

SUSAN CONRAD and DOUGLAS BIBER (eds.), **Variation in English: Multi-Dimensional Studies**. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001, 255 pp.

The editors make it clear in their introduction (pp. 1-42) that the early studies of register variation were mostly quite specific in orientation; however, newer computational analytic tools have now made generalizations much easier. The 14 articles in this book, half of which are authored or coauthored by the second editor, deal with register variation in English. Eight of the chapters were written specifically for this volume, while the remaining have been published previously. The editors explain that multi-dimensional methodology involves eight steps, the most important of which is to discover the appropriate linguistic features and their associated functions and to develop computer programs which identify these particular attributes (pp. 12-13). They emphasize that “the multi-dimensional approach was developed to analyze the linguistic co-occurrence patterns associated with register variation in empirical/quantitative terms” (p. 5). Although it was first used by Biber in 1984 (in his unpublished doctoral dissertation, A Model of Textual Relations within the Written and Spoken Modes, University of Southern California, Los Angeles), its refined version came to fruition in 1988 in his tome, Variation across Speech and Writing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Since one cannot do justice to these excellent contributions in a short review such as this one, I will comment on but three of them. Then I will list the remaining titles with authors. Needless to say, anyone interested in variation in English (synchronically and diachronically) would do well to consult these studies.

Douglas Biber and Jená Burges's “Historical Shifts in the Language of Women and Men: Gender Differences in Dramatic Dialogue” demonstrates, not unexpectedly, that authors tended (over a period of more than four centuries) to give more dialogue to characters of their own gender

rather than the opposite one (pp. 157-170).

Marie E. Helt's "A Multi-Dimensional Comparison of British and American Spoken English" confirms the widely held intuitions of both Britishers and Americans that British English is more formal while its American counterpart is more informal (pp. 171-183). It remains unclear to this reviewer what the author means when she states that "it is generally held that American English is more relaxed" (p. 171) and "slightly more abstract" (p. 181-182), although we certainly admit that one tends to hear a more abstract style in both the United Kingdom as well as the United States in University lecture halls rather than in pubs/bars.

Randi Reppen's "Register Variation in Student and Adult Speech and Writing" makes some interesting observations including a fairly obvious one, viz., abstract style is not present in student writing (pp. 187-199). Presumably, abstraction is one characteristic of adult style (and how to think abstractly).

The remaining articles are: Douglas Biber and Susan Conrad, "Introduction: Multi-dimensional Analysis and the Study of Register Variation;" Susan Conrad and Douglas Biber, "Multi-dimensional Methodology and the Dimensions of Register Variation;" Dwight Atkinson, "Scientific Discourse across History: A Combined Multi-dimensional/Rhetorical Analysis of the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London;" Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan, "Diachronic Relations among Speech-based and Written Registers in English;" Jeff Connor-Linton, "Author's Style and Worldview: A Comparison of Texts about American Nuclear Arms Policy;" Susan Conrad, "Variation among Disciplinary Texts: A Comparison of Textbooks and Journal Articles in Biology and History;" Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan, "Intra-Textual Variation within Medical Research Articles;" Jeff Connor-Linton and Elana Shohamy, "Register Variation, Oral Proficiency Sampling, and the Promise of Multi-Dimensional

Analysis;" Jennifer M. Ray, "Changing Gender Roles in Popular Culture: Dialogue in Star Trek Episodes from 1966-1993;" Douglas Biber, "Dimensions of Variation among Eighteenth-Century Speech-based and Written Registers;" and Douglas Biber, "On the Complexity of Discourse Complexity: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis."

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