Introduction to the Book

This book is a collection of thirteen articles dealing primarily with the internal and external influences that affect dialect divergence and dialect convergence in European languages with well-established written and oral standards. The volume is one of several outcomes of a European Science Foundation funded international research “network” which met several times between 1995 and 1998. Many of the chapters were commissioned by the three editors, who open the book with an extensive introduction. The remaining twelve chapters are divided into three sections: Part I. “Convergence, Divergence and Linguistic Structure,” Part II. “Macrosociolinguistic Motivations of Convergence and Divergence” and Part III. “Microsociolinguistic Motivations.”

The primary concern of the collection is with developing suitable theories to explain the phenomena of dialect divergence and dialect convergence (hereafter “dd” and “dc”), especially in languages possessing a highly developed standard variety. As the editors state at the end of their introduction chapter: “Especially with respect to the linguistic aspects, the overall aim is to proceed from the idiographic level, i.e. the level of the description of the unique, particular, situation-specific findings regarding single dialect features, to the nomothetic level, the level of general, preferably universal, principles underlying processes resulting in dc and dd” (p. 48, italics the authors’). Although the advertising blurb used on the website and book jacket states: “Dialects are constantly changing, and due to increased mobility in recent years, European dialects have ‘levelled’, making it difficult to distinguish a native of Reading from a native of London, or a native of Bonn from a native of Cologne,” in actuality this book is not a discussion of reasons why local dialects are being lost in Europe (and many articles document the retention of non-standard features, not their disappearance), but rather an investigation of the mechanisms of contact-induced dialect change, whether that be levelling (convergence) or the emergence of new forms (divergence).

Though each chapter (other than the first introduction chapter) does discuss the particulars of one or more case studies, those who might come to the book with an interest in the history of English, French, Danish, etc. will likely be disappointed, as the book is not a survey of European
dialects. Nor is the book intended as a handbook for how to do dialect research (in Europe or elsewhere). For those working on unwritten, nonstandardized languages, there is little in this book that is directly transferable; however, the book may be of value to other linguists in providing a broader understanding of dialect change tendencies and possibilities in societies in which there is a (or several) well-established written and oral standard.

Overview of dc and dd

For those without the time to read the entire book, the editors have provided a comprehensive overview of the book and the field of dd and dc studies in the first chapter. In this book “dialect” is defined as “a language variety which is used in a geographically limited part of a language area in which it is ‘roofed’ by a structurally related standard variety; a dialect typically displays structural peculiarities in several language components (cf. Chambers and Trudgill 1998:5), though some of the authors in this book deal mainly with phonetic (or ‘accent’) features. Usually dialects have relatively little overt prestige and are mainly used orally” (p. 1). This definition seems to exclude dialects that lack a structurally related standard variety, or those for which a standard has only recently been established and is still not broadly developed. Also this definition makes no statement about intelligibility. In the articles of the volume, mutual intelligibility of the “dialects” roofed by the same standard seems to be taken as a given (e.g. in interviews and experiments involving conversation between speakers of two dialects, full comprehension of content is always assumed). Though the title of the book “Dialect Change” implies a rather broad overview of dialect issues (to this reader at least), in actuality the book is focused quite narrowly on the issues of why some dialects become “leveled” to a standard, whereas others seem to emerge and grow in distinctness even in the context of a universally understood standard—the relationship between language-internal structural features that produce, or at least favor, certain phonetic developments and language-external social factors that cause certain features to spread across geographic areas and/or dialect continua.

The first chapter provides a brief historiography of dc and dd, discusses how the concepts of dd and dc relate to leveling, koineisation, accommodation, pidginization, creolization, mixed languages, dialect shift and dialect death, provides an overview of dc and dd research methodologies and surveys some of the more common research questions and hypothesis. The authors lament the fact that:

Until recently only few representatives of formal linguistic theory were concerned with language variation (let alone with dc or dd) which is a result of their outspoken preference for (1) their own intuitions regarding their standard language, and, in so far as the object of their investigations is not their own standard language; for (2) the ‘armchair method’, i. e. the fact that they hardly ever study ‘undocumented’ language systems (cf. Kiparsky 1972:193)—which is equally at the expense of nonstandard varieties. The number of theoretically oriented linguists who do fieldwork is still very limited. (p. 17)

Thus, there is clearly a contribution to this field that could be made by those of us who do regular fieldwork in ‘undocumented’ language systems.
The authors note the value of formal linguistics in the field of dd and dc, especially in that “linguistic analysis is indispensable when it comes to answering the question of if, and to what extent, similarities and differences in changes between related dialects are motivated by shared or even universal structural tendencies, or, rather, by common external factors.” Also, “linguistic analysis can counteract the ‘atomist’ approach to dialect features which is typical of traditional dialectology in its tendency ‘to treat linguistic forms in isolation rather than as parts of systems or structures’ (Chambers and Trudgill 1998:33)” (p. 18). As we research related dialects and try to sort out which similarities are the result of a period of common development (perhaps leading to greater intelligibility) and contact (perhaps leading to greater surface similarity), it’s important to remember the possibility that similarities in related dialects could be a result of neither of these, but rather the product of unrelated, simultaneous development processes. Only by studying the relationships of dialects and their sociolinguistic environments as complete systems (rather than just counting percentages of similar lexemes, particular isoglosses, etc.) can we really understand the relationships of related dialects and the likelihood of their convergence or further divergence.

**Dialects and Standard Varieties**

Those of us in SIL and similar organizations are usually in the position of working with nonstandard “dialects” or only recently or partially standardized varieties. How will the decision to choose a specific dialect (or create a mixed dialect) as a standard affect the development of that speech variety, as well as those other dialects not chosen as the standard? Standard varieties, especially when reflective of the speech of the higher classes and considered more prestigious (at least by overt measures), may tend to suppress natural phonetic tendencies such as contraction, deletion, monophthongization and diphthongization (p. 20). The spread of a standard may result in the development of regional varieties of the standard language and/or relatively standardized versions of regional dialects (p. 24). This phenomenon is examined by G. Berruto in the third chapter, through the interplay between Italian and regional dialects of Italy (“Dialect standard convergence, mixing, and models of language contact: the case of Italy”). Berruto regrets that “Unfortunately, up to date little has been written about code-switching between a standard language and a primary dialect” (p. 89), and goes on, in this article, to evaluate one model which has been proposed, Myers-Scotton’s Matrix Language Frame Model (cf. Myers-Scotton 1993), but ultimately finds it inadequate to explain the relationship between Standard Italian and the Italian dialects. Berruto’s discussion has application to other language communities whose dialects have their own strong cultural and literary traditions. For Berruto, true convergence occurs when both language varieties are affected by their contact—when the dialect change is only one directional, such as in the case of a prestigious standard assimilating a low prestige dialect, the term “advergence” is more appropriate. Berruto concludes the chapter by discussing the possible ramifications of contact between two language systems: true convergence, in which both varieties move toward each other until they are indistinguishable, a mixed or fused new language resulting from the contact of the two languages, complete language shift (dialect obsolescence), in which one dialect completely gives way to the other. But Berruto also acknowledges that “two systems can remain for centuries in continuous contact, and display the range of phenomena linked to such contact to a more or less marked degree and in a virtually stable manner” (p. 94).
In addition to the historic “primary dialects” (those with their own literary and cultural traditions that were simply not selected by history or authorities as the national standard), “regional varieties of the standard language can result from deliberate, but only partially successful, attempts by dialect speakers at learning the standard variety” (p. 25). In areas of the world where some regions have a relatively short history of use of the national standard, and yet that standard is now being actively promoted and brings economic advantages, the formation of such regional versions of the national standard are likely.

On the other hand, in areas in which the standard varieties have been taught for centuries and now virtually all the population is fluent in the standard form, the result may be a reduction in our ability to distinguish between various regional varieties. As the editors write in their introduction:

Probably more common in present-day Europe, where most adults more or less master a variety of the standard, is the situation in which the standard picks out regional (dialect) features, often of a phonetic nature...from a situation in which traditional dialects, on the one hand, and the national standard language, on the other, were kept neatly apart both on the level of the individual speaker and on the level of the speech community at large, in many parts of Europe a situation is developing in which variants or even varieties actually fill up most parts of the structural space between dialect and the standard. Bellmann 1998 has described this development as a change from diglossia, with linguistically and contextually distinct varieties, to ‘diaglossia’, a more fluid repertoire. (pp. 25-26)

In such an environment the rules for which dialect/sociolect is appropriate for which situation or content become even more subtle and difficult for an outsider to master.

In addition to the influence of the standard variety, there is also the role played by isolation or sudden contact between multiple nonstandard varieties. The massive shift that first occurred in Europe and now is taking place in most other parts of the world from rural, agrarian “community” to urban, industrial “society” seems to level some dialect differences due to new contact patterns, while at the same time giving rise to new dialects which diverge from both the standard and the traditional rural dialects. Some migration patterns have led to speech communities dislocated geographically from their original communities, and thus they end up being “roofless,” with little direct contact with the original standard variety (though perhaps an historical allegiance to it) (p. 30). Old and new political boundaries also affect dialect divergence and convergence, often causing similar, mutually intelligible varieties that fall on opposite sides of a border to converge toward two different standards, and thus diverge from each other. Often this is an intentional goal of governments who feel the need to increase allegiance to the nation and decrease solidarity with speakers across the border (p. 31).

**Linguistic Research into Dialect Change**

J. Kallen, the author of the second chapter, entitled “Internal and external factors in phonological convergence: the case of English /t/ lenition,” argues that it is primarily language-external social,
Comparing social and linguistic factors, I argue that a system of internally motivated lenition—which, if motivated by a given universal principle, should lead to a high degree of convergence among related dialects—is more illusory than real. I suggest, instead, that even speech communities which share a process that is favored by general principles can show significant divergence in linguistic behavior. This relationship of convergence and divergence suggests, at least in the case considered here, that general principles of phonology can, at best, only define points which are open to change, and establish probabilities that change—if it happens—will operate in a particular direction (pp. 54-55).

While phonology may constrain the type and directionality of change, we must look to social factors to understand why certain changes take place in some dialects and not others, and to predict the likelihood of future convergence or divergence.

We who research the relationship of less-studied dialects and languages often bemoan the fact that our analyses are often limited to lexical and phonological comparison. We know that syntactic and morphological differences are also important to understand, both for classification and for predicting likelihood of using common vernacular language tools and literature, but we are constrained in our ability to access and analyze these differences, often due to limited research exposure and our lack of personal fluency in the dialects concerned. The fourth and fifth chapters provide us with some ideas of how to research grammatical and discourse dialect differences qualitatively and quantitatively.

The fourth chapter, by L. Cornips and K. Corrigan, provides an example of a means of investigating grammatical differences, in this case, comparing the Limburger and Rhineland dialects Dutch (of Germany), and Standard Dutch and Standard German. Cornips and Corrigan employ and recommend an approach that seeks to employ both the frameworks of generative and variationist linguistics (as exemplified by Chomsky and Labov, respectively), which they feel have been needlessly thought to be in opposition to each other in this area. Cornips and Corrigan compare data gathered by the 1885 Willems dialect questionnaire distributed throughout the Dutch-speaking areas of Belgium, Rhineland and southern Netherlands, with data from similar questionnaires distributed in the 1990s and discover that over a century the Limburg dialects in the Netherlands have converged toward each other (though not toward Standard Dutch) in now allowing a much broader use of the reflexive *zich*, whereas Rheinische, very similar to Limburg Dutch in the nineteenth century, has converged toward Standard German in only allowing use of the reflexive *sich* for impersonal middle constructions (but not for adjunct or instrumental middles).

The fifth chapter, by Jenny Cheshire, Paul Kerswill and Ann Williams, recognizes that “sociolinguistic analyses of variation in discourse and, especially, in syntax remain relatively scarce. We still do not know, therefore, whether generalizations concerning the spread of sound change apply equally well to other types of language change, nor whether stable linguistic variation in phonology, grammar and discourse features has a similar sociolinguistic distribution within a community” (p. 135). Although there have been various intuitions expressed about the
relationship between phonetic/phonological variation and syntactic/discourse variation (some believing that we should expect to see less variation in syntax and morphology than at the phonetic level, others, like Labov, believing that “change in the surface phonetics may be the driving force behind the majority of structural linguistic changes” p. 136), there has been little empirical research done to demonstrate the truth of these claims, due to the fact that “variation in syntax and discourse features poses methodological and conceptual problems that prevent us from drawing realistic comparisons with phonological variation.” (p. 137)

**Historical and Sociological Factors**

The sixth chapter is a readable historical explanation for the differences between the standard languages and leveling of dialects of Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Though from the outside, these three nations appear similar in many regards (indeed were one kingdom from 1397 to 1523), various historical factors led to quite different views on the relationship of regional dialects and the standard as illustrated by the difference between a 1998 Danish law “obliging all public servants to follow regulations [regarding standard Danish] laid down by the language board” (p. 176) versus the Norwegian Primary School Act of 1969 that requires that “In their oral training, pupils may use the language they speak at home, and the teacher must give due consideration to the speech of the pupils in his vocabulary and manner of expression” (p. 194).

The seventh chapter investigates the process of new dialect creation in places where everyone (speaking the language in question) is an immigrant—specifically focusing on the creation of New Zealand English during the past two centuries and the creations of a dialect for a city created from nothing in southeast England (Milton Keynes) in 1967. The eighth chapter is an interesting study of German speech islands (such as the Mennonites of Siberia and North America, and German settlers in South America), focusing on places where these dialects have seemingly started to converge toward each other (though not necessarily toward Modern Standard German, with which these communities have little contact, hence these are “roofless” dialects), and on places where convergence has not occurred (especially Mennonite varieties) and distinctive characteristics of quite small speech islands that have survived. Though these dialects have developed on their own courses, some of them preserve elements of the older German case system lost in modern Standard German. The author concludes that while social factors certainly play a large role, “language-internal typological drift” accounts for some of the apparent convergence; that is, these isolated dialects have gone through case and inflection simplification processes that larger Germanic languages (German, Danish, English) have already undergone, and therefore some of the similarity between these speech islands may not be due to contact-related convergence (p. 235).

The middle section of the collection on Macrosociolinguistic motivations is concluded by articles on the effects of political boundaries and urban centers on dd and dc. C. Woolhiser (chapter 9) examines the effects of the relatively recent (since 1945) political boundary between Poland and Belarus, which divided Belarusian speaking communities. He concludes that though the linguistic relationship between the local dialect and the national standard (the “roofing varieties”) accounts for some of the different divergence/convergence patterns on the two sides of the border (i.e. the local Belarusian dialects are more similar linguistically to the national languages of Belarus, which are Russian and Standard Belarusian, than to Polish), equally important is the
“degree of success of national institutions in instilling in local populations a higher level of solidarity with co-nationals than with citizens of a neighboring state” (p. 262). In this particular study, he also finds confessional identity (i.e. Catholic vs. Orthodox) to be highly correlative with linguistic attitudes and use.

J. Taeldeman (chapter 12) examines the role the Belgian city of Ghent plays in the diffusion (or rejection) of dialect innovations in the East Flemish dialect of Dutch which surrounds it. Taeldeman concludes that the “gravity model” developed by Trudgill (1974) in which mathematical measures of various factors which seem to affect an urban center's ability to influence surrounding dialects are calculated, is not, in and of itself, adequate to explain the complicated relationship between the Ghent subdialect and the larger East Flemish dialect. (e.g. There are aspects in which it appears the Ghent dialect has later rejected innovations it introduced into Eastern Flemish, apparently in an attempt by urban speakers to distinguish themselves from the surrounding peasants.) Taeldeman argues that in addition to the factors quantified in the Gravity model, social-psychological (attitudes) and structural-linguistic factors also play a role, but these are probably not quantifiable, at least not in a way that can be integrated into the gravity model (p. 283).

Attitudes, Networks, Identities

As language surveyors know well, “social psychological factors,” that is language attitudes and community identity issues, are equally important for explaining how and why dialects converge or diverge. The authors acknowledge that “most research on language attitudes is experimental”; indeed there are few things harder to prove empirically than the attitudes of an individual, let alone those of a community. As they say “In the case of language attitudes...psychology and language behavior do not necessarily mirror each other” (p. 39). The eleventh chapter, by T. Kristiansen and J. N. Jørgensen, deals with the disparity between the overtly stated and indirectly revealed attitudes toward the old standard Danish (High Copenhagen), young standard (Low Copenhagen) and Local Danish among adolescents of Næstvad, Denmark. Kristiansen and Jørgensen conclude that attitudinal research is vitally important for understanding dc and dd, but recognize that “although most scholars seem to acknowledge the relevance of attitudinal factors for language change, few include separate analyses of attitudes in their projects” (p 301). This is apparently due to the “serious problems of validity and reliability connected with attitudinal data.” (p. 302). Though language dialect surveys have often not ignored the language attitude issue, certainly those of us who have attempted this type of research recognize there is room for improvement in our methodology. However, as Kristiansen and Jørgensen argue, this is not a reason to ignore the issue of language attitudes, but rather we should improve the validity of our data collection and analysis because they believe that “people's striving for a positive social identity is the critical factor underlying variation and change” (p. 302).

J. Villena Ponsoda examines the usefulness of quantitative social network analysis in explaining the distribution of certain Southern Spanish dialect features in the Spanish city of Malaga in the twelfth chapter and concludes that though social network analysis misses certain key independent variables, such as the speaker’s social history, when used for explanatory purposes, it does have great usefulness as a research tool. “Thanks to the [consideration of the correlation
between speech and network markers], the researcher gains access to the speaker's choices at the individual level and can then perform an interpretive analysis” (p. 334).

Similarly, the final article in the book, written by two of the editors, Auer and Hinskens, argues that the Accommodation Theory of dialect change (that change occurs when (1) short-term accommodation occurs in face-to-face exchanges, (2) long-term accommodation takes place in the dialects of key influencers, (3) language change occurs when the rest of the population adopts the changes the influencers have adopted) is not adequate to account for dialect change. Were Accommodation Theory adequate to explain dd and dc, we would expect that appropriate social network analysis could predict dialect changes (as a complete mapping of all face-to-face exchanges should be able to explain who would accommodate to whom and whose accommodation would become long-term and ultimately influence the entire community). In a study carried out by Hinsens among speakers of Limburger Dutch, some speakers seemed to diverge from rather than accommodate to the dialect features of their interlocutors. In examining research done on speakers of Upper Saxon German (from the former East Germany/GDR) who migrated to the former West German (FRG), Auer and Hinskens conclude that an identity-projection model (e.g. the “acts of identity” model of Robert LePage) better explains the data of how different groups of East German migrants lost or retained Saxon features depending on their attitudes toward their experience of integration (or nonintegration) into West German society. As the authors write: “Several findings suggest that the driving force behind change in the individual, and also in the community, is not imitation of the language of one’s interlocutor but, rather, an attempt to assimilate one’s language to the possibly stereotyped characteristics of a group one wants to be a part of, or resemble” (p. 356). Given that the speaker, and/or community, desires to integrate or resemble a certain dialect group, then short- and long-term accommodation become important processes in dialect change. But we cannot assume that numerous social network links will automatically lead to dialect accommodation and dialect change.

The articles in this book seem strongest in their reviews of previous literature and the authors’ integration of specific phonological, morphological, attitudinal and language-use data into larger theoretical frameworks. The works cited provide a rich bibliography of dialect research sources for further reading.

My main disappointment with the book was that although the abstract boasts that each chapter “is based on original research” (chapters 10 and 12 seem to be based entirely on previously published research), the details of the methodology of the research were seldom discussed at all in these chapters, let alone explained in detail. As a reader I felt unable to evaluate the strength of the data upon which the author's conclusions were based and less able to derive ideas for how to construct similar research projects in other language situations. Woolhiser's article on the Polish-Belarusian border dialects was better than most in explaining how he gathered his data through university student researchers and how respondents were selected (though even he does not provide the reader with the complete questionnaire and interview schedule he used). Of course, the authors and editors were limited in the content they could include, and some of the research on which these analyses have been based has already been published in more complete versions elsewhere. Nonetheless, this book would have been more valuable to my research if more details of sample selection, questionnaire design and data analysis had been shared with the reader.