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Meaning and linguistic variation: The third wave in sociolinguistics by Penelope Eckert (review)

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Language, Volume 96, Number 2, June 2020, pp. 462-464 (Review)

Published by Linguistic Society of America

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2020.0030>



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Meaning and linguistic variation: The third wave in sociolinguistics. By PENELOPE ECKERT. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xiv, 209. ISBN 9781107122970. \$29.99.

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In *Meaning and linguistic variation: The third wave in sociolinguistics*, Penelope Eckert brings us her ‘intellectual autobiography’: a curated sequence of papers from her career wrapped in first-person narratives about the social and personal context in which each paper was written. While the book covers the full span of E’s career, the focus is on THIRD-WAVE sociolinguistics, which she defines as ‘a theoretical perspective that puts the meaning of variation, in all its dynamism and indeterminacy, at the center of analysis’ (xi). In tracing the origins of key third-wave theoretical constructs to earlier work by both herself and others in the FIRST and SECOND WAVES, E builds up an unmistakable narrative arc covering the full span of her career.

The first two chapters of the book, presented under the heading ‘Beginnings’, deal primarily with E’s years studying Gascon in St. Pierre de Soulatan at the time when the region was shifting from Occitan varieties to French dominance. In contrast to the historical phonological focus of her M.A. thesis and Ph.D. dissertation, the papers she chooses for inclusion here focus on the politics of multilingualism. Ch. 1, ‘Gascon’, discusses how minority nationalist projects such as the Occitan movement crucially rely on linguistic unification, but in doing so inevitably erase the finer-grained sources of linguistic diversity within their own borders (Eckert 1983). Ch. 2, ‘Stigma and meaning in language shift’, uses the relationship between French and Gascon to illustrate how diglossia involves not the peaceful coexistence of two varieties but rather the oppression and stigmatization of the ‘low’ variety; the introductory material here situates the paper’s inception in the political context of the Ann Arbor Black English trial (Eckert 1980). This pair of papers captures the beginning of E’s concern with the nuances of language’s ideological force. Although they are distinct in flavor from the rest of the chapters, their inclusion effectively foreshadows the themes of locality, identity, and the semiotic landscape found in the later chapters about the third wave.

The second section, titled ‘My participation in the second wave’, is dominated by the Jocks and Burnouts of Belten High (Eckert 1989a). Chs. 3–6 lay out E’s analytic insights into the social and linguistic practices of these high school social groups in suburban Detroit. Ch. 3 (‘Jocks and Burnouts’), E’s study of the width of blue jeans as a signifier of different social groups occupying different parts of the high school (Eckert 1982), marks the first appearance of ‘style’ as a central theoretical construct that transcends linguistic practice. In Chs. 4 (‘Jocks, Burnouts and sound change’), 5 (‘The local and the extra-local’), and 6 (‘On the outs’), E delves progressively deeper into the territory laid out in Ch. 3, persuasively weaving the social life of adolescents into the study of sound change in progress (Eckert 1988, 1989b). In this, probably E’s best-known work, she argues that macrosocial structures like class and gender shape language change only insofar as they are indirectly realized on the ground through hegemonic oppositions between identifiable, locally specific social categories. The narrative portions of this section lay out clearly why the classic Jocks and Burnouts research, with its continued focus on static categories as opposed to

the agentive construction of meaning through stylistic practice, is not itself of the third wave. At the same time, the bracketing of the section with chapters about style nonetheless makes it evident that this work directly laid important foundations for the emergence of the third wave.

The final section, 'The third wave', arrives at the thesis of the book: that social meaning and stylistic practice are central to understanding sociolinguistic variation (Eckert 2012). E's cadre of notable graduate students come to the fore at the start of the section with Ch. 8, 'The SLIC generation'. SLIC stands for the Style, Language and Ideology Cooperative/Collaborative, a student-led seminar with invited speakers held at Stanford in the 1999–2000 academic year. This chapter includes two papers reflecting discussions from that seminar: 'Demystifying sexuality and desire' (Eckert 2002), a response to Kulick (2000), and 'Elephants in the room' (Eckert 2004), E's introduction to an issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* arising from a 2000 New Ways of Analyzing Variation conference panel on notions of authenticity and the construct of the vernacular. These lesser-known pieces should be especially useful for those who find the roles of agency, awareness, and consciousness in the third wave challenging. For instance, they may also serve as excellent complementary reading for the audience of Babel 2016, *Awareness and control in sociolinguistic research*, an edited collection in which the ever-expanding influence of the third-wave perspective is on display. Ch. 9, 'The nature of indexicality in variation', introduces and defines the 'indexical field' (Eckert 2008) through a series of E's students' case studies, while Ch. 10, 'What kinds of signs are these?', discusses how indexical meanings are layered and construed in a social context. Ch. 11, 'The semiotic landscape', is the only chapter that does not contain at least one standalone paper. Instead, it summarizes E's recent thinking and vision for the future of third-wave sociolinguistics. Of note in this chapter is the proposal, just recently fleshed out in *Language* 95(4) (Eckert 2019), that sociolinguistic variables fall along a 'continuum of interiority—that is, a continuum from the public to the personal, from the exterior to the interior self' (190). Morphosyntactic variables fall on the public end of this cline, while variation involving embodied sound symbolism and prosodic resources fall on the interior, personal end. E urges a new generation of sociolinguists to 'see whether it's crazy or not' (191), a research challenge I expect will be taken up with enthusiasm.

The memoir portions of the book increase in depth and detail as the book goes on. This makes sense as a reflection of how memory decays as it extends deeper into the past, but it left me more curious about those early stages than when I began—perhaps because, as an early-career researcher myself, I could not quite resist the temptation to look for a road map in the autobiographical narrative. The memoir portions are at their strongest when they explicitly discuss the origins and process of E's intellectual contributions. For example, E shares an excerpt from the application for the NSF grant that funded the original Belten High ethnography, then points out that 'there was no mention of social meaning in this proposal, because after a conversation with Bill [William Labov], I knew that such language was not likely to go over well with reviewers' (32). By foregrounding this absence, E makes it easier to read between the lines and spot earlier stages of her search for social meaning. Beyond this kind of decoding, though, the autobiographical elements also serve the important function of reminding us that research is a socially situated and deeply human enterprise.

One might ask who the audience for this book is. I suspect that there is not a single monolithic audience but rather many micro-audiences who will take away a variety of worthwhile lessons. It is, surely, a gift to future historians of linguistics. E's frank discussions of her years of imposter syndrome would make valuable reading for students struggling with anxiety and self-doubt. The entire book could be used as a text for a specific sort of graduate seminar, or an excerpt assigned to introduce the third-wave perspective in a graduate-level survey sociolinguistics course. Many sociolinguists will have already read some of the individual papers, but even those who have would be well advised to take a look at this new contribution; I can attest that reading the book from start to finish enriched my understanding of the intellectual context and origins of third-wave sociolinguistics, and thus deepened my grasp of the theoretical content of the third wave. And for linguists working outside of sociolinguistics who just want to get some idea of what this whole 'third wave' thing is all about, perusing this volume with an open mind should bring clar-

ity to not just what the third-wave perspective is, but also WHY one might come to such a perspective through decades of close attention to language in its social context.

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