

***Sociolinguistic variation and language acquisition across  
the lifespan***

**Anna Ghimenton, Aurélie Nardy, and Jean-Pierre Chevrot (eds)  
(2021)**

**Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Pp 319  
ISBN: 9789027209078 (hbk)  
ISBN: 9789027259752 (eBook)**

*Reviewed by Hung Phu Bui<sup>a</sup> and Huy Van Nguyen<sup>b</sup>*

Second language acquisition research has been experiencing a growing interest in developmental sociolinguistics (Howard, Mougeon, and Dewaele, 2013). Studies on the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation have recently explored sociolinguistic variables and put forward the grounding for the interface between sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics (Bülow and Pfenninger, 2021). This interdisciplinary approach offers a promising basis for new research lines and novel concepts in the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation.

Proliferating research explorations into the acquisition processes of sociolinguistic variants have been inspired and enriched, opening pathways for further research in the field. A historical view indicates that interdisciplinary research on language was initially faced with challenges as language was traditionally assumed to be an independent system. In other words, the origins and ramifications of the cognitive capacities of humans were homogeneous; therefore, there was no difference in human cognition across cultures and social groups (Hung and Nguyen, 2017). This assumption motivated a line of psycholinguistic research on monolingual acquisition. That is, humans acquire a single language at a time, and the knowledge of language that humans acquire is universal. The earlier discussion shows conflicting assumptions between such initial cognitive

---

**Affiliations**

<sup>a</sup> University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam  
hungbp@ueh.edu.vn

<sup>b</sup> Hue University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Vietnam  
nguyenvanhuy@hueuni.edu.vn

approaches to language and sociolinguistics because sociolinguists theorize that languages across different social groups are heterogeneous (Saville-Troike, 2012; Bui, 2022). In particular, human languages are influenced by social structures. Therefore, the dynamics of language is the focus of sociolinguistics as it generates language variations. Also, inquiries into language acquisition processes describe how multilinguals acquire different languages and select alternatives from their knowledge of languages to express the same meaning and function (Ellis, 2013). The abovementioned discussions of the cognitive and social factors in language acquisition unfold the different approaches to language acquisition, suggesting that a joint approach may shed light on the processes of acquisition of sociolinguistic variation. As noted by Bender (2020: 1403), including ‘the role of culture and evolution for human cognition’ can allow ‘us to recognize the continued and ubiquitous workings of culture and evolution in everyday instances of cognitive behavior. Taking advantage of this reorientation presupposes a shift in focus, though, from human cognition as a general, homogenous phenomenon to the appreciation of cultural diversity in cognition as an invaluable source of data’.

This book, edited by Anna Ghimenton, Aurélie Nardy, and Jean-Pierre Chevrot, provides an in-depth understanding of the acquisition processes of children and adults in monolingual and multilingual contexts. Focusing on social and cognitive processes underpinning the language learning mechanisms, the book takes into account language varieties in bilingual and multilingual contexts. The aims are twofold: integrating sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic accounts, and highlighting research strands in the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation.

Inspired by the aforesaid novel school of thought, Anna Ghimenton, Aurélie Nardy, and Jean-Pierre Chevrot highlight the four major research strings in the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation and provide insightful perspectives to arouse academics’ awareness of this emerging interest. The first research string is concerned with how people acquire different social dialects in their first language during early childhood. In particular, these children live in communities that use the same language as their heritage language or the language used by parents at home. In this setting, children are exposed to dialectal varieties of the dominant language used in their relatively bounded society. Their language acquisition shifts from standardization processes to destandardization and restandardization when they grow up. In other words, their language use shows a progressive weakening of the conventional forms and exhibits informal varieties by adolescence. The second research string explores children’s language development in multilingual contexts. In this type of linguistic environment, children’s inventories of dialects in different languages develop, showing potential

mixing in their language use. The third research string deals with plurilingualism. Plurilingual speakers may mix different languages that they have acquired. This internal process of language variation may derive from both formal schooling and informal exposure to language use in daily through social interactions. New immigrants and international students indicate examples of informal encounters (Narcy-Combes, 2019). In *Sociolinguistic variation and language acquisition across the lifespan*, Anna Ghimenton, Aurélie Nardy, and Jean-Pierre Chevrot highlight an updated view that L1 and L2 speakers benefit from different types of scaffolding, a set of strategies to modify one's language (Hung and Nguyen, 2022). The fourth research strand explores the social and cognitive acquisition processes of dialects that take place throughout the lifespan as a result of immigration, employment change, education, professional development, or political shifts which makes one move from one community to another. According to Meisel (2011) and Saville-Troike (2012), first and second language acquisition processes show some parallels and differences.

The book consists of two main sections alongside a succinct comprehensive introduction and index. Section One comprises seven chapters concentrating on children's acquisition processes and sociolinguistic variation. Section Two presents adults' processes of second language and dialect acquisition.

In Section One, the first chapter, authored by Jennifer Smith, initially introduces fundamental concepts in first language acquisition by underpinning mechanisms underlying the natural acquisition process. Although children are exposed to standard language forms at a very early age, language itself has different forms. People may use variable forms to refer to the same thing. The interplay between social and linguistic constraints probably influences language use. The author digs into the underlying concepts in the acquisition of language variation as this process is not as simple as it was supposed to be. By integrating recent research findings, the author makes persuasive arguments on the complexity of the acquisition processes of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic variation as these processes are intersected. The author's thorough literature survey provides the grounding for her arguments and the following chapters. The other chapters in the first section reflect studies on the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation in different L2 contexts.

In Section Two, the first chapter (Chapter 8), authored by Vera Regan, provides insights into second language acquisition processes. The author also summarizes current trends in the field of sociolinguistic variation, which serves as introductory remarks and background information for readers to take adventures in the following co-authored and single-authored chapters on adults' dialect acquisition in L2 contexts.

In terms of audience, the book has been written mainly for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students, academics, and researchers. It signals new research trends bridging language acquisition and sociolinguistic perspectives in the era of multilingualism, which mainly takes place as a result of globalization and international immigration (Hung, 2021). The editors and contributors successfully integrate well-documented perspectives and updated research findings to suggest the interface between cognitive and social approaches to the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation. For the purpose of presenting life-long language acquisition processes, the organization of chapters describes how humans acquire language variation from early childhood to adulthood.

As the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation across the lifespan shows new trends in either language acquisition or sociolinguistics, this emerging interest may provoke concerns about research methodologies and the future of the related areas. In a successive edition, the editors may consider providing an additional description of methods that may help researchers delve into the topics of interest in this emerging field. As generally noted by the editors, a joint approach (cognitive and social) to language acquisition of variation may benefit both fields of language acquisition and sociolinguistics. What research methods can be used to investigate the emerging topics of interest in the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation may be helpful for the academic world. Also, it might be necessary to discuss the future development of this field as well as outline related topics of interest.

Overall, this book provides a clear vision of the acquisition of sociolinguistic variation across the lifespan. It provides theoretical background and research findings for interested readers. With persuasive arguments by integrating well-documented perspectives and recent research results, the editors and contributors pave a pathway for future research in the field. From our personal perspective, this book is a must-read for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students in the intertwined fields of Applied Linguistics and TESOL. It is also a good reference for language educators and parents in diverse contexts and should be popular in libraries' collections.

## References

- Bender, A. (2020) The role of culture and evolution for human cognition. *Topics in Cognitive Science* 12(4): 1047–1420. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12449>.
- Bui, H. P. (2022) Vietnamese EFL students' use and misconceptions of cohesive devices in writing. *Sage Open* 12(3): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221126993>.

- Bülow, L. and Pfenninger, S. E. (2021) Introduction: Reconciling approaches to intra-individual variation in psycholinguistics and variationist sociolinguistics. *Linguistics Vanguard* 7(2): 1–10. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2020-0027>.
- Ellis, R. (2013) *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Howard, M., Mougeon, R. and Dewaele, J.-M. (2013) Sociolinguistics and second language acquisition. In R. Balyley, R. Cameron and C. Lucas (eds) *The Oxford handbook of sociolinguistics* 340–359. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hung, B. P. and Nguyen, L. T. (2022) Scaffolding language learning in the online classroom. In R. Sharma and D. Sharma (eds) *New trends and applications in Internet of Things (IOT) and big data analytics*. Berlin: Springer. Doi: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99329\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99329_8).
- Hung, B. P., Vien, T. and Vu, N. N. (2017) Applying cognitive linguistics to teaching English prepositions: A quasi-experimental study. *International Journal of Instruction* 11(3): 327–346. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11323a>.
- Meisel, J. M. (2011) *First and second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Narcy-Combes, M., Narcy-Combes, J., McAllister, J., Leclère, M. and Miras, G. (2019) *Language learning and teaching in a multilingual world*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Saville-Troike, M. (2012) *Introducing second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(Received 11<sup>st</sup> August 2022; accepted 18<sup>th</sup> December 2022)