Book Reviews

An American Language

Black English. Its History and Usage in the United States. J. L. DILLARD. Random House, New York, 1972. xvi, 362 pp. $10.

General Patton once amused a London audience by observing that Englishmen and Americans had been "divided by a common language for years." The same thing might be said about whites and blacks in the United States. The intractable "American dilemma" which has set apart European and African descendants in this country for a dozen generations has had obvious economic, political, and psychological aspects, but it has always had a linguistic component as well. J. L. Dillard in this suggestive new book goes so far as to point out (p. 25) that if in fact the Negro "has a historically different variety of English from that of the mainstream-culture white, the question remains open as to whether lack of communication is part of the racial trouble in this country."

Until recently Afro-American English, like all other aspects of the black experience, has generally been explained away by white experts, who found it culturally impossible to take the topic seriously. Just as whites have controlled the popular representation of black speech since the 19th century (consider blackface minstrels, the Uncle Remus stories, the Amos 'n' Andy show), they have also dictated the professional interpretation of the "nonstandard" English spoken by a majority of American blacks. This evaluation, now embarrassing to most linguists but still silently accepted by much of the broader culture, implied that American English derived only from British English and that therefore all aspects of black speech derived from white speech. Since Afro-Americans were assumed to have no heritage, linguistic or otherwise, any deviance from the grammar or pronunciation of so-called "standard" English was attributed, directly or by inference, to aspects of the Negroes' physiology ("thick lipped" and "clumsy") or psyche ("lazy" and "careless") which were supposed to limit their capacity to assimilate "civilized ways." The net result, however well-intentioned individual scholars may have been, was a biased and pseudoscientific put-down of Negro speech—like Negro hair texture, skin color, and social values—as inferior.

In recent times the cultural sands have begun to shift, and the durable, rational, and influential nature of black English has begun to be acknowledged. (The first time Bill Cosby used "Ya dig?"—an Africanism—on national TV was as noteworthy as Jackie Robinson's first stolen base.) Such popular shifts relate more closely than many realize to an academic counter-tradition which has grown up in linguistic circles over the past generation. In the 1930's the anthropologist Melville Herskovits first raised for white audiences the possibility that Africans possessed viable cultures which could have carried over in part to the New World, and in the late '40's a black linguist named Lorenzo Turner demonstrated that specific language carry-overs which had come to North America with the slave population before 1800 still survived in the Gullah speech of South Carolina's Sea Islands. Since then other black and white scholars have worked to hammer away at the negative image of black speech as "inferior English."

Dillard's long-delayed book stems from and helps to relate the shifts taking place in the popular-practical world of speech and the esoteric-academic world of linguistics. His essays are partly imaginative scholarship, partly committed rap. (Whether publication was held up because of what he had to say or how he chose to say it is unclear.) He aims the discussion toward problems of practical education and he proselytizes along the way in a manner which will be disquieting to scholars and refreshing to laymen, but there is provocative material for any American who has ever wondered why some of us "talk different." Dillard reviews the way black English has been (mis)treated by the academic establishment and discusses the structural differences which make black English a distinct dialect with an internal logic. He suggests how this dialect evolved in large measure through the interaction of Afro-American slaves with one another, and he goes on to show, in one of the most intriguing chapters, how the pidgin English first spoken by blacks may have related to the speech of Indians and Asian-Americans on the frontier. He gives special attention to the evolution of Negro proper names and to the influence (long denied by the dominant culture) of plantation creole dialect upon the speech of the white South.

Dillard's last two chapters, which consider who speaks black English and how it fits into the educational system, offer outspoken views on current matters, but it is his historical section that deserves special comment. Like his staunch ally, William A. Stewart, Dillard has combined knowledge of present speech patterns and current literature (his notes and bibliography are excellent) with diligent research in past records. Overcoming the linguist's hesitancy about written sources, he has wandered through American newspapers, plays, and diaries dating from colonial times. Unlike many of his predecessors (including H. L. Mencken) who scanned such materials for humorous folkways of an illiterate people, Dillard set out looking for serious examples of a significant dialect, and he returned with evidence which suggests, not surprisingly, that wherever Afro-Americans have lived in this country aspects of their separate speech have accompanied them. For example, Tituba, the Caribbean slave whose knowledge of voodoo played a significant but little-understood part in the Salem witchcraft of the 1690's, is recorded as testifying, "I no hurt them at all," and "He tell me he God." The African term *buckra*, for "white man," which Franklin recorded in Philadelphia during the Revolution, appeared eventually in the Far West and was a probable source for the term "buckaroo."

Such bits of evidence suggest that scholars who misestimated the origins, the rationality, and the survival power of black English apparently misrepresented its geographic sweep as well. Dillard therefore turns upon the so-called dialect geographers whose regional framework has identified black English with the old Confederacy and especially with the coastal southeast. But his critique of this school is too broad and too blunt. He fails to see that people like F. G. Cassidy and R. I. McDavid, whose works on the evolution of black speech in Jamaica and South Carolina

predate his own study, were not trying to confine these dialects geographically or demean them intellectually. Instead their regional approach led them properly to the two areas, the Caribbean and the Carolina coast, where North American black speech had its most formative development among the most concentrated groups of Afro-Americans at the earliest period in time. Dillard evidences too little awareness of these demographic realities.

If Dillard's book is widely discussed, as it should be, American historians may be prodded to give linguists and others a sharper picture of the distribution and movement of black Americans over time and to demonstrate that the primary sources containing relevant linguistic data have scarcely been scratched. When this is done, unduly hostile schools of language history may become reconciled in their common pursuit of further knowledge. And the phenomenon of black English may become understood before it can be buried. Ya dig?

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Early Mesoamerican Culture

The Aztecs, Maya, and Their Predecessors. Archaeology of Mesoamerica. MURIEL PORTER WEAVER. Seminar, New York, 1972. xvi, 348 pp., illus. $11.95. Studies in Archeology.

Archeologists wishing to recommend a basic introduction to the culture history of ancient Mesoamerica have been required to specify several books, sections of specialists' summaries such as *The Handbook of Middle American Indians*, or portions of monographs devoted to larger geographical areas. With the appearance of *The Aztecs, Maya, and Their Predecessors* the need for a single introductory volume has been more than adequately met. Technically well produced and profusely illustrated, this synthesizing volume traces ". . . a history of culture events in Mesoamerica . . ." (p. 2). Relatively brief chapters are devoted to geography and linguistic relationships, early population movements, and the process of domestication. The major emphasis is on the evolution and historical development of complex societies in both Highland and Lowland zones. Weaver has chosen to use the more traditional divisions of Preclassic, Classic, and Early and Late Postclassic, rather than a sequence of developmental stages, in presenting her data. This would seem to be a wise choice since the older, basically chronological, divisions are more useful in presenting the disparate rates of evolutionary growth in the various subregions of Mesoamerica.

Weaver has attempted to present a unified picture of cultural development in Mesoamerica. How well does she succeed? Looking first at the strengths of the volume (and these are considerable), one is struck by the author's obvious familiarity with the basic resources in both Spanish and English. Current research, including work still in progress, is skillfully worked into the narrative presentation. In theoretical orientation, the book is frankly syncretic. The presentation of data on regional sequences or site development is interlarded with both small- and large-scale explanatory theories and hypotheses. Although an attempt is made to choose one or another of these explanations as more probable, the lack of a single guiding theoretical orientation or explanatory framework is evident. Ecological, materialistic, structural, and "historical" explanations are all invoked at differing times. However, although this theoretical pluralism may be uncomfortable to some researchers, it is in part because of it that the text has a richness of texture and content unmatched in single-framework or explanation-oriented works.

This volume appears at a time when regional syntheses are appearing for many portions of the New World. The increasing quantity and scope of archeological research in the Americas has been one factor involved in a shift in research priorities. In a sense, the publication of these regional syntheses marks the end of a stage of archeological research concerned with the rapid delimitation of regional cultural sequences. Building on these sequences, an increasing number of archeologists are turning to problem-oriented research concerned with reconstructing the internal structure of settlements, regions, and large-scale economic systems. More detailed questions, based on models derived from cultural ecological theory, general systems theory, and a variety of other disciplines, are being posed for testing with archeological data. Weaver is aware of these developments and devotes a whole chapter to the new explanatory frameworks and research orientations. That these approaches are not so fully integrated in her presentation reflects their relatively recent emergence in Mesoamerican archeology.

Weaver's book is an outstanding example of archeological regional integration presented in a narrative fashion. In the preface, she reports the hope expressed by a Mexican colleague that the book will be understandable. For both the nonspecialist and the Mesoamerican archeologist this goal has been admirably achieved.

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Environmental Physiology

The Effects of Pressure on Organisms. A symposium, Bangor, North Wales, Sept. 1971. MICHAEL A. SLEIGH and ALISTER G. MACDONALD, Eds. Published for the Society for Experimental Biology by Academic Press, New York, 1972. xii, 516 pp., illus. $24.50. Symposia of the Society for Experimental Biology, No. 26.

The breadth of interest in the effects of hydrostatic pressure on biological function is admirably represented in this compendium. The efforts of the symposium organizers, the editors, and the contributors have resulted in a book which should be a stimulus to research with high pressures.

The contributors to the first quarter of the book give an overview of the effects of pressure on molecular structure and function. Their chapters are judiciously referenced so that a reader can delve more deeply into the molecular effects of pressure that are discussed. It is possible to find out from these chapters what, for example, pressure does to a solubility, to a *p*H, to a hydrogen bond, or to a hydrophobic bond. A knowledge of the physical and chemical effects of pressure discussed in these chapters is essential for the formulation of hypotheses concerning some of the biological phenomena discussed in subsequent ones.

The remainder of the book deals with manifestations of the actions of high pressures on biological functions ranging from the activity of bacterial and fish enzymes to the behavior of large vertebrates. The motivation for most of these studies is to increase our understanding of the effects of naturally occurring hydrostatic pressures, up to about 1100 atmospheres in the deepest parts of the oceans. The articles in this book clearly indicate that there is