

## Preface

Perhaps you have found yourself confronted by awkward questions from your students such as:

- Why is *night* spelled with *gh*?
- Why do some people say that we can't end sentences with a preposition?
- Why does English have so many synonyms like *intelligent*, *clever*, *astute*, and *bright*?

You may have found yourself at a loss for satisfactory responses, and you may have had to provide vague answers, such as “That’s just the way it is.” Luckily, there are historical answers to these questions. This book will give you confidence in responding to students by showing you how the English we use today has developed from the English of past times.

The book is designed to give you a brief and accessible account of the history of English without assuming any prior knowledge of the subject. It will outline the historical events that shaped English; explain how its grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and pronunciation developed over time; and highlight the quirks and exceptions in English that can be explained on a historical basis. We believe students long for good explanations for these quirks and exceptions and appreciate it if you can give them concrete reasons for their existence. Pedagogically, the explanations are not guaranteed to help your students learn English any faster, but at a minimum, we feel that they can help alleviate their frustration with some of the seemingly unreasonable aspects of the language and, as a result, maintain their motivation and interest. At best, the explanations may help your students to a more informed understanding of the English system and may actually facilitate their learning.

To help you incorporate some of this knowledge into your classroom activities, the book contains reproducible exercises. Some of these, such as the ones on vocabulary, can be used as actual teaching exercises where the students can learn new words and practice old ones. Similarly, the grammar exercises focus directly on irregular verb and noun forms your students need to know.

Other exercises, such as those on the place of English in the world today, are designed to increase your students' interest in language and linguistics in general.

The book is written with English language teachers in mind, and the exercises are thus designed to be used with ESL/EFL students. However, we feel that they may also be used fruitfully with teachers in training (both L1 and L2), as well as with advanced ESL learners as part of a content-based instruction course.

We have tried to avoid the excessive use of referencing and linguistic jargon, but the rendering of the sound system of English poses special problems. The main difficulty lies in the fact that the Roman alphabet is not very well matched to the sounds of English, especially vowels. An example is the vowel *a*, which is pronounced differently in each of these words: *father*, *hat*, and *plate*. A phonemic alphabet, such as those used in dictionaries to indicate pronunciation, avoids this problem by rendering sounds into symbols on a one-to-one basis. When necessary, therefore, we use a phonemic alphabet based on learner dictionaries to illustrate the development of the pronunciation of English over the ages. For your convenience, a guide to the alphabet we use is given on p. x. However, to make the book as accessible and as nontechnical as possible, we often use rhymes to indicate pronunciation; for example, until about 1700 *swan* rhymed with *man*, not *con*.

Finally, we find the history of English a continually fascinating area and hope that we have presented the information in this book in a manner that both you and your students will find stimulating and engaging.

**Norbert Schmitt  
Richard Marsden  
2006**