REVIEWS

The Cambridge History of the English Language: English in Britain and Overseas. Edited by Robert Burchfield. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xxiii + 656.

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The *Cambridge History* is a huge undertaking—six large volumes are anticipated—and a tribute to the idea that our field can still be encompassed in one broad sweep, even at a time when ever-narrowing fields and subfields promise continued fragmentation. As conceived by the general editor, Richard M. Hogg, the project aims to be an "intermediate work" between the one-volume histories of the language and more specialized monographs. Its purpose is to "provide a solid discussion of the full range of the history of English both to the Anglicist who does not specialize in the particular area to hand and to the general linguist who has no specialized knowledge of the history of English" (xv).

Reviewing even one volume of this ambitious set is virtually impossible in the confined space offered by this journal. No such length constraints seem to have been imposed on the contributors to this and the other volumes, however. Much that might have been left to journals is published here, and its deletion from the present volume would not have disappointed the intended audience. It is remarkable, given the lack of editorial discipline, that the essays are not even more diffuse than they are. Burchfield, the volume editor, seems to have provided only a general sense of the topics to be covered: linguistic history coupled with cultural background as well as treatments of lexis, phonology, and grammar. Of course the attention to each topic varies with the interests of the authors, and it is not surprising (given their other publications) that William Branford is particularly concerned with South African vocabulary or Laurie Bauer with details of New Zealand English pronunciation. Still, every author was obliged by the general plan to explore areas not central to his main line of research—all the authors are male, incidentally—and all have done a fine job of being encyclopedic and comprehensive. But digressions abound. Despite his professed subject, "The Dialects of England since 1776," the late Ossi Ihalainen devoted five pages to John Ray's *Collection* of 1674, and J. Derrick McClure began his account of English in Scotland in A.D. 574 and arrived at "Modern Scots" only after many fact-filled pages devoted to the Older Scottish

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Tongue (i.e., the period before 1700). Such discussions are often excellent, but they burst the bounds set by the grand plan that this volume should begin in 1776.

What is curious to a North American is that all the topics discussed in the volume concern "dialects of English." (McClure promotes the view that Scots may be regarded as a "distinct language" [23] without quite reaching the conclusion that "Southern" is a dialect of Scots.) Rural dialects in England are on a par with the English of Australia (described by George W. Turner) or English in South Asia (by Braj B. Kachru). Conceptually there is *English* (which has its main line of descent from Grendel's dam to Camilla Parker-Bowles). Then there are the dialects. Our dialect will be treated in volume 6, *English in North America*. We are shirttail relatives; John Bull owns the language (as the Prince of Wales lately has reminded us). H. L. Mencken was made angry by this arrogation of ownership; we, I suppose, nowadays regard it with amusement or indifference.

Planning for the volume began in 1984, Burchfield explains (3), and it seemed to those planners that some varieties of English were characterized by a "notable lack of professional scholarship at the time" (4) and therefore would not be included. As Burchfield acknowledges, that lack has been partly remedied since, and even in 1984 it was apparent that there was a thriving (and since flourishing) scholarly description of English in Singapore (one of the very few countries in which L1 English is growing more rapidly than the population), and Anthea Fraser Gupta would have been an obvious and excellent choice for a chapter devoted to it. Similarly, Josef Schmied's history of English in Africa would have fit comfortably within the covers of this volume and thus have given attention to English from Gabarone north to Khartoom. But the plan was too rigid to admit change. It was optimistic but unwise to have published the names of authors and their chapter titles for all six volumes in the very first volume to appear. As an unanticipated consequence, volume 3 remains unpublished because the volume editor and one of his contributors are locked in a dispute; volume 6 remains unpublished because the volume editor, who might have been the alpha author, lags toward being the omega. With the plan on so public a view, we are obliged to wait and wait since there seems to be no possibility for bringing in substitutes or reconfiguring the table of contents to adapt to current views or practical considerations. (I here acknowledge my personal interest since my own chapter is among those long languishing for volume 6.)

One may surmise (from the bibliographies) the approximate date of completion of the chapters: Burchfield ("Introduction") 1993, McClure (Scotland) 1992, Allen R. Thomas (Wales) 1990, Jeffrey L. Kallen (Ireland) 1991, Ihalainen (England) 1991, Turner (Australia) 1991, John A. Holm (the Caribbean) 1988, Bauer (New Zealand) 1990, Branford (South Africa) 1990, and Kachru (South Asia) 1993. As late as March 1994, however, Branford added a note in an attempt to keep up with rapid changes on the South African scene, though too late for the index. There is

nothing surprising about this situation, of course, and given the huge scale of the undertaking, it is probably the best that could have been done.

Nonetheless, the production crew must be faulted for omissions and errors that make this volume less valuable than it ought to be. The glossary, for instance, is seriously flawed. "Thurstone test" (105) should be entered and is not. "Aitken's Law" (554) is not a change "in the medieval period" but a distinctive feature of modern spoken Scots; it is, as McClure writes, "visible [*sic* for audible] in all dialects" (67). "Orthoepists" (563) are described in a way that should make a lexicographer shudder: "one of a number of sixteenth and seventeenth-century scholars." Given what Burchfield says about *either* in his *New Fowler's*, he may qualify as an orthoepist himself. Orthographists may be distressed at the spelling of *appenage* (45) (for *appendage*) or *Srinan* (563) (for *Sranan*).

These flaws are symptoms of serious obstacles to the use of the volume. Thus, Ihalainen refers to "one of the first writers using rhoticity as a dialect marker" (215), but this writer's work is not in the bibliography. There are many other such examples of citations in the text not in the bibliography. (It is probably unreasonable to expect copy editors to check quotations against original sources, but Kachru has been misquoting very slightly Macaulay's famous Minute for nearly thirty years and continues to do so here [506]. One might also wonder, too, how he could describe Ram Mohan Roy as "grateful to Macaulay . . . for the legacy of English" [508] when Roy died in England in 1833 and Macaulay did not arrive in India until 1834.)

Many readers will wish to use the index to discover the distribution of particular features, but they should not be too trusting of it. Thus, "glottal stop" and "glottal plosive" (which are inexplicably merged as if they were a single sound) appear in Thomas's chapter on Wales (125) and in the glossary (559) and are duly recorded in the index for these two places. Readers will not discover it in McClure's account of modern urban Scots (it should appear about page 84), even though it is a highly salient feature there, because he does not mention it. They will not discover it in Ihalainen's account of Cockney (227) because the indexer overlooked it. They will not learn from any contributor that this feature has replaced *h*-loss and insertion as the most stigmatized phonetic shibboleth in modern British English.

On the whole, these are wonderful essays, broad in scope and profound in learning. The rationale for bringing them together in a single volume is not, however, obvious. Omitted territory—for instance, east and west Africa, modern English cities—keeps the picture from being complete. The lack (or unreliability) of unifying apparatus too often obscures connections between the communities represented in the book. The essays stand as independent contributions with too few linkages among them.

Yet, the essays themselves are often of exceptional interest. Bauer gives a good account of the influence of Maori on New Zealand English; Branford is especially informative about the collapse of the language of apartheid and emerging revulsion

at such terms as *kaffir* on the eve of democracy; Kallen is lucid in explaining the restructuring of Irish English consonants as a consequence of the Gaelic substrate; Turner suggests useful lines for future research on prosodic characteristics and "voice quality" in the context of Australian English and elsewhere; Thomas gives proper cautions about the use of written documents to hypostacize earlier states of the language. These, and many other merits, make this volume essential reading.