

Beatrix Weber. *Sprachlicher Ausbau: Konzeptionelle Studien zur spätmittelenglischen Schriftsprache*. Arbeiten zur Sprachanalyse 52. Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2010, xi + 223 pp., € 50.80.

The book under review, a published Dresden University PhD thesis, originates from a collaborative research project devoted to the study of various forms of institutionalization, here the sub-project “Institutionalizing the Vernacular: Textualizing and Standardizing Medieval English”, led by Ursula Schaefer.¹ Previously, Schaefer had been involved in research on the oral transmission and the textualization of the English language,² and she consequently turned to the possible effects of textualization, i.e. the standardization of the English language, in more recent years. In particular, Schaefer focused on the written medium with regard to evidence of linguistic elaboration (“sprachlicher Ausbau”), a concept introduced by Kloss (1929) and popularized by Haugen (1966). It is in this context that Beatrix Weber situates her own work. Specifically, she considers the standardization of English as the emergence of an institution governing linguistic performance within a speech community (7). This new approach to the standardization of English goes beyond well-known earlier ones, e.g. by Samuels (1963) and by Fisher (1977 and 1996), that were mainly focused on the gradual spread of a standardized orthography and morphology. In her dissertation, Weber instead discusses, first, the theoretical basis of the notion of linguistic elaboration (ch. 3); she then provides a historical locus for this process to have taken place (ch. 4). Finally, she presents and evaluates empirical data to support her thesis (ch. 5).

Chapter 3 (15–27) provides a highly systematic and comprehensive discussion of subjects pertinent to the concept of linguistic elaboration. The author is drawing on earlier theories, e.g. by Haugen (1966) and by Koch and Oesterreicher (1985), to arrive at a definition apt to cover the phenomena to be investigated in the material at hand. This definition first of all distinguishes *intensive* from *extensive* forms of linguistic elaboration; while the former denotes an increase in linguistic powers of expressions, for instance, contingent on contact situations, the latter refers to the extended use of the language in increasingly more functions. As a result of her critical discussion, Weber’s own approach to linguistic elaboration entails its location in the written medium, its connection with specific discourse types (35–6), and a certain overlap, possibly as a basis or precondition, with the process of linguistic standardization. Weber’s highly competent discussion takes into account the phenomenon of grammaticalization, in particular vis-à-vis her chosen examples, *during*

¹ Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB) 537: *Institutionalität und Geschichtlichkeit* (1997–2008), Teilprojekt T: *Institutionalisierungen der Volkssprache: Verschriftlichung und Standardisierung des mittelalterlichen Englisch*.

² Cf. her contributions to the series *ScriptOralia*.

and *notwithstanding*, noting that linguistic elaboration, standardization and grammaticalization often go hand in hand (68–70).

Given the peculiar linguistic situation of late medieval England, with three languages, Latin, French and English, in competition, a discussion of an emergent Standard English in linguistic isolation would fall short of the socio-cultural reality, as Weber justifiably recognizes. Quite tellingly, therefore, she treats English as a special case (see ch. 4, 75–108).³ With two written languages, Latin and French, as role models, the elaboration of English as a written language in an increasing number of functional varieties in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is very much unlike developments elsewhere in Western Europe. It is one of the advantages of her approach to link the social perspective of contact linguistics with analyses of discourse traditions and with an eye on how they impact, or rather foster, the elaboration of English. Weber's discussion of the role of orthography as a measure of standardization, of foreign influences and the question of medium (written or spoken) shows the author again highly competent (see for instance pp. 76–83). Her survey of legal and administrative discourse traditions in England is informed by a careful examination of historical facts, on which she bases her empirical analysis in the following chapter.

In chapter 5 (111–195), Weber presents her data, which she derived from the *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England* (PROME), an 8-million word strong, trilingual corpus compiled from the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* (1272–1509). Assuming that legal and administrative documents are highly formalized, and therefore repetitive, the author focuses on conventional expressions and recurrent collocations, specifically such that originate in one of the two model languages. Her choice, constructions involving *during* (< Lat. *durante*/F *durant*) and *notwithstanding* (< Lat. *non obstante*/F *nonobstant*), is a fortunate one. Weber's corpus analysis and the conclusions she draws are sound, and her discussion of the further career of the two items as part of the English lexicon (ch. 5.3) is, again, highly competent, including a critical survey of modern approaches to grammatical issues such as the distinction between *-ing* participles and the gerund (ch. 5.3.1). Going far beyond traditional accounts of foreign influences due to contact situations, Weber concludes justifiably that the structural integration or reanalysis of what are originally participles, and later on prepositions (both) or also a conjunction/adverb (*notwithstanding*), bespeaks the impact of a foreign discourse model. Both examples, thus, beautifully show how from within one discourse tradition the reemerging written English picks up on models distinctive for the discourse type, and how later on the newly acquired lexical items find their way into other discourses within the English language. They thus showcase perfectly the elaboration of “officialese” and everyday English, some syntactic reanalyses and possible stylistic constraints notwithstanding.

With her published PhD thesis, Beatrix Weber has offered students and scholars of the history of English both an excellent survey of the ongoing discussion about the standardization of the language as well as an outstanding example of how theoretical assumptions can be turned into practice by a historical linguist. If the work is found lacking in one aspect, it is the fact that it is not (yet?) available in English. Perhaps, because German used to be a leading medium in the historical linguistics

³ “Ein Ausbauprozess – Der Sonderfall Englisch” (‘The elaboration of a language – English as a special case’).

discourse? Whatever the case, I strongly believe that *Sprachlicher Ausbau* will come to be acknowledged as an important contribution to research in later medieval English.

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