MILROY, Lesley. **Observing and Analysing Natural Language**: A Critical Account of Sociolinguistic Method. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987. 230pp.

Lesley Milroy's Observing and Analysing Natural Language is a recent addition to an ever growing number of publications in the field of Sociolinguistics. It carries the weight of one of the experienced authors in the current days in the specified field and should offer basic information to both newcomers and established investigators in natural language.

The book is divided into nine chapters, in a logical sequence, and covers the most important topics under its title. The sociolinguistic method in its various facets is presented and discussed, having theory as reference.

Data collection methods are discussed in Chapters 1 to 4. Chapter 1 is actually an introduction to Field Linguistics with an historical background and a brief discussion as well as criticism of the Traditional Model. The evolution of the method is reviewed from the early works of De Camp and others in the 60's when the problems of 'pure' dialect and representativeness were first considered.

Chapters 2 - Sampling, 3 - Speakers: Some Issues in Data Collection, and 4 - Methodological Principles and Fieldwork Strategy: Two Case Studies, deal with the fundamental aspects of data collection. They constitute a useful guide to all those intending to study language as it is naturally spoken with due consideration to social stratification of speakers, geographical limitations and the crucial point of preserving the naturalness of recorded natural language.

Reference is frequently made to Labov's work, not only in these chapters but throughout the book. The strong influence of his publications on the structure and contents of what may perhaps be termed Milroy's successful attempt to codify Sociolinguistics

Methodology can easily be recognized. Section 4.4, A
Note on Ethics, is very much to the point; it brings up
the question of how to handle the problem of the
participant's or interviewee's right to be made aware
of the nature of the process in which he is taking part
and to be kept in anonymity. By reporting only to real
situations the author makes the reader feel the need
for sensibility and respect towards individuals or
communities that supply the essential material for the
sociolinguist's work.

Data handling and analysis are dealt with in a
very skillful manner in Chapters 5 to 8: 5 - Speaker
Variables, 6 - Phonological Variation, 7 - Syntactic
Variation. The subject is introduced in a most
objective way and real examples are given. The
statistics, however, could have been further expanded
to accommodate some of the basic mathematics which
would tell any reasonably trained investigator how to
calculate, for instance, the minimum number of tokens
for a previously estimated proportion of occurrences of
a certain type and at a specified level of error. The
reference to Sankoff's VARBRUL, though useful to
researchers in the northern hemisphere, is insufficient
for those who depend on equipment normally available at
Language Departments of Universities in the southern
hemisphere. This is ackowledged in part by the author
when she refers to the relative unavailability of such
software even in the developed areas of the world.

The subjects of style-shifting and code-shifting
are carefully treated in Chapter 8. It can be seen that
the methodology for style-shifting studies evolved a bit
faster than that for code-shifting. On the other hand,
one can realize that this is an area mostly relying on
psycho-social studies and still offering a lot of room
for further development. England is of course a most
adequate laboratory for code-shifting research due to
the strong immigration of individuals from the former
colonies and the multiple languages they carry along with
the general use of English as a trade and education tool
at their places of origin. Conversely, style-shifting
investigation can be applied in a more universal manner
and the book provides excellent guidance and examples on
how to carry it out.

The last chapter contains a real challenge: that of, once having gained the information therein contained, applying it to specific areas where language may pose a problem as a limiting factor in communication as well as in educational and social growing — not only of individuals but also of society segments such as racial and/or ethnic minorities. The detection and analysis of such problems by means of the methods of Sociolinguistics can be of utmost importance to alleviate the tensions between segments of national societies all over the world. Milroy's book is also good for suggesting the increase of such applications.

In addition, the book is unique in the fact that it deals with a difficult subject in a thorough and impartial way, so that the opinions of authors of all shades in the field are carefully treated and represented. This can be fully appreciated by the comprehensiveness of its Bibliography, also very useful for those seeking the field.

The book is easy to read and should be recommended to post-graduate students of Applied Linguistics, and to investigators alike, as a valuable tool for the design and evaluation of research in natural language.

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