

Tyler Kendall & Valerie Fridland. 2021. *Sociophonetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 257 pp. + xix.

Reviewed by Costin-Valentin Oancea*

The book at issue is included in the collection “Key Topics in Sociolinguistics” by Cambridge University Press and is structured into nine chapters, a List of Figures, References and an Index.

Chapter 1, “Sociophonetics = Sociolinguistics + Phonetics” (pp. 1-11), discusses the intricate connection between sociolinguistics and phonetics. It lays the ground for the subsequent topics under scrutiny and presents in a very comprehensive way the domain and scope of sociolinguistics and what sociophonetics studies. The authors provide a brief history of the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) and successfully answer the question “What is sociophonetics?” At the end of the chapter, several titles are provided, under the heading “further reading.”

The second chapter, “Sociophonetics and its methods: Foundations” (pp. 12-39), focuses on typical sociophonetic methods for data collection and analysis. The authors mention the three divisions of phonetics: articulatory phonetics, acoustic phonetics and auditory phonetics, and acknowledge that the area of acoustic phonetics is the one where the interface with sociophonetic pursuits has had a major influence on the development of methods and approaches. Two segmental speech features (vowels and sibilant consonants) are discussed at length. Also included here are examples of spectrograms to illustrate different sound characteristics (e.g. word final /z/ and word initial /s/ display notable characteristics). All in all, this chapter provided an overview of some key concepts and approaches from both phonetics and sociolinguistics that undergird modern sociophonetic research and its methods.

Chapter 3, “Sociophonetics and its methods: Vowels and sibilants” (pp. 40-72), explores analytic methods used in sociophonetic investigation. The chapter opens with a discussion of ways of analyzing vowels (i.e. token selection, formant extraction and taking measurements, the number of vowel measurements that is required, visualization and plotting, normalization and other data processing). The chapter continues with a presentation on analyzing sibilants (i.e. token selection and delimitation, taking measurements, visualizing sibilant data, normalization). In this chapter the authors provide a reliable guide with the purpose of training researchers on how to perform basic analyses of vowel and sibilant sounds. As the authors themselves acknowledge “this chapter walks through the nuts and bolts of doing sociophonetics quite this closely” (p. 71).

Chapter 4, “Sociophonetics and regional variation: A new dialectology?” (pp. 73-95), considers accent as a regional marker and provides an in-depth analysis of regional differences in language use, as well as the factors that contribute to these differences. The authors briefly highlight the difference between *dialect*, *accent* and *variety* and great emphasis is laid upon the domain of dialectology, as it concerns itself with the study of regional language variation. The contribution of scholars like Hans Kurath (coordinator for the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada*), Harold Orton (in charge of the *Survey of English Dialects* in the United Kingdom), among others, is acknowledged. The second part of the chapter provides useful insight into sociolinguistic research on regional variation, mentioning the important contribution of William Labov (1963, 1966, 1972) and Peter Trudgill (1974) to the field of urban dialectology (Chambers

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& Trudgill 1998). The last part of the chapter is devoted to sociophonetic research on regional variation, as well as perception and regional variation.

Chapter 5, “Sociophonetics and social factors” (pp. 96-125), revolves around the idea that speech sounds are crucially intertwined with the full spectrum of our social identities, not just our regional identities. The chapter tackles the contribution of sociophonetics to the understanding of language and the social world. It discusses of wide range of topics that take into consideration social variables such as: region, social class, gender, age and ethnicity and their impact on phonetic variation and change. Several epoch-making studies from a wide range of communities are clearly presented.

Chapter 6, “Sociophonetics, style and identity” (pp. 126-155), builds on the ideas presented in chapters 4 and 5 and examines approaches to the study of “within-individual variation and the construction of linguistic style” (p. 126) as well as the contribution of sociophonetic research to this line of inquiry. The contribution of Penelope Eckert (2017), who has influenced approaches to the construction of social meaning and linguistic performance, is acknowledged in the first pages on the chapter. The discussion swiftly moves to language and individual variation with a focus on style. Included here is also a brief analysis of the three waves of studies concerning language variation and change. The last part of the chapter puts under scrutiny language and social identity (Eckert 2000), as well as perception and social identity (Munson & Babel 2007).

In Chapter 7, “Sociophonetics and sound change”, pp. 156-177, reviews some of the most significant proposals advanced regarding sound change. The authors discuss the Actuation Problem (Weinreich et al. 1968) in detail, as well as the Hyper- and Hypo-Speech Theory (Lindblom 1990). Labov’s immense contribution to the area of language variation and change is presented at length, with a focus on his stratification studies carried out in the sixties, as well as his more recent work on “the principles of linguistic change” (Labov 1994, 2010). The chapter ends with a succinct discussion regarding the contribution of sociophonetics to sound change and future theories of sound change, i.e. the ability that sociophonetics has of looking empirically at socially-patterned intra-speaker variation, research which has been previously discarded or neglected.

Chapter 8, “Sociophonetics and its methodological future” (pp. 178-207), surveys some of most recent methods for extracting and coding data. These methods allow researchers to analyse larger amounts of data which result in more reliable findings and explanations. The chapter opens with a brief presentation of computational linguistics and reviews the traditional and modern approaches used in sociophonetics. The well-known software PRAAT is clearly presented and exemplified through the use of spectrograms. The authors then proceed to a discussion of automatic acoustic analysis and mention common tools used in this type of analysis (e.g. software programs like P2FA, FAVE, MFA, WebMAUS, ISCAN). The last part of the chapter tackles the domain of speech recognition and the tools that can be used to apply speech recognition to automate sociophonetic analysis (e.g. DARLA), as well as artificial intelligence and machine learning.

The last chapter, “In closing” (pp. 208-212), considers the main benefits that sociophonetics offers to the study of language. Sociophonetics inherited, in a way, the emphasis on data and methods from the vast field of sociolinguistics. However, it has advanced immensely from the first acoustic studies of variation in speech. This domain, the authors believe, will greatly benefit from the advances in computer processing of speech and software development.

Sociophonetics is a very exciting area of research and by understanding speech as a cognitively, physically and socially governed phenomenon we can contribute to developing a cogent theory of language in society. The topics tackled in the book are very well-chosen, the discussion is refined, yet accessible even to neophytes. Tyler Kendall & Valerie Fridland’s *Sociophonetics* intertwines phonetic and phonological form with the social and regional factors that influence speech. The book covers theoretical, methodological and computational approaches

and provides a fresh perspective to old questions about language variation and change. It is also worth mentioning that the book has an accompanying website containing online resources (e.g. audio files, data processing scripts and useful links) to make the journey even more pleasant and at the same time aid students and scholars with their own work. The fact that each chapter contains a “further reading” section is a big plus.

All in all, the book *Sociophonetics* represents a very useful and much-needed contribution to the ever-growing field of sociolinguistics. For achieving all of these things the authors deserve ample credit and congratulations.

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