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## *Book Review*



**Marie-Hélène Côté, Remco Knooihuizen, and John Nerbonne (eds.)**

2016. *The Future of Dialects: Selected Papers from Methods in Dialectology xv*. Vol. 1.

Berlin: Language Science Press.

January of 2016 saw the appearance of *The Future of Dialects*, edited by Marie-Hélène Côté (Université Laval, Québec), Remco Knooihuizen, and John Nerbonne (both Rijksuniversiteit Groningen). The volume under review contains a selection of papers from the *Methods in Dialectology xv* conference, held at the University of Groningen (Netherlands) in August 2014. The volume appeared in the Language Variation series (<http://langsci-press.org/catalog/series/lv>) at Language Science Press (LSP), set up (in 2013/14) and edited by Stefan Müller (Berlin) and Martin Haspelmath (Jena). As all titles in all 12 LSP series, *The Future of Dialects* is an open access book, digitally accessible for free from the publishing house (<http://langsci-press.org/>). There is a print-on-demand service.

This volume is special for at least four reasons: 1) it is the first title in the Language Variation series, a new international series edited by John Nerbonne and Dirk Geeraerts, assisted by an international editorial board; 2) it has been published in a new way, notably digitally, open access and free, which may well be the future of the field; 3) it contains contributions in which a range of new developments (mainly of a methodological, often computational, nature) are presented; and 4) a majority of the contributions concern ongoing developments in varieties of languages spoken in the Old World, where certain dynamics in the dialect landscape and the verbal repertoires seem to differ radically from e.g. North America (dialect convergence vs. divergence—cf. Labov, 2007: 348).

The 411-page volume opens with an introduction by the editors. Apart from an extensive acknowledgements section at the end, the introduction contains a sketch of the conference series, highlighting the Groningen edition of the conference on which the volume is based, as well as summary sketches of

the contributions. Three indexes at the end of the book (names, languages, subjects) add to its accessibility and user-friendliness.

The other contributions to the volume are organized in three parts. Part I ('The future') counts three contributions in which new, ongoing research into recent developments in the relevant verbal repertoires is presented. The focus is on conceptual issues—although Naya's contribution, the shortest of the three, zooms in on the importance of multimodal methods in the study of syntactic microvariation in a group of Catalan dialects. It could therefore also have figured in Part II, titled 'Methods.' Given the general topic of the conference, it is no surprise that, with 15 contributions discussing findings from the study of varieties of 7 different languages, this part is by far the biggest.

Part III deals with 'Japanese dialectology.' As fascinating as Japanese dialects are, this division of chapters mars the overall organization of the volume—and, remarkably enough, the editors do not give an account of why these four contributions on Japanese constitute a separate part of the book. In Part II, certain languages are addressed just as often (there are four chapters each on varieties of German and English in specific constellations and situations), so the sheer number of contributions obviously can't have been the underlying consideration. Moreover, Part II contains a chapter on English/Japanese code-switching. The editors must have had a reason to reserve a separate part for Japanese dialects, but they do not give it away.

Some further questions are left open by the way the editors summarize some of the contributions in their introduction. In Part I 'The future,' for instance, Ghyselen discusses the local dialect of Ypres, a West Flemish dialect of Dutch. Ghyselen submitted data from 10 speakers (all highly educated women) for 26 variable phenomena/dialect features in the domains of phonology and morphosyntax to correspondence analysis. The outcomes show that *tussentaal*, lit. 'intermediate language' (a variational layer in between the local or regional dialect and the national standard variety, which has received ample attention in Flemish dialectology for over a decade) is not stable—neither linguistically nor functionally, i.e. with regard to domains of language use, and situationally. According to the editors, the author thinks that *tussentaal* should therefore not be considered a language variety. For the reviewer, in turn, this raises questions concerning the coherence of the constituting phenomena, not only statistically, but also structurally (Guy and Hinskens, 2016): what is/are the relationship(s) between the non-standard phenomena which occur variably in all regional manifestations of *tussentaal*? And why would one expect hard boundaries and stability to occur in newly emerging intermediate layers in the 'post-dialect continuum' (cf. Hinskens, Hoppenbrouwers, and Taeldeman, 1993), with abundant variation and fluidity in all dimensions?

In connection with the contributions to Part II, 'Methods', the editors distinguish between 'dialectometry' (chapters 5–13) and 'other methods' (chapters 14–19). The contributions in the former set all concern more or less advanced computational, often quantitative *analyses*—including generally accepted techniques such as factor analysis (Pickl). In some of the contributions in this set, quantitative analyses are applied to IPA transcription (Mathussek; Bloem et al.), a type of data which contains an unknown degree of subjectivity on the part of the transcriber—and which can be especially troublesome whenever several different transcribers have been involved. Montemagni and Wieling have contributed two chapters (the second one authored by Wieling and Montemagni), both on advanced computational approaches to questions of lexical variation in Tuscan dialects of Italian. Remarkably, the contribution by Brun-Trigaud et al. (on a group of dialects of Breton) is the only one to which the editors do not pay any attention in their introductory chapter—and it is not clear why they don't. The bias of the editors becomes apparent in the paragraph on the chapter by Bloem et al., where the editors state that "the introduction of dialectometric techniques into the study of foreign accents may improve the latter by providing aggregate perspectives in an area that has largely relied on the study of a small number of phenomena" (4). Abstracting away from the specific object (accented speech), the implicit message is: the more different phenomena, the better the quality of a study. This is at odds with the position that a theory can perfectly well be tested on the basis of one relevant phenomenon—a matter of Popperian logic: one counterexample suffices to reject or at least revise a theory. But this methodological paradigm, which is typical of formal linguistic theory, hardly seems to play a role in most contributions to the present volume; however smart the analyses often are, most studies do not surpass the explorative phase. Where research questions are articulated at all, they are mostly of a methodological or computational nature.

Regarding the 'other methods' under which the editors subsume the articles in the second group of Part II: this label mainly appears to indicate techniques to *collect data*, such as dialect imitation (Schäfer et al.) and combining different techniques to elicit data from the same speakers (Bermejo—cf. Naya: combining data from different sources). One of the techniques which are presented in several contributions on 'other methods' in Part II (Carigan et al.; Spreafico) is the registration of articulatory movements, more specifically, tongue trajectories, with the aid of ultrasound imaging (in prenatal diagnosis known as echography or ultrasound sonography). The chapters by Škevin and Hirano are the only ones in this set of chapters in Part II which do not address methods of data collection. Škevin deals with the explanation of the homogenization of the lexical layer in the dialect landscape of Dalmatian (as a result of develop-

ments which are essentially a matter of '*Wörter und Sachen*'—i.e. concerning the relationship between the etymology of lexical items in relation with the material culture, artefacts, cultural concepts and circumstances they denote). Hirano tries to explain code-switching (mostly of isolated lexical items, hence code-mixing or lexical insertion) between English and Japanese in utterances with English as the matrix language (Myers-Scotton, 1993) from a sociolinguistic/ethnological perspective.

Part III, on Japanese dialectology (chapters 20–23), counts four contributions, the first of which (by Kumagai—the longest chapter in the book) presents the first outcomes of the analyses of newly digitalized older data. The contributions by Fukushima and Onishi concern real-time analyses of processes of dialect change on the basis of data from sources from different periods of time (sources which show certain qualitative differences as well). Finally, Ota et al. delve into a suprasegmental phenomenon: lexical tone in a regional dialect. The findings show a tendency toward convergence in the distributional properties (accented syllables) of tones in standard Japanese. For this development, whose analysis the authors do not deepen tonologically, the mass media are held responsible.

A review cannot do justice to the richness of the volume, but zooming in on two contributions (one from Part I, 'The future,' and one from Part II, 'Methods') might help. In her contribution to Part I, Naomi Nagy discusses 'Heritage languages as new dialects'—hence, as future dialects. The author introduces her Heritage Language Variation and Change (HLVC) project, which focusses on transplanted varieties of Cantonese, Faetar, Italian, Korean, Russian, and Ukrainian spoken in Toronto today; the project aim is to compare heritage and homeland varieties. As there are little or no findings available as yet, the contribution is built on a discussion of conceptual issues and on an extensive account of the methods of data collection and analysis. Some definitional quibbling targets earlier work by Auer, Hinskens, and Kerswill, who the author thinks exclude 'extramural' dialects from their conception of the notions of dialect and 'new dialect.' Close reading of the preliminary definition (in Hinskens et al., 2005: 1), quoted by Nagy, seems to confirm her impression, but further reading in the same introductory chapter of the 2005 volume,<sup>1</sup> as well as in other chapters (including Rosenberg's contribution on German *Sprachinseln* in the former Sowjet Union and Brazil) and closely related work (e.g. Boeschoten, 2000 on Dutch dialects of Turkish), would have made plain that dialects which

should be:  
(HLVC)

<sup>1</sup> E.g., the considerations and literature surveys on 'Isolation and contact,' pp. 21–24, and on 'Mobility and migration,' pp. 34–36.

have become roofless because of the migration of their speakers are explicitly included in the research program. They are obviously living laboratories of processes leading to dialect divergence vis-à-vis their relatives in the homeland—processes that may, but need not be driven by language contact. It can be added that heritage languages often have a societal position and a place in the speakers' verbal repertoires that may be comparable to that of Old World dialects in the days when the dialect/standard relationship was very much a diglossic one. The data collection for Nagy's fascinating LHVC project was designed to assemble "a multilingual corpus for intergenerational [three generations since immigration], crosslinguistic, and diatopic (heritage vs. homeland varieties) comparisons in order to develop generalizations about the types of variable features, structures or rules that are borrowed earlier and more often in contact contexts" (16). Important ingredients of the methodology are a factorial speaker design, recorded speech (mainly conversational in nature), time-aligned transcription and coding (in part by students with the relevant language background) and quantitative techniques known from Labovian sociolinguistics.

Guylaine Brun-Trigaud, Tanguy Sollicec, and Jean Le Dû (Part II, 'Methods') take a close look at a group of dialects of Breton, a Celtic language spoken in the center of Brittany (northwestern France). The study is based on recent atlas data, collected by the third author. The analyses of the qualitative data concerning the sound shapes of a small number of items in 23 dialects with the aid of the Levenshtein algorithm gives a good picture of the various differences in realization, their relative share, and the degree of similarity between the dialects—insightfully illustrated with stylized little maps. The method helps to unearth a range of interesting phenomena. The question is raised whether the linguistic distance between the dialects is largely a consequence of the fact that the same sound changes occur frequently or, rather, of the application of multiple different sound changes. But which sources of variation in the sound shapes of the items studied are phonetic in nature, which ones phonological or even lexicalized and thus no longer productive? This remains unclear; what is more, the question is not even raised, although this dimension obviously plays an important role in defining the distance between related language systems.

To summarize, this volume contains proceedings rather than a collection of contributions on aspects of a coherent whole. The editors do not present a consistent view on a series of phenomena, let alone a theory, or even the contours of such an intellectual undertaking. In contrast to what the title suggests (and with the exception of the chapters by Ghyselen and Nagy), the overwhelming majority of the contributions does not discuss the future of dialects (either as linguistic systems or as social constructs) but rather the future of dialect research—more specifically, techniques that may play a role

in future dialect research. And in that respect, the volume has very much of interest to offer (which may have been reflected better by a title like *The Future of Dialectological Research*, or even *Future Methods of Dialectological Research*). The traditional dialectological handicraft and even the variationist methods are too labor-intensive and time-consuming; moreover, these heavily manual approaches can add ‘noise,’ undermining the power of the research. In that respect, using the available digital possibilities for the storage, search and analysis of data—the approach championed by Nerbonne and his former students, including Heeringa and Wieling—is the way forward. The fact that a number of these possibilities are demonstrated in this volume is its greatest merit.

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