

## Book Reviews • Comptes rendus

Filppula, M., Klemola, H., and Paulasto, H. (2009). *Vernacular universals and language contacts: Evidence from varieties of English and beyond*. New York/Abingdon: Routledge. vi + pp.385.

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What is the relationship between language contact phenomena and vernacular universals (VUs)? How distinguishable from each other are they? These are some of the questions addressed in *Vernacular Universals and Language Contacts: Evidence from Varieties of English and Beyond* (VULC henceforth). VULC is a collection of papers presented in 2006 at the symposium on World Englishes: Vernacular Universals vs. Contact-Induced Change, at the University of Joensuu Research Station in Mekrijärvi in Finland. The conceptualization of the book and symposium results from recent developments in contact linguistics (e.g., Ross, 1996; Thomason, 2001 – see also the papers by Thomason, Mufwene, and Britain & Fox in VULC) that question the preponderant role that Vernacular Universals (e.g., Chambers, 2003, 2004) have played in the analysis of linguistic phenomena in language contact situations. The volume consists of an introductory section and fifteen chapters divided into four parts, each organized based on a set of common objectives: to provide the reader with the necessary theoretical background and to contextualize the state of the field (introduction and part 1); to analyze pertinent linguistic phenomena that reinforce and/or weaken different hypotheses proposed for the investigation of features that are putatively universal (VUs) in language contact situations (parts 2 and 3); and finally, to compare different methodological and theoretical perspectives and explore their implications for the analysis of VUs (part 4).

Without going into the details of the merits of each contribution, the volume covers an extensive selection of topics that empirically validate, challenge, and consequently advance some of the hypotheses, models and theoretical principles proposed for the analysis of VUs. While some studies in VULC appeal to the allegedly universal nature of VUs to explain phenomena that are observed cross-linguistically in non-standard varieties of English (e.g., the papers by Chambers; Filppula, Klemola, & Paulasto; Schreier; Tagliamonte), others defend a stronger role for cross-dialectal influence in language contact or diglossic situations (e.g., papers by Britain & Fox; Mufwene). A third group of researchers casts doubt on the strict UV versus contact dichotomy, either because there are other more relevant oppositions such as a high versus low contact language status (Trudgill), or because the dichotomous relationship is empirically unattainable, since many phenomena observed in contact situations are caused by a combination of overlapping factors, including UVs, cross-dialectal influence, and ease of learning (Thomason). As one would expect from a volume that includes such an eclectic team of researchers from rather distinct theoretical perspectives (e.g., contact linguistics, dialectology, generative linguistics, historical linguistics, linguistic typology, sociolinguists), it is not surprising that there are no clear-cut answers to the two questions mentioned at the outset of this review. With regards to the first question, in general, most of the chapters in VULC endorse a

more prominent role for cross-dialectal influence in language contact situations, in conjunction with a variety of other factors such as high/low contact language status, ease of learning, productive and perceptual ease, and more general social factors such as gender and age. The second question is best addressed by Thomason (chapter 15), who proposes a set of four criteria for assessing the likelihood that language contact (as opposed to VUs) played a role in determining a specific linguistic change.

As is the case with any enterprise of this magnitude, the volume contains some shortcomings. First and foremost, I was surprised not to see a proportionate distribution of analyses across the linguistic disciplines. For instance, of the fifteen chapters in VULC, only two are dedicated to the study of VUs from a phonological perspective (Schreier; Britain & Fox), while the vast majority of the contributions focuses on morphosyntactic phenomena. While this is possibly a reflection of the field of contact linguistics and/or the organization of the World Englishes symposium, one might wonder if the analyses proposed are equally generalizable to other components of grammar. The volume also focuses exclusively on the analysis of English varieties. While other languages are discussed in other chapters (e.g., Thomason; Odlin), they merely serve to illustrate a methodological or theoretical position. Only after the “beyond” aspect of the title is expanded to include other languages and their vernaculars may one obtain more satisfactory answers to the issues addressed in VULC. Finally, the volume has some editing problems involving the reference sections, which could have been avoided had the editors unified the separate lists into a single bibliography at the end of the book. This would eliminate the considerable amount of overlap of references across the individual chapters (e.g., Chambers, 2004 appears in almost every single study), and would minimize the formatting inconsistencies in the reference list (e.g., the title and publisher location for Chambers, 2003 are not provided in a uniform manner; compare “*Sociolinguistic Theory: Linguistic Variation and its Social Significance*. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA” – p.16 with “*Sociolinguistic Theory*. Oxford” – p.201; see also Chambers, 2004 references for more formatting inconsistencies).

Despite some of the shortcomings discussed above, there is much to admire in this collection of papers that clearly accomplishes its main goal: to present and discuss, from a variety of disciplines and theoretical perspectives, the role of VUs and contact-induced phenomena in the shaping of non-standard language varieties. In general, VULC is superbly well written and organized and, as the first collection to gather studies on the effects of VUs and inter-dialectal influence in language contact situations, it should be a starting point for any research on the subject. This is an outstanding, state-of-the-art volume written by a team of internationally renowned scholars that will certainly inspire future research on vernacular universals. VULC is highly recommended to linguists in general, and more specifically to researchers in the fields of contact linguistics, creole linguistics, language acquisition, and sociolinguistics.

## References

- Chambers, J. K. (2003). *Sociolinguistic theory: linguistic variation and its social implications*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chambers, J. K. (2004). Dynamic typology and vernacular universals (pp. 127-145). In B. Kortmann (Ed.), *Dialectology meets Typology*. Berlin: Mouton.

Ross, M. D. (1996). Contact-induced change and the comparative method: cases from Papua New Guinea (pp. 180-217). In M. Durie & M. Ross (Eds.), *The Comparative Method Reviewed*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Thomason, S. G. (2001). *Language contact*. Edinburgh University Press.