

## **STATEMENT OF FALL 2011 LEAVE PROJECT—BETTY S. PHILLIPS**

### **1. Brief summary of leave project (100-300 words)**

I have several goals for my requested sabbatical, some pursuing research and others professional development which will influence my research and my teaching strategies. My research goals are to expand two conference papers I have given into publishable articles and to work on a third one, whose core question (about the effect of scribal practice on frequency effects) has arisen from a review of the book I wrote on my last sabbatical, *Word Frequency and Lexical Diffusion*. All of these papers will require updating myself on the latest views of exemplar theory and models of the mental lexicon, since these are areas of phonetic theory and psycholinguistic research that my research into frequency effects relies upon.

My professional development, including teaching, goals involve exploring the numerous corpora that have been developed for historical English—corpora that younger scholars are using more and more and which I have yet to incorporate into my research or into my courses. More and more of these corpora are also open access, so it is possible to construct exercises based on them so that students can see first-hand what variations exist in English grammatical structures, both synchronically and diachronically. To that end, I plan to attend a conference in September 28-October 2, 2011, on historical corpora hosted by the University of Helsinki, which is the epicenter for such work. I would like to take some time before the conference to explore dialect variation in the British Isles. Although I regularly teach a course on the history of the English language, including the development of modern varieties, I have never visited Ireland, and I have spent very little time in Britain, the last, brief visit having been over a decade ago.

### **Summary of most recent ISU sabbatical leave:**

My last sabbatical was for Spring 2005, during which I fulfilled a book contract I had negotiated with Palgrave Macmillan. *Word Frequency and Lexical Diffusion* had a 2006 publication date. It was favorably reviewed in *Language* 85.2 (2009), pp. 487-490. (See attached.) This book also led to my teaching a course on it at the 2007 Summer Linguistic Institute at Stanford University, as well as to 3 invitations for book chapters, all written during the summer of 2008. The first of those books, *Sociophonetics: A Student Guide* (London: Routledge), has just been published. (See book website <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415498791/> .)

### **3. Provide a leave narrative:**

#### **(a) Specific objectives and expected outcomes:**

The core of my research program has been the study of how changes in the pronunciation of English progress through the speech of a community, ultimately making, for example, Chaucer's English difficult for modern ears to understand. I have worked on individual changes in a wide range of eras, from manuscripts dating as early as the 9th century a.d. to dialects of current American English. During my last sabbatical I wrote a book on *Word Frequency and Lexical Diffusion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), about how word frequency is an important factor in the diffusion of new pronunciations through the word-store of individuals and the dialects of which they are a part and tying the patterns within this diffusion to current psycholinguistic theories on how words are stored in the brain. This book and its topic were deemed important enough to the discipline to be reviewed in the official journal of the Linguistic Society of America (*Language*, 2009, pp. 487-490), where it was called "provocative . . . challenging . . . seminal . . . . invaluable". In the final chapter of my book, I identified areas that needed further study in relation to the lexical diffusion theory of the propagation of change. These include whether the primary locus of lexically diffused change is in perception or production, its relationship to age of acquisition of lexical items, the possible connection with discourse strategies, and the role of salience. I plan to read more deeply in these areas in working on the projects mentioned below and in mapping out additional projects, most of which will probably extend beyond my sabbatical months. Specific plans for my sabbatical months include work on 3 articles and professional development in the use of English language corpora.

I. First article project: One reservation which the reviewer of my book had involved the possible influence of the spelling tradition of the time, i.e., "an apparent diffusion pattern from less to more frequently used words gleaned from manuscripts might have nothing to do with the properties of a particular sound change, but rather with the tendency to conservatively maintain the *Schriftbild* of frequently used words in spite of (a completed) sound change." I have always tried to address this issue in my work, but it is clear that I need to write an article that will (hopefully) definitively answer such concerns. Therefore, this is one project I plan to work on during my sabbatical, i.e., answering this concern by researching and reviewing scribal traditions and the level of influence they actually have on medieval scribes whose spellings exhibit variation.

II. Second article project: One aspect of spelling interpretation that I did not deal with much in my book was a central aspect of my 2007 article on "Æ-raising in the Peterborough Chronicle," which appeared in *The Language of the Peterborough Chronicle* (Peter Lang, pp. 29-44). This work branched into a new area of manuscript interpretation by considering how exemplar theory might illuminate a scribe's choice of spellings. In brief, what a scribe's innovative spelling might represent is not an actual change in pronunciation but a reinterpretation of a sound as belonging to a different phoneme (in simplified terms, represented by the letters the scribe has to choose

from) as the sound of another phoneme moves away from the vowel space once occupied by it, thus leaving room for the expansion of the vowel space represented by another phoneme/letter. Exemplar theory also opens up the possibility for scribes to notice sounds that they might have trouble assigning to one letter or another. For example, in one Old English manuscript which sometimes has the sequence <hr> as in *hring* 'ring' and sometimes just <r>, occasionally the scribe writes <|r>. Another manuscript uses seemingly redundant accents to indicate long vowels. I would like to investigate this phenomenon especially in the Rushworth 1 glosses, ca. 970 a.d., to Biblical Matthew, Mark 1-2:15, and John 18: 1-3. I gave a paper in August 2010 at the International Conference on English Historical Linguistics on this manuscript's variation between <e> and <æ> and would like to work on a fuller account of its variable spellings. For example, it provides examples of innovative spellings affecting the most frequent words first and the least frequent words first, depending on the sound change, as well as of "in-between" spellings such as <ę>, which might represent a sound between [e] <e> and [æ] <æ>. At the conference, one question that was posed was whether I had considered the syntactic context. To do that, I will need to familiarize myself with the York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose (YCOE). The research group behind this corpus and many other historical English corpora is organizing a conference for Sept. 28- Oct. 2, 2011, at the University of Helsinki, so I hope also to attend this conference as part of my sabbatical.

III. Third article project: Another aspect of gradience I would like to continue pursuing involves my work on stress shifts, such as the one which created the current difference in stress pattern of the verb *convict* versus the noun *convict*. I have given a paper at the 2009 SHEL (Studies on the History of the English Language) conference on linking the words which have undergone such a shift to a finding by Sereno and Jongman (1995) that the amplitude of the stress on such words varies depending upon whether the word is primarily used as a noun or as a verb. Comments on that paper included recommendations to expand the corpus. I have started by looking at earlier dictionaries so as to be able to compare the changes through time and determine the direction of change. There are corpora now available, however, that many scholars are using, and I feel I should incorporate into my work findings from a Modern English corpus such as COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English).

IV. Professional Development and Teaching Strategies: Learning more about corpora such as COCA and the ones available through Helsinki University and elsewhere will also help me develop hands-on projects for students in just about all of my courses, especially Historical Linguistics, Diachronic Analysis of English, Lexicology, and Linguistic Analysis of English. It is well-known that students understand and retain concepts better if they have a chance to discover or explore the concepts for themselves using real, current data. For instance, I already incorporate exercises and projects using the online *Oxford English Dictionary*, electronic dictionaries, and websites on pronunciation variants in English, both native and non-native—both to teach concepts and to provide students with tools for lifelong learning, since once they leave ISU, the most likely source they will turn to for information about English will be the internet. Introducing appropriate corpora to my students will especially expand their awareness

of real-time variation and change. For instance, the shift of the past tense of irregular verbs such as *trod* to *treaded* often has resulted in competing variants in modern English. Currently, the native speakers in my classes (the minority in most of my classes) usually provide the differences they perceive between such forms, but with COCA, the non-native English speakers can also call up the collocations of words, and it is clear that *treaded* is used mostly with the word *water*. One can do many more things with COCA, including comparing forms and usages from different decades dating back to the 1800's, but I need to work more with this database myself before I can design exercises for my students. The same is true for other corpora that have sprung up since my last sabbatical. In fact, I also hope to attend a conference of ISLE (International Society for the Linguistics of English) in Boston 17-21 June 2011, i.e., during the summer before my sabbatical; its theme is *Methods Past and Current*, with a major focus on "corpus linguistics, varieties and typologies, dialects and Standard English" (from their website).

**b. Anticipated contributions** to the faculty member, department, and University in relation to teaching, research, and/or service.

**Teaching:** Improved experiential learning for students (mine/department's/University's) through development of materials involving online English language corpora.

**Research:** Develop two existing conference papers into articles for submission to journals in English linguistics. Create a third, new paper on scribal variation in Old English manuscripts and its relationship to lexical diffusion. Explore new avenues of research, including recent literature on issues identified in the book I wrote on my last sabbatical.

**c. Timetable** for completion of the proposed activity:

June 17-21, 2011: Attend ISLE (International Society for the Linguistics of English) in Boston, whose theme is *Methods Past and Current*, with a major focus on "corpus linguistics, varieties and typologies, dialects and Standard English", to learn more about using corpora in my research and my class preparations.

July, 2011: Apply knowledge gained from ISLE conference to my ISU courses and preparing for my research projects.

August – early September, 2011: Expand my work Stress Pattern shift in nouns like '*convict* (from *con'vict*) by finishing work on the dictionary evidence and investigating possible corpus evidence.

Mid/Late-September, 2011: Travel in Ireland and the British Isles to update my knowledge of the regional varieties of English in Britain.

Sept. 28- Oct. 2, 2011: Attend Helsinki Corpus Festival: The Past, Present, and Future of English Historical Corpora.

October, 2011: Expand my work on the Old English Rushworth Gloss, including investigating influence of syntactic position. Work on creating student projects utilizing corpora.

November, 2011: Concentrate on new article on influence of scribal practices on manuscript evidence for lexical diffusion. Continue work on course improvement through online corpora.

December, 2011: Finish articles and outline avenues for future research.

**d. Where and how** project will be carried out: Mostly in Terre Haute, IN, but also at conferences and other places where I travel.

**e. Time-specific** characteristics: None beyond those mentioned above.

**f. Anticipated supplementary support:** None.

**g. Previous work** or preparation in direct support of proposed leave project:

"*þa næhstu æreste & þa eristu næhstu': ȝ ~ ē* in the Rushworth1 Glosses." Paper presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> ICEHL (International Conference on English Historical Linguistics), Pécs, Hungary, 23-27 August 2010.

"Types, Tokens, and Gradience in the English Diatonic Stress Shift." Paper presented at SHEL-6 (Studies on the History of the English Language), Banff, Canada, April 30-May 3, 2009.

"Æ-raising in the Peterborough Chronicle," *The Language of the Peterborough Chronicle* (Studies in English Medieval Language and Literature 20), eds. Alexander Bergs and Janne Skaffari. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007. Pp. 29-44.

*Word Frequency and Lexical Diffusion.* NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.