2014 Winter Session (2014-2015 Academic Year)

**ENGL 507A: Studies in the History of the English Language (3 credits)**

**Instructor:** Laurel Brinton  
**Section:** 001  
**Term:** 2  

**Category E - Theory, Rhetoric and Language**  
(Students in the MA program should consult Section 4.4 of the Handbook when planning their courses.)

**English Historical Pragmatics**

**Course Description:**

Language critics decry the use of forms such as *I think*, *I guess*, and *you know* as empty fillers, as signals of disfluency, and as evidence of the decline of speech today, as in:

It wasn't - quite honestly, **you know**, once you're - **I think I guess** it might have been - **you know**, all of us sort of were aware of it,  
(speaking on NPR "Fresh Air")

In contrast, linguists see these forms as serving important roles in structuring discourse and in establishing and maintaining social ties. They treat them under the rubric of "pragmatics". What are we to make, then, of Chaucer's *I guess, I think, and I know?*

He may nat be deceived, **as I gesse**  
Poverte a spectacle is, **as thynketh me**  
I am, **thow woost**, yet of thy compaignye

Those interested in Historical Pragmatics seek to discover whether similar or different pragmatic principles are at work and whether similar or different pragmatic forms are used at different stages in the language and how they develop over time.

This course is an introduction to the field of *English Historical Pragmatics*, which lies at the intersection of historical linguistics (language change) and pragmatics (meaning-making processes). It is a relatively young field, arising in the mid-1990's with the publication of Jucker (ed.), *Historical Pragmatics* (1995) and Brinton, *Pragmatic Markers in English* (1996). In 2000, the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* was launched.

The expansion of pragmatics itself (for example, in the recognition of the status of written texts as "communicative acts" and "legitimate objects of study in their own right") and of the discipline of historical linguistics (for example, with a new focus on usage, including everyday and ephemeral usage, the recognition of varieties and genre-specific conventions, the evoking of pragmatic and inferential explanations of change, and the acknowledgment of the importance of context) have all contributed to the development of the field of Historical Pragmatics. The field has now reached a state of maturity,
with, for example, the publication of Jucker and Taavitsainen's large (700+pp.) *Handbook of Historical Pragmatics* (Mouton, 2010) and the first textbook of the field.

This seminar will be concerned with exploring the nature of Historical Pragmatics and its application to English. Topics of study will include *inter alia* pragmatic forms (discourse markers, address terms, connectives, interjections); interactional pragmatics (speech acts, (im)politeness); domains of discourse (scientific and medical discourse, newspapers, religious discourse, courtroom discourse, literary discourse, public and private correspondence). We will sample a broad range of articles treating these topics in the history of English.

**Readings**

**Core Text and Readings**


**Case Studies**

- A selection of articles and papers on English historical pragmatics (see below)

**Course Requirements:**

Students will be asked to

- lead the discussion on one or more of the assigned articles (depending on enrolment)
- present a seminar on the topic of the research paper (c. 20 minutes)
- make five discussion postings on Connect
- write a research paper (of approximately 15 pages) - possible topics include:
  1) a study of a pragmatic form in an historical period or over time (in which case the use of available historical corpora of English could be used) (e.g., the rise of *you know* in Middle English, the use of *you* and *thou* forms in Early Modern English);
  2) a study of pragmatic forms in a literary or non-literary text from any period before Present-
Day English (e.g. use of *I gesse* in Chaucer; the use of *you/thou* in a Renaissance play); 3) a study of how a particular pragmatic function is realized in an historical text, an historical period or over time (e.g. the speech act of cursing or blessing, salutations, politeness phenomena); 4) the genre conventions used in an earlier period (e.g., the conventions of scientific writing in the Early Modern English period).

**Grade break-down**

- Discussion of reading - 20%
- Discussion postings - 10%
- Seminar presentation - 20%
- Paper - 50%

**Pre-requisites:**

No background in linguistics is required, although at least one course in the English Language (English 320/330/331 or its equivalent) would be helpful.

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**(Possible) Case Studies**

**Discourse (Pragmatic) Markers**

- Claridge, Claudia. 2013. The evolution of three pragmatic markers: *As it were, so to speak/say* and *if you like*. *Journal of Historical Pragmantics* 14.2: 161-184. [Available ONLINE UBC Library]

**Interjections**


**Terms of Address**


**Speech Acts**


**Politeness**


**Grammaticalization/Pragmaticalization**


**Genres (scientific discourse, newspapers, recipes, letters, court proceedings)**

**Scientific and Medical Writing**


Recipes


Letters


Courtroom Discourse


Newspapers
