

Preface

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Pages v–vi of

Language Change and Variation

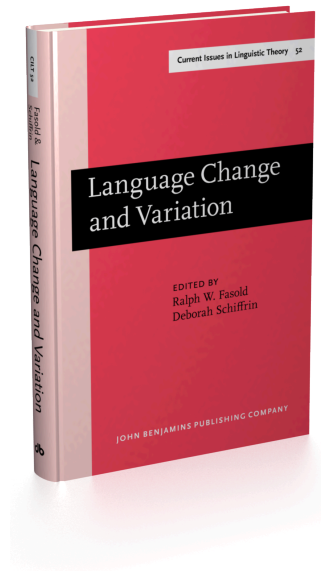
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PREFACE

The study of language variation in social context continues to hold the attention of a large number of linguists. One focus for this research is the annual series of NWAWE colloquia held at various North American universities. This volume is a selected collection of articles based on the papers presented at NWAWE XI held at Georgetown University in 1982.

This collection appears well after NWAWE XI where the research was presented. The explanation (though perhaps not excuse) for the delay is a combination of the usual problems that arise from a volume representing the work of a number of authors, an almost incredible sequence of bad fortune, and (it must be admitted) a certain degree of poor management on the part of the senior editor. Yet, because there has been no consistent, systematic outlet for studies on language variation and change, the work these articles represent has, by and large, not been superseded in the published literature. Many of the articles that appear here serve as a foundation for the current work of their authors and others. For these reasons, we believe this collection is an important one, despite the delay.

The articles deal with a number of themes, some of which have often been discussed, and others that have been less emphasized. The first group of articles in the volume center on a frequent theme: speech communities as the essential setting for understanding variation in language. Earlier work in linguistic variation dealt for the most part with phonological variation and change. The next two sections move the discussion to syntactic and morphological change and variation in syntax. A selection on the role of variation in understanding first language acquisition comprises three papers. As the study of language variation matures, it is essential that continuous refinements be made in its empirical methodology, and it is inevitable that differences in opinion on theoretical issues will arise. The articles in the last section concern theoretical controversy and methodological advances.

Several individuals were immensely helpful during the preparation of this volume. No one deserves our appreciation more than Carolyn Nocella, who carefully retyped the entire manuscript onto magnetic disks from

very problematic hard copy, making further editing and camera-ready copy preparation with computer assistance possible. Eleanor Waters and especially Sophia Behrens spent painstaking hours copy-editing the manuscript during some of the difficult periods in its history. The editors are grateful to several Georgetown University Linguistics Department Fellows for help with proof-reading, correspondence, graphics and in other ways: Alexandra Casimir-Smorciwski, Catherine Strine, Belle Tyndall and Esther Figueroa. We very much appreciate the work and patience of Anne Porcelijn in supervising this project for the publisher and the encouragement of Prof. E. F. K. Koerner, the series editor.

We found it exciting to assemble these fine studies and we hope and expect that the volume will be a valuable addition to the literature on sociolinguistic variation and change.

R.F.

D.S.