INTRODUCTION
THE COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXTS OF ACCOMMODATION

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Several of the key concerns that, some 15 years ago, underlay the development of a theory of interpersonal linguistic accommodation (cf. Giles, 1973; Giles et al., 1973) are still operative today. Most importantly, the need to understand style-shifting and code-choice in context still seems to be afforded inadequate priority in contemporary sociolinguistics, as witnessed for example in the recent review of sociolinguistic aims and methods by Milroy (1987). Milroy accurately reflects an enduring concern in sociolinguistics for survey designs, tracing dialect variation between social groups, employing a methodology inspired by a search for ‘vernacular’ styles of language, in interviews or more natural settings. According to these priorities, situational variation in speech can appear to feature only as ‘noise’, interfering with the presentation of a vernacular ‘base-line’ style which is supposedly the ‘real’ object of sociolinguistic inquiry. It is perhaps significant that Milroy’s influential treatment restricts stylistic concerns to a final chapter. Though that chapter offers a highly valuable and self-contained review of recent research, we are inevitably led to feel that style is still peripheral to sociolinguistic concerns.

It was in part to redress this bias towards ‘static’ sociolinguistic surveying that Giles’ early work under the heading of ‘accommodation’ was begun. Giles and Powesland (1975), for example, argued that explanatory initiatives in sociolinguistics needed to accept that style- or code-choice can be strategic and motivated, rather than a simple correlate of sociostructural variables such as region, class or social situation. Explanations would lie in formal study of the diverse socio-psychological processes—goals, recognised constraints, attributions and evaluations—that involve speakers and listeners in on-going interaction. The most crucial of these initial observations was that linguistic choices are not made in isolation, but relationally, as for example choices vis a vis interlocutors’ own choices. Accordingly, Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) has evolved as an increasingly sophisticated model of the dynamics of interpersonal (and subsequently, intergroup) influence in talk.

We do not intend to offer a detailed historical review of SAT’s conceptual and empirical development in this prologue. This task has recently been accomplished elsewhere (Giles et al., 1987). Also, many of the contributors to this Special Double Issue have themselves been assiduous in referencing previous work and in aligning their own specific insights and developments to the existing frameworks. Furthermore, SAT has recently featured in quite diverse literatures, and has been invoked in so many settings that a truly comprehensive appraisal is beyond the scope of this essay. As evidence of the scope of SAT’s recent employment in applied settings, we can point to the interpretation of empirical...
findings and communicative tactics from domains including, compliance-gaining (Buller and Aune, 1988), courtroom interactions (Aronsson et al., 1987), diplomacy (Gudykunst, 1986a), and radio news reporting (Bell, 1984). SAT has also been integral to the development of theory in related areas, such as intergroup communication (Gudykunst, 1986b), second language acquisition (Giles and Byrne, 1982; Gallois et al., in press), language maintenance and shift (Giles and Johnson, 1987), dialect change (Trudgill, 1986), and the analysis of miscommunication (Coupland et al., 1988; Coupland et al., forthcoming). Over the years, SAT processes have been demonstrated at many linguistic and communicative levels, from dialect and speech-rate phenomena to non-verbal signalling and discursive styles. The theory has also been robust enough to embrace many, sometimes radical revisions, extensions and elaborations, some of which are overviewed in Table 1.

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<tr>
<th>Key processes and phenomena introduced/encompassed</th>
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<td>Attributions</td>
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In the remainder of this introductory essay, therefore, we intend to focus on the general nature of the accommodation model, and offer, in passing, something of a rationale for revising conventional terminology towards the label ‘Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)’ that some researchers (after Giles et al., 1987) are now employing. We shall argue that accommodation theory has now overtaken its early life as a set of propositions predicting listeners’ social evaluations of particular speech-strategies such as convergence, maintenance and divergence (though it can usefully function at this level), and can now be viewed as a generalised model of situated communicative interaction. In fact, we shall introduce the papers in this collection as demonstrating that this is indeed so.

Although a case has previously been made for the relative merits of the accommodation framework over other competing interpersonal communication models (Street and Giles, 1982), we are by no means arguing hegemony for SAT. Taking a recent overview formulation of accommodation processes as a departure-point (Fig. 1, from Coupland et al., 1988), we can see that several of the fundamental concepts invoked under the accommodation rubric are by no means unique to SAT. For example, one of the primary interactional goals specified in the figure is ‘promote social approval’. Accommodation theory holds as a central prediction that this goal will be fulfilled, under specified contextual conditions and recognising several caveats, through ‘speech convergence’, a strategy whereby dissimilarities between interlocutors’ speech styles or codes come to be reduced.
Correspondingly, 'speech divergence', the emphasizing or increasing of dissimilarities between styles, is predicted to give rise to lowered social approval. [A full statement, in propositional terms, of the theory's principal predictions is to be found in Giles et al. (1987).] Notions of 'social approval' of course surface, variously labelled, in diverse treatments of sociolinguistic 'solidarity' processes. Brown and Levinson (1987), for example, invoke the notion of 'positive face', which they define as the desire to 'have one's wants wanted', as a perennial goal underlying 'politeness' strategies in face-to-face interaction. Indeed, Brown and Levinson's emphasis on communicative strategies, mediating intention and speech, itself aligns well with the fundamental design of the accommodation model, as in Fig. 1. Future theoretical work could well explore the degree of detailed fit between the strategies Brown and Levinson taxonomise as 'positive politeness' and the dimensions of accommodative discourse identified in the Coupland et al. (1988) paper.

Again, the priority that the SAT model gives to 'addressee focus', which Fig. 1 shows to provide the basis for particular linguistic choices, is reminiscent of Bell's (1984) observation that sociolinguistic style in general is best seen as variable configurations of 'audience design', a concept the author himself aligns with accommodation theory at a general level. Bell conceives of styles as being selected on the basis of dimensions of 'audience' ranked immediate-to-remote in relation to a speaker. Peng's (1974) work on 'communicative distance theory' may be cited as a further parallel conceptualisation of the focal involvement of addressees in the determination of style- and code-choices, as can that of Le Page (1968; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985) and Bickley (1982). The voluminous research traditions on communicative role-taking (e.g. Burleson, 1985; Clark and Schaefer, 1987; Graumann and Hermann, 1988; Krauss, 1987; Kraut and Higgins,
...and again motor mimicry (e.g. Bavelas et al., 1988) invoke overlapping concerns. Indeed, 'tenor' has been developed as an explanatory concept within British traditions of register analysis (cf. Halliday, 1978; Gregory and Carroll, 1978) to focus precisely on those dimensions of style-choice that are related to addressee variables. As is true of work in all these traditions, SAT gives explanatory priority to recipiency considerations in its account of style- or code-choice, though it also seeks to specify particular respects in which the addressee's characteristics come to influence encoding. In Fig. 1, 'attend to other's productive performance' is represented, though several alternative foci have recently been modelled (see below). Again, SAT attempts to integrate addressee considerations with a host of other variables in the socio-psychological environment of the speaker/hearer dyad.

The complex of socio-psychological processes SAT recognises in recipiency to talk (perceptual, labelling, attributional and evaluative, in Fig. 1) in general terms echoes Gumperz's (1982a, b) work on conversational inferencing. Gumperz' approach is also a rare sociolinguistic initiative in following through descriptive research, via recognising inferential processes, into considering social consequences of interaction, in terms of confirming social stereotypes and promoting intergroup tensions. Although SAT's early claim that there is 'a basic set to accommodate' (Giles and Powesland, 1975) might suggest the theory essentially models sociolinguistic solidarity and communicative cooperation, in fact miscommunication is an increasingly focal concern of the accommodation model (cf. references given above; also Coupland et al., in press). SAT explicitly recognises the likely impact of interpersonal communicative exchanges upon local and broader contextual factors. These include normative expectations of and pressures on interactional styles, sociolinguistic stereotypes, developing relationships, etc., and upon a range of individual 'states', self-concepts, identities, subjective wellbeing, and so on (refer again to Fig. 1). The model's cyclical operation, contemplating the complex interplay and mutual influences to talk, communicator-characteristics and contexts, therefore carries with it possibilities of social and individual change. Here we can conceive particularities of dialect-change in the individual or the community, changing sociolinguistic norms, ideological shifts, and processes of intrapersonal development or decline.

It is the fact that the accommodation model explicitly integrates sociological, socio-psychological and sociolinguistic processes—talk embedded in its contextual antecedents and consequences—that best justifies its status as a communicative theory. The behavioural data may well be 'speech' phenomena in face-to-face interaction—as in the treatments, in the present Issue, of accent/dialect variation (Prince; Yaeger-Dror), lexical diversity (Bradac et al.), formality (Levin and Lin; Scotton) interruptions, pauses, utterance-length, back-channelling and laughter (Bilous and Krauss)—but they are located in a complex system of individual and group dynamics operating pervasively throughout communication processes. Also, recent theoretical work of our own (Coupland et al., 1988) has suggested that taking account of a broader spread of possible 'addressee orientations' will lead to a far wider range of sociolinguistic strategies being invoked under the rubric of accommodation than the 'conventional' categories of convergence, maintenance and divergence. Correspondingly, we are proposing that the model should cease to be concerned only with 'speech' phenomena even at the behavioural level of 'sociolinguistic encoding'. We have argued that communicative accommodation can usefully be construed as the full range of interpersonal addressee-oriented strategies in discourse whereby speakers 'attune' their talk to some characteristics of the hearer. Convergence, maintenance and divergence,
which can be labelled ‘approximation’ strategies, are well documented as signifiers of interpersonal association/dissociation, but a host of other dimensions of talk can, in context, also signify these precise qualities of an interaction. A convergent orientation is thus predictably signalled through rendering talk adequately (and not over-) explicit and clear (‘comprehensibility strategies’); through selecting and continuing topics, managing sequential options, respecting face-wants and so on optimally (‘discourse management strategies’); and allowing appropriate role-discretion to an interlocutor (‘interpersonal control strategies’).

However grossly the figure we have been referring to characterises its principal components, it clearly invites multi-disciplinary input from across the range of language and communication sciences. Hence, one important phase in the development of SAT was the appearance, in the mid-1980s, of a special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* devoted to the dynamics of speech accommodation (Giles, 1984). Interdisciplinary input was a key feature of that collection, as scholars from an array of methodological traditions explored very different aspects of the model. Some 1984 papers allowed SAT to demonstrate in particular its sociolinguistic (in the narrower sense of the term) facility, off-setting criticisms that were then current that SAT’s descriptive linguistic base was limited (e.g. Bell, 1984). The sociolinguistic momentum of the 1984 collection is maintained in the present Issue, which generally reflects the rapid growth of SAT-related research across the disciplines. The papers which follow examine a rich variety of communicative phenomena and processes in conversation and in the media, again emanating from diverse cultures and methodological traditions. We are treated to rare longitudinal case-studies across individual careers and the lifespans of social groups, observational analyses and self-report data from bars, marketplaces, TV chat-shows and congressional hearings, and these alongside elegant and complex factorial experimental designs in controlled experimentation.

We would select two clusters of issues that are particularly highlighted. First, the papers further demonstrate the ubiquity and complexity of accommodative processes in action both outside the laboratory (Levin and Lin) and inside it (Bilous and Krauss), in the East as well as the West (van den Berg), and in song (Prince; Yaeger-Dror) as well as in talk. For instance, a convergent orientation is encoded variously when examining different linguistic features of the same speakers conversing (Bilous and Krauss), can be over-accommodating even when purporting explicitly to avoid this (Atkinson and Coupland), and can be multidirectional in fulfilling a variety of societal and familial needs (van den Berg). Moreover, convergences can not only satisfy individual desires to accommodate others’ linguistic habits and social prestige (Levin and Lin), but may also be directed towards changing the very nature of the social relationship operating between interlocutors (Scotton). The social meanings of approximating target others, physically present as individuals or prototypically envisaged as a group (Gallois and Callan), can also vary depending on where the accommodative ‘perimeters’ are perceived to be (Bradac, Mulac and House), at what point the sequence occurs interactionally, and under what sociocultural conditions (Genesee and Bourhis). In sum, the deceptively simple notion of convergence continues to be documented in these contributions, though in ways which innovatively explore complexities of motivation, form, consequence and ideological implication.

Second, we see this Issue as helping to clarify the emergent notion (cf. Trudgill, 1986) that interpersonal accommodative shifts are core mechanisms for understanding different long-term language/dialect changes of heterogeneous sub-sections of particular communities
(van den Berg). We see how macro-societal changes cannot only influence social attitudes to transitory convergent shifts in interaction (Genesee and Bourhis), but can also mediate longer-lasting, seemingly divergent shifts across generations (Yaeger-Dror). In addition, it will be argued that the sociolinguistic models for long-term convergent shifts are not inevitably the presumed 'real targets' themselves (for example, towards the elite patterns of the host culture), since other related social groups (Prince) and/or the believed characteristics of these targets (Gallois and Callan) are on occasions accessed instead.

This brief essay cannot hope to capture the rich array of data, methods and ideas, within the SAT framework and independently of it, that the collected articles present. Certainly, for future work in accommodation (and cf. Giles et al., in press), many issues raised here are tantalizing, dynamic constructs worthy of future theoretical consideration; some of these are intergroup contact and vitality (Yaeger-Dror), self-categorization (Gallois and Callan), markedness and interactional power (Scotton), social identification (van den Berg), institutional prescriptions (Atkinson and Coupland), and fluctuating sociocultural contexts (Genesee and Bourhis).

Relatedly, more inter-, rather than multi-disciplinary, scholarship seems an obvious priority for the future. In other words, within the same research programme, we need the closer, longitudinal linguistic detail of Prince and Yaeger-Dror alongside the more global dependent measures of Bilous and Krauss and Levin and Lin, with sociological and ideological parameters made explicit simultaneously, as in van den Berg's and Atkinson and Coupland's papers. All these should, ideally, continue to be grounded in naturalistic observations such as those of Scotton from the media, but also from desultory conversation and other more specifically contextualised 'natural' sources. These will complement the sophisticated experimental paradigms of the kind exemplified here by Bradac et al., Gallois and Callan, and Genesee and Bourhis, and should be examined across a variety of carefully-chosen and theoretically defined social and cultural contexts (cf. Giles and Franklyn Stokes, in press). Arguably, CAT is unique as a theoretical sociolinguistic statement in already having experience of such social, psychological and linguistic ecclecticism, and is well placed to expand its integrative role.

The present Issue of course raises many detailed questions for theoretical and empirical scrutiny. For instance, what is the precise relationship between momentary interpersonal accommodative shifts and longer-term idiolectal, dialectal or language-shifts? What further mechanisms and processes, if any, need to be given theoretical recognition before long-term accommodation can be modelled (presumably in some elaboration of the generalised model in Fig. 1)? What criteria can we securely identify determining which speakers, or prototypes, are selected, consciously or not, as target sociolinguistic models, when and how? How might we arrive at a sufficiently detailed account of the interlocking motivations underlying different situated attuning strategies? How can we determine whether a particular shift is normative or accommodative, and have we an adequate social perspective on its complex consequences for our networks? What legitimately are the boundaries of SAT's remit, and at what points is it useful or appropriate to give ground to other models and related (more emotional) constructs, such as empathy and caring, even accounting and deception? Can the spiralling growth of empirical findings plausibly be integrated into predictive propositional statements of the sort SAT-theorists have worked towards in the past (but which we have not attempted in this context), replete with contextual caveats and special considerations? Should we continue to strive to disentangle linear
accommodative 'stages' from negotiated discourse when accommodation is, from another perspective, a core constituent of that reality?

A plethora of further questions, which are not directly addressed in the following papers, could be raised here—and some perhaps more fitting to others’ theoretical and ideological tastes. Nonetheless, we offer this Special Issue as a testament to the enormous descriptive and explanatory potential of SAT, even in its current form, for our understanding of a vast range of language and communication phenomena and processes. The contributions that follow have a common base in using and extending the core concepts of accommodation theory, but they look outwards from this core to an impressive array of social issues, social contexts and relational processes. It is an academic theory that has provided the cornerstone for the Issue itself, but it is in the illumination of the social world of communicative interchange that all our primary interests lie.

REFERENCES


