

**Merja Kytö** and **Päivi Pahta** (eds.). *The Cambridge handbook of English historical linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2016. ISBN: 978-1-107-03935-3. xxv + 624 pp. Reviewed by **Tanja Rütten** (University of Cologne).

The book I am about to introduce has already been called engaging, well-planned, enlightening, timely, fresh and exciting by various scholars since its recent publication, and I am only too happy to join in this well-deserved applause. **Kytö** and **Pahta**, two long-standing and leading figures in historical linguistics, have provided us with a handbook which is a pleasure to read from cover to cover.

But why another handbook of historical linguistics?, you may wonder as I did. After all, van Kemenade and Los had given us *The handbook of the history of English* in 2006 (Oxford: Blackwell); Nevalainen and Traugott published the *Oxford handbook of the history of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) in 2012, and Bergs and Brinton *English historical linguistics: An international handbook* in the same year (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter). Jucker and Taavitsainen gave us *Historical pragmatics* in 2010 (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter), and there are certainly more books available to which the label ‘recent handbook of English historical linguistics’ can be given.

Kytö and Pahta seem to have anticipated our scepticism and point out in the introductory section how their edition complements what is available on the market already: strict emphasis on variety of approaches, variety of evidence, methodology, and on the research process ‘in the making’, i.e. in very practical terms. They succeed in all four perspectives, which unfold to the reader over 28 individual chapters, systematically arranged in four sections.

Sections 1 and 2 deal with frameworks and evidence, respectively, and make up Part I of the volume. Section 1 introduces six frameworks (variationist, quantitative corpus linguistics, historical pragmatics, construction grammar, generative grammar and philological methods). All chapters are written by leading experts in the respective fields and are detailed and accessible at the same time. All follow a similar structure: they start with a brief terminological, method-

ological and historical overview and then present major research paradigms. They point out which questions the respective framework is able to answer, what are its strengths and weaknesses, and they all look ahead to subsequent chapters of a similar nature, thereby providing strong links between the individual sections.

In Section 1, as throughout the volume, “authors were encouraged to make frequent use of meta-textual commentary to give advice on what to do and not to do when studying a particular linguistic phenomenon” (Kytö and Pahta, p. 12). Virtually all contributors took this encouragement to heart, and the result is a refreshingly honest account of the various frameworks and methodologies.

Section 2 discusses evidence, and ranges from a discussion of manuscripts and their representation in digitised corpora over audio recordings and grammars to the question of how to extract evidence from historical material. This section is very explicit on how to access the types of data discussed. It not only provides web addresses and other information on the various resources, but also explicitly comments on access restrictions, copyright issues, quality of the evidence, its potential and limits, and its applications. To researchers working with the respective material, these issues are part of their daily routines and are often so self-evident that they are rarely explicitly commented on. For the uninitiated, however, seeking to investigate manuscript evidence or audio recordings for the first time, such information is vital, as these points are usually part of a ‘learning-by-doing-’ or ‘trial-and-error-’ experience in the research process. Again, contributors have taken the editors’ suggestion to give advice on what and what not to do very seriously and to the definite benefit of the reader.

Sections 3 and 4 make up Part II of the book. This part focusses more closely on analytical aspects in historical linguistics. Section 3 introduces various perspectives on linguistic change, and Section 4 highlights the research process itself and presents research from a ‘hands-on’ perspective. Section 3 provides a bottom-up structure of the language system, starting with a discussion of phonological and lexical change which moves over morpho-syntactic and pragmatic change towards genre change, sociolinguistic change and contact related processes of change. All chapters cover major and well-understood change phenomena as well as more controversial issues. They discuss innovation and obsolescence as well as methodological restrictions for each of the linguistic levels investigated. Here, the volume links up more closely with related handbook publications. It picks up current issues in historical linguistic research, which, after all, readers will obviously also expect in this book.

Again, I find the individual contributions highly accessible and down to the point. They each take as their point of departure one of the frameworks intro-

duced in Section 1 of the volume, which gives the volume coherence and helps the reader to contextualise and locate the findings within one of the various dominant research paradigms. One important point all contributions in this section share is the emphasis on the language user and contextualisation of the data, even though the precise notion of ‘context’ varies from chapter to chapter.

Section 4 links the presentation of these more general and basic change phenomena to on-going research. Yet, these chapters do not read like any one individual researcher’s footprints. They are rather united in their aim to teach the reader how to practically conduct linguistic research in a diachronic perspective, and they combine this aim with current investigations in the fields of grammatical change (nominal modifiers of head nouns, Chapter 21), phonological change (ambisyllabicity in Old English, Chapter 25), and pragmatic change (speech representation in Middle English manuscripts, Chapter 28), to mention just a few. All chapters here engage in the question of which methods and data pave the way for which kinds of answers. In this regard, **Douglas Biber et al.** discuss variationist vs. text-linguistic approaches, albeit in a rather narrow understanding of ‘text-linguistics’; **Elizabeth Closs Traugott** discusses processes of subjectification and intersubjectification in three case studies (BE *going to* ‘future’, *beside* vs *besides*, and the lexical subjectification of OE *churl*), and **Philipp Durkin** weighs the pros and cons of the OED and the HTOED for an analysis of loanwords. Again, I only mention some of the issues covered in this section.

It may have become clear yet that it is impossible in this wealth of material to do justice to all contributions alike. So if asked to recommend one chapter of each section for a general impression, to senior linguists I would name Chapter 6 (“Philological methods” by **Robert D. Fulk**), Chapter 7 (“Manuscripts and early printed books” by **Simon Horobin**), Chapter 19 (“Contact-related processes of change in the early history of English” by **Peter Trudgill**), and Chapter 24 (“The individuality of English in the multilingual Middle Ages” by **Tim William Machan**). My selection highlights topics which, in common understanding, only touch the fringes of mainstream historical linguistics: philological methods, the scrutiny of original texts (and manuscripts) and perspectives on language contact scenarios and multilingualism that deserve the label ‘novel’. It is one of the greatest assets of the handbook that these issues are included and I will comment on these chapters now in more detail.

In the framework section (Chapter 6), **Robert D. Fulk** makes the point that linguistic data has an extralinguistic context: scribes update texts in terms of their own dialect or contemporary usage, and their orthographic system. Texts in books are under restriction of spacing on the page and within one line. Typesetters make mistakes and publishers may change authorial habits. All written

material has an audience, and this audience is of diverse social background, of different age, education and status. All of this is commonplace, yet, all too often philology, which mediates between the linguistic features and its records, i.e. manuscripts and books, is seen as “in service of textual editing” (p. 96) only. In an informed overview, Fulk then recapitulates the milestones of early philological study: Matthew Parker as the earliest of the Antiquarians, Humphrey Wanley’s work, the *Junggrammatiker* (to which Christian Mair returns in Chapter 9) and Eduard Sievers. He then concludes that “it is not possible to provide comprehensive instruction in philological methods in any very concise way” (p. 101), which may be correct, but is a damper to the eager reader, nonetheless.

Fulk’s most important point is that historical material cannot be taken as if it were a transcript of a sample of a modern living language. Yet, with research usually relying on digitised historical corpora, the danger of doing just that is almost inherent in these research tools. Chapter 7, therefore, “Manuscripts and early printed books” by Simon Horobin, is my reading suggestion for Section 2, because it exemplifies how this danger may be overcome, and what is to be gained if we go back to the roots.

Modern editions, whether print or digital, individual in full or as part of a sample in a corpus, are not straightforward reproductions of a medieval original. All have passed through the hands of editors, who, to the best of their knowledge, have made the respective text (more) accessible to the modern reader. In his contribution, **Horobin** discusses the various ways in which editors engage with (or interfere, or meddle with, according to one’s viewpoint) a medieval document. While this is increasingly acknowledged in corpus-linguistic inquiry, not all corpora provide equally suitable resources to help identifying and accessing the originals. Often, from a digital corpus, this identification requires recourse to a print edition before one gains access to the original eventually (e.g. in most corpora of the Helsinki Family). More often than not, no help is provided to shed light on the question of original manuscript or book (e.g. in the *Corpus of Historical American English*).

After Horobin’s informed discussion of manuscript dating and localisation, variation in manuscripts and scribes’ interventions, one wonders how anyone dared to be so bold as to use a historical corpus in the first place. But to some relief, Horobin then instructs the reader how to approach medieval and early modern sources, introducing research tools such as the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* and its *Early Medieval* sibling, or the *Medieval English Scribes* database. And while much remains to be done before we can properly link digitised (or print) editions with their original, many of the current research questions consider this (mis-)match and work towards that end, particularly in

historical pragmatics. Chapter 28 by Colette Moore (“Speech representation and Middle English manuscripts”) is a case in point in the present volume.

My recommendations for Part II of the book deal with a different issue: language contact and multilingualism. Among the perspectives for analysis in Section 3, I recommend Chapter 19, “Contact-related processes of change in the early history of English” by **Peter Trudgill**, for in-depth study. His presentation starts with Indo-European and sketches contact scenarios of languages (or rather language families) and their supposed speakers or ethnic groups in pre-historic times, and therefore *per se* on somewhat unstable ground. I would like to highlight his contribution here, because it picks up a period, the pre-historic one, that is rarely ever considered in handbooks of the English language. Commonly, overviews start with the earliest recorded stages of English during the reign of the Anglo-Saxons.

So Trudgill has to manoeuvre the reader through a wealth of (hypothetical) material and reconstructed evidence, which he masters by always clearly signposting the relevant language and language family as bringing forth English, eventually. This journey is plausible in all respects but one: His second section discusses English as a North Germanic language, at least in the heading given to that section, and so one expects the pros and cons of English as a North vs. a West Germanic language – certainly a current issue in the field. However, what the section really does is to locate English in the Proto-Germanic family, paving the way for the next section, where the focus is on contact scenarios of the West-Germanic family with continental Celtic. The confusion clears, I think, if one ignores the ‘North Germanic’ in the heading, and simply enjoys the evidence Trudgill weighs in the chapter.

Some of the contact phenomena discussed by Trudgill (Old English/Old Norse and English/French) are taken up again by **Tim William Machan** in Chapter 24, “The individuality of English in the multilingual Middle Ages”, my suggested reading for Section 4 of the handbook. Considering multilingualism a “linguistic fact of life” (p. 407), Machan provides three case studies and for each, he asks what it actually is that we call ‘the English language’. His major point is that neither clear-cut distinctions between two languages such as English and French, nor a “linguistic *mélange*” (p. 422) of, say, English and Old Norse, is borne out by all the evidence, and that individual texts provide individual answers to the issue of multilingualism. One of Machan’s examples is the mixture of English lexis and French syntax in the Middle English poem *Pearl*. While linguistic distinctions between English and French can readily be made, Machan notes “I do not know whether he [the *Pearl*-poet] or his readers understood as much, or only that the phrase was poetic, though I tend to think the lat-

ter.” (p. 423). Having studied all his arguments in the chapter, I tend to agree, which again brings us back to Robert Fulk’s Chapter 6.

I said earlier that these would be my recommended readings for senior linguists. To novice readers in historical linguistics I would, however, recommend the very same chapters (6, 7, 19 and 24). Junior scholars would then, I hope, turn to the more mainstream work and would be able to see and judge the gap between linguistics as a ‘proper science’ and philology (as an ‘ancillary discipline’ whose main contribution is generally only taken to be of an editing nature). I am extremely grateful that the present handbook is a wilful step in the direction of (re-)marrying philology with linguistics, and that it combines quantitative and qualitative approaches in all four sections and all of the 28 chapters – to me the most fundamental benefit of the volume.

### **References**

For the corpora cited, see: [www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/index.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/CoRD/corpora/index.html), access: November 2017.

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