

Besprechungen

Cinzia Russi (ed.): *Current trends in historical sociolinguistics*, Warsaw u. Berlin: de Gruyter 2016, pp. 266.

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/bgsl-2018-0019>

This volume marks the launch of de Gruyter's ambitious open access book series on historical linguistics. The choice for an opening volume on historical sociolinguistics chimes in with the high flight this specific field has taken over the past decades. Historical sociolinguistics has become firmly embedded in the landscape of mainstream linguistics through dedicated book series (›Historical Sociolinguistics‹ [Lang] and ›Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics‹ [Benjamins]), handbooks, one of the most successful new journals in recent times (›Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics‹ [de Gruyter]), a high quality summer school and conference programme, and, most of all, a vibrant Historical Sociolinguistics Network¹ that acts as informal membership organisation and dedicated information dispatcher for over 600 scholars.

Series editor Cinzia Russi (University of Texas at Austin) invited authors to contribute with the following call for »studies that draw attention to contemporary trends and developments in this field of research« and »current research on the relationship between sociolinguistics and historical linguistics, as well as on the social motivation of language variation and change« (personal communication). She thus managed to round up some of the major people responsible for the aforementioned surge (Nils Langer as HiSoN co-founder, Juan Manuel Hernández-Campoy and Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre as handbook editors, in particular), in addition to a selection of some of the very best rising stars in the field (the likes of Gijbert Rutten and Anni Sairio). This resulted in a collection of ten contributions (the blurb text mentions nine), covering highly diffuse topics ranging from language policy over stylistics, orthography, dialect loss to traditional first-, second- and third-wave sociolinguistics.

R u s s i (pp. 1–18) summarizes the main draws of the individual chapters in her ›Introduction‹, preceded by a spartan and abridged (be it heavily Anglo-centred) overview of references pertaining to the origins, development and objectives of historical sociolinguistics. No further motivation for the selection of

¹ URL: hison.sbg.ac.at (fetch date: 01.03.2018)

articles is given; the back-cover lists »the overall interdisciplinarity, the diversity of languages examined and the range of themes addressed« as »distinctive features of the book«.

Five articles focus on various aspects of the social history of English across different time periods, often very much in line with previous work by the authors concerned. Four of these contributions use correspondence as primary source material and complement the established tradition of research on letter writing in English historical sociolinguistics: ›A ›third-wave‹ historical sociolinguistic approach to late Middle English correspondence: Evidence from the Stonor Letters‹ (Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre [pp. 46–66]), ›Advice to prospectors (and others). Knowledge dissemination, power and persuasion in Late Modern English emigrants' guides and correspondence‹ (Marina Dossena [pp. 67–80]), ›Authorship and gender in English historical sociolinguistic research: Samples from the Paston Letters‹ (Juan Manuel Hernández-Campos [pp. 108–142]) and ›Like a pack-hors trying to copy after an antilope': A case study of eighteenth-century non-native English‹ (Anni Siano [pp. 219–236]). Hanna Rutkowska (pp. 165–193) explores similar themes in printed source material: ›Orthographic regularization in Early Modern English printed books: Grapheme distribution and vowel length indication‹.

The remaining chapters on languages other-than-English fan out in all directions across sociolinguistic themes and periods. Georgios Alexandropoulos (pp. 19–45) elaborates upon on the link between ideologies and conversational strategies in Greek texts from the second and fourth century in a chapter on ›Stylistic devices of Christians expressing contradiction against the Gentiles‹. The link between koineization, economic change and evolving community identity is at the heart of Robert McColl Millar's (pp. 143–164) chapter on ›Dialect death? The present state of the dialects of the Scottish fishing communities‹. In ›Diaglossia, individual variation and the limits of standardization: Evidence from Dutch‹, Gijsbert Rutten (pp. 194–218) adds a truly thought-provoking and engaging chapter to his reappraisal of Dutch standardisation history at large as he takes the best of contemporary theorising on present-day language variation and applies it to 17th-century data, moving away from traditional bipolar dichotomies between High and Low varieties, and implementing a far more diversified continuum of language varieties instead.

Two German-themed contributions complete the set of articles and may be most relevant for the readership of the ›Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur‹.

In their paper on ›Language policy in the Long Nineteenth Century: Catalonia and Schleswig‹, James Hawkey and Nils Langer (pp. 81–107) turn to the historic sociology of language, a dimension of sociohistorical linguistics all-too-of-

ten eclipsed by work in the traditional Labovian paradigm (while actually perfectly compatible and mutually enhancing). While the allotted space proved to be too limited to fundamentally explore all dimensions of the intended »contrastive analysis of the metalinguistic history« (p. 85) of both regions, especially the case of the Duchy of Schleswig is foregrounded as a *Fundgrube* for international comparative research on the topic, harbouring »quintolingualism with three autochthonous home languages (Frisian, Low German, South Jutisch), and two allochthonous [sic!] written languages (Danish, High German), used in formal discourse and other domains« (p. 94). Apart from the conclusion that the categorical characterisations of traditional models of present-day language planning fail to account for a number of intriguing facts in their case studies, the contribution also rekindles the debate on which (f)actors determine the success or failure of language planning efforts for low prestige varieties, especially in the context of 19th-century nationalism. Given the enlightening results of recent similar comparative analyses, one greatly hopes that a more elaborate treatment of the topic will see the light in the near future.

Anja Voeste (pp. 237–261) takes the reader on an intriguing trip along the intricacies of »the tense relationship between literacy and the spoken word in early modern times« in German texts from the 16th through the 18th century. Premising the opposition between a High written literary language, a widely-used oral language (across classes), and a third »literacy-imprinted« (p. 237) spoken language from the 14th century onwards, Early Modern times would further have seen the unprecedented dispersion of a speaker's communicative competence over ever more varieties and registers, due to the increasing differentiation in society. This maze of variability must have challenged the »precariat« (p. 238) (non-upper) class to converge to or diverge from the literacy-imposed variety in their written texts. Tracing syntactic, morphological and graphemic features in her research corpus, Voeste tries to grasp both the engendering interplay between orality and literacy in writing over 200 years' time, as well as the individual authors' awareness of the dissociation between both modes. While instances of (or attempts at) shifting to H variants (here rebranded as »disloyalty to primary varieties« [p. 238]) may have confronted these authors with the limits of their writing competence, Voeste reassesses that this writing behaviour did allow them to experience the advantages of mastering the written word to the fullest extent.

While this volume most certainly harbours a number of highly interesting contributions for specialists in historical sociolinguistics, the main criticism to be formulated concerns its multidirectional and eclectic nature. It is a collection of articles, in the literal sense of the word. There is no overarching rationale behind the selected contributions (apart from pertaining to the wide field of historical sociolinguistics), nor are there any thematic sections of focussed clusters. While

this is perfect standard practice for a singles journal issue in any branch of linguistics, it is commonly known to weaken the strength of any collective volume. In a field of inquiry well beyond its prime, quite a few relevant methodological and topical themes could have been singled out as a possible onset for collecting contributions. As noted in a recent edited collection, »there is still an ongoing need for solid, innovative and bold theory building in historical sociolinguistics. [...] the field is very good at describing detailed case studies challenging the generally accepted borders of what can be known on the basis of selective data. What we often appear to lack, however, is the audacity to challenge established language contact or multilingualism theory on the basis of such microstudies« (Rutten [et al.] 2017, p. 9). Even when considering that the editor had to face article withdrawals well beyond any decent time limit – the current reviewer stands guilty as charged – this very first volume in this series could have been a flagship publication critically weighing the accomplishments and remaining challenges in a specific sub branch of historical linguistics at large (very much the way Jahr [1999] did in an edited volume on historical sociolinguistics published with de Gruyter). This definitely is something to pursue in the upcoming volumes, if this open access series is to challenge the relevance and price-worthiness of its established competitors in the traditional publishing market.

Literatur

Jahr, Ernst Håkon (ed.) 1999: *Language Change. Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics*, Berlin and New York:

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Rutten, Gijsbert [et al.] 2017: *Unraveling multilingualism in times past. The interplay of language contact,*

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