

TODD, Loretto and Ian HANCOCK (Eds.) (1990) : *International English Usage*, New York, New York University Press

Brenda Hosington

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■ TODD, Loretto and Ian HANCOCK (Eds.) (1990): *International English Usage*, New York, New York University Press.

This guide to written and spoken English offers a comprehensive study, in convenient alphabetised form, of usage throughout the English-speaking world. It is a manual that treats problems of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, punctuation and style. In short, all anyone needs to know about English usage.

Its contribution to a field already well stocked with books on composition and grammar, particularly in the United States, is its coverage of all the main varieties of English used throughout the world. It has separate entries, for example, for Black English, Singapore English, Kenyan English, which it describes succinctly but on the whole satisfactorily. However, it also points up regional differences between usage of certain words such as “loan,” used in American English as both verb and noun but in British English as a noun only, or the confusing “hire, lease, let, rent” family of words, which differs once again in UK and US usage. It also covers social and stylistic variations like “formal English,” for example.

The explanations of linguistic terms like “variable” and “variety,” “transformational grammar” and “speaker orientation,” and those of grammatical features such as “tense” and “mood,” are clearly explained in terms that undergraduate students would easily understand. There are also, of course, more trendy items like “gender” and “sexist language.”

While this book would be useful to anglophones, its real value lies in its appeal to non-native speakers. Word choice, always a difficult problem that is often not resolved by recourse to dictionaries, is definitely made easier by having a manual such as this to hand. Difficulties are sometimes entered separately, as for example the pair “off/of,” “everyone/every one,” but there are also long entries for “problem pairs” and “problem words,” which explain very clearly examples such as “adept/adopt,” “ascetic/acetic” and words that are often misused like “hoi polloi” and “rationalise.”

Easy to use, particularly since there is a welcome alphabetical index, informative and clearly presented, this is an admirable book for all students of the English language.

BRENDA HOSINGTON
Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada