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Sommario/riassunto

The significant advances witnessed over the last years in the broad field of linguistic variation testify to a growing convergence between sociolinguistic approaches and the somewhat older historical and comparative research traditions. Particularly within cognitive and functional linguistics, the evolution towards a maximally dynamic approach to language goes hand in hand with a renewed interest in corpus research and quantitative methods of analysis. Many researchers feel that only in this way one can do justice to the complex interaction of forces and factors involved in linguistic variability, both synchronically and diachronically. The contributions to the present volume illustrate the ongoing evolution of the field. By bringing together a series of analyses that rely on extensive corpora to shed light on sociolinguistic, historical, and comparative forms of variation, the volume highlights the interaction between these subfields. Most of the contributions go back to talks presented at the meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea* held in Leuven in 2001. The volume starts with a global typological view on the sociolinguistic landscape of Europe offered by Peter Auer. It is followed by a methodological proposal for measuring phonetic similarity between dialects designed by Paul Heggarty, April McMahon, and Robert McMahon. Various papers deal with specific phenomena of socially and conceptually driven variation within a single language. For Dutch, José Tummers, Dirk Speelman, and Dirk Geeraerts analyze inflectional variation in Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch, Reinhild Vandekerckhove focuses on interdialectal convergence between West-Flemish urban dialects, and Arjan van Leuvensteijn studies competing forms of address in the 17th century Dutch standard variety. The cultural and conceptual dimension is also present in the diachronic lexicosemantic explorations presented by Heli Tissari, Clara Molina, and Caroline Gevaert for English expressions referring to the experiential domains of love, sorrow and anger, respectively: the history of words is systematically linked up with the images they convey and the evolving conceptualizations they reveal. The papers by Heide Wegener and by Marcin Kilarski and Grzegorz Krynicki constitute a plea against arbitrariness of alternations at the level of nominal morphology: dealing with marked plural forms in German, and with gender assignment to English loanwords in the Scandinavian languages, respectively, their distributional accounts bring into the picture a variety of motivating factors. The four cross-linguistic studies that close the volume focus on the differing ways in which even closely related languages exploit parallel morphosyntactic patterns. They share the same methodological concern for combining rigorous parametrization and quantification with conceptual and discourse-functional explanations. While Griet Beheydt and Katleen Van den Steen confront the use of formally defined competing constructions in two Germanic and two Romance languages, respectively, Torsten Leuschner as well as Gisela Harras and Kirsten Proost analyze how a particular speaker's attitude is expressed differently in various Germanic languages.