

12-2006

Review of: Beginning Creek (Mvskoke emponvkv)

Edward J. Vajda

Western Washington University, edward.vajda@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vajda, Edward J., "Review of: Beginning Creek (Mvskoke emponvkv)" (2006). *Modern & Classical Languages*. 26.
http://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs/26

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern & Classical Languages by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

and their meaning, as the latter is defined in terms of their use. He focuses on constructions that frequently cause difficulties as far as their acquisition by L2 learners is concerned. He tries to combine a structural approach to the system with a detailed presentation of the forms' function. The system of terminology used is not the traditional one. He chooses to name the various forms by the combination of their aspect and tense properties, and he avoids terms such as aorist and aorist subjunctive, which have no clear meaning and reference in the system. The use of the terms *gerund* and *infinite* instead of present participle and infinitive is also welcome.

The book opens with a very brief introduction regarding the terminology adopted and the sources of the material presented. The inflectional categories in MG are introduced in Ch. 2, whereas agreement is exemplified in Ch. 3. The opposition between active and medio-passive voice is discussed in Ch. 4. Ch. 5 focuses on aspect, tense, and mood. In Ch. 6, H offers some introductory remarks about the particles *tha*, *na*, and *as*, followed by a discussion of *tha* and its use in conjunction with aspect and the perfect tenses. Ch. 8 explores the use of *na* in a variety of structural environments. The use of indirect speech is presented in Ch. 9. Finally, the last chapter focuses on the use of negative particles.

H offers a wide range of data on the particles' constructions. Their different uses are exemplified effectively. Nevertheless, the discussion in the first five chapters is neither as interesting as the chapters on the particles' use nor as well explained. Although rich exemplification is offered in each case, the general discussion is superficial, not as straightforward as expected, and requires advanced (prior) knowledge of the language. This is exactly the point that defeats the author's purposes. It requires L2 learners to have an excellent command of the language. Otherwise, the material is very hard to comprehend.

Moreover, he classifies terms according to their inflectional properties: aspect (imperfective, perfective, perfect), tense, and mood. He bases his description of the system on the aspect distinction. The forms are first classified in terms of their aspectual properties, and then in combination with tense. He recognizes only the imperative mood, the forms of which are presented in relation to their aspectual properties. A welcome presentation is the discussion of aspect neutralization of these forms.

The presentation of voice in terms of transitivity, however, is misleading and obscure in some cases. Additionally, the presentation of subjunctive syntagms with an order meaning during the discussion of the imperative forms defies the principles of his system. The inclusion of these forms in the discussion of imperatives follows a functional-use criterion and not a structural one.

Finally, there is a major misunderstanding in the presentation of the negative forms: he includes the

conjunction/complementizer *mi*, which is completely unrelated to the negative *mi(n)*. This complementizer introduces complement clauses with no negative value; the content of these clauses is presupposed by the main verb.

Overall, the book is purely descriptive in nature. H does not account theoretically for the constructions he discusses. Nevertheless, it could be used as a relatively good reference for data purposes. [ALEXANDRA GALANI, *University of York*.]

Beginning Creek (Mvskoke emponkv).

By PAMELA INNES, LINDA ALEXANDER, and BERTHA TILKENS. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004. Pp. xviii, 254. ISBN 0806135832. \$29.95.

This introductory course is aimed at speakers who wish to maintain and pass on their ancestral language. Each chapter begins with a straightforward explanation of the concepts covered, so even students with no formal linguistic training will find the presentation easy to follow. At the same time, the material is sophisticated enough to be of illustrative value to typologists as well. The inclusion of morpheme glosses beneath most example sentences should be particularly welcome to the serious linguist.

Produced through collaboration between a professional linguist (Pamela Innes) and two native speakers (Linda Alexander and Bertha Tilkens), the text balances linguistic detail with basic cultural information about the Creek (Muskogee) and Seminole (Micosukee) peoples who traditionally spoke closely related dialects of the same language. Two CDs reproduce much of the vocabulary and exercises found at the end of each of the book's eleven chapters. Along with samplings of ceremonial songs, speeches, and stories, the recordings provide valuable examples of native pronunciation and help render the book usable for self-study.

All examples appear in the Latin-based alphabet used to write Modern Creek. This orthography is explained in the introductory chapter and further exemplified in the audio recordings. Because the standard writing system does not indicate the language's complex system of prosodic tones, the CDs are especially crucial for conveying the basic phonology.

The book's remaining ten chapters cover form-class derivation, the expression of basic grammatical relations, and the intricacies of finite verb morphology. The sequential presentation of information on verb structure—by far the language's most challenging facet, alongside the tonal pronunciation—is especially successful pedagogically. Students gain a thorough overview of the verb's complex polypersonal stative-active system of affixes, as well as of its system of internally expressed tenses and aspects.

Chapters also deal with negative and interrogative affixes in the verb complex, as well as with the expression of subject and direct object noun phrases in both their definite and indefinite forms. Perhaps the book's chief omission is the lack of any systematic description of adpositions and oblique nominal functions of various sorts.

Each chapter is styled as a sort of lesson that concludes with a vocabulary list, a series of drills or exercises, and a brief excursus into some aspect of traditional society or culture. There is also a suggested reading section that points the student to additional sources on the grammatical and cultural topics covered in the given chapter. The book ends with a general bibliography, and Creek-English and English-Creek glossaries that usefully identify verbs as stative or active and also mark which verbs take dative prefixes.

Users will find *A dictionary of Creek/Muskogee* (Jack B. Martin and Margaret McKane Mauldin, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000) to be an invaluable accompanying reference. Another useful pedagogical resource, regrettably omitted in the bibliography, is the brief audio course, *Introduction to Muskogee (Creek)* (compiled by the Kialagee Tribal Town with speaker James Wesley, Richardson, TX: Various Indian Peoples Publishing Company, 1999).

Overall, this affordably priced course is highly recommended for anyone wishing to master basic Muskogee language structure. [EDWARD J. VAJDA, *Western Washington University*.]

Bardi grubs and frog cakes: South Australian words. By DOROTHY JAUNCEY. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. 244. ISBN 095517709. \$25.

This engagingly written book is intended for the general reader. Dorothy Jauncey introduces 500 words and phrases used in the Australian state of South Australia (SA), which was founded in 1836. Her book follows others published by Oxford University Press, based on the Australian National Dictionary Centre's (ANDC) large database of written Australian English, for example, *The Australian national dictionary: A dictionary of Australianisms on historical principles* (AND; ed. by William S. Ramson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) and others on Australian regionalisms. While the state boundary division may seem artificial, SA has been argued to constitute a separate area for lexical variation (e.g. *Regional variation in the lexicon of Australian English*, by Pauline Bryant, Canberra: Australian National University dissertation, 1992).

For each word or phrase J provides at least one example and an account of its history. The range of semantic domains is good—words for food are well

represented and include *jubilee cake* and *Kitchener bun*, which did not make it into the AND. The discussion of words derived from Aboriginal languages improves on earlier work based on the ANDC database (*Australian Aboriginal words in English: Their origin and meaning*, by R. M. W. Dixon, W. S. Ramson, and Mandy Thomas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). The words are discussed in seven thematic sections: words derived from Aboriginal languages, from the establishment of the colony, from the nineteenth-century Cornish miners and German settlers, from farming and wine-growing, from the settling of the remote areas, and from everyday life. A vivid portrait is drawn of the history of the state.

The widespread belief that there is little dialect variation in Australia (except for dialects of English spoken by Indigenous Australians) is borne out by the difficulty J has had in coming up with 500 words and phrases that are uniquely South Australian (apart from shibboleths like *Murray magpie*, *pie floater*, *Salvation Jane*, *stobie pole*). Her solution includes choosing:

- a. words that are no longer used (e.g. nineteenth-century land tenure terms). These will be of use to historians.
- b. place-names (e.g. the concentration camp *Baxter*, which she defines as 'An abbreviation of Baxter Detention Centre, . . . purpose-built to house asylum seekers in Australia' (169)).
- c. words first used in SA but now generally used (*witchetty grub*)
- d. words used elsewhere in Australia but important in SA (these include opal-mining terms, wine-growing terms, and some plants and animals, as well as phrases like *fruit fly free*, which is compositional in meaning). Some (e.g. *camel trek*) are general English. But generally these words and the discussion of them enhance the social and historical interest of the book.
- e. sets of related words, for example, *noodle*, *noodler*, *noodling* (an opal-mining term)
- f. words of Aboriginal languages reported in ethnographic and semi-ethnographic texts such as explorers' books (e.g. *marloo* 'kangaroo'). In this she follows the AND's practice, although they have little currency outside the language group.

Some features limit the usefulness for linguists, but probably make it friendlier for a general audience. The examples given for each word are illustrative rather than being the earliest recording, and sources are not provided for much of the historical information. Pauline Bryant's findings on regional variation are not discussed, although the *peanut paste* example is drawn from it. (This word is not distinctively South Australian; it is claimed as a Queensland word by the Peanut Company of Australia (<http://www.pca.com.au/articles.php?rc=441>).) Pronunci-