

# Foreword

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.364.for>

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**Unlocking the History of English. Selected papers from the  
21st ICEHL : Pragmatics, prescriptivism and text types**

**Edited by Luisella Caon, Moragh S. Gordon and Thijs Porck**

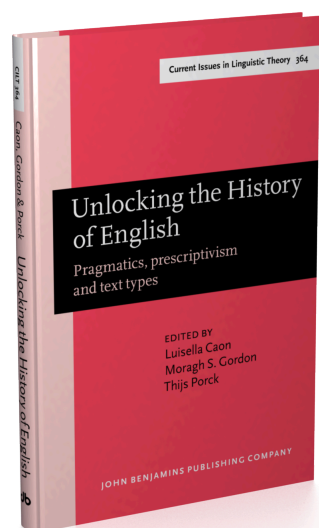
[Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, 364]

2024. viii, 253 pp.

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## Foreword

“We thought it might be time for ICEHL to go to Leiden,” Raymond Hickey suggested on behalf of the Essen/Duisberg organisers in 2016. He was referring to the 21st instalment of this reputable conference. The 20th would still be held in 2018 in Edinburgh, but the conference is usually planned well in advance, and Ray was thinking of 2020. ICEHL has always been my favourite conference (closely followed by LModE and Prescriptivism). It was the first conference I ever attended, in Odense in 1981. This was its second one: ICEHL had been founded in 1979 and had been held in Durham. Its founding fathers included the late Norman Blake and my then PhD supervisor Noel Osselton, now in his nineties and still actively doing research.

The original setup was to have the conference every other year, alternately in Britain and on the Continent. Looking at the overview on the Edinburgh website,<sup>1</sup> this was indeed what largely happened down to the early 2000s. Finding a venue depends on organisers being available for such a big event, but from the mid-2010s onwards, with ICEHL-22 going to Sheffield in 2023, the old pattern has been restored. There are two gaps in the original biannual setup (in the common sense of “once every two years”, not yet recorded in the *OED*). The prospective Helsinki organisers proposed 1990 because that would enable them to present the *Helsinki Corpus* at the conference (I remember first seeing a beamer, Dunglish for “data-projector”, at the conference). And the Leiden conference had to be postponed because of COVID. Despite our optimism about the progress of the pandemic, we still had to decide to hold the conference online – a novelty in ICEHL’s history. Fortunately, the Sheffield organisers planned the conference two years after Leiden rather than according to the original schedule.

I remember the Odense conference very well. There were no plenaries nor any parallel sessions – these came in later due to the growth of interest in the history of English internationally. I also remember first meeting Donka Minkova there, who proved to be the only participant at ICEHL-10 (Manchester 1998) to have attended all earlier conferences (with one missed, I was a close runner-up). For Leiden, she organised a well-attended workshop, and we expect to hear her speak again at Sheffield. I also remember first meeting some of our Finnish colleagues at Odense.

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1. See <https://www.conferences.cahss.ed.ac.uk/icehl20/>. There is one error in the list: ICEHL-6 was in 1990, not in 1991.

What I learned from the late Matti Rissanen was to prepare a question for each paper you attend. There is nothing so upsetting for a speaker as when their paper does not inspire any questions from the audience.

Organising ICEHL-21 would have been my last major academic job before retiring in 2020. This is why I wholeheartedly embraced the suggestion that ICEHL might come to Leiden. As a conference, it has been a major instrument in developing my academic network, a network that is still going very strong indeed. I have made many academic friends there, and have greatly profited from collaborating with them. Carol Percy, for instance, who suggested to go for a drink at ICEHL-6 in 1990, and who I meet online every month now together with Joan Beal, Merja Kytö, who rescued the plan for *A Reader in Early Modern English* (1998), Terttu Nevalainen, with whom I co-authored a chapter on the English standardisation process (2006), and of course our one-time conference photographer, Raymond Hickey. Thank you, Ray and your co-organisers, for suggesting that ICEHL might come to Leiden. Most of all, though, thanks to my brilliant and most efficient co-organisers Luisella Caon, Lauren Fonteyn, Moragh Gordon, Janet Grijsenhout and Thijs Porck for making ICEHL-21 into a truly memorable occasion.

The Hague, December 2022  
Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade