

Report from the 2024 SSHOE

The second **Summer School in the History of the English Language** took place in Oslo in June of this year and was around twice as long as its predecessor, lasting a full six days.

After spending the night at Sarajevo airport – arguably quite the detour – I arrived at Oslo airport relatively early in the morning. I got myself a coffee and found some transportation to the city. The latter would prove to be quite expensive through my entire trip, but public transport was very punctual and easy to figure out. And the coffee was just as good everywhere I went. I was also happy to realise that I indeed did not need to change currencies, making my lack of NOK and planning completely irrelevant. After an hour's ride, I then got off the bus and boarded the tram to the university. Quite a few apps were needed to acquire tickets, but luckily the people were extremely nice and helpful.

I finally arrived at the University of Oslo at around twelve, where I met with Professor Kavalir, the girls from Granada with whom I was to share accommodation, and of course all the other students and professors. I had missed the first introductory lecture, but I managed to catch half of the second one, which was an *Introduction to Old English* (Professor Bech), and I had no trouble catching up, as the contents were very similar to our own Old English lectures by Professor Kavalir in Ljubljana. It was a nice overview to have, before all the other lectures, some of which would be quite technical and nuanced. The next lecture was on the *Constructionist Approach to the History of the English Language* (Professor Nykiel). This one was quite hard for me to follow, especially since I was already very tired, but it was very interesting, because the approach being presented seemed to be a rather new one, and there developed quite some discourse between the professors, which I found very insightful and informative. Then the last lecture of the day talked about the *Influence of Old Norse in English* (Professor Pons-Sanz), which was also a nice deep(er) dive into something that I had also previously studied in Ljubljana. It gave some new information and broadened my understanding of the influence. After this, the Spanish girls and I took a tram to the city centre, visited a park and the Oslo Royal Palace, and had an unsuccessful coffee-run, as most establishments close extremely early. The day ended at our campsite, where we had rented a cabin, and which came with a lovely lake, especially beautiful as the sun set.

The second day started with a tour around the campus and continued with an interactive game (by Professor Kavalir) in which we cosplayed as different Germanic tribes colonising England. After it, came a lecture on *Paleography* (Professor Thaisen), which was very technical but gave a nice introduction into how manuscripts are researched/studied and how different types of writing are differentiated from one another. The following lecture was titled *Language and Literature, or Why you Need to know about Historical Old English when reading past literary texts* (Professor Pons-Sanz). This lecture gave very concrete examples of how grammatical differences bring about different nuances and shades of meaning in past texts, and why it is important to know how different grammatical structures were used or how they evolved, as ignorance can lead to incorrect interpretations of past texts today or their faulty adaptations into present-day English. And the last lecture of the day was *Premodern Phonology* (Professor Goering). This was another very technical and demanding lecture, but it deepened my understanding of how, firstly, phonology itself functions and changes, and secondly, why phonological changes even take place and how they are carried out. It made

my understanding of it much more concrete and less abstract. After the lecture, I took a solo trip through the city centre, visited the opera house, some bookstores, parks, and two of the most famous streets in Oslo, Damstredet and Telthusbakken.

The third day began with an *Introduction to Diachronic Corpus Linguistics* (Professor Tichy), another very complex, but very interesting lecture, which explained how corpuses are constructed and how they are researched and used in historical linguistics. The second lecture was on *Emotional Language and Language Attitudes in the Proceedings of the Old Bailey* (Professor Kavalir). The Old Bailey is in essence a 17–19th century corpus of transcribed spoken language from the court proceedings of the Old Bailey, a court in London. The corpus is extremely important because we usually do not have access to the spoken language of the lower classes of this period. It is a unique testament to spoken language, and in the lecture, we looked at the attitudes of people towards certain words, swearing, and it was very interesting to see how we can determine from their speech what kind of connotation people give to a certain word. The next lecture was on *Religious Vocabulary* (Professor Smith), which I was quite excited about, but due to some technical issues (it was a Zoom lecture), was unable to follow. After it, the last lecture of the day was *History of Punctuation* (Professor Nedeluis), which was again very interesting, especially because we never gave any special attention to why punctuation is the way it is at our college (apart of course from learning the rules). And in the afternoon, I visited the Munch Museum with the Spanish girls.

On the fourth day, there were no classes, instead we all took a trip to the Fram Museum. After that, me, the girls from Spain and a girl from Prague took a ferry to the islands of the Oslo Fjord, which were very beautiful and offered some nice spots to just relax.

The fifth day was the last full day of lectures. We began with *AI and Language Models in Diachronistic Linguistics* (Professor Tichy), which presented how AI models and language learning works, how it can be used and what it might achieve in the future. This was probably one of my favourite lectures, because it bridged the gap between natural and social sciences and approached language from a very mathematical and concrete standpoint. I for one, very much miss natural sciences and maths in my field of study, and I have also long been interested in coding, so it was cool to see that there is so much happening in this area and that there are so many opportunities for us students. Following this lecture was a practical class where we had a go at transcribing a manuscript (Professor Thaisen). Again, very interesting but very hard, and I definitely thought that I did not have enough knowledge to participate in transcription, but of course the goal was only really for us to see how it happens. Next came the lecture *Synthetic to Analytic Shift* (Professor Benskin). This lecture was probably the hardest, but it made me think the most about the information that I am consuming in my studies, about how academia works, and what my current and future positions are in this field. It made me realise just how critical I will have to be of my colleagues' and my predecessors' work in the future, despite not even being able to imagine doubting them currently, when my knowledge is still so limited. I thought it was an invaluable lecture and probably quite important to my development as a possible future 'academic' as well. Following such an existential crisis evoking lecture was a lecture on *The Great Vowel Shift, and Spelling as Evidence* (Professor Stenbrenden). This was YET another important lecture, because it once again completely changed my perspective on something – the Great Vowel Shift. It was just challenging enough but not too challenging to feel detached from my current knowledge. I would have wished to have this lecture earlier in the week, because I think it would have

made some other lectures easier and more understandable, but then again, perhaps it was able to do that retroactively. After this lecture we all walked to a pizzeria, where we had a chance to get to know each other a bit better and connect with each other.

On the last day my cabin mates and I managed to be late for the only lecture left – *Middle English Sociolinguistics* (Professor Thaisen), which unfortunately made it difficult to follow, as we arrived only to the practical part, missing the theoretical introduction. After this the professors asked about our experience and we all talked about how the summer school could have been improved, but also what was great about it. I thought it was an amazing experience, which I would love to experience again, and I am very grateful to the professors for making it happen. I might try to go again next year, or I might leave space for other people to go, because it is truly so worth it. It was extremely insightful, not just in the sense of the actual subject matter, but also in the sense of what it is like to be a professor and a researcher, and I also had the opportunity to speak and stay in contact with some of the people whose articles I studied and read during my studies.

And lastly, to round off the week, we walked to the Botanical Gardens, where we had our final chat and said our goodbyes. I then found myself in the middle of the pride parade, which was great, spent a lovely afternoon in Oslo, and then took a night bus to the west, to have a look at the fjords.

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