Language in Society – 50 years

It has been a year since we took over as co-editors of *Language in Society* from Jenny Cheshire, and we are honoured to be able to celebrate the journal's 50th anniversary. Established in 1972 by Dell Hymes, *Language in Society* has aimed since its inception to be an academic platform which not only showcases research on 'all aspects of language as part of social life' (Hymes 1972:13), but also and most importantly leads 'to a reconstruction of social theory in the light of linguistic methods and findings, and of linguistic theory on a social basis' (1972:2). For Hymes, these aims could only be achieved with the help of an inter- or multidisciplinary cross-fertilization between linguistics and other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and many others.

Fifty years later, Hymes's ambitious vision is still highly relevant to the journal's mandate: namely, the publication of empirically-grounded analyses that push linguistic and social theory in new and exciting directions. Put bluntly, empirically interesting manuscripts with little or no theoretical advancement or, conversely, theoretical essays without empirical grounding fall outside the remit of the journal. In this regard, we want to be clear that we are keen to honour the theoretical and methodological breadth that has characterised *Language in Society* over the years, spanning the gamut of sociolinguistic inquiry, from variationist sociolinguistics to conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis and linguistic anthropology. In line with current discussions in the social sciences and the humanities about decoloniality and Southern theories (Maldonado-Torres 2011; Milani & Lazar 2017; Phipps 2019; Pennycook & Makoni 2020; Heugh et al. 2021), we also welcome empirically robust studies that challenge Northern/Western epistemological biases in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and cognate fields and help us to re-orient our research questions, trouble established ways of seeing and ultimately contribute to getting us to 'think otherwise' (Foucault 1977; see also Pennycook 2012).

A key issue for an interdisciplinary journal that bridges linguistics with other traditions within the social sciences and the humanities is the balance between the 'linguistic' and the 'social'. In this respect, Hymes was quite vague in his foundational editorial: 'individual contributions will range from predominantly linguistic to predominantly social in character, but it is hoped that there will be something of each in all' (Hymes 1972:14). While we agree that it is difficult if not impossible to set strict guidelines on what the ratio should be between the two, we strongly encourage authors to *simultaneously* seek to answer big linguistic and social questions in their articles. For it is only through such a bifocal lens that the theoretical development of the study of language in social life can happen.

If we look back at the articles published in the journal, it might be somewhat of an understatement to say that the study of language and social processes has

1

developed tremendously over the last fifty years. In a recent overview of the journal by a former editor, Barbara Johnstone highlights the common denominator underpinning the contributions to the journal during her tenure (2005–2014):

> Whether or not this is made explicit in the work itself, *Language in Society* articles have come increasingly to reflect the Hymesian view of language as first and foremost social practice and of linguistic practice as embedded in practices of meaning-making more generally. (Johnstone 2018:418)

Within this practice-oriented approach to language, Johnstone outlines three main trends: (1) language and languaging, (2) constructing languages and speakers, and (3) multimodal semiosis. The first is a move away from a structuralist view of language as a bounded, enduring entity towards a poststructuralist view of language and meaning-making as emergent in discourse, arising out of the social and interactional imperatives of the local context. The second pertains to the way that languages, varieties, registers and styles are themselves socially produced and ideologically laden constructs, and are implicated in the creation of differentially valued identities of their users/speakers. And the third trend deals with expanding the remit of what we call language so as to encompass all forms of meaning-making including the body, gaze and other visual and semiotic resources. In many ways, the five papers in this issue can be understood as representing these three trends.

The first two papers in this issue deal with the social significance of linguistic variation, more specifically, how linguistic choices or variants can index complex social meanings and social change. Mesthrie's article investigates naming practices among South Africans of Indian ancestry as these diasporic communities adapted to, and negotiated, the social and bureaucratic expectations of the South African state. Like other kinds of sociolinguistic variables, Mesthrie found that personal name choices in this context were taken up differently based on factors such as religion, social class and subethnicity. While some groups showed evidence of cultural maintenance, others embraced Western and Christian names, and still others adopted hybrid naming practices. As Mesthrie concludes, 'this analysis of names overall shows their potential to unlock the complex indexicalities underpinning change in a multilayered diasporic field.'

D'Onofrio's & Eckert's paper, an investigation of iconicity, affect and phonological variation, is also focused on the complex indexicalities of sociolinguistic variables. While often relegated to the margins of linguistics, D'Onofrio and Eckert claim that iconic properties of language are in fact central to the study of sociolinguistic variation. Indeed, the article provides evidence from both production and perception studies in order to demonstrate how phonological variables can be construed as iconically linked to their referents, particularly in relation to the expression of affect. Ultimately, however, D'Onofrio & Eckert want to establish a connection between the construal process involved in the interpretation of icons and indexicals and in so doing show why iconicity has an 'essential role in sociolinguistic variation': just as iconic variables come to be construed as natural, though in fact are conventional, so the social meanings indexed by variation more generally

2   *Language in Society* **50**:1 (2021)

are, as the authors point out, 'sufficiently important to our beliefs that we strive to see them as inevitable.'

The next paper in this issue, while not technically a study within the tradition of variationist sociolinguistics, also considers variation in linguistic forms, specifically, variation in morpho-syntactic turn formats and how that variation is conditioned by speakers' stances in interaction. Using the methods of conversation analysis (methods that consider linguistic resources as well as resources of the body), Raymond, Robinson, Fox, Thompson & Montiegel analyze three grammatical formats used for offering and requesting in a variety of institutional and mundane settings. The authors argue that the occurrence of 'do you want…?' vs. 'you want…?' vs. 'want…?' is determined by a speaker's expectations regarding the recipient's acceptance of or compliance with the offer/request. The 'do you want…?' format displays a relatively neutral stance with respect to the expectation of acceptance/compliance whereas the more minimal 'you want…?' 'want…?' formats display stronger expectations that the offer/request will be accepted/complied with. While previous work on variation in turn formats has demonstrated that differences in morphosyntactic form can have an effect on the kind of action implemented, the Raymond et al. study shows that more granular distinctions can be effected by different turn formats. In this case, a change in grammatical format 'modulates' the speaker's stance *within* a single action type.

Albeit not a strictly language ideological analysis, Bogetić's article illustrates how specific word choices in online dating profiles of Serbian gay men are the ideological building blocks in the production of gender and sexual inequalities. Using the theoretical notion of 'recursive normalization' (based on Irvine's & Gal's (2000) concept of fractal recursivity), Bogetić demonstrates, with key word and collocational analysis, how the wider social dichotomy between positively-valued masculine traits and negatively-valued feminine (and gay) traits are 'recursively projected inwards' such that certain profile writers can 'normalize' their kind of gay identities by distancing themselves from 'effeminate' gay men. Although the dating profiles show evidence of a range of gay identities, Bogetić says that they are dominated by what she calls 'a normalising logic of 'proper men' that excludes the more radical aspects of digital communities and LGBTQ movements.' She ends the article by considering in a more general way how the recursion of systematic hierarchies within marginalized groups has socially-stigmatizing effects and calls for more research into 'marginalized groups' own recursively built ideologies and power relations.'

Thurlow's article, based on a semiotic landscape analysis, 'dissects' elite discourse, specifically, the terms 'premium' and 'premium economy' as they used as commercial strategies to sell goods and services. But, for Thurlow, of course, these terms do much more than sell—they are deployed as a way of enlisting and seducing consumers into a sense of privilege and superiority. While Thurlow sees language as a central strategy in the production and dissemination of ideas of 'eliteness', one of his arguments concerns the particular power that multimodal

texts wield. According to Thurlow, it is the movement back and forth between modalities (e.g., the verbal and the visual) 'which makes claims to distinction or status feel more substantial than they usually are' and which are 'key to the success of postclass ideologies.' In Thurlow's article, then, we see some of the analytic advantages that follow from viewing language as part of a wider semiotic formation.

We chose this particular set of articles for the first issue of the journal's 50th anniversary year in order to represent the wide variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the linguistic study of social issues published in the journal: second and third wave variationist studies, conversation analysis, corpus-based critical discourse analysis and linguistic/semiotic landscape studies. Read together, the articles cover a good range of geopolitical contexts (North America, Serbia, South Africa) as well the interconnectedness enabled by the global semiosphere. In this respect, it is important to highlight that, even fifty years ago, Hymes was explicit about trying to redress geopolitical imbalances of knowledge, saying that 'it is an aim of the journal to encourage a better balanced development of sociolinguistic research throughout the world' (1972:12). While there has been an increase in submissions (and acceptance) of manuscripts from a wider range of locations, the majority of articles published in the journal are still from scholars based in North America and Europe. And while we do not have a ready-made recipe for successfully redressing these imbalances, we are strongly committed to further broadening the geopolitical range of the articles we publish. A first step in this direction has been the expansion of the geopolitical breadth of the Editorial Board in order to increase the number of submissions from countries that are currently underrepresented in the journal.

We plan to celebrate the anniversary of the journal with a variety of activities and with a more active social media presence on Facebook and Twitter. An online special issue showcasing ground-breaking articles published in the journal over the last five decades will also be available OpenAccess. We also want to continue publishing special issues once a year. However, instead of considering special issue proposals throughout the year, we plan to issue a call for proposals at a particular time during the year. This is with a view to making the selection process more transparent. These proposals will be reviewed by us and relevant members of the editorial board (i.e., editorial board members with expertise in the subject matter of the proposed special issue). We are seeking collections of articles that make a significant contribution to the advancement of the study of language in society by pushing debates forward in innovative ways or by taking discussions in new directions. We are looking for collections of papers that connect in meaningful ways with each other and which cohere to form something more than the sum of the collection's parts. The next deadline for proposals is 1 July 2020.

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