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## Review

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**Bettelou Los, Claire Cowie, Patrick Honeybone and Graeme Trousdale (eds.),** *English historical linguistics: Change in structure and meaning* (Current Issues in Linguistic Theory 358). Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2022. Pp. viii + 349. ISBN 9789027210647.

Reviewed by Phillip Wallage, Northumbria University

This volume contains thirteen papers presented at the 20th International Conference on English Historical Linguistics (Edinburgh, August 2018) and is one of several volumes to emerge from that conference. The chapters deal with a wide range of issues in English historical linguistics, from changes in phonological and syntactic structure to questions of usage such as standardisation, and historical pragmatics. First there is an introductory chapter by Bettelou Los and Patrick Honeybone (pp. 1–12) that summarises the volume and reflects on the importance of the International Conference in English Historical Linguistics after twenty successful conferences. The research in the volume is organised into three parts: phonology and morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. A common theme runs across many of the contributions, that of applying novel methodological approaches to the large digital datasets now available, particularly to the study of Early Modern (sixteenth and seventeenth century) and Late Modern (eighteenth to twentieth century) periods of English. Many authors take advantage of the corpora now available to track changes across long historical timescales of a millennium or more.

On the evidence of this volume, particularly the chapters by Gerold Schneider, Eva Zehentner and Marianne Hundt, and Lilo Moessner, statistical analyses of large-scale quantitative corpus data that identify and track changes in progress at the micro-level are becoming more common in diachronic linguistics. This kind of analysis yields insights about language usage and structure that are only possible because of the large-scale datasets now available. While I have advocated these approaches in my own work and welcome their use, there is a danger in providing linguistic description in lieu of explanation. However, as many of the contributions in this volume show, large datasets and quantitative methods provide new insights into patterns of variation and change that have already been well studied, challenge existing structural analyses, and prompt new directions for research at the interface between structure and usage.

Another theme is that of change at the interfaces, for example of grammar and information-structure in Chiara De Bastiani's chapter. The chapters by Don Ringe and Charles Yang and by B. Elan Dresher and Aditi Lahiri both examine the relationship between acquisition, cognition and language change. Many of the contributions focus

on questions or issues that have received much discussion in the research literature of the last twenty years or more, for example the change from OV to VO word order in the English verb-phrase, but they apply new methodologies and tools to develop a more nuanced understanding of processes involved within these changes.

The first part on phonology and morphology comprises four chapters. Gjertrud F. Stenbrenden's 'Grimm's Law and Verner's Law: Towards a unified phonetic account' (pp. 15–40) examines the linguistic mechanisms underlying Grimm's law and Verner's law, and the relationship between the two. Stenbrenden argues that the change from Indo-European pitch-dominant prosody to Germanic dynamic stress prosody leads to the change from a voicing language (Proto-Indo-European) to an aspiration language (Germanic). This shift sets in train processes of lenition, a series of changes resulting in both Grimm's and Verner's laws. B. Elan Dresher and Aditi Lahiri in their chapter, 'The foot in the history of English: Challenges to metrical coherence' (pp. 41–60), hypothesise that the Old English metrical foot was a 'resolved and extended trochee' (p. 42) rather than the moraic trochee proposed in much of the existing literature. They argue that their analysis better explains the prosody of Old English after shortening of unstressed vowels. They further propose that Old English inherits this 'resolved and extended trochee' (p. 42) from Germanic. Using evidence from rhyming dictionaries, they argue that the Old English foot persists into the sixteenth century, finally changing due to the influence of Romance loan words once the number of exceptions passes a threshold derived from Yang's (2016) tolerance principle. Mieko Ogura and William S-Y. Wang's 'Ambiguity resolution and the evolution of homophones in English' (pp. 61–90) combines quantitative analysis of large corpora and experimental neuroimaging to explain how Early Modern English diatone formation develops as a strategy to disambiguate high-frequency homophones. The authors argue that more than 80 per cent of the homophones found in Present-day English are historically persistent, with most tracing their origins back to Old English. As noun–verb homophones (such as *address*, p. 73) become diatones in Early Modern English, a distinction in stress placement emerges. Nouns have stress on their first syllable and verbs have stress on their second syllable. Ogura and Wang hypothesise that the modern English system of diatones which emerges during Early Modern English is sensitive to word-frequency. They provide large-scale quantitative data to support this claim. The word-frequency effect has a cognitive basis. They use neural spectroscopy to show that high- and low-frequency diatones are represented in different neural substrates in the left hemisphere of the brain. Low-frequency diatones provoke brain activity in areas associated with semantic processing, high-frequency diatones provoke brain activity in areas associated with syntactic categorisation, thus providing a cognitive explanation for why the process of diatone formation primarily affects high-frequency homophones in Early Modern English.

Don Ringe and Charles Yang's 'The threshold of productivity and the "irregularization" of verbs in Early Modern English' (pp. 91–112) investigates whether the irregularisation of verbs in Early Modern English can be explained by Yang's (2016) Tolerance Principle. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English, the authors find an increase in irregular

verb forms, focusing on the replacement of *stringed* by *strung*, *sticked* by *stuck* and *digged* by *dug*. Yang's Tolerance Principle (p. 91) predicts how many irregular forms can occur. It states that the number of exceptions to a linguistic rule (such as regular morphological past tense formation) is equal to the number of lexemes that could obey the rule divided by the logarithm of the number of lexemes that could obey the rule. They argue that this principle plays a role in the increase in irregular verb forms found in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English. However, comparison of historical corpus data with corpus data from child language acquisition shows that the Tolerance Principle predicts some, but not all, the novel irregular forms found in their Early Modern English data. This is partly a function of the difficulty of reconstructing the input data for sixteenth-century language acquisition. In contrast to experimental-designed child acquisition studies, the limited historical evidence that we can glean from text corpora provides only a very partial picture of the linguistic context in which acquisition takes place, with vernacular speech particularly under-represented in the historical sources.

Turning to the five papers on syntax, we find two chapters concerning the change from OV to VO word order in early English VPs, a topic which has received extensive discussion over the last three decades. Chiara De Bastiani's 'The reanalysis of VO in the history of English: Evidence for a language-internal account' (pp. 115–36) builds on work by Struick & van Kemenade (2018), arguing that the change from OV to VO is sensitive to the information-structure status (discourse-given or discourse-new) of the object not only in Old English, but also in later periods of English. Contrary to Hinterhölzel (2014), who argues that information structure plays a role in Old English but not Middle English, De Bastiani's data show that once we take variation within early Middle English texts into account, the change from OV to VO is a consistent and uniform development from Old English to Early Modern English. Rodrigo Pérez Lorigo's 'The role of (the avoidance of) centre embedding in the change from OV to VO in English' (pp. 137–62) discusses the history of centre-embedded NPs in the history of English. A centre-embedded NP is one that contains a relative clause postmodifier and that stands as the complement of a head-final VP. In such structures, an embedded clause intervenes between the head of the complement and the verb, making centre-embedding difficult to parse. This difficulty might mitigate against the use of centre-embedded structures. Lorigo shows that centre-embedding is productive in Old English, and that the constraints on Old English centre-embedding parallel those found in other languages with SOV word order, such as Modern German. However, in order to ascertain whether the avoidance of centre-embedding has any effect on the change from OV to VO word order, it would have been interesting to know whether OV word-order with relative-clause post-modified NPs is less frequent than with other types of heavy NPs.

The remaining three papers on syntax all make good use of quantitative and statistical methods in the analysis of large historical datasets. Gerold Schneider's 'Syntactic changes in verbal clauses and noun phrases from 1500 onwards' (pp. 163–200) is a quantitative study of syntactically parsed data from the ARCHER corpus. The approach is data-driven rather than using quantitative data to test established linguistic hypotheses,

and most of the changes in verbal, nominal and clausal syntax that it reports have already been described in the literature on change in Modern English. However, the quantitative data are analysed in great detail, and the statistical analyses are interesting. The use of entropy as a metric for productivity yields some insightful results. The paper makes a good case for quantitative and statistical analysis of large corpora as a method to identify patterns of change at the micro-level. Eva Zehentner and Marianne Hundt in their chapter, 'Prepositions in Early Modern English argument structure and beyond' (pp. 201–24), present a large-scale corpus analysis of the historical shift from NP verbal complements to PP verbal complements. Existing research on the diachrony of prepositions is rather fragmentary and has often focused on the grammaticalisation of individual prepositions in verbal complements. This paper takes a wider perspective. It provides quantitative evidence that the change from NP to PP complements is less straightforward and more variable than much of the literature supposes. The use of conditional inference trees to identify how different groups of verbs behave in respect of the change from nominal to prepositional complements makes an important methodological contribution, showing how the variable contexts for changes can be identified in large datasets through a bottom-up data-driven procedure. By including a time variable in their conditional inference analyses, Zehentner and Hundt also demonstrate how variation and change can be distinguished in corpus data. The chapter demonstrates how detailed micro-level empirical analysis of large datasets can prompt new research questions and directions. Lilo Moessner's '*Should* with non-past reference: A corpus-based diachronic study' (pp. 225–42) examines the distribution of *should* with non-past reference in Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English data from the *Helsinki Corpus*. By taking an historically long view, Moessner shows that non-past *should* spreads from a subset of Middle English mandative constructions to become established across mandative constructions in Early Modern English as *should* develops epistemic modal meanings.

The final part comprises four papers on semantics and pragmatics. Gabriella Mazzon's 'Shifting responsibility in passing information: Stance-taking in Sir Thomas Bodley's diplomatic correspondence' (pp. 245–62) describes the stance-taking pragmatic strategies the sixteenth-century diplomat Thomas Bodley uses to assess and report information in his correspondence with the royal court. The author distinguishes subjective, epistemic and evaluative stance types, focusing her qualitative analysis particularly on Bodley's use of epistemic modals. Mazzon argues that many of the stance strategies regarded as developments in later periods of English are already in use by Bodley in the sixteenth century. James Hyett and Carol Percy's 'Theatrical practices and grammatical standardization in eighteenth century Britain: *you was* and *you were*' (pp. 263–86) examines eighteenth-century *was-were* variation with second-person subjects prior to its proscription by grammarians such as Robert Lowth (1762). Singular *you was* is an Early Modern English innovation emerging out of the spread of *you* from plural to singular reference. They argue that *you was* takes on some of the functions that *thou* has in earlier periods, including face-threat, solidarity and intimacy. Hyett and Percy argue that *you was* is not only pragmatically marked, but also socially

marked, associated with the lower ranks. These associations were salient. The paper makes a good case for dramatic comedies as a source of sociolinguistic information. Anne-Christine Gardner's 'Towards companionate marriage in Late Modern England: Two critical episodes in Mary Hamilton's courtship letters to John Dickenson' (pp. 278–308) demonstrates how Critical Discourse Analysis methodologies can elucidate aspects of discursive practices and social relationships in eighteenth-century England. Gardner examines the correspondence between Mary Hamilton and her fiancé John Dickenson. As well as elucidating contemporary social and discursive practices, Gardner's analysis reveals Hamilton's independence and directness in the way she negotiates her relationship with her future husband. Finally, Ekkehard König and Letizia Vezzosi's chapter 'On the development of OE *swā* to ModE *so* and related changes in an atypical group of demonstratives' (pp. 309–44) traces the development of Old English *swā* to Modern English *so*. On the basis of parallel historical developments, the authors argue that *swā* is part of a demonstrative system of manner, quality and degree, and examine changes within this system across the history of English as a whole. They argue that treating *so*, *such* and *thus* as demonstratives explains diachronic parallels between them. All three undergo the same process of grammaticalisation, leading to anaphoric and exophoric demonstrative uses of *so*, *such* and *thus*.

In conclusion, the chapters in this volume reflect the diversity of themes and methods in work on English historical linguistics and the importance of the International Conference on English Historical Linguistics as a forum for bringing together different theoretical and methodological approaches in ways that inspire new research directions. The contributions all derive insights into the diachrony of English which are only possible through their methodologically innovative uses of large-scale historical datasets. In doing so, they show how new methods provide new perspectives on – and prospects for research in – the history of English.

*Reviewer's address:*

*Department of Humanities*

*Northumbria University*

*Newcastle upon Tyne*

*NE1 8ST*

*United Kingdom*

[phillip.wallage@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:phillip.wallage@northumbria.ac.uk)

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