

Dialect Contact, Dialectology and Sociolinguistics*

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ABSTRACT

A central problem in considering the subjects of sociolinguistics and dialectology has to do with the relationship between these two topics, which has often been somewhat difficult and controversial. Is, for example, dialectology part of sociolinguistics, or is it a separate discipline? Once their relative status and complementary nature have been discussed, the ultimate goal of this article is to emphasize the relevance of the micro-sociolinguistic (accommodation theory) and macro-sociolinguistic (dialectology and geolinguistics) approaches to the phenomena of linguistic diffusion in dialect contact situations. (Keywords: dialectology, sociolinguistics, accommodation, face-to-face interaction, diffusion, dialect contact).

RESUMEN

Un problema central a la hora de considerar las disciplinas de sociolingüística y dialectología es el de su relación, lo que muy frecuentemente ha sido bastante difícil a la vez que controvertido. ¿Es la dialectología, por ejemplo, parte de la sociolingüística o es una disciplina autónoma? Una vez que se han discutido sus estatus respectivos y su naturaleza complementaria, el objetivo final del presente artículo es subrayar la relevancia de las aproximaciones microsociolingüística (teoría de la acomodación) y macrosociolingüística (dialectología y geolingüística) a los fenómenos de la difusión lingüística en las situaciones de dialectos en contacto. (Palabras Clave: dialectología, sociolingüística, acomodación, interacción cara-a-cara, difusión, dialectos en contacto).

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I. SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND DIALECTOLOGY

The problematic nature of this relationship clearly has to do with the problem of what exactly is sociolinguistics. In the past, I have found it very useful when attempting to answer the question of what does and does not constitute sociolinguistics to consider scholars' objectives as these relate to their academic endeavours in the area of language and society (Trudgill, 1978). If one does this, it becomes clear that there are some scholars who work in this area with objectives that are entirely those of social scientists – those who wish to use language to gain a better understanding of society, such as the ethnomethodologists, and Basil Bernstein in his earlier work. I am inclined to regard work of this sort as not constituting sociolinguistics, although I do not feel very strongly about this.

To move into areas which clearly do constitute sociolinguistics, we can note that there are many scholars whose work has mixed objectives: they wish to find out more about society and language, and the relationships between them. I would cite as examples of this work research in areas such as discourse analysis, anthropological linguistics, the social psychology of language, the sociology of language and the ethnography of speaking.

Finally, we can note work whose objectives are more or less entirely linguistic, such as that of linguists like Labov, for whom sociolinguistics is a way of doing linguistics, of finding out more about language. Often, the label 'secular linguistics' is used for this kind of research.

Another, different classificatory approach to the subject of sociolinguistics which is also very useful, and to which we shall return later, is that which distinguishes between macro-sociolinguistics, covering large-scale work in the sociology of language and secular linguistics, and micro-sociolinguistics, which deals with face-to-face interaction in areas such as discourse and the social psychology of language.

Where does dialectology fit into all this? Is it part of sociolinguistics or not? When I first began teaching in 1970 at the University of Reading, I inherited a course called 'Sociolinguistics and Dialectology'. After a few years, I changed the title of the course to 'Sociolinguistics', without changing the content, because I believed that dialectology could quite properly be subsumed under the heading of sociolinguistics. One consequence of this, however, was that a new course popped up in the department a couple of years later, taught by someone else, called 'Dialectology'!

Clearly, dialectology shares with secular linguistics the characteristic that its objectives are primarily linguistic. But what exactly are they? Nineteenth-century dialectology in Europe, at least, was very closely related to historical linguistics. Indeed, one of the major motivations for dialectological research was to check out the neogrammarian notion that sound change was regular and that sound laws admitted of no exceptions. Also, dialect maps such as those produced for German by Wenker, were influential in the development of support for the wave-theory of linguistic change.

However, it has to be said that more recently there has been a suspicion on the part of non-dialectologists that dialectologists – or some of them – have forgotten about objectives altogether. The accusation has been one of 'butterfly collecting' – that dialectologists are engaged in collecting data for the sake of collecting data. And of course, this accusation, whether fair or not, has been one often heard from the lips of sociolinguists. The problem is: what is dialectology *for*?

My own feeling has actually been that in fact there is nothing necessarily wrong with

just collecting data. Even if you do not 'use' the data yourself, it will be available for the use of others. And in very many countries one strong motivation for work in dialectology has been the perception that traditional dialects are disappearing and should be recorded, for later examination, before they are lost altogether. Moreover, sociolinguists and other linguists have often made use of dialectologists' findings: Labov's work in Martha's Vineyard and New York City made considerable use of the work of dialectologists in connection with the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada*; and in my own work in England, I made frequent reference to the excellent dialectological work carried out there in the 1930s by the American Guy Lowman.

This suspicion, then, that dialectology had lost its way, has been one cause for hostility between sociolinguistics and dialectology. And it would be foolish to deny that there *has* been some antagonism, with dialectologists feeling somewhat defensive about the 'newer' discipline of sociolinguistics, and sociolinguists being somewhat scornful about the 'older' discipline of dialectology. It is now apparent, however, that much of this is now past, and that we are moving into a new era of co-operation, integration and synthesis in the field.

One recent sign of this in the British Isles has been the publication of a new volume entitled *Studies in Linguistic Geography*, edited by John Kirk *et al.*, in which, although there is still some defensiveness and crossing of swords, sociolinguists and traditional dialectologists have come together and co-operated in an attempt to achieve a better understanding of the nature of phenomena such as linguistic change. This was the sort of movement that Jack Chambers and I were hoping for when we argued in our book *Dialectology* (1980) for the development of what we have called 'geolinguistics'. By geolinguistics we refer to a synthesis of the methods and objectives of traditional dialectology with those of secular linguistics and other forms of macro-sociolinguistics, together with some input from human geography. (I will return to this topic shortly). I can also cite papers at the 1988 Hong Kong conference on dialect contact and perceptual dialectology as further evidence of this synthesis (see Bolton & Kwok 1992).

In one way, then, we can say that dialectology is a part of sociolinguistics and therefore deserved a section to itself at the conference. Dialectology is an area of study which examines language in its social context, and which has, or ought to have, linguistic objectives, such as improving our understanding of the nature of linguistic change. As with other areas of sociolinguistics, it may also have mixed objectives, as when dialect maps are used as tools for studying cultural history, migration patterns and so on. In another way dialectology is not part of sociolinguistics, in the sense that it is a discipline that is much older than sociolinguistics, with its own literature, approaches and traditions.

In the end, of course, whether dialectology is part of sociolinguistics or not is of no importance. Dell Hymes (1972) is someone who has argued against the parcelling up of the human sciences into separate, labelled and competing disciplines, and he is obviously quite right. It is what we do that is important, not what we call it.

II. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE SAME PROBLEM: DIFFUSION

I have argued in the past (Trudgill 1978) that it is important, in an enormous area such as language and society, that we are clear that scholars in this field do not all necessarily share the same objectives. Different objectives must not only be tolerated, they must also be

acknowledged if miscommunication is not to result. For example, although both discourse analysts and ethnomethodologists may study conversation, I think it is important to recognize that they may be doing this for entirely different reasons. This is why, as I said before, I believe that objectives are an important and useful classificatory tool in discussing sociolinguistics.

Equally, however, I believe it is also important to acknowledge the extent to which scholars working with different methodologies and different general objectives may from time to time be able to share similar, more particular objectives and combine to shed light on the same problems. For example, in discussing the relationship between sociolinguistics and dialectology, it is possible to point to issues where traditional dialectology, macro-sociolinguistics and micro-sociolinguistics can be regarded as representing, as it were, three sides of the same coin.

Consider, for example, the problem of the geographical diffusion of linguistic innovations, and the location of isoglosses. Each of these three disciplines, it emerges, has something of interest to say about this problem. Let us look at dialectology first.

II.1. A Dialectological Approach

In the early years of traditional dialectology, dialect maps led to the development of an interest in why particular isoglosses happened to be located at particular places, and in some cases explanations could be advanced. For example, it was noted from the configuration of certain isoglosses that linguistic forms had obviously spread outwards as innovations from particular centres. These were generally either urban centres or major lines of communication such as the Danube. Kranzmayer (1956) showed that, in many respects, the Central Bavarian dialect of German (including Munich, Vienna and the Danube valley) was innovating, while North Bavarian (including the Regensburg and Nuremberg areas) and South Bavarian (southern Austria) were more conservative. Central Bavarian, for instance, has lost *l* in words like *Salz*, 'salt' and *Geld*, 'money', while the other dialects have retained it. Thus the area around the Danube has become a focal area as the result of the outward diffusion of linguistic innovations.

It could also be shown that the spreading of new words or pronunciations took the form of wedges driven into the territory of older forms, and where two wedges joined up, isolated 'islands' might be left behind. These more conservative zones were termed 'relic areas' and tended to be located in isolated places like mountain valleys or on the distant periphery of language areas. 'Transition zones', on the other hand, resulted from the fact that different innovations travelled similar but not identical distances in different directions. This differential location of isoglosses could often be accounted for in terms of the chronology of their origin, together with changes in communications networks at different periods of history.

It was also apparent that linguistic innovations tended to spread further along major rivers than they did over more difficult terrain, and that bundles of isoglosses sometimes coincided with political boundaries, past and present, or with physical barriers. A major study by Frings (1956) first published in 1922 deals with both these factors in a treatment of the dialects of the German Rhineland. A bundle of isoglosses runs across Germany from west to east, including lines for northern *hūs* / Southern *haus*, 'house': northern *maken* / southern *machen*, 'make'; northern *dat* / southern *das*, 'that'; northern *dorp* / southern *dorf*, 'village'. However, when the bundle reaches the Rhineland, the isoglosses separate out into what has

become known as the 'Rhenish fan'. Frings was able to show that the area bounded by the *maken / machen* line north of Cologne and the *dorp / dorf, hūs / haus* line south of Bonn was coextensive with the old diocese of Cologne. Similarly, the area to the south of the *dorp / dorf* line and to the north of the *dat / das* line, north of Mainz, was coextensive with the former diocese of Trier. These had been relatively stable ecclesiastical administrative areas from the Middle Ages until the end of the eighteenth century, and Frings suggests that linguistic innovations spreading from the culturally dominant area of southern Germany travelled along the Rhine to urban centres (such as Cologne and Trier), and then outwards from these centres to the edges of the administrative areas which they dominated. Speakers within a diocese would look to the diocesan capital for their linguistic standards and would travel to the capital rather than elsewhere for trading and administrative purposes. As a result, linguistic frontiers came to lie along political frontiers.

Because of phenomena such as these, linguistic maps and atlases compiled from dialect surveys could be used as research tools in historical linguistics and, to a certain extent, history. In the words of Bottiglioni (1954): «just as a geologist moves from the morphological aspect of the ground to discover the sedimentary processes that have determined it, so the linguist needs a faithful representation of the linguistic area to reconstruct its history». Maps can demonstrate the probable direction a linguistic change has taken and can help to shed light on problems such as the relative age of two current forms.

11.2. A Macro-sociolinguistic/Geolinguistic Approach

If we look next at a macro-sociolinguistic or geolinguistic approach to this problem, we can note that a probable answer from scholars working in this field to the question '*Why is this isogloss where it is?*' would be, on some occasions, *because of a diocesan boundary*. On others, though, the answer might be '*Actually, it probably isn't exactly there at all*'. Insights from secular linguistics tell us to be sceptical about abrupt dialect boundaries of any kind. Abrupt boundaries *do* exist, of course. But often they may simply be an artefact of a traditional dialectological methodology which elicits one vowel, in one phonological context, in one word, from one person, in one place, in one style, once. This greatly minimizes the amount of apparent variation. Geolinguistics has been able to show that, very often, apparent dialect boundaries may consist not of a line but of a *corridor of variability*, even if we are thinking of the pronunciation of a single word or a single consonant. Within this corridor, the percentage of different variants used will depend not only on geographical location within the corridor, but also on phenomena such as class, sex, age, style and linguistic constraints.

Having established where dialect boundaries are, and what they are like, geolinguistics, like traditional dialectology, will attempt to explain their location, especially in cases where there is no obvious cultural or political boundary. One way in which I have attempted to do this is by developing geographical diffusion models. The idea behind these is to attempt to explain and predict the diffusion of linguistic innovations, and hence the location of isoglosses. To be successful, such diffusion models would seem to require at the very least measures involving a demographic factor – the populations of different centres or areas – and a geographical factor – the distance between them. Ultimately, the hope would be to explain the location of those isoglosses which coincide with no obvious boundaries in terms of the location of a centre of innovation and the balance of populations on either side of the isogloss, as well as any other relevant factors.

11.3. A Micro-linguistic Approach

If we now turn to the third side of the coin, micro-sociolinguistics, it emerges that we know much less about the location of isoglosses and diffusion of linguistic forms at the micro level. Clearly, if a linguistic feature has spread from one region to another, it must have spread from one speaker to another and then on to other speakers, and so on. But how exactly are linguistic forms transmitted from one geographical area to another at the level of the individual speaker?

The best explanation would appear to lie in the theory of linguistic accommodation, developed by Howard Giles (1973) within the paradigm of the social psychology of language. In face-to-face interaction, I would argue, speakers accommodate to each other linguistically by reducing the dissimilarities between their speech patterns and by adopting features from each other's speech. If a speaker accommodates frequently enough to a particular accent or dialect, then the accommodation may in time become permanent, particularly if attitudinal factors are favourable. The geographical parameter of diffusion models becomes relevant simply because, other things being equal, people on average come into contact most often with people who live closest to them and least often with people who live furthest away. The demographic parameter becomes relevant because the larger the population of a city, the more likely an individual from elsewhere is to come into contact with a speaker from that city.

Face-to-face interaction is necessary before diffusion takes place, precisely because it is only during face-to-face interaction that accommodation occurs. In other words, the electronic media are not very instrumental in the diffusion of linguistic innovations, in spite of widespread popular notions to the contrary. The point about the TV set is that people, however much they watch and listen to it, do not talk to it (and even if they do, it cannot hear them), with the result that no accommodation takes place.

One piece of evidence that this accommodation plays a vital role lies in the fact that precisely the same phenomena that can be observed to take place in individual face-to-face encounters can also be observed in long-term macro-level dialect contact and dialect mixture processes, as macro-level reflections of face-to-face micro-level processes.

Take, for example, the obvious fact that accommodation of the convergence type is rarely total. We are talking rather of reducing dissimilarities. Accommodation is usually incomplete. The same thing also seems to be true if we turn to an examination of dialect contact phenomena at the macro level, indicating that the one is simply the macro-level reflection of the other.

One example of this is provided by the way in which dialect contact may lead to the development of forms that are intermediate between those present in the two or more original dialects. An obvious way in which forms can be intermediate is phonetically. For example, my research in East Anglia, in England, shows that an original area in which a word such as *boat* is pronounced as [bu:t], in contact with the London area which has the pronunciation [bəʊt], has recently given rise to the development of an intervening area with the intermediate pronunciation [bout] (Trudgill 1986). We can imagine that this is the macro-level result of a series of micro-level incomplete accommodations in which speakers have reduced pronunciation dissimilarities with other speakers without totally adopting the other pronunciation. I regard intermediate forms of this type as an example of 'interdialect'. I use the term interdialect in the manner of the term 'interlanguage', which is now widely used in studies of second-language acquisition. The label 'interdialect' is intended to refer to situations where contact between two dialects leads to the development of forms that actually originally

occurred in neither dialect.

Interdialect. however. is by no means confined to the development of vowel sounds that are phonetically intermediate. Partial accommodation may lead to the development of forms that are intermediate in other ways. Developments of this sort have long been noted by dialect geographers as occurring in geographical dialect contact areas and resulting in permanent interdialect forms in transition zones. At the lexical level, for instance, there is the well-known German dialect example where an area in which 'potato' is *Grundbirne* ('ground pear') is separated from an area where it is *Erdapfel* ('earth apple') by an intervening area in which the form is *Erdbirne*. A modern British example of the same phenomenon is the usage of *take away* in central and southern England to refer to Chinese and other establishments from which hot food can be bought for consumption off the premises. This southern area of Britain is divided from a northern area (mostly Scotland), where the term *car্ন out* is used, by an intermediate area (part of northern England) in which the intermediate form *take out* is employed.

It is important to note, however, that interdialect forms, defined as forms which arise out of dialect contact and which do not occur in the original dialects that are or were in contact, do not necessarily have to be *intermediate* in any simple or straightforward way. In some cases, accommodation has been not so much incomplete as imperfect – i.e. 'wrong'. At the micro level, the best-known form of imperfect accommodation is hyperadaptation, and the best-known form of this is hypercorrection.

The hypercorrections that most often attract attention are those of the butcher /bʌtʃə/ type, and that seem either to be temporary or to affect only individuals. Occasionally, however, it is clear that hypercorrection gives rise at the macro level to large-scale linguistic change and results in interdialect forms becoming an integral part of a particular dialect.

One such originally interdialect phenomenon is the 'Bristol l', an accent feature which is well known to students of English English accents and to many English people generally. The term '*Bristol l*' refers to the fact that in the working-class speech of the major city of Bristol, and in certain immediately neighbouring rural dialects, words such as *America*, *banana*, *idea* are pronounced with a final lll. That is, *ideal* and *idea*, *evil* and *Eva*, *normal* and *Norma*, *aerial* and *area* are homophonous.

It is instructive to attempt to provide an explanation for the development of this feature. It is after all unusual and not repeated anywhere else in the English-speaking world, to the best of my knowledge. Although l-loss and l-vocalization are very well known indeed in the history of the world's languages, l-addition is not common, to say the least.

A very plausible explanation for the historical addition of /l/ lies in hypercorrection. Wells (1982: pp. 344-5) writes:

Intrusive /l/ is not a sandhi phenomenon: it can apply equally to a word which is sentence final or in isolation, and it varies allophonically between clear and dark accordingly as the following segment is or is not a vowel [...]. Its origin must presumably lie in hypercorrection after the loss of final /l/ after /ə/, a hypothesized ['æpə] for *apple*. When the /l/ was restored under pressure from standard accents, it was added analogically to all words ending in [ə].

This is very likely a correct explanation, and one which explains this somewhat peculiar development in terms of dialect contact and imperfect accommodation.

CONCLUSION

Micro-sociolinguistics studies how linguistic changes spread from one individual to another as a result of accommodation in face-to-face interaction. Macro-level sociolinguistics – geolinguistics – studies how such changes diffuse over wider geographical areas. And both geolinguistics and traditional dialectology provide explanations for why diffusion halts at particular locations, resulting in particular configurations of isoglosses.

Accommodation in face-to-face interaction, as studied by micro-sociolinguistics, plays an essential role in the geographical diffusion of linguistic forms, as studied at the macro-level by geolinguistics, leading to the location of isoglosses, as investigated, also at the macro-level, by dialectology. As we saw earlier, except in cases of migration, if linguistic forms spread from place to place, they must also spread from speaker to speaker. One of the strengths of sociolinguistics and dialectology, or if you prefer, sociolinguistics including dialectology, is that this subject (or subjects) permits us to study language use, in real-life social contexts, both by social groups *and* by individuals.

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