

Peters, Pam, Peter Collins & Adam Smith (editors). **Comparative Studies in Australian and New Zealand English: Grammar and Beyond**. Varieties of English Around the World G39. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009. 406 pp. ISBN 978 90 272 4899 2. Price (hardback): US\$158.

Which variety of English is more advanced when it comes to using gender-neutral job titles? How do Australians feel about *I know Joanna is around somewhere – Alex has just spoken to her* versus *I know Joanna is around somewhere – Alex just spoke to her*? And is *bloody* really the “great Australian adjective”?

The answers are that Australian English, AusE, is more advanced than British, American and New Zealand English when it comes to using gender-neutral terms such as *spokesperson* and *firefighter*. A majority of AusE speakers prefer *I know Joanna is around somewhere – Alex has just spoken to her* to the preterite alternative (or, to be more precise, 56% of the readers of *Australian Style*). And surprisingly enough *bloody* is used more frequently by London teenagers than by Australians (at least according to data from the COLT corpus and the ICE-AUS corpus, respectively).

Comparative Studies in Australian and New Zealand English: Grammar and beyond is a comprehensive work consisting of 19 chapters of recent corpus-based research into many different aspects of the antipodean varieties of English. The book is divided into five sections ranging from morphology, via verbs, nouns and clauses, to discourse. However, as Peter Collins explains in the Prologue, the distribution of chapters was sometimes arbitrary as the topic of many chapters straddle more than one area. Thanks to the Prologue, the consistent format of the chapters, and the Epilogue, the volume feels surprisingly coherent despite the diverse topics. Still, all chapters are free-standing texts, and can be read in any order the reader wishes.

The aim of the book is twofold: to investigate similarities and differences between AusE and New Zealand English, NZE, and to see whether an endonormativity has developed, i.e. if the varieties “have consolidated their own norms as independent national standards” (122). Are these aims achieved? The answer must be yes. The book identifies areas where AusE and NZE are more like each other than any of the northern hemisphere varieties, e.g. when it comes to the use of non-numerical quantifiers such as *heaps of*, the use of non-reflexive *myself*, and the use of *-t* forms of irregular verbs such as *burnt*, *leapt*, *learnt*, and *spelt*. The book also presents areas where the antipodean varieties diverge, e.g. in the use of modals and quasi-modals, and in the use of *no* in negative collocations. Further, the book finds some areas of endonormativity, e.g. hypocoristics ending in *-ie*, the use of the progressive, and the use of zero complementisers as in *He decided Ø the colour was too dark*.

The reader learns a great many things not just about AusE and NZE, but also about the history of the English language, about other varieties of English, and spoken and written English, to name but a few areas. For example, the reader learns that *thrive* was originally a regular verb that acquired its irregular past forms in the Early Modern English period; that “*yous(e)* can be heard in AmE varieties from the mid-West eastwards” (46); and that quasi-modals such as *have to* and *be going to* are more frequent in speech than in writing.

Some chapters are especially interesting and well-written. A favourite is Johan Elsness’s chapter on the perfect and the preterite in AusE and NZE. Lucid, pedagogical, and full of illustrative examples, it is a true pleasure to read! Marianne Hundt’s chapter on concord with collective nouns is also an enjoyable and informative read.

Certain elements recur in the chapters. Many of the twenty-one contributors discuss the difficulties of interpreting corpus data, which provides food for thought. For example, Quinn comments that the reason that possessive *me* is frequent in AusE biographical writings and fiction might be that it is “particularly common in vernacular AusE, or at least perceived as such by Australian writers” (43). Likewise, the use of surveys in *Australian Style* as complementary data in some chapters works very well, as in the case of *I know Joanna is around somewhere – Alex has just spoken to her* mentioned above.

One of the few things I miss in this book are diachronic studies of AusE and NZE, but according to the authors there are (as yet) no corpora available that make possible comparisons of the type that can be done between LOB and FLOB or Brown and Frown.

Comparative Studies in Australian and New Zealand English is an interesting, rich and very inspiring book. It is probably too advanced to be suitable as a course book at undergraduate level, but it can surely be used as a work of reference for anybody interested in Australian and New Zealand English.

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