Robert E. Vann. *Materials for the Sociolinguistic Description and Corpus-Based Study of Spanish in Barcelona. Toward a Documentation of Colloquial Spanish in Naturally Occurring Groups, with a Foreword by Montserrat Casanovas Catalá*, 2009, xvi + 263 pages, 16 tables and 2 maps. The Edwid Mellen Press, Lewiston, Queenston & Lampeter.

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The book reviewed here starts with a Table of Contents, a List of Tables, and a List of Illustrations (both not included in the Table of Content) on unnumbered pages; they are followed by a Foreword by Montserrat Casanovas Catalá (i-vii), the author's Acknowledgements (p. xiii), and an Introduction (1-9). It is divided into two parts.

Part one of the book, called "*Critical introduction to the Vann Corpus*", comprises 6 chapters. Chapter 1 (13-39) gives a brief history of the political economy of language in Catalonia. Vann describes the historical formation of Catalan *habitus* (in Bourdieu's terminology) from early history to the post-Franco years and examines the Catalan linguistic *habitus* and market in contemporary Catalonia. Chapter 2 (41-58) deals with language ideologies in academic treatment of Catalan Spanish, first during the Franco era and then in post-Franco times, the latter differentiating academic discourse in Spain and outside of Spain. In this context, Vann defends, in accordance with other scholars who have been publishing on the topic since the 1990s, that the regional Spanish from Catalonia has to be considered an independent Spanish dialect. Chapter 3 (59-73) is dedicated to spoken language corpora of Spanish in Catalonia. The author first gives a condensed look at the term *corpus* in linguistic research and then presents published corpora of Spanish spoken in Catalonia and the adjacent areas, concentrating on the available corpora with transcribed Spanish discourse in Catalonia, among them his own corpus ("the Vann corpus"). Chapter 4 (75-89) deals with corpus-based descriptions of Catalan Spanish. In four subsections, Vann describes particularities in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and the ways of using Spanish in Catalonia. The facts presented constitute a neat summary of the salient features documented and described in different publications by the leading scholars in the field, among them, Vann himself. Chapter 5 (p. 91-101) presents methods of data collection, digitization, and transcription (transcription methodology and transcription information technology). The fact he even deals with digitization software and hardware as well as with transcription information technology makes the section particularly valuable for the classroom and for students preparing their own transcriptions of spoken language, but given the rapid evolution of technology in this field, the section might soon become obsolete. Chapter 6 (103-113) is a presentation of network profiles and select speaker data for the Vann corpus (identified as versions of profiles reported in previous publications by the author).

Part two of the book, called "*Selected transcripts from the Vann corpus*" comprises two figures with maps and two subsections called "*Colloquial group conversation from Mónica's personal network*" (115-171) and "*Colloquial group conversation from Silvia's personal network* (173-241)." As has been stated in several occasions, the most important lacuna in the field is still the lack of publicly accessible oral corpora; these are urgently needed in order to allow appropriate linguistic documentation and analysis of Spanish in the Catalan-speaking areas. This is especially true for colloquial speech. As Vann himself points out, two corpora of Spanish language conversation have already been published, Sinner (2001) and Vila Pujol (2001). He laments: "[u]nfortunately, however, these corpora represent neither colloquial nor naturally occurring spoken language data" (3) and points out that "*no corpus of colloquial Spanish conversations in naturally occurring social groups in Catalonia has yet been published* (3-4)." Such publication would definitely advance in a significant way the linguistic analysis of Catalan Spanish. Therefore, the 125 pages of selected

transcripts from the Vann corpus in part II of the book, presented as “*Colloquial group conversation*”, together with the network profiles and corresponding speaker data given in chapter 6 of part I, should be of special interest for linguists interested in the field. According to the description given, the transcripts contain data obtained by recording (in 1995) of the spontaneous spoken Spanish language of members of two social networks, from a habitually Spanish-speaking social network and a habitually Catalan-speaking social network in Barcelona. The author explains that the data—represented in orthographic transcription—“*provide faithful representation of vernacular spoken language data*” and “*reflect colloquial Spanish language discourse appropriate to coffee table socialization as a speech act. Conversation is spontaneous with multiple participants and questions are unplanned, though topic modules were observed* (8).” However, I am not sure how far the spoken language of such recordings can be realistically considered to be *spontaneous* and *natural*. As the author/interviewer himself states at the beginning of the first recording, he has a *chuleta* (‘crib, memo’) to remember the topics he wants the participants of the conversation to talk about, and that lead him to ask questions such as “*¿cuáles creéis que son las características ... que definen nuestro entorno social, el, el vuestro y el, el mío*” (p. 119) (‘what do you think are the characteristics that define our social environment, yours, and mine?’). I would not expect this kind of topics to be discussed in normally occurring conversations. But most notably, the sole fact of following a topic of conversation previously chosen or determined by one of the participants of the conversation makes the whole setting seem artificial to me. It might be less seen as a drawback from an US American point of view, where choosing topics for conversations and having small talk about previously determined topics is not a surprising thing to do; it is, though, from the European perspective. Furthermore, these conversations were apparently *not* occurring in “normal” conditions: there was a microphone visible to all participants, and even among friends, this might have had an effect on their linguistic behaviour. Apart from this problem of influencing the linguistic behaviour because of the Observer’s Paradox, another doubt arises if one takes a close look at the second conversation, presented as taking place between members of a “*habitually Catalan-speaking social network*”. How spontaneous and how natural will Spanish conversations be, in a group of people who would normally use Catalan in the interactions within this very group? Any bilingual person or any person habitually using several languages knows how difficult it can be to talk to someone in a language other than the one normally used with him or her. The choice of language, as probably one of the most salient *interactional factors* (cf. Offort 1990), and probably an especially important factor in situations of societal bilingualism or diglossia, can modify directly the linguistic form of the communicative act. As Hoinkes & Roviró (2008) point out, the language varies in the communicative situation with regard to the choice of the means of communication and the register, which determine the level of formality of the language used. In interactions between bilinguals, a language can constitute a register when used in the context of the other language, as studies of code-switching phenomena have clearly shown. Therefore, the use of a language not normally used in the in-group interactions could certainly imply the adoption of registers not intentioned by the interviewer.

The book is very carefully edited and I came across very few errors in content, which could easily be amended in a second edition. A noteworthy one is the wrong reference to Szigetvári (2002) and Szigetvári & Morvay (2002) as scholars from Turkey (p. ix); they are actually Hungarians.

The book is presented by the author himself as of interest to the scholars in different interdisciplinary fields concerned with cross-cultural communication and as of general linguistic interest to professors and graduate students in the United States engaged in teaching, learning and/or conducting research in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, contact linguistics, and the sociology of language. As a matter of fact, it is certainly suitable for these purposes within the language-specific disciplines of Spanish linguistics and Romance linguistics both in research and

teaching of bilingualism in Spanish and other languages, Spanish dialectology, Spanish sociolinguistics, Spanish culture and Catalan cultures, but does most probably not have too much interest for people concerned with marketing, as the author also proposes in the preface (p. x). For scholars capable of reading in Spanish or familiar with the subject, most chapters of part I of the book are probably not of too much interest, as there already exist extensive descriptions of the language history of Catalonia, of the specific characteristics of Catalan Spanish and the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia or the Catalan-Spanish bilingual areas of Spain in general (all of them properly mentioned by Vann several times in his book). The book was explicitly written “*to be used in the classroom as a resource for learning, teaching, and research as well as in libraries as a modest reference work bridging several fields* (xi).” There is no doubt the book achieves these goals with ease. As a matter of fact, several components of the book were field-tested by the author in Spanish linguistics courses at Western Michigan University (Spanish Sociolinguistics and Spanish in Contact). Especially the combination of facts about external language history and the close look at internal linguistic aspects of the Spanish in Catalonia, based on the different accessible spoken language corpora, together with a chapter on methods of data collection, digitization, and transcription, make this book a great source for introducing English speaking students to the field.

To sum up, the book will certainly be of great value for the purposes it is aimed at. The transparent exposition and the logical structure make the book a very handy instrument for university teaching, particularly courses in Spanish linguistics and sociolinguistics. It is written in a very understandable language, and the author is making a great effort to define and clarify terminology and theoretical standpoints that could be an obstacle for student readers. For scholars interested in the Spanish spoken in Barcelona, the transcribed conversations will doubtlessly be a welcome study material. The few critical aspects mentioned above do not lessen the value of this significant contribution. *Materials for the Sociolinguistic Description and Corpus-Based Study of Spanish in Barcelona* is, of course, an important result of Vann’s research. Taking into account the main target group—it is aimed particularly at didactic and classroom usage, and thus, students—it is probably underestimating Vann’s achievement in the field to consider this book “*the culmination of his research to date in this area*”, as does Casanovas Catalá in her Foreword (i).

References

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