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1999 *Belgium's Africa* conference (99), facilitating the meeting of two worlds with his transnational text and not as an “informant”!

I shall finish by returning to the Preface. Blommaert began with an acknowledgment of a methodological limitation: the fact that for economic reasons the data texts on which his theses are based are not available for scrutiny in the appendix. There is a fundamental conflict here between Blommaert's positioning in his dismissal of hegemony and from a location within “the system” which privileges, honors, and takes his word for it. Would Routledge have published a Julien-authored or a Tshibumba-authored monograph without such data texts? Nonetheless, I recommend *Grassroots literacy* as an illuminating and resourceful book.

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MARKKU FILPPULA, JUHANI KLEMOLA & HELI PAULASTO (eds.), *Vernacular universals and language contacts: Evidence from varieties of English and beyond*. New York & London: Routledge, 2009. Pp. vi, 385. Hb £ 80.

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As far back as 1988, drawing on much cross-linguistic evidence, Thomason & Kaufman made a strong case against the traditional historical linguistic position

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that stipulates that language-internally motivated change is primary and categorically different from contact-induced change, and that universal-type explanations are preferable to particularistic, multicausal and/or language-external explanations for language change. However, despite this and much additional evidence that has since come to light, research on variation and change is remarkably hesitant about abandoning the traditional historical linguistic position and, in fact, keeps putting it back on the agenda in somewhat different guises. The present volume examines a recent instantiation, Vernacular Universals (VUs), from a variety of perspectives.

The volume consists of fifteen articles divided into four thematic sections, an introduction, biographical notes, and name and subject indexes. The introduction gives an overview of the main issues addressed by the articles and introduces J. K. Chambers's concept of VUs, defining them as "natural outgrowths ... of the language faculty" (p. 1) that result from recurring phonological and grammatical processes.

Part 1 discusses the theoretical background of VUs. For Chambers, VUs are linked to human cognitive constraints. Discussing the variability in subject–verb agreement in English plural existential constructions as an example, he argues that it is linked to the fact that application of the look-ahead mechanism is cognitively costly and thus frequently avoided. This is supported by cross-linguistic evidence. Languages either avoid featureless expletive subjects or their scope is limited, and VSO languages generally omit subject–verb agreement rules altogether.

Chap. 2 explores VUs from a typological perspective. Focusing on four VUs – multiple negation, conjugation regularization, default singulars, and copula absence – in 46 nonstandard varieties of English, Benedikt Szmrecsanyi & Berndt Kortmann show that Chambers's VUs are indeed common, but never categorical. However, they are at best characteristic of the Englishes of the Americas. Only multiple negation is cross-linguistically common, while default singulars and conjugation regularization are typical of languages with dwindling inflectional morphology. Instead of focusing on the presence and absence of individual features, they argue, research should focus on establishing correlational tendencies and parameters of variation.

Daniel Schreier's article opens part 2, which explores variability in the distribution of putative VUs across varieties. His analysis of consonant cluster reduction (CCR) and leveling of the past *be* paradigm reveals important distributional differences across Englishes that appear to correlate with types of Englishes. High rates of CCR in prevocalic position are characteristic of non-native varieties and varieties significantly affected by contact, while the frequency of past copula leveling and the specific forms used give insights into a community's founding population and patterns of diffusion.

Chap. 4 examines number agreement in plural existential constructions in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence Extension. Terttu Nevalainen's quantitative analysis confirms that singular forms are diachronically common, but they never exceeded 40%. Their decline was gradual, with male writers leading the change in

the early part of the 18th century, and patterns of variation correlate with writers' differential access to education. Nevalainen suggests that prescriptive grammars reinforced rather than drove this process. Sali Tagliamonte then investigates the use of default singulars in 13 modern varieties of English from Canada, the Dominican Republic, and the United Kingdom. Her analysis reveals a fair amount of variation. Default singulars are more common in existential constructions and with NP subjects than with pronouns, but there is no ranking of pronouns across varieties. Socially, age plays a more important role than sex. She argues that universal tendencies are present but are manifesting differently across communities.

Part 3 deals with the relative importance of universals and language contact in the development of varieties of English. Karen P. Corrigan investigates the origin of relative marking strategies in South Armagh English (SArE), comparing a corpus of narrative folklore data from 1942–1974 and modern survey data for SArE with published data on L2 varieties, creoles, and South African Indian English. The similarities in linguistic constraints governing the use of the three attested strategies – zero-marking, use of *that* or *WH*-words – across varieties suggest to her that a universal rather than an Irish substratum influence explanation best accounts for the patterns in the SArE data; she does not consider the option of multiple causation. Moreover, she proposes that relative frequency of *WH*-marking appears to be indicative of speakers' relative traditionalism because *WH*-marking is on the rise among younger speakers of Englishes. Elaine Gold confirms that some of Chambers's proposed VUs – final CCR, alveolar realization of unstressed *-ing*, subject–verb nonconcord, and final devoicing – may have VU status because they are also attested in the now extinct Bungi English from the Hudson Bay in Manitoba, Canada. She also proposes the inclusion of new VU features such as non-distinction between *she* and *he*, functional extension of the progressive construction, and perfect constructions with *be* because they are common in Bungi and other varieties. However, she favors multiple causation rather than a universal explanation for Bungi because these features are also common in its input varieties.

David Britain & Sue Fox argue that contact generates and propagates universals. Analysing hiatus resolution among youngsters in London's multiethnic East End, they demonstrate that the traditional British vernacular system involving marked strategies (such as article allomorphy) is being replaced by a less marked strategy (such as a glottal stop). Boys of Bangladeshi origin led the change, and White and mixed-race boys in contact with them show a fair amount of variation. Donald Winford expresses skepticism about Chambers's conceptualization of VUs and their explanatory power. Comparing the TMA systems of Irish English, Barbadian English, and Colloquial Singaporan English, he argues that the significant differences between them refute the existence of (English) typological universals. He shows that substrate and superstrate input, including patterns of diffusion and differences in the social settings, provides a more coherent account for the differences, while universals of (second) language acquisition can explain the similarities. He urges researchers on Englishes to attend to the more advanced discussions on creoles and SLA.

Chap. 10 explores the relationship between universals and language or dialect contact, using a corpus-based comparative method to analyze the distribution of three features – absence of plural marking with mass plural nouns, use of the definite article, and the progressive form with statives – in corpora of nonstandard traditional varieties from England, Wales, and Ireland and of national/educated varieties from the UK, India, Singapore, the Philippines, and East Africa. Filppula, Klemola & Paulasto argue that absence of plural marking may have VU status because it is common in Englishes and cross-linguistically. However, for the other two features, VU-based explanations appear reductive. They therefore propose a multicausation approach that considers contact and universals of language acquisition.

The last section considers methodological and theoretical issues. Terence Odlin examines methods for studying L1 or substratum influence. Reviewing work on the use of articles and serial verb constructions in Hawai’ian Creole, SLA, and English varieties, he demonstrates that a method pioneered by Jarvis 2000 is most powerful because it relies on five data sets, namely performance data in the L2 from learners with two different L1s, contextually similar data in the learners’ L1s, and in the target language. Salikoko S. Mufwene questions “common accounts of the origins of dialect difference” (282), advocating greater attention to social history in accounts of language development. He argues that creoles are NOT fundamentally different from other colonial varieties of English, because they resulted from the same kinds of restructuring processes operating under somewhat different ecological conditions. Crucially, language contact played a role in the development of both sets of varieties.

Peter Trudgill argues that Chambers’s attempt to delineate vernacular from standard varieties using VUs is unsuccessful. First, a number of VUs are (or were) also used in (informal) standard varieties, are rather minor, or are ill-defined. Second, regularization processes are characteristic of contact settings. Third, contact also affects standard varieties, though at a slower pace. He proposes to distinguish between high and low contact varieties. The former are characterized by regularization and lack of redundancy and the latter by highly idiosyncratic features. Peter Siemund’s exploration of how research into linguistic universals may shed light on vernacular phenomena highlights two important issues: First, formulations of universals differ considerably across linguistic research domains and are dependent on theoretical framework; and second, the term “vernacular” is fuzzy, as it is used to refer to a range of socially and historically different varieties. He argues that a functionalist-inductive approach that conceptualizes universals as a set of implicational connections that apply to functional spaces is best suited to determining linguistic similarities and differences between varieties.

In the final article, Sarah G. Thomason challenges several problematic but commonly invoked assumptions about language change using cross-linguistic evidence. She demonstrates that contact-induced and language-internal changes are NOT different in kind, and that similar changes in different languages do NOT necessarily have the same causes. While ease of learning is a common cause for change,

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change is not always simplificatory and standardization does not necessarily add complexity. She argues that research must focus on assessing the relative likelihood of different sources and processes of change using a systematic set of criteria, and it must be open to explanations of multiple causation.

This volume gives a comprehensive overview of current structural research on varieties of English and the diversity of perspectives. The data and research paradigms presented will spark much further debate and research on the origin and processes of variation and change in Englishes and cross-linguistically.

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