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Preface
Variation at the crossroads: Advancing theory by integrating methods

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The *New Ways of Analyzing Variation* conference (*NWAV*) is recognized worldwide as a major forum devoted to the presentation of research in the variationist sociolinguistic framework. Its objectives over its nearly half-century of existence have been to foster the study of language in its social context by providing a venue in which the latest theoretical, methodological and technical developments in the quantitative analysis of natural speech are showcased. After decades of building on strong empirical foundations, the time has come for a re-engagement among sociolinguistics and linguistics more broadly. Opportunities for integration across related disciplines are valuable ways of making advances, both descriptive and theoretical. Understanding how humans deploy variation to facilitate communication while the language itself continues to change is a fundamental element in understanding human language, society and interaction. Recent progress in the field can be linked to researchers' abilities to leverage new methods and implement novel and increasingly large datasets. These advances have expanded the available testable hypotheses as well as the diversity and representativeness of language data that can be brought to

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bear on compelling questions of language as a complex system and its intersection with human populations.

To promote these lines of inquiry, *NWAV44*, hosted jointly by the University of Toronto and York University in 2015, included a special Variation at the Crossroads workshop with a focus on advancing linguistic theory by integrating diverse methods of data collection and analysis. Five speakers from diverse fields were invited to present keynote talks; each of these speakers is breaking new ground by integrating variation into areas of linguistic analysis where variation has not traditionally been considered. Each of their talks was complemented by a panel of related papers. We are very pleased to offer a sampling of the work that was presented in that workshop in this issue of the *Canadian Journal of Linguistics*.

The goal of both that workshop and this issue is to bring into focus major threads of research in language variation and change over the past half-century, critically and pointedly encouraging fresh insights regarding intersections with linguistic theory, language acquisition, historical linguistics, language documentation and other disciplines. This collection brings together research conducted in eight countries by scholars on three continents and examines a range of languages including Arabic, Ancient Egyptian, English, French, Gaelic, Nkep and Picard.

The spirit of this cross-disciplinarity is expanded on elegantly in William Labov's contribution to this issue: a critical discussion of plenary papers from the workshop. In his article, Labov highlights connections between his own work and the research presented by the invited speakers: syntactician David Adger, psycholinguist Elizabeth Johnson, endangered language documentarian Miriam Meyerhoff (also an established variationist sociolinguist), and corpus linguist Benedikt Szmrecsanyi. This discussion provides a clear sense of the intersections or overlaps among these fields – all areas that invite further investigation.

For this volume, we have selected five additional authors whose work further illustrates this spirit of cross-disciplinary analysis. These include two scholars applying formal linguistic theory to languages not previously subjected to sociolinguistic scrutiny in order to improve existing linguistic description of the languages and formal theory: Shayna Gardiner's work on the evolving syntax of Ancient Egyptian and Julien Carrier's study of the formation of a new dialect of Inuktitut in the High Arctic. The latter is also engaged in the work of endangered language documentation. Three additional articles also combine endangered language documentation with sociolinguistic variationist analysis. William Cotter documents Arabic dialectal variation in and around Gaza City, exploring a range of infrequently studied social contexts. Darcie Blainey describes liaison in Louisiana French as she comments on adaptations of traditional sociolinguistic methods necessary for work in small and endangered language communities. Julie Auger and Anne-José Villeneuve engage with language policy and planning through an analysis of Picard, a variety spoken in France.

We are delighted to present this special issue, a collection of work that strengthens variationist perspectives by integrating approaches from other areas of linguistics. It is our hope that such cross-pollination expands our field of inquiry and offers insights as we continue our study of language variation and change.

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