



Book Review

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A Critical analysis of language attitudes and ideologies

Elizabeth Peterson, *Making Sense of 'Bad English': An Introduction to Language Attitudes and Ideologies*

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Although it is widely known among language researchers that 'bad English' does not exist in the world, some ways of using English are still falsely labelled as such in daily life. *Making Sense of 'Bad English'* offers an excellent analysis of this phenomenon by providing historical explanations and sociolinguistic background for these varieties of English. More specifically, it demonstrates the formation of different attitudes and ideologies towards English as it is used in different settings around the world, as well as the practical outcomes for those who have no access to 'standard language culture' (p. xvii).

The book is composed of two parts. The first, consisting of five chapters, places more emphasis on explaining different attitudes and ideologies towards certain varieties of English from the social perspective. In Chapter 1, the author provides a thorough analysis of the role of English for people in different locations around the world and the relationship they have with it. For example, a survey regarding the use of English indicates that students in Finland are more inclined to accept non-standardized varieties of English compared to students in the United States. Chapter 1 also briefly introduces how a particular variety of English is perceived differently in various settings.

Chapter 2 explores the formation of the division between different varieties of English by outlining how English has been standardized throughout its history. It makes a comparison between the codification of English and the custom of Santa Claus to create an analogy, which demonstrates that the polarized ideologies concerning English, like the emergence of the custom of Santa Claus, are resulted from the input of other cultures and the long-term influence of society.

Chapter 3 focuses on 'inner-circle setting' (p. xxii) (Kachru, 1982), which refers to 'a location where the majority of the population of a given nation state speaks English as a mother tongue and where the major language background as they go about their daily life is also in English' (p. xxiii). Taking the United Kingdom as an example, it examines how social class and attitudes toward English varieties are interrelated, and explores various positions toward non-native English speakers. The findings show that language is not only one significant and efficient social performance to reveal the speaker's identity, but also a motivated and efficient instrument of labelling people as outsiders.

Drawing examples from the United States, Chapter 4 gives prominence to the relationship between ethnicity and attitudes toward varieties of English, especially African American English. Three case studies, 'as they relate to important issues such as school, the workplace, and courts of law' (p. 2), are presented to illustrate some practical outcomes of language attitudes. The examples manifest the interaction between language attitudes and language rights, which reveals that the rights and voices of speakers of non-standardized varieties are often denied because of their use of language, marginalizing them to a disadvantaged position.

Chapter 5 discusses three factors leading to the misunderstanding of certain English varieties. Firstly, historical and social separation affects the widespread

perceptions of a minority group's manner of speaking. Secondly, due to an absence of exposure to standard language culture, optimal conditions are set for 'covert prestige,' which is defined as 'local or in-group prestige, rather than prestige that is widespread' (p. 71) and provides the most significant and productive tool of communication for particular groups of individuals under certain circumstances. Thirdly, identity is partly voluntary and can be used to indicate speakers' attachment to other speaker groups.

The second part of the book complements the social interpretation offered in Part 1 and presents a series of case studies of language systems of English from different settings, in an attempt to discover their shared language features.

Chapter 6 examines the progressive phases of first language acquisition of English as a mother tongue, then moves on to the acquisition of different aspects of language: phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics. The confirmation of the natural adoption of many features considered inferior by first language speakers of Standardized English proves that language is usually negatively judged based on social rather than linguistic criteria.

Chapter 7 presents the background of the rise and development of African American English and discusses its distinct discourse styles and grammatical features. It shows that African American English has rich resources and a complex system, which verifies that it is acquired naturally and systematically by mother-tongue speakers, just as other languages are. The results shed light on the social and cultural aspects intrinsic to varieties of English in inner-circle settings.

While the previous two chapters attend to language systems in inner-circle settings, Chapter 8 provides a snapshot of two varieties of English in 'outer-circle settings' (Kachru, 1982), where 'English is used as a second language in specific domains' (p. xxiii).

Chapter 8 begins with a discussion of the distinct use of sentence-final *what* in Singapore, which can be explained by the factor of language contact from southern Chinese dialects. Then it reveals how short front vowels in Delhi English are interfered with by the first language. The findings indicate that 'varieties of English tend to have certain linguistic features in common' (p. 128), which are usually misjudged as ungrammatical or inferior.

Chapter 9 is concerned with the phenomenon of 'English as a lingua franca' ('ELF' for short), which means English used as a global medium of communication. Drawing on findings from related research (e.g. Jenkins, 2007), this case study makes a linguistic comparison between EFL with other language systems and summarizes several distinct features of EFL in terms of pronunciation, grammar and discourse style.

Based on the three case studies in Part 2, the author identifies patterns among the linguistic features of the English language systems described in Part 2 and concludes that each language system is distinguished from others through its specific configuration of cognitive, psychological, social and demographic factors, rather than any individual factor.

Chapter 10 revisits the goals of the book and summarizes findings of each chapter, based on which the essential take-away message is given: we should not discredit varieties of English as 'Bad English' as 'the notion of 'Standard English' is a socially constructed truth' (p. 154).

The volume has several strong points. Firstly, it provides a detailed analysis of varieties of English from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. From the synchronic perspective, it investigates different English language systems to discover what they do and do not have in common, including children's English (Chapter 6), African American English (Chapter 7), Singlish, New Delhi English (Chapter 8), and English as a lingua franca (Chapter 9). From the diachronic perspective, it offers social and historical explanations for varieties of English, including the historical progressions of English standardization (Chapter 2), the historical grounds of African American English (Chapter 7), and the historical evidence of the underlying source of certain linguistic features (Chapter 8). The integration of the synchronic and the diachronic analysis of varieties of English enhances our understanding of the nature as well as the formation of perceptions about 'good' and 'bad' English.

Secondly, the volume is well organized. The first half of the book lays out several theoretical considerations while the second half provides plenty of linguistic data, in the form of a series of case studies, to examine special linguistic expressions of English. The combination of theoretical and empirical studies strengthens the persuasiveness of the book. Furthermore, each chapter provides a wide diversity of supporting materials including definitions, linguistic facts and demographics, along with plenty of clear and informative linguistic data, tables and charts. All these efforts make the book an approachable guide for readers who are not language experts.

However, it has to be pointed out that although the book takes a critical stance to the use of 'bad English', it is still misleading and inappropriate to use it as part of the title, as there is no such thing as 'bad English' in the world. Furthermore, many representative varieties of English are unfortunately not examined in the book, especially those in the southern part of the world. The inclusion of more varieties of English could have widened the scope of research and led to more insightful and convincing findings.

On the whole, the book offers insights about the social background and historical interpretations of attitudes and ideologies towards some of the English varieties from a critical perspective. The book is suitable for students of sociolinguistics, and it is also instructive for English speakers and learners worldwide, especially those who believe in 'a standardized or prescriptive variety of English' (p. 153).

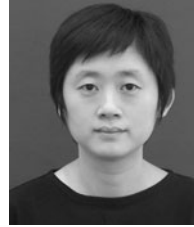
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