

## BOOK NOTES

*Language in Society* 37 (2008). Printed in the United States of America  
doi:10.1017/S0047404508081104

KATIE WALES, *Northern English: A social and cultural history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. xviii, 257. Hb \$90.

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Katie Wales's thorough treatment examines the varieties of English spoken in the North of England, not only from a descriptive standpoint but also from wider sociocultural perspectives, with a definite focus on the latter. *Northern English* makes no claim to be a reference volume about Northern linguistic features, yet it is amply illustrated with examples of Northern speech. The book rejects the approach that views Northern varieties simply as manifestations of the nonstandard, not least in its allusion, in chapter 2, to the considerable diversity in the geopolitical and sociocultural roots of the diachronic development of Northern varieties. *Northern English* is, essentially, a scholarly insider's viewpoint of the English the author grew up with, and the affectionate pride infusing the prose does not mask the serious contribution this book makes to our understanding of the diachrony of what has come to be called Standard English.

A key theme throughout *Northern English* is the notion of the North, and of Northernness in general, as a mental object situated in the popular imagination. Where, though, is the North? This question is examined extensively in chapter 1. Wales amply illustrates that there exists no commonly-agreed boundary by which one can reliably separate the North from the South. The clever title of this book alerts the reader to the fact that, although there exist great differences among Northern varieties, there also exists a certain homogeneity, which resides in the consciousness of speakers both inside and outside the geographical region with respect to their evaluation of these varieties. The content of this evaluation may differ – Wales cites “austrocentrism” (the Southern bias in histories of English) as a factor in certain interpretations of the North – but its surface existence remains.

The final chapter of the book examines the contemporary status of Northern English and what the future holds for both its existence and the diversity found within it. Wales details a number of examples of what might be characterized as resistance to change or the reemergence of traditional accent and dialect features in some contemporary varieties of Northern English, suggesting that the oft-expected “erosion” of Northern varieties might not be as imminent as once feared (or perhaps, in some quarters, welcomed). Indeed, the “waning influence” of Standard English goes hand in hand with the development of sub-Northern “regiolects,” cementing the image of the dynamic nature – capacity for “change and regeneration” in the parlance of this work – of the variation found in the language of the North. One important observation and conclusion of the final chapter is that such change and regeneration resides in accent rather than dialect, and that it is in this domain that we are likely to witness the vitality of northern varieties. *Northern English* is a well-written treatise on the contemporary status of the linguistic north, which offers new insights into both current developments therein and its historical influence upon the emergence of today's prescriptive standard. It is recommended for anyone interested in the rich diversity of varieties to be found north of the Watford Gap.

(Received 5 September 2007)