

USER'S GUIDE TO *THE ROUTLEDGE SOCIOLINGUISTICS READER*

THIS BOOK IS INTENDED to serve as a companion, a guide and a conversation on the topic of sociolinguistics. The purpose of a Reader is to compile important and/or helpful sources from a field of enquiry, sources that enable students to explore and critique the methods and principles that are associated with that field, and sources that provide the scaffolding on which a teacher can build a coherent course of study. In *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader*, we have tried to gather together some of the readings we have enjoyed and learnt much from over the years, both as learners and teachers in the field. You will find some classic readings, but many more recent ones that in our opinion embody some of the best work illustrating good ways of doing sociolinguistic research, and that have highlighted 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.

An ideal Reader on any topic would be one that could stand alone – independently modelling key methods and illuminating central principles in a field – and we hope that anyone who is studying independently and who might pick this volume up will profit from it as it stands. We have divided *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader (TRSR)* into six parts that create a spiral curriculum through key concepts in sociolinguistics. We have tried to get away from representing research as either “top-down” or “bottom-up”. Instead *TRSR* tries to forge a spiral, which emphasises the connections between different practitioners and different sub-fields in sociolinguistics. The six parts are:

- Identities, style and politeness – how people present themselves to others through language
- Perceptions and language attitudes – how people perceive others through language
- Multilingualism and language contact – how people organise their communities around language norms
- Variation and change – how the influence of intersecting and independent factors can be seen in language
- Social class, networks and communities of practice – how the specific effects of who we associate with influence language; and

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- Gender – how one of the most socially salient identities in society is reproduced and contested through language.

Users of *TRSR* who work through each part in turn will find that their journey takes them from perspectives on individual style, through individuals' place in society, and then gradually unpacks community-wide patterns of variation and change, highlighting properties and identities that have specifically local meaning.

However, the real world is generally less than ideal, and it may be helpful for a Reader to be supported with another text that can spell out methodological issues and the central principles in the field. When we have piloted the material in *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader* prior to publication, we have used it in conjunction with readings from an introductory text in sociolinguistics. The six parts complement the structure of Routledge's *Introducing Sociolinguistics* text (Meyerhoff 2006) and the two volumes should work together very well as a basis for an introductory course. But experienced teachers will see ways in which *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader* could be supplemented with readings from other introductory volumes.

The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader provides a number of questions and exercises at the end of each reading. There are always two distinct types of questions, which we call **Content Questions** and **Concept Questions**. Content Questions provide a guided check on aspects of the article that we think are essential foundational knowledge in order to be able to get the most out of the reading. They are a good basis for checking comprehension of the main points. Concept Questions probe a little further; they explore more complicated issues raised by the author(s) in the reading and they encourage readers to make connections between articles in different sections of the Reader.

Over the years, we have found that a division of questions along these lines best suits the kinds of diverse needs that many large classes in sociolinguistics have, and the diverse kinds of audiences that may be approaching sociolinguistics as beginners. For example, even very talented (post-)graduate students may want reassurance that they have understood the key points in an article if they are reading in a second (or third...) language. Equally, an introductory class in sociolinguistics at any level may include some students who are already firmly committed to a degree in linguistics, and others who are taking the course because it complements their main subject of study. For a committed linguistics major (or someone who is considering making the jump), Concept Questions are an excellent basis around which informal study groups, or discussions in tutorial sections can be organised. We hope that as well as providing ready-made topics for in-depth discussion, they also suggest other discussion topics and other ways of relating readings to each other that reflect readers' own interests.

Concept Questions are supplemented at the end of the book with brief notes on what we were thinking about when we created these questions. This is not to say they are answers; in fact, we tried to resist the temptation to offer answers to Concept Questions. Instead, we have used the notes as a way of suggesting how you might go about answering the Concept Questions and where you might look for relevant information.

If you find you like the Concept Questions, you may like to visit the **web site** associated with *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader* (INSERT ROUTLEDGE URL WHEN AVAILABLE). The web site contains links to supplementary exercises (including some interactive ones which are beyond the scope of a print book) and links to other useful web-based resources relevant to the topics covered in *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader*. In addition, the exercises scattered

throughout *Introducing Sociolinguistics* are a good source of materials that will extend users' ability to test their understanding of key concepts in sociolinguistics and to apply them to unfamiliar data sets.

Another feature of *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader* that we hope will be useful to students starting out in the field is the "how-to" chapter we have written specifically for this volume. "Sociolinguistic methods for data collection and interpretation" 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, including a one hour fast-track version for undergraduates, a workshop for formal and experimental linguistics students to familiarise them with what sociolinguists do and what kinds of questions they ask about language. As well as including answers to (or guidance on) some of the questions our students and our colleagues' students have asked over the years, we conclude with several exercises as we do with the articles throughout the Reader. In this case, the exercises are very clearly focused on methods, and can be broken up to suit the needs and interests of different audiences. (To complete all the exercises, you will probably need a two hour class.)

Representing other people's research is a fearsome responsibility. In almost all cases, the copyright holders were kind enough to give us permission to excerpt from their original work, and this adds an additional responsibility of care. 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. We have made some minor changes to the original texts, e.g. renumbering tables, figures and examples, and truncating the original references to reflect our editing, but we have retained the conventions the original authors used to name people in their references. We have also retained the original numbering for footnotes, even if this means they end up being non-sequential in our extracts. In some cases, we have identified typographical errors in the original and where we have been able to confirm this with the author(s) we have made an amendment to the text. Where an original text cited works that were "in press" or "forthcoming" we have endeavoured to find the details for these works. Unfortunately, this has not always been possible. Where references were missing in the original, they have perforce continued to be missing in this volume.

By excerpting from some of the writing that we have found most inspirational, we hope we are able to introduce a wider range of readers to the complex and intellectually rewarding field of sociolinguistics. The paradoxical world of editing a reader is that on the one hand, we hope we have done a satisfactory job and that you will enjoy *The Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader*, as it stands. But on the other hand, we particularly hope that our selections here inspire you to seek out and read these excellent articles in their entirety, and go on to the other works they refer to.

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