

Comptes rendus • Reviews

H.M. McGarrell (ed.). 2007. *Language teacher research in the Americas*. Language Teacher Research Series. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. 203 pp.

Reviewed by Natalie Rublik, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

McGarrell makes an important contribution to language teacher research with her volume as one part of the Language Teacher Research Series. Reviewing this collection of ESL (English as a subsequent language) teacher research has reinforced my commitment to bringing the voices of both language learners and classroom teachers to the forefront of language research.

The studies found in *Language teacher research in the Americas* also confirm my belief in the critical importance of action-based research in language teachers' classrooms. At one time, language research had focused primarily on the language theorists, but now the voices of teacher-researchers and their ESL students are receiving the recognition they deserve. Furthermore, this volume of language teacher research clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of the dated theory-practice dichotomy (McKay, 2006).

The series' editor imposes a common framework to the research contributions in the way of these headings: issue, background literature, procedures, results and reflection. His choice in this matter is well founded, as it offers the reader a clear, unifying link among the varied research issues and contexts presented.

In her introductory chapter, McGarrell summarizes the varied language research studies, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. Despite the diversity of countries represented in this volume, missing is a contribution from French-speaking Canada, which would offer an important perspective.

The chapters are ordered chronologically, according to the authors' last names, instead of grouping them by their corresponding countries. Presenting the research studies thematically could have been another option, in terms of highlighting links between the following twelve diverse research studies; however, I present them in the order in which they appear in the volume.

In "Understanding Practices: Bridging the gap between what teachers do and what students know", Angela Bailey, Lourdes Rey and Nayibe Rosado investigated the reason for their university students' low literacy scores in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Institutional Testing Program (ITP). The three teachers found that their teaching practices had not adequately prepared their students in Columbia, especially in the area of critical reading skills.

"Revisiting peer review", by Sandra Burger and Catherine Danforth, involves a study where ESL students gain valuable writing insights via feedback

from student-teachers, who apply their peer review knowledge to real ESL writing situations in Canada.

In “Film in the ESL classroom: Hearing the student’s voice”, Andy Curtis shifts the focus from the manner in which teachers typically use film in their language classes to students’ perceptions of these films. The results of his study in Canada show that student preference for certain films and their difficulty rating can positively affect students’ linguistic performance in class.

“ESL students as ethnographers: Examining academic interactions”, by Maria Dantas-Whitney, continues to highlight the learner’s voice in her study based in an American university. Despite success in their ESL classes, Dantas-Whitney’s students experienced difficulty communicating within the university environment. Researching various interactive situations themselves helped the students become more confident in their own oral discourse competency.

In “Studying classroom practices and learner perceptions to improve test quality”, Wendy Fraser and Janna Fox observed that their language students in a Canadian university did poorly on tests outside the classroom, compared to their in-class performance. The researchers found that including critical reflective questions on tests may improve students’ test performance.

In “Listening to text and ESL students: Facilitating low-frequency vocabulary acquisition incidentally”, Jami Gurkin describes her research involving elementary ESL students in the United States. She found that students are able to apply newly acquired vocabulary heard in oral stories by actively working with the new words, as opposed to learning only their definitions.

“Promoting innovative practices through reflective collaboration”, by Andrea Jesus, Heliana Mello and Deise Dutra, looks at the positive impact of professional feedback from the researchers on Jesus’ classroom practice with her ESL elementary students in Brazil.

In “Mi and myself: Dual identity in Jamaican contact language speakers”, Mary Hills Kuck illustrates the tension between using standard academic English and local Jamaican Creole among students at a vocational institute in Jamaica and the impact this has on her English language instruction.

Kathleen McInerney describes her study in “Local cultures, language politics, and service learning in the TEFL certificate course”, where she introduced a critical cultural component to her TEFL course in Ecuador. Doing so greatly enhanced her students’ awareness of considering the local culture, not only language functions and forms, when learning to teach English.

In “Finding and leveraging vocabulary strengths while addressing needs” (set in the United States), Elizabeth Park discovered that her ESL middle school students from various cultures had difficulty acquiring vocabulary that is considered easy for native-English speakers. Park then revised her teaching

practice by encouraging students to use their first language to facilitate vocabulary learning and to focus explicitly on one-syllable words that her students found difficult to acquire.

Eliana Santana-Williamson poses the question “Are nonnative speakers really able to converse?” in her chapter, where she discovers that ESL students’ lack of discourse markers in their English conversations impedes their ability to communicate. As a result, Santana-Williamson includes the explicit teaching of such conversation fillers in her classroom teaching in the United States.

In the concluding chapter, “Learning how to learn: Metacognitive strategy training with beginning EFL students”, Sharon L. Springer explores how metacognition may have a positive effect on students’ use of strategies and English proficiency with beginner language students in Costa Rica.

Overall, *Language teacher research in the Americas* would be of great interest and value to pre-service ESL teachers/graduate students and practicing ESL educators/researchers. Expecting only a few of the contributions to prove useful in my research and teaching, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that each of the twelve research studies has informed my practice in some manner.

I would highly recommend this volume of research, as it is informative, applicable to diverse ESL teaching situations and flows well. What struck me is the passion and critical self-reflection the contributing teacher-researchers brought to their investigations and ESL teaching, the comprehensive, diverse nature of the research presented, and the pragmatic manner by which these teachers apply their research to their practice.

Reference

McKay, S. 2006. *Researching second language classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Edgar W. Schneider. 2007. *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xvi + 367 pp.

Reviewed by Robert Dole, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

Postcolonial English: Varieties around the world by Edgar W. Schneider is a landmark work signaling the diversification of the English language in numerous countries around the world and posing the hypothesis of the development of new varieties and dialects that might ultimately develop into different languages, just as the Latin dialects of the Roman Empire evolved into modern Romance languages. Schneider proposes what he calls a Dynamic Model for the development of new varieties of English within the former colonies of the British Empire. All new language types thus adhere to a universal process,

which he divides into five different steps: 1) Foundation of the colony, 2) Exonormative stabilization, 3) Nativization, 4) Endonormative stabilization, and 5) Differentiation. By differentiation, he means the growth of distinct forms of the language within the same country.

Schneider applies his Dynamic Model to the evolution of different varieties of English within seventeen countries: Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, India, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Cameroon, Barbados, Jamaica, Canada and the United States. Most of these countries have seen their respective varieties evolve within all five stages of the Dynamic Model, but some, such as Barbados, have only reached Stage 4, and others, such as Nigeria, are only at Stage 3. He insists that the development of distinct dialects coincides with the growth of political independence, and often the date of the transition from one stage to another is marked by a major political event separating the colony from the mother country. The stabilization of a lect with an endonormative focus serves to create or enhance a sense of national identity, a means of distinguishing membership within a new social community.

The reader of this book cannot help but admire the rigorous and extensive scholarship that it represents. The bibliography contains approximately six hundred items. Schneider combines sophisticated linguistic analysis with a fascinating summary of the history of the countries that he discusses. The book is a real pleasure to read, as well as being extremely informative. It should be mentioned that the author was born in Austria and is now the chair of the Department of English and American studies at the University of Regensburg, in Germany. It is in some way marvelous that what appears to be a definitive account of the state of English in the modern world should be written by someone from outside its area.

Schneider's Dynamic Model is presented in a convincing and thoroughly well-documented manner, and it adds a new perspective to Braj Kachru's (1985) trichotomy of the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle of the world's countries in terms of their use of English. Schneider limits his Dynamic Model to the growth of distinct varieties of English, but it could be applied equally well to countries of other colonial languages, such as Spanish, Portuguese and French. It was not Schneider's intention to do so, but other scholars in the future could certainly benefit by applying his model to these other languages.

The major criticism that I would make of the book is that, by focusing exclusively on the centrifugal forces of world Englishes and thus emphasizing how the different national varieties are distinct from one another, it does not give an adequate account of the equally great, if not greater, centripetal forces that have the opposite effect, that of spreading a homogenous, internationally used standard form of English. This counter-tendency merits a few words of

recognition at the end of the book, but its relegation to the status of an afterthought does not, in my opinion, do it justice. There is indeed one form of English that is now dominant in the world and whose influence can be seen everywhere, and that variety is General American English. Thus, a former colony of Great Britain has replaced the mother country as being the variety with the greatest source of linguistic hegemony. This is seen first within the United States, where many traditional local accents are being replaced by General American. It often happens that children spend more time watching television than listening to their parents, with the result that they are more exposed to General American than to their parents' local accent.

Moreover, General American English is changing the way people speak English throughout the world because of the omnipresence of American mass media. Even the British are Americanizing their way of speaking English, in pronunciation, lexis and grammar. The book under review is a perfect example of this phenomenon. It is the first time that I have seen a book written by a European and published in Great Britain that consistently uses American spelling.

Reference

Kachru, B. 1985. Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk and H.G. Widdowson (eds.), *English in the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

David Britain (ed.). 2007. *Language in the British Isles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xiv + 508 pp.

Reviewed by John Edwards, St. Francis Xavier University

In 1981, Charles Ferguson and Shirley Brice Heath edited *Language in the U.S.A.* This was soon followed by volumes on the British Isles (edited by Peter Trudgill in 1984) and, a little later, Canada and Australia (Romaine, 1991; Edwards, 1998). In 2004, Edward Finegan and John Rickford edited an updated volume on the United States, and now, after almost a quarter of a century, we have a return look at the British Isles. Like Trudgill's collection, the coverage here falls into four sections (devoted to English, the Celtic languages, other languages and sociolinguistic contact settings), although there are more contributions here on the "other" languages. Several of the original authors reappear in this later volume. Like the Trudgill book—and like the other "country" volumes in this set of Cambridge books (it is not formally designated as a "series")—this one is well produced and uniformly well written by appropriate and accomplished contributors.

Of the twenty-five chapters here, the first ten are in the “English” section: four are devoted to history and linguistic variation, with the other six treating English in Scotland, Ireland (both the republic and the north), Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. The four chapters in the second section cover Gaelic, Irish and Welsh. The eight in the third section deal with immigrant languages, Romany, and sign language. As for the fourth section, three chapters deal with language policy and planning, and educational issues.

The book begins with a five-page editorial introduction, in which Britain sets his collection against Trudgill’s original, and presents some basic statistical data. This opening essay is entirely *too* brief, however, inasmuch as the editor provides no real notes on the chapters, nor any justification for the choices made. The coverage in the “Celtic” section is of course predictable, but ranges of possibility suggest themselves for the contents of the opening section and, especially, of the third and fourth. Consequently, it would have been reassuring to have been given a sense of the salience and relevance of the choices that were made here.

There is no space to touch upon all the interesting material here assembled, so I will restrict myself to that which is likely to be of most interest to readers of this journal. James Milroy does a particularly good job in summarising the history of English, using his twenty-five pages to best effect; similarly well done is Paul Kerswill’s eighteen-page treatment of standard and nonstandard English. Because they deal with less well-known contexts, I would also highlight the first-section chapters by Andrew Hamer (on Manx English) and Heinrich Ramisch (on English in the Channel Islands); at only five and seven pages, respectively, these contributions are perhaps a little too abbreviated in scope.

Perhaps the most interesting aspects of the second section have to do with the authors’ attempts to remain optimistic in the face of difficult linguistic circumstances. Writing about Gaelic, for instance, Kenneth MacKinnon draws our attention to the “vigorous efforts” and “new initiatives” (pp. 201–202) on behalf of Gaelic, while later commenting upon weakening family transmission and community use. Virtually all Gaelic speakers are now bilingual, a situation that has hardly boded well for minority languages in other parts of the world. MacKinnon, writing of “both an urgency and a vitality about Gaelic issues”, suggests that “Gaeldom has successfully seized and pressed home its opportunities”, and concludes by stating that we “may yet see the tide turn for the language” (pp. 215–217). Such sentiments may remind some readers of Dr. Johnson’s assessments of the triumphs of hope over experience. Pádraig Ó Riagáin’s chapter on the Irish scene paints a similar picture. While over 40% of the population now claim the ability to speak Irish, this is overwhelmingly a very restricted competence acquired at school. Residents in the *Gaeltacht*—the Irish-speaking areas of the country—naturally use much more Irish than

those elsewhere, but those residents now comprise only about 2% of the overall population. Unlike MacKinnon, with his hopes for a Gaelic turn of the tide, Ó Riagáin concludes that “it remains to be seen” (p. 236) whether recent social and political moves can inject new energy into Irish language policy — a rather more subdued tone, I think, but possibly a more accurate one. It seems to be echoed by Martin Ball: although Welsh is the strongest of the Celtic languages, it “must still fear for its future” (p. 253).

In the third section, Mark Gibson’s opening chapter documents the widespread nature of multilingualism in Britain, pointing out that — as in Canada — most ethnic-minority populations are found in large urban areas. This theme carries through the other contributions here, chapters focussing upon specific languages or language groups. Despite Gibson’s observation that “multilingualism is a *de facto* norm in the British Isles” (p. 258), he almost immediately concedes that “the majority of the UK population is monolingual” (p. 259), a point also made by Penelope Gardner-Chloros: “active knowledge of other European languages is restricted to a small proportion of the native population” (p. 340).

The fourth and final section of the book is the briefest although, given its title (“Applied Sociolinguistic Issues”), it could easily have been much longer. Still, Dennis Ager gives us a very good overview of language policy and planning, the underlying theme of which is that — unlike popular historical and contemporary assertion — the course of English has hardly been one of “unfettered freedom” (p. 377). Much of the ideological direction has, of course, come via education, and this is ably taken up by Ann Williams in her treatment of nonstandard language at school, and Ben Rampton, Roxy Harris and Constant Leung, in their summary of “other” languages in the classroom.

David Britain is to be applauded for having brought a number of important and interesting contributions under one roof — an accessible and stimulating collection, and a worthy addition to the Cambridge “series”.

References

- Edwards, J. (ed.). 1998. *Language in Canada*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferguson, C. and S. Brice Heath (eds.). 1981. *Language in the U.S.A.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Finegan, E. and J. Rickford (eds.). 2004. *Language in the U.S.A.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Romaine, S. (ed.). 1991. *Language in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trudgill, P. (ed.). 1984. *Language in the British Isles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tom Dalzell. 2009. *The Routledge dictionary of modern American slang and unconventional English*. New York: Routledge. viii + 1104 pp.

Reviewed by Margaret Levey, Concordia University

An offshoot of Dalzell's work as the senior editor on the hefty two-volume *New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (2006), which explores slang across the English-speaking world, this smaller single-volume work focuses solely on slang and unconventional English used in the United States since 1945. Each entry contains a head word, a definition, an example of culturally contextualized usage, country of origin and the date of the first known usage.

Dalzell's choice to focus on slang and unconventional English used after 1945 is intended to reflect the way in which contemporary language has been transformed over the last 60 years by the introduction of such society-altering inventions like the television and the computer, and by such culturally defining events as the Vietnam war, the youth movement, the sexual revolution and shifting race relations.

To find the 25,000 entries for this volume, Dalzell mined popular American literature in paper and electronic form, including fiction, non-fiction, scripts, song lyrics and newspapers for terms and phrases that are used in informal communication, to signal group affiliation, or to show that one is up to date. The result is what seems to be a fairly comprehensive inventory of slang used in the United States in the last 60 years; for example, the number of entries throughout the volume for slang names for various recreational drugs, such as *skezag*, *flake* and *chiba* defies manual counting, and there are 21 entries on one page alone using the word *mister*, including such gems as *Mr. Period*, a noun, "used for the personification of the fact that a woman has missed her normal menstrual period" (p. 664), and *Mr. Happy*, *Mr. Nasty* and *Mr. Softy*, all of which refer to the penis.

Despite the fact that Dalzell specifically mentions that his goal is to "keep up to date" (p. viii), because of the contemporary nature of slang, any reference work on modern slang will suffer from never quite being quite fully *au courant*, due to the lag time between manuscript and publication. That being said, this work is remarkably current. The day I received my copy, I heard a reference on the radio to *upskirt* and *downblouse*. They were not terms I was familiar with and were obviously trendy enough to warrant the attention of the young and hip radio announcers I was listening to. I rushed to look up the terms and the *Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English* did not disappoint. They were both there: "a type of voyeurism devoted specifically to seeing a woman's breasts by looking down her blouse" and "a type of voyeurism devoted specifically to seeing what is beneath a woman's skirt" (pp. 314, 1025). On the other hand, the term *butterface* (referring to a

woman who is very attractive except for her face), which I have heard students using over the last year or so, is not included.

However, given the multiple entries for *butterface* on the slang website urbandictionary.com, it may be included in the next edition of this volume. Dalzell is just one of the word aficionados in the Routledge stable who are upholding the mantle of slang expert Eric Partridge in documenting the language of the marginalized, whose unique terms are rarely included in conventional mainstream dictionaries. A recent look at the Routledge offerings shows no less than nine different works on slang and, in the spirit of keeping up to date, Routledge also maintains a website at www.partridge-slang.com through which anyone can contribute slang suggestions.

This is not a book for the faint of heart or the overly prudish, as offensiveness was not considered grounds for exclusion. In fact, it seems that the only slang that Dalzell deliberately chose not to include is sports slang because, as he points out, there are entire volumes dedicated to this. While many of the terms that Dalzell does include — especially ones whose origins are earlier — are quaint and quirky, a large portion of the entries would not be well received in mixed company. Probably not surprisingly, some of the coarsest (but most interesting) entries are those related to the pornography industry and the sex trade. Sex-related entries along with drug related entries seem to be the most ubiquitous. During random browsing, I did not find a two-page spread that did not have at least one entry related to sex or drugs.

The *Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English* is a fascinating look at the language of, as Dalzell says, “beats, hipsters, hippies, GI’s in Vietnam, pimps, druggies, whores, punks, skinheads, ravers, surfers, Valley Girls, dudes, pill-popping truck drivers, hackers, rappers, and more” (p. viii), and will appeal to anyone with an interest in contemporary English language, or to anyone who just wants to be up to date.

Reference

Dalzell, T. and T. Victor (eds.). 2006. *New Partridge dictionary of slang and unconventional English*. London: Routledge.
