

folk, to pry into their neighbors' affairs gave us the verb *snoep* ...'.

But, whatever the intrinsic interest of this section of the book, it is not comprehensive. And, if Mr Claiborne must drop a brick such as: 'The vehicle that most of us drive about in is a car to most Americans and Canadians, but a *cah* in New York ... and God only knows what in Sydney or Cape Town', the natural reaction is: 'He *ought* to know. If he doesn't, how can he comment competently on dialects?'

A sporadic failing is Mr Claiborne's love of the colloquial. This has resulted in misfortunes such as: 'Second, I would be prepared to bet that not one of them' ('vulgar' words) 'will be unfamiliar to any twelve-year-old kid of normal intelligence'; and 'A foreigner confronted with such goings on is likely to feel rather like the drunk in the old vaudeville sketch who keeps wandering on and off stage where two other actors are making with the jokes'; and 'John was unquestionably the nastiest piece of work ever to occupy the English throne'.

The last two chapters of the book are lively. The second-last is an analysis of jargon. The last considers the civil war between those advocating 'permissive' and those campaigning for 'prescriptive' English. Mr Claiborne also suggests reasons for the decline of literacy in the United States.

As the author says, his is not a book for the expert or the more advanced university student. But, despite its deficiencies, it may prove a stimulant for those nibbling or having to nibble at the remarkable history of English.

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E.S.C. WEINER. *THE OXFORD MINIGUIDE TO ENGLISH USAGE*. OXFORD: AT THE CLARENDON PRESS, 1963. XXIII + 412 pp. PAPERBACK. R3,95.

This pocket-size guide contains an amazing amount and variety of information. It is not intended for those learning English as a second language but for the average English speaker, who may have an unexpected difficulty. As the compiler states in his preface:

'it covers the known areas of difficulty and controversy, leaving aside those areas of the English language that cause most native speakers no trouble'.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I, Word Formation, 'is concerned with the ways in which the forms of English words and word elements change or vary'. Some of the problems discussed are: when to use capital letters (p. 9), the dropping of a silent e before a suffix (p. 14), the use of hyphens (p. 26), the suffixes -er or -or (p. 34), formation of plurals (p. 40) and the possessive case (p. 46). A list of difficult spellings not already mentioned concludes Part I. All the entries in this section and throughout the book are in alphabetical order.

Part II deals with Pronunciation. The pronunciations accepted as correct are those which occur in Received Pronunciation, 'being that used by educated speakers in southern England'. The author writes at some length on the subject of stress in English words. In many words the stress is moving from the first syllable to the second. In such words as *reseàrch*, *romànce*, *recèss* the stress is on the second syllable. This change is in process of occurring in such words as *combat* and *harass*. The writer emphasises that the practice of stressing the first syllable is common in America. In his list of preferred pronunciations the author has marked forms which must be avoided and forms which have two acceptable pronunciations.

The section on *Vocabulary* deals not only with the meaning of words but, if necessary, with their derivation and the grammatical construction which can appropriately be used with them. Numerous examples illustrating the use of words are drawn from well-known authors. Certain words are discussed in great detail: for example, the word 'only' merits a page and a half of explanation. The writer rejects certain much used phrases such as 'ongoing situation' although he accepts 'ongoing' when it specifically designates something that is happening now and will continue to happen. He elucidates the thorny problem of which preposition should follow the adjective 'different'. 'From' is acceptable in all contexts, 'than' is an Americanism. 'To' may be used in informal speech when 'yoked with similar and followed by a phrase introduced by "to"'.

Part IV, the final section, deals with specific grammatical problems. The writer makes no attempt to deal with English grammar systematically. He has tried, wherever possible, to avoid abstract labels, using headings that include the words under discussion. Thus under *as*, *case following* he points out that the subjective (nominative) case must follow 'as' in a sentence expressing comparison (He is as tall as I). Another

heading *may or might* introduces an explanation of when and in what type of sentences these auxiliaries occur. It is not always possible to avoid grammatical nomenclature as headings such as *article, omission of and gender of indefinite expressions* attest. All the problems listed are common ones and the explanations given are lucid and amply illustrated.

The book has three appendices: one on the Principles of Punctuation; one on Clichés and Inflated Diction and one on Overseas English. The section on Inflated Diction is very useful indeed as it includes the many overworked and unnecessary words that are creeping into South African English. Examples are 'basically' used as a 'space filler', 'at this point in time' for 'now', 'loved ones' for 'relatives', 'methodology' for 'method', 'the name of the game' and many other kinds of wordiness which are encroaching on good English diction. Two indexes, a word index and a subject index, complete the book. At the beginning of the book there is also a useful guide to grammatical terms.

The book is a work of reference and its recommendations have the authoritative backing of the Oxford English Dictionary Department of the O.U.P. Its compiler has shown great skill in his choice of problems to discuss. He has also achieved his objective of making his explanations simple and straightforward. It is an excellent book for English speaking High School students as it deals with so many of the vocabulary and syntactical problems which confront them. The book is also useful for teachers of English who may have an occasional difficulty with, for example, the pronunciation of 'controversy' or 'primarily' and the modern usage of 'shall' and 'will'. The arrangement of the book necessarily involves some overlapping. For example, aspects of the plural of nouns are mentioned under Word Formation (p. 40) and briefly under Pronunciation (p. 110), and references to the Subjective occur several times under different headings. However, the index is so comprehensive that there is no difficulty in finding the section wanted.

The compiler's determination to be thorough has led to his including in his lists of examples certain words so rarely used that the less confident student might feel that the book was too difficult for him. 'Aubade' and 'saccade' appear as examples of words in which 'ade' is pronounced as in 'calm' (p. 76), and it is difficult to imagine any English speaker using the word rendezvouses (3rd per. sing. Present Tense) or the participle 'rendezvousing' (p. 14).

These are minor points. The book is an outstanding contribution to the literature of English usage.

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WILLIAM DOWNES. *LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY*. LONDON: FONTANA, 1984. 384 pp. PAPERBACK, R14,95.

Sociolinguistics has come to mean more things to more men since the sharp definition given it in the 1960's by William Labov. It is necessary, therefore, to know what sociolinguistics means to an author whose book purports in title to straddle the field. For Downes sociolinguistics is 'that branch of linguistics which studies those properties of language which require reference to social, including contextual, factors in their explanation' (p. 15). He identifies the social factors entering into such explanation as of two main types. First, the 'large-scale' factors located in social categories within society such as those determined by age, geography, etc. The second is less obvious: small-scale interaction between individuals using language. For Downes, sociolinguistics includes discourse analysis (pragmatics, conversational analysis, etc). The connection between the two types of social factor lies in the fact that both are 'rule-following' behaviour. The rules of 'large-scale factors' lie in the power of normative behaviour. An utterance uttered and understood in its particular context is governed by similar rules. It 'counts as an activity' by virtue of rules constraining discourse, i.e. norms shared by speakers and hearers 'make it possible to understand what act it is'.

Culture is said to be a system of rules governing human activity making it intelligible for participants. In patterns of variability in society (i.e. large-scale factors) the choosing of a pronunciation variant, for example, is guided or directed by a rule which derives from social meaning associated with competing norms. It is important to realize what 'norm' means for Downes:

A norm ... is not a statistical average of actual behaviour but rather a cultural (shared) definition of desirable behaviour. (p. 215)