

## REVIEWS

*New Zealand Ways of Speaking English* edited by Allan Bell and Janet Holmes. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 1990. 305 pp.

Reviewed by  
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Coming to America has resulted in an interesting encounter with my linguistic identity, my New Zealand accent regularly provoking at least two distinct reactions: either "Please *say* something, I love the way you talk!" (which causes me some amusement but mainly disbelief), or "Your English is very good--what's your native language?" It is difficult to review a book like *New Zealand Ways of Speaking English* without relating such experiences, because as a nation New Zealanders at home and abroad have long suffered from a lurking sense of inferiority about the way they speak English, especially compared with those in the colonial "homeland," i.e., England. That dialectal differences create attitudes about what is better and worse is no news to scholars of language use, but this collection of studies on New Zealand English (NZE) not only reveals some interesting peculiarities of that particular dialect and its speakers from "down-under"; it also makes accessible the significant contributions of New Zealand linguists to broader theoretical concerns in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. Bell and Holmes' recent collection includes studies on phonological aspects of linguistic variation and change, attitudes to NZE and other varieties of English, pragmatic issues (such as language, gender, and politeness), and, to add some definite New Zealand flavor, a study of how oral formulae are learned and used by race-callers (horse racing being one of New Zealand's national passions). As a first serious book of its kind, *New Zealand Ways of Speaking English* is impressive in meeting the editors' dual challenge of providing a

platform for high quality local information as well as addressing a range of issues pertinent to colleagues internationally.

My introductory remarks about New Zealanders' self-deprecating view of their own speech are borne out by glancing at the provocative titles of studies in the first section of the book ("Attitudes to NZE"), e.g., "The Objectionable Colonial Dialect" and "God Help Us If We All Sound Like This." Studies on attitudes by Bayard, Gordon & Abell as well as Vaughan & Huygens reveal that despite New Zealanders' rugged independence in other aspects of national identity, they continue to regard British Received Pronunciation (R.P.) and North American accents as more prestigious and authoritative than New Zealand and Australian accents (which, according to this collection, they have some difficulty telling apart). However, when it comes to measures of solidarity, desirable social traits such as friendliness, a sense of humor, and sincerity are far more strongly associated by those surveyed with the New Zealand accent than with any other varieties of English.

Gordon & Abells' historical study of attitudes traces the roots of New Zealanders' "poor relation" view of their dialect back to a colonial relationship with mother England. The quotations they have collected over the years from letters to editors in the New Zealand press reveal popular condemnation of NZE in terms such as "degraded," "hideous," "corrupt," "lazy and slovenly," and "evil sounding." From the turn of the century, they report, teachers and parents have been publicly despairing that New Zealand children "murder" and "mangle" the English language, mainly in response to the distinctive closing diphthongs (as in /prajz/ for "praise", for example), centralized /i/ (as in /milk/ for "milk"), and a very closed /e/ (as in /yies/ for "yes") which, according to these New Zealand linguists, are the very features which distinguish the NZE dialect. Other studies in this book, however, do indicate that the historical grip of British attitudes and speech models has been weakening somewhat these days, as evidenced by the relatively high prestige ascribed to cultivated NZE by high school and university students. It may be that this shift towards a positive appreciation of NZE reflects changes in New Zealanders' perception of their cultural identity.

While the editors comment that the book's three studies of attitudes to speech varieties represent increasing methodological sophistication, they also note that to date much sociolinguistic research in New Zealand suffers from the shortcomings of early

Labovian methodology. Traces of this can be found in the book, such as in the Vaughan & Huygens study of sociolinguistic stereotyping in New Zealand, which employed a match-guise technique in which subjects rated and categorized recorded accent samples. This methodology might be criticized on the grounds that, in real life, responses to speakers and their accents take account of a complex set of contextual variables in the situation, as well as previous socializing experiences. Moreover, studies of this nature also raise the issue that research findings may be more than incidentally influenced by technological choices: it is interesting to note that none of the studies in this collection report the use of videotape as a medium for presenting or analyzing language data, although this tool exponentially expands the amount of information available to researchers interested in situated language use.

The section entitled "Change and Variation in NZE" investigates forms of linguistic variation across the New Zealand speech community, which turn out to be less a function of region than status. Findings of the studies in this section suggest a volatile situation with respect to accent stratification in New Zealand society, pointing more to a continuum of accents than to clear social-class divisions, as found in the more rigidly stratified British society. A recurring debate is evident throughout this volume as to how many distinct varieties of NZE really exist. Some authors accept a three-level classification of accents following an Australian model, while others dispute the applicability of the Australian model to New Zealand's relatively homogeneous speech community. One interesting question raised but not resolved in this volume is the long-standing debate about whether there exists a Maori-English dialect in New Zealand. When asked to identify speakers' ethnic origins, subjects in more than one study in this volume were able to correctly identify Maori speakers only some of the time, with a common error of classifying the speakers of "broad" NZE samples, (usually associated with lower socio-economic status speakers) as Maori speakers. It is interesting to contrast these inconclusive experimental results with the recent public reaction to two prominent radio and television broadcasters in New Zealand, one Maori and the other Samoan, who have been targets of sustained public criticism for their "inappropriate" accents. Clearly there is some accurate, albeit also negative, identification of ethnic speech styles going on which leaves room for further research on this question.

The mix of linguistic resources available in the mass media as social and cultural forces shaping language use in New Zealand is examined in two studies in this collection, but from different perspectives. Bayard investigates the effect of large doses of American and British media speech as a factor in phonological shift in NZE. According to Bayard, popular music is apparently both an indicator and a catalyst of phonological change, for the study finds that singing on New Zealand airwaves is most often rendered in a simulation of American pronunciation (as evident in vowels and rhotic /r/), while the Cockney glottalized /t/ seems to be finding its way into the NZE dialect through the influence of "punk"-inspired music as well as from numerous British television programs aired in New Zealand.

Also concerned with media language, having extensively researched this topic in New Zealand, Bell takes the perspective that language is embedded in social situations, and thus his study offers a thorough analysis of audience and referee design in the speech of New Zealand news readers and television commercials. His work, which addresses the classic sociolinguistic question of why speakers choose particular language styles in particular situations, concludes that intra-individual variation in newsreaders' styles across a spectrum of radio stations strongly indicates a response to perceived audience characteristics. Television commercials, on the other hand, initiate styles based on absent reference groups associated with the desired target group for the commercial. As in the studies on language attitudes in this volume, Bell found New Zealanders to be more susceptible to advertising persuasion when it comes in the form of non-NZE speech, particularly the upper-class British accent. At the time of his study, Bell also observed that the absence of Maori language in media advertising (and the presence of some European languages) reflected the Maori language's low consumer status in New Zealand society, despite its legal status as an official language of New Zealand. Bell's study of recipient design in the spoken media represents an important step beyond methodology that maps linguistic and social variables onto each other, for it probes the more complicated nature of the relationship between linguistic and contextual indices in language use situations.

Despite this volume being titled *New Zealand Ways of Speaking English*, several of the studies in this collection go beyond this regional focus and use local data to build on previous understandings of interactional sequences and discourse strategies

in the literature, particularly with respect to politeness theories and aspects of gender and language. On the gender question, Holmes takes issue with Robin Lakoff's earlier work (e.g., 1975) on American women's language, which characterized women's use of tag questions and other characteristically female politeness forms as indexing a deferential stance. Holmes instead takes the perspective that the linguistic expression of positive affect (or politeness) is an index of women's concern with creating solidarity and cooperation in their interaction. The studies of both Holmes and Austin also examine politeness from the addressee's point of view, thus bringing to their analyses the interpretive dimension of communication. This is an important departure from the previous focus on intentionality which has characterized research based in speech act theory. As Austin's title, "Politeness Revisited--The Dark Side," hints, this interesting study deconstructs how asymmetries of power are expressed and maintained through politeness exchanges between men and women. Austin constructs a model of "face attack," and bases her analysis on the assumption that the major variable in deciding whether or not to save face is power. Such a perspective conflicts with Brown & Levinson's (1987) consistently face-saving model of how politeness operates in society. Critical to the studies of Austin and Holmes is the dimension of context in making theoretical interpretations of discourse. From this third section of the book a call emerges for a theory which accounts for impoliteness as an everyday interactive strategy and which takes into account the interpretive work that enables meaning and social relationships to be constructed from such exchanges. These studies of language, gender, and politeness thus raise important analytical issues and challenges to perhaps reconsider the adequacy of major pragmatic models, such as Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness model and Sperber & Wilson's (1986) theory of relevance.

*New Zealand Ways of Speaking English* has much of interest to offer to applied linguists, ethnographers of communication, and sociolinguists by covering a wide range of topics and theoretical approaches. Some of the studies make for fascinating reading to the eclectic applied linguist (e.g., Kuiper & Austin's analysis of race-calling). And for scholars interested in language change, variation, and dialects of English, this book is certainly an overdue and useful addition to that body of research. But the final section, addressing issues in pragmatics, such as language, politeness and gender, is where I believe this book

makes its most worthy contribution, by suggesting some significant re-framing of established politeness and gender theories. *New Zealand Ways of Speaking English*, true to the editors' introductory promise, gathers together representative and current research from New Zealand, across a wide spectrum of linguistic interests, from phonological and syntactic analysis to pragmatic concerns about language in society. With this ambitious agenda, Bell & Holmes succeed in presenting a very readable and relevant book to the academic community in both hemispheres.

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*Individual Differences in Second-Language Learning* by Peter Skehan. London: Edward Arnold, 1989. 168 pp.

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While not denying the value of attempting to identify universal processes of second-language acquisition, it is likely that teachers are at least as aware of individual differences (IDs) between