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MAVEN 97: The Major Varieties of English. Växjö University College, Sweden

Conference review.

According to the 2nd Edition of the OED, *maven* (U.S. colloq. Also *mavin*, *mayvin*) refers to 'An expert or connoisseur'.

The first conference focusing on the MAJOR Varieties of ENGLISH (MAVEN) was held at Växjö University College Sweden, 20-22 November 1997. According to the conference committee, the most important of the regional varieties of English are the British, American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand varieties since they serve as models for learners in other parts of the world. The MAVEN conference brought together scholars studying the development of different Englishes, and in particular their interrelationships. Such issues have an obvious bearing on language pedagogy, lexicography and language description and are also relevant to research including language change and sociolinguistics. A well-balanced selection of papers was presented, that would enhance any course on varieties of language or dialectology and would also provide valuable source material for advanced students of English wishing to learn more about the English of potential interactants that they might be likely to encounter internationally. A total of thirty papers were presented by participants from Scandinavia and Northern Europe, North America, Australasia, South Africa and SE Asia.

The MAVEN 97 conference was arranged around a series of invited talks. Jan Svartvik of Lund University provided the keynote address in which he introduced, what he terms, the major and minor varieties of English. Svartvik observed that language education needs to stress the long association, remarkable uniformity and intercomprehensibility of the major Englishes, despite their geographical dispersion. Referring to Kachru's outer and expanding circles of English, he considered the minor varieties of English more 'worrying' since questions could be raised regarding their role in global communication and the direction they were heading in. Svartvik posed the key forward-looking question, 'What pedagogical attitude should we adopt to English varieties?'

Representing a number of related corpus-based approaches, Christian Mair from the University of Freiberg commented on variation studies based on machine-readable corpora. Mair considers grammatical and lexical variation 'a matter of statistical tendencies and preferences rather than categori-

cal rule'. In his introduction to the Freiburg project in which matching corpora are used to elucidate the interplay of synchronic and diachronic factors in developing the contrasts between British and American English, Mair illustrated that corpora may contribute to variation studies in three significant ways:

- (1) Corpora can provide firm evidence to corroborate observations between varieties, which must remain tentative as long as they are based on unsystematically collected anecdotal observations by individuals.
- (2) Evidence from corpora may force us to reject received opinions on what constitutes the difference between varieties.
- (3) On occasion systematic comparison of distribution patterns in matching corpora may uncover variation which has previously been unnoticed.

Janet Holmes from Victoria University of Wellington offered 'A Kiwi Cocktail' in which she described some current changes in New Zealand English. Focusing on phonological changes, she examined the celebrated front vowels, the increase in T Voicing and final glottal stops, the spread of high rising terminals and recent lexical innovations in NZE. Holmes proposed possible sources for such changes, both internal/systemic and external/social including AmE and BrE. The role of women and of Maori people in language change in New Zealand was also considered.

Arthur Delbridge of Macquarie University examined lexicography and 'national identity' as presented in dictionaries that focus on one of the varieties of English used in Australia, namely AusE, which is the one officially recognized as the national variety. Delbridge observed that in Australia other Englishes need to be considered including aboriginal English and the Englishes of recent immigrants. He examined efforts to identify sources for AusE and to illustrate its dimensions that have been attempted in recent dictionaries, in particular in the Third Edition of the Macquarie Dictionary that was published shortly before the commencement of the conference.

Peter Trudgill from the University of Lausanne provided the concluding plenary. His talk entitled 'World Englishes: convergence or divergence', which was vividly punctuated by the playback of audio material, illustrated how two catastrophic scenarios are currently feared by British intellectuals who are concerned about the future of the English language. The first was that English will split into a series of mutually unintelligible dialects that will eventually develop into languages and the second that AmE will become so ubiquitous that we will lose all trace of varieties of English.

It is intended that a volume of the Proceedings of MAVEN 97 will be published in late 1998. The conference committee of Magnus Levin, Hans Lindquist and Staffan Klintborg are to be thanked for a highly successful first MAVEN conference as are the staff and students of Växjö University College for their hospitality.