Book Review

Reviewed by **Martin Durrell,** School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK, E-mail: martin.durrell@manchester.ac.uk

The appearance of this handbook in 2012 was a sign of how well established the (sub-)discipline of historical sociolinguistics has become, and the fact that it has now been published in paperback demonstrates that its usefulness as a textbook has been clearly recognized. With 35 chapters covering the full range of the field, many of which are written by the original pioneers in the subject or their pupils and collaborators, it is a welcome complement to two previous handbooks in the series on closely related themes, the *Handbook of Language Variation and Change* – now in a second edition – (Chambers and Schilling 2013), and the *Handbook of Historical Linguistics* (Joseph and Janda 2003).

Although there is no question that the various contributors manifest clear and sometimes quite marked differences in their approaches to the topic, all would seem to acknowledge that their aim is, as the editors state in their introduction (p. 4), to explore "the extent to which sociolinguistic theoretical models, methods, findings and expertise can be applied to the process of the reconstruction of the past of languages in order to account for diachronic linguistic changes and developments". From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, this would seem self-evident as a central goal in the diachronic investigation of language, but it has really only been pursued systematically for thirty years or so. Teresa Fanego points in her Preface (p. xxvii) to the publication of Romaine (1982) as the inspiration for many scholars to work on "the application of sociolinguistic models to historical data", and this work is cited by several contributors as an inspiration for engaging in such work. There are several reasons for what seems on the face of it to be a surprisingly recent start to research in this field and these appear regularly in the chapters in this volume. Although the importance of a link between language and society has never been seriously denied in historical linguistics, this link has often been seen exclusively as comprising "external factors" in language change without serious investigation of how it was constituted, and far too frequently it simply consisted of an attempt to explain language change (which could otherwise seem inexplicable) by reference to such factors which were adduced in an *ad hoc*

manner or in terms which might have appeared superficially plausible but which were ultimately difficult to verify. This was particularly so in assumptions about language contact, whereby certain linguistic changes might be ascribed to migration or supposed political dominance without any clear idea of the precise relationship between the language groups involved which might have been the source of such change. Even in this volume, Robert McColl Millar (pp. 42–43) still maintains the traditional association of the set of dialect isoglosses known as Rhenish Fan with assumptions about the social structure of the Rhineland from the fifth century. Whilst it is not impossible that features of a sound change were "retained in a particular pocket because a strong sense of local identity existed", it is difficult to regard such an assertion as anything other than highly speculative in the absence of corroborative historical documentation. The breakthrough came, following the work of Romaine (1982) and others, precisely with the realization that real understanding of the social element in language change was only possible through the systematic and rigorous application of the techniques and methods of sociolinguistics (and sociology) to historical language data.

This naturally built crucially on the work of pioneering sociolinguists such as William Labov, who is probably the most quoted author in this volume. However, it is important to recall that this involved a serious challenge to some dominant ideas about how language is to be studied systematically, in particular Saussure's insistence on the absolute separation of synchrony and diachrony and Chomsky's exclusion of any consideration of linguistic variation in linguistic theory. This is made clear by Jean Aitchison in the first chapter in this volume, but it is a point picked up again and again by other contributors, for example by K. Anipa (p. 187), who points out that Saussure also maintained that the science of language was "only possible if usage variation is strictly shunned", and Anita Auer and Anja Voeste (p. 256), who observe that "[t]heoretical linguists [...] tended to neglect the empirical fact of variability because its integration into their conceptual framework proved to be difficult". Thus, a considerable number of linguists came to regard sociolinguistics as peripheral to linguistics proper (or "mainstream linguistics"), and some historical linguistics was confined, as Guy (2003: 369) puts it, "to post-hoc analysis of the end-products of linguistic change", i.e. to an examination of changes in the internal structures of a language between one synchronic period and another, without systematic consideration of the process by which those changes occurred within actually existing linguistic communities. Of course, this implies accepting the fact that variation (especially within a community, but even within the speech of an individual) is an inherent feature of language and that such variation is a necessary (if notoriously not sufficient) condition for change.

This also meant that historical linguistics should not be restricted, as had often been the case, to what Richard Watts (Chapter 32) calls the "tunnel/funnel view", driven by the "ideology of standard" (outlined again in James Milroy's Chapter 31), i.e. that (p. 587) "the goal of the history of English is to account for the emergence of the standard language". A crucial feature of historical socio-linguistics is precisely to take all variation within a linguistic community at a particular period into consideration in order to help identify the social factors which might have determined preference for or elimination of particular variants – and, as pointed out by a number of authors here, investigating reasons for non-change is as important as identifying those which underlie change.

In this respect an essential feature of the high quality of recent research in the field has been the availability of electronic corpora. Research in historical linguistics has always been subject to the problem which was memorably named by Labov (1992) as one of "Bad Data", i.e. that we only have access to what has chanced to come down to us, and that is in the form of written records which may have autonomous norms at some remove from those of the spoken language, not least because of the development of standardized prescriptions and stylistic norms in particular registers. The limitations of having to rely on what documentation happens to have been preserved is of course shared by any historical discipline, and the conclusions which can be drawn from it will depend crucially on the scholarly expertise of the individual researcher. Nevertheless, whereas previously historical linguistic investigations had involved the laborious and time-consuming collection of material by hand, we can now have almost immediate access to a much greater body of data which make it possible to ask questions which simply could not be considered previously. The possibilities such corpora make available are explored in detail in Pascual Cantos's contribution to this volume (Chapter 6), but one important factor is that they characteristically comprise a much wider range of genres or registers than had previously been easily accessible, following the example of, among others, the ARCHER corpus of English, cf. Biber et al. (1993). Earlier investigations had often been limited to literary texts, not only because they were seen as examples of the "best" language or a variety closest to standard, but also because of the difficulty in compiling datasets from texts in other genres, particularly those which exemplified more what Koch and Oesterreicher (1985) have termed the "language of immediacy", i.e. the register closest to spontaneous speech, cf. in particular Stephan Elspaß's Chapter 9 in this volume on the language of private letters and diaries. It is indicative of the advances in the field which electronic corpora have made possible that so many of the contributions to this volume are by colleagues who have themselves compiled or worked closely with such resources. But even so, as many

contributors to the volume emphasize, study in this field is often vitiated, not only by the fragmentary and partial nature of the documents which have come down to us, but also by the lack of full data on their authors and the consequent difficulty in assigning relevant sociological variables to them.

The 35 papers in the volume are divided into five thematic sections – a helpful index to the work is online at http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-140519068X.html (last accessed 27 May 2015). The first, entitled "Origins and Theoretical Assumptions", contains three papers which, taken together, are concerned with establishing the parameters of the discipline and its place within linguistics. Jean Aitchison, as mentioned earlier, is concerned to challenge Saussure's dichotomy, emphasize the crucial fact of variation as a central fact of language and show (p. 19) that "diachrony and synchrony [...] are essentially overlapping processes and one cannot be understood without the other". Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg consider the origin and development of the discipline, demonstrating that historical sociolinguistics is not so much concerned with "external" factors in language change as conventionally understood but rather with the application of quantitative, variationist methodology to historical data, especially as reflected in genre variation and the investigation of "alternative" histories of a language, not simply of the prestige variety regarded as the "essential" form of the language. In the final contribution to this section, Robert McColl Millar deals with the ways in which "macrosociolinguistic" forces can affect linguistic variation and change, i.e. how specific sociological conditions can determine the use of particular varieties or languages, for instance in diglossic situations or language shift, or in the emergence of standard varieties.

Part II, "Methods for the Sociolinguistic Study of the History of Languages", contains eight papers. In the first of these Juan M. Hernández-Campoy and Natalie Schilling define historical sociolinguistics in terms of reconstructing language in its social context and using sociolinguistics to understand change. They identify seven underlying problems in achieving these aims, i.e. representativeness, empirical validity, invariation, authenticity, authorship, background, and the ideology of standard. However, their tone is perhaps unnecessarily defensive, since, for example, statistical representativeness may not really be possible even for modern data, and the fact that any historical discipline is constrained by the availability of evidence (Labov's "Bad Data" problem) does not preclude methodological rigour. Alexander Bergs covers similar ground in warning of the danger of anachronism, since the uniformitarian principle may not be valid, as what is known for the present (e.g. in terms of social class or gender-related issues) may not have been true in the past as roles have changed. He comes to the clear conclusion (p. 96) that "every language period and every

linguistic community must be investigated independently and in its own right", an essential principle which is stated again and again by other authors in this collection. In the third paper in this section, Pascual Cantos shows the vital role of corpora in historical sociolinguistic research – as mentioned earlier, it is the availability of these which proved a vital impetus to the discipline. However, one might wish to question his optimistic view (p. 103) that "corpus linguistics can fruitfully contribute to overcome the obstacles of the bad data problem; by allowing researchers to process simultaneously almost all the texts that have survived from a given period, corpus linguistics partly solves the fragmentary nature of historical material" since what we have is still written language data which has been preserved by chance. We may be able to access more of it more quickly and more simply, but it still retains the features which led Labov (1992) to characterize it in its essence as "Bad Data".

The other five papers in this second section deal with specific types of input data for historical sociolinguistics. Nila Vázquez and Teresa Marqués-Aguado look at editing medieval manuscripts in their social context and effectively show how it is crucial to move on from the "Bad Data" problem to investigating what can be meaningfully done with what we actually have. Laura Esteban-Segura considers the use of medical, official, and monastic documents in sociolinguistic research and shows the crucial importance of taking the historical and culture-specific settings into account in analyzing language use and variation, with reference among others to late medieval English medical texts and official records from Valencia. The contribution by Stephan Elspaß demonstrates the value of private letters and diaries in providing evidence of language varieties with the potential to provide insights into historical orality – the "language of immediacy" rather than the "language of distance" which inevitably accounts for the bulk of the documents which have come down to us. In his paper, he also gives a useful and informative survey of available material in a number of languages. K. Anipa's article entitled "The Use of Literary Sources in Historical Sociolinguistic Research" asks some fundamental questions about sociolinguistic methodology, accepting the rejection by Hudson (1996) of the existence of discrete "varieties" and questioning Labov's quantitative methods and generalization of his findings. However, he seems ultimately to be primarily concerned to present an iconoclastic case along these lines, and the information which he gives about the practical use and value of literary texts in historical sociolinguistic research is actually rather limited. By contrast, the last paper in this section, by Carol Percy, on "Early Advertising and Newspapers as Sources of Sociolinguistic Investigation", presents a most useful critical survey of the available resources and previous research in respect of this genre (with an admirably extensive bibliography). She also provides evidence for the fact that

newspapers were influential in transmitting normative attitudes and may indeed have had a stronger influence on actual usage than dictionaries or other works of reference.

Part III is entitled "Linguistic and Socio-demographic Variables" and the first six of its eight papers deal with the relationship between individual variant features and historical social circumstances. It is notable, though, that the majority of them focus in practice on possible sociological conditions underlying change in such features rather than looking at the correlation of specific linguistic variants with socio-demographic variables at a particular historical period or periods. Hanna Rutkowska and Paul Rössler's chapter on orthographic variables begins by pointing out the crucial distinction between orthography and spelling, and that variation can still occur and be relevant despite the essentially normative nature of orthographies since the Renaissance, particularly in the interstices between private and public writing. They present a very thorough survey of research, with an impressively comprehensive bibliography. In dealing with phonological variables, Anna Hebda has of course to address the primary field of variationist sociolinguistics as established by Labov, but one which is fraught with the difficulty for historical periods of accessing the "language of immediacy" and adducing phonological variation from written records, as well as the problem in many cases of identifying the actual social contact and the identity of authors. Nevertheless, she shows that valuable work has been possible, for example on diffusion in Middle English and socially determined linguistic variation in seventeenth-century Paris, but she is clear about the difficulty of acquiring reliable evidence for later periods, as prestige norms become standardized. Similar difficulties are pointed out by Anita Auer and Anja Voeste in their account of grammatical variables, although here there is the additional problem of establishing what can legitimately be regarded as variants of the same variable, especially in respect of syntactic constructions. They look in particular at the emergence of prescriptions and the subjective nature of the reasons put forward for preferring particular variants and try to look for reasons why a particular variable might be adopted in a language community. However, their plea to go beyond simply establishing correlations between variation and social variables and to attempt to seek underlying reasons for change is not one which would be easily fulfilled, given that explanations have proved notoriously elusive in studies of language change. Joachim Grzega's chapter on lexical-semantic variables draws initially on his own theoretical approach to the correlation of lexical-semantic variables and social groups, which he calls CoSMOS, a "Cognitive and Social Model for Onomasiological Studies", trying to identify the set of forces which may trigger lexical innovation – but approached from an onomasiological rather than a

semasiological perspective. In the latter part of his chapter, he gives an extensive survey of lexical borrowing and the social conditions which can underlie it. Andreas H. Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen write on "Pragmatic Variables" with what they identify as a "Continental European" (rather than the – in their view narrower – "Anglo-American") definition of pragmatics, which covers the totality of the "use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society" (p. 295). This is of course by no means straightforward to access from written historical records, since it is most clearly connected with the "language of immediacy". However, they show how features may be adduced from written texts in respect of "expression" (e.g. in the use of variant terms of address or interjections), "utterance" (e.g. types of speech act as exemplified in the rise of "politeness culture" in the eighteenth century), "conversation" and "discourse domains". In looking at "Class, Age, and Gender-based Patterns" in language, Agnieszka Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak, in common with many other contributors to this volume, emphasizes the danger of falsely assuming that historical social relationships are comparable to those of the present day. She shows this by an extensive account of women's private writing in New England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The chapter is an excellent example of how general principles can be comprehensively illustrated through a focussed and nuanced account of a specific study, here of how a particular environment is reflected in language, with no dominant single factor but "intertwined" variables at the root of language change.

The final two papers in Part III deal with more general issues. Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre takes one of the central themes in sociolinguistics, i.e. the relationship between linguistic variation and change and social networks as identified by anthropologists and sociologists, and explores how this approach can be applied in respect of the past, where the evidence of both linguistic variation and social conditions cannot be explored with the precision possible in the present. He shows, though, that this is not an insurmountable barrier, with reference in particular to the work by Bergs (2005) on the Paston letters and a number of investigations involving social networks in eighteenth-century London. Rajend Mesthrie treats the sensitive issue of the possible links between language and race, ethnicity, religion, and castes, in part with reference to his own work in South Africa. He concludes, though, that although language difference may imply ethnic difference, the converse is not necessarily the case, and the persistence of varieties which might appear to depend on ethnicity actually correlate more closely with social networks (and this has become more apparent in South Africa since the ending of the apartheid regime), since "even the most hardened tracks pertaining to language in relation to ethnicity, caste and religion are socio-geograhic and historical in nature" (p. 364).

Part IV deals with "Historical Dialectology, Language Contact, Change, and Diffusion" and its ten chapters deal with some of the core issues in historical linguistics in exploring the spatial dimension of language variation and change. In the first of these, Paul T. Roberge takes the view that language change cannot be explained or understood by simply considering mechanisms of change or the social environment, but in the mutual interaction of the two, as proposed in the pioneering work of Weinreich et al. (1968). In the following chapter, by Raymond Hickey, these insights are developed with the insistence that there is no clear distinction between internal and external motivation for change. Some changes may be frequent, such as medial voicing of consonants, and thus be internally motivated, but the implementation of such changes within a speech community depends on a variant acquiring social significance. Brian D. Joseph points out in a similar context the important distinction between "transmission", which is intergenerational, and "diffusion", which involves contact between adult speakers within a speech community. He dismisses the notion that all language change occurs in "transmission", since "imperfect learning" has never been directly observed, and would presumably involve simultaneous imperfect learning within a community for change to occur. He also shows that "lexical diffusion" of change is not incompatible with the Neogrammarian hypothesis of regularity, and this issue is taken up by Mieko Ogura in the next chapter. Developing the familiar S-curve model, she shows the role of speaker networks in diffusion and how change can be seen in effect as speaker-to-speaker propagation in time and space, with specific reference to Tudor and Stuart London where immigration was the basis for the formation of a type of network which facilitated change starting in lower ranks.

The next four chapters in this section are concerned with geographical factors underlying variation. David Britain considers some of the same data as the previous chapter, such as the spread in Early Modern English of *you* as a subject form and *-s* as the third-person singular ending in the present tense, and he shows that the problem of identifying precise geographical detail in respect of historical texts makes it difficult to establish clear pathways of geographic diffusion. This problem is taken up by Anneli Meurman-Solin in the following chapter with particular reference to her work with historical atlas projects covering early modern English and older Scots. In common with many authors in this volume, she acknowledges the familiar problem of "Bad Data", but asserts nevertheless that the informed study of variants in the context of what is known about the societies concerned can for instance yield viable information about the origin and spread of prestige forms. The possibilities of exploiting modern linguistic atlases for information about the social history of languages is the topic of Roland Kehrein's chapter, and he shows that early interpretations on

the basis of the *Deutscher Sprachatlas* in the tradition of the Marburg School often involved associating dialect differences and isoglosses with social factors. Although much of this was speculative and depended on untenable assumptions about, for example, the effect of historical political or confessional boundaries, it did reflect a serious attempt to set language variation and change in a social context. Digital versions of this pioneering work now permit systematic comparison with recent projects and the investigation of dynamic developments in regional varieties, which interestingly enough often show convergence to regional norms rather than to Standard German. In a rare chapter dealing with language outside Europe and North America, Matthew Toulmin looks at the problems of applying the comparative method and tree model of language differentiation in the context of a dialect continuum such as that in the Indo-Aryan languages. He shows how historical sociolinguistics may be applied in conjunction with the comparative method to reconstruct the differential propagation of linguistic changes. Although he does not make specific reference to it, he is here effectively utilizing similar methods to those applied in Marburg School dialectology to identify historical reasons for dialect differentiation.

The final three chapters in Part IV deal with wider issues of language contact in relation to history. Herbert Schendl points out the often neglected but very relevant fact that multilingualism was actually the norm in medieval Europe and that the language of writing (principally but not only Latin) often differed from the everyday spoken language of the writer. He then considers the social factors which might underlie code-switching in texts – and although he does not mention this, such code-switching has interestingly enough become apparent again recently in young people's electronic communication. The analysis of this becomes easier in later periods when we know more about authors and their backgrounds. Daniel Schreier looks at the effect of migration on linguistic systems, pointing out that this often leads to dialect mixing with levelling and simplification, with various factors involved in the choice of features eventually retained. Evidence from New Zealand shows how these varieties may develop their own dynamics with resultant new dialect formation, although it is still difficult to predict whether or how such koineization will occur. Roger Wright writes on the wider and more general issue of convergence and divergence in world languages, showing clearly that the assumption (from the example of Indo-European) that fragmentation is a norm is untenable. In his view, the varieties which developed into the Romance languages could have emerged relatively early without becoming clearly differentiated for centuries – this would confirm Matthew Toulmin's views in his chapter that reconstruction must take time depth into account, that the simple family tree model is inadequate and that intermediate convergence between emerging varieties is also

possible. Looking at the future of "world languages", Wright is of the opinion that Spanish and English are unlikely to diverge – indeed, varieties of Spanish in Spain are now tending to converge, even if there is still more variation there than in South America. However, in the case of Portuguese, full separation of the major varieties is now a clear possibility.

The five chapters of Part V deal with a central issue of sociolinguistics, "Attitudes to Language", from a historical perspective. James Milroy begins with a basic critique of the concept of "prestige" and the notion that language change is inevitably driven from above by the language of a social elite. Equally problematic is the identification of the prestige form of this elite with "the language" in a process he describes as "iconization", with the concomitant ignoring, or "erasure", of variants which do not belong to this variety. As Stephan Elspaß points out in an earlier chapter, "traditional language histories are overwhelmingly histories of distance-orientated varieties" (p. 161). But the true history of a language, in Milroy's view like that of other contributors, is a social history with full account being taken of variation. A similar point is made by Richard J. Watts, taking up the topic of "language myths" which he treated at greater length in Watts (2011). He argues against what he terms the "tunnel" or "funnel" views of the history of a language, which lead simply to the supposedly uniform language of the present – effectively the standard language. He sees these views as ultimately based on a number of myths about language which have been current since the late Middle Ages, the most important of which is the myth of linguistic homogeneity linked to a particular ethnic group. Watts traces this and associated myths in respect of English through a study of writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and shows that their attempts to ascertain "true" language based on "polite" language ended in the assumption that such was the only "legitimate" language, and it was this which, in Milroy's term, was the variety "iconized". Nils Langer and Agnete Nesse deal with linguistic purism, which, although this is not mentioned explicitly here, is ultimately linked to the myths of homogeneity and invariance explained by Watts. From these are derived notions of a language being "corrupted" by foreign or "base" elements. Ideologically driven moves to rid languages of such elements have recurred in numerous languages and communities, and these are characteristically associated with similar discourses and ultimately with social concerns about the influence of cultures which are feared to be a potential threat to the language community. Anni Sairio and Minna Palander-Collin take up the theme of prestige and essentially concur with Milroy that the relationship of "prestige" to standard languages is not always straightforward. It typically involves voluntary deference to the linguistic practice of others in the adoption of features which for some reason (which may be covert) are regarded as preferable, with networks

and the position and estimation of individuals within them typically playing a crucial role. The last paper, by Catharina Peersman, treats the rather different topic of the emergence of writing in the vernacular in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which is ultimately dependent on changing attitudes to these and to the Latin which had been the predominant language of literacy since the fall of the Roman Empire. This change is associated with the rise of different social structures in the course of urbanization and laicization, but particularly interesting here is the importance of the role attributed to writing on alchemy, as this involved linguistic transfer, code-mixing and the non-academic, non-clerical nature of the subject.

Inevitably, the quality of contributions to a collected work such as this is not uniform, but it must be said that the overall level of the chapters in this work is impressively high, although the best papers are those which combine a general account of the specific topic with an illustrative case study, and the least satisfactory are those which simply present an individual's research or a theoretical account with little illustration. The book covers all aspects of the subject thoroughly, so that the reader has a comprehensive overview of what is involved in the subject and what has been achieved in a relatively short period. It is also well laid-out and well presented, with very few errors, the most noticeable being the erroneous reference to map 27.3 instead of 27.2 on page 513. The only major drawback to the volume, in my view, is that the vast majority of chapters deal exclusively or almost exclusively with English, despite the fact that much pioneering work in the field has been undertaken in respect of other languages and also that the contributors are truly international, from fourteen countries.

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