

The same figure (3.10) also illustrates that Anderwald occasionally makes too much of her figures even when there is enough data. When she comments on the treatment of the past-tense form of *THRIVE* in American grammars for the century as a whole, she argues that “[a] regular form for *THRIVE* thus seems to be quite strongly endorsed in American grammar writing” (91). But unless I misinterpret Anderwald’s data, the actual number of grammars where *thrived* is favored is 67 of 125 (see 262, Table 3.12); this amounts to 53.6 percent, which is hardly a strong endorsement (moreover, as Anderwald notes, these figures assume that any grammar in which the verb is not mentioned as irregular implicitly endorses the regular form). However, it is clearly to Anderwald’s credit that she reports on raw frequencies underlying all figures in the book, since that makes it possible for readers to see whether they agree with her interpretations of the data.

In sum, *Language between Description and Prescription* clearly fills a much-needed gap in research on nineteenth-century grammar writing and its relation to actual usage. The strength of the volume lies mainly in the impressive number of grammars covered, the equal representation of American and British grammarians, and the author’s skill in interpreting their opinions and relating them to historical as well as linguistic developments. Some problems regarding the presentation and interpretation of quantitative information notwithstanding, Anderwald’s book is a valuable, important, and very welcome addition to research on Late Modern English.

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What Is English and Why Should We Care? By Tim William Machan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. viii + 416. ISBN 978-0198736677 (paperback).

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In *What Is English and Why Should We Care?* Tim William Machan seeks to answer, for a general non-linguist audience, these questions: How have English-speakers defined their language in the past? And how does this influence our definition of English today? In chapter 1, “The River of English,” Machan lays out two issues that

he sees as fundamental to the evolving definition of the English language: first, that the majority of English speakers in the world live outside the historical centers of English; and second, that there is a pervasive sense that the English spoken by those “outside” the central regions is somehow inferior to varieties spoken by the “Inner Circle” (a term borrowed from Braj Kachru that Machan uses throughout, referring to the English-speakers in the British Isles, North America, Australia, and New Zealand). In this chapter, Machan establishes the polemic thrust of his book: that this thing we call “English” is defined by variation and flux, and its continuity is more a product of a shared imagination over millennia than it is a stable set of inherent linguistic characteristics.

The concept of “English” as the product of imaginative acts of re-creation is central to the book. Machan distinguishes this conception of the language—what he calls “heritage”—from “history,” which is the collection of objective facts. Some may object to this dichotomy (is an “objective history” even possible?), but it is an important one for Machan’s thesis. He is concerned only with the heritage of the language, created consciously or unconsciously, by people as various as grammarians, lexicographers, educators, explorers, interpreters, politicians, corporations, and national leaders. These people shape the “definition” (limits and boundaries) of acceptable English. He does not treat the linguistic structures of English at all, conceiving that the “history” of the language belongs to a different sort of book. History, he says, “looks for what’s known and testable,” while heritage “looks for a past that will enhance and give meaning to the present” (25).

Machan treats a number of lexicographic and grammatical works on the English language produced ca. 1500-1950 in chapters 2 and 3. He argues that the English lexicon is only minimally represented by the dictionaries, the mental lexicon being in reality “complex, dynamic, and situational” (36). Machan criticizes dictionary-makers’ reliance on literary sources (with Shakespeare overrepresented), their exclusion of “vulgar” words, and their focus on standard (often socially elite) varieties of the language in the period concerned. Unfortunately, these chapters do not engage with the profound differences among lexical aids in any given period nor their development over the five centuries, which limits the usefulness of these chapters for the classroom. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which speakers manipulate lexis and thus change the definition of English. Words come into being and die much faster than they can be encoded into dictionaries, and dictionaries rarely incorporate regional, colonial, or slang usages. This, Machan contends, effectively eliminates them from the “permissible” language.

In chapter 4, “Space and Time,” Machan addresses the ways that linguistic historians have attempted to model and “define” the language. He draws attention to genealogical tree diagrams as enforcing a definition of the language as no more than “what is was” (45). Tree diagrams and histories of English claim that the integrity of a language persists over time, which Machan says elides the real structural and lexical differences among regional varieties and from one chronological stage to the next. The historical linguistic enterprise, then, creates a heritage for the language that imagines “its political, aesthetic, and social heritage” as located firmly in England and the West (89).

Chapter 5 engages with the rise of codification and standard language ideology. From ca. 1500 to the present day, Machan argues, English speakers have excluded “illegitimate varieties” as essentially “non-English.” Style guides and instructional grammars are guilty of creating an equivalence between language use and social position. This merger of social and linguistic identity becomes “essentialist” and defines the language outside of linguistic criteria (118). Thus, if a language variety is judged inherently inferior, so too are the speakers of that variety; for they speak the (deficient) variety that emanates from their relative standing in the world (122).

In roughly chronological fashion, chapters 6-11 span the Anglo-Saxon period to World War II. Chapter 6 examines the “essentializing” narratives of pre-Modern English speakers, in which English is imagined as “an abstraction generally tied to geography” (146). “Beyond Britain” (chapter 7) treats the period 1500-1650, in which English speakers spread in large numbers to non-British shores for the first time. In addition to the difficulties Native Americans faced in acquiring the English language, they also struggled to comprehend the culture that accompanied the language. For the English, teaching the language was commensurate with Christianizing (read: civilizing and saving) the “savages” (a theme present in the remainder of the book). Chapter 8 examines eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial efforts in the Pacific Islands and the accompanying need to develop interlanguages (pidgins and creoles) usable in trade. The islanders’ language skills not only marked them as inferior, “savage in customs and belief” (193), they prevented their access to institutions that would allow them to improve their language skills or economic conditions.

Chapters 9 and 10 enter the nineteenth-century United States, discussing English in specialized pedagogical environments, namely, the American Indian boarding schools (chapter 9) and the Ford factory English-language-learning schools for immigrants (chapter 10). These chapters offer an examination of English-language environments that rarely appear in standard histories of the language, and as readable and detailed accounts, fit their purpose well. In these chapters, we see the use of mandatory education in English as the “pre-eminent means of socialization” (213). Machan identifies a paradox at play for both groups forced to learn English: their variety of acquired English would simultaneously allow them access to work and institutions denied them as non-Anglophones, and yet reinforce their exclusion and marginalization as speakers of “inferior” varieties. As programs invested in social engineering—creating Christians and American citizens—these efforts reinforced the hierarchies of “good” English and “bad” English in a circular pattern indicative of racial-linguistic ideologies: the English is “bad” because marginal peoples speak it, and those people (immigrants and Natives) are marginal because of their “bad” English.

In chapter 11, “The English-speaking Peoples,” Machan addresses the self-conscious “Englishness” of the Allied powers during World War II. The chapter takes its title from Winston Churchill, who cultivated a sense of unity between Great Britain, the US, Australia, and New Zealand. Churchill explicitly equated the English speakers with morality and civilization, forging a political identity for the Allied powers based on shared language. In doing so, he modeled an imaginative creation of a global

community united by shared language (despite the real structural and lexical differences among the varieties).

The final chapter of the book compares the development of English with the development of Britain as a nation, which emerged through its dynamics with extraterritorial concerns; similarly, English emerged as a language at odds with its “extraterritorial” varieties. If English is, in fact, defined by its spread beyond England, then the imagined heritage that we bestow on the language must move beyond the borders of the so-called “Inner Circle” nations. Machan objects to “reducing” the massive variety of historical and global Englishes to the name of “English” as it “silences the historical individualizing arenas” he describes in the book.

What Is English? is a timely and relevant book that addresses the non-linguistic aspects of how speakers of a language create, over thousands of years, a language identity. Machan draws together a broad range of evidence to argue his point, keeping the prose lively and readable for a general audience. Yet the greatest strengths of the book for a general audience are its greatest weaknesses for an audience of linguists and historians of the English language. Linguists may find frustrating the complete lack of linguistic data. Although it was clearly Machan’s intention to offer the non-specialist reader a narrative that focused on the social origins for the definition of the English language rather than on structural definitions, his overall argument would have been strengthened by examining, at key moments, the structural disparities between different language varieties that “count” as English (e.g., African American English shares many features with Southern US English, yet AAE is marginalized in ways that Southern US English is not). Such a move would have strengthened the argument that definitions of the language are supra-structural and thus largely a creation of social and political imaginative acts. Thus, the book would be most useful in a classroom setting when paired with readings that offer linguistic and historical data for the relevant period.

Historians may also object to the lack of contextualization of historical texts throughout. For instance, Machan offers some valid ideological critiques of tree diagrams in chapter 3, but he seems to be misreading the purpose of genealogical trees: they are meant to show language relatedness, not erase the appearance of variation. Machan provides very little historical context for the creation of grammars, lexical aids, and style guides in the very long period of 1500–1950. The vast differences in intended effect and audience of these texts is largely ignored. In chapter 8, Machan’s polemical thrust again subsumes historical particulars: he argues that the reason that linguists created grammars of Polynesian languages in the nineteenth century and not of American Indian languages in the sixteenth was because Polynesian languages were grammatically and phonologically simpler; thus, in his reasoning, “indigenous Pacific languages could be shown to be everything that English was not” (192). In fact, there were early grammars of American Indian languages, e.g., a grammar of Narragansett in 1643, written by Roger Williams, among others (Campbell 1997).¹ The apparent increase in grammars of South Seas languages is attributable more to the rise of Comparative Linguistics in the nineteenth century than an effort to prove the inferiority of those languages.

Machan's primary sources are, for the most part, a well-tread selection of works from standard histories of English, e.g., Caxton's famous story *egg* versus *ey*. His approach and argumentation are also familiar from earlier works of historical sociolinguistics, such as Richard Bailey's *Images of English* (1991) and James Milroy's *Linguistic Variation and Change* (1992). Machan does not depart significantly from Bailey's and Milroy's models, beyond his avoidance of linguistic particulars and the focus on late medieval and early modern sources.

Historical quibbling aside, *What Is English?* is an engaging work that acts as an interesting introduction to the non-neutral forces that maintain the illusion of a unilateral standard over the history of the language. Intended for a general audience, the book argues powerfully for a worldview with which proponents of descriptive linguistics can readily agree: languages are largely defined by non-linguistic (political, social, and regional) criteria, and standard language ideology is neither linguistically valid nor socially responsible.

Note

1. My thanks to Brian Joseph, who pointed out these early grammars of Native American languages to me.

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