

Roberto Cagliero and Anna Belladelli (eds.), *American English(es): Linguistic and Socio-cultural Perspectives*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, str. 242.

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This volume, edited by Roberto Cagliero and Anna Belladelli, and contributed to by nine other scholars, comprises eleven chapters divided into three major sections devoted to the three macro-sociolinguistic topics the authors singled out as being the most worthy of attention in the current socio-cultural landscape of America. The concept for the volume originated from the eponymous symposium held in Verona in 2009, which dealt with the same issues through the use of the same largely qualitative methodology.

The first section, entitled "'Minority' and American English", deals with the minority vs. hegemonic dialectic or rather its outdatedness in the discourse devoted to disparate varieties of American English today. The second section, "Spanish/Inglés", is devoted to the controversial and much-debated issue of Spanish in present-day America. Finally the subject of the third section, "Hunting for Slang", is the nature and status of American slang today, and its spread to non-American varieties of English, reflecting a relationship between US English and a globalized world.

In the opening chapter of the first section, Luisanna Fodde challenges the conventional myth of a common language in America, one which has been espoused by the supporters of the English Only movement, and trotted out, inter alia, during the Ebonics controversy in the mid-1990s. She points out how "at least until the 19th century, multilingualism and multiculturalism were common, especially in schools". The unprecedented linguistic diversity was caused not only by the fact that the United States was a multi-ethnic refuge for the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses of the Old Continent, but also due to the "decentralized political organization of the new nation, which favoured the consolidation of regional, cultural and ethnic identity". Whereas in Britain class and social position were the key factors in constructing and maintaining the standard language ideology, in America the language ideology and attitudes focused on racial discrimination, ethnic division and xenophobia. Fodde points out, however, that ethnicity and race in the United States have been known to assume both positive and negative values. The chapter also touches upon the politics of space/place, and the way this framework can be used to describe and better understand the history of American English.

In the next chapter Nicola Maurizio Strazzanti considers the unique position of American Jews. Their ambivalent status as "both insiders and outsiders in the American mainstream" owes a lot to the processes of *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*

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they embarked upon, and to their “natural predisposition towards the acquisition of ever-changing adopted languages”. Strazzanti finds that the language of American Jews “carries a spatial sense that is linked to an imaginary, textual homeland”. In their new country Jews’ old language, Yiddish, has become a post-vernacular – a language that is not used, but performed – and thus on a “theoretical, performative and semiotic stage the homeland is the language”. Borrowing certain theoretical concepts from continental philosophers such as Lyotard and Derrida, the author also briefly examines the writings of Abraham Cahan and Franz Kafka.

In the final chapter of the first section, Stefano Bosco starts by pointing out the discrepancy between the amount of work done on various Native American languages, and the attention paid to Native American English. After briefly noting the tragic fact that out of the some 300 Native American languages spoken at the time of the European conquest about 150 survive today, out of which only 20 are vital, and giving a cursory glance to Native American borrowings in English, the author turns to examining different aspects of American Indian English, such as its emergence and the existence of slang within it.

The second part of the volume begins with Donna R. Miller having a thorough censorious look into the “English Only” movement and other similar movements which advocate the exclusiveness of English in schools and other public institutions. Miller traces back the history and socio-political origins of such movements, as well examining their present proponents and the main thrust of their arguments. Comparing this debate with the one concerning the use of non-standard English, the author tries in the end to provide a balanced view, arguing for a reconciliation, fully aware of the two sides’ flaws as well as merits.

The following chapter, by Anna Scannavini, deals with Puerto Rican bilingualism, especially codeswitching and codemixing, in United States. More precisely, it focuses on the attitudes of Puerto Rican writers concerning their own bilingualism, or rather the self-representations they construct for the media, and the way these attitudes affect their writing. Scannavini’s corpus consists of interviews (all of them taken during the previous two decades) with sixteen different American authors of Puerto Rican descent, most of whom moved to the USA during their early childhood.

Elisa Bordin’s chapter is devoted to language policy in Arizona, and the recent ban on certain books by Hispanic authors. The author analyses the Arizona authorities’ suppression of the public display of Spanish, and their use of standard language ideology as one means of combating the perceived attempt to overthrow the Anglophone hegemony. Bordin also mentions the backlash by a part of the public who see the ban as “covert white supremacy in the guise of educational standard-keeping”, and who have undertaken acts of resistance and civil disobedience “freely introducing Spanish in the civil and public domain”.

Daniela Francesca Virdis examines a series of dialogues from the pilot episode of *Nip/Tuck*, a TV show set in Miami, seeking to describe, from a pragmatic and sociolinguistic point of view, the doctor-patient relationship between the white middle-class surgeon Christian and his Hispanic working-class patient Silvio. The author finds, analyzing each utterance for linguistic as well as paralinguistic and non-linguistic signals, that Christian, by using non-standard and colloquial language as well as English to Spanish

codeswitching, i.e. by his skillful use of different sociolinguistic codes, “succeeds in becoming the most powerful speaker”.

The third part of the volume, as we’ve said, is devoted to slang. It begins with *Ramón Martí Solano’s investigation of the pervasiveness of American slang and phraseology, or rather its presence in contemporary British English. After a brief look at the history of American influence on British phraseology, Martí Solano first takes a look at the frequency of American versions of phraseological units (e.g. “burn your bridges” vs. the British “burn your boats”) in the British National Corpus (BNC) and The Guardian electronic archives (GEA), after which he turns his attention to four different dictionaries of idioms and four dictionaries of slang, and analyses their respective treatment of American PhUs.*

Chapter Nine, by Roberto Cagliero, engages in a meta-discussion of slang dictionaries. Cagliero discusses some general points on compiling slang dictionaries, as well as giving a brief glance at the state of publishing such dictionaries. Finally, he expresses concern about the disregard shown by the Italian academia regarding lexicography in general and slang dictionaries in particular.

Anna Belladelli, writing about gender-specific slang, focuses on the words “buddy” and “chick”, and builds on her earlier study which examined the use of these two words in popular American female-oriented magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour*, and the new meanings and connotations attached thereto. This time she provides a diachronic study using the *Time* magazine corpus consisting of issues published from 1923 to 2006. Her aim is exploring the social and cultural implications of “the linguistic and cultural appropriation of those slang words on the part of the ‘dominant’ culture”.

In the final chapter of the volume Elisa Mattiello studies the use of slang in the American TV show *Friends*. After providing a short introduction on slang generally and delineating some differences between British and American slang, Mattiello moves onto describing various means of word formation employed in the popular sitcom, citing specific examples used by its various characters. She analyzes different properties and socio-pragmatic features of slang in *Friends* and in the end engages in a brief comparison between this show and TV series like *Everwood*, the majority of whose characters are more mature.

American English(es), a volume put together by scholars teaching at various Italian universities, “whose expertise draws on diverse and often contrasting approaches, ranging from corpus linguistics to cultural studies, from lexicography/lexicology to discourse analysis”, presents US English as being manifold in nature and rife with perpetual tension. This tension, however, stemming from its diversity, can be seen as a strength, and used as such, making the use of the motto “*E pluribus unum*” truly deserved.