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Joan F. Carbonell,
University College London

JAMES MILROY. *Linguistic Variation and Change: On the Historical Sociolinguistics of English.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. xii + 243 pages.

This book consists of a brief Editor's preface by Peter Trudgill, a preface, and seven chapters; by and large, the first chapter is a theoretical statement about the need for a social model of language change, which the author goes on to build in the subsequent chapters. The theme throughout is the integration of the theory of linguistic change into a broader theory of social change. The author, former Professor of Linguistics at the University of Sheffield and Senior Lecturer in English at Queens University, is now engaged in research and writing, and has done considerable work on various historical and dialectal aspects of English, mostly related to Belfast English.

Chapter 1, *Introduction: Language change and variation* (pp. 1-19), begins with a discussion on de Saussure's statements about the uniformity of language which, according to Milroy, are not self-evidently true. The elimination of these structuralist assumptions is thus a previous step towards the question of the study of language change. Contrary to most other approaches proposed in the last decades about the process followed by linguistic change, James Milroy is concerned with a strictly sociolinguistic theory of language change, whose theoretical im-

plications are briefly sketched in pages 4-13. The three principles on which this theory is built concern, (i) the impossibility of observing language independently of society, (ii) the impossibility of describing language structures independently of society, and (iii) the necessity of accounting for language maintenance as a preliminary to any social approach to linguistic change. Milroy then turns to discuss some aspects of Weinreich, Labov and Herzogs *Empirical foundations* (1968), which, despite their emphasis on fieldwork methods, constitute a still mainly system-oriented approach. According to Milroy, it is this internal orientation that has made the actuation problem (i.e., the determination of the causes of linguistic change) an insoluble one.

Chapter 2, *Social and historical linguistics* (pp. 20-47), opens with a discussion of some of the main system-oriented trends concerning the determination of the locus of language change. The author points, that these trends have systematically neglected the role of speakers in the process of change. In a similar way, Labov argues that the locus of change is in the group, not in the individual. As Milroy points out, linguistic change is located in speaker-interaction and is negotiated between speakers in the course of interaction, much as other aspects of discourse are negotiated between them (Milroy 1992: 36).

Chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 48-80 and 81-122, respectively) deal with the analysis and interpretation of linguistic patterns revealed by the community. Both chapters are based on previous research carried out by James and Lesley Milroy in the Belfast area. The question of the embedding of language variation in society is approached from a variationist point of view, following Weinreich, Labov and Herzog's quantitative paradigm. As for the interpretative phase of the model, the most important concern of the author is the relation of the variations previously patterned to the social variables of age, sex, class, and, most important of all, the ethnographic concept of social network.

Chapter 5, *On the time-depth of variability in English* (pp. 123-163), concerns the projection of the method previously sketched to past states of language change. Orderly variation in spelling, which has traditionally been related to scribal habits, is presented by Milroy in a brief discussion on /h/-dropping in Middle English with the following result: /h/-loss might have been current at a relatively high social stratum during the medieval period. In a second application of the method, Milroy attempts to relate some of the patterns of variation established in previous research in the city of Belfast to the vowel system of Early Modern English with similar results. A brief appendix on some etymological applications of variationism closes the chapter.

In Chapter 6, *Speaker-innovation and linguistic change* (pp. 164-205), the author explores the applications of a network-based approach to the study of linguistic change. This approach, which is primarily based on recent work in social anthropology (Boissevain 1974, Granovetter 1982), allows the researcher to account for the individual linguistic behaviour in communities. The main implication of this approach lies on the assumption that linguistic changes, just like other social changes, diffuse through the different social groups through *weak-ties* (i.e. multiple, casual ties).

The last chapter in the book, *Towards an integrated social model for the interpretation of language change* (pp. 206-222), is substantially based on Thomas Højrups theory of Life-Modes. The Danish sociologist proposes a division of the population into life-modes, which are differenti-ated by a common ideological orientation to work, leisure and family. The most important implication of Højrups theory is the possibility of linking the micro and macro levels of sociolinguistic analysis in a coherent way. However, the complete development of such an integrated model is left aside for a forthcoming paper by the Milroys, provisionally referred to as *Social network and social class: towards an integrated sociolinguistic model.*

The Bibliography (pp. 229-239) is quite complete and up-to-date, including an impressive range of material in terms of disciplines (mostly linguistics, sociology and ethnology), and references to forth coming materials by the Milroys.

This fresh outlook sketched by James Milroy, which I find surprisingly novel and lively, is a serious attempt to solve the actuation problem (the very heart of the matter) as stated by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog in 1968, providing a full range of possibilities for future research in the different areas of diachronic linguistics.

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Javier E. Díaz Vera
Dpto. de Filología Moderna
Facultad de Letras
Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha
Ciudad Real