

Book Review

Siemund, Peter. *Varieties of English. A Typological Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-52118693-3, paperback, (xix) + 308 pp.

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The present book offers an overview of grammatical features across the whole range of varieties of English. According to the author, it is intended as a course-book for intermediate to advanced students. The material is presented in a set of twelve chapters dealing with individual morphosyntactic phenomena along with an introduction and a summary as well as an outlook chapter. The data chapters deal with the following issues: (1) Reflexivity and reflexive marking, (2) Pronominal gender, (3) Pronominal case, (4) Determiners, (5) Tense marking, (6) Aspect marking, (7) Modal verbs, (8) Negation, (9) Subject verb agreement, (10) Ditransitive constructions, (11) Interrogative constructions and (12) The formation of relative clauses.

The book opens with an appropriate introduction in which the author outlines his approach and where he gives a selection of features from different forms of English to illustrate how varieties can show typological similarities. The interface of sociolinguistics and linguistic typology, especially as this has been researched in recent years by Peter Trudgill, is also highlighted. Special attention is also given to a consideration of just what features in varieties of English would be possible candidates as linguistic universals, or at least in the somewhat weaker form, as angloversals. The notion of universal, and, for example, the relevance of constituent structure for this concept, is well explained.

However, there is little or no discussion in principle of different kinds of varieties of English. At the very least one must distinguish between settler varieties of English overseas – in Canada, the United States, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, for instance – which represent a historical continuity of English from the time of the first settlers from the British Isles and second-language varieties of English as are found in India or Sri Lanka, for instance. And it isn't that the author is not aware of this: in his discussion of regularisation processes in pidgins and creoles (p. 200), which he consistently writes with capital letters, perhaps to highlight their separateness, the author discusses the results of incomplete acquisition, often adult unguided second language acquisition, and how these affect the structural profile of later varieties. Features in

pidgins and creoles, such as reduced verb marking, are compared to a similar lack of verb marking in English in East Anglia (reported on in the work of Peter Trudgill). The author relates this to unguided adult second language acquisition in both cases.

The structure of the chapters is an eminently satisfactory aspect of this book. Each chapter begins with an introduction to the topic in question, followed by an overview of the structures being discussed and an ensuing section offering attestations from varieties of English. Here the author uses a wide range of sources, chiefly publications by relevant authorities and corpora for the variety being currently discussed (often the subcorpora of the *International Corpus of English*). There follows a cross-linguistic comparison in which more general aspects of the topic in question are discussed. Each chapter finishes with a summary and a list of keywords and contains three sets of exercises, for basic, intermediate and advanced level students. There follow a set of references and a list of other items under the heading “Further reading.”

Despite these positive aspects of the current book, there are some noticeable gaps in treatment which in part are derived from deliberate choices by the author and in part from an apparent lack of knowledge on his part. Copula deletion in varieties of English is mentioned (p. 285) as a possible subject for later investigations (not necessarily by the author). But the distinction among aspectual subtypes between an interactive and durative habitual, found in Irish English in cases like *I parks the car around the corner for the night* and *She does be worrying about the children*, is not mentioned, although it has been treated in the relevant literature (Hickey 2007: 214–216). Other statements are only partly true, e.g., when the author laments the lack of diachronic research on varieties of English: this holds for the South and South-East Asian varieties of English which he mentions, but not for other varieties of English; see the comprehensive treatment in Hickey (2004). This issue is particularly relevant for a work which is typological in its orientation: the question must always be posed whether parallels between varieties across the anglophone world are due to commonalities of typology or to historical connectedness or to both.

The issue of language contact is treated in detail in the book and recent work on language typology is referenced at several points. In general the discussion of contact is satisfactory, but in some instances there is no mention of an obvious source outside English as when the author discusses unbound *self-forms* (p. 30), including, significantly, examples from Irish English, without saying that these could very well have been at least supported by transfer during language shift. Furthermore, the possible areal distribution of features in varieties of English (Hickey 2012) is not mentioned at all, a noticeable absence of a factor which has particular bearing on the development of typological profiles.

The strengths of this book can be easily recognised: the material is presented in a visually accessible manner with many tables illustrating features and offering comparisons; the author has a wide knowledge, not only of varieties of English but also of other languages, an important consideration in typological studies. Also the consideration of structural features from pidgins and creoles, both from the Atlantic and the Pacific arenas, results in a welcome broadening of the discussion. Last but not least the lucid English style of the author should be mentioned, adding to the clarity of the text and making it particularly suitable to students of English at or beyond an intermediate level.

References

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