

**PROCESSUS DE DIFFÉRENCIATION: DES PRATIQUES LANGAGIÈRES À LEUR  
INTERPRÉTATION SOCIALE**

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Linguistic theory has emerged as a theory of structure, not of practice. As a result, sociolinguistic variation has been given a kind of incidental status. But in fact, sociolinguistic variation constitutes a robust social-semiotic system that enables the non-propositional expression of social concerns as they unfold in interaction. It is a design feature of language, essential to social life, and part of the pragmatics that links speech to the wider social system. Variation takes on meaning through its role in stylistic practice, which includes the stylistic construction of social types and personae. These types and personae are not trivial, but vivify the social distinctions that constitute the social order. They are also not static, but differ across social space and across time. And change in personae is integral to social change, making variation not just a reflection of social change, but part of what brings it about. Based on a variety of data, this talk will focus on the mechanisms of variation as stylistic practice.