The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics

Author:	Carmen Llamas, Louise Mullany and Peter Stockwell, Eds. (2007)
Publisher:	Abingdon, UK: Routledge

Pages	ISBN	Price
Pp. xix + 271	ISBN 978-0-415-33850-9 (paper)	£ 14.99 GBP
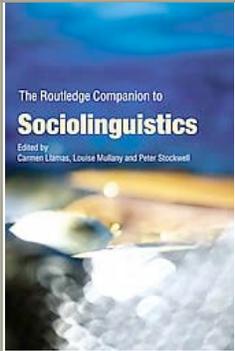
This *Companion to Sociolinguistics* is a useful reference book for anyone interested in language variation and change, from the layman who first approaches linguistic matters to the more advanced sociolinguist. What sociolinguists investigate in the 21st century has come to embrace phenomena inextricably intertwined with how our complex society has evolved. The volume thus reflects a widening of interests from traditional philological and dialectological concerns to macro-sociolinguistic themes that view language variation as a reflection of or reaction to political, ideological and educational policies.

The three editors have organized their collection of contributor articles into two parts: the first is further subdivided into five sections, each of which comprises several articles covering the main topics in sociolinguistics; the second consists of a very practical glossary of terms, where the entries are explained and reference made to the one or more chapters in the book where the subject is more specifically dealt with. The book closes with a list of references and an index. As the authors themselves explain in their preface (p. xvii), the process of compiling a companion and arranging the chapters under broad titles necessarily entails choosing and prioritizing some topics. Furthermore, several themes are covered in different chapters. This is indeed one of the strengths of the Companion rather than a shortcoming, as linguistic phenomena are often multifaceted and better described from a variety of perspectives. All the chapters contain cross-references that allow direct, speedy access to related topics and facilitate comprehensive understanding of a topic. So, for example, chapter 10, which deals with "Speech communities", is closely linked to chapters 6, 11, 12 and 16 which are respectively about "Social class", "Style and the linguistic repertoire", "Language and identity" and "The ideology of standard language".

- Section I is devoted to methodological issues and contains the basics for sociolinguistic fieldwork. It starts with a discussion of the linguistic-variable concept (Ch. 1) and then explores the various field methods available for sociolinguistic research (Ch. 2) depending on the type of study being carried out and the type of data needed and speaker required as investigative subject. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 offer illuminating examples of techniques of sociolinguistic analysis, namely of phonological patterning (Ch. 3), morphosyntactic variation (Ch. 4) and discourse (Ch. 5). Being concerned with such a vast topic as discourse, Chapter 5 provides useful suggestions deriving from neighboring fields of research not strictly sociolinguistic, such as conversation analysis and narrative analysis.

- Section II reviews the social correlates of language, all very closely interconnected. The section's leitmotiv is a strong emphasis on the link between linguistic variation and social factors. Thus, for example, Kerswill in Chapter 6 shows how and to what extent the use of certain substandard forms (e.g., negative concord "I don't want none", or preterit "done") heavily depend on social class but also on gender and age. Chapter 9 focuses on the current and ever-increasing relevance of ethnolinguistic distinctiveness, drawing examples from such diverse groups as New Zealand's Maori, African Americans, Native Americans and the Jewish community in the U.S.

- The topic of section III is the sociopsychological side of linguistic patterning, including such factors as individual choice within context (i.e., style, Ch. 11), the correlation between language and identity (Ch. 12), modes and types of speakers' accommodation to their interlocutors (Ch. 13), the repercussions of attitudes on linguistic behavior (Ch. 14) and the dynamics of politeness and power in verbal interaction (Ch. 15). Once again, most of the topics covered in this section tie in with current problems in society, shedding light, for instance, on the influences of language attitudes on several applied fields. Quite interestingly, in Chapter 14 Garrett shows how language attitudes—i.e., favorable or unfavorable dispositions towards linguistic behavior, for example W. Labov's (1972) having discovered that New Yorkers associated rhoticity (pronunciation of postvocalic /r/) with high-ranking occupations—play a relevant role in forensic linguistics. Garrett also shows how attitudes embedded in language perception sometimes have substantial effects on job candidate evaluation.

- With section IV a shift occurs, from social actors to a macro-sociolinguistic focus: sociopolitical language factors. The ideology behind a standard language is the object of Milroy's contribution in Chapter 16, which also provides the framework for the investigations in the following chapters. Milroy shows that despite a strong drive over the centuries towards linguistic uniformity for economic and political reasons, standard languages are in most cases idealizations subject to continuous changes through time. The influence of the media on language change is focused upon in Chapter 17. In it Stuart-Smith discusses the various stances of linguists about television's impact on language diffusion, e.g., the spreading of the standard norm but also the adoption of specific accents, and concludes that, however controversial, this impact is at least extremely significant from a social point of view. Standardization is also discussed in relation to multilingual practices (Ch. 18) through a fascinating

tour across space and time. This portrayal elucidates the nature of the connections between territory, ethnic identity and language, most often determined by ideologies, which in turn "mediate between socio-political arrangements, identity and linguistic practice" (p. 153). Australian Aborigines, for instance, think that languages are inherited from ancestors like the land. It often happens, then, that people inherit a language they cannot speak.

Implications of these issues are addressed in Chapters 19 and 20, the former of which focuses on language policy in formal educational contexts. Examples are drawn from language programs in the U.S. for African American children speaking African American Vernacular English and for Native American children, both of which rest on the tenet that language difference is not to be felt as a deficit at school. Chapter 20 covers the role of language policy and language planning in nation-building first, and in the changing sociopolitical settings afterwards. For example, new directions in language policy and language planning (LPLP) research are often associated as both are concerned with strategies for language acquisition in favor of minor language maintenance.

- The last section is about language change, with chapters on creoles and pidgins (Ch. 21), koineization, (the process that leads to the birth of a common or widely shared variety of a language, a koine (Ch. 22), colonial and post-colonial varieties (Ch. 23) and language death (Ch. 24). Chapter 21 addresses theoretical issues and discusses the most recently debated problems in genetic linguistics, that is, the relations of pidgins and creoles to their lexifiers and their status as separate languages or as dialects of their lexifiers. The chapter on koneization reviews the origin of the term and concept, the social conditions and speaker behavior that lead to the process, and its time scale. In Chapter 23 Fennell provides a selective but adequate historical background to language change, touching in particular on British colonial and post-colonial history. The book closes with a discussion of the sad destiny of endangered languages—disappearance or extinction—with plenty of remarkable examples and some words of warning on the considerable cultural loss that such events entail.

The book is a very helpful resource for anyone interested in the ways in which language is connected with society. The chapters, thematically congruous and arranged in a logical sequence though easily accessed independently, are very rich in examples and stimulating references to phenomena embedded in contemporary society. I'll leave you with a couple that stand out. The first, exemplifying television role's in spreading certain linguistic traits, is the adoption of TH fronting (an accent feature in which 'th' is pronounced either as /f/ or /v/) by Glaswegian adolescents who watched the popular soap EastEnders, set in London. A second sociolinguistic happening, illustrating the evolving inter-relationship of language and gender, the latter now seen as a multi-layered phenomenon that interacts with race, class and age, is the linguistic habits of non-hegemonic, non-heterosexual groups—in common parlance, lesbians, gays and the gender-fluid.

Reference

Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Silvia Bruti
University of Pisa, Italy
<s.bruti@angl.unipi.it>