A *History of the English Language* Online Course

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Abstract

This paper is a general illustrated description of the contents and structure of the *History of the English Language* (HEL) *Online Course* designed by the author for the students enrolled in *Historia de la Lengua Inglesa* at the University of Jaén (an obligatory year-long course in English Philology curricula in Spain). The purpose of the *HEL Online Course* is to offer students a very extensive range of both theory and practice-related materials, as well as other useful resources, such as a blog-page and a *Google*-powered search page. Also, the website of the *HEL Online Course* is complemented by materials available on the university's virtual o e-learning platform. The website was launched at the beginning of the academic year 2007-2008 and is currently being used by 2008-2009 students.

1. Introduction

The main purpose of presenting the *HEL Online Course* at the 2007 AEDEAN Conference was to demonstrate how the discipline can be taught and learned by taking advantage of the immense potential offered by computers and the internet, particularly at a time when teaching methods will have to adjust to the new learner-centred requirements about to be implemented in the European Higher Education Area. A second but no less important reason was to publicize the *Course* among colleagues interested in what may be termed *computer-assisted instruction* of the 'History of English'.

Different file-types are used for different kinds of activities in the teaching/learning process. For example, *FrontPage*, *Word* and *Acrobat* files are well suited for providing information for autonomous study (theory and exercises); *PowerPoint* presentations are suitable for class

explanations; *Excel* spreadsheets prove valuable for student's work, e.g. inputting dialectal differences and phonological changes and reordering them according to periods or features; *Access* databases are used for dictionaries and glossaries. Often the same content is exploited with a wide variety of formats and activities, designed to make the learning process easier and appealing, and yet thorough and methodical.

The whole website and individual webpages were designed with Microsoft FrontPage. Javacript tooltips (*boxover*)[1] (see Figure 14) and plug-ins (*Snap Shots*[TM])[2] (see Figure 15) have been used to enhance hypertextuality: mouse-over/-click inboxes containing translations, commentaries and snaps of external webpages.

The *HEL Online Course* must be viewed and assessed against the background of other similar websites, particularly in the United States and Canada. However, most of them are devoted to only one period of the history of the English, either Old or Middle English. See Alcaraz Sintes (2002), Martín Arista (1999) and the Resource sections in the Course for further references.

For the time being access to the *HEL Online Course* is restricted to University of Jaén students, but access will become unrestricted (at http://www4.ujaen.es/~aalcaraz/History_English_Language/index.htm) and the Course will be published in CD-ROM format once it is fully completed and revised, though full exploitation will require it to be run on Internet-connected computers.

2. Description of the *HEL Online Course*

The main blocks of the *HEL Online Course* are accessed by means of a horizontal menu bar at the top of the homepage. This menu bar[3] contains the following items: **General** (Course Information), **Historical Linguistics** (Introduction), **Old English**, **Middle English**, (Early) **Modern English**, **Word-Index** (Glossary), **Blog**,

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[1] *Boxover* is available at http://boxover.swazz.org <07/10/08>.

[2] *Snap Shots*[TM] is available at http://www.snap.com/ <07/10/08>.

[3] This and other menu bars in the *HEL Online Course* website were created with the JavaScript application *AllWebsMenu PRO*, available at http://www.likno.com <07/10/08>.

Site Search, **Research**, **Site map**. This horizontal menu is visible in all the webpages of the site. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Main blocks on the website's homepage

Some of the buttons in the top menu (**Word Index**, **Blog**, **Site Search**, **Site Map**) are direct links to *html* files that are displayed either in a central frame or else in a new browser window or tab. Other buttons (**General**, **Hist. Ling.**, **OE**, **ME**, **ModE**) open up new vertical menus on the left of the homepage. Each of these vertical menus is further subdivided into more specific submenus. The vast majority of the documents linked to from the buttons have been belong to the *HEL Online Course* itself, but some are external.

General menu bar

The **General** menu bar contains buttons for the **Syllabus** (a *pdf* file with the official course syllabus), **Dictionaries**, **Bibliography**, **Internet Resources** and **Exams Models**. On clicking the **Dictionaries** button, a cascading submenu opens containing buttons for dictionaries of *Old English*, *Middle English*, *Historical*, *Etymological* and *Latin*, plus a button for *Thesauri*. The references given in **Dictionaries** are both printed and electronic works. Figure 3 shows dictionaries of Old English available on the Internet. The **Bibliography** button is further subdivided into *Historical Linguistics and Language Change*, *External History*, *Old English*, *Middle English*, *General* and *Anthologies*. The **Internet** button contains links to online resources for *Indo-European*, *Manuscripts* and *Others* (that is, other websites relevant for a HEL Course).

Figure 2. General > Dictionaries > Old English > Internet

Historical Linguistics

The **Historical Linguistics** left menu displays the following buttons: **Why study English Historical Linguistics?** (a *pdf* document), **Where do PDE irregularities come from?** (a *PowerPoint* presentation), **Further reading**, **Terminology**, **Germanic Languages** and **External History**.

Old English

The **Old English** left menu has the following buttons: **External History**, **Crash Course**, **Phonology**, **Morphology**, **Syntax**, **Vocabulary**, **Texts** and **Timelines**. The **External History** button, in turn, opens into a submenu with buttons for *Anglo-Saxon Period*, *Medieval Culture*, *Runes*, *Curiosities*, *People* and *Others*. The **Crash Course** is made up of ten units. Autonomous learning is made easier by means of *boxover* and *Snap Shots^{TM}* plug-ins; see Figure 14 and Figure 15, respectively. **Phonology** splits into *Terminology*, *Sound Changes*, *Vowels* and *Consonants*. *Terminology* is a *ppt* document illustrating the basic terminology needed to explain sound changes. *Sound changes* is another *ppt* presentation summarizing the basic types of sound changes. *Vowels* contains buttons linking to *html* pages describing the evolution of vowels from Indo-European, through Northwest Germanic and Anglo-Frisian, to Old English. *Consonants* is divided into Grimm's Law,

Verner's Law, Geminations (all three of them subdivided into Description, Exercises and Solutions), Palatal Consonants and Diphthongizations, and (Consonantal) Simplifications. See Figure 5 to Figure 5.

Figure 3. The Old English > Phonology cascading menus

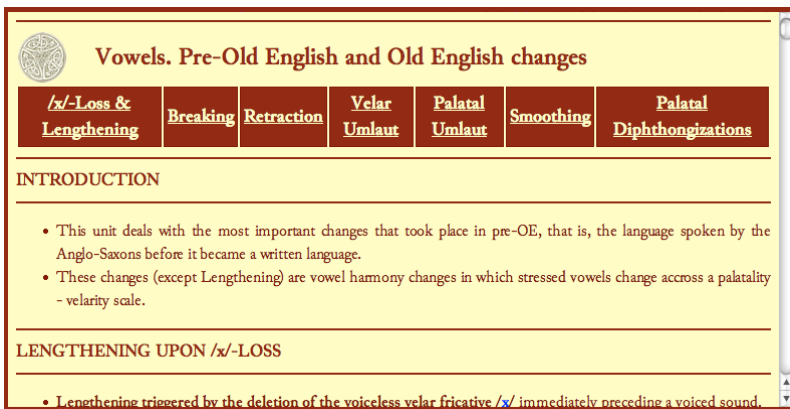Figure 4. Verner's Law. *Exercises* webpage (Central frame)

Figure 5. Old English Sound Changes webpage (Central frame)

The OE **Morphology** button contains a submenu for *Nouns*, *Pronouns*, *Adjectives*, *Adverbs*, *Verbs* and *Numerals*. Clicking of any of these buttons opens up in the central frame the relevant webpage, which gives not only a synchronic description of Old English, but also diachronic explanations of the forms, going as far back as Indo-European when necessary. All the discipline-related terms used in the explanations are links to the relevant section in the *HEL Online Course* website. For example, in Figure 6, a snapshot of the section on OE *ja*-stemmed nouns in the **Old English** > **Morphology** > *Nouns* page, the terms *gemination* and *Palatal Mutation* are underlined and link to the relevant page or to an anchored location in the webpage (**Old English** > **Phonology** > *Consonants* > Gemination > Description, and …> *Vowels* > Pre-Old English > Palatal Umlaut, respectively; see Figure 7 for the latter). The *Verbs* button opens a new submenu containing OE Verbs, a full synchronic and diachronic description of OE verbs, and three exercises[4]: Identification, Sound Changes and Crosswords. See Figure 8 to Figure 10.

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[4] The software used for these and other exercises in the *HEL* Online Course is *Hot Potatoes* Version 6.2., available at http://hotpot.uvic.ca <07/10/08>.

Figure 6. OE *ja*-stemmed nouns (Central frame)

- **Neuter: maġen** ("might"), **hæmed** ("married state").
  - ○ *ja*-stem nouns (<IE */io/):
    - Reason:
      - The thematic vowel */a/ was preceded by a yod, */j/.
      - **Heavy root syllable** (VVC or VCC): the original */j/ > */i/ > /e/, which is preserved in the nom and acc sg: Gmc *and-j-a- > OE **ende** ("*end*").
      - **Light root syllable** (VC):
        - a) this /e/ was preserved in early OE in the nom and acc plural (immediately before the inflection), but was later lost;
        - b) it produced <u>gemination</u> of the consonant: Masc: Gmc */saġjaz/ > OE **seċġ**, **seċġ(e)as**, **seċġ(as**, **seċġ(i)um**, ("man"); Neut: Gmc */kunjom/ > OE **cynn** ("race, *kin*").
      - Notice that in all cases, the /j/ triggered <u>**Palatal Mutation**</u> and was lost subsequently.
    - **Other members of the class:**
      - **Masculine:** **weċġ** ("*wedge*"), **hyll** ("*hill*"); **here** ("army"); **hwǣte** ("*wheat*"); **lǣċe** ("physician, *leech*"), **bōcere** ("scribe"), **leornere** ("*learner*"); **ende** ("*end*"), **hierde** ("shep*herd*").
      - **Neuter: wīte** ("punishment"), **stȳle** ("*steel*"), **ġetimbre** ("building"), **ġeþēode** ("language"); **cynn**

Figure 7. Palatal Umlaut (Central frame)

PALATAL UMLAUT

1. **Description**
   - ○ **Summary:** Velar Vowel + Consonant + */i/ or */j/ (but not */ji/) > Palatal Vowel + Consonant.
   - ○ Other terms: *ilj*-Umlaut or **Palatal Mutation.**
   - ○ **Type of change:** Regressive adjacent **assimilation.**
   - ○ **Period:** Pre-OE: 6th-7th cc. After the invasions, but before the earliest OE written records.
   - ○ Old English **dialect** affected: All.
   - ○ **Triggering sounds** in the following syllable: Syllabic */i/ or non-syllabic */j/ in the following syllable, normally an inflectional or a derivational suffix. These triggers had already disappeared by the time of the earliest OE written records.
   - ○ **Inputted vowels:** Short and long velar vowels: /u/, /u:/, /o/, /o:/ and /a/.There may be one or two intervening consonants between the trigger and the input.
   - ○ **Nature of the change:** The back vowel turns into a front vowel, i.e., the whole vocalic space is affected.
     - */u/, */u:/ > /ü/, /ü:/ = "y, ȳ"> Late West Saxon /i/, /i:/
     - */o/, */o:/ > /œ/, /œ:/ > /e/, /e:/ = "ē"

Figure 8. Exercise 1 on Strong Verbs: Identification

Figure 9. Exercise 2 on Strong Verbs: Relevant sound changes

Figure 10. Exercise 3 on Strong Verbs: Crosswords puzzle

The OE **Syntax** button contains a submenu for *Word Order*, *Typical Structures*, *Coordination*, *Subordination*, and two *exercises* on syntactic analysis. These two exercises are multiple-choice tests on an excerpt from Alfred's *Letter to Wærferth* (Figure 11) and on the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac (Figure 12).

Figure 11. Syntax exercise 1: Alfred's *Letter to Wærferth*

Figure 12. Syntax exercise 2: "Abraham and Isaac"

The **Texts** button opens the submenus for each of the texts studied during the course; see Figure 13. The texts are presented in a variety of formats: some are *html* pages designed with *Hot Potatoes* (see note 4) and include links to the locations where digitalized images of the manuscript are available. This allows the students to compare the transcribed text and the original manuscript. Other files are *pdf* documents designed for printing and home study. Self-study is encouraged by means of *boxover* commentaries on the grammar or style of a particular clause or word; see Figure 14.

The **Resources** button subdivides into *Phonology*, *Morphology*, *Vocabulary*, *Online Courses & Software*, *Texts*, *Computer Fonts* and *Old English Exam Model*. Each of these pages contain a comprehensive list of links to other websites, webpages, online software, online, courses… Again, each link is enhanced by a *Snap Shots*ᵀᴹ hyperlink in the shape of bubble. Placing the mouse over the hyperlink will open a preview of the linked webpages, without having to open a new tab or browser session; see Figure 15.

Figure 13. OE *Texts*: menus and submenus

Figure 14. OE > Texts > Ælfric's Preface to *Genesis*, displaying a *Snap Shot* commentary of OE formulaic greetings

Figure 15. Online Courses & Software: *Snap Shots^TM* hyperlink

The **Timelines** button displays a horizontal chronogram divided into periods and providing information about sound changes, works written in OE and Latin, translations, historical events and people (not only English), etc. See Figure 16.

Figure 16 Timelines: 800-900 *A.D.*

–500 – 0	0 – 200	200 – 500	500– 600	600 – 700	700 – 800	800 – 900	900 – 1000	1000 – 1100

Early Old English: 9th c.Supremacy of Wessex

800   900

Sound changes
Lowering of */iu/ > /eo/

Old English texts

West Saxon OE	Mercian OE	Kentish OE
King Alfred 's translations & commissions	Interlinear Gloss to the *Vespasian Psalter* (oldest extant English translation of any portion of the *Bible*)	Charters
Gregorius Magnus' *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*		
Boethius ' *Consolatio Philosophiae*		
Bede : *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*		
Orosius : *Historiae Adversus Paganos* (10th c.)		
St. Augustine : *Soliloquies*		
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (up to 891)		
Proverbs		
888: *Law Codes (Deemings, or Book of Dooms)*		
Waerferth translations		
Gregorius Magnus' *Dialogues*		
Martirologium		
Leech-Book		

Latin texts
The Books of Kells (or The Book of Columba; produced in Iona Abbey; Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS A. I. (58))

896: Nennius ? *Historia Britonum*
893: Asser . *De Vita et Rebus Gestis Alfredis*

People & Events
797: Creation *Hispanic Mark* by Charlemagne.
800: Charlemagne conquers Barcelona. Crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.
829: King Ecgbeyht (*Bretwalda*)
844: Sack of Seville by Danish Vikings
849-899: King Alfred the Great
????-908/9: Asser. Assisted Alfred in his translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*.
865: The Great Heathen / Danish Army takes York, conquers Northumbria and East Anglia. Creation of the Kingdom of York
871-4: The Great Summer Army conquers Mercia.
875: Monastery of Lindisfarne is abandoned. Transfer to Chester-le-Street (Durham).
878: Battle of Edington between Alfred and Guthrum the Old &Treaty of Wedmore (Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum)> Danelaw

Middle English

The **Middle English** left menu contains cascading submenus similar to those of the Old English menu: **External History**, **Phonology** (*Vowel*, *Consonants*, *Spelling*), **Morphology** (*Nouns*, *Adjectives*, *Verbs*), **Syntax** (*Coordination*, *Subordination*, *Cases*, *Impersonal Constructions*, the *Passive Voice*, *Negation* and *Interrogatives*), **Dialects** (*Diversity*, *Features by dialect*), **Vocabulary** (*Foreign borrowings*, *Dictionaries*), **Texts** (*Transition*: *The **Peterborough Chronicle**, Dialects*: *Dialectal features in Chaucer's* "The Reeve's Tale", *Northern*: *The Cursor Mundi*, *East Midland*: *The Bestiary* ("Cethegrande"), *West Midland*: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Southern*: *The Fox and the Wolf*, and *Kentish*: *Remorse of Conscience*), **Web Resources** and **Bibliography**. Again, different types of file formats are used in different sections and for different purposes: *html*, *ppt*, *pdf*… Also, the exploitation of the texts is varied, the aim being not only to translate the texts, but also to help students study the evolution of English through the extant forms and structures found in ME texts. For example, the excerpt from *The Bestiary* contains the translation and questions on the grammar and vocabulary found in specific sections or lines; see Figure 17.

Figure 17. ME > Texts > East Midland > "Cethegrande": text, translation and questions

7. ðis fis ðat is vnride, 8. ðanne **him hungreð** he **gapeð** wide;	Translation	What type of construction is **him hungreð**? What pronouns are used to refer to the whale here and in the rest of the text? Explain the usage. What is the phonetic value of the vowel in **gapeð**? EMid ME has **-eþ** as 3rd p. sg. pres. ind., e.g., **hungreð**. Find other verbs with the same morpheme.
9. vt of his **ðrote** it **smit** an onde, 10. ðe **swetteste** ðing ðat is o londe;	Translation	What is the phonetic value of the vowel in **ðrote**? What is the phonetic value of the vowel in **swetteste**? And that of **swete**? Why do the verbs **smit** and **flet** (line 4) lack the 3rd p. sg. pres. ind. morpheme **-eþ**, used with other verbs (e.g. **gapeð**, **hungreð** in line 8)?
		Write the phonetic evolution of **dragen** from OE to ME. Write the phonetic evolution of **fagen** from OE to ME. Why has the rhyme not survived: PDE *draw* /drɔ:/ vs. *fain*

Modern English

The **Modern English** left menu follows the same general sections and links to different types of documents. Figure 18 shows the cascading submenus for **Phonology** and Figure 19 shows a small section of an *Excel* table displaying vowels that underwent certain phonetic changes in Middle English and Modern English.

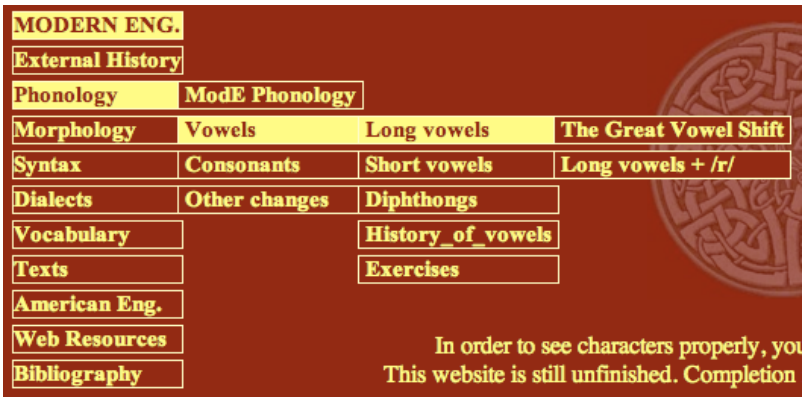Figure 18. Modern English > Phonology cascading submenus

Figure 19. Modern English > Phonology > Vowels > History of Vowels: *Excel* spreadsheet displaying only those vowels that were subject to both *Pre-cluster Shortening* and the *Great Vowel Shift*

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	ModE sound	ModE ex		ME sound	ME ex		OE / AN-OFr / ON	ex	other examples
3	/iː/	week	GVS	/eː/	weke	OSL	/ɪ/	wicu	
6	/iː/	field	GVS	/ɛː/	felde	OSL	/e/	feld	
10	/iː/	eat	GVS	/ɛː/	eten	OSL	/e/	etan	meat
129	/eɪ/	ape	GVS	/aː/	ape	OSL	/a/	apa	name, ale
131	/eɪ/	take	GVS	/aː/	taken	OSL	/a/	taka	
143	/eɪ/	gate	GVS	/aː/	gate	OSL	/a/	gatu	
156	/əu/	over	GVS	/ɔː/	over	OSL	/o/	ofer	open, nose, hope

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Word Index

The **Word Index** button on the top menu bar opens an alphabetically arranged list of terms belonging to the discipline. Each term is a hyperlink to the relevant webpage or to a specific section of a webpage. See Figure 20.

Figure 20. Word Index (terminological glossary): Beginning of A
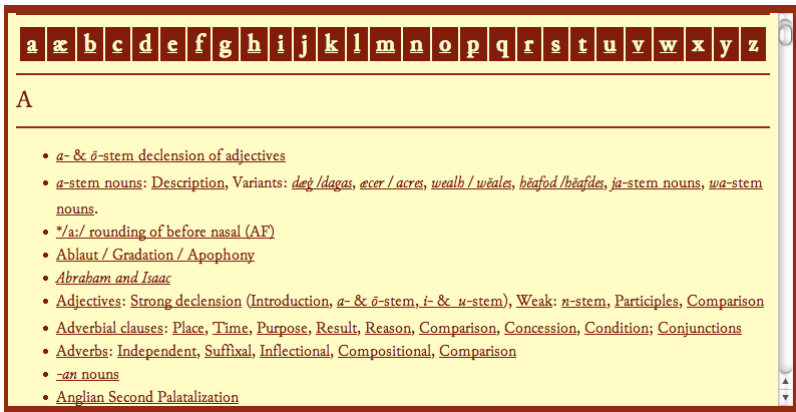
HEL Blog

Another major section is the **HEL Blog** page designed to encourage students to contribute to the *HEL* Course. This is an important part the course, since the final grades awarded depend not only on exam results, but also on student participation. Blogs prove to be an easy and objective way to evaluate the students' active participation. Both students and the instructor can post messages (see Figure 21) and subscribe through RSS feeds (see Figure 22). The Blog's homepage contains links to the other major components of the HEL Course (see Figure 23) and to other *HEL* websites and blogs, a *Snap Shots*TM link to the Toronto *Dictionary of Old English* "Word of the Week", and RSS feeds from *Intute* (The Arts and Humanities English Gateway), which can be also be viewed in new browser tabs or windows or in *Snap Shots*TM-generated mouse-over inboxes.

Figure 21. *HEL* Blog: latest post

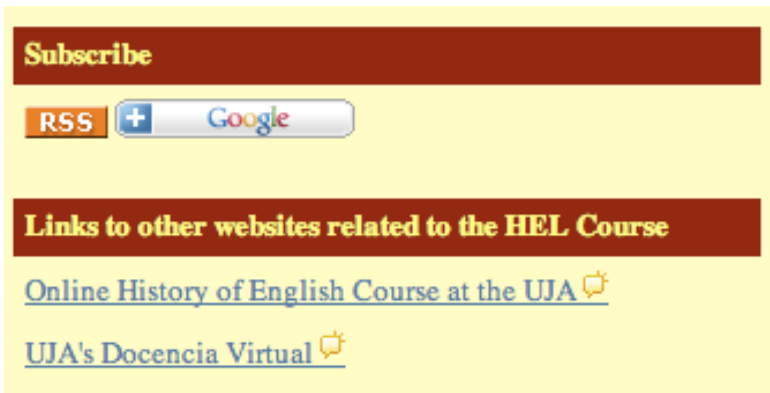
Figure 22. *HEL* Blog: RSS and Google subscription links

Figure 23. *HEL* Blog: *DOE* "Word of the Week", RSS feed from *Intute*, Links to other *HEL* blogs

Search Page

        Finally, the **Search Page** button in the top menu bar opens a *Google*-powered customized search box in the central frame. It permits conducting searches for contents found both in the *HEL Online Course* website and the *HEL* Blog. Figure 24 shows the results for the query "Bayeux": a few posts by a former student.

Figure 24. *Google* Custom Search: Results for "Bayeux"
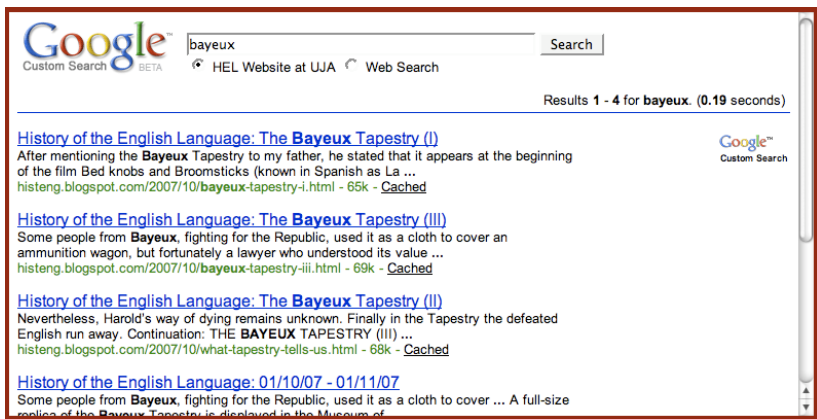
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