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In 1980, Gillian Sankoff wrote "To my mind, the most challenging problems in contemporary sociolinguistics involve putting together [language structure, speakers' orientation to the message content, speakers' orientation to other participants, and speakers' orientation to social categories]". In the following chapters of that book, she offered what I believe remains one of the most serious, comprehensive, and well-written attempts to place sociolinguistics firmly in all its social, interpersonal, and linguistic context as anyone has written to date. The problems she identified continue to challenge sociolinguists, as the varied directions in which the field has moved amply illustrate. Language remains the centripetal force holding us together, while we scatter, following the promises held out by methods and theories in many different branches of the academy.[1]

In this paper I propose to focus on *one* context for sociolinguistics. I will discuss some of the contributions that have been made and can continue to be made between the social psychology of language and sociolinguistics. A useful similar exploration can be found in Milroy and Preston (1999). The observations I offer are rather in the spirit of Lesley Milroy's recent exploration of different approaches for bridging the division between "internal" and "external" factors in variation. Milroy has proposed that as an alternative we should consider variation as being "ideologically dependent" or "ideologically independent". This is certainly a useful heuristic, but whereas this largely (but by no means only) focuses our attention on the wider social domain, I think the heuristic I introduce here places the interpersonal more squarely in focus as well. I will suggest that the need to

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manage uncertainty is a salient factor in all communication and that much
linguistic variation can be traced back, one way or another, to this need. I
will suggest, moreover, that this has been implicit in a lot of sociolinguistic
analyses of variation—what I am doing here is trying to make it explicit and
push its implications a bit further.

I take (1) and (2) to be uncontentious:

(1)   It is seldom, if ever, true that variation can be accounted for solely
        in terms of linguistic factors.
(2)   Therefore, any theory of language variation and language
        change must be equally well-equipped to articulate the effects of
        social and psychological factors as it is to articulate the effects of
        linguistic factors.

In support of these assertions, we can consider the distribution of null
subjects in conversational Bislama. The nature of the variable is illustrated in
0, and a detailed analysis of the distribution of null subjects in one man's
speech is given in Table 1.

(3)   *Mi*   *stap*   *wet*   *long*   *wan*   *mesej*   *blong*   *mi,*
        1s   stay   wait   on   one   message   of   1s
        bae   *Ø*   *i*   *kam.*
        IRR   (3s)   AGR   come[2]

        'I was waiting for a message for me, which should come.'
        (lit. 'I was waiting for a message for me, should come').

	Speaker's use of null subjects	
Addressees	**N = Ø subjects**	**% all clauses**
Extended family	50	71
MM only	40	62
Total	*90*	*67*

Table 1. Number of phonetically null subjects as a percentage of all clauses
over two accounts of the same story with two different audiences (same
speaker). (T-statistic = 14.78 with 1df, p = 0.043.) (Meyerhoff 2001)

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[2] The following abbreviations are used in Bislama glosses: 1=first person; 2=second
person; 3=third person; AGR=agreement; excl=exclusive; incl=inclusive;
IRR=irrealis; s=singular; SPEC=specificity marker; p=plural; PL=plural determiner

The distribution of null·subjects in Bislama is primarily, and it appears increasingly, constrained by morphosyntactic and discourse factors (Meyerhoff 2000), but a not insignificant part of the variation seems to be interpersonal. Table 1 shows how the frequency of one man's use of null subjects varied depending on whether he was telling a story to me, or telling the same story to his extended family (and me) after dinner. A two-tailed t-test rejected the null hypothesis that the difference in mean frequency of phonetically null subjects with the two different types of addressee was due to chance. The results are reminiscent of those found by Bickerton (1980), Rickford & McNair-Knox (1994) and Cukor-Avila & Bailey (2001).

Howard Giles' Accommodation Theory (Giles & Smith 1979, Gallois et al 1995, Jones et al. 1999) is familiar to sociolinguists and is often invoked to account for variation like this. Indeed, the contribution of CAT to sociolinguistics should not·be underestimated: it underpins sociolinguistic theory in a range of areas, for example, Trudgill's gravity model (1974), as well as work on dialect levelling and contact-induced change (e.g. Auer et al. 1998, Kerswill 2001, Kerswill & Williams 2000, Trudgill et al. 2000). But accommodation is only a strategy that is harnessed to satisfy more abstract social psychological needs.

Early formulations of accommodation theory derived directly from the insights of Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory and intergroup theory (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1986, Turner 1999, Turner et al. 1987). These theories conceptualized individuals' self-awareness as an interplay between more or less personal and group identifications, that vary in contextual salience within conversations and that vary developmentally across time. They have a lot more to offer sociolinguists than the notion of accommodation alone. They offer the possibility of a number of other testable hypotheses. For instance: social identity theory posits that strategies of social mobility will only occur when people perceive the distinctions between groups to be either unstable, or illegitimate. This suggests, then, that we will only observe style shifting that mirrors class stratification where speakers feel the boundaries between classes can conceivably be breached, or when they consider their relegation to one class rather than another to be unfair and illegitimate. (Walker 2001 also discusses applications of social identity theory and its usefulness for the analysis of ethnicity and variation.)

I will argue that accommodation is a strategy by which a range of problems are satisfied. These problems arise from speakers' need to manage interactional and interpersonal uncertainty. I believe that using uncertainty as a primitive has a couple of benefits. These are given in (4) and (5):

(4) Using (un)certainty as an analytical primitive allows us to unify a number of motivations that have been proposed as accounts of language variation.

(5) Using (un)certainty as an analytical primitive allows us to add to the typology of motivations that sociolinguistics has traditionally worked with.

At this point let me also provide a working definition of what I mean by uncertainty; this is given in (6).

(6)   *Uncertainty* refers to
    (i)   an individual's cognitive state ("resulting from [their] assessment of the number of alternative predictions available for [another's] future ... or past behavior", Bradac 2001)
    (ii)   the degree of situational (in)stability or (in)determinacy (cf. problematic integration theory, Babrow 1992).

I suggested in (4) that it might be possible to unify a number of apparently very different motivations for linguistic variation. I now review some of these motivations under headings that lend themselves to my overall goal of rephrasing them in terms of situational or interpersonal uncertainty.

(7) *Accentuate the positive—A: Speakers are accruing social capital.*
It is commonly assumed that speakers employ a particular variant because it is an index of some other desirable (however 'desirable' is measured) social attribute. Thus, linguistic variation is a strategy by whch people can accrue, control or appropriate social capital. This account has perhaps the longest tradition in sociolinguistics. It was central to the notion of hypercorrection and accounts of the lower middle class cross-over effect.

The notion that linguistic variants are metaphorical expressions of other forms of social capital remains important in Penny Eckert's (2000) recent work, though there, without assumptions of upward social mobility.

(8) *Eliminate the negative—B: Speakers are avoiding or minimizing risk.*
However, counter-balancing desires for upward social mobility, there are also desires to move towards "the sacred center of the common values", as expressed above.

Some variation has been accounted for by focusing on how selection of particular variants may minimize a speaker's exposure to social censure or to minimize their chance of being ascribed negative personal attributes. Liz Gordon (1997) has shown that historically in the UK and synchronically in

New Zealand, there is a tendency for people to hear a young woman who uses working class variants in her speech as being a slut (the indirect indexing holds with other socially undesirable traits so she is also perceived to be more likely to be a smoker). When I have reviewed this work with undergraduate classes in Philadelphia and Honolulu, I have found that it seems this indexing is by no means a post-colonial peculiarity. Gordon suggests that women's awareness of this ideology and a desire to distance themselves from such ascriptions might be the motivation for their occasional use of more standard, or more "middle class", variants than men use. Of course this doesn't account for cases where women use variants that are more robust indexes of vernacular culture than men do, but it is hardly surprising that there should be different motivations for different behaviours.

Work in other cultures—for example Bucholtz (1999) and Hachimi (2001)—suggests that in a range of cultures some variation can be accounted for by seeing speakers as avoiding attributes that they consider risky or evaluate negatively.

So where the motivation in (7) focuses on benefits, (8) focuses on costs.

(9) *The Balancing Act—C. Maximize fit; D: Maintain distinctiveness.*
Whereas early work on social identity framed interpersonal and intergroup identities as falling along a bipolar continuum, more recent work has recast social identity as "a *process* which transforms interpersonal into intergroup behaviour" (Turner 1999:11, my emphasis). That is, personal and social identities are differentiated in terms of degrees of inclusiveness. Turner's self-categorization theory places great weight on the functionality of prototype norms and on the processes of contrast between and within groups based on those norms. Again, it seems to me that empirical data on language variation is directly relevant to this and it might offer a valuable, practical basis on which to test this theory. The process by which the personal is transformed into the social (and the reflexivity of the process, which does not seem to be adequately incorporated into the social psychological approach) is integral to the work of Penny Eckert and of many other people in this audience. It's also something Nancy Niedzielski and I tried to put into a social psychological approach to language in a paper I will return to shortly.

Accommodation strategies (whether convergent or divergent) are often clear instantiations of the motivation to maximize fit or maintain distinctiveness. But since accommodative moves are only strategies and not themselves motives for variation, we find convergence and divergence used strategically under all levels of certainty.

The data and motivations I have discussed up to this point are reasonably familiar and it may be helpful to show how I think they relate to one another in terms of uncertainty so we can see where we are going.

Sociolinguistic phenomena that are motivated by a desire to avoid or attain identification with some other non-linguistic attribute require that there be some perceived uncertainty about the stability of the situation otherwise mobility towards or away from any social target simply would not be a realistic goal. Perceptions of the motility of category membership may be quite wrong of course, but the perception must be there.

On the other hand, the desire to maximize fit and maintain distinctiveness seem to require a greater degree of certainty. They require that people have a reasonably clear and fixed idea about the normative traits of whatever group or individual they are trying to fit with or remain distinct from. I show this in Figure 1.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                  situational instability                      │
│                                                               │
│  certainty  ───────────────────────────────────  uncertainty │
│                                                               │
│  Maximise fit;        Accrue capital;                         │
│                                                               │
│  be distinct          avoid risk                              │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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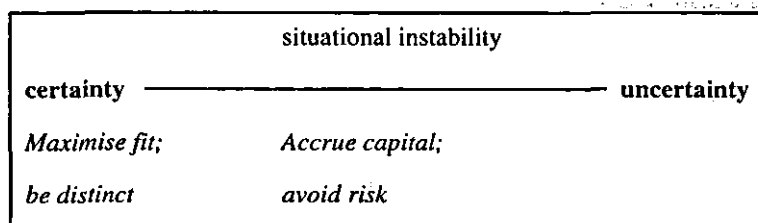
Figure 1. Placement of some social psychological factors motivating linguistic variation in terms of degrees of (internal and external) certainty.

What is clear from Figure 1 is that there is a obvious gap if variation is seen in terms of certainty: what happens when people are maximally *un*certain? Does this have any relevance to the analysis of language variation?

I suggest that when people are maximally uncertain, they set out to test their best guesses, their hypotheses about the situation and others' likely behaviour, and that this does indeed have reflexes in variation.

(10) *It's a jungle out there—E. Speakers are testing hypotheses about others.*
The notion that speakers are always testing hypotheses about their interlocutors and their interlocutors' perceptions about them, is something that Nancy Niedzielski and I tried to capture in a 1994 paper. We noted reports of quite striking divergence by South African Blacks when addressed in Fanagalo and the attitudes they expressed when explaining their divergence. In attempting to understand what exactly was going on in such divergent exchanges, we arrived at a more general model of communication that incorporated some fundamental concepts from social psychology of

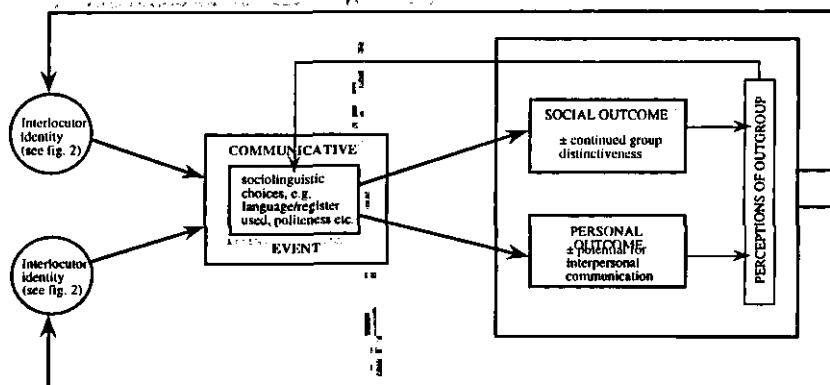language and sociolinguistic fundamentals such as network ties. Part of this model is given in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Process analysis of a communicative event emphasizing centrality of sociolinguistic and social psychological dimensions. (Meyerhoff & Niedzielski 1994).

So assuming hypothesis testing is central to communication, where do we see it in action? I offer a brief example.

Bislama, like all languages in the south west Pacific, makes a distinction between a first person plural that is inclusive of the addressee and one that is exclusive. The forms are (respectively) *yumi* and *mifala*, as shown in (11). Their typical uses are given in (12) and (13). In (12), the speaker and addressee are trying to work out when people started smashing up a dance venue; (13) is taken from court testimony (recorded by permission).

(11) *yumi*   'we' (inclusive of addressee)
      mifala   'we' (exclusive of addressee)
(12) *Hemia*   *se*   *yumi*   *stap ya,*   *i*   *no gat*   *fulap*   *man.*
      that.one   say   1p.incl   stay SPEC   AGR   no get   full.up man
      'Before that, when **we (=you and I)** were there, there weren't many people.'
(13) *Sapos*   *hem*   *i*   *no*   *ripotem*   *mifala*
      suppose   3s   AGR   no   report   1p.excl
      ating   *bambae*   *mifala*   *i*   *givim*   *moa*   *yet.*
      probably   IRR   1p.excl   AGR   give   more   yet
      'If he hadn't reported **us (= not you)**, **we (= not you)** probably would have given him even more.'

There is a nice creative juxtaposition of the inclusive and exclusive in (14), showing how speakers can play with and exploit all the connotations of inclusion and exclusion. Alis is trying to persuade me to come to a formal welcome for some visiting Americans:

(14)	MM:	*Mi*	*no*	*wantem*	*stap*	*long*	*saed*	*blong*	*ol*
		1s	no	want	stay	on	side	of	PL
		manAmerika							
		¨man America							
	Alis:	*No,*	*bae*	*yu*	*kam*	*stap*	*wetem*	*yumi*	
		no,	IRR	2s	come	stay	with	1p.incl	
		mifala nomo.							
		1p.excl	only						
	MM:	'I don't want to stand with the Americans.'							
	Alis:	'No, you'll just come stand with us.'							

Yumi is, however, also used to mark inclusiveness that can only be interpreted metaphorically. Its function seems to be to downplay the salience or the notion of co-agency and highlight the salience of some other shared social characteristic. Or its use seems to help instantiate or affirm some desired shared group membership.

I have observed a good deal of variation between use of *yumi* and other pronouns. Often conversational cues indicate what ingroup/outgroup distinctions are salient at that point in the discourse and this can explain the alternation quite neatly. But sometimes the alternation signals that something more is going on. In some cases, there is contextual evidence that the alternation reflects some interpersonal or situational uncertainty as in the alternations between *yumi* and the 2nd p sg. *yu* by Anita in example (15).

(15)	Anita:	*Yumi*	*maredem*	*evri*	*moning.*	
		1p.incl	marry	every	morning	
	Miriam:	*Yu*	*no*	*save livim*	*long*	*ol*	*bi?*
		2s	no	can leave	to	pl	bee
	Anita:	*No, ...*	*man*	*i*	*mas*	*mekem.*	
		no	man	AGR	must	make	
→		*OK*	*yu*	*girap*	*long*	*eli*	*moning.*
		OK	2s	get.up	in	early	morning
→		*Yumi-*	*yu*	*go*	*blong*	*maredem ...*	
		1p.incl	2s	go	to	marry	
		Taem	*yumi*	*maredem*	*long*	*san,*	
		time	1p.incl	marry	in	sun	

	hem	*i*	*i*	*hang*				
	3s	AGR	hang					
Miriam:	*Yu*	*luksave*	*wan*	*man*	*flaoa*	*mo*	*wan*	
	2s	recognise	one	man	flower	and	one	
	woman	*flaoa*	*o*	*wanem?*				
	woman	flower	or	what				
Anita:	*Yu*	*luksave.*	*i*	*gat*	*paoda*	*ya...*		
	2s	recognise	AGR	have	powder	SPEC		

Anita: We (incl.) pollinate them [vanilla flowers] every morning.
Miriam: You can't leave it to the bees?
Anita: No... someone has to do it. So you get up early in the morning. We (incl.) - you go to pollinate them... If we (incl.) do the pollinating in sunlight, it [the flower] will fall.
Miriam: Do you look for a male and a female flower or what?
Anita: You find one that has this powder...

This kind of alternation shows up frequently. In cases like this, I have argued elsewhere (Meyerhoff 1998, 2001) that Anita's alternation between the Bislama inclusive and the 2nd singular (which is not necessarily inclusive) reflects uncertainty caused by a mismatch between the identities she and I appear to consider to be most salient at that moment. Her moves to attune to my (English) use of the 2nd person singular suggest that *one* of the functions of accommodation as a sociolinguistic strategy is to reduce instability or situational uncertainty in interactions with others.

Hence, I suggest that Figure 1 can be filled out as in Figure 3:

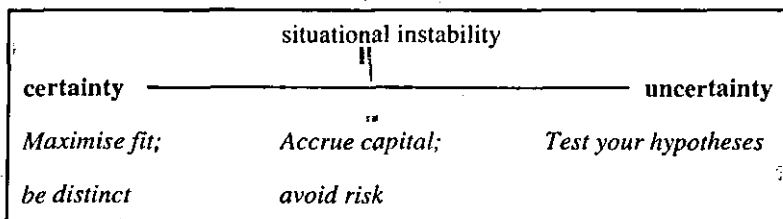| situational instability		
certainty ———————————————————— uncertainty		
Maximise fit;	*Accrue capital;*	*Test your hypotheses*
be distinct	*avoid risk*	

Figure 3. Placement of some social psychological factors motivating linguistic variation in terms of degrees of (internal and external) certainty.

The way I've represented it here might imply that testing hypotheses and maximizing fit are motivations that have less in common with each other than they do with motivations in the middle. Paradoxically, this is not so; the

representation here is a compromise based on the limits of working with the two dimensions of paper. As I have noted, there's overlap between the kinds of strategies employed at both ends of Figure 3.

In conclusion: I've provided the briefest of overviews of connections between a small part of the social psychology of language, and focused on only one part of sociolinguistics, that is the study of variation. It touches not at all on the major mutual contributions made by both fields to the study of language acquisition, language policy, bilingualism, and discourse analysis. It also touches not at all on a major concern of sociolinguistics, namely what properties define a leader of a group? The theoretical and empirical problems associated with answering this question for sociolinguists are articulated most fully in chapters 10-12 of Labov (2001), but again, there is a body of research in social psychology that is also concerned with leadership, the functionality of group norms and the mechanisms by which they are maintained or disrupted (for example, Fielding and Hogg 1997, Haslam et al. 1998). We might all profit if linguists and social psychologists were to take a closer look at the kinds of data and trends each has identified independently.

This paper is not intended to tell everybody working on sociolinguistics that they have been doing it wrong up until now. As a field, the way we have been working has made tremendous contributions to the study of language. For forty years, sociolinguistics has been eclectic in its membership and its methods. In the last ten years, NWAV itself has provided a forum for a range of voices and styles, and I believe this to be a real strength. If this paper advocates anything, it is that there be a continuation and a strengthening of that eclecticism. I believe that advocating a narrow paradigm, no matter what that paradigm is, is ultimately disabling because it has the potential to restrict free and open enquiry which may place the study of variation in ever richer theoretical contexts. The vitality of our field depends on a collective resistance to the development of methodological or theoretical orthodoxies.

There may indeed be much uncertainty out there, as I have suggested in this paper, but this last point is one thing I am certain of.

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