

## **Borrowing and Lending: Contributions to the Study of Language and Social Stratification across Sociolinguistics, Sociology, and Education**

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Interdisciplinary Language Variation Research  
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Sociolinguists' discussions of interdisciplinarity have often called for incorporating insights from other disciplines—whether to help us better analyze the structure of language (Chambers, 2003, p. 11) or model relationships among social, linguistic, and cultural factors (Coupland, 2001; Coupland, Bell, Jaworski, & Ylännä-McEwan, 1997; Hambye & Siroux, 2009; Rickford, 1986; Williams, 1992). Yet, the term “interdisciplinarity” implies a two-way exchange and a process of cultivating engagement (Carlin, 2002). How might sociolinguistics not simply benefit from borrowing from other disciplines but also lend insight into the complex relationship between language and society, with the goal of mutual advancement? To do so, sociolinguists still have much to learn about social variation, from trends in demography and mobility, to processes of inequality and discrimination, to factors in educational change. In return for borrowing, sociolinguists have essential insight to lend on language as a key mechanism that affects opportunity structures and life chances for speakers, with privilege and without.

To these ends, I describe three of my collaborative partnerships conducted at the intersections of sociolinguistics, sociology, and education. In the first project, which analyzed sociological interview data, Mallinson and Brewster (2005) and Brewster and Mallinson (2009) analyzed how restaurant servers' discourse about tipping drew on stereotypes related to race, class, and cultural capital to justify discrimination against patrons. In the second project, Macomber, Mallinson, and Seale's (forthcoming, 2010) sociological content analysis revealed how souvenir T-shirt slogans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina employed sexist language and misogynistic humor as a vehicle for coping with disaster and trauma in a public context. In the third project, Charity Hudley and Mallinson (forthcoming, 2010) synthesized research from education, sociology, psychology, and sociolinguistics. In partnerships with educators, scholarly findings were integrated into professional development workshops and school curricula to address inequalities for students who speak non-standard varieties of English.

Across these projects, the common thread is the centrality of language in dynamics of allegiance and exclusion, hierarchy and inequality—bringing new light to theories of social stratification. Indeed, social stratification is a prominent area of inquiry in sociological and educational research that involves language study. It is also a core interest for sociolinguists. Nevertheless, there are points of disciplinary divergence. For example, sociolinguists and sociologists operate with somewhat different understandings of the term “stratification” (Mallinson, forthcoming, 2010; Savage, 2005, p. 250). Disciplinary knowledge and training also yields different conceptual views on language.

For example, sociologists usually analyze language by focusing on what is said and the meanings conveyed, while sociolinguists often explain how linguistic variables and practices are central to negotiations of identity and power and, consequently, to processes of social stratification.

As Hymes contended, linguist “scholars as citizens” are obligated to understand hierarchical and unequal relationships between language, access, and opportunity (Cazden & John, 1985, p. xii). Indeed, this investigation of language and social stratification is central to sociolinguistics, sociology, and education. Despite apparent challenges inherent in interdisciplinary research, great opportunities remain to forge two-way partnerships and investigate these themes of mutual concern, for the greater academic and social good.

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