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Book Reviews

Jones Mari C. and Hornsby David (eds), *Language and Social Structure in Urban France*. Oxford: Legenda, 2013, ix + 244 pp. 978 1 907975 41 7 (hardcover)
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The argument at the heart of this ambitious volume, in which sociolinguists and sociologists come together to address contemporary methodological issues in the study of language and society in France, is that French post-war sociolinguistic research takes little account of recent developments in other social sciences and therefore lacks innovative, more sophisticated approaches to data analysis. Frequent claims of linguistic levelling due to industrialisation and to an ever-growing Paris conurbation dwarfing other major cities have led to a paucity of studies exploring new vernacular forms in growing multi-ethnic urban centres. The few studies that exist tend to be underpinned by methodological assumptions valid for Anglophone social structures but largely untested in the francophone context, as pointed out by the editors of this collection consisting of two main parts. *Part I: language and social status* unites three contributions from across the social sciences promoting cross-fertilisation of theoretical concepts that might be adapted to Metropolitan France. A further three chapters explore social categories and correlations with language use. The six contributions in *Part II: language and space* focus on the extent of regional dialect levelling and should appeal to all social scientists whose research agenda includes the conceptualisation of *space* and *social change*. The bridging issue is the question whether France's supposed exceptionalism (*l'exception française*) with regard to social structure, culture etc. is empirically founded.

Part I begins with Eric Harrison's reflections (10–21) on occupation as a proxy for social class. His pan-European approach provides little evidence for French exceptionalism: like many of its post-industrial neighbours, France has been subject to pressures of neo-liberalism, deregulation and globalisation, sitting firmly in the middle range on most class stratification measures. Paul Lambert (22–34), too, explores occupation, claiming that variationist studies have not exploited the entire range of devices afforded by social stratification research. He pleads for a social interaction distance scale as a means of discriminating social categories in the middle social stratification range, suggesting that such an approach might better illuminate patterns of variation and change. Roland Pfefferkorn (35–45) focuses on exceptionalism in French socio-political discourse; he argues that, as in many other countries, social inequality has grown but that since the 1980s a general tendency towards a 'rhetoric of avoidance' has sought to conceal any evidence of *class struggle*, a term that, according to the author, forms part of an *échantillon* of 'dirty words' (44) among certain strata in French society. Pfefferkorn therefore views the maintenance of social class as a key variable in sociolinguistic analysis as vital. Philippe Coulangeon (46–57) revisits Bourdieu's classic divide between class relations, tastes and activities among the *bourgeoisie*. Couching the discussion within the context of cultural 'omnivorousness' (47), the tendency to transcend cultural and symbolic boundaries across social groups, he argues that an increasing eclecticism among the upper classes *vis-à-vis* cultural diversity is little more than a remodelling of class culture antagonism. Coulangeon suggests that the omnivorous nature of cultural consumption among the dominant elite is part of a larger global trend; there is little evidence of exceptionalism.

The final three papers in Part I are sociolinguistic in nature. Jacques Durand, Julien Eychenne and Chantal Lyche (58–68) discuss on-going bi-directional change in Metropolitan French: while innovations emanating from a bloated urban centre continue to play a significant role in levelling and convergence towards a supra-local norm, processes of 'anti-levelling' (63) are also borne out in the data. The *loi de position* and the treatment of schwa, in particular, constitute 'a strong watershed' (67) between southern and northern French. Aidan Coveney (69–80) focuses on the poverty of data on grammatical (as opposed to phonological) variation. Without ignoring the more familiar issues inherent in studying grammatical variables, such as the opacity of obvious functional equivalents and the generally infrequent occurrence of grammatical variables compared to phonological ones, his discussion extends to broader patterns of co-variation between grammatical variables and social class, and raises questions concerning the validity of traditional INSEE classifications of occupation. Nigel Armstrong (81–93) examines the extent to which French can be considered diglossic. His analysis of variables across different linguistic levels suggests that the detection of 'hyperstyle' (89), i.e. stylistic variation exceeding the constraints of social variation, can usefully point to diglossia. The apparent existence of hyperstyle variation in French *is* exceptional, however, and poses problems for sociolinguistic theory, which assumes that style should not be a stronger indicator than class (Bell 1984).

Part II concerns itself with language and *space*. David Hornsby and Mari C. Jones (94–109) explore the effects of urban settlement patterns on language change, arguing that the concentration of poorer populations at the peripheries of major conurbations and the lack of transport links to the centre have inhibited the diffusion of urban-based vernaculars. On this score, France does appear to be exceptional: there are no social-regional accents in French cities comparable to, say, 'Brummie' or 'Geordie' in Britain. Sylvie Tissot (110–118) shows how representation of spaces such as the *banlieues*, which hold connotations of non-integration, unrest and immigration, has changed: discourse has progressively shifted away from mentioning people as victims of social inequality, now focusing on the spaces they inhabit. Zoë Boughton (119–132) studies levelling by exploring speaker perception towards accents in Rennes and Nancy. While her findings show that speakers are unable to distinguish regional accents, suggesting a high degree of levelling, data on word-final obstruent deletion do evidence diatopic variation, despite the trend towards convergence with Parisian norms. Cyril Trimaille and Médéric Gasquet-Cyrus (133–150) explore sociolinguistic change resulting from mobility and gentrification in Marseilles, tracing the emergence of a well-educated and prosperous social group identified as *néo-Marseillais*, who do not accommodate to local norms, but are shown to acquire certain lexical variants as markers of a new Marseilles identity, rejected by older working-class residents. Thierry Bulot (151–161) investigates the use of Gallo (a regional language traditionally viewed as an obsolescent rural variety) in an urban context. The hypothesis that urban dwellers lack clear perceptions about Gallo is not borne out in questionnaire data: Rennes is viewed by many as Gallo-speaking, especially among younger respondents. In the final contribution to Part II, Françoise Gadet (162–173) explores findings from the MLE-MPF project on so-called 'youth language'. First she looks at the theoretical implications associated with the handling of non-standard corpus data; second, she asks how Third Wave variationist theory can be applied to socially constructed categories in *banlieue* spaces.

Two *renvois*, one by Robert Gibb and Paul Lambert (174–189), the other by Tim Pooley (190–210), highlight the common themes emerging from the volume and suggest avenues for future research. Both underscore the relative unexceptionalism of French social structure, notwithstanding compelling evidence from sociolinguistics that phenomena such as levelling do appear exceptional.

From a variationist's perspective, this is an insightful volume, methodical in its approach to the subject matter, and careful to consider existing research from across the social sciences. Its overarching aims are very well addressed, and the proposals outlined by the contributors will undoubtedly form an important part of future research on Metropolitan French. The volume's undoubted strength and significant contribution comes from the break in the 'reciprocal ignorance pact' (Fishman 1991) that characterises the relationship between sociology and sociolinguistics. As Pooley rightly suggests (209), it is this break in tradition that must now spearhead new avenues of research.

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Collective nouns are a fascinating topic for sociolinguistic study. This is because they respond to quite complex linguistic constraints and are of course variable by their nature, being singular in form but referring to a group of individuals or entities. From a social point of view, this latter attribute makes them a target for the tidy-minded, or those