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> In some areas of research it may appear possible to separate the linguistic
> from the socio-cultural, the synchronic from the diachronic or historical.
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> Dell Hymes 1971: 423

1.1 Brief description of the proposed study

Thus far, sociolinguistics has concerned itself primarily with the analysis
of synchronic variable speech data. If, however, sociolinguistics is to reach
the final goal set for it by Hymes (1974a: 206), namely, that it should preside
over its own liquidation, then clearly sociolinguistics should itself be an
integrative mode of description. I take Hymes' comment to mean that the
subject matter of linguistics should not be confined to the study of the
conceptual function of language, but should also include its social function
or communicative use. What he argues for, then, is a general theory of
language which comprises both aspects. Such a theory would dispense with
the need for a separate sociolinguistic theory; in other words, sociolinguis-
tics would be 'redundant' (Labov 1972a: 183).[1]

   The chances of sociolinguistics becoming such an integrative discipline
are, in Hymes' opinion as well as my own, uncertain. Furthermore, I
question whether a sociolinguistic theory in these terms is possible. My
starting point is the assumption that if sociolinguistics is to meet the
challenge given by Hymes, it must move beyond the treatment of syn-
chronic phonetic and phonological data to a more general body of linguis-
tic data. My study attempts to extend the application of variation theory
from the domain of synchronic phonological variation to the study of a

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1. Others have expressed similar views. For example, Kanngiesser has said (1972a: 14):
       Sofern die Linguistik aber eine bestimmte Form von Sprechhandlungen vollzieht, ist sie ipso facto
       auch 'Soziolinguistik' ... In einer Linguistik, die diesem Erklärungsanspruch genügt, kann es
       demzufolge keine spezielle Teildisziplin mit dem Namen 'Soziolinguistik' geben.
   Cf. also Aracil (1974: 7) who says that sociolinguistics is complementary to linguistics proper, but is
   likely to absorb linguistics in the long run rather than the other way around.

problem in historical syntax. In this way, I hope not only to test the ability
of sociolinguistics to deal with historical data, but also to examine what
implications the results of this test have for the status of sociolinguistics.

The approaches to data collection and analysis are important dimen-
sions here, not because they are novel or original – they are all well-tried,
established procedures within the sociolinguistic literature – but because no
studies on historical linguistics to date have claimed to have based them-
selves on a purely sociolinguistic approach. Interestingly, the diachronic
analysis of social dialects was one of the seven dimensions of sociolinguistic
research formulated by Bright (at the first conference to carry the title
'sociolinguistic', in 1964), and it is with this dimension that I am concerned.

As a specific illustration of the application of sociolinguistics to prob-
lems in historical syntax, I examine relativization in Middle Scots, using as
a data base a sample of different types of texts written during the reign of
James V. I have made an attempt to control possible extraneous sources of
variation by limiting the texts to be sampled both chronologically and
geographically to the Central Scots region during the period c. 1530–50.[2]
The investigation focusses specifically on variation between WH forms
(*quhilk* – *which*), TH (*that*) and $\emptyset$ (instances of relative omission), which is
characteristic of sixteenth-century texts. It was my hypothesis that the
variation would correlate highly with a number of linguistic factors in the
first instance, e.g. characteristics of the antecedent (animateness, definite-
ness, etc.), syntactic position of the relative marker in the relative clause
(subject, direct object, etc.) and type of clause (restrictive/non-restrictive),
as well as with a number of extralinguistic (or social) factors such as type of
text (prose/verse), and style within a text (quoted speech/narrative prose).

If the validity of sociolinguistic research is to be measured in terms of its
ability to relate sociolinguistic data to the central problems of linguistic
theory, as Labov says (1972a: 183–4), then the results of this study should
be relevant to models of historical change and not just to the more specific
descriptive problem of providing an account of relativization in a dialect of
English.

In laying the methodological and theoretical background to the socio-
historical linguistic framework within which this study is presented, a
number of questions are relevant; these will be discussed under the follow-
ing headings:

2. Some recent comments by McIntosh lend support to my choice of this period. McIntosh (1978: 42–3)
   thinks that the most fruitful period to study is 1450–1550 since material from this time is sufficiently
   free of standardizing tendencies. In addition, he suggests that it is advisable to restrict the time span to
   less than a century to avoid possible confusion between chronological and regional patterns.

1. What is the scope of sociolinguistics? In particular, what is the relationship between sociolinguistics and linguistics, between sociolinguistics and other subdisciplines of linguistics such as stylistics, historical linguistics, and between sociolinguistics and other disciplines such as sociology?
2. What special problems, if any, arise in the adaptation of techniques used in the analysis of the spoken language to the written language? What are the implications for the application and relevance of sociolinguistic theory to historical studies?
3. How can one investigate the social or extralinguistic dimension of linguistic variation in the historical record of a language? Can the notion of 'stylistic continuum' be meaningfully applied to quantitative differences in the written language? To what extent do these different levels of usage of variable linguistic phenomena reflect differences in the spoken language?

In the latter part of the chapter the proposed investigation of relativization in Middle Scots will be outlined in terms of a socio-historical linguistic approach which suggests some possible models to account for the observed variation and a means for testing them.

1.2 Sociolinguistics vs. linguistics

It might reasonably be argued that once it has been decided to deal with a problem of historical syntax, we have already moved outside the scope of sociolinguistics and into the realms of philology, textual analysis, or even stylistics, since we have no data to draw on apart from what exists in the extant written records of a language which is no longer spoken. The question of whether such a study can in fact be called 'sociolinguistic' is in some respects fundamental,[3] and should not be dismissed as either trivial (and hence not relevant to the study), or totally utilitarian; for apart from practical questions of identity – i.e. what to call oneself, historical linguist, sociolinguist, etc., or just linguist – it is necessary to know what field one is working in. At some level one must decide what models of description are relevant to the problem at hand, or even what the problem is. As much as we might like to believe that we can avoid 'a priori theoretical considerations', it is impossible to argue that there can be a description without a theory.

I take Popper's (1972: 104) view that all knowledge is theory-impregnated. Popper (1972: 146) has argued that the epistemology of

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3. Already at this stage I have probably departed from what might be called 'Labovian sociolinguistics proper'. This will become clearer however in the next section where I discuss what implications the study of the written records of a language has for the applicability of sociolinguistics.

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induction breaks down before taking its first step. It cannot begin with
perceptions and build theories upon them, since there are no such things as
sense data or perceptions which are not built on theories. The conclusion
which can be drawn from this is that the data are no guarantee for the
theories.[4]

To take a linguistic example, our idea of 'the structure of a language' is
based on what we think is in the real world and what constitutes a des-
cription (or an explanation) of it. It determines which observations are
selected as being important, and hence the very shape of the description.
The notion 'shape of the description' is indeed quite a real one. We 'know',
for example, what a grammar or a phonology of a language looks like. A
phonetic description of a language might include a classification of conso-
nants in terms of place and manner of articulation. Such a classification
embodies a theory of phonetics which tells us what to include as relevant
and what to look for in the sound system of a language; for example, one
does not expect to find a language with no stops or fricatives, although
there is no reason why they should occur universally. Nor does one expect
to find a language using sounds which for some reason do not fall within the
descriptive categories, e.g. those which are thought to be physiologically
impossible.[5]

It is in this sense that such a classification can be considered predictive;
although languages may still surprise us, we generally look for what we
have found before elsewhere, or what can be accommodated within the
present descriptive model. A taxonomy then, linguistic or otherwise, does
not serve as a classificatory scheme for ordering neutral facts or obser-
vations since it is already based on theory. There is, however, a distinction
to be made between description and explanation; I assume that the func-
tion of a theory is to explain how the phenomena it describes have come
about.

This illustration is not intended to point a finger at phonetic theory, since
it could reasonably be argued that we 'know' more about phonetics than
any other aspect of language. Yet to 'know' all the possible speech sounds

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4. I am assuming that this position is not controversial, at least within the philosophy of science (cf. also
   the discussion in Harre 1976: 24–34); and I will not argue here against the so-called 'autonomy
   principle' with respect to the relationship between facts and theories.
5. There has been a tendency among some phoneticians to regard phonetic data as raw data. Pike's (1968:
   57) comment, 'Phonetics gathers raw material; phonemics cooks it', reflects this view. Phonetics cooks
   too in the sense that it assumes that certain sounds, e.g. coughing, are to be classified as non-speech
   sounds, and hence not part of the data. Laver (1976: 55) has recently emphasized the fact that the
   phonetic level of analysis is a 'level of considerable abstraction from the phonic artefacts created by
   each act of speaking'.

which can be produced or describe how they can be produced is not to 'explain' them. Popper (1972: 195) has pointed out that every explanation can be further explained, so the idea of an ultimate explanation must be rejected.

It should now be clear that I reject the view that a successful sociolinguistic theory or progress towards a sociolinguistic theory involves transition to a theory which will provide direct empirical tests for most of its basic assumptions or explanations, although this would seem to be the view held by Labov (1972b: 114). In accepting a sociolinguistic framework for my study, I commit myself to a description of the imbrication of language structure and use, but reject the notion that this can be an explanation of an essence. I agree with Popper (1972: 195) that we must give up essentialism, i.e. asking what a thing is, what the true nature or essence is which causes something to be what it is or act as it does. Even though I make use here of some recent analytical tools, I do so without accepting that there is anything in the nature of language which entails a description of it in terms of a variable rule or other such formal expression of quantitative relations. Furthermore, apparent successes with such analytical devices cannot be regarded as an indication of truth or a correspondence with the nature of language. To believe this would be to subscribe to 'radical instrumentalism' (cf. Chalmers 1978).

Before returning to the question of the relevance of sociolinguistics to historical linguistics, the relationship between sociolinguistics and linguistics must be considered. The term 'sociolinguistics' immediately suggests an interconnection between two separate and distinct disciplines; though it is not to be assumed automatically that these disciplines are sociology and linguistics. Hymes (1974a: viii), for example, views sociolinguistics as a multidisciplinary field, which includes not only sociology and linguistics, but also social anthropology, education, poetics, folklore and psychology.

Hymes has made the interesting observation (1974a: 84) that such mixed or hyphenated terms linking linguistics with the social sciences and, in particular, anthropology have quite a long history; terms such as 'ethnographic philology', 'philological ethnology', 'linguistic anthropology', etc., occur from at least the nineteenth century. The form, relative chronology and prevalence of such terminology is revealing, as Hymes points out. Until World War II these mixed terms were generally phrasal formations, either coordinate, e.g. linguistics and anthropology; genitival, e.g. the sociology of language; or adjectival, e.g. anthropological linguistics. It is only since the war that compounds with 'linguistics' as the second member have come

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into use. Hymes concludes that this usage signifies that it is linguistics and linguistic concepts and methods which have become central.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the goals and scope of a sociolinguistic theory, if there is such a thing, could be stated in terms of the many disciplines whose interests converge in sociolinguistics; but this raises the issue of whether sociolinguistics can be said to merit any independent status in linguistics or whether it is merely an eclectic amalgam of ideas and procedures from disparate disciplines. The issue could be resolved to some extent through examination of the individual goals of a number of these disciplines; then an assessment of the progress towards these goals could be made.

At a simpler level, practitioners of these separate disciplines could be asked to state the goals of their respective disciplines; this can be done under the assumption that whatever the specific individual questions which exist in a discipline, there will be some general agreement among practitioners about what constitutes doing X (whether X is linguistics, anthropology, etc.). The entity X is a central and recognizable enterprise to all concerned with the discipline. Thus it may be said very simplistically that the description of languages is the occupation of linguistics just as the description of human cultures constitutes the enterprise of anthropology. In each case the professional of X understands it means to describe a language or a culture, etc., and that there is a method of enquiry upon which the answers depend. Perhaps even this seemingly simple assumption is not uncontroversial. It can be questioned whether sociolinguistics has reached such a level of definable autonomy.[6]

Sociolinguistics has gained a great deal from sociological methods of research. This is not surprising in view of the fact that sociology appears to have a long-standing connection between theory and empirical investigation, while linguistics has recently been going through a period when linguistic descriptions may be considered justifiable on the evidence of intuitions, even in the face of contradictory empirical data (not to mention conflicting intuitions).[7] However, the research aims of an independent sociolinguistics cannot be met by relying on the methodological perspec-

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6. I am assuming that a discipline has to reach a certain level of maturity before it begins to define itself in terms of the activities of those who practice it, i.e. linguistics is what linguists do. Cf. Bailey (1971), Aracil (1974).
7. This is not to say that linguistics does not possess a tradition of this sort. For example, Hjelmslev (1953) considered his theory of language to be empirical in an important sense. Conversely, not all sociologists would accept the statement that there is a well-established connection between empirical investigation and major sociological theories (cf. e.g. Nisbet 1977; Adorno 1978). I discuss the extent to which a sociolinguistic theory can and should be empirical in Chapter 9.

tives drawn from linguistics and sociology. If the interdisciplinary perspec-
tive is to be fruitful, it cannot be merely an 'additive' one; it must be
integrative.

Hymes (1974a: 76) takes essentially this view when he says that 'Adding a
speechless sociology to a sociology-free linguistics can yield little better
than post-hoc attempts at correlation between accounts from which the
heart of the relevant data will be missing.' The whole must, in other words,
equal more than the sum of its parts if any claim to independent status is to
be made. Hymes has argued repeatedly, and perhaps in more eloquent
terms than most, for an integrated theory of sociolinguistic description, i.e.
a partially independent body of method and theory which is itself a mode of
description in the same way that recognized autonomous disciplines like
linguistics and anthropology are conceived.

A sociolinguistic mode of description would entail an organization of
linguistic means fundamentally different from an abstract grammar of a
single speech community. Hymes (1974b: 434) argues that the conception
of grammar in terms of a more or less homogeneous norm is a frame of
reference which must be transcended (cf. Romaine 1980b, 8.5 below). In its
place he proposes that we begin with the sociolinguistic concept of a speech
community organized in terms of styles. In this context 'style' is being used
to refer to a way of doing something. A speech community would be
characterized by both referential and stylistic features which must be
considered with respect to structure on the one hand and use on the other.
Referential and stylistic features represent two standpoints from which
utterances may be the same in form or meaning (cf. Aracil 1974).

The contrast between linguistics proper and sociolinguistics lies in the
fact that language structure constitutes the subject matter of linguistics,
while language use is left to sociolinguistics. A sociolinguistic theory,
however, presupposes a linguistic theory; if it is to be truly integrative, it
must relate both structure and use. This obviously is no small task.
Lomax's work on cantometrics (Lomax et al. 1968) and parlametrics
(Lomax 1977) is perhaps the only detailed, and certainly the most concrete,
example of how one might study the relationship between ways of speaking
and types of speech communities.

Cantometrics refers to the study of the relationship between song style,
dance style and social structure cross-culturally. Lomax's more recent
work (1977) is an attempt to apply a parallel framework to the study of
speaking style in its relationship to social structure. He has claimed that the
presence of certain styling qualities such as repetitiveness, volume, etc.,

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cluster together in different cultures as distinctive performance models, and that these speech styling qualities also correlate with song and dance style.

If sociolinguistics is not additively comprised or extended from linguistics or sociology, then what relation does it have to linguistics? Labov (1977: 3–4) has argued that there are many reasons to reject sociolinguistics as an independent discipline, hyphenated or otherwise; the most important of these from his standpoint is that the recognition of an independent sociolinguistics would implicitly endorse the existence of an asocial linguistics. In the preface to *Sociolinguistic Patterns* he comments: 'I have resisted the term sociolinguistics for many years, since it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social' (p. xiii).[8]

Furthermore, Labov suggests that, to be independent, sociolinguistics would have to be organized around theoretical questions distinct from those of the diverse disciplines whose interests fall within sociolinguistics. So far no such coherent framework of theoretical principles has emerged. He notes that until recently sociolinguistic studies were data-gathering exercises without reference to theoretical issues more general than the observation that a given individual or group spoke language X. The problem in unifying sociolinguistics is considerable due to the large number and diversity of subdisciplines assembled under it.

Labov claims, however, that in the past few years a body of sociolinguistic research has been developing which is addressed much more specifically to linguistic issues such as the linguistic organization of variation, constraints on optional rules, implicational relations and limits to variability. What is perhaps even more important to Labov is the systematization and elaboration of descriptive and analytical techniques, i. e. methodological innovations. It is at this point that we can begin to question whether there are any specifically sociolinguistic questions which would give a theoretical coherence to a mode of description which is recognized as constituting sociolinguistics rather than being a use of sociolinguistics.

There has also been a distinction made between sociolinguistics and the

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8. There are of course a number of 'successful' asocial linguistic theories in the history of linguistics. Whether or not a theory is social or asocial does not determine its success. For example, Chomsky and Hjelmslev exclude language use from linguistic theory (cf. Chomsky 1976: 54–79). Hjelmslev has said (1953: 2–3):
    To establish a true linguistics, which cannot be a mere ancillary or derivative science . . . linguistics must attempt to grasp language not as a conglomerate of non-linguistic (e.g. physical, psychological, logical, sociological) phenomena, but as a self-sufficient totality, a structure *sui generis*. Only in this way can language in itself be subjected to scientific treatment.
    In Chapter 9 I argue in more detail that the choice of categories or aspects of language for inclusion in a linguistic theory is not a matter for empirical decision.

sociology of language (cf. especially Fishman 1971; Dahlstedt 1973), both of which can be said to start with the data of one field to study problems which have a bearing on the other. For example, sociolinguistic research is intended to produce a linguistic description as its end result, although it uses social facts and even social methods to arrive at this end; the sociology of language uses linguistic information as a means of describing social behavior. The two approaches are by no means mutually exclusive (cf. Romaine 1975: 54f; Trudgill 1978a: 4–5). Labov's (1966) study of variation in New York City speech is by now considered a classic example of the genre of work which is recognized to be sociolinguistics; yet Labov himself professes to believe there is no such thing as sociolinguistics, but instead acknowledges the existence of linguistics only, which studies language as a form of social behavior. For Labov, then, there is no linguistics other than sociolinguistics, or, as Hymes has phrased this conception of linguistics, 'a socially constituted linguistics' (cf. Halliday 1978).

Since Labov's study however, others (especially most American linguists) have adopted the term 'sociolinguistics' as a cover term for variation studies (although there are some who call themselves 'variationists'). They tend to regard their field of study as a relatively 'new' aspect of linguistics, but there were certainly sociolinguists, in practice if not in name, before Labov, e.g. Quirk, Ulvestad and Fries, to name only a few. Indeed, there are still those who are engaged in what might be called sociolinguistics but who do not consider themselves sociolinguists. Crystal and Davy (1976: 11) say, for example, that the aim of 'stylistics' is to analyze language for the purpose of isolating those features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context and to classify these features into categories based on their function in the social context.

Lass (1976a: 219) has commented on this tendency to claim novelty for the study of variation in a review of Bailey and Shuy (1973). He notes that 'Freedom from static analysis has been around for a long time (certainly since Sapir) for anyone who wanted it, and some of the "new ways" are a good deal older than most of the bibliographies would lead one to suspect.'

Sociolinguists have no monopoly on the study of variation. What is true, however, is that more attention has been devoted recently to certain types of variation. Historical linguists and dialectologists have of course long been concerned with the study of variation through time and space respectively; and most linguists have dealt with variation in linguistic forms conditioned by linguistic context (cf. Bloomfield's concept of 'alternation'). For many linguists, however, the study and description of variation among

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speakers or variation in linguistic form which was not conditioned by linguistic context, i.e. 'free variation', was largely excluded.

It is of course in these latter two areas (and especially the last) that sociolinguists have attempted to fill the gap; what is really more novel is the acknowledgement of a linguistic conditioning that is relative rather than absolute as in traditional descriptions of morphophonemic alternations. Linguists have never been ignorant of variation; it has just been more convenient to assume as a pragmatic principle that languages and linguistic communities were homogeneous. This assumption of homogeneity has in fact been largely responsible for the provision of a sound descriptive base for linguistics, which has then been built upon by sociolinguists and made their work possible.

Martinet (1963: vii) has commented on both the necessity and utility of the homogeneity hypothesis:

> There was a time when the progress of research required that each community should be considered linguistically self-contained and homogeneous. Whether this autarchic situation was believed to be a fact or was conceived of as a working hypothesis need not detain us here. It certainly was a useful assumption. By making investigators blind to a large number of actual complexities, it has enabled scholars, from the founding fathers down to the functionalists and structuralists of today, to abstract a number of fundamental problems, to present for them solutions perfectly valid in the frame of the hypothesis and generally to achieve, perhaps for the first time, some rigor in a research involving man's psyche ... Linguists will always have to revert at times to this pragmatic assumption. But we shall have to stress the fact that a linguistic community is *never* homogeneous and hardly ever self-contained.

Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) argue quite strongly that the key to a rational conception of language itself lies in the possibility of describing orderly differentiation in a language by breaking down the identification of structuredness with homogeneity. They claim (1968: 101):

> nativelike command of heterogeneous structures is not a matter of multidialecta-lism of 'mere' performance, but is part of unilingual competence. One of the corollaries of our approach is that in a language serving a complex (i.e. real) community, it is the absence of structured heterogeneity that would be dysfunctional.

The homogeneity hypothesis is bound up with levels of abstraction, as Wunderlich (1974: 137–41, 391–4) has pointed out. The problem in taking the idiolect as the lowest level of abstraction is that an individual language system does not in itself represent the language of which it is a part. This is the difficulty Labov refers to as the 'Saussurean paradox'; to deal with it,