

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

*Social and Regional Factors in Canadian English: A Study of Phonological Variables and Grammatical Items in Ottawa and Vancouver*, by Gaelan Dodds de Wolf. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1992. xiv, 184 pp. Tables. \$24.95 paper.

This book, published with the help of a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, contains seven chapters of very unequal length and a countless number of tables and charts which in several cases are repetitive or of dubious relevance to the main argument. The text itself is satiated with references to authors, making the reading of this book a very tedious affair. For instance, on page 5 one finds the following sentence: "Within a sociolinguistic framework, the interaction of these factors [factors influencing change and choice] in English has been discussed by Labov (1966b) for New York City, Wolfram (1969) for Detroit (Black English), Trudgill (1974) for Norwich, England, Macaulay (1977) for Glasgow, Woods (1979) for Ottawa, Milroy (1980) for Belfast, Gregg (1984) for Greater Vancouver, Petyt (1985) for West Yorkshire, and Clark (1985a, 1985b) for St. John's, Newfoundland." Indeed, for whom has this book been published? If it is for the dialectologist, the linguist, or the scholar of the English language, most of these references are superfluous, as are several passages of the book — for instance chapter IV about "Sociolinguistic Methodology." If it is for the average reader, the maze of phonetic and phonological representations in the various tables and charts and the use of linguistic terminology without explanation will be a definite stumbling block. The precise purpose of this book remains a mystery.

The substance of the book is based on two unpublished sociodialect surveys, one by H. Woods, *A Sociodialectology Survey of the English*

*Spoken in Ottawa: A Study of Sociological and Stylistic Variation in Canadian English*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1979, and the second by R.J. Gregg, *Final Report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada on "An Urban Dialect Survey of the English Spoken in Vancouver,"* 1984. From these two studies, de Wolf has selected *eight* phonological variables and *twenty-three* grammatical items. The phonological variables include the voicing of intervocalic [t], for example, in tomato, the variable *ing*, some of the so-called Canadian diphthongs, etc. . . . In neither of the two surveys quoted above can one find data elicited from *actual* conversations. Lists of single words, pictures, and the reading of passages are used. Some have argued that the reading style, in some cases, is quite close to the actual use of language, however, it is not *actual use*. Examples of the grammatical items are the present perfect standard variants: drunk, lain, proven; the use of agreement with "be," "there is, there are"; "between" + object pronoun (between J. and me or I), etc. . . . These grammatical items were tested through elicitation frames. Here again, the point must be made that it is not *actual use*, but *reported use*. It is from these very restricted data, gathered in two Canadian locations, Vancouver and Ottawa, using a methodology that has serious limitations, that the author based her conclusions on "Language Use in Canadian English," which is the title of the last chapter. The conclusions are certainly not modest. They cover *Canadian English language* use according to sex, age, socio-economic status, and regions. Many conclusions are also supported by percentages. One wonders if these percentages can justify some of the sweeping statements, for instance about gender and age in Canada: "The higher the score for women over forty when compared with that of the previous style suggests once more a heightened awareness of language use or, . . . a conservatism derived from greater linguistic insecurity" (p. 63).

De Wolf has a great admiration for the work of W. Labov. She writes, "Labov's seminal New York City research launched a branch of sociolinguistics wherein theoretical observations and methodological analyses are based on sound sociological and statistical techniques" (p. 1). Nobody would deny that Labov's influence on the study of social dialects has been immense, mainly because he was the first to show that seemingly random linguistic behaviour can be patterned. However, the response to other aspects of the Labovian analysis has not been uniformly positive. He has been criticized for making unwarranted, sweeping generalizations about the nature of linguistic

variation. (For instance, Hans Kurath, "The Investigation of Urban Speech," *Publication of the American Dialect Society* 49: 1-7, 1968). In other words, care must be exercised when drawing general conclusions from small samples. Reading some of de Wolf's conclusions — for instance, "Cultural and linguistic heterogeneity is recognizably present in the national speech community. Within this variable framework, an underlying uniformity in Canadian English is expressed through an overall consensus both of majority preference and of educated usage with respect to a large number of salient linguistic items, and through the recurrence across location of social factors significant to linguistic variability" (p. 151) — one can rightly wonder if these affirmations are based on data presented in the book.

The author uses the word "standard" quite frequently, as in "standard value" (pp. 49, 57, 63, 76, 83, etc.). This raises an interesting question: Is there a Canadian English standard use? De Wolf does not deal directly with this question, although she often refers to a "standard." In one section, however, she gives some indication of what "standard" means for her. For phonological variables, the conservative English orthography will be considered as the standard form (p. 49). For syntactic items, the standard is that expressed either through the majority usage, or, in the case where such usage has recently shifted or is currently shifting, the formerly prevalent or traditional variant of the standard British English form" (p. 4). Such subjective and *a priori* decisions are, to say the least, surprising in a book which pretends to be based on the statistical analysis of data (p. 41). It could probably be said that no one dialect is recognized as standard in Canada simply because no one city or area dominates the political, economic, and cultural life of the country, and therefore no one dialect is recognized as standard by the society at large. What are the tendencies of Canadian English? Do speakers of Canadian English follow either a British or American English model? Due to the paucity of her data, de Wolf has very little to say about this important question. In her last chapter, she makes the following statement: "Although there are examples of uncertain usage, the traditionally standard grammatical variants of British English are strongly evidenced in Canada, despite the influence of the American model. . . ." (p. 150). Although this statement might be true, I have failed to see any justification for it in the data and the analysis presented in this book.

In spite of these remarks, this book raises some challenging questions and will certainly encourage more research on Canadian English. It is highly regrettable that Canadian Scholars' Press has not

provided more guidance regarding the content and the organization of this book.

*The University of British Columbia*  
*Aichi Shukutoku University*

BERNARD SAINT-JACQUES

*British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, edited by Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers in association with The Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations at the University of British Columbia, 1992. x, 451 pp. \$21.95 paper.

Collections of previously published material provide an excellent opportunity to assess the development of a field. This is true with respect to *British Columbia Reconsidered*. It consists of twenty-two articles published between 1980 and 1991, divided into six sections: pioneering, politics, domestic life, culture, work and poverty, and one excellent bibliographical essay. The introductory essay by the editors places the articles which follow within the context of previous examinations of British Columbian society and points out that few, if any, of these examinations took gender into account. The editors describe the developing intricacies of studies on women, how researchers are becoming more sensitive to the interrelationship between gender, race, class, etc., and how these researchers are revising accepted theories on women's oppression in light of the experiences of women who have remained outside the mainstream of Canadian society. Not all the articles exhibit that sensitivity, but this reflects the rapidly changing field more than any intransigence on the part of the authors.

What also stands out in this collection is the breadth of work being done in women's studies in general and on British Columbia women in particular. For example, the pioneering section consists of two articles which taken together reveal the variety of experiences of women living in isolated areas of mid-nineteenth century British Columbia. The article by Sylvia Van Kirk examines women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, certainly an event not ignored in the traditional historiography of B.C. But what Van Kirk has revealed is the involvement of women on this frontier in a multitude of roles. The politics section follows with four studies on the early efforts of women to gain the franchise, the role of Dorothy Gretchen Steeves and Grace Mac-