
abstract The aim of this Sociopedia.isa entry is to provide a brief description of this interdisciplinary area of research, and to sketch its evolution. The article stresses the importance of maintaining and developing the legacy of interdisciplinary connections developed in the past and the social commitments behind many of these studies. After describing the main areas in sociolinguistics, some recent directions are outlined, introducing some of its most promising developments.

keywords discursive approaches to human sciences ♦ ethnography of communication ♦ language contact and language rights ♦ language and society ♦ sociolinguistics ♦ variationist sociolinguistics

The first commandment of the study of discourse must be: Let people surprise you as to what they can do, and what they can use to do it. (Hymes, 1974: 102)

We will be using observation as a basis for theorizing. Thus we can start with things that are not currently imaginable, by showing that they happened. We can then come to see that a base for using close looking at the world for theorising about it is that from close looking at the world we can find things that we could not, by imagination, assert were there. (Sacks, 1984: 25)

Introduction

‘Sociolinguistics’ and ‘language and Society’ are terms that are often used interchangeably to refer to an interdisciplinary field of research in which linguistics and sociology, and other human sciences, join together to study verbal and other human conducts; but in fact their definition is a highly controversial matter. Sociolinguistics (Ammon et al., 2006; Bratt-Paulston and Tucker, 2003; Chambers, 2009; Coulmas, 2005; Coupland and Jaworski, 2009a, 2009b; Figueroa, 1994; Halliday, 2007; Llamas et al., 2007; Mesthrie et al., 2009; Meyerhoff, 2006; Meyerhoff and Schlee, 2010; Romaine, 2000; Trudgill, 2000) is a research area with a relatively short history (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2008). Since the term was initially created, it has adopted shifting shades of meanings

and until now it has not been univocally definable. (For a history of sociolinguistics see: Bratt-Paulston and Tucker, 1997; Figueroa, 1994; Hymes, 2000; Koerner, 1991; Rampton, 2006; Samarin, 2000). Hymes (1974: 195) writes: ‘The term “Sociolinguistics” means many things to many people, and of course no one has a patent on its definition’; this assertion would appear to be still valid nowadays. Below are some of the research areas that have been included under sociolinguistics, in various combinations and according to different authors. This grouping of research areas is useful for descriptive reasons, but in fact many of these fields of research are strictly interrelated:

- Quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of language and variationist sociolinguistics;
- Ethnographic and anthropological approaches to the study of language;
- Language contact: Creole studies, code-switching, language death and survival, language rights and language policy;
- Discursive approaches to sociology and other human sciences.

The term ‘language and society’ offers the broadest meaning, to include all the research areas, though it is frequently used interchangeably with sociolinguistics. It is certainly noticeable that there is a difference in

the meaning attributed to the term 'sociolinguistics' between Europe and the United States. In the 1960s the term 'sociolinguistics' started to be used mainly to refer to a broad area of studies in language and society on both sides of the Atlantic. It embraced variationist sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, anthropological linguistics, interactional sociolinguistics, symbolic interactionism, conversation analysis, discourse analysis and so on. In order to refer to this interdisciplinary coalition nowadays, Bucholtz and Hall (2008: 404), for example, use the term *sociocultural linguistics*, mainly for reasons of clarity. The term 'sociolinguistics', they say, is increasingly used, particularly in linguistics in the USA, to define the study of how variations in language relate to sociocultural phenomena. Topics covered include dialects, gender- and age-specific speech forms, professional jargon, etc. However, in Europe, Coupland and Jaworski (2009b: 2), for example, conclude that 'Sociolinguistics is now a broad and vibrant interdisciplinary project working across the different disciplines that were its origins.' In their edited collection they include articles from all of the fields listed above.

The aim of this Sociopedia.isa entry is to provide a brief description of this interdisciplinary area of research, and to give an idea of its evolution. This article stresses the importance of maintaining the interdisciplinary connections developed in the past that have shown themselves to be so very fruitful. Such connections do not necessarily interfere with clarity in relation to disciplinary boundaries. As Bucholtz and Hall (2008: 403) point out: 'the development and spread of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, along with discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and many other approaches, has created an interdisciplinary foundation for the study of language, culture, and society. These fields do not come together under a single disciplinary banner but rather forge an alliance or coalition that fosters dialogue and collaboration between complementary approaches.' I also aim to point out the value of the social commitments behind many of the early studies (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2008), hoping that these can be maintained and strengthened. After introducing the main areas in sociolinguistics, I describe some of the most interesting and expanding fields. Then a discussion of possible future developments of this interdisciplinary area of enquiry follows. A few suggestions for further reading are also included.

The main research areas in sociolinguistics

Since the 1960s a very fruitful coalition has developed among scholars in linguistics interested in the relation between social phenomena and language, while sociologists and social scientists became increasingly aware of the centrality of language in any social and cultural phenomenon (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1968; Giglioli, 1972; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1964; Lambert, 1967; Laver and Hutcheson, 1972; Pride and Holmes, 1972). Giglioli (1972: 7–8) writes: 'Some linguists have become concerned with socially conditioned linguistic phenomena, and some social scientists have become more aware of the social nature of language. The term sociolinguistics refers to this mutual convergence.'

In the early days, sociolinguistics was an interdisciplinary, loosely defined field of research in which scholars, mainly in linguistics and sociology but also in anthropology, psychology, philosophy, education, gender study and so on, developed a wide variety of lines of research focusing on language and, mainly, on talk in interaction. Certainly, some perspectives in sociology and in philosophy have contributed greatly in creating an interest in language within the human sciences, in particular with regard to the importance given to discourse and situated practices (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1963; Giddens, 1976). For example, an interest in and a focus on language was developed within sociology and it converged with the interest in sociology and other human sciences that had independently developed in linguistics. In analysing talk in interaction, conversation analysts study the problem of order in ordinary conduct: the sociological problem *par excellence*. Sacks (1984: 21), defining the field of conversation analysis, says: 'I want to propose that a domain of research exists that is not part of any other established science. The domain is one that those who are pursuing it have come to call ethnomethodology/conversation analysis. That domain seeks to describe methods persons use in doing social life.' The interest in language fell within the disciplinary boundaries; in other words, conversation analysts had no interest in language *per se*, but language was of interest inasmuch as it could be informative in relation to the machinery that holds the social world together. It is evident that conversation analysis can be very interesting and useful to linguists; moreover, their investigations practically converge with those in pragmatics, but this is a sort of extra bonus.

Nowadays, some of these lines of research, born

at the boundaries of various disciplines in the human sciences, constitute defined fields of enquiry that are closely interrelated, such as linguistic anthropology (Duranti, 2009), ethnography of communication (Saville-Troike, 2002), pragmatics (Östman and Verschueren, 2009), conversation analysis (Schegloff, 2007), discourse analysis (Schiffrin et al., 2003), critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer, 2009), narrative analysis (Bamberg, 2007) and discursive psychology (Potter, 2007); in fact, looking back, the fertility of this interdisciplinary research area, based on discursive approaches to human sciences, is incredibly impressive.

In language studies, variationist linguistics had a very important role. In fact, in the USA, variationist sociolinguistics and quantitative approaches to linguistics (Labov, 1972, 2001) became prevalent in the field of sociolinguistics. While urban ethnography was at the start of Labov's work in language variation, its approach is substantially quantitative, therefore methodologically quite different from most other approaches in sociolinguistics. As Figueroa (1994: 71) points out 'Labovian sociolinguistics is not a theory of *parole*, nor is it a study of language use for descriptive purposes, but a study of language use for what it reveals about linguistic structure. For Labov language and social context are two separate entities and sociolinguistics correlates linguistic facts (phonology, morphology and syntax) with social facts (class, gender, age).' He studied how language changes in relation to specific cultural patterns and functional uses. Variants that have no linguistic significance have important social meaning and implications and they can mark a person as belonging to a definite social class, age group, or gender category; there can be very material consequences in terms of access to education, employment and so on tied to the use of different language varieties. Variationist sociolinguistics conceptualizes language as: 'An object possessing orderly heterogeneity' (Weinreich et al., 1968: 100). The most innovative aspect of Labov's (1966, 1972) work was to quantify the incidence of variants in different speech samples using large-scale quantitative studies based mainly on interview data. Studies in language variation nowadays draw on theoretical and methodological approaches developed in sociology, such as discourse analysis and conversation analysis, in order to show how linguistic forms are socially and contextually embedded; 'These fields (DA and CA) are nowadays part of the general sociolinguistic programme rather than lying outside it' (Coupland and Jaworski, 2009b: 8). In fact most of the more progressive contemporary research on variation uses qualitative approaches.

Variationist sociolinguistics certainly played an

important part in sociolinguistics studies. Bucholtz and Hall (2008: 402) point out in relation to the definition of sociolinguistics: 'By the mid 80s, sociolinguistics did not necessarily refer to the broad field originally conceptualised by Hymes and others; rather the term was often used, especially in linguistics departments, to refer to a quantitative approach to language and society. At this point a disciplinary division of labour had emerged whereby statistical analysis was primarily reserved for sociolinguistics (in this new, narrow sense) and ethnographic work was carried out largely (but not entirely) under the rubric of linguistic anthropology.' However, they also specify that the term, especially outside linguistics departments in the USA, was concurrently used: 'to denote a broadly interdisciplinary sociocultural approach to language' (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008: 402). On the other hand, Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2008: 535) acknowledge the relevance of quantitative approaches to dialectological analysis in sociolinguistics: 'variationist sociolinguistics emerged as a major force in shaping US sociolinguistic research'; but at the same time they recognize an important role for anthropological linguistics and ethnography of communication in contributing to contemporary sociolinguistics.

Ethnography of communication (Bauman and Sherzer, 1974; Fitch, 2001; Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972; Hymes, 1981) is an area of research that aims to describe how particular ways of experiencing and understanding the world are reflected in different ways of speaking. For ethnographers of communication, different patterns of talk are specific to definite cultural groups; communication is locally patterned and practised, and it is constitutive of all societal and cultural communities. Hymes (1974: 75) talks of communicative competence: 'Within the social matrix in which [a child] acquires a system of grammar, a child acquires also a system of its use, regarding persons, places purposes, other modes of communication, etc. – all the components of communicative events together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them.'

Above all, the ethnography of communication has contributed to the understanding of culture as essentially a communicative phenomenon, locally constituted through talk (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2008). Ethnographic studies have been conducted in different cultures as well as in a variety of social and institutional settings (courtrooms, health services, schools, etc.) aimed at describing specific communication practices (Bauman, 2004; Covarrubias, 2002; Urban, 1991). The approach focuses mainly on the situated uses of language and describes locally patterned practices of communication, including various gestural dynamics, silence,

visual signs, technologically mediated communication, etc. For linguists, ever since Hymes's (1974) programmatic consideration, the focal point has been the study of language in relation to society and social phenomena. Interesting in this respect is the terminological flux, noticed by Bucholtz and Hall (2008: 402) in relation to Hymes's early work: 'the elision of sociology as a contributor to sociolinguistics between the 1971 and the 1974 version appear to reflect the growing attention to disciplinary boundaries in this stage of the field development'. Nevertheless, there was material cooperation among scholars in sociology and anthropology; for example, in that very period, Hymes and Goffman were co-editors of the book series 'Conduct and communication' from the University of Pennsylvania Press, a series on approaches to face-to-face interaction.

The study of language contact (Clyne, 2003; Matras, 2009; Myers-Scotton, 2006; Thomason, 2001; Winford, 2003) is also considered by many scholars to be part of sociolinguistics (Coulmas, 2005; Coupland and Jaworski, 2009b; Holmes, 2008; Mesthrie et al., 2009; Wardhaugh, 2010). This topic of research investigated a variety of areas such as multilingualism, Creole studies, code-switching, language death and survival, language rights and language policies. As Matras (2009: 3) explains: "Contact" is, of course, a metaphor: language "systems" do not genuinely touch or even influence one another. The relevant locus of contact is the language processing apparatus in communicative interaction. It is therefore the multilingual speaker's interaction and the factors and motivations that shape it that deserve our attention in the study of language contact.'

Across the disciplinary boundaries most of these approaches share some common features: notably, an interest in fieldwork and a focus on interaction. Their view of language as produced in interaction corresponded to a strong commitment to use fieldwork, in particular ethnographic methods of data collection, and, especially in conversation analysis, 'an insistence on the use of material collected from naturally occurring occasions of everyday interaction' (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984: 2). From a linguistic perspective, the focus is shifted to language as an ongoing interactional production, that is, 'to actual talk and performance', as Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2008: 536) point out. A similar shift in focus occurs in sociology: social reality is conceived as socially constructed (Berger and Luckman, 1966).

In ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), social reality and social order are conceptualized as ongoing interactional achievements, the product of members' work: 'For ethnomethodology the objective reality of

social facts, in that and just how it is every society's locally, endogenously produced, naturally organized, reflexively accountable, ongoing, practical achievement, being everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely, members' work, with no time out, and with no possible evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement, or buy-out, is *thereby* sociology's fundamental phenomena' (Garfinkel, 1991: 11). Some of these approaches also had in common an interest in ethnographic methods of data collection and interpretative methods of analysis. The collection of data through interviews, ethnographic observation or participant observation were shared by many approaches in sociology, in linguistics, in anthropology and so on, and interpretative methods of analysis were increasingly recognized as being able to describe and understand better the complexity of human experience (Atkinson et al., 2001). It is precisely these common interests in fieldwork, language in interaction and qualitative methodologies that created a common ground in which cross-fertilization among different approaches became possible. It is precisely the collaboration and dialogue at the disciplinary boundaries that have proved to be so fertile. This legacy is worth preserving.

A concern with social justice was also central to many of the studies from the beginning: issues of unequal access to education (Cazden and Hymes, 1972) and the role of language in education and in relation to the reproduction of the social order (Bernstein, 1972). In fact such a concern can be identified as one of the motors of the fast development of this area of research in the 1960s. Many interactionists were committed to social justice and social transformation and their studies were often devoted to describing subjective interpretations of human experience and, in particular, that of socially excluded people (Denzin, 1992). Dorothy Smith produced a radical critical approach to sociology, institutional ethnography, taking up the 'women's standpoint' (Smith, 1974). This approach has a clearly emancipatory connotation: 'Institutional ethnography works from the local of people's experience to discover how the ruling relations both rely on and determine their everyday activities' (Smith, 2005: 44). Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) is also an approach motivated by social transformation that focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced by text and talk. The field of multilingualism and language rights is very closely linked to the struggle of people, in particular indigenous peoples, for recognition of their linguistic, cultural and human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1994). This legacy of social commitment is also worth preserving and developing.

Some interesting interdisciplinary areas in development

It is important to create and maintain material sites in which this fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation can develop. In fact, still very relevant and current is what Hymes (1974: 116) said in relation to the importance of the flexibility of institutional structures and interdisciplinary cooperation: 'Still, I do not think that the answer is to create new disciplines, even though sociolinguistics may have in it the makings of one. What is needed is opportunity to combine the kinds of training and knowledge required to pursue sociolinguistics problems, in short, flexibility in institutional structures. Whether the centre be a faculty of linguistics or anthropology or sociology, a school of English or some of these jointly, is secondary, it depends on local conditions and initiatives. What is primary, given recognition to the field, is the means to pursue it.' In fact, the interdisciplinary nature of this subject has been particularly problematic for sociolinguists at an institutional level, since they have been generally dispersed in a variety of departments: linguistics and other language-based subjects, but also in sociology, philosophy, anthropology, education, law, human geography, etc. Nevertheless, in times of budget cuts and departmental restructuring it could also become relevant, at the practical level, to seek interdisciplinary cooperation in order to ensure institutional viability for this area of research (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008: 422) and it would also be useful to open new fields of interdisciplinary cooperation. In actual fact, it is important to create material sites for interdisciplinary cooperation at an institutional level.

A developing area of enquiry, in terms of interdisciplinary cooperation, is the field of workplace studies (Arminen, 2001; Button and Sharrock, 1996; Drew and Backhouse, 1992; Heath and Luff, 2000; Heath et al., 2001; Hughes et al., 1993), which is part of a long-standing interest in ethnomethodology in studying interactions in different institutional contexts (Boden, 1994; Boden and Zimmerman, 1991; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Firth, 1995; Lynch, 1993; McHoul, 1990; Peräkylä, 1995; Travers and Manzo, 1997; Watson and Seiler, 1992). In various instances, conversation analysts and ethnographers work together with engineers in computer science, artificial intelligence, etc. on the development of new technology. It is aimed at describing in detail the management of work activities in which various technological means are employed; their contribution is primarily directed at practitioners and developers. In participatory design, for example, the importance of continuous interaction between developers and those who will use the technology is

stressed (Kensing and Blomberg, 1998), as users are considered: 'the ultimate arbiter of the system adequacy' (Suchman, 1993: vii). Ethnographic studies and conversation analytical studies of work settings are at present conducted in order to provide indications for the production of future technologies (Hartwood et al., 2002; Hughes et al., 1993; Jordan, 1996; Luff et al., 2000; O'Neill et al., 2005), together with studies that explore the potential of new technologies and new practices through the introduction of technological prototypes in an experimental situation (Büscher et al., 2007). In relation to future technology, it is worth mentioning the DESIS (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability) network. This is a network in which designers and various institutions, companies and non-profit organizations join together to create future technology in a sustainable future perspective, that is, to 'design' new systems that enable more sustainable lifestyles.

In relation to the pervasive globalization process the world is undergoing at present, a relevant area of research is the field of biocultural diversity, in which linguistic and biologists join together to study cultural diversity in relation to biodiversity. Ethnobiologists and ethnoecologists explore the relationships between language, traditional knowledge and the environment, studying place-naming and indigenous knowledge of local flora and fauna, for example. Maffi (2005) points out: 'By the mid-2000s, a small but significant body of literature on biocultural (or, in a less widespread version, biolinguistic) diversity has accumulated, and a related field of both scholarly research and practical applications is emerging.' This research is aimed at studying and assessing the threats to biodiversity and to cultural and linguistic diversity and at pointing out the consequences in terms of the social and environmental sustainability of such loss (Harmon, 1996). Among the 2005–8 objectives of the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) there is: 'improved understanding of the synergy between cultural diversity and biological diversity and on how this may be harnessed and applied towards shared values, tools, mechanisms and processes that enhance conservation and promote a more sustainable and equitable use of natural resources'.

Maintaining linguistic diversity (Kendal, et al., 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 2003) is the scope of international initiatives such as UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit and the AdHoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (Knapp and Antos, 2009: 371). The areas of research in the fields of multilingualism, language rights and linguistic human rights appear particularly significant

nowadays in relation to globalization processes. Two main types of language rights have been identified: expressive and instrumental rights. 'Expressive rights' denote language as the main marker of cultural identity and aim at ensuring the free and safe use of the mother tongue for minority groups as well as cultural reproduction. 'Instrumental rights' ensure that language does not become an obstacle in satisfying basic human rights and political participation. Knapp and Antos (2009: 374) explain: 'Linguistic human rights combine language rights with human rights. LHRs are those (and only those) LR, which, firstly, are necessary to satisfy people's basic needs (including the need to live a dignified life), and which, secondly, therefore are so fundamental that no state (or individual or group) is supposed to violate them.' Issues related to language rights and linguistic human rights are becoming increasingly relevant and the focus of discussion not only in research but also in political and educational debates in relation to migration and globalization processes.

Interest in the field of language endangerment (Dalby, 2002) has continued to grow since the publication of Fishman's (1991) *Reversing Language Shift*, and the special issue of *Language* (Hale, 1992) on endangered languages. Also increasing are the number of foundations which provide grants for language documentation, with the aim of 'preserving' threatened languages. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) criticizes monolingual reductionism and the tendency to describe linguistic diversity as a complication, an obstacle, a problem. Her original and pioneering work attracted criticism, particularly from those who wish to dissociate academic activity from political action, because of her deep commitment to language rights for dominated and oppressed minorities. Knapp and Antos (2009: 386) point out that: 'Linguistic diversity is the normal state of life in our planet.' In particular, in relation to immigration and multiethnic communities, the danger of enforcing linguistic integration is recognized and mother tongue medium education is recommended at all levels, including for secondary education. Multilingualism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995) would seem to be the most effective solution, particularly at the educational level. In fact, research has shown the importance of multilingual education, especially with young children. 'There is a clear risk that the policy of using English as a vehicular language may contribute to stunting, rather than promoting, academic and cognitive growth' (Williams, 1998: 63–4). The European Union's policy on multilingualism represents an interesting example of the effect on countries of maintaining language diversity and promoting language rights (EC, 2008). A recent OSCE document points out the importance of the

effective political participation of minorities in order to preserve cohesive and stable societies and prevent interethnic conflicts, and in this respect it encourages minority-language media broadcasting and the translation of politically relevant information into minority languages (OSCE, 2009: 5). In globalizing societies the challenge appears to be to promote social cohesion through respecting and sustaining their different linguistic and cultural components.

The development of these interdisciplinary areas of research, as pointed out above, is dependent on flexibility at the institutional level and consequent availability of jobs in these areas. The importance of sustaining interdisciplinary research at the institutional level can never be stressed enough, for example, the creation of specific laboratories sustained by different university departments, and based on definite interdisciplinary research objectives, would seem a feasible solution. The idea is to create physical spaces for researchers, in different disciplinary areas, to meet and cooperate on the basis of joint research projects. The availability of interdisciplinary spaces at an institutional level appears particularly relevant for sociolinguistics and language and society fields of enquiry, looking in particular at the most recent developments in the field. The next section discusses the recent directions of sociolinguistics, introducing some of the most recent and promising developments in this interdisciplinary area of research.

Where is this field of research heading?

In order to get a sense of the direction that this interdisciplinary field of research is taking, it is useful to look at what is disseminated as sociolinguistics and language and society nowadays. In fact, the idea is to infer such development not only from what is being written on the subject (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008; Coupland and Jaworski, 2009b; Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2008), but also by providing empirical and observational data on the development of the discipline, through an examination of the relevant journals and textbooks in the field. From the literature we get a sense of competing definitions of the term sociolinguistics: in the USA, there is a progressive identification of sociolinguistics with a quantitative approach in the study of language variation (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008), but at the same time Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2008) identify a role for anthropological linguistics and ethnography of communication in modern sociolinguistics. In Europe, though, the broadest definition appears to be current still and the terms language and socie-

ty and sociolinguistics are used interchangeably (Coupland and Jaworski, 2009b).

If we look at what is actually disseminated as sociolinguistics nowadays, the general impression is that sociolinguistics has remained largely the same: a broad interdisciplinary field. The research areas described above that developed in the 1960s are still present today. There are some interesting emerging areas, though, such as multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001), linguistic landscape (Landry and Bourhis, 1997), the sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert, 2010) and forensic sociolinguistics (Eades, 2010) and so on.

This impression is clearly inferred, for example, in the blurbs of two of the most important sociolinguistic journals. The *Journal of Sociolinguistics* blurb reads: 'The *Journal of Sociolinguistics* promotes sociolinguistics as a thoroughly linguistic and thoroughly social-scientific endeavour. The journal is concerned with language in all its dimensions, macro and micro, as formal features or abstract discourses, as situated talk or written text. ...' The *Language in Society* blurb reads: '*Language in Society* is an international journal of sociolinguistics concerned with language and discourse as aspects of social life. ...' They both present sociolinguistics as a broad interdisciplinary enterprise. Moreover, examining the articles published in the last 10 years in the two journals, we find that most of the articles can be classified into the four areas presented above, with a few exceptions and with some differences in the number of articles in each area.

In the journal *Language and Society*, the articles related to the study of language variation are not so numerous as the articles on ethnography of language and linguistic anthropology. The area of language in contact is well represented, but certainly a good proportion of the articles can be included in the field of discursive approaches to human sciences: discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, language and education, language and gender, etc. It is necessary to point out that categorizing the articles is not always straightforward since many of these areas are often interrelated and overlap; it has often been a matter of evaluating the prevalent themes in the articles. In the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, on the other hand, the articles on language variation are far more numerous than those on ethnography of language, or on the area of language in contact; however, in this journal a large number of articles focus on the area of discursive approaches to sociology and other human sciences.

Similar results are obtained by examining some of the main introductory texts in sociolinguistics published or reprinted since the year 2000 (Ammon et

al., 2006; Ball, 2010; Blommaert, 2010; Bratt-Paulston and Tucker, 2003; Chambers, 2009; Coulmas, 1997, 2005; Coupland and Jaworski, 2009a, 2009b; Halliday, 2007; Holmes, 2008; Hudson, 1996; Jaworski and Coupland, 2006; Mesthrie et al., 2009; Meyerhoff, 2006; Romaine, 2000; Trudgill, 2000; Wardhaugh, 2010). Topics in the four areas described above are present in almost all of the books with only a few exceptions. Chapters on language variation are almost always present and the field of discursive approaches to human sciences is frequently included. Ethnography of language and linguistic anthropology is present to a lesser extent, while the field of language in contact is extremely well represented. Creole studies, code-switching, dialectology, language death and survival, language rights, language policy and so on are almost always present.

The European Sociolinguistics Symposium is also worth mentioning. It is presented as the 'international conference on language in society' in the website presenting the 2010 programme. The Sociolinguistics Symposium was started in the 1970s by a group of British-based sociolinguists. It is one of the most important international conferences on language in society. Variationist sociolinguistics, which had an important role in the past, plays but a very small role in it nowadays. The Sociolinguistics Symposium has always been an inclusive initiative promoting a definition of sociolinguistics as a broad interdisciplinary area and this is probably one of the main reasons why it grew so rapidly.

From this empirical examination, sociolinguistics appears to result fairly consistently in a broad interdisciplinary area that is similar to the one that developed 50 years ago. There are newly emerging fields and it is noticeable that among the most promising there are interdisciplinary areas of enquiry such as multimodality (Kress, 2010). In fact, it appears that the main strength of sociolinguistics as an area of research lies in the cross-fertilization of different disciplines and this tendency is confirmed by the most recent developments, some of which are briefly introduced here.

Multimodality (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Machin, 2007; Norris, 2004; O'Halloran, 2004) is an innovative approach that explores the various and interconnected ways in which communication is achieved: through language, but also through gestures, body posture, images, sound, music, the use of space, etc. In this emerging field, specific domains of multimodal phenomena are explored. A variety of theoretical approaches have looked at multimodal communication and representation, including visual studies, anthropology, conversation analysis, socio-

cultural theory, sociolinguistics, new literacy studies, architecture and film making. (Constantinou, 2005; Goodwin, 1995; Heath, 1984, 1986, 2004; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; LeVine and Scollon, 2004; Norris, 2004; O'Toole, 1994). Language is not conceptualized in isolation, but 'The analysis and interpretation of language use is contextualized in conjunction with other semiotic resources which are simultaneously used for the construction of meanings' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001: 1). It appears that language studies may undergo a major shift in order to account for the great variety of meaning making practices. In fact, just recently multimodal analysis has become established as a largely applied methodical tool across discourse studies and other disciplines. Publications and conferences include an increasing number of contributions employing and developing this analytical framework: social semiotics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, etc.

An area of research that is also acquiring a similar increasing visibility is the field of forensic linguistics together with forensic sociolinguistics. Forensic linguistics (Coulthard, 2010; Gibbons, 2003; Gibbons et al., 2004; Olsson, 2008; Shuy, 2005; Solan and Tiersma, 2005; Tiersma and Solan, 2002) is a relatively new area; *Forensic Linguistics: International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law*, for example, was only established as recently as 1994. Forensic linguistics is an important, expanding area of academic endeavour in applied linguistics (Cook, 2003; Davies and Elder, 2004) devoted to the study of language and the legal system; it is increasingly visible at an institutional level. Major areas of study include: the written language of the law; the language of court proceedings and police questionings; the provision of linguistic evidence, legal translation and interpreting, etc. (Gibbons and Turrell, 2008: 1). The field of forensic sociolinguistics (Eades, 2010; Gibbons, 2006) explores how sociolinguistic knowledge can contribute to the legal process. Ethnomethodological and conversational analytical studies of the courtroom setting have contributed substantially to this field of research (Atkinson, 1981; Travers and Manzo, 1997). Many studies in this area investigate the role of language in the perpetuation of inequality in and through the legal process (Eades, 2010), continuing the long tradition of social commitment of many sociolinguistics studies.

Another two emerging areas of research that do not enjoy the same visibility and prominence but that are certainly worth mentioning are the field of linguistic landscape and sociolinguistics of globalization. In different ways they are both interested in globalization processes. Linguistic landscape

(Backhaus, 2007; Gorter, 2006; Landry and Bourhis, 1997; LeVine and Scollon, 2004; Shohamy and Gorter, 2009; Shohamy et al., 2010; Stroud and Mpendukana, 2009) refers mainly to the presence and relevance of languages in a given territory. 'The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs and public signs in governmental buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration' (Landry and Bourhis, 1997: 25). Linguistic landscape often refers to the social context in which more than one language is present. Studies are exploring how linguistic landscape may provide information on the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory and be consequently related to linguistic vitality. The study of multilingual landscapes promises to introduce a new perspective into theories and policies of multilingualism, and to provide essential data for a politics of language. The study of linguistic landscape is a relatively new development encountering a growing interest in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics.

Sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert, 2010; Coupland, 2003; Fairclough, 2006; Meyerhoff and Niedzielski, 2003) aspires to a substantial criticism of the basic concepts of sociolinguistics in relation to a changing reality. In the age of globalization language is no longer tied to stable communities – people move across the globe and language changes in the process: 'globalization forces sociolinguistics to unthink its classic distinctions and biases and to rethink itself as a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements' (Blommaert, 2010: 1). General principles found in the social sciences to be associated with globalization are explored in order to infer the theoretical and methodological implications for the study of language.

There are many other areas, which I have not mentioned, that are undergoing rapid development: for example, within pragmatics there is the field of 'linguistic politeness' (Bousfield, 2008; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Watts et al., 2005). Many studies have developed based on the dominant research paradigm established by Brown and Levinson (1978) with their work on politeness as a universal aspect of human interaction. The sociolinguistics of sign language (Lucas, 2001) is another interesting area. Since the early 1980s there has been an increasing recognition of sign language as a real language and as Lucas (2001: xvii) points out: 'the field of sign language sociolinguistics has virtually exploded'. Overall, looking at the new developments of this field of research on both sides, the sociolinguistics approaches to the study of languages and the discursive

approaches to human sciences, the vitality of sociolinguistics appears impressive.

Conclusion

This article has outlined the evolution of the interdisciplinary area of research of language and societies, highlighting the shifting meaning that the term 'sociolinguistics' has assumed over the course of time. It appears a very rich and rapidly expanding interdisciplinary field of research. On one hand, we can witness attempts at re-grounding linguistics on a new basis (see Figueroa [1994] for a detailed discussion of these issues); in fact the emphasis on linguistic variations, actual performance and so on are in clear opposition with the focus of analysis on essential forms and structures of linguistic theory (Chomsky, 1980; Saussure, 1916), the very definition of what is language is at stake. On the other hand, in a variety of disciplines – sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, etc. – some researchers start to see the study of language and verbal interaction as central to their endeavours, in relation to problems specific to their respective disciplines: for example, exploring the socially constructed nature of social order (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1992); describing the centrality of discourses in the definition of economies of power (Foucault, 1982) and so on.

Above all, the article seeks to underline the relevance of this interdisciplinary field of research and its incredible fertility. It highlights the importance of this legacy both for the study of language and the human sciences. It stresses the need of creating institutional space for this interdisciplinary area to grow and develop. Scholars not only in sociology and linguistics but also in many other disciplines, such as anthropology, philosophy and psychology, have developed a wide variety of lines of research to study the links between language and society. The collaboration and dialogue found at disciplinary boundaries appear, in fact, to be the most productive, and the social involvement of many scholars from the outset and their social commitment are also well worth preserving. In fact what is impressive, trying to look at this field of research as a whole, is the amount of interchange among various areas of research. Concepts and methodological tools are circulating among different research areas, they are reused, reinterpreted, to fit specific paradigms, with an evident effect of cross-fertilization.

Annotated further reading

Coupland N and Jaworski A (eds) (2009) *Sociolinguistics* (6 vols) London: Routledge.

Volume I: *The Sociolinguistics of Language Variation and Change*; Volume II: *Subjective and Ideological Processes in Sociolinguistics*; Volume III: *Interactional Sociolinguistics*; Volume IV: *The Sociolinguistics of Multilingualism*; Volume V: *The Sociolinguistics of Culture*; Volume VI: *Theoretical Perspectives in Sociolinguistics*.

This series provides a vast, up-to-date and critical overview of the interdisciplinary field of sociolinguistics.

Edwards J (2009) *Language Diversity in the Classroom (Bilingual Education and Bilingualism)*. Cleveland: Multilingual Matters.

This book is focused on language contact in classroom settings. The non-standard varieties that children bring in school have often been unfavourably perceived, giving rise to educational difficulties. The author discusses attitudes towards languages and dialects – with close attention to non-standard varieties – in particular Black English. The assumptions and intentions underpinning bilingual and multicultural education are highlighted.

Figueroa E (1994) *Sociolinguistics Metatheory*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

This is an excellent book to gain a critical understanding of the first developments in sociolinguistics. It presents critically and in detail the work of some of the main authors in sociolinguistics: Dell Hymes, William Labov and John Gumperz. The author addresses a central question, in examining those authors: what is the relationship of sociolinguistics to received linguistics?

Hogan-Brun GS, Mar-Molinero C. and Stevenson P (2009) *Discourse on Language and Integration*. Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

To promote integration and social inclusion in relation to rapidly increasing migration is one of the main challenge facing European societies. This volume presents a critical analysis of the debates on integration of migrants in Europe and challenges the assumptions underlying the new 'language testing' regimes: controversial policies imposing a requirement of competence in a 'national' language and culture as a condition for acquiring citizenship.

Kress G and Van Leeuwen T (2006) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

This book is considered a groundbreaking work in multimodality, an increasingly vital area of language and communication studies. It proposes the first systematic comparison between the grammar of language and of visual design, highlighting difference and similarities. This book presents a distinctive and widely applicable analytical approach to communication and visual studies. It provides a framework for understanding the meaning making machinery, considering a variety of modes.

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Isabella Paoletti is a researcher at the Linguistic Centre of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal. Her research interests include discursive and ethnographic approaches to the study of interaction in social and institutional settings. Among her recent publications is *Communication and diagnostic work in medical emergency calls in Italy*, *Computer Supported Cooperative Work* 18(2–3), (2009): 229–250, and she is editor of the essay collection *Family Caregiving: Relational and Institutional Issues* (New York: Nova Science Publisher, 2007). [email: isabella.paoletti@fsh.unl.pt]

résumé Cet article a pour objectif décrire l'évolution de ce champ de recherche interdisciplinaire. Cet article souligne combien il est important de préserver et prolonger les connections interdisciplinaires héritées de ce passé et l'engagement social qui motivent tant études en ce domaine. Après de décrire les principales domaines sociolinguistiques, les récentes directions son expliqués, en présentant des plus intéressants développements.

mots-clés approches discursifs a les sciences humaines ♦ contact de langages ♦ droites linguistiques ♦ ethnographie de la communication ♦ langage et société ♦ sociolinguistique de la variation ♦ sociolinguistiques

resumen Esta entrada a Sociopedia.isa tiene como objetivo describir la evolución de este campo interdisciplinario de la investigación. El artículo destaca la importancia de mantener y desarrollar el legado de conexiones interdisciplinarias desarrolladas en el pasado y los compromisos sociales que subyacen a muchos de sus estudios. Después de describir las principales áreas de la sociolingüística, también se resumen algunas recientes líneas de investigación y se introducen algunos de sus más prometedores desarrollos.

palabras claves enfoques discursivos de las ciencias humanas ♦ etnografía de la comunicación ♦ lengua de contacto y los derechos lingüísticos ♦ lenguaje y sociedad ♦ sociolingüística ♦ sociolingüística variacionista