



РЕЦЕНЗИИ BOOK REVIEWS

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Book review: Meyerhoff, M. (2018). Introducing sociolinguistics (3rd edition). New York: Routledge. 400 p. ISBN: 9781138185593

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The book entitled *Introducing Sociolinguistics* by Miriam Meyerhoff, is an overview of the concepts and issues in sociolinguistics with the aim of covering foundation issues, recent advances, and current debates. Likely intended for students of applied linguistics, it serves as a reference for both students and teachers in the realm of sociolinguists. It provides a range of data from languages and social settings with examples and introduces the patterns and systems used by sociolinguists in their research and teaching. As a textbook, chapters have summaries, exercises, and examples with the definition of key terms in the margin of some pages. Furthermore, each chapter ends with a summary and a reference list of information for further reading.

The book contains a total of 12 chapters. The author begins Chapter 1 by defining what sociolinguistics is before moving to the discussion of the main parts. This chapter contains a general snapshot of the concepts and issues in sociolinguistics. Also includes in the first chapter the introduction of some general methods of doing sociolinguistic research. When we look closely through chapter 1, however, we discover no conclusion of the sub-topics with a discussion section. Any debate over the relationship between language and society, or the several roles of language in society, should also start with challenges to define these terms. There is no sign of such a discussion. Not mentioning any introduction of what socio-



linguistics is, how it differs from the sociology of language, different definitions of the term, the origins of sociolinguistics, and introduction of the different possible relationships between language and society makes this chapter incomplete and imperfect. In addition, the book's attention is restricted to answering 'what' questions and ignores any attention to the 'why and how' questions' relating to the branch of sociolinguistics, i.e., critical discourse analysis.

Today, most scholars believe that speakers' knowledge of what they are talking about is knowledge of something completely abstract. We should recognize that a language is basically a group of items, what Hudson (Hudson, 1996: 21) calls 'linguistic items,' such units as words, sounds, structures, etc. However, the author pays no attention to these issues in the introduction section.

Overall, the author's concerns with the spoken varieties of language has no trace of the discussion of written varieties. Questions such as What specific differences are between spoken and written discourse? How linguists define spoken language as 'primary' and the written language as 'secondary'? In what way do most people link the spoken and written forms? are out of concern in this book. Likewise, as it is acknowledged that the concern for language is not new, a brief overview of the history of linguistics in this chapter, might provide a base for understanding the areas of concern to the modern linguistics.

Chapter 2, Variation and Language, tries to discuss the flexibility inherent in human language. This involves the discussion of variables and variants, constrain/constraints, free variation, determinism, regional dialectology, reallocation, intermediate forms, social dialectology, interspeaker/intraspeaker variation, the envelope of variation, synchronic variation, diachronic change, stereotypes, markers, and indicators. The author also talks about factors motivating variation in how people use language (p.27).

Although the above concepts have been the subject of interest in sociolinguistics, some common problems need to be considered in this chapter. As such, most of the examples in this section (regular vs. probabilistic alternations between variants) are phonological features. No guidance on predicting certain kinds of linguistic behavior is suggested in the writing of variable rule, a modified version of the kind of rule found in grammars modeled on Chomsky's ideas, suggested by Labov (Labov, 1972). This chapter addresses the fact that within any particular language, it is difficult to find any two speakers who use their language in exactly the same way. However, when we investigate language, we face the dual problem of universality and diversity. It seems that the author paid less attention to the universality part in his book, while the term idiolect has been devised and used widely in sociolinguistics research. According to the author, 'Chapter 2 starts with a historical perspective and discusses how both the methodological and theoretical roots of sociolinguistics lie in traditional regional dialect studies' (p. 5). While it is accepted that the concern with language is not new, it is recommended that the author first introduced a general framework of the historical perspective of sociolinguistics in the introduction section to give a clear picture of the chapter and then provides the details of the chapter. Hence, the chapter needs an introduction to map the whole chapter.

Chapter 3, Variation and Style, is paired with chapter 2 to point out that language usage varies as situations vary. It addresses the role of stylistic variation

as a locus of sociolinguistic research. It draws on a considerable attention to explaining the methods used to analyze style shifting. These involve the methods associated with audience design and attention to speech, which are central to debates about how sociolinguistics should develop. However, the chapter begins with the definition of the term variant in a universal way without mentioning any common difficulty in distinguishing between variety and variable. Although it has been proven that all languages have internal variation, i.e. every language exists in a number of varieties and is in a sense the sum of those varieties, the author has nothing to say about the question of what we mean by variety? what are internal and external varieties? and how these varieties differ from each other? with a messy structure of defining terms like free variation, determinism, and constraints, and no definition of fundamental terms like lect, isolect, sociolect, and dialect mixture used as foundation stones in sociolinguistics.

Chapter three also discusses the term style shifting. The author defined it with reference studies done by scholars like Labov (Labov, 1972), with no reference to the year of publication. As such, she defines style shifting with no specific attention to formal and informal aspects of style and with no attention to Tarone's (Tarone, 1982) continuum of superordinate and vernacular style, which is an adapted Labov's methodology (Ellis, 2008: 142) and finally ignores explaining other related studies on style shifting like Major (Major, 1987), Schmidt (Schmidt, 1977) and Thompson (Thompson, 2011).

Chapter 4, Language Attitudes, explains why context matters. The aim is to review different approaches associated with the study of language attitudes, by considering how attitudes toward others are revealed through language. The main section of this chapter is then to address how the 'roots of audience design traced back through accommodation theory to social identity theory' (p. 82). Too often, scholars from many disciplines study language use to describe variation toward or away from the perceived style of the persons in a speech community but fail in research articles to inform the dialectology root of sociolinguistics to 'explore how people's attitudes to language and language users can be used to complement traditional maps of regional dialects' (p. 5). The author talks about terms like accommodation theory and its types in a general way. However, having a key role in sociolinguistics, she only describes the concepts and fails to explain their relevance to other concepts like code-switching. She does not talk about the major role that accommodation plays, which appears to be as relevant a motive as prestige. As such, there appear to be no examples of accommodation theory provided by the author; for example, Coupland's (Coupland, 2010) study, Ylänne-McEwen & Coupland (Ylänne-McEwen & Coupland, 2000), etc. Next, the author does not pay any particular attention to concepts like 'the speakers' creation of his/her own identity'. Likewise, one type of convergent behavior, audience design, is somehow related here, but the author does not elaborate on this concept in relation to accommodation theory. She also ignores explaining concepts like referee design, speaker design, and the like in this chapter.

Chapter 5 leads to a call for attention to aspects of hidden meaning and use in more detail; the meaningful role of language in relation to cultural and social norms. With the introduction of politeness as a variable in speech and the related concepts, the discussion is mapped considering the use of linguistic competence affected

by social and cultural factors. However, while acknowledging wide diversity among human languages, much of this diversity exists at the surface of language. When deeper, more abstract aspects of language are investigated, it becomes clear that many universals are common to all languages. To our knowledge, Meyerhoff has not focused on this property of human language and how this property determines the meaningful use of language in a speech community.

Chapter 6, multilingualism and language choice, in addition to giving a comprehensive picture of how speakers from multilingual societies chose which and when to use their languages, also refers to vitality. Some key topics like diglossia, code switching, code mixing, and speech levels are introduced in this chapter. However, not looking mainly at the role of choices that speakers use in their speech, which is related to terms like register and style, the author only discusses them in a more general way. For example, she does not clarify the discussion of what causes a speaker to select variety X from one language instead of variety Y in another language. Furthermore, the description of different types of code-switching: i.e., situational and metaphorical should also be considered in this chapter.

Code-switching may present particular forms of resistance in itself. Several instances have been obtained from speakers of different languages withdrawing others to code-switch and instead maintaining the use of the other's language, even though sometimes such use delivered a weaker means of communication. Discussion of this issue is of key importance here, but the author does not explain it enough in this chapter. Moreover, in this chapter, no particular attention is made to the dimensions of solidarity and power as two components relating to code-switching; For example, there exist numerous studies in the case of solidarity and power (Lewko, 2012; Méndez & García, 2012) but the author does not consider enough space for them.

Another problem in this chapter concerns the types of the key terms that occur over time in multilingualism research. Code-switching and code-mixing, two subcategories of bilingualism, have been regularly discussed in this chapter. However, the new concept of code-switching, which refers to the use of the whole language repertoire in every context, yet to be described and explained in this chapter. Furthermore, the author pays no particular attention to two key concepts in the study of language: multilingualism and monolingualism. Hence, assigning a separate section to discuss these two concepts is recommended.

Chapter 7 provides a window into how languages change over time. It looks at 'how speakers change the way they speak over time and see how such examples of intraspeaker variation can be used as diagnostics of different kinds of socio-linguistic variation' (p. 6). Two main concepts of apparent and real time are introduced as measures in the study of variation. She speaks of the relationships between variations in individuals and communities over time, and within communities at any one point in time. Again, failing to give a comprehensive and clear introduction of the traditional view of language change, changes in progress and the process of change in a general way, the author gives only a picture of those aspects of change in a general way. Particularly, any detailed attention to structural changes, changes in morphology, phonology, syntax, and semantics deems to be necessary. Two recommendations are of importance here; first, discussion of changes in the structures of two types of phonological structures i.e.,

phonemic coalescence and phonemic split, with ample examples; second, describing two types of variation in phonological change, i.e., allophonic and free variation. Additionally, the author needs elaborate more about internal and external change as two kinds of change in the history of language.

The term borrowing, implied in the external nature of change, has attracted the attention of many scholars over the years. Hence, the term has not captured any attention in this chapter. As such, the traditional viewpoint on language change also benefits an explanation of change in ‘family tree’ and the associations among languages. The family tree serves no value in this chapter. Also, the term etymology should be discussed in this chapter.

When we compare forms in a number of modern languages to determine whether those languages have developed from the same source, we are using a linguistic research technique known as the comparative method. This technique has been of more significant value in sociolinguistics used by scholars to discover the patterns of language developments over time. Despite its more significant value, the comparative method has not been mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 8 begins with the definition of social class from different perspectives, relates it to mobility, and contrasts it with caste. She states the relative frequency with which they use individual variants distinguishes groups of speakers. The chapter also surveys research that has examined social class in its general term. This involves different approaches to social class, which are discussed by scholars like Karl Marx and Max Weber.

According to Falk (Falk, 1978), the interrelationship between regional and social dialects is often very close in some countries. Features considered marks of low social class in one area might be regional features transplanted from another area in which they are standard. As a result, it seems that the interrelationship between regional and social dialects is not paid serious attention.

Income level and source, are among key factors in any classification system that centers on how much money people have. However, one limitation of this chapter is to discuss solely social class issues without relating them to factors like age, race, and ethnicity in more detail. Sociolinguists who have analyzed speech variations in children, frequently select them based on their social class. Discussion of this issue regarding social class, has yet to be particular attention. Similarly, the distinction between social space and systems of social classification as respectively multidimensional and one-dimensional has not been considered particular attention. In addition, the author needs to talk about the role that speech characteristics like sociolect and idiolect play in sociolinguistics research. Also, no particular attention was paid to defining and discussing field methods’ roles have in describing speakers’ language.

In chapter 9, the author talks about social networks; she overviews a number of case studies related to the differentiation between loose and dense networks. On the other hand, she also talks about a specific kind of social network, the community of practice, in this chapter. A great deal of our findings in linguistic behavior can be understood with regard to people seeking to discuss, comprehend, or even reject identities by language. Indeed, language is a reflective sign of identity. However, specific points of connection between identity and social networks must be discovered. The author did not express anything about it in more detail.

Chapter 10 starts with a discussion of differences among sex, gender, and grammatical gender, considering gender as a central topic of interest in this chapter. The chapter views gender as a social and cultural category. As such, ‘the chapter focuses largely on research concerned with the details of linguistic performance and how these details are related to details of social organization between and among groups of male and female speakers’ (p. 6). However, despite having a long and thorough discussion of the chapter, it seems there exists no discussion on gendered interaction, to our knowledge. According to Yule (Yule, 2010), interaction among men appears to be more hierarchical. Furthermore, one influence on men and women’s different developmental styles is that some traits turn out to be extremely significant in cross-gender interactions. Likewise, women produce more ‘back — channels’ in same gender interactions as signs of attending.

The majority of case studies and examples that are cited in the book are discussed in Chapter 11. These studies include the outcomes of contact between speakers of different varieties of English and between speakers of quite different languages (p. 16). Likewise, language contact can bring about new styles, ways of marking social group differences, and even the creation and development of creole languages (p. 16). Nevertheless, the distinction between language and dialect is not purely linguistic. Some non-linguistic factors are of key importance in the field of sociolinguistics. With due respect to the author, assigning a separate discussion of these factors may play a part in the classification of dialects.

Chapter 12 focuses on the link between what has been covered in previous chapters and tries to expand the associations that have been formed between sociolinguistics and other fields of study. As such, some materials in chapter 2 are picked up again in this chapter. For example, the author talks about the role of variation as an integral part of what we know about language, the relationships between systematic variation and spontaneous speech, the inevitability of meaningfulness in variation analysis, and the consideration of why speakers tolerate and generate a variation. She hopes that ‘this chapter will provide a sense of some of how one is looking ahead, what some of the trajectories are for future work, and where there might be possibilities for quite significant shifts in how we study language’ (p. 278).

To sum up, despite having a gem, reader friendly style, the book needs a comprehensive view of sociolinguistics. First, the book needs to categorize concepts in a better way. It means that instead of having one part, the author can categorize chapters into different parts. Next, the lack of attention to some key terms and some ideas of prominent scholars like Brown and Gilman’s (Brown & Gilman, 1960) study of *T/V distinction*, Grice’s (Grice, 1975) *cooperative principle*, Bernstein’s (Bernstein, 1971) discussion of *codes*, DeCamp’s (DeCamp, 1977) discussion of the *creole* and *pidgin* languages, and the discussion of *solidarity issues* in sociolinguistics (e.g., Wardhaugh, 2006) is another limitation of this book. Third, explaining some chapters (e.g., Chapter 2) with no general introduction makes readers unable to get involved and have background knowledge of the introduced subject matters. Fourth, not providing ample evidence in a more elaborative way is another limitation of this book. Reading a book with insufficient examples to cover the issue makes the reader bored and negatively affects the attention and his/her learning overall.

Finally, although the author proposes the book as an introductory text for those interested in studying sociolinguistics, some serious problems make this book less reader-friendly for novice students. For example, the author paid no attention to general topics, did not include a discussion section at the end of each section, and needed to have a clear and coherent introduction to sociolinguistics. Instead, the definition of concepts and key terms in the margins of some pages and in the glossary renders the book a good reference for scholars, post-graduate students and professors.

As the final remarks, we would like to express our appreciation to professor Miriam Meyerhoff for her contribution to our sociolinguistic understandings and hope that the present book review and the complementary comments and suggestions are beneficial in further revisions in the next edition of the book.

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