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Language change, as David Crystal states in the quote that opens this volume, “is as natural as breathing” (Crystal 2006, 89). José María Oliver, PhD in Linguistics by the Universidad de Buenos Aires, demonstrates this fact as he walks his readers through the development of the English language across space and time. The book stems from the various teaching materials developed for use in the *History of the English Language* course at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata where Oliver works as a lecturer. It maps the history of English concisely, constituting a helpful guide for students and a pedagogical resource for teachers. It must be noted that this publication has been made under an open access policy that encourages the free circulation and socialization of knowledge, and is available to download from the site SEDICI, the institutional repository of the Universidad Nacional de La Plata.

The main goal of the book is to showcase that language changes and to explain the processes that have led the different varieties of English to their current state (6). In order to do so, the author has structured the contents in four axes, each examined in one of the four chapters: linguistic change, linguistic change in time, linguistic change in space and linguistic change in society.

The first chapter, “Linguistic change in the History of English,” introduces the notion of linguistic change and its importance in the study of the English language through time. Oliver underscores that language, subject to change over time, is not neutral, as one may find after observing its history from the theoretical perspective of historical linguistics. While admitting that a strict periodization of the language does not reflect reality, the author offers multiple graphs and tables to illustrate the relationship between historical events and linguistic changes. This outline of the history of English begins as far back as several centuries before Christ, highlighting key points such as the introduction of Latin by Roman settlers since Claudius’ era in 43 AD, the arrival of Germanic tribes in the fifth century, the Norman Conquest in the eleventh century and the introduction of the printing press in the fifteenth, while mentioning aspects of linguistic change such as the Great Vowel Shift and the introduction of a more analytical grammar and the rise of standardization, phenomena that are delved

into more deeply throughout the book, specifically in the second chapter. In this first chapter, Oliver (13) summarizes the three major models that have contributed to the development of historical linguistics—the neogrammarians, structuralism, and generativism—as well as the three main perspectives that provide explanations for language change according to Schendl (2001)—functions, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. In doing so, he presents an array of bibliographical references and reframes it in a systematic and cohesive way, allowing the reader to finish the chapter with a global understanding of the theoretical perspectives and with organized references for further reading on each one. In addition to this, the chapter is wrapped up with a case study adapted from Campbell (2020), in which text extracts written in Modern, Early Modern, Middle and Old English are presented to encourage consideration of linguistic change in practice.

As previously stated, the second chapter, “Walking through Change in the History of English,” focuses on the history of English itself, detailing the language’s stages and pinpointing the most relevant historical moments to approach it while commenting on previous periodizations, such as Graddol’s (1997) and van Gelderen’s (2014). By comparing and analyzing different periodizations and labels, Oliver demonstrates that “the way to establish periods and internal divisions in diachrony should be seen as a combination of external facts and turning points in the internal history of the language, that is, a mixture of the so-called internal and external histories” (35). Ultimately, this chapter proposes a clear periodization of these internal and external histories, relevant to the history of English because language change is deeply intertwined with the cultural, social and political contexts in which it takes place. At the end of this chapter, the author anticipates possible doubts that readers might have about certain linguistic changes but, rather than formulating an answer, he presents fragments of texts from original medieval sources and guides them to find the answers independently, while exploring the social and linguistic landscape of fourteenth century English.

Up to this point, the book centered on theoretical perspectives and concepts while focusing on the earlier history of the language and the transition between Old and Middle English. The second half of the book shifts its focus towards the modern spread of English around the world and the resulting emergence of multiple varieties. Hence, the third chapter, “Moving on to Global Englishes,” summarizes the debates that have been prompted by this phenomenon and explains with different graphs and models the complex scenario, consistently taking into account the so-called “internal and external histories” (van Gelderen 2014, 11), that is, the combination of external facts and turning points in the internal history of the language. Oliver (59) reviews different critical postures, such as Kachru’s (1992) three-circle model of World Englishes, van Gelderen’s

(2014), Jenkins' (2015), and Kirkpatrick's (2007), considering how some criteria that link varieties to specific racial and cultural groups, perceiving them as superior, are based on prejudice, while others, such as Kirkpatrick's, propose analysis of varieties based on the three main functions of language—communication, identity, and culture. The idea of a standard language is explained along with its connection to historical developments and the notion of a unified nation (Haugen 1996), and a picture is drawn of the present-day debate over the process through which a variety becomes the standard. After walking the reader through the salient features of different varieties of English, the author points out two negative consequences related to the spread of English: the marginalization of non-native English speakers and their linguistic resources, and the loss of linguistic diversity. "These issues" he finds, "boil down to the notion of power: the power of the language as a global dominant one, and the power of the speakers who impose certain usage" (72). For example, the adoption of English may be a necessity for economic and social mobility for non-native speakers of English, but it can also lead to a sense of cultural dislocation, a tension between assimilation and preservation of identity. Having emphasized the idea that proficiency, communication, and identity are at the core of the present-day discussion, with a focus on the use of English rather than on its speakers (79), the chapter concludes with a case study in which sample texts written in different varieties are presented.

In the fourth chapter, "Variation and Change: Synchrony Meets Diachrony" after referring to the seminal work on language variation and change by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968), the author explains, providing examples, how variation does not always lead to change, and offers the definitions of variation, variety, and related terms (*style shifting*, *variable*, *variant*). Following a section on contemporary discussions, such as present-day gender-related issues, and the impact of the Internet on language, the argument made at the very beginning of the book is taken up again: language change is inevitable and it is not a neutral entity. As Carter states (2002, 12), "it is difficult to see language use independently from the power of those who use it or control its use or enforce its use on others." With this, the final chapter compellingly ties together the propositions about language presented and demonstrated throughout the book.

In sum, this volume offers a history of the English language integrating a vast array of bibliography, while providing examples and case studies along the way which encourage the reader to put into practice the new information, question it and reach possible answers autonomously. Its efficiency as a companion for students and teachers, while rendering it a helpful tool for them, might, as a downside, narrow down its target audience to those that are already familiarized with specialized terminology and with certain schools of thought. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy how, employing an engaging and didactic rhetoric, Oliver offers a

concise history of the language that, without sacrificing accuracy and critical thoroughness, renders the long and winding road of the history of changes in the English language accessible and appealing.

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