

BARBER, CHARLES, BEAL, JOAN C., and SHAW, PHILIP A. *The English language: A historical introduction*. 2nd Ed. (Cambridge Approaches to Linguistics). Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Many texts have been written to satisfy the demand for books about the history of English.

Among them, this book rates quite high. This second edition adds to the first a chapter on Late Modern English (211 – 237) that describes the state of the language from 1700 forward and adds material about varieties of English in the world under the imposing title, “English as a World Language” (238 – 264).

Since students enroll in such courses as this text is suited for are in many cases found to be innocent of any knowledge about language beyond the prejudices and stereotypes of their upbringing and the prescriptions of their schoolteachers, a section is offered which introduces the fundamental principles of language, the structural components of language and language change, and presents a discussion of the Indo-European and the Germanic languages, all of which occupies 105 pages of this slender volume. Nonetheless, those who teach these courses experience the reality that no matter how fundamental the approach, such students struggle mightily with the mountain of new concepts introduced over a brief period in what is only a prelude to the main body of the course.

But once we get off the runway, we take flight in a thoroughly exemplified treatment of English from the earliest days and the sources that provide the basis for our knowledge of it. Long samples are quoted from, e.g., Anglo Saxon Manuscripts (130 – 32), the 991 poem commemorating a battle of the men of Essex led by Byrhtnoth against a Viking force (136), and the *Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* (145, 6), which offer plentiful data whose modern reflexes students can discover in personal or group study and class discussion.

This text does not ignore the extralinguistic environment and the social forces that have acted upon English during its development. The discussion of how English withstood the challenge posed by the renaissance of Latin centuries after resisting the French invasion in the chapter on Early Modern English (184 – 210), e.g., enriches students' understanding of the world in which English has been used, an important aspect of knowledge about the language which is neglected in works which focus primarily on structural developments.

If I have a complaint with the present text, it involves the section on word-formation in English wedged into the chapter on Late Modern English (probably at the publisher's urging in an effort to satisfy as many potential needs as possible). That material describes processes that have always been part of English, and is in fact part of a more detailed study of morphology from the viewpoint of language change.

But the discussion in the same chapter of standardization, spelling, and the effects of spelling on pronunciation as the English-speaking world rapidly became a literate one is particularly rewarding in its treatment of some *ad hoc* developments that underlie a few of the prescriptivists' most cherished precepts. As elsewhere, engaging examples animate the text.

The charts, tables, and numerous figures which complement the text with phonetics and other information are adequate to depict what is needed, and I found the index to be useful. This edition of the text successfully adds to the first, and I recommend it for general interest study, suitable courses in the history and development of English, and as a source of example data for broader use.

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