

Edgar W. Schneider. *Postcolonial English*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press. 2007. xvi, 367.

When opening this volume, part of the Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact, I expected to find an historical-comparative accounting of the varieties of English, as the title suggests, in former colonial regions; found instead was the perhaps equally ambitious project of formulating a model that accounts for the development of English where England had formerly held colonial interests. We are told in the introduction that the discussion intends to focus on “developmental phenomena characteristic of colonial and early phases of postcolonial histories” (3) and the “type of contact situation caused by these historical circumstances” (*ibid.*). The “Dynamic Model” (the model) introduced here is based on the notion that “a fundamentally uniform developmental process,” through a “cyclic series of characteristic phases,” has operated in “relocating and re-rooting” English in these locations (5). This book is organized from the general to the specific; Ch. 2, 3, and 4 establish the conceptual basis of the model, and Ch. 5 applies it to 17 postcolonial regions; American English is reserved for separate discussion in Ch. 6.

The phases of the model are identified (Ch. 3) as the following:

- I. Foundation
- II. Exonormative stabilization
- III. Nativization
- IV. Endonormative stabilization
- V. Differentiation

In each phase are examined constituent topics:

1. identity construction
2. sociolinguistic conditions
3. linguistic effects

At the level of phases III, IV, and V sociopolitical factors in the development of the variety are added to the discussion.

The model makes a contribution in recognizing the “perspectives” of both settlers and indigenous language users in events that constitute the development of the variety (31, as well as input from “adstrands,” *i.e.*, third party language groups, such as non-English speaking Europeans in Australia and the Americas, and Africans in North America; it recognizes also the importance of “dialect contact” among English speaking settlers in any region, who, it is important to recognize, did not constitute a homogenous speech community of a single variety (34-5).

The author makes a contribution to semantics in the discussion of the meaning *in re* place, fauna, and plant names and the hierarchy of loans from indigenous languages in the contact situation (79). This reader is at a loss, though, to grasp S’s point about what is wrong with the concept *loan words* (*ibid.*). Is it not the conventional term?

While the topic comprises the development of varieties of English in former colonial regions, in the foreground of the discussion throughout are found political, social, and economic relationships and developments, and significant historical and political events, such as Great Britain’s failure to protect Australia during the early phases of WWII (122), which are seen to either signal or condition transition to subsequent phases. Such occurrences as the official recognition and promotion of indigenous languages, as in Australia (123) and New Zealand (131), and nonstandard varieties as in Jamaica (63) and Nigeria (212) are taken as evidence of the acquisition of phases. The occurrence of these former events is certainly instrumental in the development of social and political identities that a variety indexes, witness also the American Revolution and the development of an American identity and American English, but the inclusion of these latter projects is a curious criterion for a model of language establishment, as it was a relatively recent, fashionable trend that resulted in the various preservationist and

promotional campaigns mentioned; events of this kind captured in the model appear to result less from inexorable human movements than from an accident of sociopolitical history.

Likewise, the so-called “complaint tradition” is given prominence throughout in discussions about the development of “endonormative standards” and is recognized as a marker of the phase; it is not clear that this is other than instances of the well known prescriptive tradition, active in English language and culture at least since the days of Dean Swift (A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue, 1712), the target of which has always been features of nonstandard varieties, whether on the British Isles or elsewhere.

The model here formulated is meant to apply to English in postcolonial environments. But should the essential elements of such a model not apply to well known-historical examples of like language diffusion? Among many others, one thinks of the westward expansion of vulgar Latin through the Gallic territories and Britannia, carried by Caesar’s armies and the legions of administrators, tradesmen, and settlers who followed; or the progress of English as it took over in the garden of the Emerald Isle (where, similarly, only very recently do we see officially sanctioned restoration projects in effect), even as it had millennia earlier in Britannia as a result of colonizing by the Angles and Saxons over against indigenous strands of Celtic and an *adstrand* of Scandinavians. Nowhere, however, does history record such events as official recognition and promotion of indigenous or nonstandard varieties until the advent of the aforementioned trend; nonetheless, spoken Latin did in fact take root in new fields, with a linguistic history that captures the development of differentiation and standardization in the settlement regions (*i.e.*, Phases IV and V). From these broader perspectives, the essential features

of (post)colonial language expansion evidently has occurred in these and other historical cases, despite the absence of these trends.

The central pillar of the model involves “social identity” among the speakers of the region in question (26), a premise that comports well, for example, with Noah Webster’s aims in establishing an orthography for Americans. This is further underscored in the conclusion (309) with particular reference to LePage and Tabouret-Keller, who see language use *as* an “act of identity” (*Acts of Identity: Creole-based Approaches to Language and Ethnicity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1985). In fact, by the time such phrases as “a specific form of English was chosen and further developed to signal their identity” and “blossoming as a marker of social identity” (306), remarks of this ilk seem ubiquitous in the work.

At this juncture a comment on nomenclature is in order. We often encounter the idea that a variety or its features serve as a *symbol* of the identity of the speakers in question (27, *inter alia*) and thereby participates in a system of *covert prestige* (236). Two important distinctions must be made here. More familiar to most linguists are the properties of linguistic signs, most of which bear a *symbolic* relation to their referents, which relation includes the features of arbitrariness and being displaceable in time and space, along with a small number of onomatopoeic signs, which have an *iconic* relation. Granted that many such instances occur within quotation marks, the terms *symbol* and *icon* are misapplied in this context. The semiotic relation between the specific features of the speech of a region and its speakers depends on a relationship between sign and referent based on psychological association resulting from physical juxtaposition, *i.e.*, a contiguous relation of time and space (see Charles S. Peirce, 1873 - MS 380). As examples of *indices*, black clouds *mean* rain, and footprints in the snow *mean* someone has been present. They depend for their existence as signs on having been physically influenced by what they

signify, *e.g.*, a walker in the location of the footprints left them in the snow after it fell. These do not function as *symbols* in a communication system, but are present facts that must be interpreted to discern facts that are not present. As Georges Mounin puts it, the “*indice* ... is a perceptible fact that provides information on other facts which are not perceptible” (*Semiotic Praxis: Studies in Pertinence and in the Means of Expression and Communication*. Trans. Catherine Tihany, with Maia and Bruce Wise. New York: Plenum Press, 1985, 214). Linguistic (symbolic) signs are *decoded* (*i.e.*, as parts of a system); indices are *interpreted* (*ibid.*, 154). Dialectical features thus *index* the region with which they are associated.

The use of the term *covert prestige* also requires clarification. As the concept has developed, it refers to the situation of speakers knowingly and deliberately employing features disfavored by users of the prestige variety, for the purpose of achieving solidarity, identity, and recognition within a more specific group, as a choice not to assimilate to the general society. Where a lower SES variety *is* the everyday language of the community, albeit functioning as L or M in relation to H, we do not have a situation in which covert prestige is expressed, merely in the fact of using the accustomed language of familiarity and intimacy in socially motivated contexts, as is claimed in numerous contexts (188, 226 *inter alia*). If the main criterion is the use of a lower sociolinguistic vernacular, the notion of *covert prestige* is being applied too broadly, particularly when the variety has achieved growing, open popularity, as is the case in numerous examples cited; in a previous generation the great popularity of reggae music led to widespread imitation of certain features of Rasta English among fans (see, *e.g.*, Pollard, Velma, *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000). And currently the linguistic and behavioral norms associated with the Hip-Hop culture are enormously popular among young people of all classes, and goods and apparel that are part of the Hip-Hop fashion

compass are marketed by fabulously wealthy moguls through all the established media. Such developments constitute not covert prestige but a cultural sea change, just as by the 1980s denim shirts and the “high five” became a virtual uniform for the middle and upper middle classes and professional level athletes internationally, *i.e.*, their status has swung from counter-culture indices to *mainstream* fashion.

Furthermore I take issue with the claim that under the officially sponsored project promoting Jamaican Creole, its prestige is changing from “covert to overt” (236). According to my recent work among young male Jamaicans who live on the island but work seasonally off it, even youthful speakers of the variety display the same extreme unwillingness to expose the local speech to outsiders as that documented by Salikoko S. Mufweme for Gullah, as a result of the stigma associated with the variety (Investigating Gullah: Difficulties in Ensuring “Authenticity” in Glowka, A. Wayne & Lance, Donald M. *Language Variation in North American English*, The Modern Language Association of America, 1993). Whatever the egalitarian posture of some activists and academics and pandering by local politicians, the attitudes of everyday people who speak the variety continue to reflect the stigma associated with it.

In the discussions of Phase IV Endonormative Stabilization and Phase V Differentiation, much is made of the notion of the development of local standards. From the standpoint of social attitudes a solid case can be made for this. But it also needs to be noted, as James H. Sledd points out, “fundamental structural similarities justify the one name *English* for a multitude of varieties. Privileged speakers of English everywhere ... understand one another with no great difficulty and generally ... agree in accepting or rejecting a given expression” (Standard Language and Questions of Usage, in Glowka and Lance *ibid.*). With very little divergence in morphosyntax and somewhat noticeable phonetic variance, and absent a few spelling

conventions, the standard speech and the writing of any region is hard to distinguish from that of any other.

The constitution of the model involves three important questions regarding the notions of *nativization*, *innovation*, and what it is that constitutes a variety. The name of the third phase in the model, *nativization*, is recognizable to students of creolistics as the set of processes a contact language undergoes in the minds and mouths of children in a community, who acquire the variety as a first language and through the generations transform it. In this work the term names a stage that subsumes a wide range of values. In the case of Australian English, it is applied both to regularizing borrowed words, such as indigenous place and fauna and flora names (121) and the development of local patterns from the “feature pool” filled by dialect diffusion, which eventually results in a local variety (97 f, 122); in the case of Jamaica, *nativization* is applied to the development of Jamaican Creole (229 f). Elsewhere we see *nativization* glossed as “creolization” (227) and the claim that in the case of trade colonies, “pidginization and the spread of pidgins are thus the most important effects of the [first] phase” (213).

This observation raises the question of just what it is that is being *nativized*. The several dialects that were brought to Australia, for example, and which developed into the Englishes of Australia? Or the spawning of contact languages that go on to live their own lives as pidgins or creoles, some independent of intense English contact and some in the shadow of an English speaking environment, as in Africa, the Caribbean, and Hawai’i? The metaphor, “relocating and re-rooting” English seems quite apt for Phase I with respect to the foundation of English in the new location, but it does not apply to the genesis of contact languages, and including those as varieties of English in the same model as English varieties transplanted in Australia is problematical.

The well-known truism that “there is no way in principle of distinguishing a ‘language’ from a ‘dialect of a language’” does not dismiss objections to the view that these Englishes and creoles “represent points on a cline,” that there is “not a categorical difference” between them (61). The objections of “creolists who have insisted on the status of creoles as separate languages on principle” are acknowledged in passing (*ibid.*), but it is not *principle* that leads to the recognition of pidgins and creoles as independent varieties, but the structural facts of their constitution — structural characteristics that are *not* English — and their histories, vis-à-vis their lexifiers. Ample structural reasons exist to render impracticable placing “Cajun English” (a well established creole), so-called Chicano English (a putative L2 variety), and an established variety such as Appalachian English on the same plane. This inclusion of creoles among dialects of English deprecates them as “pidginized English” — which term appears herein (66). This is a step backward in linguistic inquiry, and it is in fact extraneous to the model’s essential utility.

The model, as mentioned earlier, recognizes the settler population in any new region as representing several dialects who contribute to a “feature pool” (35). This leads to the observation that “dialect diffusion,” along with the notion of “historical depth” (110), accounts for many of the forms found in nonstandard dialects in the postcolonial regions (82). Many such features which appear in the several varieties, though, are also characterized as “innovations.” One example is collocations such as *look* with *to* and *chance* with *for* in New Zealand (131). But these features also characterize traditional and rural forms in American Inland North and Midland Dialect areas and have long been a feature of sports talk in the United States, *e.g.*, *He’s lookin’ to steal second* and *he has a chance for a no-hitter*. Given the known migration patterns in each of these areas, it is much more likely that these preserve older dialect features. The post-vocalic rhoticity of most American English dialects is counted as an innovation (262); this is

very curious as it is known that many areas of England maintained post-vocalic rhoticity until near the end of the eighteenth century (except, famously, for East Anglia, speakers of which region populated the Coastal Virginia area). Meanwhile, established scholarship shows that such features are attested in rural varieties of BE (see, *e.g.*, Mufweme, *ibid.*); likewise accounted for are plural (s) in various forms with *you*, such as *yous*, associated with Belfast speech, and *ye ones* [*> youns*], which was known to Chaucer. Adverbs without (-ly) (280) are as old as English itself. Such items cannot be seen as “dialect diffusion” in Phase 1 and “innovation” in Phase 3 and 4.

Among the structural effects of nativization discussed appear the following features which are described as *innovations*:

- reduction of vowel system (ɪ = i) in Southeast Asia (72 f)
- substitution of [t] for [θ] and [d] for [ð] in South African and in many other varieties (72 f)
- reduction to a five vowel system in East African varieties (102)
- syllabic, not stress-based, pace of delivery (78)
- consonant cluster reduction and the formation of CVCV structures (78)
- using (-s) plural with collective or mass nouns such as *staffs* among Malaysian and Indian speakers (102, 151, 169)
- missing concord, *e.g.*, *this two languages*, in Malaysia (151)
- omission or insertion of articles (from standpoint of standard varieties) (169)
- word formation processes involving compounding such as *tie-head* ‘scarf’ and *follow-back* ‘younger sibling’ (Cameroonian Pidgin, 218)

Such phenomena as these are universally associated with EFL situations, manifestations of *interlanguage*., yet in these and other spots, (196), the model identifies as innovations by-products of interlanguage calcification. These processes, the product of incomplete acquisition of the relevant phonetic and phonological functions, grammatical categories, and semantic operations of English, are ubiquitous among speakers of many types of languages. For example, we see *Staffs Only* written on doors on the subway in Shanghai, we hear *vocabularies* and *alphabets* in the mouths of speakers from the more than 165 immigrant speech communities in

Los Angeles, and seemingly random use of articles, among a great many EF/SL speakers. It is hard to see how these constitute “innovation” as it is generally understood.

Similarly, the remark, “there are no pronunciation variants which are exclusive to any given form of English” (72) seems to lead in this direction. Nor can we properly regard these as “transfers” to L2 (45). For such to qualify as innovation in a new variety, we would have to see evidence that the features occur in the mouths of the full speech community, not only in the EFL segments. The example above from Cameroonian Pidgin demonstrates, on the other hand, word formation strategies characteristic of pidgins, which all speakers of the pidgin would be expected to acquire, as is in fact seen in pidgins and creoles the world over. This distinction itself on the one hand argues strongly against including pidgins and creoles among the varieties of English in the model and on the other against regarding such interlanguage features as innovations that define a variety.

Lost in the mix appears to be the traditional concept, universally observed, that in foundation areas, more rapid innovation occurs, while in remote areas, traditional features are conserved. This can account for a very great number of items in (post)colonial English found to vary from that of Great Britain today. With this concept in mind, the starting point for investigating innovation and change in the expansion areas would seem to be features of the variety(ies) that were carried there.

The long chapter on English in the Americas takes up an extremely complex assortment of developments that clearly justify a chapter unto itself. One remark merits comment, “Emancipation made a difference for [African Americans’] identities; certainly they had no other option than to feel as Americans and to try to get integrated into mainstream society; but progress in that respect was made only very slowly if at all” (286). This would come as a great

surprise to the millions of African Americans who serve at all levels of local, state, and the federal government and the military services and who prosper at every level in business, the professions, education, and the arts, and in every capacity in sports. Historically, of course, an option did exist, Liberia, and tens of thousands availed themselves of it (who, history records, did identify themselves as American, vis-à-vis their African counterparts).

Table 4 .1 indicates that *r* is flapped (optional) in British English, but not in American English. In fact this feature is probably the most prominent index of American Englishes in contrast to those of the Commonwealth. It likewise does not represent ‘initial syllable deletion’ in British English, despite ubiquitous forms such as *round* for *around*. Also the term *RP* is glossed, after many instances, on p.202. If readers of this text require that gloss, it would more effectively appear after the first.

Despite these errors and a few objections, this text makes a contribution in recognizing a valid outline for a model for language expansion, semantics, and a discussion which offers very rich reference to a great variety of sources. We encounter fascinating information about the language situation with respect to English in many parts of the globe, such as the very complex situation in South Africa, where eleven official languages are recognized. This is valuable reading for anyone with an interest in language expansion, language contact, the question of language and identity, and the socio-political phenomena that surround these.

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