



PROJECT MUSE®

The Cambridge History of the English Language, Vol. VI:
English in North America (review)

James A. Walker

The Canadian Journal of Linguistics / La revue canadienne de
linguistique, 48(1/2), March-June/mars-juin 2003, pp. 125-127 (Review)

Published by Cambridge University Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjl.2004.0021>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/174199>

space, koineization, and comparative sociolinguistics. The cases of topic-author mismatch rarely result from inappropriate author choice; rather, they seem to fall out from the nature of the topics, many of which are by their nature not something closely associated with any one author. This results in some very careful chapters, consisting largely of reviews of other people's work. The chapters in question are all more than competent, but prevent the reader from fully benefiting from their authors' talent and experience.

At the level of proofreading, the book contains some errors that interfere with understanding, or even create misunderstanding. For example, the material at the top of p. 235, an apparent continuation of a table from the previous page, should probably be a separate table, titled "6-syllable stems." Likewise, it is clear from the table on p. 751 that the sentence at the bottom of the previous page, "In this table *non-significant* factors are in bold", should read "In this table *significant* factors are in bold". Presumably such errors result from copy conversion associated with the publisher's standardization of tables, and can easily be corrected in future editions.

Such future editions would be welcome, especially given the editors' bold decision to assign equal weight to "the tried-and-probably-true and the potentially productive" (p. 1). In a field as (relatively) young as variationist sociolinguistics, ideas develop quickly, and can in many cases be empirically tested just as quickly. It is natural that the concerns of the field should change over time, and the discipline is well served by a handbook that is willing to stay at the leading edge of such change. It is equally true, though, that over time certain methods and approaches will be more frequently tested than others, and will become yet more central to work on variation and change. It is hoped that future editions will reflect these core concerns by devoting proportionally more space to them.

John Algeo, ed. *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. VI: *English in North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. Pp. xxxii + 625. US\$120.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by James A. Walker, *York University*

This book is a welcome addition to the Cambridge University Press series on the history of the English language. Some may find the title a bit misleading, since, apart from two chapters on Canada, the contributions deal almost exclusively with varieties of English spoken in the United States. Given this limitation, as well as others discussed below, the volume provides a good general introduction to the study of North American English.

Roughly half of the volume deals with issues of origin, contact, development and change. After his preface (pp. xv–xxvii), editor John Algeo provides a detailed outline of the historical and social events of the last 400 years in Chapter 1, "External history" (pp. 1–58). He states that the focus of his historical discussion is the experiences which have had an impact on the language of Americans (p. 6), but the linguistic relevance is not always apparent. Two chapters deal more specifically with connections between Britain and North America. Chapter 2, "British and American, continuity and divergence" (pp. 59–85) by John Hurt Fisher, examines features shared by American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) and the extent to which they constitute separate varieties. Michael Montgomery similarly surveys the British and Irish heritage of AmE in Chapter 3, "British and Irish antecedents" (pp. 86–153). These two chapters contain a great deal of overlap and might

better have been combined into one. Although all of the first three chapters rely to various degrees on the sociohistorical analyses presented in Bailyn (1986a, 1986b) and Fischer (1989), which correlate American cultural regions with areas of Britain, Montgomery correctly cautions against the reductionist approach of directly linking linguistic regions of Britain with those of the U.S. (p. 151). The influence of aboriginal and other languages on AmE is discussed in Chapter 4, "Contact with other languages" (pp. 154–183) by Suzanne Romaine, which also documents the various contact languages that arose during the European settlement of North America. While Romaine devotes several pages to the lexical contributions of the major immigrant languages to AmE (pp. 177–181), a discussion of varieties of English influenced by these languages (e.g., Chicano English) would have made this chapter more comprehensive. In Chapter 5, "Americanisms" (pp. 184–218), Frederic G. Cassidy† and John Houston Hall examine linguistic features (mostly lexical) considered to be unique to or characteristic of AmE. British reactions to such Americanisms (a coin termed as early as 1768) are discussed by Richard W. Bailey in Chapter 14, "American English abroad" (pp. 456–496). This chapter also examines the more recent spread of AmE as a global language.

Issues of spelling and usage are the subject of two chapters. In Chapter 10, "Spelling" (pp. 340–357), Richard L. Venezky outlines the development of separate orthographic practises in the U.S. and the emergence of spelling authority. Chapter 11, "Usage" (pp. 358–421) by Edward Finegan, provides a historical overview of the study of grammar and usage in America, from Webster and the nineteenth-century school grammars, through the debates between the grammarians and linguists, to the "dictionary wars" of the twentieth century.

The remainder of the volume deals with varieties of and variation in North American English. In Chapter 7, "Dialects" (pp. 253–290), Lee Pederson identifies and discusses the four major speech areas of the United States: Northern (comprising the upper Midwest), Midland (centred in Pennsylvania), Southern and Western, with "General American" usually identified with inland Northern (p. 265). He also notes the relation of "focal areas" (major urban centres such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston) to these regional patterns (p. 262). Pedersen's discussion is detailed, but the complete absence of maps in this chapter (and elsewhere in the volume) is a surprising omission. In addition, most of the features Pedersen lists are lexical or phonetic, though Ronald Butters redresses this imbalance somewhat by examining grammatical features of AmE in Chapter 9, "Grammatical structure" (pp. 325–339). In Chapter 8, "African-American English" (pp. 291–324), Salikoko Mufwene discusses the variety of AmE which has received more attention than any other. As he notes, though, the "peculiarity" of African American English may lie less in the distinctiveness of its features than in their statistical distribution and the structural principles producing them (pp. 295, 312).

Undoubtedly of most interest to readers of this journal are the two chapters on varieties of English spoken in Canada. Chapter 13, "Newfoundland English" (pp. 441–455) by William J. Kirwin, discusses the most salient variety of Canadian English. Distinguishing between the "West Country" and "Anglo-Irish" varieties of Newfoundland, Kirwin documents not only the distinctive phonological and lexical features of these varieties but also their grammatical features, such as nonstandard verbal *-s* (*Some people haves fish-houses*) and the perfective construction with *after* (*A lot of new ones are after coming out*). In Chapter 12, "Canadian English" (pp. 422–440), Laurel J. Brinton and Margery Fee deal more generally with the "scholarly fiction" of Standard Canadian English (CE), viz. "the variety spoken by educated middle-class urban Canadians from the eastern border of Ontario to

Vancouver Island” (p. 422). Despite the existence of national and regional dictionaries and style guides, CE remains largely understudied (p. 424), which unfortunately renders some of their generalizations questionable. A number of phonological and grammatical features characteristic of CE are discussed, including Canadian raising, the [a]/[ɔ] merger and discourse *eh*. As a result of increasing influence from French, the English spoken in Quebec is said to be somewhat distinct from standard CE (pp. 425, 439), though more recent empirical studies of this variety (e.g., Boberg 2002; Poplack and Walker 2002) suggest that this claim is exaggerated. Similarly, the view that increasing multilingualism in the major urban centres (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver) is likely to promote the maintenance of “ESL varieties” which will change standard CE in the future (p. 426) remains empirically untested.

Although containing a number of assertions which specialists in the field may find misleading or controversial (e.g., the discussion of Labov’s study of New York City [p. 76]), the volume is relatively comprehensive and should be accessible to the general educated public. The inclusion of a list of phonetic symbols (pp. xxx–xxxii) and a glossary of linguistic terms (pp. 497–515) will be particularly helpful to those without a training in linguistics. Despite the abovementioned focus on American English, this volume serves as a good introduction to the various diachronic and synchronic issues in the origins, development and status of varieties of English spoken in North America.

REFERENCES

- Bailyn, Bernard. 1986a. *The peopling of British North America: An introduction*. New York: Random House.
- Bailyn, Bernard. 1986b. *Voyagers to the West: A passage in the peopling of North America on the eve of the American Revolution*. New York: Random House.
- Boberg, Charles. 2002. Ethnic diversity and the “authentic speaker”: The acquisition of Canadian English in Montreal. Paper read at New Ways of Analyzing Variation 31, Stanford University.
- Fischer, David Hackett. 1989. *Albion’s seed: Four British folkways in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Poplack, Shana, and James A. Walker. 2002. An English “like no other”? Language contact and change in Quebec. Poster presented at New Ways of Analyzing Variation 31, Stanford University.

Laurence R. Horn. *A Natural History of Negation*. In the *David Hume Series on Philosophy and Cognitive Science Reissues*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. 2001. Pp. xlviii + 637. US\$30.00 (softcover).

Reviewed by Chaoqun Xie, *Fujian Teachers University*

A Natural History of Negation turned out to be an important book of far-reaching and influential significance, after its original appearance in 1989. Ever since then, “there has been an explosion of interest in the grammar, semantics, pragmatics, and psycholinguistics of natural language negation” (p. xxiii). Negation has been continuously and enthusiastically