FINAL HONOUR SCHOOL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Paper 4 The History of the English Language to c. 1800

Trinity Term 2018

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Choose ONE question from EACH of the two sections. Each answer must be no shorter than 2000 words and no longer than 2500 words, excluding bibliography and appendices. Answers must be typed double spaced on one side of the paper only; the word length of each answer must be indicated at the top of the first page.
Please remember to number your pages.

In the course of your two answers you must show knowledge of two consecutive periods from those covered in the paper (Old English, Middle English to c.1500, early modern English c.1500-1750).

Questions in Section B invite you to make your own selection of texts or passages of texts to analyse, in accordance with the terms of the particular question you choose. Copies of these texts/passages MUST be included as an appendix to EACH COPY of your portfolio. Credit will be given for judicious selection of material, as well as for the quality of the analysis. The material you analyse must not exceed a combined total length of 100 lines (not 100 lines for each text selected, but 100 lines in total for all texts selected). This limit applies to both prose and verse. It is an upper limit: in many cases, much shorter pieces of text will be adequate for your purposes. There is no lower limit, but the quantity of material you analyse must be sufficient to allow you to produce an analysis of the required length.

In both sections, careful attention should be paid to the precise terms of quotations and questions. You must acknowledge all primary and secondary sources used in your answers, ensure that citations and quotations are accurate, and provide a bibliography for each answer.

Section A

1. 'Of all guides to the pronunciation of English, spelling is the worst' (H. C. WYLD).

2. 'A dictionary is, in essence, an eco-system of the language'. Discuss, making detailed use of at least TWO dictionaries.

3. In historical research, 'there are no bad documents' (HIPPOLITE TAINE). Discuss.

4. 'The period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries is unique in that it represents a time before normative grammar' (TERTTU NEVALAINEN). Is it?

5. 'Modern sociolinguistic models, and the insights they yield, can fruitfully be applied to the past'. Discuss. You may restrict your answer to ONE such model if you prefer.

6. 'It is obvious that if any one word in a group of semantically related words shifts, the others are also immediately affected'. Making detailed use of examples, analyse the causes and consequences of semantic change.

7. 'Lexical change is the most observable form of linguistic change'. Discuss.

8. 'The levelling of inflectional endings is arguably the most significant process in English morphological history'. Discuss.

Section B

9. 'Nothing reveals the deficiencies of a language more surely then translating into it' (CHRISTIAN KAY). Provide a close analysis of the language of TWO texts which seem to you to reveal or contest this claim.

10. 'Register remains an important but understudied variable in the history of English'. Provide TWO texts, from different registers, and argue for or against the contributions to language history which they provide.

11. 'It is unfortunate that historical language change has usually been seen from the perspective of the standard language'. Choose TWO texts from different periods which engage with language history outside that of the standard variety, assessing the significance of the contributions which they make.

12. 'The past itself is not a narrative. In its entirety, it is as chaotic, uncoordinated and complex as life. History is about making sense of that mess, finding and creating patterns and meaning from the maelstrom' (JOHN ARNOLD). Provide a detailed examination of TWO texts which shed light on the ways in which meaningful patterns might be imposed on the language of the past.

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13. 'We know less about syntactic change than about any other form of linguistic change'. Provide a detailed examination of TWO texts which illuminate our understanding of the history of English syntax.

14. 'London English is a product of dynamic processes of immigration and adaptation, and, as such, can be difficult to describe in terms of a set of characteristic forms'. Provide TWO texts which demonstrate the problem of defining London English.

15. 'Pronominal change is a pragmatic and sociolinguistic issue, rather than a linguistic one'. Provide TWO texts which contribute to help account for changes in pronominal use.

16. 'In fundamental ways, English remains a Germanic language'. Examine this claim, making detailed reference to TWO texts from different periods.

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