

Ruxandra Vișan. 2018. *Landmarks in the History of the English Language*. Bucharest: Ars Docendi. 209 pp.

Reviewed by Daria Protopopescu*

Landmarks in the History of the English Language by Ruxandra Vișan, published by Ars Docendi publishing house, offers an overview of the history of the English language before 1500, with a focus on the Old English and Middle English periods. There are also excursions into the Early Modern English age, which are provided by the author in order to compare the various stages in the development of certain forms and structures. However, the observations concerning the Early Modern English age are made mainly in order to offset the previous historical periods, which are the main focus of this book. From the beginning, it is essential to emphasize that the book establishes itself as an initiation into the history of English, specifically meant for Romanian readers, and as a precursor for a more advanced study. As such, this book emerges as the first historical overview of English which is targeted to Romanian readers. The author's professed aim is to provide Romanian readers with useful parallels and generalizations which will enable these readers to become familiar with key aspects in the history of English before the sixteenth century.

The book is divided into three parts, the first, entitled "Boundaries", consisting of two chapters: chapter 1, "From 449 to 1066" (pp. 17-54), and chapter 2, "From 1066 to 1476" (pp. 55-97). Thus, each chapter is centred, respectively, on the two traditionally delimited periods under scrutiny: Old English and Middle English. The author chooses to present aspects pertaining to the history, phonology and lexis of English in the chosen time frame. What is interesting to note is the make-up of the two chapters which start with preliminary remarks over the landmarks of the two time periods, followed by detailed discussions of the linguistic consequences of the main historical events of each period. There is also a follow-up section after every main topic in which the author poses research questions meant to improve the readers' knowledge.

It is in the second part of the book, "Developments", that the author provides insight into the structure of English, concentrating on morphological and syntactical issues. Thus, it is in chapter 3, suggestively entitled "Inflections aplenty...or Not really" (pp. 101-158), that the author chooses to offer an overview of the development of inflectional forms from Old English to Present-Day English, maintaining her focus on the presentation of Old and Middle English structures. This chapter is, understandably, placed at the interface between syntax and morphology, and the author gives insight not only into the development of English inflections, but also into the changes that took place concerning word order in the history of English. The last chapter, "A glimpse at grammaticalization" (pp. 159-175), which is also included in the second part of the book, deals with a process which is essential for a good understanding of the history of English, namely grammaticalization (Hopper and Traugott 2003).

The final part of the book, entitled "Linguistic illustrations" (pp. 179-202), offers readers a relevant selection of Old, Middle and Early Modern English texts for translation practice and discussion.

Each of the chapters in the book includes innovative sections of exercises, meant for Romanian readers. The author successfully combines the theoretical explanations and generalizations with practical exercises that are meant to illustrate the structures and issues discussed in each chapter. The book is a complex attempt of combining elements of historical

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linguistics, sociolinguistics and socio-historical research. The style and accessible way of presenting information recalls previous books such as David Crystal's *The Stories of English* (2004) or Jonathan Culpeper's *History of English* (2005). The author makes use of a vast array of primary and secondary sources, and includes in each chapter relevant excerpts from previous histories of English for discussion and analysis.

The book is an initiation that targets both Romanian students of English and academics. It provides an appropriate synthesis of the vast amount of information involved (which covers several centuries). The format is clear and informative, and the practical exercises original and useful. What I found particularly interesting is the initial discussion of the traditional periodization in the history of English that the author offers. What do labels such as Old, Middle, Early Modern English or Present-Day English really mean and how can we represent them in a way which is clear for those who wish to have an overview of key historical aspects of English? This is the main question that the author initiates, which frames the book as a fluid, coherent and nuanced overview rather than a dry, syncopated account of the history of English. It is these questions together with the crisp, clear writing style and the innovative exercises that make this book a successful historical overview, undoubtedly useful for both students and academics.

References

- Crystal, David. 2004. *The Stories of English*. New York: The Overlook Press.
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