

LAVIS III
April 15, 2004

Francis Lieber's *Americanisms* as an Early Source on Southern Speech
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1. Background on Francis Lieber -- 1798 -1872

Professor of history and political economy at South Carolina College (present day University of South Carolina in Columbia) from 1835-1856 then at Columbia College (present day Columbia University in New York City) from 1857-1872. He left South Carolina largely because of his anti-slavery views. Lieber was born in Germany; obtained a Ph.D in mathematics at Jena in Germany in 1820; he was close with Wilhelm von Humboldt and familiar with his linguistic writings. Lieber's biographer (Freidel 1947:180) refers to von Humboldt as Lieber's mentor. Lieber immigrated to America in 1827. In terms of scholarly works Lieber is probably most known for being the originator and editor of the 1st edition of the Encyclopedia Americana (13 volumes, 1829-1833) and for his seminal works in political science.

2. A Manual of Political Ethics, Boston: Little and Brown, 1838

Legal and Political Hermeneutics, Boston: Little and Brown, 1839

On Civil Liberty and Self-Government, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1853

3. Some language and linguistic related publications of Francis Lieber (among others)

"On the Study of Foreign Languages, Especially of the Classic Tongues: A Letter to Hon. Albert Gallatin", Southern Literary Messenger III, 1837, pp. 162-172. Expanded version reprinted in vol. 1 of Lieber's Miscellaneous Writings, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1881. p.499-534 Dictionary of Latin Synonymes, Boston: Little and Brown 1839. [translation from German of

Ramshorn's dictionary of Latin Synonyms]

"On the Vocal Sounds of Laura Bridgeman [sic], the Blind Deaf Mute at Boston: Compared with the Elements of Phonetic Language", Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge v. 2, 3-32, 1850. Reprinted in enlarged form in v. 1 Miscellaneous Writings,. 1881 pp. 443-497.

"Plan of Thought of the American Languages", in Henry Schoolcraft (ed.), Information Respecting

the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States..." vol 2, pp. 346-349, 1851-1857.

Encyclopedia Americana ed., 13 volumes, Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1829-1833 (Note: though articles in the E and Creole dialects. Other important linguistic articles are 'Indian Languages of America' by John Pickering, 'Philology' (in the general sense) by Peter Duponceau, and 'Dumb and Deaf' most likely written by William Woodbridge of the American School for the Deaf)

4 Sources on Lieber

a. Freidel, Frank (1947) Francis Lieber, Nineteenth Century Liberal, Louisiana State University Press. (This is a general biography that only touches on Lieber's language-related writing.)

b. Andresen, Julie Tetel (1990) Linguistics in America 1769-1924: A Critical History, London: Routledge. pp. 114-119.

c. Heath, Shirley Brice (1982) "American English: Quest for a Model". In B. Kachru (ed.) The Other Tongue: English across Cultures, University of Illinois Press, p. 237-249

d. Müller-Vollmer, Kurt (1998) "German-American Cultural Interaction in the Jacksonian Era: Six Unpublished Letters by Francis Lieber and John Pickering to Wilhelm von

Humboldt", *Die Unterrichtspraxis* 31:1-11.

e. Campbell, Lyle (1997) *American Indian Languages: The Historical Linguistics of Native America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

f. Davis, Stuart (2003) "'Is this Negroish or Irish?' African American English, the Antebellum

Writings of Francis Lieber, and the Origins Controversy." *American Speech* 78: 285-306.

g. Davis, Stuart (to appear) Observations Concerning African American English in the Writings of

Francis Lieber. In Charles Mack and Harry Lesesne (eds.), *Francis Lieber: Intermediary Between Minds*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press

5. Lieber's linguistic interests in the 1830s-1840s especially as reflected in his unpublished writing and letters in the Lieber collection housed in the Huntington Library near Pasadena. (Note: most of the materials in the Lieber collection have nothing to do with linguistics.)

a. American Indian languages

b. German and the German language in America

c. Creole languages

d. American vs. British English (formation of new words and new usages of old words)

e. Laura Bridgman (language development in children more generally)

6. Connected theme: observing language development and change in progress.

"Geology shows us that creation is all the time going on, that is to say, we live in the very midst of constant changes, almost or wholly imperceptible at the moment, which, nevertheless at the end of thousands of years appears as one stupendous phenomenon and in beholding which our first idea is always that the thing was called into existence in the state in which unpublished papers in the Huntington Library)

7. Between 1849 and 1851 Lieber compiled a manuscript written in 10 small notebooks (volumes) which he entitled "Americanisms, Anglicisms, etc. etc." (which Heath 1982 and Andresen 1990 refer to as "Notes on Language"). These volumes contain about 820 entries on 385 pages altogether (but not including the index which comprises v. 10). Entries are on words and expressions that Lieber considered to be new (i.e. very recent) or whose usage or form was novel or unusual Lieber was primarily interested in words and usages that he considered to be Americanisms or Anglicisms (i.e. words or usages in England but not in the U.S). Lieber had spent some time in England and was a regular reader of the London 'Spectator'. Lieber was also interested in local vocabulary and slang. While the bulk of the manuscript was written between 1849-1851, there are entries as late as 1860. It is quite possible that Lieber began compiling the manuscript in response to John Bartlett's *Dictionary of Americanisms* first published in 1848. Lieber occasionally referenced Bartlett usually to say that Bartlett does not include something or does not have it right. Lieber's manuscript which was never published can be found amongst the Lieber papers in the Huntington Library (near Pasadena). Heath (1982) discusses Lieber's manuscripts but provides only a few entries.

8. Purpose of the present paper -- bring together entries from Lieber's *Americanisms* that in some way relate to southern English. Of the over 800 entries in Lieber's *Americanisms*, maybe about 10% may in some way be southernisms or of interest for the history of southern English.

Among Lieber's entries that I have compiled here include entries for slang terms, terms for people, comments on grammar, and other southernisms.

College slang -- terms used by students at South Carolina College recorded by Lieber in the 1840s

9. Bugs about v. 9, p. 329-330

Bugs about is the call of our students when there is disorder, and the professors come out. The bugs are of course the professors, and probably is connected with "big-bugs" for great important people like big-whigs. — I dare say the call "bugs about" is general in Colleges and perhaps old English. "No bugs, but gentlemen and friends" cried Preston [president of S.C. College] once pretty angrily; "no bugs, come here and let us talk." And students readily came.

10. Splurging v. 8, p. 273

means among our students (S.C. College) to make a showy recitation with the display of much collateral reading. When I heard the word it appeared to me that I knew it, and that it received a new meaning only at the hands of the students, but I believe that after all it was nothing but the association with Splatter etc.

11. Chawcastic v. 7, p. 211-212

a word among our students, probably invented here, possibly imported into our college from a western region. To chaw a person is to say sarcastical things to or of him, and this slang word is formed as so many others, e.g. judgmatical, that is of a common word, sometimes a cant word, with an addition which gives it a ludicrously pompous or scientific sound. If the word has been made here, and only lately too, as I am told it has, it only shows how such words originate. It may very easily spread in the West, for it chimes in with the ready disposition of those people to make and use cant words of the sort.

12. rat-fresh v. 3, p 74 "Freshmen in our institution are called rat-fresh, if they have entered college when the Freshman class was formed, to distinguish them from the freshman who enter the class in October and remain in it, but a month and a half, the class then rising to Sophomore. This term, though universal now, has come into use only these last 6 or 8 years, yet I have never been able to ascertain its origin. No one knows it."

Other slang type expressions

13. Smash down, v. 1, p. 32

a baryphonic expression for "first rate". "A regular smash-down sort of a dinner" "A smash-down captain of a feller"

14. Spanking v. 1, p. 27

Our president Preston when in very good humour, praises, by calling a student or his performance spanking. He is a spanking fellow; a spanking speech, i.e. brilliant, making a fine effect. Is the word Virginian? I once heard that it is naval slang,

15. rampunctious v. 3, p. 93

"I have heard this word, here, for lecherous, or easily excitable by the venal and purely carnal impulses"

16. Bodyacious v. 1, p. 21

In the upper part of S. Carolina, bodyacious is used by the vulgar people for entire, whole, root and branch; f. i. the pigs broke into my fence and destroyed the potato patch bodyaciously".

17. Judgmatical v. 6, p. 193-4

one of those odd words common in the West and even here (the South where I live). As in bodacious or bodyacious (q. v. in this collection) the reminiscence of acious in audacious and voracious helped to generate the word, so has a reminiscence or Aucklang as the Germans would say, of mathematical, problematical and altogether, the lengthened spread sound contributed to produce this word sounding to the unlettered undoubtedly more scientific, more dignified than judicious, while a number of persons use it half in joke and half as "as good a word as any other." I was surprised to find the word, as used by the English sailors, in the report of Sir James Clark Ross to the Admiralty after his return from the polar search for Sir John Franklin. [clipping from the London Spectator Nov. 17, 1849: "Another bear was seen to slide on his haunches down a cliff of seven hundred feet high, steadying himself with his forepaw, most "judgmatically" as the sailors said."]

Qu: Is this word judgmatical a common word among the less bred English and has it passed over to the U.S.? Or is it Irish? It has quite the western air about it, but a number of Irish formations and English sailor phrases have, because in all three the same cause prevails — an active manly mind with bold carelessness and disregard of binding rule."

18. Cantancrement v. 7, p. 218 "She is full of cantancrement" is said here (middle of S. Carolina) of a woman full of worrying mischief, ill-nature and quarrelsomeness—of tarmagants. I do not know to what local extent this curious, yet aptly sounding word is used. Is the origin owing solely to expressive sound? Or is there a meaning or root enlarged to paint the idea.

19. Foggy v. 9, p. 311

Old Foggy, sometimes written Foggy, I suppose from fog, meaning cloudiheaded is a word used by the "young democracy" of the U.S. against their superiors in age and experience. I never met this word before 1851.... Prof Reynolds of S.C.C tells me that old Scottish people in Charleston frequently use the term foggy for what would be in German Philister. A merchant sticking to old heavy ways and methods will thus be called a fogy.

[Lieber then mentions a letter from Edward Everett saying that he found "foggie" an invalid, a garrison soldier" in a dictionary of the Scottish language; Lieber then cites a letter that he himself wrote to a local newspaper where he states "There is no doubt in my mind that fogy is one of those many words which center, as it were, upon themselves several etymologies. They have sprung from different roots, at several places, and coming to mean similar things, they ultimately form but one word, used in pretty much the same sense over the whole district of the various origins."]

20. Biánt v. 5, p. 163

Biánt, from beyond or Be ánt?, a word much used by the negroes of this region, perhaps of all S. Carolina. It means too bad, extravagant, beyond endurance, beyond corruption. So e.g. if they see a girl extravagantly dressed, or if a child is peculiarly naughty they will say: You are or she is biánt. They exclaim occasionally merely "biánt'!" It is not a tasteless word and it must be owned, very convenient." "That's biant" equivalent to that beats everything "Is not biant

perhaps Irish? and have not the negroes adopted it from them? The common white people use it too, possibly only because it is very convenient

21. Nam-a-sense or Name-o-sense v. 8, p. 264

from Name or common sense i.e. in the name of common sense, a negro exclamation of surprize It is common here (middle of S.C.)

Southernisms

On back inside cover to volume 1 Lieber gives a definition of Americanisms as "Provincialisms on a large scale". He then lists the following geographical areas of provincialisms "West, South, N.Y., N. England, Louisiana, German".

22. Favouring v. 1, p. 2

Is Favouring for "looking like" merely American or Old English or provincial English? In America it is used both in the North and in the South. Perhaps in the South more. "This cow favours yours very much". "Look at me. Do I favour him"? [sidenote "Shakespeare has it."]

23. Evening v. 1 p. 28 All over the South evening means after dinner. They say "I'll come to see you this evening at two o'clock." This is very inconvenient. Evening they would call night e.g. Seven o'clock at night i.e. 7 o'clock in the evening"

[Extra comment in v. 7, p. 209 on "evening"]

It seems from the following [newspaper clipping from the London Spectator of Dec. 1, 1849] that the use of the word evening, common here in the South, to denote afternoon, is old Engl, or used in some parts of England so. It must be remembered that dinner was at an early hour in Engl, at the period of which the extract speaks, so that "just before dinner" can not have been evening, as indeed, at present, it might be the case in London.

24. Bacon and Greens v. 1. p. 35 The daily, greasy, favorite dish of the large majority of the South. — Greens for common vegetables is good English.

25. Snap beans v. 1, p. 35 The common bean, called so from the noise when broken, and because always broken before cooked

26. pullet v. 3, p. 72 pullet From poulet, is used by the negroes etc in the South almost exclusively for all the individuals of the hen tribe, Perhaps a large cock would not be called so.

27. Dipper v. 2, p. 65

People in the South and West drink a great deal of water, owing to the warm climate, and the unfortunate chewing and whiskey drinking. Every where therefore stands a bucket on the back or the front piazza, filled with water, and a ladle, sometimes of cocoa nut, sometimes of tin etc is near it. Out of this ladle every one drinks, and it is acalled a dipper. All are accustomed to drink out of this dipper, one after another, without any feeling of disgust, but it would create much disgust, and be considered very impolite, to put the water which may remain in the ladle, again into the bucket.

28. Bar. Mosquito bar v. 3, p. 94

This is the common American term for mosquito net--at least in the U.S. In the W. I. I believe, they use the latter term. I found at least all the English in St. Thomas, Puerto Rico etc use mosquito net; but I have not been at Jamaica. Here in the South, the word bar alone, is used in all cases in which both parties know that no other bar can be meant.

[Note: DARE (v. 1) assigns this term to Louisiana and other areas of French settlement]

29. stake-and-rider v. 3, p. 97-98

stake-and-rider fence, is the name given here in S. Carolina (and perhaps everywhere further south) to the fence called in Virginia and further North worm-fences (xxxxx). [illustration]

Perhaps, however, stake-and-rider, means more particularly the worm fence with the addition of two rails at every corner, standing upright and crossing over the fence, to give additional strength?

[Carver 1987 (*American Regional dialects: A Word Geography*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor) assigns this term exclusively to the Lower North]

30. A heap v. 4, p. 114

A heap" is used in the South, by negroes, etc for much, very similar to the German hänfig (frequent) only that the German word heap is applied to time, still odder than the negroish heap.

31. Volunteer v. 4, 120-121

In the South of the U.S., and, I believe, in the whole country, plants which grow spontaneously, but not wild ones, are called volunteers, e.g. lettuce which has sown itself from plants originally planted. Any plant, not planted by man, yet uncommon where it grows, for instance a very rare tree in the forest, which might suggest the idea of having been brought there by man, yet being spontaneous would be called a volunteer. In one word, Volunteer in this case expresses the opposite to intentional cultivation, while wild is only the negation or absence of this thought. The idea of cultivation must have been suggested in our minds, and then negated before we use the term volunteer. Von selbst is the German for this.

[volunteer plants - plants that grow spontaneously but not wild]

32. Tote v. 5, p. 137

Tote, the well known southern word for fetching, pulling etc, but I did not know that it is used as a verb neuter, for toting one's self in which it is not quite unlike Dragging one's self. It is thus used at the beginning of the following clip, content of the Columbia Telegraph, June 1, 49. which I place here entire as a curious sample of corruption of Language and that hyperbolic language mixed with the oddest and most fantastic contrasts, so common with the common people of the West.

[attached article is a story with dialectal dialogue and expressions entitled "Catching a Weasel Asleep" -N.O. Cres] "C. once toted into the village tavern." [C. is someone's name]

33. Rise v. 5, p. 143 "How do you rise" for "how d. y. d." [do you do] a common expression in the upper part of S. C. perhaps in the whole state, and in a wider extent. Laborde stated it, and Loomis says, that he has constantly heard it in Lexington.

34. Soffké v. 5, p. 150 The Cherokee name for a dish of soft corn and peas, boiled together, and which, according to Webster is called elsewhere as Succatash. The whites in Georgia, near the Cherokees use likewise the term Soffké"

35. Branch v. 6, p. 165-166

the universal term for a brook, a rivulet, in the South of the U.S. ... Brook would not be understood by our negroes and common people

36. Gully v. 6, p. 166

In the South no other word is use for a deep rut or channel washed by the heavy rains, frequently 20 feet deep, by educated as well as other people.

37. Cook-house v. 7 p. 219-220

Common people here (S. Carolina) occasionally say cook-house for kitchen. There are two reasons; probably combined. A low, heavy, untrained mind has always a tendency to word diffuseness—terseness requires character, energy and cultivation; and the common white people here are very untouched by civilization. They live a lazy life void of energy. Another reason is that kitchens are here almost always separate houses. Judge Wardlow told me that he had frequently heard Cook-house, and many other diffuse compositions for things which have simple direct names in the established English.

38. Doty, Doddered v. 8 p. 248-9

Doty is a very common expression here about (Columbia S.C.) for spongy rottenness inside a tree, among common white people and negroes. I donot know how far it extends, or whether it may be provincial even in England. Does it come from doddered, which I see Hugh Miller uses in his Footprints of the Creator when he says "a few doddered oak.....

39. Givy v. 8, p. 258

Givy weather means here in the Eastern South, moist, warm weather, "growing weather". I donot know how far the word extends, or whether it occurs in England or Scotland.

40. Truck v. 8, 258

Truck means here in the eastern South everything like the Italian roba. What truck have you here; my truck is growing (by the farmer). It means stuff in its widest sense, and something more. It means inanimate and animate things, that is considered as things. It has not such extensive meaning as the Latin Res, because this means even deeds. Truck means under certain circumstances all sensuous entities.

41. Season v. 9, p. 327

Season is frequently used here, and always in Mississippi etc (as Oscar tells me) for a good rain, a rain of some duration, one that is not a mere sprinkling. Sometimes it is used for rain altogether

42. Frenching v. 9, p. 335 This is a curious word. Mr. Brumby tells me that it is common in Florida to say a field frenches cotton or corn etc when the plant promises well but at certain periods becomes poor and dies owing to the soil. Mr. Thornwell said he heard it lately 1854, for

the first time, from his overseer. Where does the word come from? Surely not from French? Or has some clever fellow used it first thus tropically?

43. Honing v. 9, p. 341

a word among the illiterate here-about (S.C.) for longing. Dr. Gibbes tells me that he is frequently told: such a patient has a honing or hones for such a thing. I have, at this moment, no idea of the affinity of this word, but from mere guess and [] impression, I would say that it is some old Saxon word, or derived from some well established Saxon root. It is not connected with the German Hin, expressive of motion toward a thing? At any rate, if it be, there must be many intermediate links which connect that German root with a S.C. cracker.

44. Saving v. 9, p. 357

In Virginia they use saving for harvesting, gathering: I am saving my hay—he saves his corn
Grammar

45. To go a catting [end of v. 4, added pages]

—meaning whatever you undertake to do, do that and nothing else. When I go a catting, I go a catting.

46. v. 1, p. 7 (no real entry) reference to "like to"

""He had liked to be shot" for "he was on the point" or in a hair's breadth of being shot, or very near, etc.

47. v. 4, p. 131 The Imperfect instead of the participle past. It is common to say: I had went, but I did not know that this is done with all verbs whose imperfect has if I can say so, a participial sound as all irregular monosyllabic Saxon verbs have. It is odd on the other hand: illiterate persons frequently add the common participle ending of ED to irregular participles ending in T. [felted SD]

[In v. 5, p. 159: notes Attacted for attacked "I have of heard it here (Columbia S.C.), even of decently dressed people."]

48. Done v. 6, p. 167-170

Bartlett (Americanisms) does not give this word as it ought to be given. Done is the word by which the negroes of the southern U.S. form the participle past, similar to the process by which the modern languages substituted the auxiliary have with the participle to the simple form of the ancient perfect, and for the same reason, that is the uneducated thinking in a loose slovenly manner, use circumlocution for neat, pointed precision. Now the negroes use this done either with the participle present which is rare or past or the infinitive, and often, may generally leave out the auxiliary have, thus for I have gone there they say: I have done going there; I done going there, I done gone there, I done go there (rather thaar). The lower white persons have much adopted this done, which is an amplification and still further fixing of the idea of the past, the complete finishing of an action. [The following is a side note to the end of this paragraph] Nothing is more common for a negro than to say: "I done do it", i.e. I have done it. "I done been" means I have been (there). "I done dig" I have dug, I have finished digging. The negroes of the "low country" (near Charleston etc) will say "I done for go" i.e. "I have been going there."

This amplitude need not so much surprise us, when we consider that the auxiliary do is used in good English in precisely the same way in interrogation, as "did you go there" for "went you there" as other languages e.g. the German would express it.

Terms denoting people

49. Creole v. 2, p. 52-53 In Louisiana means native, no matter whether man, animal, or thing — white, mixed, or black. they speak there of creole ladies, creole lawyers, creole negros, creole cane, mules, eggs, trees. It does by no means indicate an admixture of negro blood. A creole Indian would be a native Louisiana Indian. Nor does it indicate "of French descent". The son of German parents, is a a creole if born in Louisiana. In Europe they always connect the idea of colour with creole, but this is neither Spanish nor Louisianish.

50. Servant v. 2, p. 53

means here always a slave, and is preferred both by whites and coloured, to slave.

51. Coloured v. 2, p. 53

is used by negros for all who have colour, and also by whites who wish to speak inoffensively. Properly speaking coloured people are mulattos. Negro is disrelished by negros.

52. Lady [woman] v. 8, 240-241

[Under this entry is the following comment] In the South woman means a black female...In hotels etc an American asks for his wife as his lady. They write in the book: Mr. Brown and lady. But here I find the same in a Scottish paper. [use of lady for wife in a newspaper clipping]

53. Cracker, Sandhill cracker, sandhiller v. 3 p. 92-93

There is in the Southern States a peculiar species of population of white men - squatters (that is unauthorized settlers) on pine lands of little value. They are called, by way of contempt, crackers etc. Some of them may well be called the savages in the midst of civilization. They generally have a miserable horse or harness, a cow to their pityful little cart, on which they bring a puny load of wood, stolen in the forest around them, to town. I have seen boys and men riding such a cow harnessed to the cart. They are sallow, even greenish, live upon whiskey, and stolen hogs or cattle, and mostly live without any fear of God or men. Very many of them cohabit promiscuously, change concubines and cases of fearful incest have occurred. I have known them. A stone jug is invariably dangling under the cart. In it they take the whiskey from town which they buy from the money they get for their wood. Often have I seen their children as drunk as the parents. Here is a field for missionaries, instead of distant countries in the East.

[Note Carver (1987:130) "*Cracker* originally referred to a backwoodsman who was a braggart and sometimes an outlaw (1766)"]

54. Pinetuckian v. 3 p. 94

Pinetuckian (a jocose imitation of Kentuckian) is used for cracker which, [??] the pine alluding to their squatting on pineland.

[v. iii p. 88; pineland is a type of land of little value that can't be used for agriculture]

55. old woman v. 4, p. 116

Common people, here, speak always of their wife as "my old woman" without any intention of disrespect or joke. I believe the wife speaks of her husband likewise as "my old man", but it is not so common as the other. [The following is a later adder comment]

"Later. It is however quite common, and probably much so, as the former."

56. Good Liver v. 4, 121

"his word, which in nearly all modern languages, and I think in England means a man who indulges in a good table and enjoys the pleasures of the palate (the French bon-vivant) means here in S.C. [South Carolina] a man who, without being wealthy has enough to live. This is an odd meaning of the term.

57. Burried Jew v. 5, p. 156-157

In this region (Columbia, Camden S.C.), I donot know to what farther extent, burried jew means in common parlance, what the Germans call "baptized jew", that is christians who have been jews. The difficulty arising out of the fact that Jew has the double meaning of religion and national descent, and that while the one can be changed, the other remains still to be designated, is felt every where. In Germany however, it ought to be added that a desire exists or at least existed illiberally to designate the "baptized Jews" by way of contempt which neither in France, England nor here exists.

58. Corner-Man v. 6, p. 191-192

In Charleston S.C. there are a great many foreigners, especially Germans from Bremen etc. who keep the lowest groghops generally placed at the corners where they carry on much illicit trade with negros. These people are greatly disesteemed, as an injurious part of the population. It is natural, therefore that, a name for them corresponding to the idea of a class of men, should come to be settled, and Cornerman is this, now settled worder. Etymologically it is similar to the famous Berlin Eckensteher (corner standers) though this signifies a different class of people, viz. men who wait for jobs at certain corners, sometimes with a wheelbarrow. As they are idle, somewhat vagabondish, always and in the street and Berlin people with ale, they are saucy, ready, vulgar fellows, and the Eckensteher has become the embodiment of a certain part of Berlinism, in the comedy, the caricature, and the anecdote.