questions were mostly factual recall of definitions, concepts and famous names in the field. Students on the MOOC are allowed to re-take a worksheet as often as they wish in order to get above the 60% level – or in order to reach 100% for the more ambitious. I found that getting questions wrong was a very good way of focussing on what I had not learned adequately, and I was happy to do more reading – not always on the VLC – before attempting a worksheet again. Given unlimited re-takes it is quite straightforward to reach full marks. The later worksheets on transcription, one of RP and the other of NAE, were very much more difficult, partly because transcription is less definitive and so inherently more difficult than factual recall, and partly because some of the solutions were, at best, arguable: for example, a clear open 'e' that was shown in the solution as a schwa, or the 'correct' transcription of one NAE word making it sound like RP, or the need for an IPA symbol that was not available on the virtual keyboard provided. Then the worksheet on distinctive features was sufficiently challenging for the rules to be different: perfect answers are not required! The more difficult worksheets generated a lot of debate on the students' forum, with Prof. Handke responding helpfully and, in one or two cases, amending questions that were proving unsatisfactory.

Building on the success of the first MOOC, the VLC is offering three more from the autumn, Linguistics 101, 102 and 103 – numbers which hint at more to come. 101 Fundamentals provides an introduction to phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. 102 Speech Science covers the anatomy of speech, the physics of speech, the auditory system and speech perception. 103 The Nature of Meaning promises to be a more philosophically oriented course with units on semantics, sense and reference, theories of word meaning, propositions, predicates, speech acts, deixis, ambiguity and vagueness. These MOOCs will have a slightly different structure from the first. They are free to take, and those who complete a course will receive a free statement of participation. The statement of accomplishment for those who achieve 60% or better on the worksheets will, however, require payment of a small fee, yet to be announced.

In these early days, the economic basis of MOOCs is far from clear. It is not obvious for how long MOOCs delivered free can co-exist with traditional (and expensive) university education. But for as long as MOOCs of high quality are available free they must rate as the best bargains in education. I have already signed up to the VLC's Linguistics 101, 102 and 103.

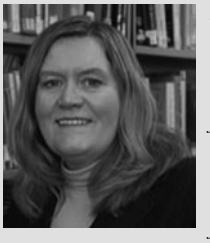
REVIEW

English: past, present and future

Lynda Mugglestone, *The Oxford History of English*. Updated edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 600. Paperback £14.99, ISBN 978-0-19-966016-2

Reviewed by Joan C. Beal, University of Sheffield

The Oxford History of English is an updated version of a work whose first edition appeared in 2006. The content is essentially the same as that of the first edition, with the same fourteen chapters covering a chronology stretching from prehistory ('Before English', pp. 9–38) to the present ('Into the Twenty-first Century', pp. 488–513). Apart from the addition of some post-2006 publications to the references and suggestions for further reading that accompany the chapters, this updating is most obvious in the last chapter, where David Crystal considers, alongside globalization and changes



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in educational policy, the influence of electronic communication. The latter, in particular, is an area of rapid change: the appended timeline (pp. 514–29) informs us that Twitter was launched in the same year as the first edition of *The Oxford History of English* was published, and by the time this second edition appeared it had reached 10 million users in the UK.

Although the definite article in the title might lead prospective readers to expect a definitive history of English, the editor and authors are careful to distance themselves from the notion of a linear, unified history. Tellingly, Lynda Mugglestone's editorial introduction bears the title 'A History of English' and begins with an epigraph from Thomas Shadwell 'How can there be a true History, when we see no Man living is able to write truly the History of the last Week?' (p. 2). Mugglestone goes on to state:

> The emphasis throughout the following volume is placed on the construction of 'a history' rather than 'the history', recognizing that many other pathways could be navigated through the past – and present – of the English language. (p. 2)

Later in the volume Matthew Townend, discussing the effect of contact with Latin, Norse and French in the Middle Ages, asserts that 'as in other aspects of the history of English, one must not tell a teleological narrative' (p. 97), whilst the late Richard W. Bailey notes that 'old-fashioned language histories have often endeavoured to look at a "national" language as if it were a single (and triumphant) result of some Darwinian process of selection' (p. 416). This opposition to the idea of a single 'history', articulated clearly in Watts and Trudgill's *Alternative Histories of English* (2002), acknowledges the impossibility of producing a single, linear history of a language that has always been diverse and never the property of a single group of speakers. Whilst this diversity is acknowledged throughout, it is particularly at the forefront in the final four chapters. Clive Upton addresses regional variation in chapter 11, Bailey's chapter 12, 'English Among the Languages', steps out of the chronological sequence to discuss interaction between English and other languages at various periods, Tom McArthur looks at 'English World-Wide in the Twentieth Century' in chapter 13, and David Crystal also considers globalization in the final chapter.

This, then, is not the volume to consult in order to trace the development of a specific linguistic feature or pattern from Old English to the present day. Although the chapters are, for the most part, in chronological order, different aspects of language are emphasized and different methodological approaches taken by individual authors. Thus the main focus of April McMahon's chapter 6, 'Restructuring Renaissance English', is on phonology and phonological theory, whilst the following chapter by Terttu Nevalainen concentrates on morpho-syntax and takes a sociohistorical approach. The great strength of *The Oxford History of English* is that each chapter is written by a leading expert on the period and/or topic concerned and each author is given the freedom to emphasize what he or she considers most important.

The Oxford History of English is unlikely to be suitable as a stand-alone textbook for absolute beginners such as A-level English language students or first-year undergraduates. Although a key to phonetic symbols (pp. x–xi) and a mouth diagram (p. xii) are provided, there is no glossary of linguistic terms, and a familiarity with other histories of English is sometimes assumed, as in Townend's statement that 'it is a somewhat hackneyed convention for histories of the English language to take in the Peterborough Chronicle as one of the must-see sights' (p. 96). However, any reader looking for an up-to-date and authoritative overview of a specific period or topic would do well to consult the relevant chapter here, and the volume as a whole is an excellent introduction to the history of English for more advanced or sophisticated readers.

Reference

Watts, R. J. & Trudgill, P. (eds) 2002. *Alternative Histories of English*. London: Routledge.

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