

Magdalena Murawska¹

MARTIN J. BALL
CLINICAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS
2005, Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 356

Clinical Sociolinguistics is conceived as a sociolinguistic resource for those health professionals who deal with patients with various speech-language pathologies, hearing-impairment and other disorders where the ability to communicate is an issue of concern. It presents state-of-the-art theories and studies with particular emphasis on those which can be applied in medical contexts. The collection of papers is divided into two parts. The first part includes eleven chapters addressing various issues of sociolinguistic research. The aim of each section is to acquaint the readers with the main tenets of a particular field and to point to the consequences they may have in the medical practice. For instance, in Chapter Nine, having introduced some basic notions and studies concerning language change, the authors discuss the innovation vs. pathology problem. Different communities use different language varieties divergent from the standard, but it does not necessarily render them deficient. Admittedly, sociolinguists themselves sometimes find it difficult to determine whether a given pattern is a change in progress or a non-standard usage, let alone clinicians, who may not be familiar with sociolinguistic theories. One of the reasons of this state of affairs is that sociolinguistic journals, which could be of interest also to medical professionals, are not frequently consulted by them. A similar problem is dealt with by Preston and Robinson (Chapter Eleven), who maintain that our judgment of other people influences also our perception of their language. This appears to be an issue of concern for doctors who encounter patients of different regional or ethnic backgrounds. The medical profession must exercise great caution in this respect as the clinician's decision concerning treatment based solely on his/her subjective perception may have serious consequences. Other chapters in the first part address such issues as language with respect to gender, culture and power, language planning, African American English, regional and social variation, etc. Each of them ends with a further reading section, which can be of use to those interested in a particular subject.

¹ Katedra Socjolingwistyki i Pragmatyki Językowej, Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań.

While the first part of the book presents the results of sociolinguistic research, the second part demonstrates how they are put into practice in specific cases in various medical sub-specialties. The keynote of all the chapters is the authors' belief that the process of medical assessment and diagnosis can be supported by sociolinguists' knowledge and experience. For instance, the awareness of language variation and sensitivity to it are of primary importance in studying language acquisition. In testing bilingual children's language, for the results to be valid, clinicians need to allow for a number of factors such as the form of tests and their correct interpretation. These two examples revolve around the problem of difference vs. pathology. This recurring motif of the book illustrates the dilemma frequently faced by speech-language pathologists, namely what constitutes a disorder and what is simply a variable speech pattern. Yet another example of how informative sociolinguistic research can be for clinicians is shown in Chapter Twelve. Firstly, it gives the definition of literacy held by clinicians and then presents how sociolinguistics can broaden the understanding of this concept. Furthermore, the chapter points to the specific application of this information in the clinical practice. In this way, the authors support those definitions of disorders that are dynamic and context-dependent, which, in turn, could help to improve the processes of assessment, diagnosis and treatment. Other sections address such issues as sign languages and the work of interpreters in clinical settings. The authors stress repeatedly that hardly any case is straightforward for speech-language pathologists, and, therefore, their work can be streamlined significantly thanks to the cooperation with sociolinguists. What is more, it proves to be a joint venture that can benefit both sides. Any studies of language variation (here in bilinguals and sign language speakers) can broaden our knowledge of this matter in general. At the same time, sociolinguistic contribution may not only help clinicians in their work but also improve the quality of their encounters with patients.

Concluding, the book successfully fills the gap in the literature concerning the practical application of sociolinguistic knowledge, in this case in the area of speech-language pathology. The authors have attempted, firstly, to sensitise clinicians to various phenomena studied by sociolinguists and, secondly, to demonstrate that these phenomena can significantly affect the process of assessing and diagnosing linguistically diverse speakers and speakers with various speech-language pathologies. The end product is a highly informative and comprehensive resource, which proves that different disciplines can successfully cooperate in order to increase their effectiveness.