

REVIEW

by Maria-Pilar PEREA

Universitat de Barcelona*

mpilar.perea@ub.edu

WEGMANN, Monika (2016) *Language in Space: The Cartographic Representation of Dialects*, Strasbourg: Éditions de linguistique et de philologie, 317 pp.

Monika Wegmann's book *Language in Space: The Cartographic Representation of Dialects* aims, on the one hand, to demonstrate that there are no clearly defined linguistic borders in the East and South-East of England; and, on the other hand, to offer an alternative method to create dialectal maps without drawing borders.

To carry out her objectives the author has analysed the materials derived from four researches: the *Survey of English Dialects* (SED), *The Linguistic Atlas of England* (LAE), René Kontic's investigations on the *Dialects in East-Anglia and the South-East of England* and *The Computer Developed Linguistic Atlas of England* (CLAE).

The work includes an introduction and final conclusions in addition to an appendix where several maps and graphs illustrate her research. They complement the cartographic representations that appear in the different chapters of the book. The core of the book is found in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Regarding the method used to perform the different cartographic representations of the dialects of the area studied, Wegmann divides her study into three large parts: a diachronic ("A Diachronic Comparison of Maps and Methods") and two synchronic (the first, based on Hans Kurath's works, from whose results the author proposes an alternative representation, and the second, of quantitative nature, based on the achievements of the dialectometric studies developed in the Salzburg school and directed by Professor Hans Goebel. The results, therefore, offer an overview of the

* Department de Filologia Catalana i Lingüística General, Facultat de Filologia, Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, 585, 08007 Barcelona, Spain.

development of cartographic representations of English dialects from the last half of the 19th century until the early 21st century.

Before presenting the achievements and shortcomings of the various cartographic approaches, Wegmann carefully examines the concept of isogloss, a term which has aroused some controversy in its use for the delimitation of dialectal borders, since its application often depends on the materials under study, the selection of linguistic items or features, the interpretation of the data and, in some cases, the cartographic technique used to draw this abstract dividing line.

The diachronic part (chapter 2) is divided into two sections. The first, based on the relationship that could exist between the English dialects and the ancient tribes that populated the territory, offers methodological progression from the approaches by Louis Lucien Bonaparte, Alexander J. Ellis and Joseph Wright. The historical and linguistic aspects are examined in all cases. The second section, which studies the dialectal situation in the 1950s and afterwards, analyses Peter Trudgill's proposals that appear in the first edition of his book *The Dialects of England* (1990).

The synchronic part is mainly based on data from the SED and the LAE. The problem arises in relation with the choice of linguistic features, which do not always belong to the four levels of language (phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical) and are numerically equivalent. Various comparisons are made between the different sort of maps and the procedural problems are analysed: the value of the four levels of language discussed, the weight of the isoglosses, the distinction between more important and less important isoglosses, etc. In this same chapter, the author is based on René Kontic's maps (1990), which do not clearly define dialect boundaries in the East and South-East of England because these areas proved to be too heterogeneous. A second method used by Kontic recalls Jean Séguy's initial dialectometric techniques and is based on statistics.

Given that the lack of homogeneity between the areas studied and that the isoglosses drawn in the different works do not show the real internal variability of the areas, Wegmann offers an alternative proposal, not definitive at all, which shows the value of uniformity rather than diversity in order to find local and transition areas instead of abrupt dialectal boundaries.

Before the author starts to explain the quantitative proposal in chapter 4, chapter 3 examines the distribution of five phonological features, since the study is centred in the field of phonology. This option contradicts the criticisms that Wegmann had made up until then, since she reproached both the selection of the features, which had to be chosen at random, and the reduction of the study to the field of phonology, since the four areas of language would have to be taken into consideration. Her justification in this part of the book is not entirely convincing. The five items studied are extracted from SED are: a) /ʊ/ vs /ʌ/ distinction (*brother, butter*, etc.); b) /j/-dropping (*few, nephew*, etc.); c) /l/-vocalization (*April, funnel*, etc.); d) /h/-dropping (*hair, hand*, etc.); e) loss of rhoticity (*arm, forks*, etc.); and h/-dropping and loss of rhoticity combined.

It is in the final part of the chapter 3 where Wegmann justifies the possibility of including randomly chosen features of all levels of language. Different maps lead her to ratify her hypothesis – the non-existence of clearly defined dialect boundaries in the East and South-East of England. The maps indicate the areas showing least variability. Thus, her aim is to determine linguistic proximity by maximal uniformity. Note that this assertion is the opposite of the measure of “linguistic distance”, sought by Chambers & Trudgill (1998) and some dialectometrical approaches.

In chapter 4, SED materials combined with CLAE dataset are treated using computer-supported quantitative approaches. Dialectometry is defined and examined as a resource for surpassing traditional qualitative mapping techniques. Wegmann has adapted the VDM program designed by Goebel to her data. She describes all the processes concerning the treatment of data, such as the similarity and distance matrices. The resulting visualizations of this technique offer maps that are able to show not only surface structures but deeper ones, an aspect that was impossible to appreciate in conventional isogloss maps. Different sorts of maps resulting from applying the VDM program are analysed: interpoint and similarity maps as well the similarity distributions using several colours and the dendrogrammatic Cluster map.

Finally, conclusions confirm Wegmann’s objectives and show the importance of quantitative methods (dialectometry) in showing a new spatial interpretation in English dialectology. The problems that arise in this work linked to the spatial structure

of the language are common both in Romance and German linguistics for more than a century. The author's excellent work raises other questions that can be applied to all dialectal studies: the need to avoid subjectivity in the selection and interpretation of data, the controversy generated by isoglosses as a method to determine linguistic areas, the importance of transition areas, which discard abrupt boundaries and facilitate the determination of a dialectal continuum, the focus on the general aspects rather than the particular, the value of quantitative methods in the study of dialectal varieties, which facilitate the recognition of both superficial and deeper language structures.

The last assertion of the conclusions: "It can be concluded that the common notion of clearly defined dialect boundaries, which seems to preoccupy the minds of both laymen and dialectologists, must be based on psychological or subjective factors rather than linguistic reality," might suggest that the determination of dialect boundaries is closer to the approach given by perceptual dialectology, which mainly uses maps in order to examine folk perceptions of dialect boundaries that can be compared with traditional linguistic definitions.

References

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