

## Situating sociolinguistics

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I attended a conference recently in a small town in the US, and after the sessions one evening a group of us went out for a meal at a local microbrewery. The place was crowded, with people sitting either at long communal tables in a makeshift hangar or in small groups around the large fire pit outside. I was standing chatting with a group of five or six fellow linguists, when a man came over from a nearby group and, in a friendly American way, asked us if we were from the local area. As we were explaining that we were only in town for a sociolinguistics conference, it became clear that we would soon have to answer “that question”. And, sure enough, the man immediately asked “What is sociolinguistics exactly?” The linguists in the group all glanced at each other for a moment, as if summoning the courage to reply. One of us (not me) then said, “I’ll take it,” before turning back to the man and starting to explain what it is that we all do.

Nikolas Coupland’s new edited volume *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates* is an advanced, book-length response to this very same question: what is it that we sociolinguists all do (and why)? It is an expansive, stimulating and deeply interesting volume, featuring twenty contributions from leading figures across a range of sociolinguistic sub-fields. Though framed in its subtitle as focussed on “debates”, the book is more appropriately described as a series of “state-of-the-art” articles, most of them describing established research programmes in five different theoretical domains (though, admittedly, what constitutes the state-of-the-art is more contentious in certain areas than in others). These domains give the book its structure, with five parts devoted to one domain each, and three to four chapters per part. There is, in addition, a sixth part featuring three chapter-length overviews of the evolution of

sociolinguistics as a field. Together, the six parts and Coupland's general introduction make up the twenty chapters in the volume.

In this review article, I briefly summarise, in the first section, the main arguments raised in the volume. I do not provide a detailed discussion of all the points made, but instead focus on a common over-arching theme that emerges across the volume- a theme that characterises the field's current preoccupations and the various ways in which those preoccupations are being addressed. In the next section, I identify a number of further areas of current sociolinguistic research that, given the overall theme identified, are noticeable for their absence of coverage in the book. Specifically, I discuss recent research on sociolinguistic perception, work on the acquisition/socialisation of socially meaningful uses of language, and sociolinguistic research in the global South. Finally, I conclude by describing an area of social theorising that is touched upon within the book, but that I believe would benefit from continued and deeper consideration by sociolinguists. I focus here on sociolinguistic treatments of subjectivity (or selfhood), a topic that has a long history in the field, but that I would nevertheless argue is under-theorised in much of our research.

#### SOCIOLINGUISTIC THEORISING

In his opening introduction to the volume, Coupland provides a useful contemplation on the status of sociolinguistic theory itself. Beginning from the assertion that 'nothing that we can call a unified sociolinguistic theory has emerged' (p. 5), Coupland nevertheless identifies a trend within sociolinguistic research away from more positivist "scientific" conceptualisations of theory (articulated in terms of predictive generalisations, and investigated via large-scale surveys) to more "reflexive", small-scale, qualitative approaches that require different types of theoretical foundations to sustain them. Coupland's comments here elide much of the (primarily, though not exclusively, variationist) research that retains a

positivist outlook, and so over-state the movement of the field *as a whole* toward a more poststructuralist perspective. His claims do, however, reflect a growing interdisciplinaryisation of the field, and an increased diversification of the theories and methods that are brought to bear on our objects of study.<sup>1</sup> For Coupland, as for others before him, these changes raise questions about the status of sociolinguistic insights and the interpretive frameworks we develop to account for them. Are these what we can call sociolinguistic theory proper? Or, are we engaged in broader social theorising, such that our work can (and should) have impact beyond the confines of our field? In Coupland's words, 'this is a metatheoretical question that needs to be considered in light of the full contents of [the] book' (p. 11). Addressing this metatheoretical question is what motivates the book's subsequent treatment of five theoretical areas that are currently the focus of much research in sociolinguistics.

Given Coupland's framing of the issues in this way, it is fitting that the first section of the book is entitled "Theorising Social Meaning". This is a topic that has been at the heart of theoretical developments in the field over the past twenty years, involving such central concepts as indexicality (Silverstein 1976; Ochs 1992), enregisterment (Agha 2005, 2007), ideology (Woolard 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000) and stance (Du Bois 2007; Jaffe 2009). What emerges over the course of four contributions to this section, by (in order of appearance) Michael Silverstein, Penelope Eckert, Alexandra Jaffe and Susan Gal, is an understanding of sociolinguistic variation as situated within a field of culturally relevant registers and styles, where the meaning of variation accrues via a metapragmatic process of *construal* in context that mediates between known social structures (e.g., distributional regularities across groups) and instances of encountered language use. In other words, meaning is the product of an in-the-moment negotiation on the part of interactants between what they know about the world (i.e., certain types of people speak in certain ways) and the details of what is happening in the

interaction at hand. All of the chapters in the section elaborate on well-known theories of the social meaning of variation, with each one offering a slightly different perspective on the semiotic processes underlying language change.

For Silverstein, Eckert and Gal, the centrality of construal to meaning is what makes change possible. Drawing on Peirce's (1932) triadic conceptualisation of signs, Eckert reminds us that the perception of practice (i.e., construal) is itself a sign that becomes available for use elsewhere, so that meanings that were at one time context-bound can, over time, calcify, becoming transportable and enregistered (Agha 2007). Silverstein describes how this process of enregisterment can "drag" multiple features along together, while Gal focuses on how both noticing and construing variation in context is a language ideological process that necessarily takes place with reference to what she terms a relevant "cultural model". These different theoretical arguments are all very nicely illustrated in Jaffe's analysis of the popular blog *Stuff White People Like* (one of the few chapters in the volume to offer an empirical analysis of new data). Jaffe demonstrates how the blog achieves its comic effect by highlighting (and thus rendering humorous) the process by which a relationship of indexical co-occurrence (e.g., white people like Moleskin notebooks) is perceived and experienced by some as iconic. This is construal in action, and Jaffe illustrates how by focusing awareness on this process, the blog's authors materialise a new symbolic distinction between metapragmatically aware white people (who the authors position as being positively valued) and unaware white people (who are not). Construal thus acts as the building block for the creation of a new social opposition- that is, it serves as a tool for creative indexicality.

While the first section focuses on the semiotic mechanisms through which language acquires social meaning, the second section, "Language, Markets and Materiality," examines how these practices become commodified and circulate within a broader symbolic marketplace. There are three chapters in the section, two on theories of markets and

commodification (by Helen Kelly-Holmes, and Monica Heller and Alexandre Duchêne, respectively) and a third (by Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall) on embodiment and the ways in which communicative interaction includes a range of features and practices above and beyond the purely “linguistic”. Bucholtz and Hall’s contribution is a welcome inclusion in the volume given the growing attention being paid to questions of embodied materiality in linguistics (e.g., Goodwin 2000; Mondada 2016; Voigt et al. 2016), though its appearance in this section feels a bit anomalous. Nevertheless, the chapter does an excellent job of reviewing different ways in which embodiment has been treated in sociolinguistics to date, including everything from work on discourses of the body to research on embodied elements of self-presentation and different forms of embodied agency. Kelly-Holmes and Heller and Duchêne, in contrast, examine the analytical utility of using market-based frameworks for examining language and linguistic practice. Reviewing numerous well-known studies in this area, both chapters clearly demonstrate the central role the marketplace has played in sociolinguistic theorising over many decades. Heller and Duchêne, in particular, provide a very compelling argument for why it is important to recognise the different types of *value* that come to be associated with language/linguistic practice and the complex ways in which this assignment of value is attempted, negotiated and, in certain cases, resisted by speakers and communities. More broadly, Heller and Duchêne encourage further research on the ‘cultural organisation of symbolic and material markets’ (p. 154) and, crucially, how the two interact.

A question that Heller and Duchêne raise in their chapter is whether the type and amount of commodification we see today is similar to what has occurred in the past, or whether it is specific to our current era of late modernity and advanced capitalism. A similar issue underpins the three contributions in the next section, “Sociolinguistics, Place and Mobility”, by Alastair Pennycook, David Britain and Jan Blommaert, though here the

concern is not the marketisation of language, but rather the movement of people and, with them, social practices across cultural and geographical space. Of the three contributions, Pennycook's and Blommaert's largely agree that we live in a qualitatively different epoch, one that requires new frameworks (and terminology) for analysis. Pennycook considers what he terms the "trans-super-poly-metro movement", or the emergence of new terms such as *translanguaging* (e.g., Garcia 2009; Blackledge and Creese 2010), *polylingual languaging* (e.g., Møller 2008), and *metrolingualism* (e.g., Otsuji and Pennycook 2010) to refer to the mixed and multiple resources speakers draw on in interaction, where these resources are not necessarily conceptualised as belonging to bounded or fixed "languages" or "codes".

Synthesising research on these issues to date, he describes how the use of these terms derives from a more participant-focused analysis of language use, one in which the question of whether speakers themselves orient to the juxtaposition of linguistic resources as "switches" (Møller 2008) is paramount. Pennycook concedes that many of the phenomena captured by these new "trans-super-poly-metro" terms have long been discussed in the literature, citing such frameworks as heteroglossia (e.g., Bakhtin 1981), integrationalism (Harris 1990), and even early conceptualisations of code-switching (e.g., Blom and Gumperz 1972).

Nevertheless, he argues that the new terminology is useful, if only to escape the "burden of history" that is associated with such concepts as "diversity", "bilingualism" and "multilingualism". In other words, Pennycook agrees that these new terms may represent 'old wine in new bottles' (p. 201), but he sees these bottles as an important intervention in developing a post-"Fishmanian" sociolinguistics that focuses on practices and resources rather than on fixed languages.

Blommaert also advocates for moving beyond a "Fishmanian" conceptualisation in order to capture the dynamic ways in which linguistic resources are used by speakers in situated interaction. Blommaert argues that doing so requires us to 'reimagine the

sociolinguistic phenomena and processes we intend to study' (p. 248), and that such a reimagining can be accomplished by the adoption of *chaos theory* (or complexity theory) in our work. Abstracting away from the details, Blommaert maintains that envisioning sociolinguistic systems as *complex* would allow us to see them as 'characterised by internal and external forces of perpetual change, operating simultaneously and in unpredictable mutual relationships' (p. 250). Like Pennycook, Blommaert argues not so much that the actual phenomena we study have changed, but rather that we need new (and, in his opinion, better) "images" and "metaphors" to account for them. This claim is contested in Britain's chapter. While he agrees that sociolinguistics, and particularly dialectology, has been historically focused on *sedentarism*, Britain cautions against an over-zealous and romanticised focus on mobility or *nomadism*. Instead, Britain reprises some of the claims of his own recent work to argue for careful discussions of mobility, ones that a) do not ignore the importance of *place* in favour of *flow*; b) avoid orientalist connotations of "superdiverse" individuals; c) recognise that while the academic recognition of mobility is recent, the actual lived experience of mobility by individuals is not; and, finally, d) investigate the variety of different mobilities that exist, including the more mundane daily movement of our lives. Britain's comments serve as a useful check on Pennycook's and Blommaert's eagerness to forge ahead into new theoretical territory.

Section four, "Power, Mediation and Critical Sociolinguistics", shifts the focus to a discussion of how to model the workings of power in relation to language and social change. The three contributions to the section, by Sari Pietikäinen, Jannis Androutsopoulos and Ben Rampton, all adopt a welcome interdisciplinary perspective on both what constitutes power and how best to approach it. In her chapter, Pietikäinen reviews the distinct ways in which socio-political critique has been conducted in sociolinguistic research, identifying three main analytical traditions: emancipatory (or normative) critique, as practiced, for example, in

Critical Discourse Analysis; ethnographic critique, commonly found in linguistic anthropology and language ideological research; and carnivalesque critique, as found in media and performance-based studies. Pietikäinen's goal is not to argue for one version of critical research over another. Rather, she claims that all are important components of a broader critical project, and (echoing arguments made in her own earlier work; e.g., Pietikäinen 2014) proposes Deleuze & Guattari's (1988) concept of the *rhizome*, a non-hierarchical structure that maps the multiple connections between different cultural forces and semiotic chains, as a useful way of bringing together these distinct epistemological approaches. Rampton also argues for the tighter integration of social and sociolinguistic theories, though he focuses more on what Gumperz-inspired interactional sociolinguistics can contribute to an understanding of the workings of Foucauldian *governmentality* (that is, the individual and institutional strategies through which social control is maintained; Foucault 1978/2003) in contemporary society. Rampton makes a lucid and compelling argument for micro-analyses of linguistic interactions as crucial to accounting for emerging forms of cultural regulation, particularly those that relate to new technologies and modes of surveillance. While Rampton's discussion of new technologies and governmentality is interesting, it runs the risk of falling into the trap of technological determinism, or the belief that technological mode necessarily determines social/semiotic function. discussed by Androutsopoulos in his contribution to the section. Part of a larger discussion of the differences between "media", "mediation", and "mediatisation", Androutsopoulos argues for the importance of "normalising" our treatment of digital and other mediatized forms of communication in sociolinguistics (rather than continuing to treat them as exceptional). He rightly states that doing so will not only enrich the types of sociolinguistic phenomena we are able to capture, but will also better reflect the semiotic ecosystem of (many of) our informants.



The final theoretical theme of the book, “Sociolinguistics, Context and Impact”, considers the relationship between academic linguists and stakeholders outside of the academy. This section contains three chapters, by Lionel Wee, Ceil Lucas and Robert Bayley, and Diana Eades, though only the contributions by Wee and Eades squarely address the broader theoretical theme. In his contribution, Wee focuses on the disconnect that can arise between theorists of language policy, on one hand, and activists and policymakers, on the other. In what can be viewed as a partial retreat from some of his earlier claims (e.g., Wee 2011), Wee argues convincingly that achieving uptake from stakeholders (and hence enabling actual change to take place) requires taking “on the ground” perspectives seriously, even if that means compromising some of our own theoretical coherence and elegance. Eades makes a similar argument in the context of language and the law. Drawing on a number of courtroom examples from her own previous research, Eades demonstrates that it is possible to influence how lawyers and judges treat linguistic issues if we are willing to see things from the legal professionals’ perspectives and adjust our message and tactics accordingly. Wee and Eades together thus make a compelling case for a theoretical humility of sorts, particularly when our goal is to influence how language is handled in specific applied domains. Despite being included in this section, the contribution by Lucas and Bayley does not touch on issues of applying linguistic knowledge outside of the academy. Rather, the chapter summarises the many advances in sign language sociolinguistics over the past 20 years, and argues forcefully for the importance of considering sign language variation within sociolinguistic theorising. Like Bucholtz and Hall’s chapter in section 2, Lucas and Bayley’s chapter is an important contribution to the book, but seems oddly placed in section 5.

The last section of the book, “The Evolution of Sociolinguistic Theory”, comprises three chapter-length reflections - by Allan Bell (editor of this journal), Barbara Johnstone (former editor of *Language in Society*), and Nikolas Coupland - on how sociolinguistics has

developed over the decades. Both Bell and Johnstone organise their discussions in relation to Dell Hymes' (1972, 1974) programmatic vision for the field and his desire for a "socially constituted linguistics". Summarising the main topics their respective journals have covered over the years, Bell and Johnstone both express cautious optimism about the direction of sociolinguistics and its growing sensitivity to the complex and nuanced ways in which language and society interact. Referencing the question posed in his general introduction, Coupland closes the volume by advocating for sociolinguistic theory as a theory in its own right, related to but distinct from social theory more generally. He does so by expanding on his earlier notion of *sociolinguistic change* (e.g., Coupland 2014), which he defines as 'consequential change over time of language-society relations' (p. 433). While not reducing all of sociolinguistics to the study of change, Coupland argues that a focus on shifting language-society relations opens up a theoretical space unique to sociolinguistics, one in which we can bring our specific methods, frameworks and analytical foci to bear in innovative ways on broad questions of social scientific relevance.

#### ADVANCES, ABSENCES AND ERASURES

Though necessarily partial, the summary in the previous section provides a flavour of the variety of topics and perspectives (not to mention personalities) included in this largely very satisfying volume. Despite this variety of topics covered, I nevertheless believe that it is also possible to discern a shared preoccupation that unifies the different theoretical discussions. All of the chapters in the volume reveal an increasing attention across sociolinguistics to the *situated* contexts of linguistic interaction and to the *lived experiences* of language users. A focus on the situated nature of talk and on how meaning emerges in context has obviously been central to interactional sociolinguistics for decades (including in more recent "third-wave" articulations of variationism, e.g., Eckert 2012). Yet, the chapters in the volume also

demonstrate the importance of adopting a situated, emic perspective in studies of language change (cf. chapters by Silverstein and Eckert), commodification (Heller and Duchêne), mobility (Britain), social critique (Pietikäinen) and language activism (Wee). In other words, the volume illustrates a significant movement across the field of sociolinguistics away from overly generalised, mechanistic, “one-size-fits-all” interpretations of linguistic practice, towards an increasingly reflexive analytical stance that is sensitive to the semiotic and ethnographic contours of the situations we investigate. While there are disagreements over whether we have gone too far (or not far enough) in this regard (e.g., Edwards 2012; Guy and Hinskens 2016; Bell 2016), it is undeniable that the kinds of theoretical advances described in the volume have allowed us to explore situated instances of language use (whether spoken, signed, written, or tweeted) in more detail and depth than was previously possible. For this reason alone, Coupland’s volume is an invaluable resource for those with an interest in the past, present and future of the field.

Given the importance of situated, emic perspectives to the theoretical narrative developed, there are three areas of sociolinguistic research that are surprisingly absent from the volume, and a fourth that I believe deserves further elaboration and treatment in our work. In what follows, I take each of these in turn.

### *Perception and Attitudes*

The first of these areas is research on speech perception and attitudes, a topic that has been of interest to sociolinguists from the earliest days of the field (e.g., Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum 1960; Labov 1966; Giles 1970) and continues to be at the theoretical cutting edge (e.g., Campbell-Kibler 2009; Babel 2016). In particular, I have in mind research that explores the various social, linguistic and cognitive influences on how sociolinguistic meanings are perceived and ascribed, including the effects of individual exposure (e.g.,

Clopper and Pisoni 2006; Levon and Fox 2014; Beck 2016), the presence of additional linguistic and other semiotic cues (e.g., Johnson, Strand and D’Imperio 1999; Hay, Warren and Drager 2006; Pharao, Maegaard, Møller and Kristiansen 2014), social stereotypes and ideologies (e.g., Campbell-Kibler 2008, 2011; Levon 2014), and differing frequency distributions of relevant forms (e.g., Labov et al. 2011; Wagner and Hesson 2014; Levon and Buchstaller 2015). These studies and others like them have contributed directly to the elaboration of the very notion of *construal* that Silverstein, Eckert and Gal all identify as crucial to the further development of sociolinguistic theory. This is not to mention research in folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology (e.g., Niedzielski 1999; Niedzielski and Preston 2003; Preston 2010, 2011), which is entirely devoted to identifying the specific contextual elements that affect how and what people perceive. In short, work on perception and attitudes has become a cornerstone of current theorising in many areas of sociolinguistics. Because of this, its absence in the current volume is a conspicuous omission.<sup>2</sup>

### *Language Socialisation*

The second absence in the volume is research on language socialisation, or the ways in which culturally and contextually specific uses and understandings of language are transmitted across speakers and generations. Canonically, language socialisation research examines the acquisition of linguistic norms by children from both caregivers (e.g., Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Smith, Durham, and Fortune 2007) and peers (e.g., Goodwin 1990; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2007). The field has also branched out to consider other kinds of “novice” socialisation situations, including second language socialisation (e.g., Zuengler and Cole 2005; Duff and Talmy 2011; Drummond 2012), heritage language socialisation (e.g., He 2006; Smith-Christmas 2014), and adult socialisation into new communities and cultures (e.g., Benor 2004). Together, research on socialisation has

developed a sophisticated theoretical vantage point from which to understand how individuals acquire the ideological frameworks that underpin meaningful language use. As Gal reminds us in her contribution to the volume, construing linguistic practice as meaningful first requires noticing it (cf. Niedzielski and Preston 2003), and noticing is itself an ideological process that must be learned. Socialisation thus undergirds many of the various theoretical themes of the book (e.g., meaning, markets, mobility) and its inclusion in the volume would have been a useful complement.

### *Sociolinguistics in the South*

A third conspicuous absence in the volume relates to the geopolitical positioning of the various contributions. Though the table of contents features an impressive array of top scholars from across the discipline, it is impossible not to notice that these scholars are overwhelmingly located in the global North (and primarily in North America and Western Europe). While perhaps partially a function of where sociolinguistics initially developed as a field, the almost total lack of contributions on any of the thematic areas from scholars located in the global South has, in my opinion, two effects. First, it makes it seem as if sociolinguistics does not take place outside of North America and Western Europe, whereas this is clearly not the case. There are vibrant (if, admittedly, somewhat smaller) sociolinguistics communities in Africa, South America, South and East Asia, and elsewhere, and it is unfortunate that the work of scholars from these locations is not showcased in the volume. The second effect is that not including the work of sociolinguists in the global South can be said to perpetuate a particular geopolitics of knowledge that privileges Northern perspectives and prevents Southern scholars from contributing a differently positioned interpretation of events and practices that concern them (e.g., Mignolo 2002). This is not to say that all work need necessarily feature multiple analytical and epistemological

perspectives. Yet for a book that aims to represent the theoretical cutting-edge of the field, a more geopolitically diverse set of contributions would have been warranted.

Indeed, a caution against making theoretical over-generalisations based on a restricted geographical sample dates back at least as far as Rickford's (1986) classic paper on local understandings of society and social class in Guyana. There, Rickford argues that a unified conceptualisation of the social class hierarchy (as in traditional variationist research from the United States) is not applicable in all contexts, and particularly not in post-colonial settings. Similarly, sociolinguistic research on Arabic has demonstrated that such key explanatory concepts as education, social class, "dialect", and group membership are all conceived of very differently in the Arab World, and in ways that challenge certain theoretical orthodoxies (see, for example, Haeri 2000; Al-Wer 2013). Finally, there exists a prominent body of research exploring how language participates in (re)imaginings of the nation, belonging, and local social relations in various locations around the world. This work examines the effect on these processes of globalisation, post/de/neo-colonialism and emergent discourses of transnational cosmopolitan "modernity" (e.g., Bhatt 2010; Besnier 2011; Park and Lo 2012; Kerfoot and Hyltenstam 2017) – social forces that all impact the global South differently than they do the global North. For these reasons, the inclusion of research that adopts a Southern perspective would have been welcome. (For a more detailed discussion of the geopolitics of knowledge in our field, see the forthcoming special issue of this journal on Southern approaches to sociolinguistics.)

### *The Self in Sociolinguistics*

The final point I would like to make does not so much relate to an absence from the volume as to an area that I believe requires further research in sociolinguistics. From the contributions to the book, it is readily apparent that as sociolinguists we are very good at

analysing, on one hand, micro-interactional moves in the moment (including the micro-level structure and patterning of linguistic features and systems), and, on the other hand, macro-social trends and flows. Where we have more difficulty is in conceiving of the people we study holistically. What I mean by this is that the challenge for sociolinguistics – particularly those of us interested in patterns of language use – is to see individuals as more than bundles of momentary interactions, stances or alignments while also not falling into the trap of basing our analyses on overly simplistic conceptualisations of coherence, integration and stasis. Doing this requires us to develop a theory of selfhood that encompasses both the multiplicity of diverse identifications we all maintain and enact in social interaction and the subjective continuity individuals experience across their lives.

In saying this, I do not intend to re-open a debate on the structure-agency divide, as the contributions to Coupland's volume amply demonstrate that both are essential to our accounts of sociolinguistic practice. But what I do think is missing in much sociolinguistic research is a clearer understanding of how individuals continually *mediate* between structural predispositions and agentic desires across interactional moments, including how they establish subjective continuity and (the semblance of) coherence across time and space (cf. Linde 1993). There is, of course, a rich history of research on the self in sociolinguistics. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985) Acts of Identity model is an early example of an agentic conceptualisation of linguistic practice, whereby speakers variably adopt different linguistic forms in order to indicate affiliations with particular social groups at different times. A similar mechanism also underlies Coupland's (2001) theory of the Relational Self, where stylistic variation involves a dialectical relationship between a speaker's strategic deployment of culturally relevant "voices" and listeners' interpretations of that practice in context. These theories succeed in capturing the fact that individuals are made up of a multiplicity of identifications and affiliations that can be invoked through speech. Yet in both cases, the

analytical lens is anchored at the level of the immediate interaction, examining how stylistic practice at any one moment is the product of both persistent (i.e., biographical) and contingent (i.e., contextual) features. Where our theorising has focussed less of its attention is on how individuals *stitch together* these disparate moments in the construction of a continuous whole, into a self that perdures over time and across contexts (cf. Bell 2001: 164). To my mind, focussing on this aspect of sociolinguistic practice is the crucial next step in our theorising of the self in sociolinguistics.

There are elements of this kind of examination of selfhood present in various current research trajectories in the field. One such trajectory comes from research on stance and, particularly, stance accretion (Du Bois 2002; Rauniomaa 2003). Work in this area examines how the repeated taking of specific interactional stances sediments over time into an enregistered personal or community speech style (e.g., Johnstone 2009; Moore and Podesva 2009). While to date we have little information on the specific mechanism governing this process, the concept of stance accretion is important for linking strategic language use in the interactional moment with more durable categories of being. Another relevant trajectory is work on stylistic repertoires (e.g., Rampton 1995, 2006; Sharma 2011; Sharma and Rampton 2015). This type of research examines the various social, biographical and cognitive factors that influence the variety and types of styles individuals have access to, as well as the ways in which these styles are strategically used in interaction. Recently, work on this topic has been extended to consider changes in style repertoires over the lifespan and what these changes can reveal about the relationship between language and subjectivity (e.g., Rickford and Price 2013; Sharma 2016). Finally, a third trajectory involves research on subjective conflict, or the ways in which individuals use language to negotiate a tension that exists between the numerous personal and communal identifications they maintain (e.g., McIntosh 2009; Levon 2016). Studies in this area remind us of the complexity of subjective experience, and that the



constraints on observed practice often exceed what is immediately observable in a given context.

I cite these existing research trajectories to demonstrate that exciting research on the self in sociolinguistics is already taking place (and, in certain instances, has been taking place for some time). What I believe is needed now is to bring these efforts together into a coherent research programme that is itself grounded in a robust theory of *selfhood*. While much attention has been paid over the years to notions such as “community” and “identity”, I would argue that sociolinguistics has yet to fully integrate a sophisticated and psychologically realistic understanding of the self (Johnstone 1996 and Coupland 2001 are notable exceptions). This is in spite of the fact that various theories of selfhood are implicit in much of our research. Though I do not have the space to explore the point in detail, work in sociolinguistics has tended to adopt one of two perspectives on selfhood. In the so-called “modern” tradition of social psychologists such as Erikson (1968) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), the self is viewed as bounded and internally coherent – the self understood as an integrated inner core of being. In contrast, work in the “post-” or “late-modern” tradition (e.g., Giddens 1991, following Mead 1934 and Bakhtin 1981) focusses on the self as fractured and multiple, as a plurality of differentiated self-definitions, any one of which can be adopted in a given context. Recently, research in social psychology has argued for a model of the self as comprising elements of both “modern” continuity and “late-modern” discontinuity simultaneously. In Dialogical Self Theory (DST, e.g., Hermans 2001; Hermans and Gieser 2012), the self is understood as a repertoire of *I*-positions, or a pool of relatively autonomous, and potentially conflicting, subject positions each associated with its own independent history, values and practices. Crucially, within DST behaviour is modelled as the result of a *dialogue* between positions. Thus, while other models of multidimensional selfhood allow different aspects of the self to emerge at certain moments, only DST captures the interrelations between these inner selves and the ways

in which they work together to inform an individual's social practice. For this reason, DST could provide a promising framework for modelling the kinds of dynamic yet structured patterns of semiotic practice we observe in sociolinguistic research (for an early example of what later became DST in sociolinguistics, see Hill 1995).

Ultimately, the particular theory of selfhood we adopt in sociolinguistics is a matter of empirical investigation and debate. My goal here is not necessarily to advocate for one framework over another, but rather to suggest that the time is ripe in sociolinguistics for us to seriously and explicitly theorise the notion of the self in our research. Coupland's volume demonstrates that we have developed very sophisticated understandings both of how individuals operate in micro-level interactions and of the macro-level social forces that structure normative regimes of language. I believe that our next step should be to bring these two traditions together to investigate the *self-in-society* (and *society-in-the-self*) in order to develop a more nuanced appreciation of the complex subjectivities of the individuals we study and of the crucial role of language in materialising that complexity.

#### NOTES

- 1 A reader notes that this "growing inter-disciplinarity" can actually be seen as a return to the field's origins, when certain foundational figures (such as Hymes and Halliday) argued for sociolinguistics as an explicitly inter-disciplinary endeavour.
- 2 A reader comments that research on the perception of speech, perhaps particularly in the sociophonetics tradition, often adheres to similarly simplistic and positivist understandings of social meaning as some work in variationist sociolinguistics. I agree that this can be the case, but also argue that a growing body of research within sociophonetics (including the studies I cite here) attempts to integrate more sophisticated models of social meaning within an experimental paradigm.

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