

BESPRECHUNGEN

Joan C. Beal. *English in Modern Times*. London: Arnold, 2004, xvi + 264 pp., £ 16.99.

English in Modern Times is the first introductory textbook describing the development of the English language from the beginning of the 18th century until the end of the Second World War. Until recently, there seems to have been a lingering agreement that phonological and syntactic changes are only observable at a great distance and that we are chronologically ‘too close’ for any meaningful observations concerning language to be made. Traditionally, histories of English covered the periods up to 1800 and – for the time after the 16th century – they predominantly focused on descriptions of metalinguistic works, such as grammars and dictionaries, particularly stressing or even sharply criticising their normative or prescriptive characteristics (a notable exception is Strang 1970). Thus most histories of the English language used to end with statements about the 18th century as an ‘age of prescriptivism’ or ‘age of correctness’.

Fortunately, however, this scenario has changed in the last decade: a growing awareness of the differences in the language of an increasingly more distant past and the change of emphasis within historical linguistics to socio-historical and corpus-based approaches has led to a recent upsurge in interest in Late Modern English. In addition to introductory textbooks to the language of the 18th and 19th centuries (Bailey 1996, Görlach 1999, Görlach 2001) and surveys of the language of the period in the respective volumes of the *Cambridge History of the English Language* (Romaine 1998; Lass 1999), scholars working in the field now find lively discussion forums such as the tri-annual ‘International Conference on Late Modern English’ (Edinburgh 2001; Vigo 2004).¹

Beal’s textbook *English in Modern Times* summarizes many of these recent findings and shows that late modern English is indeed a highly rewarding field of study. Beal views this period, coinciding roughly with that historians call the ‘long’ 18th (1660–1815; restoration until the fall of Napoleon) and 19th

¹ At the *Anglistentag* in Bamberg 2005, the linguistics section – ‘Modern English in the Making’ (Convenors: Marianne Hundt and Ursula Lenker) – was devoted to various aspects of this period. For the proceedings, see Houswitschka, Knappe & Müller, ed. (forthcoming).

centuries (1789–1918; French revolution until the end of the First World War) as a “coherent period”, at least in British history: we see the rise of the constitutional monarchy, the rise of the British Empire and its breakdown, the Industrial Revolution, and the consequences of the urbanization of society, of new technologies, of new means of transport, of rich new opportunities for communication and universal education (summarized on 1–13).

The book takes a socio-historical approach, maintaining that these social changes in the Anglophone world need to be taken into account to understand not only the rise of Received Pronunciation (RP) and the genesis of urban dialects, but also other, more general linguistic changes which make English become recognizably ‘modern’ in the sense of ‘like that of present day’. Thus, chapter 2 on the “vocabulary of Later Modern English” (14–34) explicates that in this period new words were coined at a rate not seen since the 16th century because of trade, exploration and colonization and in particular technological and scientific innovations (see the huge number of neo-classical compounds, eponyms etc.). On the other hand, an investigation of new coinages in the period labelled “War and Rumours of War” (1900–1945) shows that war does not – as has been repeatedly suggested – stimulate *long-lasting* lexical innovation (29–33).

Ultimate reference to extralinguistic factors is also made in the detailed accounts of syntactic (66–88) and phonological changes (124–166) in the last centuries. Beal here describes the emergence of what Labov has termed ‘linguistic insecurity’ – a characteristic typically associated with the aspiring middle classes and thus intrinsically linked to social mobility – as the most important driving force in language change. This development is illustrated by the role of grammars and dictionaries, which may have started as agents of codification in the 18th century, but which found a new market as self-help guides for the aspiring classes in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is even more evident in the pronunciation guides and dictionaries, which became immensely popular as a consequence of the rise of social accent and, in particular, the development of the ‘received accent’ – RP. In chapters 5 and 6 (124–166), this is exemplified by an account of various phoneme sets (FACE – GOAT, BATH – CLOTH, FOOT – STRUT), as well as an analysis of *yod*- and *H*-dropping, and the loss of rhoticity in Southern English. In contrast to these meticulous analyses, chapter 4 on syntactic change basically only lists the most important issues, such as the decline of the subjunctive, the regulation of relativizers and the second-person pronouns, and also innovations such as the *be* + *-ing* construction or group-verbs. Beal herself characterizes this chapter as ‘provisional’ (68): it is certainly true that relatively few categorical losses or innovations have occurred in the last two centuries and that the “overall, rather elusive effect can seem more a matter of stylistic than syntactic change” (Denison 1998: 93 [in Romaine 1998]), but one nevertheless misses central fields of change, such as the grammaticalization of new tense markers as for example *to be going to*, *to be about to*, or changes in the field of voice (passive, middle voice).

Although Beal stresses in her preface that she takes a “socio-historical” perspective, the book itself shows another focus. Chapters 2 to 7 are

arranged in pairs: for each linguistic level (lexis, syntax/morphology, phonology) there is a chapter reviewing “the efforts of those who sought to ascertain and fix the language” (see chapters 2 “Recording and Regulating the Lexicon: Dictionaries from Dr Johnson to the *Oxford English Dictionary*”, 5 “Grammars and Grammarians” and 7 “Defining the Standard of Pronunciation: Pronouncing Dictionaries and the Rise of RP”) and one chapter describing the changes which occurred despite (or sometimes because of) such efforts (see chapters 2, 4, and 6, on lexical, syntactic and phonological change as reviewed above). Considering Beal’s prior work (e. g. Beal 1999), it does not come as a surprise that these parts are meticulously researched and full of interesting details on authors, works and their impacts. She can, for example, show that the so-called prescriptive authors of the 18th century often describe real usage, while the descriptive scholars of the late 19th and early 20th century played their part in the normative agenda by choosing to ‘describe’ only one variety, i. e. Standard English and/or RP.

All in all, much more space is devoted to the 18th century (especially in the chapter on grammarians) than to the later centuries, and the argumentation is not always free from inconsistencies: on the one hand, Beal makes a strong point in arguing that the metalinguistic authors of the 18th century are not as normative as they are often described. On the other hand, she describes their studies as “normative, prescriptive works” in spite of which language change has happened. The focus of the book is thus clearly on metalinguistic works (instead of balanced language corpora which would have been available for the period covered), and on British English (chapter 8 on attitudes and the use of non-standard varieties of British English and the emerging extraterritorial Englishes is unfortunately not more than a surplus appendix). For these focal areas, however, it presents a wealth of information in the form of a handy guide. The book will thus certainly become essential reading for undergraduate and graduate students taking courses on the history of English and also for scholars looking for a lucid introduction to this previously neglected period of the English language.

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MÜNCHEN

URSULA LENKER

English Media Texts Past and Present. Ed. Friedrich Ungerer. Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 80. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2000, xiv + 286 pp., € 115.00.

70 years after Walter Benjamin's pioneering book *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* and some 40 years after *Understanding Media* by Marshall McLuhan, it seems high time that European university anglicists paid attention to the linguistic and other aspects of media communication. While publications of the 1980s and 90s were mostly concerned with synchronic or theoretical features of media (cf., for example, Allan Bell's *The Language of News Media* [1991]), Ungerer's present collection of papers provides partly empirical and partly historical analyses of media, in particular, newspapers.

The book under review is almost exclusively based on papers presented at a symposium held at the University of Rostock in October 1998. The thirteen contributions are grouped into three parts: Part 1, with six papers, has the title "News, Headlines, Advertisements: How Newspapers Developed". The second part (four papers), entitled "The Genres of Present-Day Newspapers", promises a "critical view" in its subtitle. And the last three papers of Part 3 discuss the "challenge of television" in the form of talk shows and TV advertising.

The opening paper, by Udo Fries and Peter Schneider, is a working report on ZEN, the machine-readable *Zurich English Newspaper Corpus*. The emphasis here is on corpus linguistic questions of compilation, i. e. the representative quality of the selected texts, the period covered by the selection (1671–1791), the technical and, above all, orthographical aspects of ZEN. Given the irregularities of 18th-century spelling, the authors rightly discuss their "semi-automatic spelling unification", otherwise called "normalisation". But both the detailed presentation of WordCruncher routines (now a somewhat dated tool of corpus-analysis) and the wide neglect of previous research on normalisation (cf., for example, Markus 1997, with further references) show that the paper is less concerned about being up to its time than might be expected.¹

The second paper is also closely connected with a historical corpus, namely the *Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English Tracts* (covering the period from 1640 to 1740). Claudia Claridge generically contrasts news reporting

¹ In the short list of references, even the only article mentioned in the notes (by Kristina Schneider 1999) has been forgotten.