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KIESLING, Scott, F., *Linguistic Variation and Change*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011, 200 págs. ISBN: 9780748637621.

The subject of this book— linguistic variation and change — has occupied a very important place in the landscape of sociolinguistics since 1952. Indeed, these were the questions which have puzzled the scholars for decades.

This book is conceived as a source of information for students and researchers from other study areas: “Students and (teachers) are encouraged to follow the literature cited for topics that they want to pursue further.” (XIII).

Dr. Scott Kiesling organized this research in four parts: first, he puts the reader in touch with a very sketchy survey of questions with respect to language variation; secondly, the author presents a view of the variation and the social relationships; the third part is a more detailed description of linguistic variation and change; and the last one can be seen as the culmination part of the research.

Chapter 1 introduces the development of sociolinguistics from a historical point of view. This section presents an overview to some general characteristics of Labovian linguistics. Kiesling considers that variation language is tied to the imbrications of linguistic, social and cognitive structures. These follow naturally from the claim of heterogeneity language: “All three of the major constraints (structural, social and cognitive)

act on language simultaneously, and it is the tension among them that ends up driving and determining the direction of changes” (12).

Before going into methods of analysis, the linguist comments briefly (chapter 2) on the way in which the linguistic variable was defined since it was used by Labov in 1963. This is not the only point in which Dr. Kiesling shifts his focus. The linguist emphasizes that during the discussions on the linguistic variable, scholars like Cedergren and Sankoff (1974) or Guy (1980) had intended to elaborate new methods for the analysis of the variables. Finally, the author concludes that the relationship among the linguistic variables in a community can be interpreted as an independent one; although they are part of our need to translate our ideas, sometimes they can interact.

The third chapter “Discovering and describing patterns of variation and change” focuses on scope and concerns methods approaching to language variation, with special attention to data gathering and the informants profile. Dr. Kiesling also argues that the manner in which the surveyed speakers evaluate the language of the other people needs to be incorporated within the methodology.

Interestingly, the speech community is another factor which places tight constraints on the variation language and change. However, some scholars dispense with this concept. Penelope Eckert, for example, stressed the need of the speech community to be seen as a community of practice which goes hand in hand with the activities that the individuals realize.

The rest of this chapter deals with data sample, the interview and the statistic analyses. Unquestionably, it explains the ways in which they can be generated and their role for sociolinguistics.

The second part “Variation and social relationships” synthesizes the social patterns from which variationist linguistics has developed. It begins with the fourth chapter “Social patterns I: Interspeaker variation”, which takes as a foundation the major findings of the social constraints on the linguistic variation.

The findings which Scott Kiesling reports are meant to broaden and enrich the readers’ knowledge by bringing new observation. Therefore, the linguist thinks it is more important to focus on taking into account all the groups that can be relevant for a speech community in order to use the social patterns that were used in others researches: “[...] urban language surveys have designed the social categories of age, sex, social class, and ethnicity in order to ensure that the sample includes all types of relevant people in a speech community. The real problem comes in using these categories in the interpretation of results”. (89)

The central fact of the fifth chapter “Social pattern II: intraspeaker variation” is that people are not programmed to use the same way of speaking in various situations. Factors like *power* or *solidarity* drive them towards the speech pattern they perceive as the most valid in that situation. This cannot be confined to the conversations give and take. When these are occurring, normally speakers pay attention to what happens in that situation.

In chapter 6, Dr. Kiesling looks more closely at the relation between meaning and social patterns. Following Labov (1972), Silverstein (2003), Johnstone *et al.* (2006), the author makes a distinction between three types of indexical meanings of variants, in order to explain under better circumstances the linguistic change.

The social structure and cultural values of the speech community have been invoked as an explanation for the different meanings of a variant.

The way in which children acquire language is introduced in the following chapter. If we scrutinize the examples which the scholar highlights, we observe that a child first becomes acquainted with a general variation pattern; then more differentiating features are acquired creating new ways of speaking in their peer groups.

Chapter 8 traces three phonological processes (the shifts, the mergers and splits) and some morphological variables (the morphophonemic and the morphological alternation). The shift changes to be considered here involve chain and drag shifts.

The second phenomenon, the development of mergers, depends on the collapse of two vowels, while the splits produced depend on the phonetic effects on segments.

As far as the phonological factors are concerned, grammatical category, semantics, frequency and preceding realizations involve the pivotal points in morphophonemic variables that largely determine changes.

The following chapter “Structural patterns II: syntax, lexical variables, and suprasegmentals” deals with the syntactic and pragmatic variation.

A set of syntactic variation principles might be attributed to the grammaticalization, although there are few studies that approach such inferences.

In its most general sense, pragmatic variation denotes any form of linguistic use in a syntactic construction.

The study of the lexical change called by some researches related to the intensifiers and address term.

Finally, the suprasegmental variables are further explored in this chapter. Here, the author reviews the general problems that might appear when the scholars study this kind of change.

Chapter 10, the last one, sums up some general conclusions that are moulded to the language variation and change. This is a summary about the problems that have puzzled and continue baffling this field: “In most cases once a change begins it tends to keep going unless arrested by an unusually strong social influence or very large-scaled demographic reasons. To expand the metaphor even further, the path does not end; varieties only pause at different points” (176).

In this research, which constitutes a detailed and meaningful approach of general and abstract problems of language variation, Dr. Kiesling has attempted to explain and improve our understanding of linguistic variation and change by paying close attention to various studies.

This book enables us to identify these phenomena, to illuminate long-standing problems of Labovian sociolinguistics. In fact, the analyses and observations are meant to map us out through this language variation.

All in all, this volume covers a wide range of core issues, unveiling new perspectives by challenging us to develop thoughtful reflections and insights on the field.

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