

Watch Your Language!

Ever wonder how English came to be the world's favourite second language? Or how the English we speak, write, and think is influenced by advertising and other mass media? By other languages? By political rhetoric? By literature? How did the word on the street become so different from the word on the page--and now--the word on the screen? Please join us for a multi-faceted six week exploration of the history and contemporary uses of English with Christopher Levenson.

February 2

The origins of English as a Germanic language; the linguistic influence of the Norman Conquest and later of the Renaissance in making English the world's favourite second language, and some recent versions of English in former colonies and elsewhere.

February 9

The contribution of various writers including Chaucer and Shakespeare to the vocabulary of English; how meanings of certain words have changed over the centuries, and manifestations of the false god of linguistic purity (eg. Quebec language police, Nazis).

February 16

Loan words: resident aliens or landed immigrants? Why do we borrow them? Some examples from especially French, but also German, Italian, and a smattering of other languages.

February 23

The word on the street: formal speech and writing contrasted with various levels of informal speech, such as slang, dialect, and jargon. Why bother with grammar and punctuation?

March 2

Politics and the English language: the contemporary pressures on English from mass media (eg. how advertising changes the way we speak, spell "rite", and think). Another look at Orwell, political rhetoric, political correctness, computer-speak and other technologies. The role of neologisms and of cliché.

March 9

How literature changes and is in turn changed by our language (Hopkins, Dickinson, Joyce, Woolf). What is the future for our written language and languages in general? What about Esperanto and other manufactured languages? Plus, if time permits, a quick look at word games: spoonerisms, palindromes, etc.

About Christopher Levenson

Christopher Levenson was born in London, England but has lived and worked mainly outside England - in Holland, Germany and the US - before emigrating to Canada. He taught English, Comparative Literature and Creative Writing at Carleton University until retiring in 1969. He has also travelled widely through Eastern and Western Europe, Russia, India, SE Asia and Australia. His first book of poetry was published in 1959, and he was co-founder and editor of *Arc* magazine. His eleventh book of poetry, *A tattered coat upon a stick*, was published in March 2017.

Spring 2018 Details

- 10 to 11:30 am
- Fridays, February 2 to March 9
- Oak Boardroom, New Delbrook Rec Centre