

# **Energeia und Ergon**

Sprachliche Variation – Sprachgeschichte – Sprachtypologie

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Band II

## **Das sprachtheoretische Denken Eugenio Coserius in der Diskussion (1)**

eingeleitet und herausgegeben von  
Harald Thun

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# Variety is the Spice of Life: Language Variation and Sociolinguistics<sup>1</sup>

Leonhard Lipka (Munich)

## 1. Variety in Coseriu's writings

In a paper originally written in 1958, COSERIU (1981a:12) points out that spatial or dialectal variety is not the only variation in language, and sets up three fundamental types of internal differentiation: 1. *diferencias diatópicas*, 2. *diferencias diastráticas*, and 3. *diferencias diafáticas*. In a note to a later article, which is the printed version of a contribution to a conference in 1978, he states that he adopted the terms *diatópico* and *diastrático* (in 1957) from a 1951 publication by L. Flydal, and added *diafásico* and *sinfásico* (earlier *diafático* and *sinfático*) himself (COSERIU: 1981b:30). The three terms describe varieties of language which are conditioned: 1. geographically (*dialectos*), 2. sociologically (*niveles de lengua*), and 3. situationally (*circunstancias típicas, estilos de lengua*) (COSERIU:1981b:21). The distinction (*diatopisch/diastratisch/diaphasisch*) is further illustrated in COSERIU (1973:38–40) with French examples. He makes the point that 'dialects' are complete systems, with a complete phonology, grammar and lexicton, while 'levels' and 'styles' are incomplete, and that there is an ordered relationship “*dialecto → nivel → estilo*”, since a 'dialect' can function as a 'level', and a 'level' as a 'style', but not the other way round (COSERIU: 1981b:16).

## 2. Coseriu's concept of sociolinguistics

In his article on the foundations and tasks of socio- and ethnolinguistics COSERIU (1981b:8–10) discusses various definitions of, and approaches to sociolinguistics (inter alia FISHMAN's and HYMES's, without mentioning the names). He rejects wider definitions, e.g. “el estudio del lenguaje en relación con el contexto social”, and settles for a narrower one: “estudio de la *variedad y variación del lenguaje* en relación con la estructura social de las comunidades hablantes” [COSERIU's emphasis!]. This is distinguished

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank Monika Krenn, Eva Leitzke, Bernd Brömser and Graham Pascoe for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

from ethnolinguistics, which he calls “estudio de la variedad y variación del lenguaje en relación con la civilización y la cultura” (COSERIU: 1981b:10). He then makes an even finer subclassification (e.g. between *lingüística sociologica* and *sociología del lenguaje*).

On the level of historical languages he distinguishes: 1. *sociolingüística de la lengua* (which studies diastratic variety and synstratic units, i.e. *niveles*) from 2. *dialectología* (concerned with diatopic variety and syntopic units, i.e. *dialectos*) and 3. *estilística de la lengua* (the discipline of diaphasic variety within *niveles* and *dialectos* and synphasic units, i.e. *estilos*, conditioned by the situation) (COSERIU: 1981b:21–23). He claims that stylistics does not yet exist. I will return to this presently (see 3. below). Let me state, at this point, that I find Coseriu’s definition and delimitation of sociolinguistics too narrow and his distinctions too fine – I consider that the various parameters of linguistic variety are too closely related to be separable in practice in many cases.

### 3. Linguistic stylistics and notational terms

For English, a practical and theoretical proposal for dealing with stylistics has been put forward in PLETT’s (1975/79) book *Textwissenschaft und Textanalyse*. More general is the scope of ENKVIST’s (1973) *Linguistic Stylistics*. Both authors have also concerned themselves with the subject in various articles. So a certain amount of work has been done in the field, also by other linguists (e.g. Crystal, Davy, and Leech).

In the introductory remarks to his book, ENKVIST (1973:13f.) raises the question as to whether *style* exists and comes to the conclusion that it is a “notational term”, not a “substantive term”. By this concept he understands a term which “must always be defined with the aid of more basic concepts” (ENKVIST: 1973:14). A notational term is never simple, primitive, and basic. Because of the notational character of the term *style*, “other definitions and terminologies are possible and perhaps even plausible” beside the one ENKVIST gives (1973:17). This clearly means that for notational terms in general, there is no single correct definition, but different writers and linguists may introduce their own definitions and terminologies.

Obviously, not only *style*, *dialect*, and *level* are notational terms, but also *sociolinguistics*. We are therefore free in principle to define it in a wider sense or more narrowly. In contrast to Coseriu I prefer a more comprehensive definition.

The notational character of *style* and *sociolinguistics* becomes particularly evident if we compare the treatment of “associative meaning” in two editions of a book by the same author. In LEECH (1974:16f.), the second subtype of this summary class of meaning – opposed to denotative “conceptual” meaning – is labelled “stylistic” and defined as that meaning which conveys information “about the social circumstances” of the use of a linguistic item. The author discusses “dimensions of stylistic variation” closely following CRYSTAL/DAVY (1969). In the revised edition, LEECH (1981:14) calls the same type simply “social meaning”. This clearly demonstrates the close relationship between *stylistics* and *sociolinguistics* and further strengthens the arguments for a broader definition of the latter.

Another notational term which I have always found very useful, both in word-forma-

tion and in sociolinguistics, is Coseriu's concept of *norm*. It is discussed in a number of publications. In COSERIU (1970:204f., 208f., 211) it is represented as improving on Saussure's dichotomy of *langue* and *parole*, since it neither belongs to the abstract functional system nor to its concrete *realisation*. It is rather a relatively abstract level, found in phonology, morphology, lexicology (including word-formation), and syntax (e.g. in word order). Coseriu distinguishes an individual norm from the social norm, which is more important in our context.

Applied to the common underlying system of the German language, we may claim that there are different Swiss, Austrian, High German, and Bavarian norms on various levels. With regard to the lexicon, High German *umziehen* ('move house') corresponds to Austrian *übersiedeln* and Swiss *zügeln*. In Austria, besides the specifically Austrian terms *Palatschinken*, *Paradeiser*, and *Kassa*, we find both *Zuschauer* and *Zuseher* (for TV viewers), and a by-pass is more appropriately called an *Umfahrung*, not an *Umgehung*. The Swiss norm is *Sprachwissenschaftler* (not *-ler*), *kontroversiell*, and *allfällig* (instead of *eventuell*) – this last function word and adjective is also used in Austria. *Weiters* (for *weiterhin*) is also part of the Swiss and Austrian norms. The Bavarian norm is *Krapfen* (for *Berliner*), *Hebefeier* (for *Richtfest*), *Klaßlehrer*, *-zimmer* (for *Klassen* . . .), and the unambiguous formula *Montag mit Freitag* (for . . . bis . . .); the last three items belong to official usage.

#### 4. Models of linguistic variation

Having discussed Coseriu's ideas on variety in language and on sociolinguistics let us now look at some other views of the phenomenon itself and the related discipline. We will first discuss alternative models<sup>2</sup>, and then see to what extent they are compatible with Coseriu's approach.

**4.1.1.** A relatively recent classification of varieties of English is to be found in QUIRK/GREENBAUM (1973:1–9). It shows clearly that the assumption of a single, homogeneous linguistic system is only a methodologically necessary abstraction from the "facts of life" in language. Linguistic variation is the spice of every language and there is no living natural language which does not show variation. How dull language would be without it!

The *University Grammar* (1973:1) lists the following six kinds of interrelated varieties:

1. Region (i.e. geographical), 2. Education and Social Standing (i.e. social), 3. Subject Matter ("sometimes referred to as 'registers'", 1973:6), 4. Medium (speaking vs. writing), 5. Attitude (varieties "often called 'stylistic'", 1973:7), and – separated by a broken line –
6. Interference ("on a very different basis from the other types of variety . . . the trace left by someone's native language upon the foreign language he has acquired", 1973:7).

The six variety classes may be further subdivided and each one "is related equally and at all points to each of the other variety classes" (1973:2). Nevertheless there are claimed to be specific correlations between some parameters, e.g. that the written medium is tied

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive survey of varieties of English and of models for the description of variation cf. WÄCHTLER (1977: esp. 7–49).

up with educated English and that regional or uneducated English is hardly found in writing. Attitudinal varieties are said to have a great deal of independence. The grammar distinguishes five subclasses: (rigid) FORMAL (neutral) INFORMAL (familiar), of which it labels only two ('formal' and 'informal').

The term *register* mentioned above is another striking example of a notational term<sup>3</sup>. For HALLIDAY (1978:31–35, 142ff., 221ff.), it is not at all to be identified with subject matter only. It is labelled a "diatypic variety", defined as a variety "according to the use", as opposed to *dialect*, defined as a variety "according to the user". It is thus situationally determined. *Register*, according to Halliday, is a complex notion determined by three variables: 1. *field* of discourse (type of social action, in a situation, including subject matter), 2. *tenor* (role relationship between participants), and 3. *mode* (the channel and the part played by language, not only medium). HALLIDAY (1978:32f.) points out that subject matter is not directly reflected in language and that if we are actually engaged in gardening or cooking very few words from those areas will be used while talking. Both *field* and *tenor* obviously involve social and situational factors. In general, as the title of the collection of his articles indicates, HALLIDAY (1978:2) thinks of language as a "social semiotic", i.e. "an information system" interpreted "within a sociocultural context". This leads him to the conclusion that "variation in language is . . . the expression of fundamental attributes of the social system; dialect variation expresses the diversity of social *structures* (social hierarchies of all kinds), while register variation expresses the diversity of social *processes*" (HALLIDAY's emphasis: 1978:2).

A third approach to language variation in British linguistics must also be briefly mentioned. CRYSTAL/DAVY (1969:64ff.) distinguish eight "dimensions of situational constraint" in language, which are then grouped together into three broad types. Leaving aside the detailed question of "Individuality" (i.e. idiolect), we are left with the following dimensions of socio-stylistic variation: 1. Dialect (regional or class dialect), 2. Time (i.e. diachrony), 3. Discourse (with the categories a) Medium and b) Participation, e.g. monologue or dialogue), 4. Province (e.g. the language of law, advertising etc., related to Halliday's *field*), 5. Status (i.e. social standing of participants, thus largely equivalent to *tenor*, e.g. formal, polite, intimate), 6. Modality (i.e. the distinction of traditional "genres", thus related to *mode*), and 7. Singularity (peculiarities of individual authors). Some of the finer distinctions in this model are quite interesting, as when e.g. "spoken to be written" (in dictation) and "written to be spoken" (in news broad-casting) are distinguished within the category *complex medium* (CRYSTAL/DAVY: 1969:70).

4.1.2. Let us now look at some American approaches to language variation, which furthermore have in common that they focus on sociolinguistics and stress the need to consider the influence of the situation which produces a specific variety. Although not all studies use the terms, the concepts of "situationally determined code-switching" or "style-shifting" could capture the common ground.

In 1964 the sociologist GOFFMAN (1964/72) published a short article entitled "The

3 For various notions of *register* and its relationship with both situation and sociology cf. DAVIES (1969).

Neglected Situation". He starts out distinguishing two currents of analysis of speech behaviour, the *correlational approach* (in which social variables, such as age, sex, class, caste etc. determine speech) and the *indicative approach* (which studies expressive and paralinguistic indicators, gestures, etc.). He argues that the "social situation" has been neglected, which he defines as "an environment of mutual monitoring possibilities" in which "two or more individuals find themselves in one another's immediate presence" (GOFFMAN: 1964/72:63). The joint endeavour of people to cooperate in social situations he calls *encounters* or *face engagements*. He pleads for a study of the rules for the initiation and termination of encounters, of turn-taking, and of "face-to-face action" in general. This plea for a concern with interaction has since borne rich fruit.

Labov, perhaps the most prominent sociolinguist, has never neglected the influence of the situation, both in his methodology and his empirical work. He devised various techniques for overcoming the "Observer's Paradox" and for recording the variety he called the *vernacular*, i.e. "the style in which the minimum attention is given to the monitoring of speech" (LABOV: 1972:208f., 87–94). In his famous study in three New York City department stores (Saks, Macy's, and S. Klein) (cf. 1972:43–69) he used independent variables such as the store (ranked according to social stratification), sex, age, race, and occupation of the informant. The dependent variables were four possible occurrences of postvocalic /r/ (a prestige marker) in 1. casual style: "fourth floor", and 2. emphatic style: "fourth floor". These utterances were elicited (in 1962) by means of "rapid anonymous interviews", with the interviewer in the role of a customer asking for directions ("Where are the women's shoes?") and a repetition ("Excuse me?", leaning forward). Labov thus received two varieties of pronunciation, which he later called "contextual styles".

The techniques were further refined in the Lower East Side (LES) study (1963–1964), based on a sociological survey and tape-recorded data. Here, LABOV (cf. 1972:79–85) distinguishes five "contextual styles", in which attention on speech increases: A. Casual Speech, B. Careful Speech, C. Reading Style, D. Word List, and D'. Minimal Pairs. At the same time, besides the recognition of finer situational variants, the social stratification is refined in the LES study since LABOV (e.g. 1972:111–115) distinguishes five "socio-economic classes", viz. lower class, working class, lower middle class (further subdivided), and upper middle class. He also states that there are sharp differences between blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, and professionals, within the social indicator 'occupation'. On the whole Labov's work proves convincingly that more or less permanent social factors are closely connected and interrelated with situational parameters, and consequently that sociolinguistics and stylistics cannot be separated as easily as is often believed.

There are also close links with ethnolinguistics, more specifically the American school of the ethnography of speaking, whose main representative is Dell Hymes. In a very influential article he discusses "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life" (HYMES: 1967/72:35–71). As an anthropologist he concentrates on *speech events* and *rules of speaking* in a diversity of *speech communities*. The components of speech he distinguishes in his own model are arranged to form SPEAKING, as an acrostic (HYMES: 1967/72:59–65), viz. Situation (setting and scene), Participants, Ends (goals and outcomes), Act Sequence (message form and content), Key (tone, manner, style), Instrumen-

talities (channels and forms of speech), Norms (of interaction/interpretation), and Genres (e.g. poem, myth, curse, prayer). These components all influence speech and therefore the variety of a language used in a particular situation.

**4.1.3.** So far we have reviewed quite a variety of models for capturing the influence of social and situational factors on the variety of language and speech used on a particular occasion. In a most useful survey article on categories of situational context from the perspective of stylistics, ENKVIST (1980) reviews various models and taxonomies of context features. Unfortunately he makes a slight error, in attributing the acrostic list of situational variables from Hymes to Fishman (ENKVIST: 1980:81f.). The stylistic viewpoint in this article, with the focus on the context of situation, however, leads to a neglect of social factors.

It is interesting to compare a treatment of language variation from the opposite corner, viz. TRUDGILL's (1974/83) introduction to sociolinguistics. We find most of the parameters we have already encountered. There are chapters which relate language to: Social Class (thus dealing with social dialects, sociolects), Ethnic Group and Sex (restricted languages), Context and Social Interaction (register/style, situation), Nation (standard language), Geography (dialect). TRUDGILL (1974/83:41f.) gives two interesting diagrams which demonstrate convincingly the interrelation between social and regional variation for dialect and accent. In both cases the lowest class has the most localized dialect/accent, which leads to a pyramid shape, since the higher one goes in social class, the narrower regional variation gets. Trudgill claims that in English dialects there is still some variation in the highest class, so the pyramid is flattened at the top. With accent, however, there is a clear peak, since the highest class uses Received Pronunciation (RP) only.

Another example where regional and social variation is clearly interrelated is Cockney, which must be characterized as both a regional and a social dialect (cf. WÄCHTLER: 1977:28, 162, 172, 176). We clearly have an intersection of different parameters of linguistic variation. It is primarily restricted to a specific social class in London, although some features (and people) have been exported to Australia, and some phonological features seem to be acquiring a prestige value in some far-away urban varieties of English in Britain. As with all variety classes, further subclassification is possible ("Deep Cockney", "Light Cockney").

A last point has to be made with regard to sociolinguistics and language variation. There is a variety of language use which does not transmit information and was therefore completely neglected by structural linguistics. It is used at parties, in railway-compartments between strangers, or in the opening and closing phases of encounters for establishing and maintaining social relations. Further and finer functions of such seemingly useless chitchat can and have been established. Malinowski introduced the term *phatic communion* for this fundamentally social function of language, which as a situationally and socially determined variety of many languages is characterized by certain linguistic and extralinguistic peculiarities. It must be included in any treatment of sociolinguistics and language variation. It seems that COSERIU (1981b:15) refers to this function when he states that "el lenguaje . . . es el fundamento de todo lo social y la manifestación primera de la 'sociabilidad' humana, del 'ser-conotros', que es una dimensión esencial del ser del hombre".

4.2.1. This brings me back to another important article by COSERIU (1983), in which the defects, or rather insufficiencies, of structuralism are pointed out, and the need to incorporate language use, texts, variety, and sociolinguistics is stressed (COSERIU: 1983: 9, 14, 16). He clearly states: “le structuralisme . . . ne concerne que *l'homogénéité*, et non pas la *variété*” (COSERIU's emphasis: 1983:13f.). This linguistic theory abstracted from diatopic, diastratic, and diaphasic variation, but variation has to be taken into account in a more comprehensive, pragmatic approach.

4.2.2. At this point I would like to raise a fascinating problem, which for reasons of space can only be touched here: language variation as exemplified by Spanish and English on the two sides of the Atlantic. In his paper on *dialecto, nivel*, and *estilo de lengua*, COSERIU (1981a:14) observes that the Spanish of America is fundamentally “un dialecto (mejor dicho, un conjunto de dialectos) de la lengua española común”. He gives examples where, on either side of the Atlantic, identical forms (e.g. *vereda*) may have different meanings and vice versa (1981a:20–23). Phonological distinctions may be neutralized in some socio-cultural level in Madrid, and lost completely in Santiago and Montevideo, but represented by different archiphonemes. It would be tempting to compare this to the situation in North America and check corresponding differences between British and American English.

Since this is beyond the scope of this article, let me pick out an example which again shows a rather complex interrelation between regional and social variation. According to Alan S.C. Ross, a forerunner of modern sociolinguistics<sup>4</sup>, who introduced the British public to a distinction between *U* (for upper class) and *non-U* words, *ill* is *non-U* in *I was very ill on the boat*, as against the *U* word *sick* (ROSS et al.: 1956:30). In a succinct publication on British and American English, STREVENS (1972:98ff.) gives the usual comparative, transatlantic word-lists contrasting *ill* (British English) with *sick* (American English). The latter would thus conform to *U* usage.

If we include complex lexemes, the situation becomes even more complicated since, according to the LONGMAN DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH, the following are perfectly acceptable in British English (and the last one is even marked as such): *sickness, sick leave, sick pay, sickroom, and sick parade*. The dictionary further specifies that the adjective is used attributively in British English (*a sick uncle*) and predicatively in American English (cf. QUIRK/GREENBAUM: 1973:124). In a “usage note” we find the explanation that in British English *to be/feel sick* is ‘to vomit’ and that it is therefore confusing to say *I was sick yesterday*, meaning ‘I was ill’. However, *a sick child*, is quite all right. All this goes to show that a simple opposition of two isolated words, and their correlation with specific social or regional varieties, is a very considerable simplification.

4 His observations were originally made in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 55 (1954), 20–56 under the title “Linguistic Class-Indicators in Present-Day English”. They remained largely unnoticed until Nancy MITFORD took them up in *Encounter* in her article “The English Aristocracy”. Soon other writers joined the debate and *U* vs. *non-U* became a sort of parlour game for the British public. The discussion was revived in the late 1970s. Excerpts from ROSS (1954) together with contributions to the controversy by MITFORD, WAUGH, SYKES, and BETJEMAN have been published under the title *Noblesse Oblige* as ROSS et al. (1956).

## 5. The integration of models

COSERIU's extension of the scope of linguistics in his article "Au-delà du structuralisme" (1983) does not mean the elimination of previous insights. I should also claim that his position with regard to language variation and sociolinguistics can be integrated with other, British and American, models.

**5.1.** The by now classical distinction between diatopic, diastratic, and diaphasic varieties should be maintained. In addition, the finer differentiations between subject matter, medium (simple and complex), attitude, and interference may be useful for some purposes. This also holds for Halliday's concept of *register* (with its three components), Goffman's suggestions for conversational analysis (since further developed), and especially Labov's methodological and empirical insights.

**5.2.** Coseriu's definition and delimitation of sociolinguistics is too narrow to my mind. We have seen a number of cases where sociologically determined varieties are so closely interrelated with other variables that it is practically impossible to separate them. This becomes especially clear in the work of Labov, and also when we consider varieties of English such as Cockney. There is also an amazing parallelism, on the level of semantics, between synchronic variation (both regional and stylistic) and diachronic variation, i.e. change of meaning. I have tried to establish the relationship with the help of inferential semantic features in LIPKA (1985). Sociolinguistics, in my opinion, must also consider the most fundamental social function of language, viz. phatic communion, and therefore include pragmatic factors and transcend structuralism. I therefore follow Coseriu's lead and join him in going beyond structuralism, while recognizing that variety is the spice of life.

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