

Language in Society 36 (2007). Printed in the United States of America
DOI: 10.1017/S0047404507220147

TERTTU NEVALAINEN & HELENA RAUMOLIN-BRUNBERG, *Historical sociolinguistics: Language change in Tudor and Stuart England* (Longman Linguistics Library). London: Pearson Education, 2003. Pp. xvi, 266.

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Historical sociolinguistics is another outcome of the long-term endeavor by Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg, from the English Department at the University of Helsinki, to “put sociolinguistics to the test of time” (p. 202) by reconstructing the English language in some of its social and historical contexts, here in the Tudor and Stuart periods (Early Modern English). This enterprise has also allowed the authors to refine the methodology of historical sociolinguistics: first by confronting both the fragmentary nature of historical materials and the difficulties of socially reconstructing the past – the “bad data problem,” in the words of Labov – and second by looking for the solutions afforded by ancillary disciplines like corpus linguistics and social history. In fact, the authors’ research is built, on the one hand, upon the *Corpus of Early English correspondence*, a collection of personal letters (nearly 2.7 million words from 1410 to 1681) compiled specifically for historical sociolinguistic research, which ensures the reliable reconstruction of both linguistic and extralinguistic variables, as well as the commonsense use of the findings of social history, which facilitates access to period-specific information in the process of reconstructing the sociohistorical circumstances that may have affected linguistic variation and change in the past. Corpus linguistics and social history, in the view of Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, scientifically legitimate historical sociolinguistics by conferring upon it “empirical” and “historical” validity.

In the nine chapters of the book, the authors attest to the existence of covariation between some of the morphosyntactic changes that affected Early Modern English grammar and the usual sociolinguistic variables: age, social status, professional and educational background, gender, domicile, migration history, and so on. Additionally, they verify the historical soundness (or lack thereof) of some “sociolinguistic universals” prevalent in contemporary Western societies, such as the distinction “from above” vs. “from below,” the curvilinear hypothesis, the role of social aspirers in promoting language change, and the leadership of women in connection with some changes (“from below” in these historical stages of English language development). They also look at “supralocalization” and trace the wavelike or hierarchical regional diffusion of some innovations from the period. Two important novelties – in comparison with previous publications derived from the same project, such as *Sociolinguistics and language history: Studies based on the Corpus of Early English correspondence* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) – are, first, the attempt to locate each of the changes under scrutiny at different stages of their diffusion along the S curve and, following Labov’s seminal research in Philadelphia, to trace the cumulative effect of the external variables (gender and social status in particular) during each of the stages; and second, the introduction of register as an independent variable, which, in connection with the corpus of personal letters, proves to be statistically significant.

Altogether, the different sections of *Historical sociolinguistics* show coherent linguistic research based on the extension of present-day sociolinguistic tenets to past stages of language development. The authors are particularly successful in demonstrating the existence of covariation between some changes in progress during the Early Modern period and a number of sociolinguistic variables, including social rank, gender, region, and register. By doing so, they not only contribute to elucidating some relevant questions concerning this period of the history of English and to test the historical validity of current sociolinguistic proposals, but they have also endowed the discipline with added scientific validity.