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***THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE THROUGH THE PRISM
OF THE CENTURIES*, KLAUDIA BEDNÁROVÁ-GIBOVÁ,
PREŠOV: FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA PREŠOVskej
UNIVERZITY, 2014. 95 PP. ISBN 978-80-555-1092-7**

Historical linguistics can boast a long tradition of scholarly research. Ever since Sir William Jones found similarities between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin there has been an increased interest in the research on language typology and language history. A century later two other historical linguists, Jacob Grimm and Karl Verner made a breakthrough discovery which established the permanent place of diachrony among the branches of linguistics. Despite the ups and downs in attitudes towards historical linguistics, and historical semantics in particular, it is vital to familiarise students of English with the roots of the language which they chose as their major. It is, after all, language with its etymology and structure that is the mirror of culture and society.

The monograph reviewed here is entitled *The English Language through the Prism of the Centuries* and is intended as a textbook for first-year students at the MA level, who take the History of the English Language course. The textbook comprises 7 chapters, the first of which is of an introductory nature providing the reader with the details of the pre-English period, while the last one, chapter 7, includes 3 tests which the author used in the early days of her career as a university teacher. From the didactic perspective, the chapter with sample tests serves an important function, undoubtedly facilitating the process of preparing for the final exam, as well as being a thought-provoking revision of the material covered in the main body of the book. As for the introductory chapter, although it leads us smoothly to the Anglo-Saxon period via an insightful picture of the Proto-Indo-

European and Proto-Germanic beginnings, one may feel the lack of certain theoretical foundations concerning, for instance the laws governing language change or types of semantic change, to mention but a few.

The main body of the textbook, chapters 2 to 6, are characterised by an extremely consistent layout. Each is centred around a subsequent historical period starting with Old English (449-1100) through Middle English (1100-1500), Early Modern English (1500-1750) and Modern English (1750-1900) up to Late Modern English (1900-present). Within each of the chapters the sequence of sections follows the pattern as indicated below:

1. *Historical background*
2. *Cultural background*
3. *Linguistic situation*
4. (the name of the period) *illustrated*

The first two sections, titled *Historical background* and *Cultural background*, shed light on the most important aspects of the external history of the English language, such as invasions, political turmoil, technological innovations, literary achievements and such like. The next section, titled *Linguistic situation*, elucidates the internal history of a given period, providing the readers with the details of phonology, orthography, lexis and syntax. Last but not least, each chapter is rounded off with several samples of texts characteristic for the period discussed.

The consistent pattern of the sections is an undoubted merit of this textbook, as such neatness is of great significance for the students, who will always know where to find the information they need for revision or for an exam. The only question that may raise some doubt in the context of the textbook's layout is the position of the final section in each chapter. In the chapters on Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English the section ... *illustrated* is a subsection of *Linguistic situation*, whereas in the chapters on Modern English and Late Modern English it is treated as a separate final section of these two chapters. It is virtually impossible to deduce whether this was an intended pattern devised by the author or a mere oversight after organisational modifications. Nevertheless, the slight difference in the layout mentioned in no way detracts from the overall neatness and tidiness in the arrangement of sections and their contents.

The English Language through the Prism of the Centuries undoubtedly has a high didactic value. It is student-friendly both in its language and the scope of knowledge it tackles. Another great asset, which has already been pointed out, is the consistent layout of the sections throughout the textbook. However, there are some editorial errors, such as referring to Hladký 1998 (p. 27, 29), which – according to the bibliography – should be Hladký 1996 or doubling the word *with* (p. 58). Also a number of misprints have not been avoided, like the use of the symbol & (p. 58) instead of the word *and*, the verb *consist* (p. 70) instead of *consists* or

the compound *televisions announcers* (p. 72) instead of *television announcers*, as well as the use of the abbreviation *ELF* (p. 73) instead of *EFL*. There are also instances of the inconsistent use of the convention, according to which words cited are italicised and their meanings are provided in inverted commas (e.g.: p. 60, 62). Lastly, one may express certain doubts as to the names given to the later periods of the history of the English language, namely Modern English (1750-1900) and Late Modern English (1900-present). What may be somewhat controversial is the use of the name Late Modern English in the formal name of the chapter, and the employment of the abbreviation PRES instead of L.Mod.E. in a number of places throughout the textbook. Although historical linguists fail to see eye to eye as to the timelines of individual historical periods (see, for example, Baugh and Cable 2002, Fisiak 2000), most of them tend to name the most recent period Present-day English.

All in all, textbooks like the one reviewed here should be in demand, and should have specific groups of students as the target readers. Unfortunately, the overall trend among students of English, at least from the perspective of my university, is to choose other scopes of linguistics as their major and to stay, academically, away from research into historical linguistics. Hence, it is the task of us, university teachers and historians of language, to write textbooks which would encourage researchers-to-be to follow in the footsteps of renown historical linguists and focus their studies on language with a diachronic perspective. The monograph under review is a fine exemplar of a motivating and thought-provoking textbook, which is suitable not only for students of English but also for any lay person who wishes to set out on a journey into the past, and the heart, of the English language.

References

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