ME short /u/ items with initial labials.

Consonants

Changes in the consonant system have been less dramatic. OE had long consonants (as in *sittan* 'sit'), but these were generally lost by 1400. OE did

not have a phonemic contrast between voiced and voiceless fricatives: the contrast begins to appear in intervocalic positions in the north-east Midlands around 1200 and is then reinforced in all positions by borrowing from French (e.g. *vertu* ‘virtue’; OE had no initial voiced labial fricative). There have been numerous cluster simplifications: OE initial /hl, hr, hn/ were merged with /l, r, n/ in ME; initial /hw/ was merged with /w/ in some ME dialects, but still remains in some present-day dialects; medial and final /xt/, as in OE *riht* ‘right’, remains in Lowland Scots; but the fricative was lost (with vowel lengthening) in some ME dialects and was probably generally lost in most London and east Midland areas before 1600. Final [b] was lost after [m] in ME (as in *lamb*, *dumb*, etc.), but parallel loss of [g] after [ŋ] (as in *sing*) has been variable: it was lost quite early in Scots and was probably variable in EModE, but the stop remains today in west Midland dialects. Loss of the alveolar stop [d], after [n] seems to have been widespread around 1700: its probable loss is indicated by hypercorrect spellings such as *gownd* ‘gown’ and the survival of the hypercorrection *sound* (ME *soun* < Fr *soun*) (see Wyld 1936).

Consonant simplification has proceeded further in regional varieties than in RP. Syllable-initial /h/ is lost in many vernaculars; London English merges /ð, θ/ with /v, f/ except in voiced initial position; loss of final /t/ after other obstruents is very common, so common that in some dialects (Lowland Scots, northern Hiberno-English) the weak verbs *keep*, *sleep*, etc. have the past tenses *kep*, *slep*, etc. and are effectively reanalysed as strong verbs; loss of final [d] after [l] and [n] is also widespread, as in Scots *fin* ‘find’; Ulster [weil] ‘wild’. Loss of pre-consonantal [r] (especially) before [s] had already taken place in some south-east Midland varieties by about 1500 and enabled forms like *cuss*, *hoss* and *passel* to be translated to the New World. General loss of non-prevocalic /r/ was probably in progress in the sixteenth century, but could hardly have been complete in ‘polite’ London English until much later – possibly even the late nineteenth century. Its loss in some dialects has resulted in a division into rhotic and non-rhotic dialects (Wells 1982). In addition to RP, eastern English and Midland varieties are mostly non-rhotic. Rhotic dialects include those of Scotland, Ireland and many in England south and west of a curved line running from rural Kent to North Lancashire.

Syntactic and morphological change

Inflectional loss and simplification

At varying speeds in different dialects, OE inflectional morphology was greatly reduced in ME. Chaucer’s English, being more conservative than

some northerly dialects, still retained traces of OE adjectival inflection (now simplified to *-e* as in *shoures soote* ‘sweet showers’), and rather more variation in noun plural inflections than those dialects that were rapidly generalising the *-es* plural. There was still a distinction in conservative dialects between the singular and plural of the definite article/demonstrative (*þe/þo*), and an indefinite article (unknown in OE) derived from the numeral *ān* came into use. The third person singular present of the verb was inflected in *-eth* in more southerly dialects and in *-s* and *-es* in northerly ones. Northern dialects tended to simplify the strong verb pattern by losing the prefix *ʒe-* and the *-en* inflection on past participles. In Chaucer’s English, the Scandinavian *th-* forms of the third person plural pronoun (general in the north in earlier ME) had penetrated only to the nominative form (*they*). The oblique cases were still initial *h-* forms descended from OE. The third person singular feminine *she*, in various spellings (e.g. *scho*, *sche*) occurs in the east Midlands as early as the Peterborough continuations (c.1154). It is probably a phonetic development from OE *heo* > *hjo* (with stress shifted to *o*) > *ʃo* (Britton 1991). Initial *h-* forms, such as *ho*, have survived until recently in some southern and western varieties.

Shakespeare’s inflectional morphology is already virtually that of PresEng. In the strong verb, it is actually simpler, as past participle forms are often identical to the preterite (e.g. *writ*, *rode*, *chose* ‘written, ridden, chosen’). The third person singular present of the verb now varies between *-eth* and *-(e)s* endings and continues to do so in formal writing into the eighteenth century (and later in poetry). The genitive of the neuter personal pronoun is still *his* in formal style, but a new colloquial genitive *its* has appeared. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1994) have shown how rapidly the modern *its* form displaced the older forms in the course of the seventeenth century. Otherwise, many early ME morphological distinctions are lost in later ME and EModE, e.g. the verb present plural ending (*-en*), the infinitive ending (*-en*) and adjectival inflection; but there are sporadic archaisms, e.g. the *ʒe-* perfective prefix (by now *y-*) in, e.g. *yclept* ‘named’.

Some general trends in syntax

As a result of the availability of large corpora (notably the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*), there have recently been many advances in the study of historical English morphosyntax. These include pioneering work in the social embedding of change in late ME and EModE (see especially Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1996). See also the chapters by Rissanen (1999) and by Dennison (1998) in volumes III and IV of the *Cambridge History of the English Language*. The present account is necessarily brief.

In OE, relative clauses were introduced by the indeclinable particle *þe*, or by forms of the demonstrative pronoun, sometimes with *þe* attached. Place and time clauses used the adverbials *þā* ‘then’ and *þār* ‘there’ (often as correlatives), while adverbial clauses of reason, cause, purpose, etc. often used prepositions followed by the demonstrative + (variably) *þe*: thus *for-þām-þe* ‘because’ (lit. ‘for-that-which’). The OE relativiser system was modified and extended in ME. For example, *þæt*, which in OE was the neuter singular article or demonstrative, appears as a relativiser with non-neuter and even plural antecedents as early as the Peterborough continuations (1154).

The main innovation in ME relative and other subordinate clauses is the use of the OE interrogatives – WH-forms, such as *who*, *which*, *when*, *where*, etc. – as relativisers and subordinators. This change may be attributed partly to a tendency to interpret some subordinate clauses as indirect questions, but the imitation of Latin and French models is clearly important, especially as the WH-forms tend to occur in the more formal styles. Although these uses were well established by 1600, the specialisation of *who/whom* to use with human antecedents and *which* to non-human antecedents postdates 1600 (Hope 1994). Furthermore, WH-relatives are still today much rarer in everyday use than in written and formal English, being largely confined to non-restrictive clauses. Otherwise, *that* or zero is preferred as in *the man that I saw . . .* or *the man I saw . . .*

In early English, interrogatives were formed as in other Germanic languages – by subject/verb inversion, as in *Go you?* and *When came you?* By 1600, *do*-interrogatives are well established. Shakespeare uses both constructions, as in *think’st thou?* and *dost thou think?* Forms with *do*-support appear in informal contexts, and this strongly suggests that the gradual adoption of *do*-support, which first appears in the fifteenth century, is a ‘change from below’ (Labov 1994:78). These points apply *mutatis mutandis* to negation also (cf. *he sees not/he does not see*).

From ME onward, with loss of inflections and a growing tendency to expect the subject in initial position, there is gradual loss of impersonal verb constructions. These were common in OE with certain ‘private state’ verbs (e.g. *think*, *like*). An OE sequence such as *þām cyninge līcodon peras* is to be interpreted as IO (dative)-V-S, ‘to the king – were pleasing – pears’ (see further Fischer & van der Leek 1983). By EModE the impersonal verbs (e.g. *like*) have been reinterpreted as personal verbs in an SVO order, and only *methinks* (‘it seems to me’) survives as a residue.

Tense/mood/aspect

The PresEng tense/mood/aspect system makes greater use of auxiliary verbs than the OE system did. For the passive, OE had lost the Germanic

inflected form and now used auxiliaries: the dynamic passive was expressed by the use of *weorþan* ‘become’: *he wearþ ofslæzen* (‘he was slain’), and the stative passive by *bēon/wesan*: *he was ofslæzen*. But the various aspectual meanings of the verb – stative, habitual, progressive, future – could normally be expressed by the simple present or preterite form. The perfective also was quite likely to be expressed by a simple form, as in *ic syngode* ‘I sinned’ (Luke 15:21), to translate the Latin perfect *peccavi* ‘I have sinned’.

Verb Phrases using the auxiliaries *bēon/wesan* ‘be’ and *habban* ‘have’ were quite common in OE, but not necessarily to express progressive and perfective aspects (as in PresEng). Thus, in Orosius 12:35: *sēo ēa bið flōwende ofer eal Aegypta land*, the verb phrase *bið flōwende* expresses a general condition rather than a progressive aspect. When constructions with *habban* + past participle occur, they are not usually perfect tenses, as in Present English; *habban* is commonly to be interpreted as a full verb denoting possession, as in *ic hæfde hine gebundenne* ‘I had him in-a-state-of-being-bound’ (see Traugott 1972, Brinton 1994). Verbs of motion and verbs of becoming formed their perfects with *be* rather than *have* and continued to do so until Early Modern English. Shakespeare, for example, still preferred *be* to *have*, as in *The King himself is rode to view their battle* (*Henry V*, iv.iii.2).

The history of the *do* auxiliary is complicated. By Shakespeare’s time it has virtually become a dummy marker of tense, as in *he did go* (‘simple’ past meaning), replacing the earlier *gin* (from *begin*), favoured by Chaucer. By about 1600, it has become more common in negative statements and questions than in affirmatives. The *be* progressive (as in *I am going*) is uncommon in EModE literary use, but it was almost certainly more common in spoken English.

Modality

In OE, the Gmc preterite-presents, now modal auxiliaries such as *cunnan* ‘to know’, functioned as full verbs as well as auxiliaries. They had infinitive forms and could take direct objects. The specialisation of *shall* and *will* as future auxiliaries is gradual: in ME *will* was strongly volitional in meaning, with *shall* preferred as a predictive; *shall*, however, could still carry strong connotations of obligation well into Early Modern English. In early varieties of English, *can* (as auxiliary) meant ‘know how to’ and *may* ‘have the ability to’. Thus:

- (6) I can ne I ne mai tellen . . . (Peterborough Chronicle, c.1154)
 ‘I do not know how (to count), nor have I the power to count . . .’

By later ModE, forms like *might* and *should* sometimes function in subordinate clauses where earlier English would have used subjunctive inflections, with no auxiliary.

Tense/mood/aspect in different varieties

Dialects of English can differ quite substantially in how they use auxiliaries and in how tense, mood and aspect are expressed. Some dialects use only *will* (not *shall*) for prediction and may lack certain other modals, e.g. *shall* and *may*. Some dialects extend the use of the progressive construction to certain ‘private state’ verbs, as in *I’m not caring* for *I don’t care*. Others avoid the standard perfect tense and use constructions superficially similar to the OE ‘possessive’ + participle, as in *he has it bought*; in contrast, in Southern British English the perfect construction seems occasionally to be preferred to the simple past, where the latter would be predicted (as in *He’s won it last year*). Other dialects retain *do*-support in affirmatives, sometimes with ‘habitual’ meaning, as in Irish English *He does be coming round now and again* (where no emphasis is intended).

Vocabulary change

Introductory

Whereas OE vocabulary was predominantly Germanic, at least 80% of the PresEng lexicon is estimated to be non-Germanic – borrowed chiefly from French, Latin and Greek sources from ME times onward. These borrowings contribute mostly to formal and literary registers, while, in everyday speech English vocabulary is still quite noticeably Germanic. Often, a borrowed word and a ‘native’ word exist with the same, or similar, referent. In pairs like *house/mansion*, *deep/profound*, *child/infant*, for example, the first item is Germanic and the second French. In most (but not all) such cases, the native word is more appropriate to casual usage, whereas the French word is more formal, technical or ‘high-sounding’. The more formal and technical an English text is, the more likely it is to contain many words borrowed from French, Latin and Greek.

German provides a contrast to English in the matter of loanwords. It has been rather resistant to borrowing, and ‘new’ words in German have tended to be constructed from the native word stock. Thus, German has *freiwillig* (cognate with ‘free will’) for English *voluntary* (from French) and *Hauptmann* (lit. ‘head-man’) for English *captain* (from Norman French). Since early ME times, new words in English have not usually been created from native elements (an OE example is the ‘loan-translation’ *gospel* < OE

god spell < Gk εὐαγγέλιον ‘good news’), and many that were originally created in this way have been lost. Borrowing was encouraged by the influence of translation from French and classical writings in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, by the need for precise technical terminology in science and philosophy as these branches of learning progressed, and by a general sense of inferiority about the English language – a belief that it lacked eloquence and expressiveness.

Not all of the borrowing into English is due to general literary or cultural influences. Some of it has arisen from direct spoken contact with speakers of other languages. There are sporadic borrowings that were adopted in the course of commerce and colonisation from the late sixteenth century onwards. Items like *yacht* and *schooner* are from Dutch, *bungalow* from Malay and *tobacco* from a Native American language. Much more important than these, however, are the borrowings that came about during prolonged language contact with Scandinavian and Norman French speakers in medieval England.

I have been careful above to speak of the ‘Germanic’, rather than ‘Anglo-Saxon’, vocabulary of English. Old Norse was also Germanic, and our everyday vocabulary contains a large Scandinavian element. Most of these loanwords were adopted between c.800 and c.1050, but they do not normally appear in English documents until after the Conquest. They do not call attention to themselves as ‘non-native’ in the way that classical borrowings do, and that may be partly why Scandinavian influence tends to be understated. In fact, many of the commonest words in the language are Scandinavian loans.

Apart from a few administrative terms surviving from Danish rule (*by-law* ‘town-law’, *husband* ‘householder’), Scandinavian loanwords include common verbs, adjectives and nouns, such as: *get*, *take*, *want*, *scrape*, *call*, *flat*, *ill*, *awkward*, *ugly*, *sky*, *skill*, *egg*, *leg*, *skirt*. They are particularly numerous in north Midland, northern and Scots dialects, e.g. *brig* ‘bridge’, *gate* ‘way, road’ (thus the street name ‘Briggate’ in Leeds), *laik* ‘play’, *gar* ‘do’, *speer* ‘ask’ and *kist* ‘chest’. Many ‘grammatical words’ are Scandinavian, e.g. the third person plural pronoun: *they*, *their*, *them*. Indeed, a very commonly occurring sequence – *they are* – is probably wholly Scandinavian: the OE form was *hie sindon*.

Many Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse words were too similar to each other to be distinguishable historically, and when this is so, the modern form is presumed to be from Anglo-Saxon. Thus, *lamb* and *house*, for example, are taken to be Anglo-Saxon, even though Old Norse would have given identical forms in PresEng (< ON *lambr*, *hús*). The best basis for explaining the close intertwining of Anglo-Saxon and Norse elements in English is to postulate the existence at some stage of a Norse-English contact language

in the Danelaw. Perhaps this contact language, rather than 'pure' Old English, is the immediate ancestor of the modern language.

Many early French (particularly Norman French) borrowings have also become very common words, e.g. *chair, table, just, very, faith, peace, war, catch*. Here again there was everyday contact, but the Normans were politically dominant. Thus, Norman influence is clearest in the legal, military and domestic fields and in terms relating to social organisation, law and administration. Basic vocabulary in these areas is largely Norman: *prison, burglar, attorney, war, captain, sergeant, soldier, beef, boil, duke, baron, bailiff, rent, treasure*. Many literary and religious terms also were adopted from Norman French. Many OE words were displaced by French ones; some disappeared entirely (e.g. OE *frīþ* 'peace'), whereas others remained with altered meanings (thus OE *bord* 'table' remains as 'board').

The chief period of French borrowing was between c.1250 and 1400 (see Baugh & Cable 1978), and this came from the Central French dialect, mostly through written channels. After that French influence declined, although English has continued to borrow French words occasionally ever since (e.g. *garage*, c.1900). Often the same word has been borrowed two or three times, first in its Norman French form, then in a later medieval French form and later again either in a Latinised French (or original Latin) form, or in a modern French form. For example, *kennel, cattle, catch* are Norman, whereas *channel, chattel, chase* are the Central French equivalents; *jaunty* is Norman, *gentle* is Central French and *Gentile* a Latinised form; *chief* is early French and *chef* is modern French.

Many bound morphemes (especially suffixes) have been adopted from French, and some, such as *-able, -ity* and *-age*, are still productive. They can be used to form derivatives from Germanic roots as well as French (thus, *likeable, roughage*). Sometimes, the suffixes are ultimately from Greek or Latin, but through the medium of French, and it is not always clear which of these languages was the direct source of a borrowing. Sometimes, Gmc affixes are attached to French or Latin roots: thus, *nationhood, beautiful*.

Although Latin had always had some influence on English (either direct or through Latinised forms in French), the main period of classical borrowing started with the Renaissance in England (from about 1500). Latin and Greek made the chief contributions to what we have called the 'functional elaboration' of English (see page 18); not only did they provide an immense battery of general abstract terms, they were also used as the sources for the entire vocabulary of technical terms that were needed in the developing sciences, e.g. *momentum, equilibrium, apparatus* (from Latin), and *criterion, phenomenon* (from Greek). In sixteenth-century literary circles, there was some resistance to the borrowings that came in

through written use, and they were labelled ‘inkhorn terms’. Some of these, such as *immorigerous* and *obstupefact* were short-lived, but they were very numerous: even Johnson’s Dictionary of 1755 lists many such borrowings that did not survive his own century. Nonetheless, the influence of classical borrowing on the more elaborated styles of written English is extremely strong.

Semantic shift

Just as words can vary in meaning in different dialects, so their meanings also change in the course of time. They may, for example, become wider and more general in their application, or they may become narrower. Some Anglo-Saxon words that have survived alongside loanwords seem to have narrowed in their meanings. Thus, OE *dēor*, *stōl*, *heofon* ‘animal, chair, sky’ have more restricted meanings (‘deer, stool, heaven’) in PresEng and are replaced in their old meanings by loanwords. In rarer cases, it is the loanword that has narrowed in meaning: thus, *science* is no longer all kinds of ‘knowledge’. Many of the more learned classical borrowings have shifted in meaning as they have been pressed into everyday use. Often, an original literal meaning has become figurative only. The ‘extravagant and erring spirit’ of Hamlet did not spend lavishly or make mistakes – *extravagant* and *erring* both retained their Latin meanings, approximately ‘wandering’. Sometimes, over long periods, meanings have shifted quite radically away from their sources; thus, *cardinal* (now a cleric) is derived from Latin *cardo* ‘hinge’, and the Greek root of *cynic* meant ‘dog-like’. In other cases, the rational connections in meaning are more discernible: thus, the Greek-derived *hygiene* ‘health’ has come to mean ‘cleanliness’, presumably because cleanliness was believed to be necessary to good health, whereas Latin *sanus* ‘clean’ has undergone specialisation: *sane* now means only ‘mentally healthy’. During the progress of a semantic shift, the new usages are often considered ‘incorrect’; the word *refute*, for example, which meant ‘disprove’, is now often used to mean only ‘reject, disagree with’. Of course there are protests, but they will be in vain. Semantic shift is continuously in progress, and it is the usage of the many, not the complaints of the few, that determines how words are used.

Closing comments

The history of English has been closely researched, and much is known about it (see now the volumes of the *Cambridge History of the English Language*). However, two major traditional characteristics of the subject have tended to bias past research. First, disproportionate attention has

been given to OE and its Germanic and IE ancestry, with some neglect of recent centuries. This has been underpinned by the ‘genetic’ model of language relationship, in which languages are believed to be traceable to a *single* parent language. In the present account, I have attempted to balance the traditional genetic account of English with emphasis on the importance of language mixing and borrowing.

The second traditional characteristic is the emphasis on a variety known as *standard* English. In the present chapter I have been unable to avoid some of this bias. But there has been progress – much of it inspired by social and regional dialectology and a new emphasis on the importance of urban language studies. There has been pioneer work on the social history of English (e.g. Leith 1983), and new methods of accessing the social embedding of historical change are being successfully used by the Helsinki School and others. New developments of this kind promise to bring about further advances in our understanding of the history of English.

2 Standard and non-standard English

Paul Kerswill

'Standard English' and spoken English as opposing norms: a demonstration

The populations of the British Isles have a varied, and often strained relationship with the language with which they have to engage every day in print and in the spoken media. This is the language through which they are (almost) all educated, and which, many of them are persuaded, is both correct and, in an absolute sense, good. Some are at ease with this language, others struggle to master it. A few turn their backs on it. This bald characterisation of the multiple relationships between language users and Standard English is intended to highlight, not only the diversity of the sociolinguistic set-ups throughout the islands, but also the wide range of beliefs, opinions and responses relating to the notion of 'Standard English' on the part of educators, policy makers and professional linguists, as well as, of course, those millions who do not belong to any of these groups. This chapter will address, first, how 'Standard English' and 'Received Pronunciation' (RP) have been conceptualised by those who have an academic, professional or policy-maker's interest in them. Second, the chapter will deal with the nature of the 'variety space' which is said to be bounded by Standard English and RP on one side and by 'non-standard', 'vernacular' speech on the other.

As we shall see later, the standard–non-standard dimension is closely related to the distinction between written and spoken language. But let us begin with an illustration of how norms involving standard/written English interact with norms of spoken or non-standard usage. Sixteen adult non-linguistically trained speakers of British English were asked to perform a task judging the 'use in spoken English' of the following sentences:

- 1 He and I are going shopping
- 2 I and he are going shopping
- 3 Him and me are going shopping
- 4 Me and him are going shopping

For their judgements, respondents could choose between: ‘Normal and natural’, ‘OK, but perhaps something a bit odd’, ‘OK, but rather odd’, ‘Very odd’ and ‘Virtually impossible’. The rationale for the task was as follows. English insists on nominative forms in subject positions (such as *I, he*), and accusative forms in object positions (*me, him*). However, it is apparent that, in conjoined subjects, the accusative form may appear, giving such utterances as *Me and him are going shopping*, among speakers who would not dream of using *me* or *him* as single subjects. This discrepancy between the single and conjoined subjects has been explained as the use of the *default accusative* in conjoined subjects, of the same type that gives the answer *Me* to the question, *Who wants ice cream?*¹ There is, thus, a potential conflict between the default accusative subjects and the ‘correct’ *He and I are going shopping*.

The second area tested here is the ‘correct’ order of presentation of the other and the self: many children have been taught that it is polite to mention the other person before themselves, so that second and third person pronouns should appear before the first person pronoun. Thus, in the task, judgements about both orders were sought.

In order to allow respondents to choose their own criteria, the question itself was phrased in as bare a form as possible (‘Below are four sentences. Please judge their use in spoken English by placing an x in the appropriate column.’). The judgement categories do not refer to correctness, but to usage, in a way that allows respondents to invoke both prescriptive and frequency-of-use criteria. Finally, the implied context (mundane, involving oral production) was chosen to increase the acceptability of default accusatives even in sentences presented in printed form. The results are shown in Table 2.1.

Both the nominative (1 or 2) and the accusative (3 or 4) forms are fairly widely accepted. An inspection of the individual responses shows that there is, however, an overwhelming tendency for respondents to go for *either* the nominative *or* the accusative, only three accepting both by entering a tick in either the first or the second response column.

¹ There are technical linguistic explanations for this pattern, and I am grateful to Mark Newson for pointing these out to me. In English, the grammar has difficulty in assigning the nominative case in conjoined subjects, preferring the default form, such as *me* or *him*. Other languages, such as Hungarian or German, do not follow this pattern; this is a parametric difference. The presence of *He and I*, etc., as conjoined subjects is the result of a prescriptive rule, and conflicts with the normal grammar. That this is an imposed rule is suggested by the occasional presence of nominative forms in prepositional phrases or in object positions, such as *between you and I* or *She came over to meet you and I*; these forms originate in hypercorrection. Similarly, the preferred ordering of third and second person subjects before the first person, as in *You and I*, is a prescriptive rule without a basis in the grammar of English.

Table 2.1. 'Use in spoken English' judgements

	Normal and natural	OK, but perhaps something a bit odd	OK, but rather odd	Very odd	Virtually impossible
1 He and I are going shopping	8	3	1	3	1
2 I and he are going shopping		2	2	6	6
3 Him and me are going shopping		7	3	4	2
4 Me and him are going shopping	5	2	2	4	3

An interpretation of this result would be to say, simply, that there are two grammars at play: some people have the default accusative rule in conjoined subjects, while others don't. However, this would imply a massive difference in the grammars of the two sets of speakers. Given that all but two of these speakers are university graduates (i.e. they have a similarly high involvement with written norms), this seems unlikely – though one would not wish to exclude the possibility. A better explanation is that different people are orienting, more or less consciously, to different norms: either those of 'Standard English', corresponding quite closely to the written language, or those of speech, incorporating both informal and dialectal features. Further support for this interpretation is the fact that, for those who chose the nominative, the prescribed order of third-person-first is strongly preferred (sentence 1), while, for those who selected the accusative, first-person-first is favoured (sentence 4) – corresponding, in all likelihood, to spoken usage. The experiment did not explore whether people felt uncertain in their judgements. It is likely that they did, as witnessed by Trudgill's (1975:42) assertion that some speakers feel uneasy about the utterance *It was him that did it* because it is not 'correct'.

This simple experiment demonstrates the existence, and strength, of the two opposing sets of norms, which we can probably label as 'mainly written/standard' and 'mainly spoken/non-standard'. If people seem able to choose which set to orient themselves to in this experiment, with its straightforward choices and barely contextualised language, then it is certain that they do so, too, in 'real' instances of language use, but in far more complex ways that involve much more than a single binary selection. So we have to recognise that, in the plethora of overlapping and nested speech communities of the British Isles, there will be a multiplicity of linguistic norms. One of these is Standard English, which as we shall see has a privileged position.

Understanding ‘Standard English’

Whose perspective?

So far, I have avoided trying to define ‘Standard English’. This is because the way this notion (or lay externalisations of it such as ‘correct’ or ‘good’ English) is understood is closely related to the perspective of the particular language user or commentator. A member of the population ‘at large’ will have a view informed, at the very least, by his or her early socialisation, family history, educational experience, socio-economic class (however defined), social network, participation in the ‘linguistic market’ at work (Sankoff & Laberge 1978), ethnic (including national) origin and personal, including political, beliefs. Academic commentators (such as the present writer) will claim to perform a rational analysis of the notion of ‘Standard English’, accountable to the axioms of their academic sub-discipline. For some, this will involve a dissociation from the long list of social factors just given, with the claim that popular beliefs do not have face validity and that a linguistic analysis is required. Others will integrate their analyses with due recognition of the social factors. For a third group of academics, lay beliefs about and behaviours towards Standard English will themselves be the object of research, as will the social, demographic and ideological factors impinging on the status and use of Standard English and other varieties. In the course of this chapter, all these perspectives will crop up in different guises. Finally, it must be realised that policy makers, who are often politicians and not necessarily ‘experts’, may or may not have the academic’s reflective or critical skills – or may choose not to apply them (see Chapter 24). However, because of their huge influence, what they determine affects millions of people in their everyday lives.

Time, place and ideology

Ideas surrounding ‘Standard English’ depend on the social and economic relationships between sections of the population in a particular time and place – and on the ideologies that are linked to these social conditions. This is most clearly seen in the rise of a belief in a ‘standard’ pronunciation in Britain. Early and mid-Victorian England saw unprecedented social change, with the emergence of an urban industrial working class. According to L. Milroy (1999:184), rural dialects had become ‘revalorised’ as ‘class dialects’, as the population became urbanised under the capitalist system. A discourse of ‘class’ emerged, reflecting a view of social formation which was ‘not necessarily determined by birth’ (Mugglestone 1995:74) and, at the same time, one of the main symbols of class became pronunciation. A typical commentator of the time stated that, ‘The language of