



The Linguistic Individual: Self-Expression in Language and Linguistics (Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics)

Barbara Johnstone

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Linguists usually discuss language or dialects in terms of groups of speakers. Believing that patterns can be seen more clearly in the group than the individual, researchers often present group scores with no indication of the variation within the group. Even though linguists acknowledge that no two individuals speak alike, few study individual variation and voice.

Barbara Johnstone makes a case for the individual's importance and idiosyncrasies in language and linguistics. Using theoretical arguments and discourse analysis, along with linguistic examples from a variety of speakers and settings, Johnstone illustrates how speakers draw on linguistic models associated with class, ethnicity, gender, and region, among others, to construct an individual voice. In doing so Johnstone shows that certain important questions in sociolinguistics and pragmatics can only be answered with reference to individual speakers. Johnstone's study is important both for the understanding of speech as expressive of self, and for the study of variation and mechanisms of linguistic choice and change.

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