

These are minor points. The book is an outstanding contribution to the literature of English usage.

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WILLIAM DOWNES. *LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY*. LONDON: FONTANA, 1984. 384 pp. PAPERBACK, R14,95.

Sociolinguistics has come to mean more things to more men since the sharp definition given it in the 1960's by William Labov. It is necessary, therefore, to know what sociolinguistics means to an author whose book purports in title to straddle the field. For Downes sociolinguistics is 'that branch of linguistics which studies those properties of language which require reference to social, including contextual, factors in their explanation' (p. 15). He identifies the social factors entering into such explanation as of two main types. First, the 'large-scale' factors located in social categories within society such as those determined by age, geography, etc. The second is less obvious: small-scale interaction between individuals using language. For Downes, sociolinguistics includes discourse analysis (pragmatics, conversational analysis, etc). The connection between the two types of social factor lies in the fact that both are 'rule-following' behaviour. The rules of 'large-scale factors' lie in the power of normative behaviour. An utterance uttered and understood in its particular context is governed by similar rules. It 'counts as an activity' by virtue of rules constraining discourse, i.e. norms shared by speakers and hearers 'make it possible to understand what act it is'.

Culture is said to be a system of rules governing human activity making it intelligible for participants. In patterns of variability in society (i.e. large-scale factors) the choosing of a pronunciation variant, for example, is guided or directed by a rule which derives from social meaning associated with competing norms. It is important to realize what 'norm' means for Downes:

A norm ... is not a statistical average of actual behaviour but rather a cultural (shared) definition of desirable behaviour. (p. 215)

Motivation in making the choices created by variability in the speech community is, therefore, to be explained in terms of values and beliefs. 'Behind every norm is a value'. (p. 216.) The significance of the the social meaning of variants for Downes' understanding of variability - and linguistic change - is immediately obvious. Giles' (1970, 1975) studies of attitudes to English accents and the association between stereotyped personality traits and accent provide some main types of social meaning. Downes uses Labov's (1963) classic Martha's Vineyard study in illustration of his view of values as beliefs. Islanders who adopted the pronunciation of the local fisherman were motivated by the value associated with local identity and 'the beliefs intertwined with considering that of value.'

The foundations of Downes' sociolinguistics are firmly in the tradition of Labov. He is therefore to be numbered among the British exponents and practitioners of that tradition such as Trudgill and the Milroys. Labovian concepts and terminology are fully aired, for example: the 'vernacular' and the 'standard', 'apparent time, covert and overt values', etc. He follows the Labovian trail into variable rules and polylectal grammars which he presents with the criticisms which have been levelled at such grammars. With a discussion of C.J. Bailey's wave theory and implicational hierarchies, and Bickerton's 'inherent variability', he brings the debate up to date. There is, however, a significant theoretical issue on which Downes would seem not to be of common mind with Labov. Specifically with regard to the notion of 'values' and 'value systems', Downes' theory would appear to be more powerfully explanatory than Labov. For Labov, values are more in the nature of aggregate behaviour and have little to do with belief systems. In Labov, 1972, p. 251, this statement is made:

In fact, social values are attributed to linguistic rules only when there is variation ... When the issue is resolved, and the one form becomes universal, the social value attributed to it disappears.

A belief, in the technical sense of the term, could hardly be so ephemeral as to 'disappear' with localized changes in behaviour.

This is an important state-of-the-art book with the author's own insightful interpretations of topics such as process in historical change, contextual information in the understanding of an utterance and a philosophy-of-science view of theory in sociolinguistics. It is eminently comprehensible and enough is said on most of the topics in the impressive index to gain a coherent view of the field. Only Giles' (1975) accommodation model suffers in this respect. (There may, in fact, be a partial

challenge to Downes' view of norms, rules and values in Giles' "convergent accommodation" in which shifts in speech behaviour are made in order to be received more favourably by one's interlocutor).

For one who has taught and researched in the tradition of Labov, Downes goes to the top of the list of textbooks for senior undergraduate courses in sociolinguistics.

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