

# ENGLISH IN THE ISLAND WORLDS

GERHARD LEITNER

The Atlantic, the Pacific or even the Indian Oceans are full of islands many of which were uninhabited when Asian, Arab or European colonizers set foot on them. Madagascar has become francophone, Fiji with a population of less than one million has ten languages, all originating in migration. New Zealand was fairly homogeneous when the Maori settled it but recent migrations have made it highly multilingual. Unsurprisingly, islands have been and are attractive sites for research on the development of languages. Derek Bickerton's bioprogram postulated a universal language acquisition device that would be activated in children to create a new language, a creole, from an adult pidgin. The main sites of exemplification were colonial plantations many of which were on islands. Peter Trudgill (2004) claims that new Englishes can and did grow mechanistically, without appeal to social factors in situations of extreme language homogeneity but in the presence of dialect diversity. His example was New Zealand where the demographic strength was allegedly mainly responsible for bringing about the two islands' English once the baseline was taken over by children. Not all islands were or ever have been isolated sites. Quite the contrary, many were sites of extreme population movement. One only needs to mention the South-East Asian island world of Indonesia. Even islands like Pitcairn, the settlement of the mutineers of the "Bounty", were not quite so isolated, though thousands of miles away from other civilizations. The mixed settlers were found, by pure chance, but they refused to be taken on board to New Zealand or Australia, and were subsequently visited by protestant religious groups regularly. A number of the islander group moved on to another island, Norfolk, a former penal prison settlement where they remained reasonably isolated until Australia annexed it at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And, of course, the Caribbean islands or today's Bermuda were hardly ever lonely places. Many were first stops for slaves from America before they were sold on to American slave-holders. Islands became, in other words, worlds of their own or of transit but worlds with an identity.

The concept of "insular areas" is a way of looking at new varieties of English. Three papers in this volume mirror an island context. Leitner

gives a comprehensive account of the main issues pertaining the development of postcolonial varieties which consequently generates pluricentricity in different habitats. Roberto Masone deals with a small Caribbean island to look at poetry, while Katherine E. Russo takes a large one, Australia, and turns to print media.

Being a case study, Masone's methodology derives from post-colonial theory and is inspired by the poetry of Marlene NourbeSe Phillip. He shows clearly how that author subverts the English language to express identities. In contrast, Russo chooses one newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, to study the nativization of English and the change of the language. She develops two sizeable topic-focused corpora that come from the two political major contenders in the early 2000s, i.e., the conservative Prime Minister, John Howard and later the Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. Howard refused to apologize to Australia's Aborigines and wanted to focus on practical improvements. Kevin Rudd did apologize but he was accused of non-delivery, a foreseeable allegation for making promises made or raising expectations without meeting them. Russo's corpora have very different political backgrounds but the main purpose of her study is to identify words that have undergone semantic change and now incorporate Aboriginal meanings. She can show convincingly that the frequency of use does differentiate political standpoints but that neither can work against language change. Both use words with Aboriginal meanings.

Masone's paper is deeply embedded in post-colonial thinking. The book is, for want of a better word, a collection of poems that draw on multi-medial techniques, but she is well able to bring the texts to life.

Being so different, they show how much there is to study and we are sure, readers will enjoy them.