E&F focus on the syntax of Anglicized Norse but they conclude with some ideas about its phonology.

Historians of English are indebted to E&F for raising big, new questions that will stimulate new work invigorating the field and leading to new conclusions that will have consequences for other areas of research, for the histories of other languages, for generalizations about language contact, and about the way that syntax may change across generations. Rewriting the history of English will not go unresisted, but traditionalists now have much to contend with. E&F have made a substantial contribution to our understanding of the history of English; it will be interesting to see how the coming debates pan out.

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African American slang: A linguistic description. By MACIEJ WIDAWSKI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. 296. ISBN 9781107074170. $105 (Hb).

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Maciej Widawski's *African American slang* uniquely pairs a dictionary with a linguistic description of lexical patterns in African American slang. Together, both parts display the dialect's vast lexicon and also affirm that African American slang is a rule-governed system. Throughout the main text and the glossary, W cites over 5,000 examples from a wide range of modern and diverse resources, including movies, articles, and TV series. His study provides an easy-to-follow guide for an audience of linguists and nonlinguists alike.

This book contributes to the study of African American English by providing a detailed linguistic description of morphological, semantic, and pragmatic patterns in African American slang. While researchers have produced linguistic descriptions of the dialect's phonology and

morphosyntactic properties, no single work has previously focused on exploring the 'patterns of form, meaning, themes and functions of African American Slang' (xi). In doing so, this book represents a step toward understanding more of the dialect's patterns and disputing claims that African American slang is linguistically deficient in comparison to standard English.

My review summarizes the introduction and the book's five chapters, offering critiques along the way. Overall, W convincingly shows the reader that African American slang is rule-governed, displaying many of the same patterns found in American slang and standard English more generally. Most of my concerns raised are with respect to methodology, given the potentially controversial nature of what to include in a dictionary.

Ch. 1 (1–18) lays the foundation of the book by focusing on intent, terminology, and methodology. Importantly, W emphasizes that this work is intended to be descriptive and empirical. In regards to terminology, he defines two important concepts: AFRICAN AMERICAN and SLANG. W draws on Baugh's (2001:709) definition of 'African American' as referring to those who have a direct relationship to the linguistic legacy of slavery in the United States. He goes on to describe other terms used by researchers to discuss the speech of African Americans, such as Afro-American Vernacular English, Black Vernacular English, and Ebonics. Importantly, this section defines who the speakers of the dialect are, the coiners and users of African American slang.

Slang is defined across several dimensions, including its informality (Thorne 1990:iii), emotional expressivity (Chapman 1986:xii–xiv), ability to mark group identification (Eble 1996:11), its rhetorical affect (Dumas & Lighter 1978:5–17), and its development and dissemination across groups (Coleman 2012:26–116). W combines these ideas into a single definition (which he adapted from Widawski & Kowalczyk 2012:18) as follows:

> Slang is a highly informal and unconventional type of vocabulary. It is perceived as deeply expressive, attractively catchy, and deliberately undignified. It consists of standard expressions modified in some way or appended with new meanings, and sometimes of entirely novel expressions. Slang is coined chiefly by members of social, occupational, or ethnic groups which are typically separate from mainstream society, yet it is often adopted by larger social segments. It is employed in place of standard expressions to convey some extra information of a psychological, social or rhetorical nature. It thus provides alternative, highly informal synonyms for referents already named in the language, but sometimes gives names for referents for which there are no standard expressions, or which have yet to be named. (8)

This invites a larger question about what formality means. With little discussion of formality in the book, this definition assumes speakers use slang only in informal situations. Readers are not informed of the possibility that speakers who use African American slang may also do so in situations they perceive to be formal. Furthermore, not all slang words evoke the same levels of formality. For example, Major (1994) discusses the fact that African American speech and slang have contributed to formal American English, citing the movement of words like *afro*, *attitude*, and *bad* into mainstream formal language. Thus, it is unclear what 'informal' means and whether every African American slang word can be characterized as such.

W goes on to discuss his methodology for collecting expressions. In this section, he explains where he collected data and his criteria for including and excluding expressions. Slang expressions used in this book could have their origins inside the African American community or outside of it, but W prioritized usage over origins. He thus turned to African American sources like magazines, films, songs, internet blogs, and conversations with African American students, but also included sources that are 'non-African', such as *USA Today* and *The Simpsons*. The latter were used to assess the 'crossover' terms. There is no explicit notation, however, for words that are crossover terms in the main text or glossary. The use of 'non-African' sources raises a concern about how W decided which general American slang terms to include and exclude. W says that there were borderline cases for which the origins are unclear, though the expression may be associated with one group or another. In these cases, REPRESENTATIVENESS was the criterion that mattered most. In other words, W ensured that the expressions were used by African Americans or typically identified as African American slang. In addition to making sure the items included were representative, W also focused on including expressions that were up to date by mostly

using sources that were no older than ten years old. He notes that slang is fluid: some expressions can change quickly, while others are resistant to change.

While representativeness is a useful criterion to decide what should and should not be included, it is possible that the representativeness of words could have been affected by the sources W chose. W drew more on scripted and published sources, and less on ethnographic sources, though he did pull items from conversations with African American students. As a result, it is unclear if the representativeness of the sample actually reflects what speakers produce in natural speech. W does insist, however, that he sought to collect slang expressions where they were most used.

Moving beyond the sources, W next provides readers with more information about the lexical database he created. He selected 5,500 citations for analysis, with 1,000 citations used in the main text and 4,500 used in the glossary. All of the lexical material was compared against existing work on African American slang, such as Geneva Smitherman's *Black talk* (2000) and Clarence Major's *Juba to jive: A dictionary of African American slang* (1994). It was also compared against dictionaries of American slang, such as Barbara Kipfer and Robert Chapman's *Dictionary of American slang* (2010) and Jonathon Green's *Green's dictionary of slang* (2010). Though the latter two are not dictionaries devoted solely to African American slang, they include entries identified as slang from African American English.

As mentioned above, the book has two components: the linguistic description of African American slang, and the glossary. In each chapter of the main text (Chs. 2–5), W clearly defines the linguistic processes of interest and identifies four to eight examples of each process from his database of African American slang. For each example provided in the main text, there is a translation of the expression into standard English, followed by a citation. This method of describing African American slang enables someone with little to no linguistic experience to read this book with ease. In the glossary, each entry includes a headword, followed by its grammatical category, a usage label, a standard English definition, and citations.

Ch. 2, 'Forms', focuses on describing the formation of new words in African American slang. Such word-building processes include combining, shifting, shortening, blending, borrowing, and creating. W walks the reader through each of these terms and includes subclasses of each process. For example, 'combining', a word-building process, encompasses compounding, affixation, and the building of words to form phrases with a fixed meaning. When describing these linguistic processes, W considers various explanations as to why the processes occur. He frequently points to examples of these patterns in Standard English as well. This technique is useful because it shows the regularity of these processes across the language, not just in African American slang. It also advances W's point that African American slang is not linguistically deficient.

Ch. 3, 'Meanings', explores how the meanings of words are transformed in African American slang. This is particularly done through figuration and semantic shifting. Figuration involves metaphor and metonymy and is a process through which words accrue meanings that are less literal. Semantic shifting includes generalization, specialization, melioration, and pejoration. The former two refer to denotative meanings becoming more or less general, while the latter two refer to the connotation becoming more or less favorable over time. As in the previous chapter, W discusses the meanings of these terms and includes examples where the process happens in African American slang and in standard English. He asserts that the productivity of these semantic processes, which are often found in poetry, is a testament to the linguistic creativity in African American slang. Establishing this point provides more evidence against claims that African American slang is semantically impoverished in comparison to standard English.

Ch. 4, 'Themes', explores important themes in African American slang, which are split into two categories. The first set includes themes that are common to American slang, while the second includes themes that are specific to the African American experience. Common themes include the human body, physiology, sexuality, alcohol, drugs, and categorization. More specific themes include expressions connected to African Americans, racism, whites, violence, entertainment, luxury, and geography. Examples of each theme are provided from his lexical corpus of African American slang.

Ch. 5 describes the social functions of African American slang. W explains that these expressions convey 'extra information, whether social, psychological, rhetorical or cultural' (123). Socially, slang functions as a form of identification, rebellion, and secrecy. Psychologically, it expresses emotions, humor, or toughness. As for its rhetorical nature, slang can function as a form of stylization or imitation and is known for its conciseness and forcefulness. Lastly, slang serves a cultural function in which the use of certain terms can carry cultural-specific information. Using the same approach he did in other chapters, W walks the reader through a discussion of each term and follows up with examples in African American slang. This chapter is especially important because it delves into the reasons why speakers, whether African American English speakers or not, employ African American slang in their speech.

The conclusion provides summaries of each chapter. Importantly, W hopes that readers will walk away from this book with a greater appreciation for African American slang as an innovative and rule-governed sociolinguistic phenomenon. Despite the concerns that I have raised, W successfully creates a text that thoroughly examines the morphological, semantic, and pragmatic patterns of African American slang. As mentioned above, as the only book that incorporates both a comprehensive description of the lexicon and a glossary of terms, it is in a league of its own.

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