

**K. AARON SMITH and SUSAN M. KIM, *This Language, A River: A History of English*, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2018, 360 pp.**  
(Reviewed by Felicia Jean Steele, The College of New Jersey, USA)

K. Aaron Smith and Susan M. Kim of Illinois State University have made a significant contribution to the inventory of the History of English Language (HEL) textbooks, especially for institutions where HEL is the only linguistics course taken by future teachers of English or "Language Arts" in K-12 schools. Smith and Kim have composed one of the best accounts of diachronic morphosyntax accessible to undergraduate students. The treatment of phonology and the lexicon, though, may impede instructors more accustomed to more traditional HEL textbooks, particularly Baugh and Cable or Brinton and Arnovick. Additionally, the organization of the first five chapters also complicates the teaching of foundational concepts and terms. Despite these two issues, the book's clarity of prose, affordability, and clear articulation of its audience recommend it for use in HEL courses.

Smith and Kim clearly identify the audience for their textbook, presenting it as "a history of the English language that will provide students with fundamentals both for future study and for the teaching of English in secondary schools" (2018: 11). With that audience in mind, Smith and Kim preface their narrative of the history of the English language with a forty-page chapter on "Grammar Fundamentals" (2018: 21-62). The authors acknowledge that "this chapter will be a review of material" for some students while "for others this chapter will be a first introduction to terms and concepts like 'subject' and 'relative clause'" (2018: 21). This chapter presents a comprehensive review of terms used in traditional grammar and necessary for the discussion of changes to the syntactic and morphological systems of English across historical periods. In future editions, the authors would be well-served to ensure that more grammatical and linguistic terms, particularly those more abstract in nature, such as *deictic*, also appear in the glossary.

Although Chapter Two discusses and reviews terms related to traditional grammatical terminology, other descriptive linguistic terminology, particularly that related to phonology, morphosyntax, and the lexicon appear after Chapter 3, "Before English." Smith and Kim separate their treat-

ment of Proto-Indo-European, the comparative method, and the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European grammar from their discussion of the First Consonant Shift. The intervening chapter, "An Introduction to Phonetics," provides a clear account of articulatory phonetics for the beginning student, but includes a number of idiosyncracies that make the use of publicly available resources, particularly those developed to conform to International Phonetic Association standards, more challenging. Smith and Kim appear to be following Daniel Jones's conventions for representing the diphthongs of American English rather than those of A.C. Gimson more typically used in most HEL textbooks (Crystal 1996: 237). For example, Smith and Kim represent the primary PDE diphthongs as [oi], [ai], and [au] rather than as [ɔi], [aɪ], and [aʊ] (2018: 90). In addition, they invert the voiceless/voiced order found in typical IPA charts so that voiced sounds always appear at left. As a result, students may have difficulty using resources available from the IPA, the University of Victoria, and the University of Iowa as they learn these sound/symbol relationships.

The authors' practices for the representation of the Great Vowel Shift (GVS) also may cause difficulties. The vowel quantities for the GVS are represented just as they are in typical descriptions, but the spatial metaphors for the breaking of high vowels are radically different. Most accounts of the GVS follow the characterization that Minkova and Stockwell describe as "center drift" or the "diphthongization, centralizing, and lowering of [i:] and [u:] to some variant of [ay] and [aw]" (Minkova and Stockwell 2008: 34). Smith and Kim represent the breaking of the high vowels into positions outside the typical formulation of the vowel space.

The authors' treatment of the English lexicon is not as robust as that found in other textbooks, but the absence of protracted discussions of borrowing in each period of the language may be one factor that allows the authors to keep the text relatively concise and affordable. If future editions were to add exercises that led students through use of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Middle English Dictionary*, or the Lexicons of Modern English Project, the book would be enriched.

Nevertheless, Smith and Kim provide a substantially more theorized discussion of morphosyntax than most other HEL textbooks. Their sustained attention to periphrastic constructions throughout the history of English provides a significant corrective to treatments of syntax that neglect the topic until Early Modern English. Smith and Kim also introduce interesting material that allows for instructors to model the development of research projects for undergraduate students. For example, their description of the loss of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular verbal inflection *-st* in EME would provide

just such an opportunity for instructors and their students: “The loss of the inflection *-st* is an especially interesting problem in the history of English because the sounds that make up that inflection were not vulnerable to loss” (2018: 240). Smith and Kim encourage instructors and students to consider the complex interplay of phonotactics and morphosyntactic change in introductory courses.

*This Language, A River* provides brief samples of literature written in each historical period of English, including samples from Bede, *Beowulf*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary*. It is an affordable and highly usable contribution to the inventory of HEL textbooks available to instructors, although it might be most useful for instructors who already use a variety of online resources or who pair the book with a reader, such as Burnley’s *History of the English Language: A Sourcebook*.

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