

A History of the English Language

Albert C. Baugh , Thomas Cable

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Comprehensive and balanced, this classic exploration of the history of the English language combines internal linguistic history and external cultural history from the Middle Ages to the present. The emphasis is on political, social and cultural forces that affect language.

The fifth edition reflects the latest trends and statistics of the past 10 years in a revised and updated Chapter One, "English Present and Future." It also provides a new section on gender issues and linguistic change and includes a thorough revision of Chapter 11, "The English Language in America," including updated material on African American Vernacular English. Discusses Black English and varieties of English in both Africa and Asia, as well as varieties in the United States, Australia and Canada. Includes a map of American dialects. Provides examples of twentieth-century vocabulary.

For multilingual readers or anyone who wishes to develop a well-rounded understanding of present-day English.

A History of the English Language Details


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Author : Albert C. Baugh , Thomas Cable

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From Reader Review A History of the English Language for online ebook

Sophie says

It gives a really in-depth view of all the cultural and political influences that shaped the English language to what it is today. Kind of nice to read if you have the time and interest for these kind of things.

Erin Riggio says

I read this in a college class and really enjoyed it. It might be a bit dry to read in its entirety, but pick it up for some fascinating anecdotes about the history of our language.

Holly says

I read this book three times in one semester as an undergrad in the 1980s for a really hard class. I LOVED IT--both the class and the book.

Sara says

This was a good book; I wish I had the latest edition rather than this edition from the early 1990's. The language has changed since the introduction of the Internet and texting which wasn't an issue at the time this version came out. I think I may have had this version since it was new, though. I just now got around to reading it in its entirety.

Very informative. Some chapters were more interesting than others. I liked the chapters on Old English and also on American English.

Always something to learn, so I keep expanding my knowledge of my own language. Languages are alive and amazing.

Alina says

This book cycles through the entire history of the English language, from the proto-Indo European start to its modern day variations. For everyone who thinks that our language is as simple as "English is a mix of German and French," you have SO much to learn. A favorite non-fiction.

Clara says

This is a fantastic, highly detailed overview of the history of the English language in which I learned some surprising things, such as:

--"they," "their," and "them," our plural pronouns, were a Scandinavian (specifically Danish) import. Old English conjugated them as "hie," "hiera," "him."

--In fact, the Danish invasions of England prior to the Norman Conquest probably contributed a lot more to our loss of inflection (word endings) than the French influence on our language ever did. While we "borrowed" a lot of words from the Norman French, we adapted our syntax to the Scandinavian model, so that our language became much simpler in terms of inflection compared to say, German or Latin.

--Also, Middle English grew out of a lack of regulation/caring on the part of the Norman invaders, who kept speaking their own version of French while the English middle/lower classes spoke a rapidly evolving (and unchecked) form of English.

--We can thank the 18th century (Enlightenment period) for many of our more restrictive grammar rules of today; for instance, "lay"/"lie," "between you and I," "between/among," "different from" versus "different than," etc. This was also the period in which a grammarian named Robert Lowth condemned the double-negative, a construction often used by Shakespeare, but now deemed grammatically incorrect (as though English were equivalent to algebra!)

--When a grammarian makes people stick to certain grammatical rules, this is called "prescriptive grammar."

-- Prescriptivists like to assert rules for everything, from how a word should be used based on its etymology to how it should be used based on its usage in Greek or Latin, and even to how it should appear based on analogy (for example, if you write "backwards" and "forwards," you should also write "afterwards" and "homewards.") Gah, I kind of detest these 18th century guys. They ruin all the fun that writers like Shakespeare had with English--Shakespeare, who molded the tongue like clay, coining and using more words than almost anyone else in the Elizabethan period.

Basically, this text confirms that English is an ever-changing, ever-living language, growing and morphing, adapting and revising itself according to the needs and circumstances of those who speak it. What lives cannot be contained; it can only be described in each successive moment of its appearance--that's our language, and we should be proud that whatever grammatical boxes we place it in, it always manages to break out of.

Jessica Hatchigan says

Read this for a college course (and basically had to memorize the contents). It was one of my most challenging - and rewarding - classes. Baugh shows how language is elastic, bending and changing and morphing as time, history and cultural influences force and/or influence written and verbal exchanges.

Christina says

An incredibly easy-to-read but detailed account of the whole history of the English language, divided into three parts: Old, Middle, and Modern English.

Relaynie says

English language, linguistics

Erica Walsh says

Totally a book I had to read for college - but if you ever said, "Why is this a word?" then this book is fun. And if you are nerdy - this book is fun.

Nadja says

unlike my professor, this book actually makes sense

Rao Javed says

Syllabus book...always hate them.

Krystal says

I'm putting this on here because it may be one of the first honest-to-god textbooks that I actually read all the way through. It feels like an accomplishment.

Marcella C says

10% informative, 90% snooze fest.

George King says

My college text--and still the standard by which others must be measured. The complexity of the English language is a thing of beauty.
