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978-1-107-02120-4 - Further Studies in the Lesser-Known Varieties of English

Edited by Jeffrey P. Williams, Edgar W. Schneider, Peter Trudgill and Daniel Schreier

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CHAPTER I

*Introduction**Jeffrey P. Williams, Edgar W. Schneider, Peter Trudgill
and Daniel Schreier*

With the appearance of the seminal piece on ‘lesser-known’ varieties of English by Trudgill in 2002, a research trajectory was charted that gathered together scholars involved in the documentation of overlooked and understudied varieties of English, many of which were spoken by very small groups of people in remote and isolated locales. This assorted group of ‘lessers’ gained prominence in the literature for their value in providing insights into larger questions in linguistics and sociolinguistics, culminating in the first instance in an edited collection of documentary descriptions and analyses (Schreier, Trudgill, Schneider and Williams 2010). We continue to expand our treatment of lesser-known varieties of English (LKVEs) in this second volume of further documentary descriptions.

As we stated at the outset of the first introductory volume to the documentation and study of LKVEs, one fundamental problem has to do with how to evaluate and demarcate the status of the term ‘lesser-known’. To aid the reader, we once again reproduce the set of characteristics we outlined in the previous volume here in order to set the template for the individual contributions that follow.

Lesser-known Englishes:

1. are spoken as first languages and not as ESL or EFL varieties, often in environments where bi- or multilingualism is restricted;
2. are identified as distinct varieties by their respective speech communities and other groups in their social environment;
3. are associated with stable communities or regions;
4. are typically spoken by minorities; they are usually delimited (not necessarily ‘isolated’ but socially or regionally distinct) to small communities which are embedded into a larger (regional) population ecology;
5. were, many of them, originally transmitted by settler communities or adopted by newly formed social communities that emerged early in the colonial era, so that they substantially derive from British inputs;

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6. were formed by processes of dialect and/or language contact (which makes it impossible to ascribe them genetic status, e.g. creoles or koinés, see below);
7. frequently take the function as identity carriers by their respective communities;
8. are very often endangered.

The last point deserves more discussion here than we were able to provide in the first volume. The notion of endangered varieties of a seemingly voraciously dominating language such as ‘English’ may seem insincere to some. Wolfram (2008) has written passionately about the Ocracoke Brogue as being an *endangered language* that challenges the established canon of linguistic endangerment:

As it turns out, our classification of the Ocracoke Brogue as an endangered language variety has challenged the established canon of endangerment in linguistics. After several invitations to speak at language endangerment conferences early in our studies where we presented the case for labeling the Ocracoke Brogue as an endangered language variety, we have now been excluded from conferences and workshops on this topic, reflecting the marginalisation of English dialects in terms of the language endangerment canon. In fact, after one of my presentations at a national conference on language endangerment, a colleague congratulated me on the presentation only to follow up with the comment, ‘Do you think anyone takes you seriously when you argue that isolated dialects of American English should be considered as endangered?’ I would like to challenge the exclusion of dialects from the endangerment canon on several bases. Indeed, it seems like the endangerment canon is based on some questionable assumptions about the nature of language variation. (Wolfram 2008: 9)

Attitudes such as those that Wolfram is challenging here are pervasive in the field. And while we might seem to be swimming against the tsunami, we are in strong agreement with Wolfram’s statements; not just on ethical grounds, but also on the grounds of first-hand experience of working with languages that are unquestionably, within the endangerment canon, endangered. Williams has worked with endangered American Indian languages (Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Navajo) and has observed parallel although not identical sociolinguistic conditions between these communities and those in isolated island communities in the anglophone West Indies. Endangerment as a sociolinguistic condition cannot be determined by only global considerations but must be evaluated according to local conditions and a nuanced sociohistorical understanding of language varieties.

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As the first volume's production led us to envision a second volume, which now appears, the production of this second volume leads us to consider a more contentious project that chronicles the *endangerment* of English varieties in a third volume.

In an attempt to broaden the scope of the 'lesser-known' typology, we have included more varieties that have a deeper chronology – extending back to the seventeenth century in some cases. We have also explored the boundaries of the upper extent of genesis of 'new' varieties, as the contribution on Pasifika Englishes demonstrates. Expanding our domain of documentation in this volume, we were both challenged and engaged by the paucity of coverage of lesser-known varieties on the global stage. Over half of the contributions to this volume are from the New World, not surprisingly since English has a long and dominant colonization there. As we stated in the first volume, our list of varieties there was not exclusive or exhaustive. The expansive list we develop here is also equally unbalanced in terms of thoroughness of documentation.

In developing and realizing this second collection on LKVEs, it was essential to continue with the same frameworks of presentation and typological organization. The contributors were selected and solicited based on their expertise in the relevant varieties, and were provided with a basic framework for documentary presentation. We provided the same basic prompts for (i) sociohistorical origins, (ii) sociodemographic data, (iii) structural features (phonetics/phonology/morphology/syntax/lexicon) and (iv) assessment of the future of the variety.

Finally, as far as grouping and classification are concerned, the fact that the LKVEs display considerable heterogeneity in their social and contact histories made it difficult (in fact, nearly impossible) to assign them to separate categories on typological grounds.

Again, following suit from the first volume, we organized the contributors' chapters geographically instead of opting for a new scheme based on some sort of sociolinguistic-typological classification. We now briefly introduce the contributions from Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean, and the South Pacific.

Europe

In this volume we extend our focus from the British Isles, as in the first volume, to the broader geopolitical landscape of insular Europe. The three varieties that are described by Krug, Rieder and Levey all developed and are primarily spoken in island communities.

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Malta, in spite of its proximity to Italy, is part of the British Commonwealth and a member of the EU. **Manfred Krug** explains its multilingual history, under the rule of Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians, Byzantines, Arabs and Normans, which is reflected in the linguistic stratigraphy¹ of the English spoken there. In the early nineteenth century, Malta became part of the British Empire and has remained an anglophone outpost ever since. Maltese English, as opposed to most other lesser-known varieties, is not endangered.

In his chapter, **David Levey** describes another insular European outpost of English on Gibraltar: an overseas British territory located off the southernmost tip of Spain. In spite of English's status as the only official language in Gibraltar, Yanito – the local variety that contains elements of Andalusian Spanish and British English – is generally preferred in vernacular contexts. However, as Levey points out through his description, the use of English in such contexts is on the rise with younger speakers in particular.

Maria Rieder provides a foundational description of Irish Traveller English. This formerly undocumented variety differs from other kinds of English through its incorporation of Shelta (also known as 'Gammon' or 'Cant') into Irish English, which evidences archaisms and dialect mixture. As Rieder points out, the combination of Shelta lexicon with Archaic Irish English grammar creates an unintelligible code that promotes in-group cohesion and solidarity.

The Americas and the Caribbean

As is well known, the transplantation of English to the Americas has produced a wide range of sociolinguistic outcomes. Beyond the catastrophic consequences for the indigenous languages of North America, there is also the emergence of new and stable varieties through the mechanisms of language/dialect contact that is emblematic of the Caribbean region.

In her chapter on American Indian English (AIE), **Elizabeth Coggshall** provides an overview of the socially and linguistically related varieties of English spoken by indigenous populations of the United States and Canada. No one would argue about the lesser-known status of AIE, and

¹ The use of the term stratigraphy is intentional in this description. The intent is to draw a parallel with the concept of stratigraphy in geosciences that dates back to the mid seventeenth century. Biostratigraphy is likely to be the best analogue for linguistic stratigraphy since it accounts for the formation and extinction of species. In this case, the layers of linguistic influence in the language can provide clues to periods of influence and contact, and cultural realms of contact, as well as other aspects of sociolinguistic history.

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Cogshall addresses the challenge of providing a unified description of a set of disparate varieties that share some features that set them off from other anglophone varieties.

The English language has a lengthy and complex history in its West Indian setting, with its incipient transportation to the region in the early seventeenth century. Williams (2012) estimates over sixty varieties of English spoken throughout the region, but the vast majority of those are lesser known. This volume enhances our knowledge of the lesser-known West Indian varieties of English with chapters on Bequia in the Vincentian Grenadines, Saba (one of the former Windward Netherlands Antilles), St Barthélemy and St Eustatius (also one of the former Windward Netherlands Antilles).

In spite of its relatively small size, the island of Bequia exhibits a great deal of linguistic variation within its English-origin varieties. **James A. Walker** and **Miriam Meyerhoff** discuss that variation within the context of providing an overview of Bequia English. The variety of linguistic inputs to the overall sociolinguistic landscape of the island – including whalers from the northeastern US region, former indentured servants from eastern Barbados, creole English speakers from other islands in the eastern Caribbean – is not atypical for the insular speech communities of the West Indies.

Saba, an island of less than thirteen square kilometers in area, also exhibits significant village-level variation, like Bequia. **Jeffrey P. Williams** and **Caroline Myrick's** description of Saban English focuses on the varieties spoken primarily in the villages of Windwardside and Hell's Gate. Saban English predates Bequia English by almost a century, with Saba being colonized by anglophones in the mid seventeenth century. Internal isolation has characterized Saban social interaction over the centuries of European settlement and colonization, resulting in distinctive village dialects.

St Eustatius, or Statia, was one of the most important entrepôts for African slaves during the middle to later seventeenth century. Its cosmopolitan character, based on a diversity of merchants, sets the island apart from most others in the West Indies during the same period. **Michael Aceto's** contribution on St Eustatius is important because of the island's prominent place in the region's history, as well as its distinctiveness vis-à-vis other regional varieties. Aceto explains this divergence in terms of socio-economic focus: St Eustatius was a commercial centre and not an agricultural centre.²

² A similar explanation holds for St Martin English.

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Ken Decker outlines the sociolinguistic history and grammatical features of Gustavia English – a late eighteenth-century arrival. Gustavia English is an endangered variety of English spoken by a very small population in the town of Gustavia on the Francophone island of St Barthélemy that has been overshadowed by the surrounding sociolinguistic complexity of the French-origin varieties of the island.

While Paraguay is well known to sociolinguists because of its societal bilingualism involving Spanish and Guaraní (or *Guaraní Paraguayo*), it is very much lesser known in terms of the place and history of English in the country. **Danae M. Perez-Inofuentes** describes the English of Paraguay that was brought in through immigration from the British Isles and more importantly Australia, during the nineteenth century.

Ian Hancock discusses and describes a lesser-known variety of English that shares its origins with the well-known Sea Islands Creole, often referred to as *Gullah* or *Geechee*, that is spoken by a declining elderly population of fewer than three hundred in south Texas, central Oklahoma and northern Mexico. This English-based creole took form on a former reservation, leading to spatial and cultural isolation for the speakers and fostering a social situation where the language has retained more original features than Sea Islands Creole – its closely related kin.

The South Pacific

The South Pacific was an area of linguistic and sociolinguistic diversity and complexity prior to the transplantation of the English language into the region. While responses to English have produced a wide range of sociolinguistic outcomes, many of the South Pacific varieties cannot be classified as lesser-known varieties of English.

Rachel Hendery, however, describes an extremely isolated and lesser-known community on Palmerston Island – a tiny atoll in the Cook Islands. Unlike the situation with many insular locations of English, Palmerston was uninhabited at the time of the first anglophone settlement. After 140 years of near-total isolation and with a total population of fewer than seventy-five individuals, there are no salient linguistic differences between the three social groups of the island.

In their chapter, 'Pasifika Englishes in New Zealand', **Donna Starks**, **Andy Gibson** and **Allan Bell** discuss varieties of English spoken by Polynesian peoples in New Zealand. As the authors point out, Pasifika English is one of the youngest lesser-known varieties in the region, having been formed around sixty years ago. As with many third- and

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fourth-generation New Zealand communities, the process of language shift from their Polynesian languages to English is evident and progressing.

David Britain and **Kazuko Matsumoto** describe Palauan English and in doing so provide the first documentation of a Micronesian variety of English. Although Palauan English has arisen under different sociocultural conditions than have other Postcolonial Englishes (Schneider 2007), it still exhibits many of the same features.

In conclusion, our second volume documenting further studies in lesser-known varieties of English enhances the body of published work on the wide-ranging variation in English as a global language. There are a number of further issues and topics that we would have liked to be able to cover in this volume, and we intend it, as was our intention with the first, to spark further interest in fieldwork and documentation of minority Englishes in a postcolonial world. Endangerment is a very real factor for the vast majority of LKVEs, with documentation and archiving as key initial steps in revitalization and reclamation efforts. We will leave those discussions and topics for another volume.

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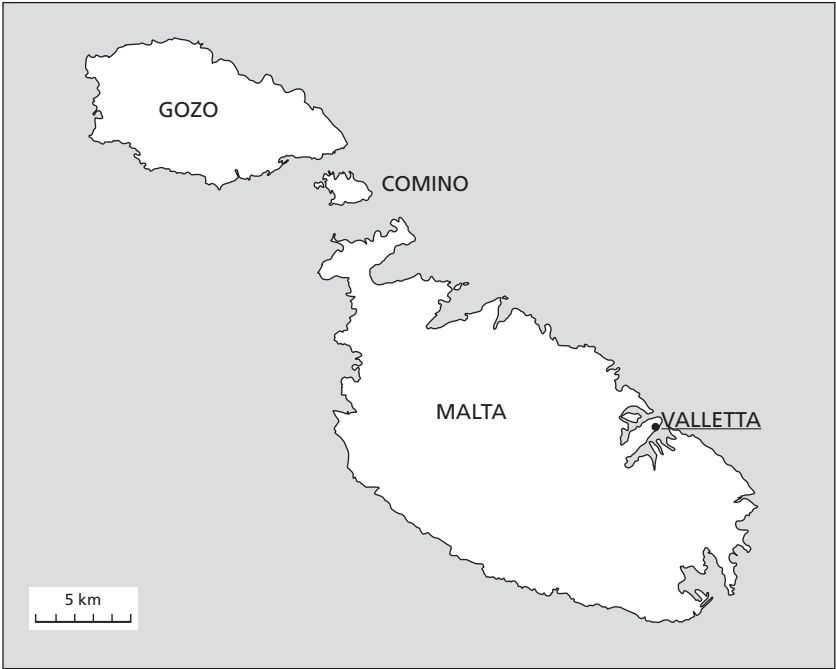
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PART I

Europe

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Map 2.1 Malta's three inhabited islands



Map 2.2 Malta in its wider geographical context