Review of Ronald K. S. Macaulay, Locating Dialect in Discourse: The Language of Honest Men and Bonnie Lasses in Ayr

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Review
Reviewed Work(s): Locating Dialect in Discourse: The Language of Honest Men and Bonnie Lasses in Ayr by Ronald K. S. Macaulay
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Errington traces these changes through an examination of titles, address styles, honorific lexemes, personal pronouns, and kin terms. Throughout these different domains, “a progressive leveling of pragmatically salient markers of status and status differences has been complemented by decreasingly appropriate asymmetric exchange patterns” (p. 19). Recurring, strategic use of titles, personal pronouns, and kin terms has also resulted in rapid structural change.

Despite the devaluing of priyayi status terms and the “erosion and increasing permeability of traditional elite/non-elite distinctions” (p. 131), the significance of speech styles as etiquette markers continues, and the focus on etiquette is another important aspect of Errington’s book. “Speech levels,” notes Errington, “are better thought of as ‘speech styles,’ and as integral parts of ‘linguistic etiquette’” (p. 10). Javanese speakers themselves stress the overarching importance of etiquette. As Errington notes, “priyayi quite consciously emphasize the prescriptively allusive, indirect qualities of polite conduct, linguistic and otherwise, that they call _ajus_ in Javanese” (p. 150). Errington’s model, moreover, endeavors to capture these interrelations. His notion of indexicality, for example, “allows for a treatment of this aspect of linguistic etiquette as integrally related to speech style distinctions” (p. 223). Perhaps, most importantly, the comprehensiveness of Errington’s data and analysis also allows for a comparison of the Javanese case to other systems of social and linguistic etiquette, and for a test of more general formulations of linguistic etiquette such as those put forward by Brown and Levinson.

Finally, Errington’s approach attempts “to deal with the effect of use on structure [and] to bridge the gap between code-oriented and interactional points of view on linguistic etiquette” (p. 87). As he notes, “speech style usage is intrinsically a reciprocally shaped and negotiated part of interaction” (p. 94), and “there is a dynamic relation between shared conventional knowledge (code) and interactive implementation (pragmatics) such that convention not only informs but is reciprocally transformed by use” (p. 108). Despite this concern, however, Errington’s analysis remains a primarily code-oriented approach. Very little actual interactional description is included, and there is little discussion of the social, political, or economic factors involved in speech level change and change in etiquette.

This is not to fault Errington’s excellent analysis. What he does cover is superb. It is only to suggest fruitful areas for further research. As Errington himself notes, “an ethnographically grounded account of linguistic interaction in Surakarta would deal . . . not just with structure and use of Javanese speech levels, but with a wide range of code switching and code choice involving Indonesian as well as Javanese” (p. 8). Such research would complement Errington’s analysis and would give an even better picture of the role of speech styles and linguistic etiquette in Javanese society today.

**Locating Dialect in Discourse: The Language of Honest Men and Bonnie Lasses in Ayr.**

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Sociolinguists have examined linguistic variation primarily because of an interest in the mechanics of language change. As a result, what we think of as descriptions of regional and social dialects—the speech of New York or Norwich; Black English Vernacular or Chicano English—are often in fact descriptions of fairly small inventories of features, usually phonological. Using standardized procedures, such as preplanned interviews or reading-aloud tasks, researchers assemble large numbers of tokens of each feature as uttered by a random or representative sample of speakers and subject the data to statistical scrutiny to see what forms speakers in various social categories are likely to use in various situations.

Ronald K. S. Macaulay argues—explicitly and by example—for a different approach. Macaulay’s study of the dialect of Ayr, in western Scotland, is based on relatively free conversational interviews with 12 adult natives of Ayr, six middle-class and six lower-class. The interviewees were selected through personal contacts of Macaulay’s and through contacts of those contacts, and the interviews were conducted by Macaulay—an Ayrshire native of the same generation as many of the interviewees. Macaulay describes dozens of phonological, morphological, and syntactic features of his subjects’ speech and shows how they meet various requirements of discourse: how they express intensity in narrative, use expressions such as “well” and “you know” to manage the flow of information, encode related propositions in complex syntax, and quote the speech of others.

Macaulay defends interviewing against the claim that the interview is an unnatural speech event and does not produce normal speech. He shows that his subjects were for the most part fluent and relaxed and used a range of styles. Macaulay transcribed the interviews, noting nonstandard pronunciations, then marked each clause or fragment with a detailed label, such as “coordinate clause introduced by or” or “restrictive relative clause with that.” He also noted which segments of each interview were narratives. The result of this painstaking procedure was that Macaulay was able to look at the syntactic and generic contexts of variable features, rather than simply counting how often each variant occurred, and he was able to see how the interviews compared and contrasted and what functions the talk was serving at any given point, rather than assuming that the interviews produced equivalent data or that given sections were necessarily “casual” or “careful” in style.

One example of the value of this approach is Macaulay’s discussion of the variable /au/, sometimes /au/ (“out”) and sometimes /u/ (“oot”). Macaulay’s middle-class subjects always used /au/; the lower-class speakers used /u/ 60 percent of the time.

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Because he worked in detail with just a few interviewees, Macaulay was able to examine interviews and lexical items one by one. He notes that some of the lower-class speakers used less than 50 percent monophthongs, typically in narrative parts of the interview, while others used more than 80 percent monophthongs but chose diphthongal pronunciations in certain words and when quoting or emphasizing. Thus, rather than two groups, there were really three: a group of monostylistic diphthong users, a group whose speech was variable in the Labovian sense (they typically used the more standard form in more careful speech and the less standard form in more casual speech), and a group of monophthong users who chose the standard form in a limited range of cases, perhaps somewhat more consciously.

A particularly interesting part of Macaulay's discussion of the interviews as discourse is the chapter on the expression of intensity. In order to keep interviewers listening and make it clear what the point of their contribution is, speakers may differentiate linguistically between more important information and less important information. Macaulay's lower-class speakers often did this by manipulating word order, putting key information near the beginning of the clause with constructions such as left dislocation ("Mr. Patterson he was a gentleman" (p. 120)), right dislocation ("Oh and it was a great thing this" (p. 120)), clefting ("it was half a croon you were paying" (p. 121)), and what Macaulay calls demonstrative focusing ("that was him idle" (p. 121)).

The middle-class speakers, on the other hand, tended to use manner adverbs and modifiers such as very, quite, and just to highlight information ("I found it extremely irritating" (p. 125); "I didn't have time to really train" (p. 128)).

The book raises important questions, too. The chapter describing each interview provides fascinating hints about how individuals choose from their linguistic resources to create individual linguistic identities, but Macaulay makes little of this. Macaulay never squarely faces the issue of sample size, a problem that Macaulay himself claims about his results. For the questions it raises, as well as the ones it answers, I plan to use the book as a text in my next graduate course in sociolinguistics.


This book presents a detailed historical review of American political debates over language policy. These debates, focusing at times on whether or not it is advisable to have a language policy and at times on the content of a proposed policy, have occurred relatively frequently during the history of the United States but do not seem to have evolved much. As in many other parts of the world, there seems to be a single story that Americans tell each other over and over again, a story whose tension flows directly from the revolutionary history of their country and the ideology that legitimates it.

As Baron tells it, the central theme of this story has to do with equality and liberty: the liberty to choose one's path, combined with guarantees of equal access to the rights and privileges of citizenship. For some, such beliefs entail nonintervention in the area of language; for others, on the contrary, intervention is desirable. Even among those who seek intervention, there are radically opposing views: on one hand, those who seek linguistic uniformity in order to ensure equal opportunity, and, on the other, those who opt for multilingualism. Nonetheless, from Baron's presentation it would seem that it has been rare in American history for arguments to be made for a multilingualism associated with cultural pluralism in a profound sense; rather, the debate has more frequently been over the best ways to ensure equal access to common resources and common identities.

At the same time, it is possible to see in this account the ways in which these variations on a common theme have also led to stances that contradict, in some ways, the principles they are meant to uphold. Proponents of linguistic uniformity, especially, seem to have been prone to judging non-English speakers as deficient in some way, whether simply not fully eligible for the rights of citizenship, or more seriously morally or cognitively defective.

Baron approaches these themes from a number of different directions. He discusses public debates on the issues at various points in American history, focusing on specific public figures, from Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Hayakawa. He examines these debates and their manifestations in legal wrangling with respect to several states with large populations of non-English speakers: Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Mexico, and Louisiana form the major focus, with some discussion of other states such as California, Hawaii, and Maine. He pays considerable attention to attitudes toward the German language and the effect of the First World War on American feelings about German, in particular, and multilingualism, in general.

Finally, Baron discusses the role of education in support of language policies, implicit and explicit. Here, it seems clear that Americans expect their schools to be agents of Americanization; the only