

Scholarly Book Reviews

The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes

By: Patricia Freidrich and Eduardo H. Diniz de Figueiredo

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The Sociolinguistics of Digital Englishes (2016) by Patricia Freidrich and Eduardo H. Diniz de Figueiredo explores how sociolinguistics have been altered by current era of globalization, especially digital communication and the Internet. There are many books out there about sociolinguistics; however, this is the only one that incorporates how Englishes, in the digital age, have been influenced by new modes of communication, genre (e.g., wikis, blogs, and videologs) and digital/social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). Central topics related to sociolinguistics such as language choice, language shift, language ideology, multilingualism and many more are discussed in the context of world Englishes and internet communication.

The authors are careful and intentional with using the term world Englishes. They reference world Englishes scholarship and theory to bring attention to the fact that English can no longer be viewed as a single entity. Instead there are multiple local varieties. As English has expanded, the need to develop local norms for local uses have surfaced. They argue American and British English are important; yet, they are

not the only forms of the English language. Indian English, Nigerian English and many other Englishes exist.

The authors indicate that this book is intended to be a key reading for “all students studying sociolinguistics and digital communication or with an interest in language in the globalized world” (p. i). We believe it speaks to a broader audience: anyone who has interest in languages. The book is comprehensible and accessible to every reader who has an introductory knowledge of sociolinguistics. The authors shy away from theory-heavy linguistic explanations and definitions. New or unfamiliar terms are highlighted in bold letters and explained simply and meaningfully immediately within the text.

The book is divided into 9 chapters. All of the chapters start with a list of objectives, “This chapter will help you understand that...” (p. 1) and ends with questions for discussion. The objectives and discussion questions are detailed and to the point. While many important topics are discussed, this review will only highlight certain concepts.

Chapter 1, “Introduction: Language, Englishes, and technology in perspective,” looks into how English has become a global language of communication. The authors assert it is essential to investigate and revisit sociolinguistics in its new virtual context. They ask the questions, “Do people use English creatively when they communicate online?”, “Does the language change as a result of that?”, and “Does English influence, and is it influenced by, other languages it meets online?” (p. 4). The majority of information that exists on the Internet is in English. However, Internet not only serves native English-speakers (NES) but also functions as a lingua franca between people whose first language is not English. Many interactions online occur among nonnative English-speakers (NNES). Before digital communication it was not common to come across speakers of local varieties of English, unless one travelled. Now, local varieties reach a broader audience through movies and media.

The authors also provide examples of new and loanwords from English for computer terms in various languages: “cliquear” for “to click” in Spanish and “blogueiro” for “blogger” in Portuguese.

Chapter 2, “Language, society, and changing networks,” provides insight into how language is a “social entity, one that is used for interactions among people in diverse groups” (pp. 20-21) and influenced by “attitudes, technologies, political forces, and economic factors” (p. 21). It identifies how the Internet era changed the frequency, the form and the audience of people’s communication. In fact, the concept of social network introduced by Milroy and Milroy (1985) has a different

meaning now. It has now become a term used to connect to other people to share thoughts, feelings, images and many more on websites, blogs, online games, and other virtual spaces. Possibilities for intercultural communication have increased vastly. People in different parts of the world connect and will probably never meet in person while using English as the lingua franca.

Changes in oral and written modes of language are also explained. The new cyberculture, for instance, brought the use of emoticons, emojis, and new abbreviations such as lol (laughing out loud). Online gamers and bloggers have their own unique way of using English. The authors illustrate examples of newly created words such as *hashtag* and *selfie*. They include examples of new compound words such as *weblog* and the Internet slang terms *hacktivism* for activism via hacking. The chapter further deepens our understanding of language ownership and argues ownership is not inclusive to being a native speaker of that language.

In chapter 3, “Code-switching, code-mixing, and virtual Englishes,” provide extensive research and examples of code-switching, as well as code-mixing, that happens both in the real and virtual world. The more global online communication becomes the more choices language users have. Things previously done in real life are now being done virtually as evident by expressions such as “tagging”, “bookmarking”, and “trending”.

Authors also talk about heteroglossia, translanguaging, pidgins, creoles, and minority languages. They point out to the availability for resources online for minority/creole

language users if they want to hear stories or learn vocabulary in Gullah or in Jamaican Creole.

In chapter 4, “English knowledge, power, and Internet competence”, authors tackle how power operates in and through language. They cite works of Pennycook, Fairclough, and Foucault; scholars whose names we often associate with language is linked to power. They delve into Bourdieu’s concept of cultural and linguistic capital. They argue that even though a great variety of voices are heard through the Internet it is still a space predominantly for hegemonic voices. They critique that not all individuals around the world have access to the Web or digital literacies. Digital literacy is primarily acquired in countries that have higher socioeconomic capital. They regard having access to English language education similarly. Later, the authors talk about the possibilities virtual worlds created for English Language Teaching (ELT).

In chapter 5, “Changing varieties, discourse practices, and identity,” the authors demonstrate the importance of identity and how it is intertwined with language. They argue the topic of identity is already complex and it got even more complex in the virtual world. For example, people can choose different names (e.g., in online games and chats) and choose their *avatars* depending on who they wish to portray. Often international emerging businesses choose English names to attract more customers worldwide. The authors also mention how the Twitter and its feature of including only 140 characters forces users to develop “special linguistics abilities to accomplish that goal” (p. 93) of writing an effective message. They further take on the issue of language use in texting as well as where

Standard English stands now with digitalization of language.

In chapter 6, “The sociolinguistics of gender and race construction on the Internet,” the authors embark on inquiries that discuss issues of gender and sex, and race and ethnicity and their relation to language. They also delve into how these are affected by digital media. For example, people who are introverted in real life may find it easier to communicate virtually. Later they share data reporting on how men in general have more access to Internet than women worldwide and further unpack how gender and identity can easily be hidden and manipulated on the Internet. However, they explain the benefits of Internet also and how it has been “a place for linguistic gender-related innovation.” (p. 116)

The authors talk about how gender and racial awareness and activism have become stronger with the help of Internet. They discuss how linguistic prejudice takes place in relation to race/ethnicity and language. For example, some Englishes that are stigmatized like Chicano English and African American Vernacular English. They remind the readers that linguistic varieties associated with racial/ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic status tend to be the most marginalized.

Chapter 7, “Truthfulness and access in online communication,” discusses how the digital age provided linguistic innovation; however, it also had undesirable outcomes. Some examples provided are cyberbullying and trolling. They examine why people do what they do online due to factors of anonymity and invisibility in online spaces.

In Chapter 8, “Culture and webs of

significance,” the authors attempt to define what culture is and how it can be represented through “webs of significance,” which refers to people sharing knowledge and experiences socially. People share their knowledge and experiences using language. We must keep in mind that even though the majority of people living in the U.S. speak English, we cannot associate nations with a specific culture. The authors further state that online cultures are “more flowing, less stable, more fluid” (p. 153) and acknowledge how the U.S. and U.K. influence the English language in cyberspace to a certain extent. An extensive discussion of Kachru’s Concentric Circles model is also included.

Chapter 9, “Conclusions” focuses on addressing the following questions: Have languages, or specifically Englishes become liquid? If so, what was the role of the Internet in this liquefaction process? The authors explain what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman means by *liquid modernity*, “that our behaviors, relationships, trade negotiations, wants, and wishes transform so fast in present society that we do not have time to strengthen them enough for them to become robust and durable,” (p. 160). The authors assert that oral Englishes have remained strong and have not reached a “liquid” state. This is not the case for Englishes in a digital environment because they “are indeed a liquid state, as they do not seem to have a regular shape that is based on specific norms and institutions, or regular patterns that can be expected” (p. 164).

The chapter concludes by the authors anticipating how more fluid Englishes will become in the digital world. The Internet has made Englishes more malleable in which connects people across the globe every day.

Overall, Freidrich and Diniz de Figueiredo’s book constitutes an extensive effort to present up-to-date account of sociolinguistics research. It fills an important void in the field of sociolinguistics and provides a starting point for discussion that is needed to understand the impact of digitalization on the English language. As authors argue no other language has been impacted as much as English.

Conducting Qualitative Research of Learning in Online Spaces

**By: Hannah R. Gerber, S.S. Abrams, J.S. Curwood,
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In *Conducting qualitative research of learning in online spaces*, Gerber, Abrams, Curwood, and Magnifico lay the foundations of knowledge for doing just that: researching learning in online spaces. The world is increasingly flat and often online spaces allow researchers to conduct studies that exist across multiple modes of online communication; these online spaces require researchers to acquire the right tools to rigorously seek answers to their questions about how learning occurs online. The creation of online spaces has not only shifted research practices but also the means of expression and communication of their users. Digital literacies in multitude of forms, such as words, pictures, movies, sound, and the remix of it all are becoming the norm. This book helps researchers understand the digital world and think through ways in which researchers could connect with communities and access online spaces with minimal invasiveness to the communities. Additionally, this book will provide researchers with not only methods of gaining access, but also equip them with the right tools of research design, data collection, and analysis with augmented certainty of not breaching the participants' privacy. Through this work, the hard endeavor of qualitative research is rendered feasible.

In the start in his foreword, Anthony, J. Onwuegbuzie sets the tone among qualitative research movements drawing from Lincoln and Guba's (2011) historical positioning of qualitative research movements from the early 1900's all the way through Web 2.0 in the 2000's into what he terms "methodological innovation". Knowing about the historical movements gives the researchers a clear sight to their questions and research stances. Researching Web 2.0 use and online spaces, especially within and outside academe within informal learning frames, is of paramount significance to understanding contemporary learners and learning. The authors of this book provide salient information on how to do this and how to study online spaces and the flows of learning across these spaces.

In the first chapter, Gerber et al., displayed the complexities of research sites and called for using a multimethod approach to research. Networked field sites, the term they used to describe the interconnectedness and fluidity of spaces, lays a background to suggest adopting a pragmatic stance in researching the multiple online sites that are at times connected and different in forms. In Chapter

Two, Gerber et al., introduce online spaces and possible online data sources available for researchers. Chapter Three connects online spaces and learning theories, such as behaviorist, socio-cognitive, and socio-cultural. In this chapter, the reader understands that despite the advancement of technology, learning in online spaces is still tied to the theories of learning in social sciences. Chapter Four defines the profile of a qualitative researcher and digs into inhabiting online spaces with the complexities of collecting rigorous data ethically. Chapter Five explains trustworthiness and rigor in light of the philosophical paradigms of research. Chapter Six accompanies researchers into the analysis of data, as, when it comes to ethics in online research, the line between what is ethical and what is not can often be fraught within confusion. The last chapter pushes the traditional boundaries of qualitative research methods. It centers on research in new times; it broadens the sources of data and challenges the researcher to be creative in selecting the right tool for the right set of data.

Overall, the structure of the book is reader friendly and provides resources for both beginner and experienced researchers. It is, however, not meant for researchers with little to no experience with the traditional qualitative approaches. This work is a stepping stone into thinking through researching learning in online spaces. It is a great resource for every researcher interested in understanding and documenting how learning occurs in online spaces.