

Watts, Richard, Peter Trudgill, eds, 2002. *Alternative histories of English*. London/New York: Routledge. xiv+280. ISBN 0-415-23357-7 (pbk).

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Alternative histories of English (AhE) is a collection of 12 papers on what the editors describe as *lesser known varieties of English*. It focuses on the history of 'a selection of important non-standard varieties of English'; 'varieties of English beyond England and the USA'; of 'communicative and pragmatic aspects'; 'styles and registers other than formal written English'; and 'language as it has been used by speakers and writers other than White males'. The editors arrive at these goals after surveying the research history on English, which, they argue, has been biased towards the standard and they hope to provide readers with a sense of the current language diversity. While I will comment on all papers I will spend more space on those that are relevant to Australianists.

Jim Milroy's *prologue* "The legitimate language" informs readers on what *alternative histories* are, what they would (have to) do. Contrasting *conventional* with *alternative* histories, he starts with the obvious that histories (of a language) are legitimatizations and explores how they could establish "a canon for the orthodox history of English." (p. 8). "The conventional history, as it appears in written histories of English for the last century or more, can be viewed as codification—a *codification* of the *diachrony* [or history, GL] of the standard language rather than its synchrony." (p. 7). Those histories legitimated the standard by emphasizing, for instance, its historic depth or *historicity*, its purity, its unbroken descent from a single source, while mixing (as it occurred in Middle English) and non-standard varieties are de-emphasized, unless they serve a higher purpose such as to promote the standard's universal appeal. Milroy concludes "the typical history has been influenced by, and sometimes driven by, certain ideological positions" (p. 24), especially the dispossession of non-relevant speakers of the language and the identification of (the standard) language with the nation, even race. Though that sounds persuasive, one cannot escape the impression that the conventional histories' concept is a construction that he derives from a few writers such as Wyld, Skeat, Sweet, and Jespersen. Few embrace the entire ideology Milroy refers to. Few—at least outside the chosen ones—adhere to a strong version of a single descent theory, they mention the interaction between northern and southern English in the rise of the standard. Milroy argues that alternative histories should shift the focus, include urban varieties, emphasize mixing, spend more space on contact varieties etc.

Introducing Part I of the AhE on "The history of non-standard varieties of English", the editors describe its goal as "to focus on *aspects* of the histories of *as many as possible* of those varieties of English which have *often—or even always*—been neglected in the histories of the language" (my emphasis, p 27). One cannot be vaguer and readers must turn to individual papers to see what they mean by *aspects*, *as many as possible* and by *often* or *always*. Alas, no clarifications follow. Trudgill's "The history of the lesser-known varieties of English" looks at 21 varieties. Instead of grouping them in terms of region, *viz.* Caribbean (Bermuda, Lesser Antilles, Bahamas), north America (Newfoundland, the Maritimes, Quebec), the Pacific (Pitcairn, Palmerston, Norfolk), South America (Brazil), southern and eastern Africa and the British Channel Islands, by period, the growth of the Empire that saw English introduced, in terms of its character as a contact or transplanted language or, finally, in terms of socio-political status as a second, foreign or other language—they are grouped in a haphazard fashion. It is hard to see why he includes educated Indian English, southern and eastern African English, while he says nothing on Butler English—surely a more neglected variety than educated Indian English (Hosali 2000)—Kriol (in Australia) or Krio (in western Africa). As to coverage there it is hard to see why India is given 13 lines and Pitcairn Island 24. As for the concept of *alternative histories*, a look at Norfolk is instructive. Trudgill describes its location, size, population, discovery by Captain Cook, annexation by NSW in 1788 and the fact that some of the Bounty mutineers who had been left behind on Pitcairn Island made their way there. On language, "the local English of Norfolk Island, which is spoken by only about 25 per cent of the current population, is still rather like that of Pitcairn (.), but less basilectal,

and it has been argued that it is really a 'cant' or 'antilanguage' (p 42). He could have said that the language's name is Norfolk, that it is the official language, that there are dictionaries and teaching materials. It is false to use terms like cant or antilanguage, since they can only be interpreted sensibly in a country where there are varieties that non-cant and *language*.

There follow Wales "'North of Watford gap': a cultural history of Northern English (from 1700)"; Gordon/Sudbury "The history of southern hemisphere Englishes"; Poplack *et al.* "'Deformed in the dialects': an alternative history of non-standard English"; and Meshtrie "Building a new English dialect: South African Indian English and the history of Englishes". I will confine myself to Gordon/Sudbury, who comment on the origin of the varieties in question, the diversity of transplanted dialects, the role of indigenous languages, and salient linguistic features. SAfrE is given due weight, there is a comparison of phonology, though we learn little on whether the concept of southern hemisphere Englishes can unify a range of morpho-syntax, grammar, or lexis. In fact, the authors conclude that "there is little to distinguish the southern hemisphere varieties from other major world Englishes with respect to morpho-syntactic features" (p 85). The well-known concept of *northern/southern English* (Leitner 1982) would have weakened the idea of grouping these Englishes in a single chapter.

Part II on "The history of communicative and pragmatic aspects of English" has papers by Watts "From polite language to educated language: the re-emergence of an ideology"; Millar "Eloquence and elegance: ideals of communicative competence in spoken English"; Nevalainen "Women's writings as evidence of linguistic continuity and change in Early Modern English"; and Jucker "Discourse markers in Early Modern English". These two papers deal with the period to 1700 and are somewhat peripheral to the main issue, *viz.* the lesser-known varieties, all of which emerged from the latter part of the 18th century. Watts and Millar share an interest in the 18th century's rise of *politeness* in language and other concepts that promoted a particularly elitist view of standard English and both papers show similarities and differences in Anglo-American Englishes. Watts' comparison of politeness and, what he calls, today's *educatedness* is especially interesting. The concept of educatedness is indebted to the 18th century and feeds into today's educational debates about English as a mother tongue in England. Its impact on, for instance, Australia and New Zealand remains unmentioned.

A few concluding remarks. Given the editors' intents, it is hard to see why there is little on slang or swearing (Taylor 1976), on similarities of non-standard Englishes (apart from a paper on Canada). Milroy's discussion on the relevance of the 18th century concept of *politeness* and 20th century *educatedness* would have invited the inclusion of the history of language-education issues. As far as the meaning of *alternative histories* is concerned, some papers fall into the *standard trap* that editors wish to avoid. Gordon/Sudbury has nothing on non-standard English, let alone ethnic or indigenous forms. Meshtrie deals with South African Indian English and, at least, looks at an *ethnic* (educated) variety and mentions in passing other forms of English. The book strikes one by its blatant omission of relevant literature. Of course, there is no obligation to refer to other works, but given what was said above, one would think of Görlach's many papers on the history and varieties of English. There is a well-established literature on Indian English, yet all that is quoted is Kachru (1983). On Australia and New Zealand, one misses Collins/Blair (1989), Blair/Collins (2001) or Newbrook (1992); on Africa, Schmied (1991). On lesser-known Englishes, Sebba (1997) or Mühlhäusler (1997). The absence of Wurm *et al.*'s *Atlas* (1996) is a most peculiar omission, as it covers many of the lesser-known varieties. The ignorance of non-Anglo-Celtic publications (*pace* Jucker) is worth pointing out, especially since the editors proclaim such an anti-ideological ethos. One cannot escape the conclusion that the book does not live up to its tall claims; not only does it not fulfil the editors' hope that readers in 500 years' time will benefit from it (Introduction), it is quite insufficient even today. As I said above there are some good papers (e.g. Watts, Millar, Jucker), but Australianists will be disappointed by Trudgill and Gordon/Sudbury.

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