RECENZJE

Begoña Crespo. *Change in life, change in language. A semantic approach to the history of English*, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt a/M. 2013. Pp. 145.

The development and use of various forms in spoken and written English at different periods in history has been the subject of many scholarly works. These studies tried not only to explain the linguistic evolution of the language but also to draw conclusions in terms of the society, culture and the individuals using it. Various approaches were adopted in order to investigate language change and history, such as those in historical linguistics, corpus linguistics, pragmatics, etc. Crespo in her *Change in life, change in language. A semantic approach to the history of English* offers a closer look at the evolution of the English vocabulary from the sociolinguistic perspective.

The study under review deals with the semantic change in the Middle and early Modern English periods, and its relation to the changes that took place in the society of the time. The book is composed of three parts, preceded by the Prologue and Introduction. Whilst the Prologue constitutes a short (one page long) synopsis of the book content, the Introduction is devoted to presenting the aim of the monograph, discussing its particular parts, and highlighting the approach that has been adopted by the Author. As Crespo explains (pp. 14), her objective is "to determine the mechanisms through which change occurs" rather than to decide whether it occurs or not.

In Part One (pp. 17-37) the reader is presented with the socio-historical background, which helps understand the period under study, i.e., from the 12th to the 17th centuries. The aim of the book is to illustrate the mechanisms which trigger language change. Thus, in order to do so, the Author starts with a portrayal of the social context of the period, instead of limiting the work to a purely linguistic discussion, which is a great advantage of the book and makes it accessible to a larger audience. And so, in Part One Crespo discusses the medieval multilingualism, showing how trilingual England has changed into a monolingual country; then she moves to the discussion of the evolution of the standard language, which, in turn, leads to the emergence and rise in dictionary production. Crespo concentrates on the lexicon, since in this area "linguistic change is most easily detected" (pp. 34). One may have a feeling that the notion of lexical borrowing (and the attitudes to borrowing in early Modern English) is touched upon too briefly; however, this is understandable if we bear in mind that this part functions as the introduction to the study proper.

Part Two (pp. 39-61) constitutes an overview of the major theoretical frameworks of the linguistic change and presents how different schools dealt with the issue. Crespo pays special attention to the historical sociolinguistic and socio-historical linguistic approaches, in which it is the individual who plays an important role in any linguistic change. She presents various reasons (external and internal) behind language change and concludes that these arise "as a result of contact with other languages" (pp. 51). This leads to a discussion of phenomena connected to language contact, such as interference, bilingualism and diglossia.

Finally, the third part of the volume (pp. 63-116) concentrates on the semantic change. Much space is devoted to the explanation of the basic concepts, such as semantics, semantic change, meaning, sense, etc. Crespo makes it clear that the concept of meaning is closely related to the context in which it occurs (referring to the basic semantic triangle suggested by Ogden and Richards[1]). The role of context is especially important when one has to base his/her conclusions

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[1] Ogden, C.K. & I. A. Richards. 1923. *The meaning of meaning: A study of the influence of language upon thought and of the science of symbolism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.

exclusively on historical written material, as is the case with the study under review. Analysing semantic change involves deciphering various shades of meaning. Factors such as the lack of informants who could help explain frequently arising ambiguity make such research a difficult and demanding task.

Further, the Author discusses the approaches of various scholars to the theory of semantic fields. She starts with Trier's theory, presenting its major assumptions. Being aware of a number of weak points of this theory (Crespo writes for instance: "there are serious problems with Trier's view of lexical fields as closed, delimited groups" (pp. 69)), she suggests that studies of semantic fields should differentiate between the basic and peripheral terms and rely on the Prototype Semantics in order to concentrate on the central meanings of words. Here, the works of Aertsen[2] might be added to Crespo's list of references. In his studies, he proposes to look at particular senses of words independently rather than at entire words.

Additionally, the Author presents a different treatment of vocabulary in terms of the semantic divisions offered by various authors. These include a brief (usually one paragraph long) summary of studies by such scholars as Lehrer, Kleparski, Lyons, Palmer, Moskowich, and Serjeantson. The fact that Crespo decided to summarise the study of Serjeantson in a much more detailed manner (it takes three pages, pp.70-72) than of the others, seems not to be fully justified, especially that it is Moskowich's approach which Crespo decides to follow in her analysis. All in all, Crespo is aware of the subjectivity of the division of vocabulary into semantic fields. She writes: "The consideration of semantic fields differs so much from one author to another that the approach adopted would seem to depend on a given author's own conception of the extralinguistic reality" (pp. 73). Then Crespo proceeds to the discussion of semantic change and the possible reasons behind it. She adopts Arlotto's approach (1972)[3], according to which the process of semantic change should be explained both linguistically and socially. The Author presents the existing models of the classification of semantic change, for instance those of Ullmann, Williams, Hughes, Berndt, Millward, and others.

The latter part of Part III of the monograph is the analysis proper. Structurally, the monograph would have been much better organised if this practical part was extracted and presented as an independent chapter (Part IV). The research is based on the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts*. The study is restricted to the diachronic part of the corpus, excluding the synchronic dialectal part. Crespo further limits her research to one word class, i.e., the noun. She extracted all the nouns from the corpus, i.e. altogether 31,346 nouns and categorised them into 29 semantic fields: abstractions; physical activity; mental activity; agriculture and vegetation; farm duties; physical appearance; hunting, fishing, falconry and other sports and games; climate and atmospheric weather; food, drink and culinary arts; construction; artistic activities; finance and commerce; war and military matters; laws; medicine; anatomy and the human body; household items and other objects; miscellaneous; the physical world; navigation, sailing and the sea; trades; weights and measures; reference to assemblies or groups; references to person or rank; family and social relations; religion, beliefs and rites; clothing and textiles; animal life; technology and science; technology and administration. Unfortunately, the Author gives only a few examples of nouns categorised to each of the selected fields. In some cases her choice seems unclear, e.g., the noun *fruit* belongs to the category 'agriculture and farm duties' whilst *apple* to 'food, drink and culinary arts'; *trade* has been grouped with nouns for 'finances and commerce' although the category 'trades' exists; *fish* belongs to the field 'navigation, sailing and the sea' but at the same time could have been part of the fields 'hunting, fishing, falconry and other sports and games' or 'animal life' (in which we find for instance *birds*); *mariner* belongs to the category 'trades' rather than 'navigation, sailing, and the sea'; etc. However, as mentioned above, the creation of

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[2] e.g., Aertsen, H. 1987. *Play in Middle English. A contribution to word field theory*. Amsterdam: Free University Press; or: Aertsen, H. 1989. "Word field semantics and historical lexicography", *Folia Linguistica Historica*, IX/2: 33-57.

[3] Arlotto, A. 1972. *Introduction to historical linguistics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

semantic fields and decision how to categorise particular words is a very subjective matter. It would be helpful if Crespo explained what prevailed in her decision making, whether the use of a particular form (token) in a particular context was the ultimate factor for categorising it into a certain semantic field; whether one word could have been categorised into more than one semantic field or not; etc. Nevertheless, the selection and categorisation of nouns must have been a time consuming process and the Author's effort cannot be underestimated. It is a pity that the Author did not provide us with a list of the selected nouns, illustrating the semantic groups to which they had been classified, for instance in the form of an appendix. Not only would it make the picture of the semantic fields clearer but also it could serve as a reference material for other scholars doing similar research. We can only assume that it was the size of the material which influenced the Author's decision not to include it. Apart from these few comments, the methodology has been presented in a clear and concise manner.

A minor note would be the use of the term 'field' on page 89, which may be confusing for the reader. Crespo writes "Created using Microsoft Access 97, the database contains 22 fields, organised as follows (…)", and a little bit further on the same page: "I now list and describe in greater detail the 29 fields that have been used to classify the nouns in the corpus". The former use of 'field' refers rather to 'categories' and the latter to semantic fields, which at first glance is not clear at all.

The semantic field chosen for the study is 'personal rank nouns', due to being the most common (with the greatest number of nouns) in the material under investigation. Here a certain confusion occurs, since the reader is not told whether the greatest number of nouns refers to types or tokens of the nouns? Later we learn that the total of 4,153 tokens were recorded (pp. 95), but still the reader knows neither how many different nouns (types) belong to the semantic field under study, nor what actual lexemes have been categorised as 'personal rank nouns'. On page 96 Crespo writes about the number of forms undergoing certain changes, but does not explain what she means by the term 'form'. Again, the same question arises: does it refer to the number of 'types' or 'tokens'?

The analysis (section 3.4) has been organised according to the particular semantic changes that the studied vocabulary underwent, starting with 'absence of semantic change group', and then moving on to changes such as: specialisation of meaning, expansion or generalisation, deterioration, concretion, metaphorical extension, shift, etc. Altogether eleven types of change have been distinguished. Following her data, 2,107 nouns did not undergo any change. The number of 'forms' which underwent particular changes are given in Table 9 (pp. 96). A certain inconsistency occurs in the numbers given, which most probably results from a misprint, which does not affect the overall picture of the studied material. On page 96 Crespo writes: "Of the different types of change observed, the most notable is specialisation with 1,238 forms", whilst following the table (same page), specialisation was found in 1,243 cases.

Each of the discussed types of change is illustrated with a few examples. However, no information is given concerning the specific frequencies of occurrence of the particular items (i.e., how many tokens of the same noun were found). This raises the question: would the presence or lack of change depend on the number of records of the particular item in the analysed corpus?

From this section we find out that it was the specialisation and expansion of meaning which were the most frequent types of semantic change in the analysed material. In the latter part of her study, Crespo presents the particular changes from the point of view of the period when they occurred, the origin of nouns affected, dialect, type of text and the audience. It is only here that the Author mentions (though briefly) frequency. She writes for instance, "the periods with the least number of forms present a greater number of types of changes" (pp. 112).

The book ends with Final remarks (pp. 117-120) and an impressive list of references (over 400 books and articles!), which only make the work more valuable.

To conclude, despite minor shortcomings, Crespo's *Change in life, change in language. A semantic approach to the history of English* is a highly worthwhile text, which not only

professional scholars but also students of linguistics will find interesting and inspiring. It reads very well; and its structure is transparent. It explains the notion of the semantic change and issues connected with it in a clear and easily accessible way, which is even more valuable bearing in mind that many scholars view semantic change as unpredictable and fuzzy (Hock 1986)[4], arbitrary, 'whimsical' (Sweetser 1990)[5], and chaotic (Koch 2001)[6]. The monograph will provide a valuable source of reference for many academics.

MAGDALENA BATOR

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[4] Hock, H.H. 1986. *Principles of historical linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

[5] Sweetser, E. 1990. *From etymology to pragmatics*. *Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic change*. Cambridge: CUP.

[6] Koch, P. 2001. "Bedeutungswandel und Bezeichnungswandel. Von der kognitiven Semasiologie zur kognitiven Onomasiologie", *Zeitschrift fur Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 121: 7-36.