Shondel J. Nero (ed): Dialects, Englishes, Creoles, and Education

Ronald Kephart

Received: 25 May 2007 / Accepted: 30 May 2007 / Published online: 23 August 2007
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2007

This volume brings together a multiplicity of voices, both theoretical and practical, on the politics, challenges, and strategies of educating students who speak and/or write in dialects of English or related language systems that are at variance with academic discourse.

From the Preface (xvii)

This is both an important and a daunting task, and this fairly slim, unassuming book certainly accomplishes it. After an excellent general introduction by the editor, the book is divided into sections of one or two chapters each that focus on a particular aspect of the challenge.

In her editor’s introduction, Nero does a very nice job of mapping out the landscape across which issues of language variation and education are played out by placing the spread of English around the world in its social, cultural, and historical context. In doing so, she introduces the concept macroacquisition, the acquisition of a second language by a speech community. Clearly this could be a contested concept, given the fact that individual humans, not ‘communities,’ acquire language(s). Still, as a heuristic device it reminds us that the spread of English was rarely if ever a simple top-down imposition, that Creole and other varieties of English were created by speakers of other languages, and that in the process of creation these speakers of other languages made Englishes that they could use. As Nero points out, the problems arise when the target ‘English’ of schooling remains that of the metropolitan powers, a form that may be much less useful for most than the local variety that has developed.

R. Kephart (✉)
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of North Florida, 1 UNF Drive, Jacksonville, FL 32224, USA
e-mail: rkephart@unf.edu
Section I (World Englishes, Creoles, and Education) contains two overview articles: ‘World Englishes and Language Education’ (Kachru), and ‘Keeping Creoles and Dialects Out of the Classroom: Is It Justified?’ (Siegel). Kachru broadly examines English Language Teaching programs around the world, calling attention to the overuse of American and British models of English. Siegel focuses specifically on the always-contentious issue of bringing non-standard varieties of English into the classroom.

Sections II, III, and IV focus on restructured varieties of English. Section II (African American Vernacular English (AAVE)/Ebonics) focuses on the language of African Americans in the United States. Rickford (‘Linguistics, Education, and the Ebonics Firestorm’) gives a comprehensive review of the Oakland (California) School Board’s attempt to increase awareness and understanding of AAVE in the public schools there. Delpit (‘What Should Teachers Do? Ebonics and Culturally Responsive Instruction’) suggests some ways for teachers to balance the validation of their students’ linguistic diversity with the goal of enhancing their knowledge of Standard English.

In Section III (Caribbean Creole English) the articles by Winer (‘Teaching English to Caribbean English Creole-speaking Students in the Caribbean and North America’) and Pratt-Johnson (‘Teaching Jamaican Creole-Speaking Students’) focus on the practical problems involved in dealing with English Creoles versus English in classrooms. One especially tricky problem that arises here is that the boundary between English Creoles and English can be fuzzy, lulling students into a false sense of knowing more English than they actually do, while not being consciously aware of some of the subtle differences that can sabotage easy movement from one language to the other. For example, the sentence They go in the store looks and sounds ‘English’, but in some Caribbean Creoles it means ‘they have entered the store and they are still inside’; quite a difference from the usual North American or British English ‘they enter the store on a regular basis’.

Section IV (Hawai’i Creole English (HCE)/Pidgin) contains one article, ‘Pidgin, Local Identity, and Schooling in Hawai’i’ (Eades, Jacobs, Hargrove, and Menacher). Here the authors contrast the folk-model friendly appropriateness approach, under which students are taxed with leaving their home language at home and using only English at school, with a more progressive language awareness approach, which encourages conscious knowledge of the differences between HCE and English.

Sections V, VI, and VII deal with indigenized varieties of English. Section V (Hispanized English) contains two articles that focus on varieties of English that are influenced by coexistence with Spanish. The first, ‘The English of Latinos from a Plurilingual Transcultural Angle: Implications for Assessment and Schools’ (García and Menken), is an overview. The second, ‘Tex Mex, Metalingual Discourse, and Teaching College Writing’ (Kells), focuses on hispanized English of the US-Mexico border regions.

Section VI (West African Pidgin English) contains one article, ‘West African World English Speakers in U.S. Classrooms: The Role of West African Pidgin English’ (de Kleine). De Kleine focuses on the performance of West African Pidgin English-speakers in writing classes, and argues that a contrastive analysis approach...