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A history of English: A sociolinguistic approach. By Barbara Fennell. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001. Pp. xiii, 284. Paper. \$29.95.

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The task of writing a history of English that can serve as a textbook is not an enviable endeavor. For every point that an author chooses to include, a host of others may be omitted; for every detail an author chooses to address, a host of terminological and theoretical issues must often be explained in order to make the details comprehensible. Perhaps for these reasons, despite the numerous textbooks that have tackled this challenge, there is still room for scholars drawing on different methodologies and theoretical approaches and, therefore, raising different questions, to add their voice to the scholarly and pedagogical conversation. And perhaps, in the end, we must resign ourselves to the fact that not everyone will be satisfied with any one textbook. Barbara Fennell's explicitly sociolinguistic approach in her new textbook, *A History of English*, distinguishes her work from many of the textbooks that precede hers and means that she addresses a range of important and interesting research questions that do not typically appear in such texts. Perhaps the compromise is that this book may better serve as a supplemental text, with a focus on the significant sociolinguistic perspective that it adds on the relevant historical issues, rather than as a primary textbook for most introductory university courses on the history of the English language.

The book jacket advertises the text as “an intelligent and accessible synthesis of modern sociolinguistic approaches to the development of the

English language.” To this I would add an important caveat: accessible to advanced students who already have a background in linguistics. Students potentially have much to learn from this book, and while some sections are highly accessible, others assume significant amounts of linguistic background that will make the presentation of much of the material difficult if not impenetrable for beginning students without extensive explanation by the instructor. Without a glossary and with a limited index (e.g., “Chancery” and “Estuary English,” to name two critical concepts discussed in the text, are not included), the text relies to some extent on students and/or instructors to have or to provide the necessary background to understand the quite complex technical material it contains, for example, in phonology and syntax. Unlike many survey textbooks on the history of English, Fennell often usefully cites and summarizes specific scholarship and historical linguistic studies (e.g., in the discussion of structural changes in Present-Day English)—valuable material for more advanced students as avenues for further research. The citations on any subject are, obviously, more selective than comprehensive, as the latter is beyond the scope of an introductory text. Instructors accustomed to more traditional history of English texts will find some material noticeably absent; for example, the chapter on Old English does not include a discussion of the Christianization of England. At the same time, each chapter has the potential to surprise readers with interesting, valuable, and unusual inclusions such as an extended discussion of the Middle English creole question in chapter 4.

Fennell describes the goal of the book as providing a taste of the variety of ways in which scholars and students can approach the development of English, including particularly sociohistorical and cultural background, descriptions of major structural changes, and specific topical focuses. The information that falls under this last category is what most distinguishes Fennell’s text from other textbooks on the history of the English language: her expertise as a sociolinguist and her particular interest in language contact make these sections in each chapter lively and engaging in their coverage of more recent sociolinguistic research and in their focus on the speakers involved in language change. In Fennell’s book, readers can also gain the important sense that research on the history of English is ongoing—that they are entering a scholarly conversation in which many questions remain under investigation and unresolved.

In the first chapter, Fennell effectively introduces her sociolinguistic approach by explaining such phenomena as accommodation, language

acquisition, prestige, and so on, in order to emphasize how speakers participate in language change. She outlines both language-external and language-internal reasons for change, with a particular focus on the effect of language contact (e.g., introducing terms such as SUBSTRATUM EFFECT). The overview of language study, from phonetics to semantics and pragmatics, gets only two pages near the end, and while the working is clear and the examples helpful, students new to linguistics may be overwhelmed and in need of more explanation of concepts such as derivational versus inflectional morphemes and allophones versus phonemes. The discussion of the sounds of English on the final two pages of the chapter is similarly spare. Inexplicably, Fennell also chooses to list the sounds here without charts that explain the distinctive features of the consonants and vowels (e.g., manner of articulation for consonants, height for vowels); yet in subsequent chapters this information is crucial as the text refers to, for example, “high vowels” and “stops” as well as includes vowel charts for the earlier periods of the language.

The ordering of chapters 2 through 8 is fairly standard, beginning with the “pre-history” of English through the four traditional periods of English to chapters on American English and World English. Each chapter begins with a timeline with important and interesting dates included—a potentially effective pedagogical tool for supplemental research by students, as the text of the chapters refers only occasionally to specific events in the timeline. The chapters are generally structured to begin with historical and sociocultural information, then provide descriptions of linguistic features, followed by material on literary achievements, and finally a specific topic of sociolinguistic interest. Given Fennell’s explicit focus on the last section, the literary sections tend to be more survey-like in their coverage of the kinds of texts available with a few sample excerpts included for linguistic study rather than necessarily literary interest or merit.

Chapter 2, “The Pre-History of English,” provides a survey of Indo-European language families, with more extended attention to the Germanic languages, including more technical discussions of the First and Second Consonant Shifts. The introduction to historical linguistics includes interesting details about the scholars that followed Sir William Jones’s famous observation about language correspondences. Later in the chapter, Fennell summarizes neogrammarian, structuralist, and contemporary linguistic models, which is useful background, but by comparison with the discussion of historical linguistics, some of these

sections feel underdeveloped (e.g., a discussion of “Saussurean principles” without mention of Saussure and a very brief paragraph on generative grammar). The special topic at the end is the spread of Indo-European, in which Fennell describes in some detail Renfrew’s (1997) new work combining archeology and linguistics. The emphasis here and elsewhere on the uncertainty of the scholarship is important and useful. Throughout the book, Fennell works hard to explain which theories are still contested and seems comfortable acknowledging the limits of our “best knowledge.” As she summarizes, “much of the work of historical and comparative linguistics comprises informed speculation or educated guesses about the way things might have been” (53).

The sociolinguistic focus of chapter 3, “Old English,” is language contact and a highlight of the chapter. Fennell includes here the borrowing scale from Thomason and Kaufman 1988 in order then to examine the kinds of borrowing involved with various languages, particularly Celtic, Latin, and Old Norse. The extended discussion of the possible influence of the prolonged and extensive settlement of Danes is especially useful; at the end, Fennell agrees with Thomason and Kaufman that Old Norse influence was pervasive but not deep, except in the lexicon (92), but importantly, the discussion leaves room for disagreement. Some of the technical material in the chapter will be easier for advanced students: for example, there are some phonetic symbols that have not been introduced before (e.g., [x] and [ç]); the discussion of the case system is clear but relatively short; the useful summary of important characteristic features of Old English lists strong and weak nouns, but the subsequent discussion never mentions this distinction; and there is no explanation of the labels in the strong verb chart such as “pret. sing. a” or “past part. i.”

Chapter 4, “Middle English,” has several interesting inclusions: a discussion of the development of towns and burghs; prolonged attention to Middle English dialects, including mention of scholars such as Angus McIntosh; the historical stigmatization of *h*-dropping; and a valuable section at the end entitled “Myth of Middle English Creolization.” The creole question is an excellent choice for the sociolinguistic focus, and Fennell wisely cautions that “it is something of a cautionary tale, since it shows that it is dangerous to take over an argument, however appealing it might be, without careful consideration of the factual evidence at hand” (126). Fennell spends perhaps a surprising amount of time on the question of a French creole given that most recent research has focused on Old Norse, but the discussion of both possibilities is valuable and her

conclusion well justified: “There is no doubt that there was simplification in ME and that contact with Scandinavian and French is the most likely reason for it. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether we can justify an assumption that there was a stable pidgin or creole English in thirteenth-century households, because we have no real record of the linguistic behaviour of bilingual individuals” (128).

The overarching argument of chapters 5 and 6 is that by Early Modern English, the structure of the language is very close to that of Present-Day English (PDE) and all changes since then are “slight” (138)—with exceptions such as the Great Vowel Shift—and “in the direction of regularization” (166). Scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English will undoubtedly disagree with such a framing, and at times it leads Fennell to problematic statements that seem to imply a directionality to changes in the language, with PDE as the ultimate goal: “Clearly none of these differences [in a text by Jonathan Swift] is major, and it would be accurate to say that the core grammar of English had developed almost completely by the eighteenth century” (146).¹ (Importantly, the discussion of worldwide English in the final chapter recognizes that English[es] will continue to change, and raises important questions about the language’s status as a global language.) The treatment of the Great Vowel Shift in chapter 5 is enhanced by a discussion of possible motivations of the change within a sociolinguistic framework. Other strong points include the final section in which Fennell discusses titles, the use of *thou* and *you*, and indirect requests within the context of power and solidarity relations, as well as a surprisingly long and engaging discussion of Samuel Johnson’s work. The sociolinguistic focus of chapter 6 is English in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. The details provided here focus on the sociohistorical details in order to explore factors that influence language attitudes and use; there is a striking absence of any technical linguistic details about the structure of these varieties of English.

Chapter 7 on American English devotes important time to exploring possible reasons for the divergence of American and British dialects. The preliminary discussion of the decimation of Native American languages is perhaps necessarily short (which accounts for a tone that may strike

¹ In a subsequent chapter, Fennell provides a more nuanced version of this statement: “The core structure of the English language as we know it today was fairly well established by the eighteenth century” (172).

readers as dismissive). The section on African American Vernacular English includes a discussion of the two hypotheses about its origins with an interesting discussion of whether it is diverging from and/or affecting other varieties of American English (Fennell cites work by William Labov, Walt Wolfram, and Crawford Feagin among others; interestingly, the important article by Bailey and Maynor [1989] is cited in the bibliography but not in this section of the text itself). Fennell can at times feel out of her element in describing American dialects. For example, assertions such as “Portland, Oregon is the focus of the Pacific Northwest” (215) may seem surprising to American readers (although Wolfram and Schilling-Estes [1998:112] make a similar claim), as is the subsequent somewhat confusing transition that seems to suggest it is located on the Puget Sound. Unfortunately, descriptions such as the statement that the first settlers in the area of the Pacific Northwest spoke English oversimplify the historical situation: many of the first non-native American explorers in the Pacific Northwest spoke Spanish, French, and Russian (see, for example, Reed 1965).

Other mistakes in the textbook also may be a source of concern. Some must be assumed to be typos, such as dating Cawdrey’s English dictionary to 1694 rather than 1604 (149). Others do not fully square with current research: for example, the assertion that periphrastic comparative and superlative constructions of adjectives continue to grow in popularity (173) contradicts recent research in Kytö 1996 and Kytö and Romaine 1997.

The notion of “coverage” with the history of English is complicated (as well as idealistic), as it includes decisions not only about linguistic details but also about historical context, literary traditions, and theoretical approaches to the topic. At a comparatively short 269 pages of text, Fennell’s new textbook cannot compete in terms of comprehensiveness with the more extensive attention to historical, literary, and linguistic details available in other textbooks. At the same time, Fennell demonstrates the ways in which a sociolinguistic perspective can bring new, revealing questions to bear on how we think about and teach the history of English—and in this way, the book, particularly the sections with an explicit sociolinguistic focus, enhances the range of possibilities for supplementing and rethinking the potential of existing textbooks on the history of English as well as the material we consider fundamental to teaching students about the history of English.

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Second language syntax: A generative introduction. By Roger Hawkins. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. Pp. xviii, 383. Paper. \$39.95.

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This book is a pleasure for the second language (L2) researcher to read, and a challenge for the teacher of second language acquisition (L2A) theory to use. It offers an extremely clear and engaging introduction and overview of current L2A research from the generative