

Multilingual practices in the late modern speech community

Pia Quist, University of Copenhagen

It is part of most European national ideologies that languages, speakers and places constitute a unity. Languages belong to specific speakers, and speakers belong to specific places. This tying together of places, languages and people is not only characteristic of most lay people's conceptualizations of languages. A tight connection between place, body and language also lies at the basis of most variationist and dialect studies, whether linguistic variation is described horizontally, as linked to geography, or vertically, as linked to social stratification. Variationist sociolinguistics has from the beginning been criticized for focusing too narrowly on ethnically homogeneous speech communities, pointing to the fact that they are the exception rather than the rule (Le Page 1980: 336). Such criticism become even more relevant today as the Western, late modern speech community develops in ways that in particular challenge the connection between language, body and place. Increased geographical mobility, linguistic heterogeneity, CMC and new information technologies integrated in everyday communication are some of the phenomena that make it intricate to carry out traditional variationist sociolinguistics in the city. On this background, I will address the question: How can we study variation in the speech community from a sociolinguistic perspective in the heterogeneous urban context of late modernity? I will discuss this question by critically scrutinizing the connections between language and place, place and body, and body and language. Notions of style and practice will be suggested as the main means needed to grasp the complexity of the late modern speech community. The discussion will draw on findings from a study of linguistic and stylistic practices in the ethnically mixed neighbourhood Nørrebro in Copenhagen (Quist forthc.). Connected with all of this I will also address questions on how to include immigrant related speech practices, such as multiethnolects (Quist 2008), in the analysis; are 'lect' terms useful in the sociolinguistic study of the speech community?

References

- Le Page, Robert 1980: Theoretical Aspects of Sociolinguistic Studies in Pidgin and Creole Languages. I Albert Valdman & Arnold Highfield (eds.): *Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies*. New York: Academic Press, INC. 331-367.
- Quist, Pia 2008: Sociolinguistic approaches to multiethnolect: language variety and stylistic practice. *International Journal of Bilingualism*. Volume 12. Number 1&2. 43– 61.
- Quist, Pia forthcoming: *Stilistisk Praksis*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum/Copenhagen University Press.