Observing and Analyzing Natural Language, by Leslie Milroy, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, paper, xiv, 230 pages, $24.95 CDN, ISBN 0-631-13623-1.

This is an excellent book by one of the foremost scholars in sociolinguistics. A thoughtful discussion of the relationship of sociolinguistic methodology and analysis to theory, it should be required reading for both specialists and for 'anyone who wishes for whatever purpose to find a way of compiling an honest and accountable description of the way ordinary people use language in their daily lives' (212). Milroy assumes background knowledge of the basic, early work in the field (i.e., Labov 1966 and 1972) but presents newer material in more detail so that the nonspecialist should be able to follow. While the book will be of considerable use to those contemplating quantitative sociolinguistic research, it is not a technical manual. For more discussion of technical aspects of sociolinguistic research design and analytic techniques, Milroy supplies useful bibliographical references.

The book is divided into chapters on early approaches to the study of variation, sampling, interview design, social variables, analyzing phonological and syntactic variation, style-shifting and codeswitching, and practical applications. The methodologies of two classic case studies, Labov's Philadelphia project and the Milroys' Belfast project, are presented in some detail. There are two main themes: that methodological and analytical choices are, consciously or unconsciously, grounded in theory and that the methodological techniques developed on the basis of a particular speech community or particular type of linguistic data cannot necessarily be applied to other speech communities or other types of data, at least not without adaptation.

One of the most important examples for these two issues is Milroy's discussion of social class. Since Labov's classic New York City study, social class, made operational through the construction of socio-economic status indices, has been the major social variable in sociolinguistic research. But as Milroy shows clearly, many linguists are unaware that this functionalist notion of social class is highly controversial in nature. Our explanations of linguistic change in terms of prestige, both overt and covert, are predicated on the notion of a class consisting of some group of people with shared values, as evidenced by similar occupations and incomes. Milroy compares this particular model of social class with competing models, particularly the Marxist notion of social class. One problem for the field has been researchers' taking the functionalist model as a given, without realizing its effect on

our explanations of sociolinguistic behavior. A second problem is in terms of Milroy's second theme, mentioned above: many studies which have adopted Labov's use of socio-economic indices have had problems with the interpretation of patterns of covaration of language use and social class. So while social stratification based on socio-economic measures might have been revealing in the New York City context, it is not necessarily applicable to other urban contexts, as Milroy notes for a number of British sociolinguistic studies.

Along with pointing out the problems (as well as good points) in mainstream sociolinguistic research, Milroy's book is particularly useful in indicating alternatives, again with their pros and cons. For instance, Horvath's (1985) use of Principal Components Analysis in her Australian English study is presented as a way of grouping speakers on the basis of their linguistic behavior as opposed to assigning them to preconceived social groups. And for those interested in the study of syntactic variation, a number of ways of dealing with the usual problem, lack of sufficient data, are outlined, as are the theoretical implications of these solutions.

The reader will conclude that sociolinguistics has matured considerably in the decades since Labov's pioneering research, and that the preoccupations of the seventies in terms of refining quantitative methodology have given way to the study of wider ranges of speech communities and of types of linguistic data. For the most part this book deals with the Labovian approach to sociolinguistics, i.e., as the study of change in linguistic systems, although speaker-based approaches (e.g., Gumperz' interactional sociolinguistics) are also discussed. As Milroy notes, whether indeed a unified sociolinguistic theory will develop is a matter of debate.

There is little to criticize in this book. It is uniformly well written and insightful. I found only two errors, both of them minor. In a list of mixed codes (e.g., Tex-Mex, a variety used by Spanish-English bilinguals in California), Milroy gives Joual, which she describes as a mixed code consisting of Canadian French and English (186). Joual, like other North American varieties, contains English borrowings, but it is not a mixed code. Nor is it general 'Canadian French,' since it is geographically restricted to Quebec urban centres. The second errors is contained in the brief discussion of research on linguistic constraints on code-switching. Berg-Seligson (1986) is said to present bilingual Spanish/Hebrew data which challenge 'claims of universal [constraints]' (195). This is misleading since Berg-Seligson does not challenge the existence of universal constraints in general but rather of Poplack's Equivalence Constraint. Indeed she claims her findings lend support to Poplack's Free Morpheme Constraint. Finally, for a methodological update, Milroy's statement that the

VARBRUL computer program developed by David Sankoff and his colleagues is not adequately documented for inexperienced users (138) is true of PC versions but not of the recently released and relatively easy to use MacIntosh version, named Goldvarb.

REFERENCES

BERG-SELIGSON, S. 1986. 'Linguistic constraints on intra-sentential code-switching: A study of Spanish/Hebrew bilingualism.' Language in Society 15:313-348.

HORVATH, B. 1985. Variation in Australian English. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LABOV, W. 1966. The Social Stratification of English in New York City. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.

----------. 1972. Sociolinguistic Patterns. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

RAND, D. and D. Sankoff. 1988. Goldvarb: A Variable Rule Application for the MacIntosh. Montréal: Université de Montréal.

Ruth King
York University