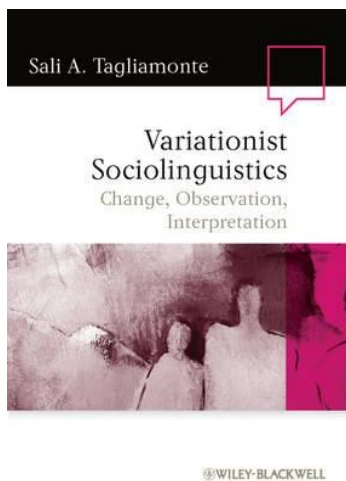


Review

SALI TAGLIAMONTE – *VARIATIONIST SOCIOLINGUISTICS. CHANGE, OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION*. OXFORD: WILEY-BLACKWELL, 2012, 402 PAGES.



Sali Tagliamonte's book occupies a well deserved place in the collection "Language and Society" published by Wiley-Blackwell. This book focuses on the intricate relationship between language and society, also known as sociolinguistics. The author discusses that part of sociolinguistics which has become known as *Variationist Sociolinguistics* or *Language Variation and Change* (LVC). The book consists of a "Preface", a "List of figures" (pp. xvii-xix), a "List of tables" (pp. xv-xvii), twelve chapters, "Appendix A: Corpora Cited" (p. 358), "Appendix B: Time Periods in the History of English" (p. 359), the "References" (pp. 360-391) and the "Index of linguistic variables" (pp. 400-402).

The aims and the organization of the book are outlined in the "Preface" (pp. xiv-xvi).

Chapter 1, "*Sociolinguistics as Language Variation and Change*" (pp. 1-24), introduces the reader to the field of sociolinguistics. First, the definitions of a number of key terms are discussed in detail: sociolinguistics, sociology of language, the linguistic variable, linguistic change, variation. This is followed by a brief overview of the principle of accountability and the evolution of the linguistic variable. All the essential theories used in variationist sociolinguistics are presented, combined with well-chosen examples that enable students to see the study of linguistic variables in action. At the end of each subchapter there is a mini quiz. The chapter contains several exercises to help you interpret different data and to account for linguistic variation and change.

Chapter 2, "*Social Patterns*" (pp. 25-70), reviews the prevailing social patterns and principles in the LVC framework. The author discusses social variables like social class, gender, ethnicity, age and presents the early stratification studies (Labov 1966, Trudgill 1974). The factors and the principles that influence linguistic change are also covered as well as the types of linguistic change.

Chapter 3, "*Linguistic Patterns*" (pp. 71-99) deals with the linguistic patterns that underlie variation. Studies dealing with phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and lexical variation are highlighted. By summarizing research on language variation (Labov 1963, Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1994, Cheshire and Fox 2009, etc.) the author manages to show the evolution of variationist sociolinguistics.

Chapter 4, "*Data and Method*" (pp. 100-119) opens with a discussion of the speech community which has three main dimensions: (i) well-defined limits; (ii) a common structural base; (iii) a unified set of sociolinguistic norms (Labov 2007: 347). Different types of corpora are presented as well as how to build a corpus, how to collect data and how to interpret it.

Chapter 5, "*Quantitative Analysis*" (pp. 120-161) tackles the methods used in LVC to interpret the data. This chapter is devoted to the use of logistic regression as a tool for language variation research.

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The program used to do such a research is Varbrul and the more recent Goldvarb. Some experienced researchers consider Goldvarb to be essential in a quantitative analysis, some students or neophytes might find it extremely complicated and hard to use. There are also other programs to conduct a variationist analysis, which are easier to use. In *Analysing Sociolinguistic Variation* (2006) Tagliamonte explains how Goldvarb works and why it has become an essential tool in variationist sociolinguistics.

Chapter 6, “*Comparative Sociolinguistics*” (pp. 162-176) is connected to the previous chapter and explores the insights that can be gleaned from comparing and contrasting the results of statistical models of linguistic variables. A part of this chapter is dedicated to the variable (did), based on research carried out by the author in rural Somerset.

Chapter 7, “*Phonological Variables*” (pp. 177-205) is one of the most important chapters in the book as the foundations of variationist sociolinguistics have their origin in the study and analysis of phonological variables. The author presents two of the most studied phonological variables, (t,d) and (ing). The chapter contains many useful tips for studying phonological variables as well as exercises.

Chapter 8, “*Morpho-Syntactic Variables*” (pp. 206-246) deals with morpho-syntactic variation and it discusses verbal (s), the adverb (ly) and the modal (have to). Among the studies presented here, Bickerton’s (1975) analysis of verbal (s) in African American Vernacular English is mentioned as well as Bailey’s (1991) analysis of the ex-slave recordings and Samaná English studies (Poplack and Sankoff 1987).

Chapter 9, “*Discourse/Pragmatic Features*” (pp. 247-278) is devoted to the analysis of particles such as quotative “be like”, which is “possibly the most vigorous and widespread change in the history of human language” (p. 248). General extenders, such as “and stuff” are also discussed. The correlation of the use of “be like” with the sex of the speaker is intriguing and invites to look into the matter.

In **Chapter 10**, “*Tense/Aspect Variables*” (pp. 279-313) the author assesses that tense/aspect variables are very difficult to study because: “(i) there are often more than two variants, (ii) the variable context is never clear cut, (iii) there is inevitably more than one defensible method for analysing them” (p. 279). The subject of grammaticalization is brought into discussion and the author argues that of all the grammaticalization processes the development of tense/aspect features is the best studied. Language change in apparent time is discussed and the focus is on the use of “gonna”.

Chapter 11, “*Other Variables*” (pp. 314-348) focuses on variables which are to classify and does not fit into any of the previous types of variables. The author stresses the importance of studying these variables from a synchronic perspective, from a historical perspective as well as from a social perspective. This chapter has two important sections: instant messaging and teen language which look at forms such as “lol”, “haha”, “omg” which can become interesting research topics.

The last chapter, “*Sociolinguistic Explanations*” (pp. 349-357) represents the summary of the book and to account for linguistic variation which has been the goal of the book.

Sali Tagliamonte’s book is extremely useful for those who study variation and for those interested in why and how language varies. The plethora of studies discussed combined with the numerous examples provided make it a stimulating reading. To conclude, the book under review is a welcome contribution to the study of variationist sociolinguistics and an up-to-date survey, for which the author is to be commended.

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