The origin of American Black English: Be- *forms in the HOODOO texts* By Traute Ewers. Ed. by Herman Wekker (review)

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The origin of American Black English: *Be*-forms in the HOODOO texts. By TRAUTE EWERS. Ed. by HERMAN WEKKER. (Topics in English 15.) Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996. Pp. xii, 327.

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Traute Ewer's book analyzes data from the so-called 'HOODOO texts' (Hyatt 1970–78), five published volumes of the transcripts of mechanically recorded interviews conducted with approximately 1,600 African Americans in 1936–40 in the eastern United States by Harry Middleton Hyatt (13 more were also carried out in 1970 in St. Petersburg, FL). Hyatt's research goals were folkloric, not linguistic; moreover, he destroyed all but one of the original 1936–40 sound recordings after the transcriptions were completed. Thus his data are useless for phonological analysis. However, because the interviews were transcribed by a person whom Hyatt termed an 'expert' transcriber (27), they do appear to offer court-reporter-quality data on the morphology, lexicon, and syntax of relatively spontaneous African-American Vernacular English from a part of the twentieth century for which a paucity of hard evidence exists. Indeed, the HOODOO data are on the whole probably more reliable than the far more famous texts known as 'The WPA ex-slave narratives' (Rawick 1972–79), 41 volumes of interviews variously and inconsistently conducted and transcribed by numerous persons in the 1930s—texts which nevertheless have served as the basis for a number of important studies of Early African American English (e.g. Brewer 1973, 1974, 1986; Schneider 1989). Moreover, the interviewees in the HOODOO texts are a generation (or more) younger than the subjects of the 'Ex-slave narratives', thus providing virtually unique data for this set of AAVE speakers. Similarly, the thirteen subjects Hyatt interviewed in 1970 must have been younger than those he interviewed in 1936–40—just how much younger cannot be determined since Hyatt recorded very limited sociological data for his informants, but the thirteen would appear to belong to a cohort that is amply represented in the sociolinguistic literature.

As E acknowledges, the foregoing information was thoroughly discussed in Viereck (1988). E repeats it again in useful detail in the opening parts of the book, a version of E's doctoral dissertation at the University of Giessen, Germany. The linguistic focus of the book likewise overlaps somewhat with Viereck's (1988) article: Both Viereck and E analyze invariant *be* in the HOODOO texts, and E looks at the distribution of other forms of *be* as well, i.e. the conjugated and zero forms of the copula and the auxiliary *be* that follows *will/would*. Viereck did not analyze the 1970 data, however, and in fact suggests in a footnote (301, n7) the very comparison that E has expanded into this book. In addition, E summarizes at great length the history of the scholarly debate on the origins of African-American Vernacular English in the United States and Canada; she also gives a synopsis of the 'divergence controversy' of the 1980s (see e.g. Bailey & Maynor 1989, Butters 1989). Furthermore, E attempts to make her analysis of *be* in the HOODOO texts shed light on those very discussions of theories of origins and convergence/divergence.

For all these goals, E meets with varying success. The book is most useful in outlining the 'origins' debates. E frames the discussion in familiar terms—'dialectologists' on the one hand, 'creolists' on the other. Her handling of this dichotomy, though, is simplistic and severe. On the one hand, the historically and theoretically extreme position of Krapp (1924) is presented as the typical 'dialectologist' position; an equally extreme and jejune paraphrase of the 'creolist' position is represented by Dillard (1972). E does cite a wealth of material that has been written on the

'origins' topics in the past 75 years, and readers are thus rewarded with what amounts to an extensive annotated bibliography of the secondary literature. Even so, few (if any) scholars today are identifiable as either of the two caricatures that E portrays as the norm—neither the Dillard-style 'it-all-comes-from-Africa' camp nor the Krapp-style 'it-all-comes-from-England' camp. It is commonly accepted that AAVE has at least some Caribbean (and African roots). It is also commonly accepted that AAVE is a variety of Southern United States English. In truth, the question is generally unrewarding: It is impossible to say for many linguistic features that either a 'creolist' or a 'dialectologist' solution is exclusively right. Further confounding the issue is a theoretical position that E does not mention at all, though one ought to do so in any truly comprehensive survey: the 'universalist' theory enunciated by Bickerton (1981). In Bickerton's view, the origin of many creole features is subject to the third interpretation that they were reinvented in response to universal language-learning tendencies and may not be borrowed either from English dialects or from African languages.

Because the 'dialectologist-versus-creolist' controversy is pretty much a nonproblem, one is not surprised at E's conclusion (239–41) that *be* in the HOODOO texts does not shed much light on whether AAVE originated in Africa or England. But there is another problem here as well, quite apart from the relationship between E's statistical results and the overall nonproblem to which she attempts to relate them. This is E's attempt at drawing conclusions about the origins of AAVE based on a comparison of Hyatt's data from 1936–40 with the much more limited data that Hyatt collected in Florida in 1970. 'Real-time' comparisons of data from points 30 years apart may be interesting in themselves; however, for purposes of projection into an era a hundred years earlier than either of them, the two bodies of data are relatively useless. E's comparisons might tell us something about the origins of AAVE only if we could be certain that decreolization took place in a very steady, unwavering, inevitable progression for every linguistic feature from early slavery days until the present—that is, only if such decreolization would inevitably be noticeable in comparing 1940s statistics with 1970s statistics. But of course there is a perfectly obvious 'creolist' explanation for why, e.g. 'the ratio of be_2 . . . is only insignificantly lower in [the 1970 data] than in the early [i.e. 1936–40] material' (239): perhaps 'decreolization' of this particular feature simply stopped before 1936 and remained stable until 1970 and thereafter.

Furthermore, any conclusions drawn from a comparison of the earlier and later Hyatt data are questionable because of differences in the ways the two sets of data were collected. The 1970 set was drawn from only 13 African-American speakers in one fairly large city in the South (19). By contrast, the 1936–40 data reports on 130 times as many subjects drawn from throughout the coastal Atlantic states and the South. Without any attempt at justification, E simply assumes that the geographical and statistical differences between the two populations are inconsequential; tests of statistical significance do not form an important part of E's methodology.

Despite such shortcomings, however, E's book deserves to be consulted in any consideration of early AAVE. One is grateful for the recurring reminder of the value of the Hyatt texts and for any addition to the generally skimpy data on the morphology of AAVE of the earlier twentieth century.

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Dramatic discourse: Dialogue as interaction in plays. By VIMALA HERMAN. London & New York: Routledge, 1995. Pp. x, 331. $69.95.

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This book focuses on 'modern discourse frameworks for the different kinds of illumination they offer with respect to the workings of dramatic speech in plays' (17). It contains an introduction and five substantive chapters, each of which reviews literature in some approach to discourse studies and subsequently applies it to language use in dramatic texts. Designed to be 'inter-disciplinary' (17), this book is meant to be appreciated by readers interested in theories and applications (especially applications in dramatic contexts) alike.

The introduction chapter states the purpose of the book, discusses such notions as *dialogue, discourse, interaction, conversation* and *utterance*, and situates drama in the context of social life but with its own specificities. It provides a contextual view of speech in drama which emphasizes that while dramatic discourse transforms written language to speech, it is more than recitation of the written texts, as it recreates situations jointly achieved by the participants and as it involves nonverbal resources. The introduction names the approaches to discourse which the rest of the book will survey and apply—ethnography of speaking, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, Gricean pragmatics, speech act theory, politeness theory, and gender studies—but does not explain what problems or phenomena in dramatic discourse motivate the use of these approaches.

The strongest chapter is Ch. 1 ('The ethnography of speaking'). It details Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model and the concept of speech event and uses these notions as tools to delineate the context of drama. It raises interesting questions such as how deixis anchors the participants within the spatiotemporal coordinates of speech events; how space and time are verbalized in drama to serve as two grammatical coordinates that ground speech; how setting integrates with participant framework as some contexts define the participant roles that are appropriate to them; how agency, liability, and distribution of participant roles are managed in drama; how fictional time and audience time are grammaticalized in/through drama; and more generally, how discourse/interaction and performance/reception mutually embed each other: These various issues are richly illustrated with works by both classical and contemporary dramatists.

The goal of Ch. 2 ('Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis') and Ch. 3 ('Turn sequencing') appears to be to summarize the major findings of conversation analysis (CA) and to examine how some of the conversational structural mechanisms work in drama. Ch. 2 reviews literature and focuses on turn-taking; Ch. 3 concentrates on various sequence organizations. Compared with other chapters, the survey of literature in these two chapters is sketchy. Key concepts such as turns, turn-taking, and turn-constructional-units are explained not through the original CA