

English Linguistics: Accents of English: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (A006660)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0

Study time 150 h

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 2)

English

Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Simon, Ellen

LW06

lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

	crdts	offering
Master of Science in Teaching in Languages(main subject Linguistics and Literature)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject Dutch - English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - German)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Greek)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Italian)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Latin)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Scandinavian Studies)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Spanish)	5	A
Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject French - English)	5	A
Master of Arts in Historical Linguistics and Literature	5	A
Exchange Programme Linguistics and Literature	5	A
Exchange Programme Medieval Studies and Auxiliary Sciences	5	A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Accents, diachronic perspectives, synchronic linguistics, World Englishes, regional and nonnative

Position of the course

In this advanced course, students get a deeper insight into variation in spoken English by studying accents of English from a historical as well as contemporary perspective.

Position of the course in terms of language proficiency: In the master programme in English, students are expected to develop from an initial CEFR C1 level into a first-stage C2 level ("Mastery").

Contents

In English, with its millions of speakers around the world, language variation in the form of accents plays an important role. In this course, we will draw from insights in historical linguistics, by studying the sounds of Old and Middle English, and discussing how these accents changed as the result of language contact, and how accents spread to and emerged in different parts of the world. In addition to the historical perspective, the course also draws on evidence from synchronic linguistics. Accent bias, which is a focus point in a large body of present-day research, because of its prevalence in contemporary society, is examined from a synchronic as well as diachronic angle as we will discuss when it emerged and how dynamic it is. In relation to this, we will explore the field of second dialect acquisition by examining recent studies on how accents can change within

speakers as people move to new regions or countries. Finally, we turn to the issue of intelligibility and address the question when and why accents can (and cannot) be a challenge for mutual understanding.

The course comprises several parts, addressing the following topics (or related ones):

- (I) The Sounds of English through time: from Old English to Present-Day English;
- (II) Accents of English around the world: origin, development and spread;
- (III) Accent bias in English: attitudes towards accents then and now;
- (IV) Changing accents: second dialect acquisition;
- (V) Understanding English accents: an experimental approach.

Initial competences

- To master English at CEFR C1 level ("Expert"/"Effective operational" proficiency).
- A solid foundational knowledge of linguistic terminology and concepts is crucial.

Final competences

- 1 Being capable of demonstrating an advanced knowledge of the sound systems of older stages of the English language (including Old and Middle English)
- 2 Being able to explain changes in historical accents of English, from the Anglo-Saxon period till the Early Modern English period, and demonstrate knowledge of linguistic and social forces of language change
- 3 Being capable of discussing the origin, development and spread of accents of English world-wide
- 4 Being able to demonstrate a deep insight into the origin and causes of accent bias, the linguistic and social forces at work in second dialect/accents acquisition, and in factors affecting accent intelligibility
- 5 Being capable of discussing and presenting results of scientific publications on historical and contemporary aspects of accents of English
- 6 Using digital search environments and search strategies to identify relevant literature and research topics in the field

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

- **Lectures:** topics will be introduced or examined more in depth through short lectures
- **Seminars:** exercises on e.g. Old and Middle English pronunciation; presentations by students on selected scientific publications; discussions in smaller groups
- **Independent work:** project work on a topic related to any of the themes identified in the course content; study of relevant literature to identify and submit discussion points

Study material

Type: Slides

Name: slides & handouts

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Type: Reader

Name: Accenten van het Engels: leesmateriaal

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Language : English

Available on Ufora : Yes

Additional information: A series of scientific articles will be made available on Ufora for students to print or read / study online.

References

Huber, M. (2019). Unearthing the diachrony of World Englishes. In: D. Schreier, M. Hundt & Edgar W. Schneider. *The Cambridge Handbook of World Englishes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 484-505.

Levis, J. M., & Silpachai, A. O. (2022). Speech intelligibility. In: The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and speaking (pp. 160-173). Routledge.

McCully, C. & Hilles, S. (2005). *The Earliest English. An introduction to Old English language*. London: Longman.

Schreier, D. (2019). World Englishes and their dialect roots. In: D. Schreier, M. Hundt & Edgar W. Schneider. *The Cambridge Handbook of World Englishes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 384-407.

Sharma D, Levon E, Ye Y (2022). 50 years of British accent bias. *ENGLISH WORLD-WIDE A JOURNAL OF VARIETIES OF ENGLISH* vol. 43 , (2) 135 – 166.

Siegel, J. (2010). *Second dialect acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Voeten, C. (2021). Individual differences in the adoption of sound change, *Language and Speech* 64.3, 705-741.

Smith, J. (2015) The historical evolution of English pronunciation. In: Reed, M. and Levis, J. (eds.) *THE HANDBOOK OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION*. Series: Blackwell handbooks in linguistics. Wiley Blackwell: Oxford, pp. 1-18.

Course content-related study coaching

Class feedback. Individual feedback on project work.

Assessment moments

continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Presentation, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

Extra information on the examination methods

- actively participating during class
- working through questions related to the topics discussed on the basis of the reading of scientific papers or the lectures (exercises)
- reporting on a specific topic, as discussed in class and on the basis of scientific articles (presentation)
- leading a discussion on a particular topic on the basis of the reading of scientific papers (oral performance in class)
- reflecting on the scientific research in any of the topics discussed in class (assignment)

Calculation of the examination mark

100% continuous assessment, including active participation during class and in group work, an oral presentation(s) and a written assignment(s). Students who do not take part in the assessment of one of the parts of the course evaluation cannot pass the course. Should the average mark be higher than 10/20, the final mark will be reduced to the highest non-pass mark (= 9). Attendance in class is mandatory, as students are expected to actively participate in this Master's course. They prepare for the contact hours and contribute during the lessons. In case of absence, a certificate must be submitted.

Facilities for Working Students

1. Class attendance is mandatory for a number of teaching activities
2. Class attendance is recommended for a number of additional lectures.
3. Lectures will not be recorded but sufficient online learning material will be provided
4. Possibility to receive feedback at another time: by appointment

