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On Penelope Eckert's (2018) *Meaning and Linguistic Variation*

Contextualizing the Third Wave in Variationist Sociolinguistics: On Penelope Eckert's (2018) Meaning and Linguistic Variation

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1. Introduction

The present paper started its life as a project for a conventional book review of Penelope Eckert's *Meaning and Linguistic Variation: The Third Wave in Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). However, it soon became clear that my own long-standing engagement and grappling with sociolinguistic variation study in its various incarnations was creating the urge to go beyond the usual exercise of a brief summary and evaluation. The result is an extended commentary, and one which openly places the discussion of Eckert's book within my own academic (interactional sociolinguistic, European) perspective and context.[1]

I begin with an overview of the book's basic set-up and configuration (section 2). A detailed summary follows that attempts to capture and distill Eckert's perspective as put forth in her book (section 3). Section 4 then consists of a critical reflection on the book that discusses its notable contributions as well as some potential for expansion. The latter also takes a more general view on the Third Wave in variation studies. In essence, I argue that Third Wave research would greatly benefit from better integration with the research tradition of interactional sociolinguistics, both in terms of theory and analysis. Rather than as a mere critique, this is intended as a response to Eckert's proclamation that "[w]hat I have presented here is just an idea, and an expectation that others will carry the [Third Wave] project

[1] I cordially thank the *Views* editorial board members for their helpful, insightful, and inspiring comments on a first version of this paper, and for providing the encouragement and room to pursue and expand my undertaking in the present form and beyond. I am, of course, responsible for all remaining shortcomings.

forward" (p. 164). Proposing to contribute a share to this project with my own reflections, I, like Eckert, look forward to the conversation continuing.

2. Overview of the book

Eckert's *Meaning and Linguistic Variation* is a book that the author herself characterizes as an "intellectual autobiography" (p. xi) and "memoir" (p. 193). As such, it is not made up of all new content, but rather uses as its basis a collection of journal papers and book chapters, which Eckert selected under the premise that they "best illustrate my thinking over time" (p. xii). While these papers constitute the book's "skeleton" (p. xii), each is embedded in a newly written textual framing that provides reflective context, featuring notably Eckert's personal biography and experience at the time of study compilation and/or writing, and the evolution of her thinking in transition to the next piece. Ultimately, a narrative arch is created that spans Eckert's own involvement in the three 'Waves' in the development of sociolinguistic variation studies, which she first identified in 2005 (and since has worked to specify further; see notably Eckert 2012, which is not reprinted in the book).

To quickly recap the theoretical basics, the original 'First Wave' investigated sociolinguistic variation as a correlate and reflection of macrosocial categories like region of origin, social class, gender, and ethnicity. The 'Second Wave' sought to fine-tune these categories, and to explore their ramifications in terms and on the level of smaller, local social groups, notably by means of ethnography. The 'Third Wave' shifted the focus from variation as a reflection of social dynamics to variation as a device used agentively by social groups and their individual members to construct and navigate their social worlds.

Eckert's book consists of 192 numbered pages of body text (plus front and back matter). The text is divided into three parts, entitled "Beginnings" (chapters 1-2), "My participation in the Second Wave" (chs. 3-7), and "The Third Wave" (chs. 8-11). About a quarter of the body text is recognizably new; and the remaining three quarters are reprinted. The chapters feature either one reprinted paper (chs. 1-6 and 9-10) or two of these (chs. 7 and 8). Only the closing chapter 11 consists of entirely new text. A reference list of the reprinted papers is provided in the acknowledgements (p. xiv).[2]

Identification of new text is easiest at chapter beginnings, because the paper titles are clearly set off from preceding supplementary introductions. At the end of chapters, boundaries are less prominently marked with five asterisks between reprinted and new paragraphs (though not all papers feature this kind of 'postscript'). Asterisks seem to function simultaneously as indicators of text omission, because the reprints do not feature back matter like individual reference lists: these are incorporated into a comprehensive reference section at the end of the book. Otherwise, the reprints appear faithful, except for minor details such as the deletion of abstracts, adaptation of some figure headings, and the fact that any endnotes in the originals were converted into footnotes in the book.

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[2] See also the list of references at the end of the present paper. Note that the ordering of papers in the book is not necessarily chronological by publication date.

3. Book Summary

Part I of Eckert's book ("Beginnings") opens with a brief recap of her biography and beginnings as a scholar, up until her master's studies at Columbia University in New York in the 1960s and previews the inspiration she found in the work of William Labov. These first couple of pages induct the reader into the tone and drift of the newly added text passages, being written rather informally and featuring bits of quite personal information (such as that Eckert was not a stellar student in high school and college).

The first pages of Chapter 1 then lead up to the first reprinted paper, recounting how Eckert became interested in French dialectology (via the *Atlas linguistique de la France*, Gilliéron & Edmont 1902-1910) and specifically in the southern varieties. She ended up doing fieldwork on these for her dissertation, in the Pyrenean commune of Soulan. The ensuing paper, "The paradox of national language movements" (1983), discusses the sociopolitical complexities and tensions arising in language preservation efforts in the example of Occitan (to which the varieties spoken in Soulan belong). According to Eckert (citing Fishman 1973), the crux lies in the fact that a language preservation endeavor over a large region such as the Occitanie forces a certain degree of standardization that ends up putting a main variety selected for concerted promotion at odds with local, on-the-ground language uses, particularly in rural communities, and both in terms of form and prestige. Ultimately, speakers of the local 'patois' (the unlabeled varieties of rural regions, as opposed to the labeled, well documented and established dialects such as e.g. Gascon, Provençal or Languedocien) may find their, theoretically most 'authentic', language use even further stigmatized, in addition to the low prestige it already had vis-à-vis the national language French. This is the titular paradoxical outcome of maintenance efforts that attach more value to a standard, codified, supra-local Occitan than to its actual local manifestations.

Chapter 2 also focuses on Eckert's Soulan data, featuring the paper "Diglossia: Separate and unequal" (1980). The paper discusses diglossia as a sociolinguistic situation in bilingual communities under which two coexisting varieties, an 'H' and an 'L' ('high' and 'low' – cf. Ferguson 1959) are allocated different domains of communication. Such an arrangement may seem to provide considerable value to the 'L' (commonly, a local vernacular), and not only to the 'H' (the relevant standard language), as they each cover different areas of social life; and this could be expected to prevent language shift from L to H. However, as Eckert illustrates in the example of Occitan, on the ground and in modern society, the H is typically associated with economic and educational advancement and super-regional mobility, and as such inevitably one-ups the L over time. At this point, we also find Eckert's first appropriations of ideas like social meaning, persona presentation, and agency for the analysis of language use, as she describes how the use of the local L in Soulan became linked with "increasingly modest" and "powerless" domains, while the use of the H, French, brought with it a "lofty connotation" that entered speaker's self-images and gained "the power of dignifying situations" (p. 24-25). The chapter ends with a new passage discussing an analysis of nonce borrowings that shows how "peasant stigma had entered the [Soulan] lexicon itself, producing pairs of words that differed only in social connotations" (p. 27) – for example, a

Gascon word for a poor peasant's barn versus a French word for a fancy baron's barn. These considerations provide the transition to Part II (the longest part) of the book: "My participation in the Second Wave".

Part II opens with more biographical notes regarding Eckert's move from New York to the University of Michigan. While teaching at the resident anthropology department, she became increasingly interested in the social motivations of sound change on a personal level: "I was sure that the motivation lay somewhere in the meaning people attributed to the new sounds" (p. 30). She turned to Michigan as a new research site to pursue this idea. Chapter 3 thus transitions the reader into Eckert's large body of work on adolescents in U.S. high schools, whom she picked as a group to focus on because of "the intense identity work" going on at that time of life, which she was convinced linked students' language use to their orientations towards social class (p. 31). Having picked up ideas on social networks from John Gumperz, Susan Gal, and Lesley Milroy, she set out on a new project to examine "the relation of linguistic variation and some finer social categories" in the "day-to-day interactions of social groups in adolescent society" (p. 32). Reflecting on her project proposal now, Eckert points out that, while it was not opportune to mention social meaning and social agency in a variationist research context at the time, she herself even then "deeply believed in the importance of such agency" (p. 33) – thus already previewing the Third Wave.

Chapter 3 therefore introduces the reader to Eckert's work on Detroit's (pseudonymously named) 'Belten High', and the local 'Jocks' (school- and achievement-oriented students) and 'Burnouts' (out-of-school-oriented students) as the dominant social groups, which were distinguished by different clothing and linguistic styles. The chapter features the fairly short paper "Clothing and geography in a suburban high school" (1980), which is actually an ethnographic analysis of jeans leg width as a signaling device for group membership (the Jocks wearing noticeably narrower jeans legs than the Burnouts at the time this research was carried out). The chapter closes with a newly added account of how it was Eckert's ambition that her ethnography of the school also resonate with the populations involved (Jocks, Burnouts, school officials).

Chapter 4 provides little framing, briefly setting up the subsequent reprinted paper by emphasizing the importance of social motivation (i.e., the "social meaning" or "symbolic value of the variable" – p. 40) for the spread of linguistic change, rather than people's length of exposure. The featured paper is "Sound change and adolescent social structure" (1988).[3] It propagates the Second Wave of variation study quite strongly (though without naming it such), as a "move from general demographic correlations based on survey techniques to participant observation in smaller groups and networks in an effort to uncover the social motivations for the kinds of linguistic emulation that lead to the spread of change through populations" (p. 41). Drawing again on Eckert's research in Detroit high schools, the paper is a study of how "the rapid development of social structure in preadolescence and adolescence is intimately associated with the development of patterns of linguistic

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[3] Oddly, the title provided in Eckert's book is different from that of the original published version, which is "Adolescent social structure and the spread of linguistic change".

variation", and how "the social significance of variants for adolescents [is] associated with the system of social differentiation arising within the cohort" (p. 45). Eckert provides ethnographic descriptions of the Jocks-Burnout social system, as well as analyses of vowel variants (realizations of /ʌ/, featured in the Northern Cities Shift) that show clear patterning according to respective category affiliations, which in turn reflect different orientations to school and neighborhood. In closing the paper, Eckert very openly exhorts sociolinguists to look to ethnography in order to "find the intervening variables between broad demographic categories and the daily realities of social and linguistic life" (p. 65).

Chapter 5 is concerned with another prominent aspect of Eckert's work – her critical deconstruction of the 'speech community', a concept which she describes as "a convenient, even necessary, fiction" (p. 66). Drawing on her experiences in Southern France, in her native New Jersey, and in Detroit, she discusses how people carve out social space from continua, through collectives and their practices, an issue expounded in the paper "Variation and a sense of place" (2004). A central point she makes in this paper is that "[r]ather than constituting some kind of envelope for the linguistic behavior of its inhabitants, the community is a contested entity that is differentially constructed in the practices and in the speech of different factions, as well as different individuals" (p. 69). Therefore, it may be particularly rewarding for researchers to investigate the construction of boundaries setting off spatial and social entities, rather than simply the very entities thus circumscribed, in order to understand the spread of linguistic change. This point is again illustrated with Eckert's Detroit high school data, showing, this time, how populations in different schools as well as groupings within these schools use broader social dynamics, such as the neighborhood's socioeconomic setting, as well as school versus out-of-school and urban versus suburban orientations, as resources and reference points in their own local identity and boundary work. This work crucially involves differential use of linguistic variables, which is thus linked, on a very local level, to the broader dynamics described. These dynamics, in turn, become renegotiated through local use. With this line of argumentation, Eckert ultimately provides an account of how language change that is linked to macrosocial categories can actually be traced to microsocial levels of interaction, contact, and identity work.

Chapter 6 picks up Eckert's biography as she completed fieldwork for her Belten High project. After a succession of different jobs, she moved to California for good, where she met Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, whose work influenced her adoption of the concept of 'communities of practice'. A review of this concept follows, whose upshot is that it is practice that "makes [a] cluster a community", that links local communities to macro-social structures, and that is the locus where "variation and style take on meaning" (p. 85). Chapter 6 then turns to Eckert's long-standing interest in language and gender, which was furthered by a certain frustration with "the way variationists were talking about gender" as well as by problems with the "male-female binary" she had encountered in the analysis of her high school data (p. 85). The bulk of the chapter is thus made up of the paper "The whole woman: Sex and gender differences in variation" (1989). The paper opens by juxtaposing, on the one hand, the wealth of outside sociological research sociolinguists have adduced to back up their findings about variation and socioeconomic status, with, on the other hand, the

dearth of information on which they have drawn in their use of biological age as well as binary sex categories as independent variables. Eckert discusses the problems of this state of affairs, arguing that "[g]ender, like ethnicity and class and indeed age, is a social construction" that "may enter into any of a variety of interactions with other social phenomena" (p. 94). She asserts that this kind of complexity has been too often ignored in analysis and interpretation. This complexity notably involves power relations in society, which implicate different orientations towards and needs for relational work for men and women. This in turn arguably exerts an influence on language use and variation. Eckert exemplifies her points with her high school data, showing, overall, how adolescent girls "are asserting their category identities through language more than are the boys", which, of course, needs to be taken into account e.g. in the interpretation of vowel realizations. She closes by contending that "where most [variationist] analyses have fallen short has been in the confusion of social meaning with the analyst's demographic abstractions" (p. 107). In the subsequent transition to chapter 7, Eckert accordingly remarks, "I guess this paper marks the beginning of my public difficulties with the variation mainstream" (p. 107). Ultimately, the repeated finding that "women show a greater range of variation than men" led her to more deeply focus her research on style (p. 108).

Chapter 7 picks up at this point and introduces style as "structured co-occurrences of features" (p. 109). The first paper reprinted here "was the first laying out of the perspective on style that gave rise to the Third Wave" (p. 109). Co-authored, it is entitled "Variation and personal/group style" (Arnold et al. 1993). The paper focuses on high school student 'Trendy' and the stylistic practices she both describes and performs simultaneously. Trendy's "presentation of herself" (p. 111) is discussed as a vivid instantiation of individual stylistic practice that also contributes to the construction of her peer community, and constitutes "a process of bricolage" in which "[r]esources from a broad social landscape can be appropriated and recombined to make a distinctive style that will be identifiable not only by which resources it uses, but how it uses each resource and how it combines all its resources" (p. 112). Elements from all levels of social context may be incorporated, subject to a person's or group's interests regarding the interpretation and construction of meaning.

The point about bricolage and the emergence and assembly of styles ultimately led Eckert to a new research project on an even younger age cohort than before, namely fifth to seventh grade U.S. elementary school students in California (aged about 11-14). The rationale was that during that age period, the 'heterosexual market' would be emerging, an adult-life previewing social system expected to coincide with much personal and group identity work and hence also language-stylistic practice. The second reprinted paper in chapter 7 is, as Eckert puts it in a brief interlude, "the first thing I wrote about this work" (p. 114). It is entitled "Vowels and nailpolish: The emergence of linguistic style in the preadolescent heterosexual marketplace" (1996) and discusses the "conscious process of stylistic production" that feeds the creation of the new "peer-dominated social order" (p. 117). This process requires collective collaboration in the construction of social groupings and their relationships to each other. Eckert describes girls as the main agents in the establishment of this new order, and illustrates her argument with the linguistic and

behavioral practices of 'Trudy', the 'stylistic icon' for her group of 'home girls'. The chapter closes with a 'postscript' relating Eckert's findings on stylistic practice on a more general level to Judith Butler's writings on the performance of gender.

Part III, "The Third Wave", ensues, opening once more with a biographical note, about Eckert's move to Stanford University full time. Chapter 8 follows up with a list of some of the colleagues and graduate students Eckert subsequently came to collaborate with, as the Third Wave was more and more taking shape. The first reprinted paper in this chapter is accordingly introduced as "a kind of Third Wave manifesto" (p. 126). Entitled "Demystifying sexuality and desire" (2002), it is actually a response to a conference paper by Don Kulick, which Eckert took as a jump-off point to argue for researchers to finally turn their interest from static categories such as sex/gender, to the very "*idea* of category membership" (p. 128; original emphasis) in terms of its construction, and the use of semiotic (stylistic) practices in the process. She once more draws on her work with pre-adolescents for illustration, arriving at the conclusion that "every act that indexes masculinity or femininity isn't necessarily about being male or female" – it may just as well be about claiming other kinds of category memberships (in Eckert's example, being a tough kind of Chicana).

Another 'interlude' ensues, in the form of a succinct recap of Eckert's critique of First Wave variationist research and its "view of variation as passively acquired and deployed, and of stylistic practice as limited to the suppression of stigmatized variants" (p. 135). Third Wave and like-minded researchers, by contrast, have come to hold that the use of styles, for example in persona construction (presenting a 'self' to others),[4] implies agency. The second paper featured in chapter 8 picks up these points. It is entitled "Elephants in the room" (2003), and arguably functions even more as a Third Wave manifesto than the preceding paper: it states outright that "[v]ariability in language is to a great extent the product of speakers' social agency" (p. 136). However, "the models of language that dominate sociolinguistics […] focus on patterns that are thought of as automatic, leaving the more intentional variation outside the paradigm" (pp. 136-137). Eckert argues against the continuing primacy of the 'automatic', 'natural', 'ingrained', 'subconscious', 'authentic', and 'vernacular' in variationist research and even in linguistics at large. Rather, the focus should turn to agentive linguistic 'acts of identity' (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) and 'stylistic moves', and what these may tell us about "language and the social world […] as a continuous human production" (p. 140).

The postscript to chapter 8 reemphasizes that "agency does not require attention or even awareness" (p. 141), and that awareness has in fact been overrated as an issue by variationists, while it may have little explanatory power in the analysis of language production at large.

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[4] Eckert cites Coupland (2001, 2007) for this use of the concept 'persona'. (Note another small inconsistency in this reference in the book, as the date of Coupland's publication is inaccurately rendered as 2000 and the title of the edited volume as *Stylistic Variation in Language*.)

After another brief introduction that sets up the notions of 'indexicality', the 'underspecification' of the social meaning of variables and their subsequent "vivification" in styles (p. 143), chapter 9 reprints what is probably Eckert's best known and most frequently cited recent paper, "Variation and the indexical field" (2008).[5] Here, she expressly declares that the concern of Third Wave studies with agentive uses of variation and its social meaning is of equal value as the concern of more classic variationist studies with language change across macrosocial groups. As a theoretical footing for the Third Wave agenda, she develops the concept of the 'indexical field', a "constellation of ideologically related meanings [of variables], any one of which can be activated in [their] situated use" (p. 144). This concept is based on Silverstein's (2003) notion of the 'indexical order', by which he maps out the relationship among the 'semiotic values' (social meanings) a certain way of speaking can bring to or take on in situations of use. After expounding her concomitant conceptualization of styles and stylistic practice, Eckert proceeds to illustrate their workings in case studies from her own and her graduate students' research. Thus, she recounts how her Belten High Burnouts use Northern Cities Shift variables and negative concord to project urban savvy. Zhang (2005) investigated Beijing yuppies' avoidance of certain Beijing Mandarin variables combined with a use of full tone to project cosmopolitanism. Campbell-Kibler's (2007) work on the velar versus apical realizations of <ing> then leads Eckert to draw up a first draft of that variable's indexical field of social meanings, as a matrix featuring, among others, degrees of education and formality (p. 157). She similarly pieces together the indexical field of /t/ release, which encompasses the personas of 'school teacher' and 'nerd girl', among others (p. 161). She concludes with the insight that "[t]he social is not just a set of constraints on variation – it is not simply a set of categories that determine what variants a speaker will use – it is a meaning-making enterprise" (p. 163) – and one that yet remains to be explored to its fullest extent.

Chapter 10 connects to the previous by recapping sociolinguistic variables as 'indexical signs' whose meaning in a given situation of use is subject to context-based interpretation or 'construal' (p. 165). This constitutes the segue to the next paper, "Where do ethnolects stop?" (2008), in which Eckert illustrates how variables may actually index different aspects of context in different moments of use. The example she uses is the variable /æ/, which is most commonly taken as an index of ethnicity in California. However, in Eckert's elementary school data, realizations of the variable transcend associations of ethnicity alone and are appropriated "in the service of other kinds of social differences within the cohort" as well (p. 172). Thus, at one school in particular, realizations of /æ/, rather than merely correlating strongly with ethnicity, turn out to be a better indicator of whether or not a speaker is a member of the 'in-crowd' that dominates social life. As Eckert points out, "if our aim is to understand linguistic competence in practice […] then the subtleties of indexicality take on supreme importance" (p. 185).

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[5] Indeed, the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, where the paper was published, lists it at the very top of its "most cited articles based on citations published in the last three years" (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14679841; December 13, 2018).

The closing chapter 11 ("The semiotic landscape") is the only one to consist entirely of new text. Eckert explains the titular metaphor such that a landscape, as opposed to a map, "embodies perspective", which, here, is "the perspective of ego, the stylistic agent", and their orientation towards and relationship with others (p. 186). Such landscapes are shaped and "constructed in the interests of producing a local – a 'who we are' – that embodies relations to the non-local" (p. 186). As researchers, investigating these landscapes "allows us to see meaning arrayed in the world" (p. 188), and to study respective changes, shifts, developments, and circulations. Any small "moves" here constitute "micro-moments of social change" (p. 189) that ultimately constitute the larger systems manifest on the macro level.

The book ends with an outlook on what is next for variationist research. Eckert speculates about whether morphosyntactic and phonological variables may play different roles in persona projections, related to their salience, frequency, and place in the semiotic landscape. She also points out the need to explore the relationship between social and semantic meaning. She then closes by affirming that her identification of the Three Waves of variation study was not meant to pit research traditions against each other, but rather to underscore the value of studying the social meaning of variation, on its own terms.

4. Commentary

Put simply, for those interested in the current state-of-the-art of theory in sociolinguistic variation studies, there is no way around Penelope Eckert, as the originator of the Three Waves view and a central figure in the development of the Third Wave. This book conveniently compiles in one place some of her most salient work, like an autobiographical reader. This work is duly arranged by and placed in the context of the development of her thinking over time, thus incidentally also guiding the reader along the history of her field and the genesis of its ideas. In other words, with its set-up, the book operates on both the level of theory and of meta-theory simultaneously, the latter providing insights into the formation of the first.[6] In all these respects, the book is set to immediately become canonical reading for students and scholars of sociolinguistics alike.

At times, the recurrence of Eckert's central studies and concomitant presentations of research settings and data collection creates a sense of repetitiveness in reading, which is, however, offset by the new insights each paper contributes. It is still recommended to read the book in its entirety, as some of the earlier works are not immediately fully contextualized, but are subject to qualification later on. For example, Jocks and Burnouts are initially presented as the categories of most central interest in chapter 4, while chapter 5 revisits the boundaries of these groups and expresses a regret at not focusing enough on the 'In-betweens'. Invocations of authenticity in the first paper are countermanded by the in-depth critique of the notion featured in chapter 8.

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[6] I thank Henry Widdowson for pointing me to this particular idea (p.c.).

However, some aspects, particularly in the early papers, are left entirely without such reconsideration and contextualization. Yet the paper on diglossia, for one, would have called for an update, at least in terms of references, regarding later incarnations of the concept (e.g. Hudson 2002). International readers not entirely familiar with U.S. educational settings may at times miss explanatory information on institutions, stages of progression, cohort ages, and cultural conventions. Perhaps most strikingly, chapter 9 ends, at the same point as the reprint, on the statement (already quoted in my introduction), "What I have presented here is just an idea, and an expectation that others will carry the project forward" (p. 164). This reprinted paper (just like the last reprint of the book, in chapter 10) dates back to 2008. Yet, there are no references provided to related work that has appeared since (not even Eckert's own). In all these respects, the reprints (together with their reader) would have benefited from annotation and further commentary.

In addition to these points, and in light of the fact that Eckert's book is in and of itself an exercise in (autobiographical) contextualization of her theoretical work, there are further, quite fundamental aspects on which some more perspective and expansion would have seemed desirable. These concern in particular the details of the model of communication underlying the Third Wave approach, as well as the reach of the approach beyond Eckert's own, as I would call it, 'Stanford School' of sociolinguistics.

As it happens, Third Wave work typically gives short shrift to its underlying model of communication, or even implicitly presupposes it, rather than making it explicit and submitting its processes and assumptions to deliberation. Yet, the Third Wave approach is clearly premised on a very specific communication model, namely a socio-constructional, interactional, dialogical one. The way Eckert lays out the idea that speakers may agentively deploy styles to create and project personas, and, thus, even in "small stylistic moves," enact "micro-moments of social change" in their social worlds (p. 189), is predicated on the assumption that communication is not a one-way street, but entails joint engagement, collaboration, and meaning construction between speakers and listeners, on an equal footing. After all, a speaker is hard pressed to successfully project a particular persona to their surroundings, via the use of a particular style and with its full ramifications of social positioning and delineation, if the addressees of this projection do not cooperate, in the sense of recognizing the act and interpreting it along the desired lines. And this need to 'reach' their audience in turn necessarily affects the stylistic moves speakers can and will engage in. Bakhtin describes this speaker-listener 'dialogue' as follows:

> *When constructing my utterance, I try to actively determine [the listener's] response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance [...]. When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee's perception of my speech: the extent to which he [sic!] is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies - because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance. These considerations also determine my choice of a genre for my utterance, my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the style [sic!] of my utterance.* (Bakhtin 1986 [1952-53]: 95-96)

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Thus, the agentive use of styles is conceptually a truly 'interactional' activity, where 'interaction' designates "'the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another's actions when in one another's immediate physical presence" (Goffman 1959: 15).[7] Communicative meaning is jointly achieved, through emergent and mutual anticipation, negotiation, and interpretation between speakers and listeners. Therefore, the listener's role in stylistic meaning-making deserves just as much attention as the speaker's.

In her book, Eckert does, albeit briefly, allude to these mechanics in chapter 10. She draws on Peirce's (1998 [1931]) notion of 'construal' for the statement that, in order for sociolinguistic variables to 'work' as indexical signs, "[c]rucially, the hearer must recognize that the sign is indexical, and must construe what exactly in the context the form is pointing to" (p. 165). Yet, arguably, this and similar ad hoc mentions of 'hearers' do not sufficiently bring out the *constitutive* role that listeners play in the activity of agentive language use.[8]

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, most Third Wave work has so far focused on the production end of variation. This may be beginning to change, though, as there have been some recent Third Wave studies from within Eckert's academic circle that do take the listener into account in their research program (e.g. Campbell-Kibler 2007, 2011; D'Onofrio 2018). However, these again only vaguely link up with theory that specializes in explicating interaction as the central site for the speaker-listener dialogue of meaning-making, despite the fact that they could arguably benefit from its insights. Such theory is laid out and readily available within the analytic framework of 'interactional sociolinguistics', a paradigm notably drawing on the sociological work of Erving Goffman and the anthropological linguistic work of John Gumperz (see e.g. Schiffrin 1994; Gumperz 2001; Tannen 2004; Gordon 2011).

As already intimated above, Goffman's writings opened up analytic and conceptual access to the 'interaction order' as the level of dialogic activity that mediates between the micro (individuals) and macro (social groups) systemic planes (e.g. Goffman 1983; see also Schiffrin 1994). And Gumperz' notion of 'contextualization' (e.g. Gumperz 1982) actually outlines the very mechanism by which the social meanings of language use factor into communicative meaning-making on this interaction level. Contextualization refers to the fact that a speaker's use of linguistic variants or varieties always and inevitably cues the social associations of the particular variant or variety chosen, indexing them as relevant for message interpretation. In turn, listeners draw on such 'contextualization cues' in their emergent, interactional 'inference' of an utterance's full meaning. Contextualization processes are therefore the basis of and link between speakers' and listeners' dialogical deployment and invocation of social meaning.

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[7] Riley (2010) reports that this appropriation of the concept of 'interaction' from chemistry was originally introduced by Georg Simmel (with reference to Simmel 1908).

[8] Note that in a recent article Eckert co-authored with Labov (not included in the book), we do find the concrete statement, "Since meaning is constructed in the interaction between speaker and hearer, evidence of social meaning ultimately must be sought by bringing together data on production and perception" (Eckert & Labov 2017: 471). But my diagnosis still applies: no thorough theorizing of this observation (nor reference to relevant work on interaction as such) is provided.

For Third Wave studies, explication of interactional mechanisms is not only relevant on the theoretical level or for data exegesis. These fundamentals also provide the basis for empirically re-tracing and corroborating the communicative effects of agentive language use. More specifically, the dialogical link between production and perception as set out in the interactional communication model explains why and how speaker evaluation experiments (out of language attitude study, using the matched-guise technique – Lambert et al. 1960) can be adapted and utilized to elicit the social meanings listeners will actually, in practice, invoke upon hearing certain varieties in certain contexts of use. By eliciting listeners' contextualization practices in a bespoke set-up and design, such experiments generate empirical evidence of the particular aspects of the indexical field of variation that are "vivified" (Eckert 2018: 143) in a given situation (Soukup 2015). Such evidence, interesting in its own right, powerfully enhances the credibility of discourse analytic exegeses of agentive language use in production data (see e.g. Soukup 2009).

The interactional model of communication explicitly holds that meaning-making practice (including contextualization) is always situated within and thus relative to the configuration of the local speech situation in which it takes place (e.g. Gumperz 2001; see also notably Hymes 1972). This explains quite readily why "hearers perceive meanings as a function of their perceptions of the context of utterance" (Eckert & Labov 2017: 471) – because they inevitably engage in locally situated meaning-making (contextualization). Eckert and Labov (2017: 471) describe Third Wave work that picks up this fact as "promising, but in its early stages". I contend that such work would be significantly advanced by scaffolding it with long-standing interactional sociolinguistic theory as outlined here (see Soukup 2015 for further discussion and exemplification).

All in all, despite its theoretical and empirical benefits, interactional sociolinguistics has so far received only little attention from Third Wave protagonists. Certainly, conversation analysis (CA) and its focus on categories and category membership (e.g. Sacks 1992) seem more closely intertwined with Eckert's thinking on styles than interactional sociolinguistics with its focus on the interaction order as the central site of situated, dialogical meaning-making. This is also evident in the fact that research on agentive language use related to the Third Wave but focusing much more on interactional activities has gained limited traction in Third Wave 'citation networks' so far (e.g. Schilling-Estes 2004; Coupland 2007; Soukup 2009; Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa 2012).[9] Of course, one reason for this may lie in the fact that interactional sociolinguistic work on agentive language use started out with Gumperz' research on code-switching, which in turn has largely grown out of an anthropological linguistic tradition, while interest in style-shifting comes out of variation studies, as Eckert's book once again attests. In fact, it took some time to acknowledge that the processes underlying both phenomena are fundamentally the same (see Milroy & Gordon

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[9] Note that Eckert cites Coupland (2001, 2007) as an important influence on her thinking, but does not actually review his extensive relevant work in her book.

For reference, note furthermore that interaction-focused work on agentive language use has at times alternatively designated the phenomenon under study as 'Speaker Design' (Schilling 2013).

2003). Thus, calls to merge endeavors and interests are fairly recent (see notably the proposal of a 'sociocultural linguistics' by Bucholtz & Hall 2008).

This parallel run of approaches to the agentive uses of style-shifting and code-switching, together with the long-standing U.S. Anglophone domination in the variationist paradigm, are probably also responsible for the Third Wave's strong focus, evident in Eckert's book, on individual linguistic variables as carriers of meanings in styles, with only beginning interest in complex systems of variables such as may make up entire varieties ('codes', 'languages'). Yet, as Auer (2007: 12) has put it, "the meaning of linguistic heterogeneity does not (usually) reside in individual linguistic features but rather in constellations of such features which are interpreted together. […] [W]e do not interpret single variables but a gestalt-like stylistic expression." Certainly, Auer's view arises from a European sociolinguistic perspective, where variation arguably involves more linguistic complexity than is commonly encountered in most U.S. American English contexts (with the exception of African American English). This is one more aspect in which better integration of the current 'Eckertian' canon of Third Wave work with research from outside of its established realm has great potential for more comprehensive insight into the phenomenon of agentive language use, around the world.

At any rate, in this respect, as in the others listed above, the point is not to find fault with the Third Wave as such, but to propose that Eckert's outline of the Third Wave approach to sociolinguistic variation in her book would have benefitted from additional commentary, linkages, referencing, and general perspectivization. I have aimed to provide some of this contextualization, as it were, in this paper.

That all being said, a huge, and much more concrete, bonus of the book deserves to be mentioned in closing this commentary. It arises from the personal insights and experiences Eckert shares in the new material in which her reprints are embedded. Especially for students and young academics, it is conceivably helpful to catch glimpses at the 'real-life' aspects of great scientific careers, to render them more relatable and even attainable. What we learn is that insecurities have plagued even as great and renowned a scholar as Penelope Eckert: she recounts that, for a long time, she suffered from impostor syndrome that stopped her from asking questions even in graduate school and beyond; but that she finally surmounted them by essentially finding her scientific 'home' (in the Third Wave). Life events that may not seem like it at the time may turn into career serendipities in retrospect: thus, a psychologically disturbed stalker in New York may be the personal impetus for taking on a new job (and academic field and research project) in Michigan; and a botched tenure process in Michigan may lead to an even better job and life in California. Research ideas, topics, and material may at any time spring from personal inclinations, biographies, connections, and interests (like falling in love with an old French linguistic atlas, or enjoying the informal, eye-level company of high school kids more than the formal role of being their teacher). Individual teachers may have a greater impact on their students and colleagues than they ever realize (like the tragic substitute teacher Eckert dedicated her book to, whose class made her first dream of being a linguist).

Such insights into the author's private and interior life are interspersed throughout the book. In sum, they add a welcome, pleasantly unusual, highly accessible, and very much relatable human element to a sophisticated scholarly discussion. This in no way detracts from Eckert's clout, but rather earns great respect for its honesty and courage. It is another reason to strongly recommend this book particularly to graduate students and young scholars, whom Eckert's trials and tribulations may personally resonate with, and whom her successes may encourage in the, perhaps similarly non-linear, pursuit of their own careers.

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