


References

- Beal, Joan C. 2010. *An introduction to regional Englishes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Braber, Natalie. 2015. Language perception in the East Midlands in England. *English Today* 31(1), 16–26.
- Braber, Natalie. 2018. Pit talk in the East Midlands. In Natalie Braber & Sandra Jansen (eds.), *Sociolinguistics in England*, 243–74. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Durkin, Phillip. 2012. Variation in the lexicon: The ‘Cinderella’ of sociolinguistics? Why does variation in word forms and word meaning present such challenges for empirical research? *English Today* 28(4), 3–9.
- Llamas, Carmen. 1999. A new methodology: Data elicitation for social and regional language variation studies. *Leeds Working Papers in Linguistics and Phonetics* 7, 95–118.
- Pearce, Michael. 2020. The survival of traditional dialect lexis on the participatory web. *English Studies* 101(4), 487–509.
- Robinson, Justyna A. 2010. Awesome insights into semantic variation. In Dirk Geeraerts, Gitte Kristiansen & Yves Peirsman (eds.), *Advances in cognitive sociolinguistics*, 85–110. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Sandow, Rhys J. 2022. Maid in Cornwall: Social, stylistic and cognitive factors in lexical levelling. *English World-Wide* (advance online publication, DOI: 10.1075/eww.22013.san).

(Received 22 December 2022)

doi:[10.1017/S1360674322000533](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674322000533)

Lisa Jansen, *English rock and pop performances: A sociolinguistic investigation of British and American language perceptions and attitudes* (IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society 51). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2022. Pp. ix + 188. ISBN 9789027257895 (e-Book).

Reviewed by Monika Konert-Panek , University of Warsaw

Singing accent stylisation in popular music has recently become an extensively studied topic, with its beginnings marked by the seminal study by Trudgill (1983), focused on the Americanisation of the British singing accent. Throughout the following period of about forty years, the characteristics of singing accents have been investigated from a variety of angles and theoretical standpoints, including acts of identity, the language-ideological perspective, referee design or usage-based phonology. In particular, this research area contributed from and flourished within the third wave of sociolinguistic studies (Eckert 2018) and is now perceived as part of an emerging research subfield of pop cultural linguistics (Werner 2022).

Yet some aspects regarding the exact mechanisms involved in this sociolinguistic phenomenon call for further research, one of them being a thorough account of the audience’s perception of language performance. The reviewed volume aims at filling

this gap, with its main title, *English Rock and Pop Performances*, expounded in the subtitle, *A Sociolinguistic Investigation of British and American Language Perceptions and Attitudes*, which adequately highlights the main theme of Lisa Jansen's study, situated at the intersection of perceptual dialectology and folk linguistics.

This view is needed in particular against the backdrop of growing interest in the audience other research fields have recently shown, e.g. cognitive neuroscience (Rogers & Ogas 2022). In this context, the sociolinguistic perspective on the topic may become a vital contribution to complete the picture and shed light on the issue that has incessantly fascinated not only linguists, but also general listeners, as Jansen puts it: 'ranging from overhearers to music enthusiasts or from musicians to journalists and bloggers' (p. 2), leading to heated debates regarding a given singer's accent and possible motivations behind this decision.

The reviewed book is structured as follows. Apart from the Introduction (chapter 1) and 'Concluding remarks' (chapter 8), the main body of the volume comprises six chapters, which can be divided into two parts: the overall theoretical background (chapters 2 and 3) and the account of Jansen's study (chapters 4 to 7). The theoretical chapters offer a general overview of the discussed area, starting with the sociolinguistic perspective on language performance as such, subsequently moving into the area of singing language as a specific case of the above. Next, the author proceeds to the detailed description of her research, beginning with the data and methods applied in the qualitative study (chapter 4), the results, divided into the perception of the stimuli (chapter 5) and the discussion phase (chapter 6), and finally the discussion of the obtained results (chapter 7). The final elements of the book are two appendices with, respectively, the transcription of the stimuli and the codebook, as well as the index. The structure of the volume is clear and the author smoothly guides the reader throughout its scope.

In chapter 1 (pp. 1–4), Jansen lays out her overall aims, which are to examine how the audience perceives different singing styles and what patterns govern the relationship between linguistic forms and social meanings attached to them. Following Watts & Morrissey (2019), she sees the audience as part of a community of practice, both engaged in the performance and interacting with other members through various forms of opinion sharing. In this way, the audience shapes and strengthens the general indexical connections between social and linguistic meaning, defining its own role in language-ideological processes of perception and attitude formation. Hence, as with other types of mediated performance, the resulting associations of linguistic forms and social meanings both reflect already existing attitudes and create new ones, which, as highlighted by Jansen, proves the necessity of studying language performances from the sociolinguistic perspective.

The above standpoint becomes, therefore, the main theme of the next chapter, 'Language performances as an object of sociolinguistic investigation' (pp. 5–13). Compared with vernacular linguistic forms, performed language had been seen as less worthy of sociolinguistic attention for a long time. However, the third wave of sociolinguistics introduced the shift of the focus from communities to individuals, the consequence of which was also increasing interest in stylised language

of individual users and the impact their choices have on others. In this context Jansen supports the view that popular culture, including performed language, is a powerful tool of spreading both linguistic features and the associations that accompany them. Thus, chapter 2 constitutes an excellent introduction to the topic, offering a broader perspective and positioning the selected field in the overall sociolinguistic landscape.

The author then moves to a specific subtype of linguistic performance, that is, the singing mode. Chapter 3 ('Singing as language performance', pp. 15–40) is part literature review regarding singing styles as such, part introduction to the author's own analysis, in which she assumes an audience-centred perspective. First, Jansen provides an overview of almost four decades of research into the field of singing practice and style in popular music, starting with the variationist perspective, through stylistics, the language-ideological approach up to the sociolinguistics of globalisation. Key notions that come to the foreground in this chapter include: reflexivity, indexicality and indexical fields, as well as enregisterment. The categorisation that proves to be particularly crucial for the author's study is presented in subsection 3.1.2, entitled 'Two trends: Going mainstream and going local', as it is clearly reflected in the material (auditory stimuli) described in chapter 4. In these accounts, the standard perspective of the performer is assumed, with the focus on the possible motivations behind the choice of a given singing style.

In the second part of this chapter, Jansen explores the role of the audience in the reflexive interpretation of language performances through the examination of four cases representing different patterns of perception and evaluation of selected performers (Arctic Monkeys, Joss Stone, One Direction and Rihanna). The author's selection is representative and allows for an insightful analysis that reveals a variety of the audience's reactions. Some particularly interesting aspects that come to the fore concern, for example, different (i.e. more negative) reaction towards Americanisation in the spoken style vs singing style (the case of Joss Stone) or the inability of the audience to interpret the intended message owing to the lack of phonetic knowledge (the case of Rihanna). The latter case brings to mind Coupland's (2007: 154) overview of important elements of stylisation, confirming the requirement of 'an acculturated audience able to read and predisposed to judge the semiotic value of a projected persona or genre'. The case studies discussed by Jansen prove the significance of the audience in the process of meaning creation and the necessity to perceive it as an active participant of communities of practice.

At the end of chapter 3, Jansen presents the research questions that are to be addressed in the following parts of the volume (pp. 38–40):

- RQ1: Are typical American and/or British phonetic features actually recognized as American or British by the participants?
- RQ2: Which other features (linguistic and non-linguistic) prompt a response and affect listeners' evaluations?
- RQ3: How do British and American listeners' perceptions of the same stimuli differ?

RQ4: How do the British and American listeners evaluate different artists' language behavior?

Throughout the theoretical part of her work, the author's strategy is to select the most representative cases to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the discussed phenomenon. This approach is reasonable and practical, making it possible to divide the topic into manageable units, which arouse interest and are at the same time reader-friendly. The presentation of the material is clear; the above research questions naturally result from the cases presented earlier and smoothly introduce the following empirical work.

Chapter 4 ('Qualitative data and analysis', pp. 41–67) discusses the procedural steps adopted in the study regarding methodology and data collection, data analysis and processing, as well as the revision of indexical fields. The data were collected with guided, semi-structured interviews based on auditory stimuli, i.e. short music clips (approximately one minute long) from ten songs. What should be highlighted is that interview transcripts were analysed not only in a purely qualitative fashion, but they were also quantified. MAXQDA 2018 software was used to provide a content analysis of the transcript corpus (about 170,000 words). The data were coded in a cyclical, multilevel fashion, following a hermeneutic-interpretive process, with the ultimate outcome being the compilation of the codebook. The abovementioned auditory stimuli comprised ten songs, divided into four groups depending on the degree of perceived Americanness, i.e.: (1) British: going local (The Subways and Cheryl) (2) British: mixing British English and American English (Band of Skulls and Jessie J), (3) British: Americanised (Bush, The Subways and Olly Murs, McFly) and (4) American: American English (The Black Keys and Taylor Swift). In each category, both pop and rock genres were represented, usually by one song, except for Category (3), in which two songs were described for both genres. The study was conducted among fifty participants, twenty-five British and twenty-five American ones, mainly students. During the guided interview phase, having been presented the audio stimuli, the interviewees were asked questions regarding their potential identification of the artist/song, the genre it represents, as well as the artist's origin.

The author justifies each step of the research, emphasising the fact that a relatively flexible form of the interview allowed the participants to express their views more freely compared with an entirely pre-defined structure, which would be too limiting for the purpose of a perception study. The presented line of argumentation is convincing and the overall procedure is carefully chosen and precisely described, with the indication of potential problems and limitations of applied methods. The analysis is based on the reviewed concept of indexical fields, the flexibility of which allows for the inclusion of a variety of social and linguistic factors in the research space. Jansen's important contribution in this regard is the division into intentional, indexical and associative fields (p. 64). This conceptual and terminological refinement allows the complexities of the matter to be grasped more precisely, separating the production

(the intentional field) from the perception perspective (the associative field), as well as the interaction between the two and the relationship between social meanings and extralinguistic factors (the indexical field). This approach constitutes a valuable addition to the sociolinguistic theory.

Chapters 5 and 6 comprise the results of the analysis, divided into, respectively, the perception of the stimuli (pp. 69–97) and the discussion phase of the interviews (pp. 99–116), presenting listeners' attitudes towards singing styles and genres together with the associative fields. In chapter 5, the author provides an overview of the types of linguistic and non-linguistic features that are perceived as typically British or American. Audio stimuli are presented in separate subsections, with a clear division between rock and pop ones. The analysis shows the complex nature of perception and association mechanisms, presenting the intricacies of this phenomenon – the features listeners focus on, the ones they may fail to notice, or the ones they add to make the impression subjectively more consistent. The analysis also reveals the impact of the lexical dimension (e.g. the presence of words such as *party* or *awesome*, which may reflect certain cultural stereotypes) with regard to the perceived Americanisation, as well as the cases of the extrapolation of one feature to the whole song, which sometimes even leads to the perception of certain Americanisation characteristics that are actually absent, as Jansen observes with regard to the song *It's a Party* by The Subways: 'it seems that reporting on perceived rhoticity simply fitted the overall impression that the song is typically American' (p. 77).

Another interesting aspect that comes to light in this audience-focused study of Americanisation concerns the potential significance of economic factors in this regard, apart from stylistic, socio-cultural or even political ones. From my personal experience, this is an issue that tends to appear during Q&A sessions at conferences, being at the same time largely overlooked by researchers. Jansen observes that both groups of the interviewees 'perceive economic considerations not only to be the strongest motivation for emulating an American voice, but also the dominant reason for an intentional, conscious change' (p. 100). This is yet another area where certain intriguing differences between the perspectives of the general audience and the researchers emerge. Further implications of this issue are to be explored, with a possible consideration of the performers' perspective, too, as some of them mention certain pressure from record companies in this respect.

In chapter 7 (pp. 117–31) of the volume the author discusses major results of the study with reference to the research questions and in light of the previous accounts of singing accent stylisation. She states the implications of the present work and reflects on the methodological challenges of qualitative sociolinguistic research. Concluding remarks are presented in chapter 8 (pp. 133–5), followed by two appendices, with the transcriptions of the stimuli (pp. 147–55) and the codebook (pp. 157–89).

The reviewed volume, with its audience-centred perspective, provides the first solid empirical basis of the audience's attitudes and perceptions of the Americanised singing style in popular music, as well as convincingly integrating it with the relevant theoretical framework. Apart from filling this research gap, Jansen establishes new

patterns of conducting qualitative research in sociolinguistics – the approach that, in her own words, is frequently perceived as ‘less convincing or meaningful’, at the same time being ‘more difficult to analyze systematically’ (p. 41), which seems to be to some extent confirmed by the lack of sufficiently precise and rigorous accounts of qualitative methods in sociolinguistic research. Therefore, Jansen’s book, with its fresh and detailed insight into the procedures regarding this approach, especially the coding process and quantification of the results, is a highly valuable contribution, which is certain to become inspiring for future research in the field of sociolinguistics.

Those two excellent features, namely, filling the gap regarding the audience’s perspective and providing a comprehensive pattern for qualitative analysis, both with respect to rigorous procedures of conducting guided interviews, and the possibilities of quantifying the results for descriptive statistics, are the most significant merits of the book. While some other general aspects of sociolinguistic style in popular music, e.g. sonority-related factors, remain open to further discussion, the author’s overall audience-centred approach is novel and useful. In sum, Jansen’s book serves as a valuable resource for researchers interested in the sociolinguistics of popular culture. At the same time, thanks to its accessibility, it is highly recommended also for general music enthusiasts or journalists, as this is a topic that links the domains occupied by linguists and non-linguists alike.

Reviewer’s address:

Institute of Specialised and Intercultural Communication

Faculty of Applied Linguistics

University of Warsaw

Poland

m.konert@uw.edu.pl

References

- Coupland, Nikolas. 2007. *Style: Language variation and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eckert, Penelope. 2018. *Meaning and linguistic variation: The third wave in sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rogers, Susan & Ogi Ogas. 2022. *This is what it sounds like: What the music you love says about you*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Trudgill, Peter. 1983. Acts of conflicting identity: The sociolinguistics of British pop-song pronunciation. In Peter Trudgill (ed.), *On dialect: Social and geographical perspectives*, 141–60. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Watts, Richard J. & Franz A. Morrissey. 2019. *Language, the singer and the song: The sociolinguistics of folk performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Werner, Valentin. 2022. Pop cultural linguistics. *Oxford research encyclopedia of linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.999> (accessed 22 December 2022).

(Received 27 December 2022)