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Sociolinguistics

Theoretical Debates

Sociolinguistics is a dynamic field of research that explains the role and function of language in social life. This book offers the most substantial account available of the core contemporary ideas and arguments in sociolinguistics, with an emphasis on innovation and change. Bringing together original writing by more than twenty of the field's most influential international thinkers and researchers, this is an indispensable guide to the newest and most searching ideas about language in society. For researchers and advanced students it gives access to the field's most pressing issues and debates and provides a platform for new initiatives in sociolinguistic research.

NIKOLAS COUPLAND is an elected Fellow of both the UK Academy of Social Sciences and the Australian Academy of the Humanities. He has published more than 20 books and more than 150 articles and chapters on wide-ranging aspects of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. His volume *The Handbook of Language and Globalization* (2010) was the winner of the British Association for Applied Linguistics annual book prize.

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Cardiff University and Copenhagen University



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Preface and acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to the many people who have shown confidence in this book project and patience in the face of delays in its completion. I had originally envisaged this book as a short review of ‘sociolinguistic theory’, written in my own name. As time went on, and as the field expanded and theory proliferated, I came to realise the impossibility of shouldering even the core of this task myself. It was once possible to argue that there was rather little theoretical ambition in sociolinguistics. Even if originally true – not true any longer!

The project then evolved into one based on ‘theoretical debates’, necessarily so because many of the emerging theory-rich perspectives came from different parts of what I take to be sociolinguistics – the fertile and shifting multi- and interdisciplinary fields of enquiry where language and society come into contact with each other in so many ways. This made any single theoretical vision contentious in its wider context. What was needed, I latterly realised, was to bring as many as possible of the leading researchers into this debate, and I am again grateful that so many of them have been willing to play along.

In the pages of this book many different voices interact with each other, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes less so, but in all cases with importantly distinctive ways of representing what we know in the field of sociolinguists, what we need to know, what we can generalise about, what generalising means, where we are heading, and what next, with a modicum of ‘so what’ thrown in too. In some cases the debates in question have been actual collaborative discussions based around first drafts of the chapters that appear here. Regrettably, I was not able to realise my ambition of circulating all or even most of such drafts around the full set of contributors, theme by theme. Coordinating the timing of different contributors’ writing, and my own, and getting to a finishing line, proved to be enough of a challenge. But a *spirit* of debate certainly comes through the chapters: All contributors are striving for consolidation and clarification, and often genuine innovation and agenda-setting, and to this extent the book serves as an opportunity to take stock across many of the central fields of sociolinguistic research and to conceive of future developments.

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The six sections are not exactly the same as the ones I had planned when designing the book, nor are the authors allocated to them exactly as planned. I felt it was essential to encourage contributors to set their own theoretical and metatheoretical targets for their chapters, and I am sure that what may have been lost (relative to planned structure), as the book's chapters evolved, is more than compensated for by the sharpness and originality of what the contributors provide. Any significant omissions are of course my own responsibility.

I am grateful to Cambridge University Press, and to Andrew Winnard in particular, for allowing me the flexibility to shape-shift the book over time; also to Stephanie Sakson for her expert and very supportive input into preparing the manuscript for publication. One or two planned chapter contributions did not make it into the final collection, because of the sorts of human and professional exigencies that we all know about. I have been sorry to miss out on those contributions.

Different universities have supported me in the preparation of the book. It began its life when I was chair of the Centre for Language and Communication Research at Cardiff University, and continued through my time as Visiting Professor at the University of Technology Sydney and Research Professor at the University of Copenhagen. Without that support, plus the continuing support of esteemed colleagues at these three locations, the project would certainly have foundered.

The Press has agreed to set the chapters of the book in a mix of USA-based and UK-based house styles for academic English, to reflect, at least to some degree, individual authors' preferences. These styles include not only the familiar distinctions in spelling but also some distinctions in punctuation. The setting of Chapter titles, Part titles and running heads has, on the other hand, been regularised.

NIKOLAS COUPLAND