

BOOK REVIEWS

the social contingency of grammaticality and standardization and their relation to the dynamics of power in postwar capitalism, which has generated a freeplay of class signifiers, a convoluting and even carnivalization of high and low, creating a paradoxical and simultaneous obfuscation and instantiation of class. Further work could include the studies of Peter Stallybrass & Allon White in *The politics and poetics of transgression* (1986) and those of Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and symbolic power* (1991), which could help illuminate how symbolic mobility itself reinforces stratification. Bourgeois anxieties create a covert prestige of mobile class markers, a delicate interplay of *différence* that controls the language of fashion. “Leveling as anti-standardization” could also be viewed in this context. The empowered class is adept at manipulating such symbols so as to most subtly allude to status. (The Swiss author Max Frisch once said that Americans can show their wealth even in a bathing suit.) Subtleties of syntax, lexicon, and pronunciation can be likewise manipulated.

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VAN HERK, GERARD, *What is sociolinguistics?* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Pp. xvii, 243. Pb. \$36.95.

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Gerard Van Herk’s *What is sociolinguistics?* is the first in Wiley-Blackwell’s “Linguistics in the world” series, which features textbooks that assume little prior knowledge in introducing foundational topics of language. Accordingly, Van Herk’s text provides firm sociolinguistic footing for beginning students. Readers with no previous knowledge in sociolinguistics will have little trouble following, as Van Herk explains technical terms in clear lay language and illustrates with well-chosen examples that do not presuppose familiarity with concepts presented. Beyond its informative value, Van Herk’s entertaining prose makes this an enjoyable read. The book is sprinkled with personal anecdotes that are funny and relatable, and help make it accessible to the most beginning student.

Ch. 1 introduces the author—who and where he is, what he does, how he speaks—and begins to address what sociolinguistics is, highlighting connections to other disciplines. Ch. 2 covers a great deal of terminological groundwork, emphasizing important differences between sociolinguistics and other linguistic fields. Van Herk contrasts sociolinguists and “normal people” within a discussion about standard and nonstandard varieties, and draws a nice parallel between linguistics and other fields: for geologists, diamonds and feldspar are simply both minerals, which have different societal values (13); the same is true of language varieties for linguists. The chapter contains the requisite discussion on language and dialect; speech community, speech network, and community of practice are also clearly defined. The chapter ends with a useful text box on variationist methodology.

The next set of chapters cover social factors that sociolinguists typically study. Ch. 3, “Place,” demonstrates the complex sociohistorical factors involved in how regional dialects develop, and discusses physical, linguistic, and social isolation, each illustrated with a case study (Newfoundland English, Québec French, and African Nova Scotian English). Van Herk then turns to newer sociolinguistic conceptualizations of place, discussing how relationships and tensions between urban and rural areas may affect language use and the spread of features, and closing the chapter with enregisterment.

Ch. 4, “Social class,” revisits previously mentioned concepts: status and prestige, probabilistic versus categorical variation, and the distinction between variables and variants. Van Herk explains hypercorrection and provides proposed explanations based on linguistic insecurity and linguistic markets, followed by levels of awareness (stereotypes, markers, and indicators). The chapter is rounded off by a discussion of how prescriptive rules and standard English developed. Ch. 5, “Time,” provides somewhat more technical detail than previous chapters, but Van Herk maintains accessibility even while explaining complex concepts, such as the apparent time hypothesis and the uniformitarian principle. Van Herk humorously explains why so many language-change studies reveal an s-shaped curve—because change is “like the transmission of a disease” (67), in that it begins with few people “having it,” then spreads quickly before tapering off. A short section is devoted to vowel system changes, featuring the Northern Cities Shift. The chapter’s final section illustrates language use at various stages across the lifespan, from the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence to speech among the elderly, which Van Herk rightly notes has been somewhat under-researched. A useful addition to this section, which introduces age “as a meaningful social category” (69), would be findings of some of the studies cited (e.g. Rose 2006). Ch. 6 introduces ethnolects and provides an overview of historical debates and current research trends in African American English, which has a full chapter devoted to it later in the text. A well-rounded discussion covers the significance of naming an ethnic variety and issues surrounding whiteness and visibility. Reflecting the breadth of the subfield, “Gender and identity” (Ch. 7) covers expansive ground,

starting with Robin Lakoff's early work on women's language, and the "dominance vs. difference" debate. Van Herk describes ways that languages encode gender, including direct versus indirect indexing. He next discusses gender trends in variationist research, intersections of class and gender, and the gender paradox. The chapter shifts gears once again to introduce performativity and agency, with a short but particularly clear overview of Judith Butler's work. Following a review of how language and gender researchers have incorporated these concepts, Van Herk provides a look at studies of language and sexuality from a similar theoretical perspective.

Ch. 8, "Style," highlights the move—in the field, and reflected in the text—towards an approach to intraspeaker variation that places increased importance on speaker agency. Readers are reminded of the attention-to-speech model of style and introduced to audience design and speaker design approaches. The chapter ends with a clarification of terms important to the study of style—genre, register, and jargon. Ch. 9, "Interaction," begins with Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model and touches on conversational style and conversational analysis. Van Herk then covers politeness theory, before introducing solidarity and power through address terms.

Chs. 10–14 move increasingly "closer to our sister discipline, the sociology of language" (161). Ch. 10 demonstrates that multilingualism is the global norm, and focuses primarily on diglossia and code-switching. "Language contact" begins where the previous chapter ended, with more on code-switching, along with various instances of borrowing. Contact languages are described, and here the section on pidgin and creole development is especially rich, detailing the relexification and language bioprogram hypotheses, as well as the creole continuum and implicational scales. "Attitudes and ideologies" covers folk linguistics and the language subordination process, in addition to matched guise studies, critical discourse analysis, eye dialect, and 'anti-languages' used to construct oppositional identities. Ch. 13, "Language as a social entity," discusses language maintenance, shift, and death. Born to immigrants to Canada, Van Herk skillfully uses his own family's linguistic history to illustrate influences on ethnolinguistic vitality. Quite a short discussion of language death follows, but it is briefly revisited a few pages later. Van Herk makes the important point that "although language shift and decline is a macro-level (society-wide) process, it results from a series of micro-level (individual) choices" (165). The chapter ends with language planning, including a discussion of status versus corpus planning. Ch. 14, "Education," outlines recent sociolinguistic work on school as a place, and adolescence as a time, of intense identity formation, reflected in language use. The chapter turns to children's linguistic and social backgrounds, reintroducing elaborated and restricted codes, alongside counterarguments. Van Herk showcases techniques for helping nonstandard speakers boost educational success, and outlines types of bilingual education programs around the world. He ties these sections together insightfully: "whether we're talking about languages or dialects, the basic ideology underlying how

things are supposed to happen in schools is the same: no matter how you come in, you're supposed to leave as part of the mainstream" (182), and this thought carries into the chapter's final sections.

The concluding chapter, which shares the book's name, is an in-depth look at African American English (AAE). Van Herk reminds readers that while the topics are divided into discrete chapters, this separation is somewhat artificial. Thus, his goal in this last chapter "is to try to draw these strands together, by investigating how different sociolinguistic approaches can tell us something useful about a single language variety" (188). The chapter revisits each topic from preceding chapters, illustrating their applications to AAE. Although Van Herk expresses ambivalence about this approach, because the discussion of AAE winds up at the end of the book, rather than throughout, this chapter is a highlight of the text. Readers not only gain insight into how the multitude of sociolinguistic issues apply to AAE, but also deeper awareness of the interconnectedness of previous topics. It is an excellent capstone for an introductory sociolinguistic course.

Each chapter contains a good number of interesting discussion questions and inventive exercise ideas to activate students' learning. Throughout the book, boxes provide tidbits of relevant information. For example, in the chapter on ethnicity, the box "As an aside: Calling people names" (79) lists many terms historically used in the US Census to categorize racial groups. Additionally, nine of the fifteen chapters include "Spotlight" readings, which feature influential articles (e.g. Labov 1966; Bell 1984), provide helpful background and/or technical information, and suggest further readings. A glossary, bibliography, and index all make the book easy to use. Beyond the text itself, there is a companion website, complete with notes and lecture slides, which adhere very closely to the book's content.

There are many options for sociolinguistic textbooks; Van Herk has provided instructors with one that is engaging, accessible, and broad in its coverage of the field. It is manageable for beginning undergraduate students, provides ample opportunities for discussion, and its personal, familiar style makes it pleasurable to read. Van Herk closes with these words: "Everybody's a potential sociolinguist. Go find out some stuff. Let me know how it goes. All the best, Gerard" (195). Van Herk has certainly provided budding sociolinguists with the knowledge and tools to begin this journey.

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