

Lajos Szöke, *A Historical Grammar of the English Language*, EKF Liceum Kiado, Eger 2004.

In the Preface to Lajos Szöke's *Historical Grammar* (p. 10) the book is defined as "a relatively concise historical grammar" of English that is meant as a textbook for college and university students, as well as for teachers of English "who wish to learn something about the history of the language they teach." It is also said that it is "focused on the internal history" of English since the historical events are covered by other subjects in the curriculum. It seems to me, however, that for both of the target groups of readers the book is too technical. It is too much concerned with details of change and too little with causes, social or linguistic, of change and maintenance, for that matter.

The grammar is written in the manner of traditional historical grammars, except for the many tables and diagrams which give a much better overview of the changes. A great deal of attention is devoted to phonological and morphological developments from Indo-European roots, in a well organized way and supplied with plenty of examples. This material, however, seems to be rather too comprehensive for undergraduate students of English, as well as teachers with no previous knowledge of diachronic analysis. Students at the (post)graduate, or at least advanced students at the undergraduate level, on the other hand, could find ample information on diachronic topics which they may need to study. What appears to be missing for the undergraduate level of study are sociolinguistic and cognitive insights into the changes, considerations of mechanisms that promote language change and those that prevent it. Such an approach may be more important for the explanation of the present form and usage of the English language than a complete description of the changes starting with very intangible language forms such as the Indo-European.

The author's intentionally eclectic approach is, indeed, most appropriate for such a textbook, because he is free to apply different theoretical models of presentation, depending on their suitability for a particular theme. Szöke points out the fact that there are many unresolved problems in the historical grammar of English, but that he will not "take sides in controversies" (p. 10). The discussion of the merits or deficiencies of theoretical models, however, would be an essential element had the author had the more advanced students in mind. The theories are not explicitly mentioned, except for Fillmore's case grammar, which is used in the treatment of compounding, though without an explanation of the basic principles or terms such as deep and surface structure.

According to the Preface, the author relied especially on those sources that were written for the non-native speakers, in order to help them better under-

stand the present state of the language. But there is very little comparison with Hungarian – for whom the book was meant in the first place, I imagine – or other languages apart from those directly involved in the growth of English. It is only students of Germanic languages that would find the book directly useful, since there is ample reference to Proto-Germanic. It is not the kind of textbook (for example like Rolf Berndt's, listed among the references), which supplies enough comparison or reference to similarities and differences between English and another, or other languages. It must be conceded that it must be more difficult to find common features between English and Hungarian than another Germanic or Indo-European language, but explanation of general trends and rules of change, or systematic differences between such divergent languages could have been used at an advantage.

The chapters on phonology are dedicated to the “history of English vowels” (ch. 2) and the “development of English consonants” (ch. 3) respectively. Each of the chapters begins with the presentation of the IE system, continues through Common Germanic, Old and Middle English to Early Modern English, accounting for the major and a number of minor changes. The chapter on vowels ends with a brief discussion of what is in the table of contents called “suprasegmental features of accentuation”. The pleonastic expression is corrected in the text to *Suprasegmental Features*. First the IE stress system is discussed here, next Germanic innovations and finally, the ME system of accentuation with its French element. In connection with this an, to me, exotic expression is used about the prosodic features, which are said to be of a “non-Italiano type,” again without much explanation.

The description of morphological changes is divided into morphological structures of OE and those of ME. All parts of speech are covered, with inflectional types and paradigms where it is applicable. The nouns and verbs are, naturally, given the most detailed treatment being taken from the IE and Gothic systems through to the OE inflections. In the chapter on ME particular attention is given to the gradual loss of inflections. However, the innovations in the pronominal system of ME, for example, only the Old Norse influence on the possessive pronouns with the initial *þ-* is commented, whereas the third person plural form in general and the feminine *sche*, *scho* are not discussed. The interesting introduction of the French *secounde* as a numeral is not commented on either.

Syntax is treated under the title “The Formation of the English Syntax”. The chapter deals with the various types of subject and its omission and it contains a discussion of the predicate. The tenses and the function of cases are discussed in greater detail, followed by a description of the various types of paratactic and hypotactic sentences, concord and word order. A separate section deals with ME and EModE syntactic developments and finally with questions and negations. A peculiar statement is that the syntactical function of the definite article in ME was “very much like in ModE” and that the differences are due to the “medieval circumstances of life (that) demanded special use” (e. g. before names and names of rivers p. 176.)

Generally speaking, the chapters on syntax, word formation and semantics are not well organized, the numbers of sections are illogically, or probably erroneously, marked and there is a larger number of more typographical errors than in the earlier sections.

Word formation covers derivation through its history from Indo-European to OE with a very detailed history of affixation. Borrowed affixes are marked for date of entry and source, but not always accurately. Compounding stands out from the rest of the chapter, since the discussion of the relationship between the components is based on Fillmore's case theory, without much explanation, with examples that are taken only from Old English. A special section is devoted to the *History of Conversion* as a more recent phenomenon which is explained as a result of the loss of inflections.

Although this is a book on grammar, a short section on semantic change is introduced as part of word formation. The same system is used as earlier, i. e. terms and partial explanations from various theories and the most common division of types of semantic change. Polysemy, homonymy as well as synonymy are analysed only in connection with phonological change and borrowing, not as elements in the semantic or cognitive processes.

The last chapter deals with the "development of the English vocabulary" and, as usual, it begins with the IE inheritance to proceed via a common NorthWest IE vocabulary, through Common Germanic. Language contact and loan words as a result of it are discussed, particularly those that were borrowed during the OE and ME periods. The "fate" of French words in English has a separate section. This chapter is a superficial account of borrowing without a discussion of the causes of borrowing and mechanisms of adaptation.

Whereas the phonological and morphological changes are often very well explained, the possible causes of language change are too briefly accounted for and not discussed at all levels of language and for all periods, except for the obvious contact induced changes in the vocabulary. As said earlier, the various sociolinguistic topics so important in language change are only briefly covered, such as standardization, which contains, so to say, only a list of early grammarians. Nevertheless, the grammar can be of good use to students in the graduate courses, and teachers of English with some knowledge of the history of English.

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