

BOOK REVIEW

Camelia Bejan, *Morphosyntactic changes in the history of English. An introduction*. Iași: Editura PIM, 2017. 210 pages. ISBN: 978-606-13-3830-6.

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The current collection of textbooks on the history of the English language includes introductory ones (Algeo & Pyles 2004, Baugh & Cable 2012, Gelderen 2006, among others), providing a chronological view on all periods in the development of the language, and concise linguistic introductions to particular periods, such as Smith (2009), Hogg (2002) on Old English, Horobin and Smith (2002) on Middle English, Görlach (1991), Nevalainen (2006) on Early Modern English, to mention only a few.

Camelia Bejan's textbook *Morphosyntactic changes in the history of English* is a recent addition to the first type of textbooks. The volume works chronologically, from the Old English period to the Early Modern English one, with dedicated chapters for each period.

This textbook is also a noteworthy contribution to the series of textbooks written by Romanian scholars (Băncilă 1991, Poruciuc 2004), who, in the previous few decades, delivered courses in the History of the English language to advanced philology undergraduates in Romanian universities.

Summary

The textbook introduces core aspects in the history of the English language and it is organized in three parts, each corresponding to a historical period: Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English, further subdivided into chapters that cover the main morphological or syntactic features of the language at each stage.

Chapter 1 provides a brief treatment of Old English morphology. The major word classes are closely examined and the focus is on the inflectional system of nouns, adjectives and verbs.

Chapter 2 gives a synchronic description of the syntax of Old English. The core aspects dealt with are the realization of the arguments in impersonal constructions, the rise of the periphrastic constructions involving perfect and passive auxiliaries and the principles governing word order: verb-second in main clauses and verb-final in subordinate clauses.

In Chapter 3 the focus is on Middle English morphology. The main issue discussed is the decline of the inflectional morphology on nouns, adjectives and verbs. The disappearance of the remnants of the old inflectional system marks the transition of English from a synthetic type to an analytic type of language.

Chapter 4 examines the developments in the Middle English syntax. The growing importance of word order leads to the stabilization of SVO word order, the rise of the formal subject and the demise of the impersonal constructions. A new development is the rise of modality, aspect and voice signaled by the increasing number of periphrastic verbal constructions. The changes affecting subordinate clauses at this stage are the decline of the verb-last principle and the gradual decrease in the use of the subjunctive mood.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the distinctive morpho-syntactic features of Early Modern English. In the nominal system, the periphrastic genitive gains prominence. In the verbal system, the main developments addressed are the consolidation of the progressive *be-ing* construction, the regularization of *do*-support in questions and negative sentences, the demise of multiple negation and of the impersonal constructions, as well as the emergence of new infinitival constructions.

Evaluation

This textbook evinces a distinctive feature that makes it appealing to its readers – the pedagogical rigor – both in the informative content and in design.

First and foremost, the textbook stands out for the accessibility of the linguistic material, which includes relevant current research and theory.

The main idea in *Part I. Old English* that is systematically made clear is that of **the Germanic roots of the English language**. Old English was a highly inflected language, with a rich inflectional system on nouns, adjectives and verbs, derived directly from that in Germanic languages. In late Old English, modal and auxiliary verbs, initially used as lexical verbs, started to be employed as support verb, but periphrastic tenses and passive constructions were still at a stage of inception. The presence of the non-finite verbal forms: the infinitive, a verbal form of nominal origin, and the participle, which was commonly declined as weak or strong, is also a Germanic feature.

Another noteworthy Germanic feature of Old English, highlighted by the author, concerns word order patterns. Clauses were organized on two Germanic word order principles: verb-second principle in main clauses and verb-last principle in subordinate clauses. Old English subordination was explicitly marked by the verb-last principle, the subjunctive mood and a wide range of compound subordinators.

In the late Old English period, the language already begins to show signs of decay and simplification of inflections that characterize the later stages of English.

The overview of the Old English period concludes with study assignments of various types, which require students to recognize structures, identify modern survivals of Old English inflections on nouns, adjectives, or verbs, or check the frequency of occurrence of certain verbs in a collection of biblical texts.

The keyword at the center *Part II. The Middle English period* is ‘**transition**’. The two chapters are meant to make students aware of how the transition from a highly inflected language into an analytic one took place. In the early Middle English period, the structure of the English language was mainly affected by two tendencies: the decline of the inflectional morphology, often due to phonological reasons, and the parallel reduction of word order sequences.

A crucial aspect in the Middle English period that is highlighted in the textbook is the rise of aspect and modality. It is generally assumed that all auxiliary verbs are derived historically from lexical verbs that underwent a process of grammaticalization. The chronological order of their emergence is: modals / perfect *have*, then *do*, passive *be*, progressive *be*, passive *get*. Middle English can be characterized as the period in which the modern auxiliary system becomes established, the auxiliary sequences increasingly occur and the auxiliary *do* starts to be used.

The author also lays stress on the reduction of word order patterns, triggered by the gradual erosion of the inflectional system on nouns, adjectives and verbs. In main clauses the pre-verbal position in the sentence becomes the territory of the subject, which leads to the stabilisation of English as a rigid SVO language type. Word order in subordinate clauses underwent crucial changes as well, the verb-last principle was gradually lost, resulting in the establishment of the SVO.

The two chapters provide diverse types of study assignments. Students are expected to apply their theoretical knowledge to the analysis of Middle English constructions that exhibit the mixed properties of modals and auxiliaries. Alternatively, they have to account for modern English sentence types in diachronic terms, such as subject-verb inversion, *Never in my life have I seen such a disaster*, as vestiges of V2 in Modern English,

The ideas lying at the core of the chapter on the syntactic developments in *Early Middle English* are the movement from greater regional variability towards a more orderly state and increased grammaticalization. The language of most 16th c. texts was characterized by a richness of variant constructions, inherited from Middle English dialects, gradually reduced in the 17th c. and in the 18th c., when texts resemble the present-day language.

The transformation of English into an analytic language continues in the Early Modern English period, which is characterized by a further loss of inflections and an increase in the number of auxiliaries, as expected of a language becoming more analytic. The auxiliary *do* is regularly used in questions and negative sentences. Besides the perfective structure, well established in Early Modern English, new periphrastic systems also evolved as a result of grammaticalization, including the progressive aspect (*be + -ing*) and *be going to* as an indicator of future time in the 17th c. century. This century is viewed as a crucial period in the development of the English verbal system, when the language reaches the state of considerable homogeneity characteristic of the 18th century.

The study assignments attached to this chapter are designed to enable students to understand the extent of the transformations that the language has undergone. They vary from on-line tasks, such as word searches in the electronic Shakespeare or examining short texts extracted from the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (1998) to sentence-based exercises. To acquire a proper appreciation of how English has evolved over time, students are also asked to comparatively examine excerpts from authentic texts, for instance, from three Bible translations, illustrative of the three periods in the evolution of the language.

This textbook highlights the major developments in the history of the English language, while closely assisting students in gaining an understanding of the language's successive transformations.

The pedagogical value of this textbook resides not only in its informative content, but also in its reader-friendly terminology and concise style. Students gain an overall view of the main changes taking place in the language throughout the centuries. The theoretical accounts are supported by numerous illustrative examples selected from the relevant bibliography and accompanied by translations into modern English and/or glosses where appropriate.

Secondly, besides the accessible accounts of the linguistic phenomena, this textbook also strikes through its meticulously designed structure. Pedagogical rigor is further ensured by the inclusion of an introduction and a summary for each chapter, suggestions for further reading from key texts, aimed at extending knowledge or deepening the focus of study, as well as a glossary of terms, and an answer key section. The volume is completed by a substantial and up-to-date reference section that also includes a list of printed and on-line dictionaries, as well as corpora, available for the study of the diachronic linguistic phenomena.

One suggestion seems to be in place for the selection of the informative content. The author emphasizes the internally motivated language changes,

leaving the external factors affecting the development of the language unmentioned. Therefore, a new edition of this textbook that includes succinct summaries of the social and political events that led to the linguistic changes would be beneficial for the undergraduate readers. These accounts would help students correlate the knowledge acquired from different courses and understand the interplay of internally and externally motivated language changes.

This accessible, new textbook is ideal for use in upper undergraduate courses and seminars and as a resource for researchers in linguistics and in disciplines related to linguistics, interested in a concise treatment of the history of the English language.

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