

REVIEWS

Die Sprachmauer: Die Verarbeitung der Wende und ihrer Folgen in Gesprächen mit Ost- und WestberlinerInnen. By Norbert Dittmar and Ursula Bredel. Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag, 1999. Pp. 207. Paper. € 20.00.

Reviewed by STEPHEN BARBOUR, *University of East Anglia, Norwich*

In 1993 and 1994, starting from a seminar series led by Norbert Dittmar, Professor of Sociolinguistics at the Free University of Berlin, a considerable number of interviews with Berlin residents were recorded on the topic of the *Wende*, the events of 1989–1990 from the mass exodus of East Berliners to the west via Hungary and Czechoslovakia, through the opening of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the GDR regime, to the unification of the two German states. Of the 77 interviews conducted by participants in Dittmar's seminars and other students at the University, 56 were of adequate quality for transcription and analysis, 31 with East Berliners (33 interviewees, as some interviews involved 2 informants), and 25 with residents of the western part of the city (28 interviewees). Of the eastern interviewees 19 were women and 14 men; in the west there were 15 women and 13 men. Ages ranged from around 20 to around 60 (some ages were unknown), with a considerable clustering of informants in the age ranges 30 to 39 in the east and 40 to 49 in the west. Despite the reasonably representative nature of the sample, the data have not, to my knowledge, been submitted to quantitative analysis but have formed the basis of two qualitative studies, Braber 2001 and the current book.

The book has only five chapters: chapter 1, introduction; chapter 2, presentation of the interview material; chapter 3 (by far the longest), an examination of the differing social and psychological reactions to the *Wende*; chapter 4, linguistic correlates of these differing reactions; chapter 5, an epilogue, charmingly entitled "Dornröschenkuss," likening the "reawakening" of the east on contact with the west to the awakening of the heroine on being kissed by the prince in the fairy tale "Dornröschen" ('Sleeping Beauty').

Despite Dittmar's status as a leading critic of assumptions of obvious and immediate links between social and linguistic phenomena (see

Journal of Germanic Linguistics 14.4, 2002

Dittmar 1973, 1976), the book clearly falls within a German tradition that is much less agnostic than most sociolinguistic writing in English in ascribing social correlates to linguistic differences (see also Barbour 1987). Chapter 4, the most language-oriented, quotes Bernstein's work with approval (Bernstein 1971–1975); this work, with its readiness to link social and linguistic categories, has classic status in German sociolinguistics, whereas most sociolinguists in Bernstein's home country of Britain would be at least cautious in accepting its findings (see Trudgill 1975). The bold findings of this chapter are nevertheless impressive, and merit further research; I would single out the assertion that the high number of at least apparent slips of the tongue by East Berliners signals linguistic and social insecurity, and that the distribution of the pronouns *ich*, *wir* (grammatically first person), *du* (grammatically second person), and *man* (grammatically third person), all used to refer to the self, reveal complex social-psychological attitudes to the information conveyed. This most linguistic chapter underlines what has been a common finding of research into German in east and west, that differences of linguistic substance between eastern and western language varieties are minimal; much more noticeable are differences in frequency of use of certain forms, and the much more widespread use of nonstandard variants in the east. The chapter also reinforces the common popular belief that easterners had (and still do have) markedly different public and private registers, correlating with a public sphere dominated by Party and State, and a private sphere characterized by very great social solidarity. The evidence for this is good, but I would question the belief that this separation is something exceptional; perhaps it is found in many societies where our attention has not been drawn to it since the political situation seems "normal" to our western eyes. Perhaps it is noticed in eastern Germany since the GDR political system was always seen as something of an anomaly by westerners. It might have been expected that an "anomalous" east would have innovated linguistically more than a "normal" west, but some of the clearest east-west differences involve western innovation: the sharper decline of Berlin dialect in the west, the greater western use of verb-second word order after the conjunction *weil*, and the markedly greater use of the modal particle *halt*, of southern German origin, in the west.

Chapter 4 makes an interesting contribution to linguistics; however, even though both authors are linguists, by far the weightier set of conclusions of the research, presented in chapter 3, could be seen as enhancing our knowledge of social psychology through the study of

language use. This chapter provides fascinating insights into the utterly different reactions in east and west to the events of 1989–1990. Through analysis of the narratives of the interviews we obtain a striking picture of how East Berliners, though perhaps physically fairly stationary, have in effect left an old home to arrive in a new one, where the existing inhabitants, the West Berliners, act with varying degrees of effectiveness as welcome parties, guides, teachers, and mentors. What is particularly fascinating, but depressing, is the degree of disappointment among easterners at their humiliation, powerlessness, and disorientation in their new home. These attitudes are known, but the interview transcripts in the book give an invaluable blow-by-blow account of real encounters that have fueled the disillusion.

Why have things gone so wrong? My own view is that, in a society in which national identity is still seen by many in ethnic terms (see Barbour 2000), people simply did not realize until it was too late that the Germans, though arguably sharing a national identity, had developed distinct social identities in east and west, that the easterners could not simply adapt overnight to their “reunification” with their “true home country.” Poignant are the several cases where interviewees describe the process not as “reunification” but as “takeover,” and the individuals who say they would be happy to see the Wall back in place. Fascinating is the contrast between the utter transformation of easterners’ lives by unification, while westerners often experience little more than pleasanter weekends with the new accessibility of the surrounding countryside.

Given the dominance of social-psychological findings in the book, the title *Die Sprachmauer* (‘The Language Wall’) might surprise non-Germans; the book is overwhelmingly about social differences demonstrated by language use, and even the linguistic findings relate almost entirely to differing frequencies in the use of particular forms in east and west, rather than sheer linguistic differences. This focus on perceived linguistic difference would however be quite unsurprising to observers of the German scene; almost from the outset the division of Germany into two states was accompanied by anxieties that the language would divide, that easterners and westerners would be unable to communicate with each other, something that never remotely happened except in certain kinds of political and economic registers (for a complete account of the “linguistic division” see Stevenson forthcoming). Why was this division so fervently expected and feared? I think it can only be explained if we consider the role of the language as a core value in German national identity (see again Barbour 2000).

The book is excellently written, the authors having performed the considerable feat of making highly readable a book crammed with data. I would only criticize the lack of an index, a deplorable fault in so many books published in German.

Given the book's focus on social psychology I do not feel, as a sociolinguist, very well qualified to comment on the research methodology; I was, however, disturbed by one analytical tool, the decision to treat the interviews as if they were film scripts, and to subject them to the analytical methods used in film studies. This seems to me perverse; although an interviewer may be working from a script, surely the interviewee's response is generally completely unscripted, while, even today, unscripted film dialogue is very much the exception, though used by some directors, such as Mike Leigh; even such innovative directors do, however, use cutting, which of course would have falsified the interview data had it been applied here.

Many observers have commented on the almost tragic failure of the two parts of the country and city to grow together harmoniously; Dittmar and Bredel's interview transcripts form an absolute treasure trove of individual accounts of how the state, the society, and individuals got it wrong. Politicians and opinion formers should read this invaluable contribution to our understanding of the interactions of the individual, society, and the state.

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School of Language, Linguistics and Translation Studies
University of East Anglia
Norwich NR4 7TJ
England
[s.barbour@uea.ac.uk]

A history of English: A sociolinguistic approach. By Barbara Fennell. Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001. Pp. xiii, 284. Paper. \$29.95.

Reviewed by ANNE CURZAN, *University of Washington*

The task of writing a history of English that can serve as a textbook is not an enviable endeavor. For every point that an author chooses to include, a host of others may be omitted; for every detail an author chooses to address, a host of terminological and theoretical issues must often be explained in order to make the details comprehensible. Perhaps for these reasons, despite the numerous textbooks that have tackled this challenge, there is still room for scholars drawing on different methodologies and theoretical approaches and, therefore, raising different questions, to add their voice to the scholarly and pedagogical conversation. And perhaps, in the end, we must resign ourselves to the fact that not everyone will be satisfied with any one textbook. Barbara Fennell's explicitly sociolinguistic approach in her new textbook, *A History of English*, distinguishes her work from many of the textbooks that precede hers and means that she addresses a range of important and interesting research questions that do not typically appear in such texts. Perhaps the compromise is that this book may better serve as a supplemental text, with a focus on the significant sociolinguistic perspective that it adds on the relevant historical issues, rather than as a primary textbook for most introductory university courses on the history of the English language.

The book jacket advertises the text as “an intelligent and accessible synthesis of modern sociolinguistic approaches to the development of the