Social Meaning and Linguistic Variation

The “third wave” of variation study, spearheaded by the sociolinguist Penelope Eckert, places its focus on social meaning, or the inferences that can be drawn about speakers based on how they talk. While social meaning has always been a concern of modern sociolinguistics, its aims and assumptions have not been explicitly spelled out until now. This pioneering book provides a comprehensive overview of the central tenets of variation study, examining several components of dialects, and considering language use in a wide variety of cultural and linguistic contexts. Each chapter, written by a leader in the field, posits a unique theoretical claim about social meaning and presents new empirical data to shed light on the topic at hand. The volume makes a case for why attending to social meaning is vital to the study of variation while also providing a foundation from which variationists can productively engage with social meaning.

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Social Meaning and Linguistic Variation

Theorizing the Third Wave

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Finally, we dedicate this volume to our colleague, mentor, and friend, Penny Eckert. Each chapter has grown from a seed that she has planted and nurtured with passionate intellect. This book exists because of her profound influence on the field in which we work and her profound influence on each of us personally.
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