

Review: Acquiring Sociolinguistic Variation (2017). Eds G. De Vogelaer, M. Katerbow.

Research examining first (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition abounds, but up until recently it has been relatively rare to find studies that focus either on children's acquisition of sociolinguistic variation (though see Payne, 1980; Foulkes et al., 1999) or of how adults acquire and deal with variation in an L2. This might seem somewhat surprising. Language learning doesn't exist in a vacuum, and as Foulkes et al. (1999) point out, if children develop their language abilities primarily through interpreting what they are exposed to, we would expect to see some influence of sociolinguistic variants, "since the child will not *a priori* know that there is any difference between these and other systematic aspects of realization" (Foulkes et al., 1999; p.2).

As is carefully explained in the detailed yet wide-ranging Introductory chapter, this omission probably has its roots in the history of the two fields. When language acquisition and sociolinguistics became prominent in the 1960s, research was influenced by the then dominant paradigms in these fields; (1) the Chomskian paradigm in language acquisition, with its focus on homogeneity and the ideal speaker-listener, and (2) the Labovian paradigm in Sociolinguistics, concerned primarily with the dynamics of language change, which put heterogeneity centre stage. However, as De Vogelaer et al. (Ch. 1) point out, "the basic assumptions in both paradigms explicitly acknowledge that much is to be gained from including language variation in language acquisition, or from an acquisitionist perspective on language variation" (p.2). As a result of the recent rise of usage-based approaches to language, in particular for spoken word recognition (e.g., Bybee, 2001, 2007; Goldinger, 1996, 1998; Pierrehumbert, 2001, 2006; Docherty & Foulkes, 2014), and the consequent surge in interest in variation leading to the development of sub-fields such as sociophonetics, the study of the acquisition of variation is now a topic of great interest in both sociolinguistics and language acquisition. This ambitious book aims not just to bridge the gap between these disciplines but also to provide a state-of-the-art interdisciplinary perspective, drawing on research carried out in different communities with speakers from different language backgrounds.

The book succeeds in doing just that, bringing together 10 contributions from different subfields of linguistics (phonetics, phonology, syntax, morphology), focussing on different speech communities [American English in Philadelphia, African American English (AAE), Italian-Veneto, Flemish-Dutch, Swiss German, London English, Cypriot Greek], on adults and children (pre-school through to adolescence), and showcasing a range of methods. All chapters contribute in some way to at least one of 3 research questions; [1] at what age (L1) or proficiency level (L2) do sociolinguistic patterns appear, and which factors underlie any age-related changes, [2] what is the motor for acquisition and what is the role of the environment? [3] what is the cognitive nature of the mechanisms responsible for the acquisition of variation?

The chapters by Leivada & Grohmann (Ch. 9) and Ghimenton (Ch. 8) extend previous research (e.g., Foulkes et al., 1999) to show that very young children reproduce sociolinguistic variation in the input in communities where usage is complex, e.g., as a result of diglossia (Leivada & Grohmann in Cyprus) or where there is extensive code-mixing (Ghimenton in Italy). Cornips' study of Heerlen Dutch (Ch. 4) further shows that this may be dependent on the grammatical categories involved [see also Farrington & colleagues' study (Ch. 7) which suggests phonetic and morphosyntactic variables may vary differently in age-grading], confirming Labov's (1989) prediction that children acquire grammatical properties

before stylistic and sociolinguistic constraints. The chapters by Enders (Ch. 6) and Schleeff (Ch. 11) indicate that acquisition of variation proceeds somewhat differently in an L2, though. Schleeff's study of Polish adolescent immigrants in London indicates that constraints are acquired one-by-one with some more easily learned than others. More time in the host community seems to mean more native-like production, as we might expect based on previous work (e.g., Flege, 1997), but even after 3 years some constraints are altered, some are rejected and others are re-interpreted. Similarly, Rys & colleagues (Ch. 10) show that the initial stages of second dialect (D2) acquisition are characterized by lexical learning, but that there is no acceleration in acquisition, as would be consistent with a shift to rule-based learning. However, as in L1 acquisition, learners do reach a stage where they are able to experiment with different styles as related to different identities, as is neatly illustrated in Enders' case studies of 3 adult learners of Swiss German (Ch. 6). Here and in Schleeff's data (Ch. 11), usage patterns are linked to participants' sense of identity within their respective speech communities, indicating that although acquisition of variation in an L2 or D2 may be challenging and may be achieved differently from in an L1, variation is still fundamental to understanding language use.

The importance of the environment is further underscored in the chapters by Buson (Ch. 3) and Farrington & colleagues (Ch. 7). Motivated by studies that have suggested students who are not proficient in a standard variety of English might experience difficulty with a curriculum based on that standard variety, Farrington & colleagues explore patterns of age-grading in phonetic and morphosyntactic variables in AAE to examine how usage develops during adolescence. By studying the trajectories of dialect patterns in African American schoolchildren, they show that older children orient towards peer groups formed at school, and as a result, exploit variation differently to construct identity (cf. Eckert, 1989). Likewise, in a study of working-class French children's usage of discourse markers in a mixed vs. homogeneous school, Buson (Ch. 3) shows that children design their speech for their addressee, but interestingly, that those with socially heterogeneous networks have greater stylistic flexibility.

However, the role of experience in acquisition may not be entirely straightforward. That is, more exposure to variation does not necessarily appear to equal better performance. In her study of young children's awareness of accent variation, Beck (Ch. 2) shows that mono- and bi-dialectal children aged 5yrs are able to identify their own local accent, but that bi-dialectal children, exposed to a different dialect at home, do not show increased awareness of a familiar vs. unfamiliar accent. Further, in contrast to previous work (e.g., Kinzler & DeJesus, 2013; Floccia et al., 2009) bi-dialectal children did not outperform mono-dialectals in a similarity judgement task. These results raise crucial questions not just about how we design tasks to test young children's knowledge of variation, but also about how, given the different tasks used in different studies with different populations, we go about comparing results. De Vogelaer & Toye (Ch. 5) provide another perspective on the development of accent awareness, showing that although younger children (8-10 yrs) in Flanders are able to distinguish between varieties and orient towards the standard, only older children (11-12 yrs) and adolescents assign prestige to it. Moreover, the covert prestige associated with the local variety only emerges later in adolescence, peaking at 16yrs. As De Vogelaer & Troye point out, the development of sociolinguistic competence is just one aspect of social development, and we therefore likely need to consider findings within the broader context of psychosocial development (p.147).

Overall, this book succeeds not just in giving the reader an overview of the many different types of work and theoretical positions in this area, but also in highlighting issues pertinent to anyone currently working on variation; task design and the challenges of comparing data across studies based on different approaches, the differing and vital contributions of individual case studies (micro) vs. large-scale (macro) studies to understanding variation, the importance of interpreting variation with reference to the speech community, and the complex and rather thorny notion of salience, to name but a few. It is a book you will probably want to dip in and out of, though I would encourage readers not just to stick to the chapters most obviously relevant to their field. Of course, this brings its own challenges and some of the contributions could perhaps have been more sensitive to this possibility. However, one of the strengths of this volume is its diversity, and the insights I gained were invaluable in thinking not just about potential differences in how different aspects of language might be acquired, but also how different methodologies contribute differently to our knowledge. Understanding variation, and its use and acquisition across different speech communities clearly requires a multifaceted approach that draws on the social, psycholinguistic and linguistic, and this necessarily means different methodologies. By mixing a social approach to cognition with a cognitive approach to the social (p.23; Campbell-Kibler, 2016), the contributions in this book make a compelling argument for the importance of studying and understanding variation at all levels. In moving from data to theory, our challenge is perhaps now how to integrate the detailed knowledge we have accumulated from these many diverse approaches.

Word count: 1459

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