

Explanations in Sociosyntactic Variation

What explains variation in human language? How are linguistic and social factors related? How do we examine possible semantic differences between variants? These questions and many more are explored in this volume, which examines syntactic variables across several languages. It brings together a team of internationally acclaimed authors to provide perspectives on how and why syntax varies between and within speakers, with a focus on explaining theoretical backgrounds and methods. The analyses presented are based on a range of languages, making it possible to address the questions from a cross-linguistic perspective. All chapters demonstrate rigorous quantitative analyses, which expose the conditioning factors in language change and offer important insights into community and individual grammars. It is essential reading for researchers and students with an interest in language variation and change, and in the theoretical framework and methods applied in the study of how and why syntax varies.

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Studies in Language Variation and Change

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Sali A. Tagliamonte, University of Toronto

Studies in Language Variation and Change is dedicated to studies of systematic and inherent variation in language, including contemporary or historical sources. It is concerned with the impact of society, geography and culture insofar as they intersect with the structures and processes of language. *Studies in Language Variation and Change* is firmly situated in the variationist sociolinguistic enterprise with its roots in historical linguistics, dialectology, anthropology and importantly in the advancing quantitative methods of the field. The series concentrates on book length syntheses of research that engages with the details of linguistic structure in actual speech production and processing (or writing). It emphasizes replicability of findings, consistent reporting and building critical and substantive explanations out of empirical foundations.

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Series Editor's Preface

Sali A. Tagliamonte

This volume focuses on foundational issues in the study of grammatical variation and change, what has come to be referred to as 'sociosyntax'. The volume arose from a two-day symposium at the University of Copenhagen sponsored by the famed LANCHART project.¹ The goals of the workshop were ambitious and programmatic: to elevate the research enterprise to a higher level of synthesis, to facilitate discussion of foundational issues, to promote convergence between different approaches and to extend the research foci of scholars from a language-specific to a cross-linguistic perspective. Eight scholars from six countries (Denmark, the Netherlands, Scotland, Belgium, Canada and the United States) came together to present data and results relevant to sociosyntax research, with the instruction to exemplify a foundational issue with a case study probing it. The organizers were Tanya Karoli Christensen and Torben Juel Jensen, and the original set of invited scholars was Leonie Cornips, Stefan Grondelaers, Ricardo Otheguy, Jennifer Smith, Dirk Speelman and Sali Tagliamonte.

The workshop was held in November 2014, at a time when Variationist Sociolinguistics was expanding its enterprise to include new quantitative methods and tools, and there was an expanding concern for research on lesser-known languages and communities and cross-fertilization among scholars. Just a month earlier in October the premiere conference on variation, NWAV 43, was held in Chicago. At that conference, there was a homage to William Labov, who had just retired, and a slate of papers pushing the boundaries of a burgeoning community studying language as it is used in the world. Fresh from this stimulating meeting, we all re-grouped in Copenhagen, about a month later.

In Labov's foreword to *Principles of Linguistic Change, Volume 2* (Labov 2001:xvi), he admonishes researchers of something he considers to be of great importance: 'it is hard to understand the world by rising above it.' In this workshop we did not do that! With a set of common variables to present as case studies, including zero complementizers, general extenders, pronouns, auxiliaries and word order, we literally rolled up our sleeves and got down to work.

¹ <https://lanchart.hum.ku.dk>, accessed 31 October 2021.

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To facilitate discussion and to spark interaction among the group, each invited speaker was also asked to respond to one of the other papers immediately after it was presented. This led to rousing debate, sometimes friction, but always jovial appreciation made possible by what many of us experienced only for the first time – an infusion of convivial Danish *hygge*. Late into the dark evenings, we delved deep into the thick of all the problems; we confronted the tension between linguistic and non-linguistic factors; we addressed the still mysterious relationship between production and perception; we debated the dilemma of variants with no semantic equivalence and the nebulous boundaries of grammar and variation. This volume is the result. It embraces an expanded set of scholars as the original participants brought in their collaborators and contributors and were encouraged to make connections across chapters.

Explanations in Sociosyntactic Variation sets new standards for future research, explicitly focussing on the overarching theoretical and methodological challenges posed by studying syntactic variation and offering a body of evidence based on interpretations that attempt synthesis. The research studies focus on syntactic variables but engage with how the broader context influences these constructions and configurations: taking a comparative perspective, scrutinizing how variables are embedded in society, how they operate in conjunction with morphology, how they are impacted by meaning and ideology, whether social stratification patterns are predictable and how to deal with variants that do not mean the same thing or come from the same source. A common finding is that the syntactic underpinnings of language are critical but that this deep, indeed tectonic, component of language is also influenced by a myriad of social, historical, cognitive and functional factors. In sum, this volume champions the idea that scholars in pursuit of insightful interpretation should look broadly and deeply; they should seek explanations of linguistic variables in all the splendid phenomena that influence communication in the secular world, paradoxes and all.

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Aside from our author colleagues, who have waited so patiently for this book to be completed, and our families, who have suffered our long nights of work and preoccupation, we want to give special thanks to professors Frans Gregersen and Sali A. Tagliamonte, who graciously offered to read and review the introduction to this volume. It is greatly enhanced because of your insights.

Remaining errors are our own.

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