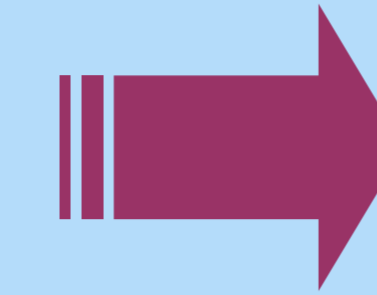


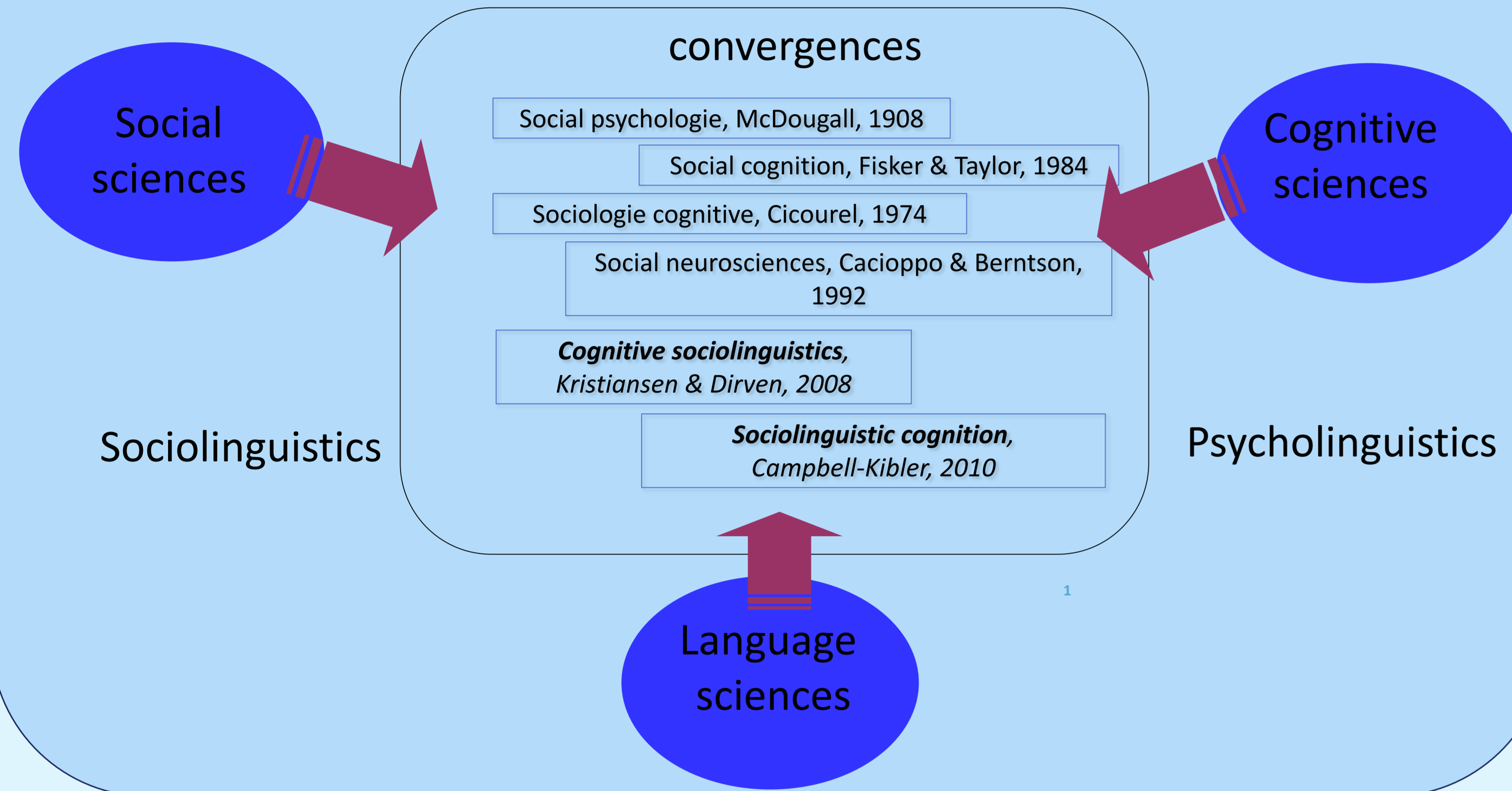
“Competition between ways to say a word (...) is a strange notion for a linguist’s lexicon; the field has not really even assimilated Labov’s variable rule very well”

Menn, Lise & Edward Matthei (1992). The “two-lexicon” account in child phonology. Looking back, looking ahead. In: C.A. Ferguson, L. Menn & C.Stoel-Gammon (eds.), Phonological development. Models, Research, Implications. Maryland: York Press. p. 211–247.



Twenty years after Menn & Matthei’s remark, what’s new about the encounter between language acquisition and variationist sociolinguistics?

1 - The current scientific landscape favors the approach bringing together psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics



3 - Review of studies on child usage of sociolinguistic variables at the phonological level (published from 1964 to 2011)

Nardy, A., Chevrot, J.-P. & Barbu, S. (2013). The acquisition of sociolinguistic variation: looking back and thinking ahead, *Linguistics* 51(2), 255-284.

Topics	Number of studies and languages	Children age	Main tendencies
Social background	7 studies English, French, Spanish	[3-10]	All the studies converge: from the age of 3, the higher the social status of the parents, the more standard variants the child produces. See also, Barbu et al. (poster, this session)
Gender	11 studies English, French	[2-10]	All possible tendencies found : - 7 studies (ages 2-9): No gender effect - 2 studies (ages 6-10): More standard variants in girls - 2 studies (ages 3 -7): More standard variants in boys
Context	10 studies; children aged English, French, Spanish	[3-12]	All the studies but one converge: the children use more frequently the standard variants in the formal context (from the age of 3-4 within family exchanges).
Input	2 studies English	[3-4]	- Mothers of girls address more standard variants to their 2-4 year-old daughters than mothers of boys (Foulkes et al., 2005). - At the age of 3, correlations between the use of non standard variants by mothers and by their children (Smith et al.2007). See also, Liégeois et al., this conference, session 3C
Age	7 studies English, French	[2-12]	The frequency of non-standard variants: - increases around the age of 2-4 years - decreases after the age of 6 in formal situation (school)
Evaluation of variants	6 studies English, French	[2-12]	- 4 studies : Evaluation based on context or status takes place between 9 and 12 years of age. - 1 study using a very simple task (pointing the puppet who speaks correctly) : 5-6 year olds from upper-class families distinguish between standard and non standard variants (Nardy, 2008)

2 - The framework of variationist sociolinguistics

Linguistic heterogeneity and within-language variation

Depending on their situation in the social or geographical space, speakers of the same language speak different dialects of this language.

Variation, variables, variants

Variables : points within the linguistic system where the speaker can say the same thing in different ways.

The variants are “identical in reference or truth value, but opposed in their social and/or stylistic significance”

Labov, 1972: 271

Examples of sociolinguistic variables in French

Presence vs. absence of a variable liaison consonant	[iletisi] vs. [ileisi] <i>il est ici</i> ‘he is here’
Presence vs. absence of the preverbal morpheme of the negation <i>ne</i> . . . <i>pas</i> which surrounds the verb	<i>je ne fume pas</i> vs. <i>je fume pas</i> ‘I do not smoke’

The variants often carry social information about the speaker and the context (indexicality)

Standard variants associated to ...	Non-standard variants associated to ...
social prestige, high education level, professional ambition. They may be valorized.	social skills, solidarity or loyalty towards the group They may be stigmatized.

The frequency of use of the variants depends upon several factors

The sociodemographic characteristics of the speaker	Elements of the interactional context
more standard variants in women, older speakers, and those with a higher level of education.	more standard variants in formal situations, speaking about work-related topics or to a prestigious addressee, to increase the social distance, etc.

4 – Conclusion and future research

Chevrot, J.-P. & Foulkes, P. (2013). Introduction to the special issue: Language acquisition and sociolinguistic variation, *Linguistics* 51(2), 251-254.

Working hypothesis

Knowledge about social life and knowledge about language structure each other. The acquisition of sociolinguistic variation is not a side effect of the general acquisition process, but an inherent and active part of it.

Key issues for years to come

- Age of appearance of adult-like sociolinguistic patterns during development (continuing issue)
- Relationship between the environment – family, peers, teacher – and the acquisition of variation
- The motor of acquisition : Awareness of norms and identity and/or implicit learning of patterns ?
- Cognitive mechanisms responsible for the acquisition of indexical knowledge : symbolic variable rules or exemplar-based schemas ?
- Comparing the gender- and SES-related differences in sociolinguistics (sociolinguistic variables) and psycholinguistics (general abilities : lexical diversity, syntactic complexity, etc.).