Analysing variation in English
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Cambridge, UK
Cambridge University Press
2011
Pp. xiii + 332
978-0-521-89866-9 (hbk)

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Reliable ways of collecting language data, either oral utterances or written texts, are a prerequisite for systematic analysis and interpretation of the given data. Analysing Variation in English is a repertoire tailored to such a need for examining language variation, particularly on syntactic and phonological variants, through two structured thematic parts. Part one (Chapters 1 to 6) expounds techniques or scientific methods in the spirit of objectivist epistemology for collecting and analyzing empirical data (i.e., language that is used in speaking and writing) to trace microlinguistic variation alongside an account of the rationale for the choice of methods and the particular forms or procedures in which the methods are employed to uncover existent variants in language. Part two (Chapters 7 to 12) synthesizes a range of perspectives from experts in various disciplines/fields of linguistics about the relevant factors or macro-influences that may shed light on variation in a variety of language contexts. A total of 12 chapters of the volume also highlight future research directions in the section “Where next?” at the end of each chapter and, importantly, generate significant implications for educational policies and practice by emphasizing the relationship between language, society, and education. The book contributes to linguistic analysis by positioning ubiquitous variation in a dynamic continuum where variation is internally highly structured and complex while externally dynamic, constantly changing and constructed with social factors. The exploration of such dual-featured variation shows that English variation...
is among the most relevant challenges to “official” knowledge and represents key movements in linguistics. Hence, the book provides up-to-date reliable furthering knowledge of analyzing linguistic variation, its methods and theories, its findings and its questions for the future. This book targets students as well as researchers and educators who work in English language and linguistics. The combined latest thinking about language variation with practical methods and useful recommendations for future directions of the field, informative resources for integrating disciplines across curriculum and tendencies for the future in the field of cross-linguistics, applied linguistics and/or interdisciplinary study are presented.

Methodologically, the book is comprehensive and pioneering in the authors’ way of synthesizing innovative techniques of collecting and analyzing variable linguistic data. These techniques are not methods of dichotomist classification but complementary in response to research purposes. These techniques are not arbitrary at all but scientifically tested as well as thoroughly reviewed in reference to traditional qualitative approaches, including strengths and weaknesses. To examine phonology, Chapter 1 embraces using both symbol-plotted interpretive maps for the feasible summary of transcribed data of each particular sound/word and telephone surveys for the practicable investigation of geographical or regional distribution of the variation in phonology. In this sense, traditional qualitative methods of using audio recording (e.g., questionnaires) are claimed to be limited in giving their elicitation of only a particular segment for impressionistic transcription of sociolectal/sociolinguistic stylistic variation in phonological differentiation. Similarly, to analyze morphosyntactic variation across English-speaking regions, Chapter 2 introduces validated methods for making grammatical judgement to naturalistic morphosyntactic data upon recognizing that traditional qualitative methods of introspective elicitation cannot carry on the investigation of large-scale dialect variation within syntactic variables. For either phonological or morphosyntactic variation, English corpora used by linguists as raw materials provide the basis of accurate, empirically justified, linguistic observations on which to analyze variation in English, thereby testing research hypothesis and informing the existing theories for linguistic analysis and description. This is the spirit throughout Chapter 3, where conventional and unconventional dialect corpora are presented for the complementary role either for large-scale analyses or answering specific individual research questions based on natural, informal, daily speech. Viewing linguistics as a science, Chapter 4 discusses the mathematically-
based cluster analysis for hypothesis generation in large corpus languages through creations of different types of data matrices, in contrast to the traditional way of reviewing the existent literature. In the same lens, Chapter 5 suggests innovative ways of using maps, trees, and networks to analyze relations between dialects by quantifying the distance between linguistic varieties across a wide range of linguistic features, while the traditional approach of using only osogloassese cannot reach such end. As another signature chapter for the first thematic part of the volume, Chapter 6 turns attention to perceptual methods that value non-linguists’ perceptions on how and why language works and changes. Thus, the introduction of the existent innovative methods in the first part of the volume provides the better or best practice for the study of variation in language and, significantly, makes interdisciplinary investigations of language change possible.

Theoretically, the book vigorously explores language change with variation due to varieties of non-linguistic variables such as the development of linguistic theory, the impact of language in legal and educational settings, the role of identity and genes and, therefore, social factors, for the theoretical underpinnings that inform the study of variation in linguistic analysis. As stated in Chapter 7, there is a heated debate among linguistic theorists on the issue of “what” in syntax and phonology should be counted as linguistic variation, specifically inter- or intra-speaker variation. Such debate is further probed in Chapter 8, where linguistic variation is conceptualized as a unitary part of language change, dynamic, contradictory, and constantly changing across time and place. Thus, new methodologies or the philosophical framework for viewing existent linguistics variation is called for to respond to the vibration in current linguistic theory. From the discipline of forensic linguistics, Chapter 9 addresses variation on the text, both oral and written, in legal settings and social consequences of such variation in the operation of the law in terms of individual or social groups. Looking beyond traditional variationist research where identity is a given label of social status, Chapter 10 turns attention to sociolinguistic analysis which values social meaning of language associated with identity, arguing that identity is not fixed but built in ideologies, socially constructed, and co-constructive with language. From the biological angle, Chapter 11 asked a controversial question in linguistic analysis: Are differences in our genes relevant to understanding differences in language? That is, is biological or genetic variation part of the factors that cause linguistic variation? The question raises more inquiries about the way our sampling and inference making is based on the collected samples. Although the chapter provides no direct
answer to the question, it invokes more proactive thinking and a call for future research in these areas. The book ends in Chapter 12 with emphasis on linguistic variation legitimacy in classrooms and the role of cultures and dialects learners bring to the classroom. On the whole, the multidimensional discussions about influences on linguistic variation in the second part of the volume significantly expand the epistemological landscape of the study of linguistic variation and establish a platform for more thinking and exploring language change in linguistic analysis.

The authors incorporate a number of features throughout the book to facilitate its use by the readers. Technical concepts are introduced to different levels of reader with sufficient explanation in line with illustrations, figures, or maps. The table of abbreviations in the front and the index at the back of the book make it easy to check specific concepts, terms, or topics. Although the two thematic parts of the book are structurally divided into “how” and “why”, they are closely related in meaning, thus, taking the reader through the whole repertoire. This is the first book that has comprehensively synthesized such a wide range of the practical methods for the analysis of language variation and perceptions of experts from other fields of linguistics, including the future direction of the field. Situating linguistic variation in a variety of social contexts, the book reshapes language, society, and education into a progressive, unitary continuum. Only in this continuum can analyzing variation in English make meaning.