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The Handbook of Language Variation and Change (review)

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J.K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill, and Natalie Schilling-Estes, eds. *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Oxford: Blackwell. 2002. Pp. xii + 807. US\$124.95 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Gerard Van Herk, *University of Ottawa*

The Handbook of Language Variation and Change is the most recent volume of Blackwell's linguistics handbook series, described by its editors as "a convenient, hand-held repository of the essential knowledge about the study of language variation and change" (introduction, p. 2). The volume pushes the boundaries of "hand-held" at 807 pages, considerably longer than Blackwell's earlier *Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, which itself includes a substantial variationist component.

Following a brief introduction and "An Informal Epistemology" (J.K. Chambers), the book is divided into five parts: methodologies, linguistic structure, social factors, contact, and language and societies.

As the search for masses of vernacular data is a goal and a distinguishing characteristic of variationist research, it is appropriate that the handbook begins with discussions of methodology. The "Field Methods" section includes chapters on fieldwork, focussing on the sociolinguistic interview and advance preparation (Crawford Feagin); language attitudes, dealing more with findings than methodology (Dennis R. Preston); the advantages and pitfalls of written materials (Edgar W. Schneider); and the use of large, electronically searchable text databases (Laurie Bauer). The "Evaluation" section is made up of chapters on the quantitative paradigm, particularly multivariate analysis with VARBRUL and related computer programmes (Robert Bayley); implicational scales, once highly influential in the analysis of linguistic continua (John R. Rickford); and an overview of the use of instrumental phonetics in sociolinguistics (Erik R. Thomas).

Part two of the handbook deals with linguistic structure. Chapters discuss the links between variationist work and current theoretical phonology, especially Optimality Theory (Arto Anttila); the role of chain shifts and mergers in sound change (Matthew J. Gordon); the relationship of variation to (Chomskyan) syntactic theory (Alison Henry); and a (largely negative) discussion of the relatively young field of variationist discourse analysis (Ronald Macaulay).

Part three, the book's longest section by far, is concerned with social factors, divided into subsections on time, social differentiation, and domains. The "Time" section includes

chapters on the relative value of real- and apparent-time studies, stressing the advantages of the latter (Guy Bailey); the recent interest in speech produced by, or directed toward, children (Julie Roberts); and the social situation of language change (J.K. Chambers). The "Social Differentiation" section deals with the social factors that "have figured in our research from the very beginning" (p. 373), with chapters on approaches to the analysis of stylistic variation (Natalie Schilling-Estes); the components and treatments of social class (Sharon Ash); approaches to, and the role of, sex and gender in variation and change (Jenny Cheshire); and the definition and expression of ethnicity (Carmen Fought). A section on "Domains" brings together a disparate group of concepts described as "relational arenas within which variable linguistic behavior takes place" (p. 473), with chapters on a non-essentialist approach toward language and identity (Norma Mendoza-Denton); the family as a locus of change (Kirk Hazen); and the relative utility and applicability to variationist analysis of the sometimes overlapping concepts of communities of practice (Miriam Meyerhoff), social networks (Lesley Milroy), and the speech community (Peter Patrick).

Part four of the handbook deals with the study of language varieties in contact, with chapters on the potential contributions of human geography research to the analysis of variation (David Britain); the relative effect of language contact on different linguistic domains (Gillian Sankoff); and the effect on language change of koineization (Paul Kerswill).

Part five, "Linguistic and Social Typology," includes chapters on (speculated) possible links between societal types and degree and type of linguistic change (Peter Trudgill); the value of a variationist reworking of the comparative method of historical linguistics (Sali Tagliamonte); and a typology and comparison of models of language death (Walt Wolfram).

The editors of the volume describe their desire to strike a balance between generations of sociolinguists ("the founders" and "their intellectual offspring") and topics ("the relatively mature and the relatively recent") (introduction, p. 1). In this, they clearly succeed. Such a balance, however, raises problems of its own. Assigning roughly equal weight to each topic worthy of a chapter short-changes some areas critical to an understanding of variationist work, while over-covering areas of specialist interest. This is particularly clear in part I, methodologies (which as a whole needs to be proportionally longer, especially in a discipline driven by the search for empirical evidence). The sociolinguistic interview is central to variationist methodology; to treat it as part of a single 20-page chapter seems short shrift. This is especially clear when a full 30 pages are devoted to written documents. Despite my own research interest in such documents, I acknowledge that their analysis remains peripheral to the variationist mainstream. A similar imbalance exists between variable rule analysis, dealt with in less than one chapter, and implicational scales, marginal to the field, which are assigned a full chapter of their own. Elsewhere in the book, the distribution of chapter topics assigns far more weight to social than to linguistic factors. This may address previous criticisms of variationist sociolinguistics as too much linguistics and not enough socio, but it certainly does not reflect the majority tendency of the discipline. In each of these cases, the problem is not with the treatment of each topic; rather, it is that the "third generation" of sociolinguists at whom the book is aimed deserve a (proportionally) more detailed treatment of the topics central to the discipline.

With respect to individual chapters, the most successful are those whose authors are the obvious (first or second) choices for the topic. In these cases, the engagement of the authors is evident, and illustrations and examples are drawn from their own research, resulting in chapters that are highly readable and that function as effective teaching tools. Particularly notable in this respect are the chapters on language attitude, ethnicity, social networks,

space, koineization, and comparative sociolinguistics. The cases of topic-author mismatch rarely result from inappropriate author choice; rather, they seem to fall out from the nature of the topics, many of which are by their nature not something closely associated with any one author. This results in some very careful chapters, consisting largely of reviews of other people's work. The chapters in question are all more than competent, but prevent the reader from fully benefiting from their authors' talent and experience.

At the level of proofreading, the book contains some errors that interfere with understanding, or even create misunderstanding. For example, the material at the top of p. 235, an apparent continuation of a table from the previous page, should probably be a separate table, titled "6-syllable stems." Likewise, it is clear from the table on p. 751 that the sentence at the bottom of the previous page, "In this table *non-significant* factors are in bold", should read "In this table *significant* factors are in bold". Presumably such errors result from copy conversion associated with the publisher's standardization of tables, and can easily be corrected in future editions.

Such future editions would be welcome, especially given the editors' bold decision to assign equal weight to "the tried-and-probably-true and the potentially productive" (p. 1). In a field as (relatively) young as variationist sociolinguistics, ideas develop quickly, and can in many cases be empirically tested just as quickly. It is natural that the concerns of the field should change over time, and the discipline is well served by a handbook that is willing to stay at the leading edge of such change. It is equally true, though, that over time certain methods and approaches will be more frequently tested than others, and will become yet more central to work on variation and change. It is hoped that future editions will reflect these core concerns by devoting proportionally more space to them.

John Algeo, ed. *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. VI: *English in North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. Pp. xxxii + 625. US\$120.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by James A. Walker, *York University*

This book is a welcome addition to the Cambridge University Press series on the history of the English language. Some may find the title a bit misleading, since, apart from two chapters on Canada, the contributions deal almost exclusively with varieties of English spoken in the United States. Given this limitation, as well as others discussed below, the volume provides a good general introduction to the study of North American English.

Roughly half of the volume deals with issues of origin, contact, development and change. After his preface (pp. xv–xxvii), editor John Algeo provides a detailed outline of the historical and social events of the last 400 years in Chapter 1, "External history" (pp. 1–58). He states that the focus of his historical discussion is the experiences which have had an impact on the language of Americans (p. 6), but the linguistic relevance is not always apparent. Two chapters deal more specifically with connections between Britain and North America. Chapter 2, "British and American, continuity and divergence" (pp. 59–85) by John Hurt Fisher, examines features shared by American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) and the extent to which they constitute separate varieties. Michael Montgomery similarly surveys the British and Irish heritage of AmE in Chapter 3, "British and Irish antecedents" (pp. 86–153). These two chapters contain a great deal of overlap and might