

Charles Barber. 2000. *The English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. xii + 299 pp.

Barber tells the tale of English from its conception to its present-day state. He illustrates chronological development of Old (OE), Middle (ME) and Modern English, and by way of phonological, morphological and syntactic analysis, the shift from a synthetic (inflectional), to a more analytic-based language, in which more emphasis is placed on word order. The author provides an overview of basic linguistic terminology before the development of English is discussed, making the book suitable as a text for courses whose populations include students without a background in linguistics.

Chapter 2, "The flux of language," discusses sound laws. B postulates social phenomena that cause change, such substratum influence (p. 41), and the situation in which members of the lower classes strive to imitate the prestigious pronunciation of the upper classes, who respond by; changing so as to maintain social difference. B posits psychological influences for phenomena such as *assimilation* and *metathesis* as well. Socio-linguistic theory is integrated in the historical discussion found in typical texts.

B introduces his discussion of English with a chapter on the Indo-European languages in which he focuses on the *Centum* branch, on Proto-Germanic, and on Germanic. He describes the simplification of the inflectional system found in Proto-Indo-European, the placement of the accent on the first syllable of a word, and Grimm's Law.

In B's introduction of OE, from the Anglo-Saxons settling on Romano-Celtic territory, items such as the developments of *i-umlaut*, morphology, syntax, and the vocabulary of OE are explored. He describes the efforts of the ruling French speakers to oust English by barring it as a literary language, in which the Normans ultimately would not succeed, because, as B states,

“...they [the Normans] never outnumbered the English in the way the Anglo-Saxon settlers must have outnumbered the Britons, and ultimately French died out in England” (p. 141). B discusses the penetrating influence French has had upon English, particularly in phonology and vocabulary development.

B also discusses the development of orthographic conventions, as OE developed into ME, with the introduction of new symbols, such ‘g’ being distinguished from the OE yogh. He further describes the change in which scribes adopted the continental style so as to distinguish the letters ‘m’, ‘n’, ‘v’, ‘w’ and ‘u’ in words such as OE *sunu*, *cuman* and *lufu*, which became written ME *sone*, *comen* and *love*.

Two chapters also discuss English and its influence on the “scientific age” and as “a world language.” In “English today and tomorrow,” B asserts that the conformity urged by prescriptivists is a losing battle, commenting, “It’s not really much good clinging to the bank: we have to push out into the flux and swim” (p. 278).

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