

Preface and user guide

This book is intended to serve as an accessible guide, a reliable companion and a clear and casual conversation on methods of data collection and analysis in the field of sociolinguistics. The book outlines important principles that inform the collection of sociolinguistic data, how such data is handled and analysed once it has been collected and how it is then related to other work. *Doing Sociolinguistics: A practical guide to data collection and analysis (DS)* offers readers an opportunity to engage directly with some of the foundational and more innovative work being done in what is broadly known as quantitative or variationist sociolinguistics. While this is not to the exclusion of studies that examine sociolinguistics using more qualitative methods, it is a useful perspective to foreground, as it emphasises connections between the methods and principles required for the general study of language structure and the study of the socially situated uses of language.

The book can be used as a stand-alone text in introductory methods classes or an easy reference to different methodological issues, e.g. questionnaire design or transcription. Yet, it may be helpful for a methods book to be supported with another text that can spell out current issues and central principles in the field. We have written *DS* with particular companion textbooks in mind: the Routledge textbook *Introducing Sociolinguistics, 2nd edition* (Meyerhoff 2011) and *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader* (Meyerhoff and Schleeff 2010). But experienced teachers will see ways in which *DS* could be supplemented with readings from other introductory volumes. *DS* was written in such a way that it can also be used in more specialised sociolinguistics classes that require students to learn about methods in order to prepare them for their own research. Thus, it also provides the scaffolding on which a teacher can build a coherent course of study.

This book reflects on many conversations we've had with our students and we have written it in a 'can do' style, as we realise that student researchers are often limited by time and resources in what they can achieve. We take this to heart when providing ideas and practical guidance, often discussing what could ideally happen but what may still be acceptable practice if circumstances are dif-

ficult. We offer a positive attitude that students working under time pressure in a one-semester course will especially appreciate. *DS* was written by three people, but since we intensively reviewed and edited each others' writing, it speaks with a single authorial voice. Our book is a snappy distillation of what we have learnt as researchers and teachers. This means there are no gaps in the guidance on process: we have worked through each step as we do with our own students and in our own work.

We have divided *DS* into two parts: data collection and data analysis, and our 16 chapters reflect the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct sociolinguistic analyses of language. The book walks the readers through the different phases of a sociolinguistic project and can be read as a coherent 'story'. Users of *DS* who work through each part in turn will find that their journey takes them from guidance on how to find a research topic to collecting and analysing the data and writing up the final report.

Each of the 16 chapters consists of three parts: (1) a clear yet brief introduction to the issues involved, (2) exercises and (3) an informative list of further reading and references. These suggestions for further reading allow more advanced users or users with very specific and clearly focused research questions to get a quick start creating a 'master class' of their own.

The exercises we provide at the end of each chapter probe a little further; they explore more complicated issues, they reinforce the content of each chapter and offer ideas for research topics to the user. We have tried as much as possible to make these exercises 'hands on' and data-based. Where this was not possible, we have tried to raise awareness of our research culture and the complex and intellectually rewarding field of sociolinguistics by providing examples and excerpts from some of the writing that we have found most inspirational. We hope we have been sensitive in our treatment of their original ideas. Where we have omitted something from the original text, we show this with ellipsis, so: [. . .]. Likewise, any editorial comments of our own are enclosed in square brackets.

Exercises are supplemented on our companion website (www.routledge.com/textbooks/meyerhoff) with brief notes on what we were thinking about when we created them. This is not to say they are answers; in fact, we tried to resist the temptation to offer answers. Instead, we have used the notes as a way of suggesting how you might go about addressing the exercises and where you might look for relevant information. Our companion website also contains some additional material and exercises relevant to the topics covered in *DS*. Links to the companion website are scattered throughout the book.

The idea for this book goes back to a 'how-to' methods chapter Miriam and Erik wrote for *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader* in 2009. That chapter itself started out as a two-hour workshop for (post-)graduate students, who might or might not be already working in sociolinguistics. It has subsequently been adapted to the needs of various audiences. It made sense to turn this into a

short book that introduces methods in sociolinguistics clearly, straightforwardly and in a 'how-to' spirit that enables students to start their own research. We all bring differing expertise to the book and while we wrote many chapters together, some were initially written by one person and then edited by the team later on. It is fundamentally invidious to try to carve up our contributions in what is pre-eminently a collective work, and doing so undermines the well-known capacity for scholarly collaboration to generate something that is more than a sum of its parts. Nevertheless, we are compelled to recognise the climate of evaluation and its impact, particularly on emerging scholars. We therefore acknowledge (with regret) first authorship for the chapters as follows: Miriam and Erik co-wrote chapters 1, 2 and 10; Miriam wrote chapters 3, 5, 11 and 15; Erik wrote chapters 4, 6, 8, 9 and 16 and Laurel wrote chapters 7, 12, 13 and 14. There was a lot of give and take in the process, though, and ideas were free-floating from chapter to chapter. Miriam edited the whole manuscript to ensure a coherent style.

We hope that we have done a satisfactory job and that you will enjoy *DS*, as it stands. But we particularly hope that our chapters here inspire you to conduct your own research, make your own contribution to the field of sociolinguistics and, most importantly, that your journey will take you much beyond the modest guidance that we have provided here.

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