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Sociolinguistics by Bernard Spolsky.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 128 pp.

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Sociolinguistics by Bernard Spolsky is one of five introductory linguistic texts in a series called *Oxford Introductions to Language Study*, edited by H.G. Widdowson. The other books in this series include: *Second Language Acquisition* by Rod Ellis (see review by Carleen Curley in *ial*'s June 1997 issue), *Psycholinguistics* by Thomas Scovel, *Linguistics* by H.G. Widdowson, and *Pragmatics* by George Yule.

In the preface, Widdowson acknowledges that most academic introductory texts in the field are often quite specialized and long, which makes them rather inaccessible to the newcomer. Thus, the purpose of *Sociolinguistics*, as part of *Oxford's Introductions to Language Study* series, is to accommodate readers new to the formal study of language. As a brief yet comprehensive overview, this book is intended "not to supplant but to support" (ix) other sociolinguistic texts. Spolsky's *Sociolinguistics* is not only a good overview for beginning students of linguistics, but is also easily accessible for the lay reader interested in studying the relationship between language and society.

Spolsky's book is an overview of sociolinguistic sub-fields, theories and debates. Although it uses simple definitions and few references to introduce terminology and concepts, it provides a comprehensive overview. Opportunities for a more in-depth study are found in the extremely useful supplemental readings, reference, and glossary sections.

Spolsky admits that any overview of sociolinguistic concepts is "bound to be a personal view" (p. xi). Due to Spolsky's extensive knowledge and experience in various sociolinguistic realms, however, the possible limitations of his "personal view" are not a concern. Spolsky has previously published works as varied as an *Analytical Bibliography of Navajo Reading Materials* (1970), *Papers on Language Testing* (1967-1974), *The Languages of Jerusalem* (1991), and *Influences of Language on Culture and Thought* (1991). In addition, the reader is informed in the author's preface of his vast first-hand experiences in the study of language and culture in such places as New Zealand, Montreal, New Mexico, and Israel.

Sociolinguistics gives an informative overview of the various key concepts involved in this prominent sub-field of linguistics. Spolsky notes that, "in the thirty years or so that it has been recognized as a branch of scientific study of language, sociolinguistics has grown into one of the most important of the hy-

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phenated fields of linguistics" (p. 3). "There are indeed," he further notes, "some sociolinguists who wonder how language can be studied in any other way" (p. 4). Spolsky gives readers not only definitions of key sociolinguistic concepts, but also illustrates each definition with several examples. Most importantly, he illustrates how these concepts interplay in the historical development of sociolinguistic theories and debates.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each focusing on a topic prevalent in current sociolinguistic research. These divisions make information easily accessible to a reader interested in one specific topic.

In chapter one, "The Social Study of Language," Spolsky defines sociolinguistics as "the field that studies the relation between language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live" (p. 3). This chapter, as well as the following chapters, expands upon this definition by exploring viewpoints for study and providing many examples from modern and historical linguistic environments. This first chapter lays the foundation for scientific inquiry into sociolinguistics including its scope, complementary approaches, methodological issues, and techniques used by sociolinguists at work.

Chapter two, "The Ethnography of Speaking and the Structure of Conversation," introduces an approach to language study derived from anthropology. This approach, largely based on the work of Jakobson and Hymes, studies conversation as embedded in a sociocultural setting. The chapter begins with a linguistic view of a sentence; that is, how that sentence fits into conversation and the underlying socially recognized rules that allow communication to occur. These rules are defined in relation to the structure of conversations, politeness and politeness formulas, and terms of address. Spolsky gives a brief explanation of how each of these function in conversation.

In chapter three, "Locating Variations in Speech," and four, "Styles, Gender and Social Class," Spolsky looks at how these rules of conversation vary across speech communities, which he defines as "a group of people who speak the same language" (p. 24). Due to social factors that affect the speech patterns within these speech communities, additional variance occurs across repertoires, defined by Spolsky as "a collection of varieties of languages spoken by a group of people" (p. 25). The factors discussed by Spolsky include: (1) dialects which are located regionally or socially; (2) styles of speech patterns and their related differences and degrees of formality; (3) special varieties (registers or jargons) with a special set of vocabulary specific to a particular profession, social group or activity; (4) slang; (5) gender; and (6) social stratification. These six types of dialect and stylistic differences emerge through various processes such as physical and social isolation, changing speech styles for a specific audience (audience design), and modifying speech style to more closely approximate that of a listener (accommodation).

In chapter five, Spolsky discusses bilingual speakers, specifically how bilin-

gualism shapes their lives and what influences the language that they choose to use. Issues related to this topic include language socialization, different kinds of bilingualism, problems that competent bilingual speakers face, and the switching between or mixing of languages in a single conversation.

Chapter six, "Societal Multilingualism," takes another view of bilingualism by looking at it from the perspective of society. Spolsky begins with a historical perspective, noting that multilinguistic societies are the normative rule, not the exception. Additionally, the languages in these societies have great political significance since, as the author notes, "the most common result of this language contact has been language conflict" (p. 55). Recently, as cross-linguistic contact increases, there is growing interest in language maintenance, language shift, and endangered languages (languages which are currently only spoken by aging adults). Such issues also carry great emotional significance since languages often indicate ethnic identity and establish social relations. Other issues covered include language rights, pidgins, creoles, Black English, and diglossia (when two different languages are used for two distinct purposes within the same society).

In the final chapter, "Applied Sociolinguistics," Spolsky attempts to demonstrate how sociolinguistic research findings have been applied to controversial social issues such as language policy and planning, and language education. Issues introduced in this chapter include how and where new words are adopted into a language, the world movement from normativism to prescriptivism for spelling, and how languages are spread. This chapter concludes with an important linguistic question for our time: Is the spread of English an example of imperialism or hegemony? As English continues to be the dominant language for international communication, it is an important task for sociolinguistics to understand the implications of this phenomenon.

The readings, reference, and glossary sections are great supplements to the survey. The readings section, for example, is useful for connecting the basic concepts presented in the text with the dynamic world of research in the field. It provides references with short abstracts of significant contemporary sociolinguistic literature. These are accompanied by questions that engage the reader and encourage text comparisons. The following section, references, includes an additional but more briefly annotated list of useful books and articles recommended for further study. This section is particularly useful to the reader in that it classifies each book into levels ranging from introductory to highly technical. Also, as in the readings section, the references are ordered in a way that parallels the survey section, helping readers to choose texts appropriate to their particular interests. The final section, the glossary, is not only a useful dictionary of terms specific to the field of study, but also functions as an index.

Upon first glance, one might feel that *Sociolinguistics* is an extreme oversimplification of a complex field of study. How is it possible for a field as vast as sociolinguistics to be adequately covered in only 78 pages? Yet, this book is indispensable for the novice as an introduction to key concepts that are clearly ex-

plained through relevant examples. The well-organized layout of the series also makes the annotated bibliographical references and glossary especially accessible and useful. *Sociolinguistics*, by Bernard Spolsky, illuminates complex technical terminology and makes the interesting and dynamic world of sociolinguistics accessible to all.