

Joan C. Beal 2006: *Language and Region*. London/New York: Routledge. viii + 117 pp. ISBN 9-78-0-415-36600-7 (hbk) and 9-78-0-415-36601-4 (pbk)

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Language and Region is the latest book by Joan C. Beal, from the University of Sheffield, whose seminal work on the history of English in the late Modern period (1999a, 2004) is already familiar to scholars in our country. Besides historical linguistics, Professor Beal has also published extensively on dialectology, especially on Scots (1997) and the dialects of northeastern England (1993, 1999b, 2000, 2005). In addition, she is Director of the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition, at Sheffield, “the only university-based unit in England devoted to the study of all aspects of folklore throughout the country”, including its linguistic components (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/natcect/>).

Language and Region appears in Routledge’s *intertext* series, a collection of practical handbooks which basically aim at “developing readers’ understanding of how texts work”, particularly, undergraduate students’, and try to place texts “within the contexts in which they occur and [...] [to] explore relationships between them” (ii). In accordance with the practical aims of the series, the book covers certain aspects within English dialectology that are significant today and offers a collection of well-designed exercises with a twofold aim. First, to enable students to become aware of the linguistic features, the range of functions and the contexts of usage of certain accents and dialects of English, particularly British English, and, second, to introduce them to the rudiments of research in this field. Indeed, an outstanding characteristic of this textbook is its contextual and innovating approach to English dialects.

The treatment of the discipline differs from other textbooks. The traditional approach to teaching geographical varieties of English has been based on the collection and representation of speech features from different regions and localities, which students are encouraged to learn, visualize in maps and, occasionally, identify in a set of selected recorded texts. This is the procedure followed by classical introductory accounts, from G.L. Brook’s *English Dialects* (1963) or Martyn F. Wakelin’s *English Dialects: An Introduction* (1977), together with the three comprehensive volumes of *Accents of English* by John C. Wells (1982a, 1982b, 1982c), to more popular treatments such as *Discovering English Dialects* by Wakelin (1979), and Peter Trudgill’s best-selling *English Accents and Dialects* (1979), with Arthur Hughes (now in its fourth edition, Hughes and Trudgill 2005), *International English. A Guide to Varieties of Standard English* (1982) with Jean Hannah (whose fourth edition appeared in 2002), and *The Dialects of England* (1999, second edition), as well as the workbooks *Dialects*, by Peter Trudgill (1994), or Dennis Freeborn’s *Coursebook in English Grammar. Standard English and the Dialects* (1995). While some sections of the book comply with this well-established approach to dialectology, in other chapters Beal attempts to place the study of dialects in a new context, in such a way that some of the cultural, psychological, literary, social and even economic implications of the contemporary use of English dialects are dealt with.

This aim is particularly accomplished in chapters one, 'Region, nation, locale' (1-13), and two, 'Regional language and its uses' (15-28), where Professor Beal is sensitive to the new regional realities that globalisation has generated and explores their connections with dialect. In particular, by providing students with a local-identity questionnaire that they can distribute in their local communities, she manages to make them familiar, in practical terms, with the tug of war between globalisation, at one extreme, and the maintenance of regional identities, at the other: the possibility that, despite *macdonaldization*, some areas still retain their distinctiveness and people develop a sense of identity which often involves the way they speak. This means that a fluid sense of region and, accordingly, dialect is adopted, "covering whatever geographical areas are considered distinct from each other by the people living in them and whatever varieties of English are perceived as different from each other by the people who speak and hear them" (4). Within this fluid approach to region, some readers, however, may miss the author's engagement with recent research on dialect areas in connection with the psychological perception of speech differences by speakers: the field of *perceptual dialectology* as explored in the last fifteen years by, among others, Dennis Preston (1989, 2002; see also Long 2003). This absence in the textbook contrasts with the presence of other issues common in sociolinguistics and the social psychology of language, such as dialect levelling or evaluation.

Dynamic is also Beal's approach to the present uses and functions of dialects in the English-speaking world, where they are no longer the relic speech of old, non-mobile male speakers from rural areas, but have also become common urban phenomena. As such, dialects have become entrenched within popular culture, so that they can nowadays be found "on the web, in souvenir shops and tourist offices and in regional newspapers", and regional accents are used "in soap operas, such as *Coronation Street* or *East Enders*, where the locality of the setting is important, and in advertisements where the product is associated with a region" (15). Some linguistic consequences of this appropriation of dialect by popular culture are, on the one hand, the difficulties of separating 'proper' dialect from slang, colloquial and idiomatic English, as well as, on the other, the stereotyped characteristics of many samples of dialect which students of English often come across in these contexts. Both issues are illustrated in practical exercises involving *realia*, such as a funny spoof word-processor, *Word for Northerners*, or a T-shirt listing some features of Pittsburghese, incidentally the only example of non-British varieties of English in the book.

Social psychology provides another dimension to Beal's dynamic and contextual approach to the study of dialect. In chapter three, 'Attitudes to regional languages' (29-40), students are introduced to the methods used by social psychologists such as Howard Giles (1977; Giles and Powesland 1975; Giles and St. Clair 1979) and sociolinguists, like William Labov (1972, 2001), to elicit listeners' reactions to accents. Later, they are encouraged to elaborate their own questionnaires and to test the different responses to their own local varieties by placing their informants' answers within the classical scales measuring intelligence, friendliness, honesty, attractiveness, suitability for certain jobs, etc. The author's attentiveness to real and novel dimensions of dialect in the English speaking world is manifested again in her comments, for instance, on some commercial consequences of dialect evaluation, such as the tendency for call centres in the UK to be located in regions with recognisable local accents – such

as the north of England, or the Celtic fringe – or even to employ operators whose mild local accents are favourably appraised (32-33). The other end of the continuum is represented by the many examples of distant RP used by the villains in American movies, as exemplified in many of Disney's films, which have followed this practice since at least the 1950s.

Three chapters are devoted to the description of some shibboleths of British English accents and dialects: 'Recognising accents' (chapter four, 41-52), 'Words and things' (chapter five, 53-66) and 'Regional grammar' (chapter six, 67-80), respectively dedicated to phonology, lexis and morphology and syntax. In contrast to the recent and classical textbooks mentioned above, Beal's account is highly simplified – obviously because these descriptions already exist in the market and they would not wholly agree with the culturally-oriented objectives of Routledge's *intertext* series. Nevertheless, these sections clearly benefit from the practical stance that distinguishes the book at large: they are accompanied by activities and project works which not only help students recognise some of the key features of British English accents and dialects, but also train them in the elaboration of questionnaires that may allow them to elicit some features from their local varieties. Moreover, the cultural orientation of the book inclines the author to deal with topics that would not normally feature in other textbooks on dialectology, such as her attempts to disentangle the terminology and thereby distinguish between *standard*, *sub-standard* and *non-standard* in connection with value-judgement (68).

An interesting chapter, in my opinion, is the one on the lexicon, especially because Beal relates it to other issues touched on in the book. The author is well aware that globalisation is accelerating the attrition of dialect vocabulary among the younger generations, but, at the same time, her own experience in dialect research permits her to handle this assertion with care. While it is true that dialect words are disappearing from the active repertoire of speakers, a majority belong to traditional, industrial or farming activities. In general, attrition seems to be restricted in some semantic fields connected with other aspects of everyday life, such as bakery, butchery or fishmongery, which are still the target of lexical creativity on the part of speakers, even though, as remarked above, it is not easy to draw boundaries between dialect vocabulary, slang and colloquialism. Additionally, many speakers retain a passive knowledge of some dialectal terms which may still be remembered by informants provided that they are interviewed adequately. In this sense, Beal offers examples of activity questionnaires and sense-relation networks that may help the trainee dialectologist elicit the adequate response.

In the last chapter, 'Writing in dialect' (81-90), Professor Beal returns to some of the topics tackled in earlier sections by looking at the appropriation of dialect in literature, a common practice both throughout history and in the present. The author deals with all the implications of this issue and carefully distinguishes literary dialect – the conventional representation of dialect with different purposes in texts that are otherwise written in standard English – from literature written entirely in dialect. Both instances are illustrated with documents from the past, like Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), and from the present, like Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) or sections from *The Hensbarrow Homilies* (2002), the dialect poem by the Cornishman Alan M. Kent. The first two help the author discuss some of the conventions commonly used to portray dialect in literature, trying to balance the desire for accuracy with

transparency and accessibility: eye dialect, semi-phonetic spellings, allegro-speech spellings *-an'*, *'cos* or *gonna-* regionalisms, colloquialisms, etc. A further commentary on Kent's *Homilies* takes Beal's discussion back to the opening sections on globalisation, within which dialect texts may be interpreted as political statements that bring to the foreground different points about language identity and nationhood, thus fulfilling one of the aims of Routledge's *intertext* series: "placing texts within their contexts", cultural and political. The book finally includes a key to some of the exercises and project works suggested, a list of phonetic symbols, an index of technicalities defined in simple terms and an updated reference list, with useful web resources.

All in all, *Language and Region* is a novel and practical account of English accents and dialects. It is novel, in so far as it brings the study of dialect in line with the global realities of the present day, and because, in doing so, it exposes undergraduates to functions of dialect within popular culture, tourism and even marketing. The textbook is also practical throughout, aiming at making students aware of the features, functions and uses of their own local dialect and even helping them take the first steps in research on the field. There is, however, one small snag for foreign students of English: the orientation of the majority of practical exercises and projects to the students' first-hand experience of dialect makes them difficult to be accomplished by their peers in Spain, who, being separated from the daily linguistic reality of Britain, can only remotely grasp all the implications of the use of British English dialects in the modern world.

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