BOOK REVIEWS

Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford (eds.), Style and Sociolinguistic Variation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. xvi + 341 pp. Cloth (0-521-59191-0) £45.00/$65.00 / Paper (0-521-59789-7) £15.99/$23.00.

Reviewed by Barbara Johnstone

This book is the result of a workshop held at Stanford University in 1996, where scholars from linguistic anthropology, psychology, and (mostly) linguistics exchanged ideas about style and its role in accounting for linguistic variation. The workshop did not result in consensus – quite the contrary. In forcing people to confront and articulate the fact that they were defining style in different ways in order to answer different questions about language, discourse, and society, predicated in some cases on different understandings of the purpose of sociolinguistics, the workshop did something much more valuable. The result is both thought-provoking and frustrating in the way a book should be if it is to push the field forward. The editors deserve our gratitude for organizing it and seeing it through.

In the most general terms, stylistic variation as it is understood here is variation within an individual’s speech. (As is conventional, ‘speech’, ‘speaking’ or ‘language’ are typically used to refer to utterances, although each of these terms carries potentially misleading implications.) The questions sociolinguists have asked about style have to do with how and why an individual’s pronunciation, lexical choices, or morphosyntax may vary from one instance to another, and what the significance of this variation is for how we understand language. In their introductory chapter, Rickford and Eckert identify three trends in the treatment of style in variationist sociolinguistics.

In the Labovian approach, style is operationalized as the degree of attention speakers are paying to their speech as they speak. As variationists in this tradition collect data, different levels of attention are elicited in different interview topics and tasks, ranging from the most casual conversation an interview can contain, when speakers are presumably focused mainly on the referential and interactional goals at hand, to the reading aloud of minimal pairs, which presumably focuses speakers’ attention mainly on their pronunciation. Style thus defined has been a key explanatory variable, repeatedly found to be correlated with class, sex/gender, age, and other demographic attributes in predictable ways. Style is crucial for answering the questions about language change that centrally concern Labovian variationists, since new variants spread through the speech community differently depending on how they pattern stylistically.

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9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden MA 02148, USA.
Part 2, Attention paid to speech began with a chapter by William Labov. The idea of "features or styles of talk" founders Macaulay, another example is Emile Durkheim's famous book, which discusses social actors and their roles in a community. Emile Durkheim's book, which discusses social actors and their roles in a community, provides a framework for understanding how individuals interact and how these interactions influence social structures and norms.

In Part 3, social interaction and self-identification. This chapter is dedicated to understanding how individuals interact and how these interactions influence social structures and norms. It examines how individuals construct identities and how these identities are shaped by their interactions with others.

Finally, Part 4 draws on the previous three parts to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding social interaction and self-identification. This framework is used to analyze a variety of social interactions, including those that occur in schools, workplaces, and communities. The framework is used to examine how individuals construct identities and how these identities are shaped by their interactions with others.

The book concludes with a chapter by William Labov, who discusses the importance of understanding how individuals interact and how these interactions influence social structures and norms. Labov's chapter provides a summary of the key themes and ideas presented in the book and offers suggestions for further research and study.
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