



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The meanings of social meaning

Terkourafi, M.

Citation

Terkourafi, M. (2026). The meanings of social meaning. *Journal Of Pragmatics*, 253, 16-26. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2025.12.005

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4302430>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



The meanings of social meaning

Marina Terkourafi

Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, The Netherlands



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 December 2025

Received in revised form 13 December 2025

Accepted 16 December 2025

Available online 6 January 2026

Keywords:

Truth-conditional equivalence

Indexical meaning

Associative reasoning

Enregisterment

Inference

Arbitrariness

Alienability

Cancellability

Detachability

Persona

ABSTRACT

In its most inclusive, "social meaning" is an umbrella term for inferences about the speaker, irrespective of how these inferences arise, are represented, or change over time/place. However, once these differences are heeded, what various authors have called "social meaning" turns out to share little beyond this general definition. An important difference stems from the observation that, while for Labov truth-conditional equivalence provided the opportunity for social meaning to arise, in experimental pragmatic accounts it is the difference in truth-conditional content that enables it. Consequently, the two types of social meaning are: a) represented differently (indexically vs. propositionally), b) constituted differently (via association/enregisterment vs. by Gricean inference), and c) differ in their arbitrariness or alienability, with the latter remaining stable across time/place, such that they cannot result in language change. Yet, in both cases, there are at least two competing variants and it is the use of one rather than the other that generates social meaning for the hearer capable of identifying the relevant alternatives. However, even this expanded view of social meaning fails to account for social meaning generated in the absence of any alternatives, when expressions devoid of denotational meaning perform a socially binding function for their users. To take in also these cases of social meaning par excellence, where the sole meaning of an expression is its social one, I propose a conceptualization of social meaning as input and as output to the inferential process that allows us to capture its essentially performative, multi-modal, and hearer-dependent nature.

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Social meaning rising

The term "social meaning" has known a sharp rise in popularity in recent years (see Fig. 1); and while one cannot be certain that the observed uptick in frequency is due to linguistics publications alone, the term's rising popularity is beyond doubt.

This popularity, however, has also a dark side: more often than not, the term "social meaning" is used as if it were self-explanatory; indeed, it is hardly ever explicitly defined. This lack of explicit definition obscures the fact that in the literature on social meaning, the term is used to mean many different things, which are sometimes incompatible with one another.

To some extent, such diversity in usage is understandable: the term itself is compound, signalling its grounding in two fields, sociolinguistics and semantics/pragmatics. Yet, research on social meaning to date has been taking place in the former much more than in the latter. This special issue takes stock of ongoing research on social meaning from a variety of

This article is part of a special issue entitled: Social Meaning published in Journal of Pragmatics.

E-mail address: m.terkourafi@hum.leidenuniv.nl.

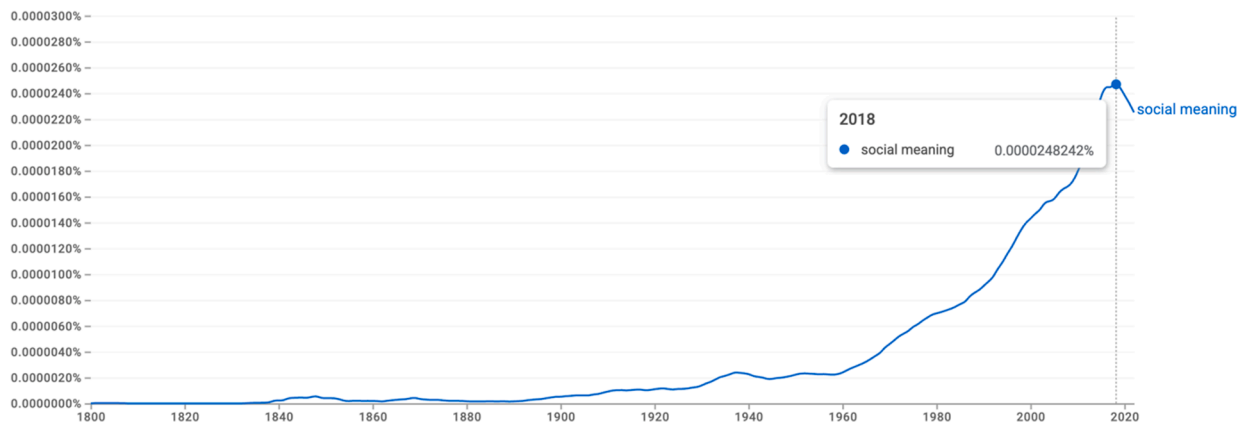


Fig. 1. N-gram showing frequency of “social meaning” in books published in English (1800–2022)

(source: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=social+meaning&year_start=1800&year_end=2022&corpus=en&smoothing=3#; last accessed 10 December 2025).

perspectives including corpus, experimental, semantic/pragmatic and semiotic ones. Cataloguing the varied understandings and uses of the term allows us to explore the extent to which terms from different fields map onto one another so that we may, with renewed awareness, launch into a new phase of studying this fascinating topic.

2. Tracing the evolution of “social meaning”

“Social meaning” as a term of art in sociolinguistics is as old as the field itself. In his seminal study of /ai-/ /au/ centralization on Martha’s Vineyard, Labov writes:

At the first stage of change, where linguistic changes originate, we may observe many sporadic side-effects of articulatory processes which have no linguistic meaning: no socially determined significance is attached to them, either in the differentiation of morphemes, or in expressive function. Only when *social meaning* is assigned to such variations will they be imitated and begin to play a role in the language. (1963: 293; emphasis added)

And further, under the subheading “*The social meaning of centralization*”, we read:

From the information we now have at hand, there readily emerges the outline of a unifying pattern which expresses the social significance of the centralized diphthongs. It is apparent that the immediate meaning of this phonetic feature is “Vineyarder.” (1963: 304)

Labov’s choice of word here is interesting: social meaning is “immediate”. Producing one variant instead of another is associated with a certain social identity directly without taking into account the denotational/referential meaning of an expression; indeed, in keeping with his later definition of the linguistic variable as “alternate ways of saying ‘the same’ thing” (1972: 188), variant choice should have no impact on the denotational/referential meaning of an expression: it should have no consequences for truth conditions. This associative mode of meaning (a variant being associated with a social identity directly *qua* form, unmediated by what it means) remains integral to the understanding of social meaning in variationist sociolinguistic work – where “indexical meaning” is the most common term for describing this.¹

With the gradual, if not unproblematic, expansion of the study of variation from sounds (units without meaning) to meaning-bearing units (for an overview, see Terkourafi 2011), the discussion has also shifted from choosing among variants which do not differ in denotational/referential meaning to choices between alternatives which may differ in “logical or semantic meaning” (Solt et al., 2025). Based on a series of matched-guise experiments investigating numerical (im)precision (saying “\$509.55” vs. “about \$500” in different contextual conditions and various inferences about speaker competence, likeability, and pedantry listeners draw based on this choice), Solt et al. propose that social meaning can (also) be the output of a process of inference that capitalizes precisely on the different semantic meanings of the two competing expressions:

In contrast to a common view in sociolinguistics that social meanings are indexically associated with linguistic forms themselves, our results support the view that for particular types of variation, especially those where alternatives differ in their semantic content, social meanings may derive from pragmatic inferences drawn by the hearer, including reasoning about the needs of the situation, the speaker’s epistemic state, and the reasons for their choice of form. (2025: 381)

¹ This meaning of “indexical” originates in semiotics and linguistic anthropology (e.g., Silverstein 1976, 2003) and is different from indexicals in semantics, which are expressions like ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ whose reference can shift from context to context (Braun 2017).

Here, because the forms bear meaning in and of themselves, social inferences (about the type of speaker using them) are mediated by what the form (denotationally) means. In other words, while for Labov truth-conditional *equivalence* provided the opportunity for social meaning to arise, in the more recent experimental accounts it is precisely the *difference* in truth-conditional content that triggers and enables it.

This shift is crucial: it has consequences for how social meaning is represented (indexical meaning does not have to be propositionally representable but inferential meaning necessarily is), how it is cognitively processed (arrived at automatically by association or calculated via reasoning about the situation), how it changes over time (whether the social meaning of the same form changes or stays the same across time and place), and how it can be studied (ethnographically, by observing it in its natural ecologies, or experimentally, by manipulating dimensions such as speaker epistemic or native status).² In this introduction, I briefly go over these differences, before proposing a new way of approaching social meaning capable of encompassing the different understandings of the term illustrated in this special issue as well as some new ones.

3. Social inferences vs. social meaning: same or different?

Starting with how social meaning is represented, the two views above stand on opposite sides. If social meaning is seen as the product of a process of calculation using the Gricean maxims (Fairchild et al., 2020; Beltrama and Papafragou 2023; Solt et al., 2025), then necessarily it is propositional, since Gricean inference by definition takes propositions (“what is said”) as input and yields propositions (“what is implicated”) as output.³ That is not the case, however, with indexical meaning, which can be ineffable. An apology performed by saying “My bad” instead of “I apologize” or “I am sorry” (Terkourafi 2015) can compound a whole gamut of attitudes into a cool, hip, laid-back, urban type of persona (Podesva 2007) or habitus (Bourdieu 1990), which, being the product of practices (including linguistic ones), can be hard to summarize or represent propositionally.

Moreover, this persona is *situated*: it is anchored in a specific time and place, something the linguistic label used to describe it can obscure. The persona of “Vineyarder” at the time of Labov’s study, including the linguistic means used to index it, is likely different from the persona of “Vineyarder” today, although the same descriptive label applies to both of them. In the case of indexical meaning, that is, not only the index (what does the pointing) but also what is indexed (what is being pointed to) are continuously shifting (more on this below).

The associative mode involved in this kind of indexical meaning is described by Campbell-Kibler as follows:

Speakers and listeners learn these links through observations of co-occurrence and metadiscourse, which position particular forms tied to particular meanings. These connections are made to seem natural and self-evident through their repetition and their embedding in culturally normative systems of understanding. Having learned these connections, speakers can employ the forms to try to invoke their associated social constructs, either to appropriately align with existing features of a situation or to alter a situation (Silverstein 1976). This work is a crucial tool in the construction of social structures both large and small. Linguistic features, in this view, are resources for social activity, similar to other social objects like wearable fashion, consumption practices, bodily hexis, etc. (2016: 217).

Contrary to the process described by Campbell-Kibler above, which amounts to enregisterment (Agha 2003), the social inferences discussed in the recent experimental pragmatics literature are derived by calculation. In a series of experiments involving failure to be as informative as required, Fairchild et al. (2020) and Beltrama and Papafragou (2023) showed that social inferences about the speaker’s helpfulness, competence or warmth depended on the reasons participants attributed to the speaker for this failure (unwillingness vs. inability to be more informative, with inability variably attributed to non-native status (Fairchild et al., 2020), or lack of knowledge (Beltrama and Papafragou 2023)). In all cases, it is violations of Relation or Quantity that triggered social inferences about the speaker along the familiar Gricean route.

While showing how the resulting social inferences can be derived through a Gricean route, experimentalists are also quick to point out that they are distinct from classic Gricean conversational implicatures in two ways: the social inferences they are now concerned with require neither an assumption of cooperativeness nor the attribution of speaker intention to arise (Beltrama and Papafragou 2023: 4, 30). In the case of social inferences, that is, the Gricean apparatus is enlisted by listeners irrespective of such constraints.⁴ Rather, what social inferences require is “legibility” (Eckert 2019): “they need to be recognizable by listeners within the social context of a given speech community, regardless of the degree to which the speaker meant for them to be recognized” (Beltrama and Papafragou 2023: 30).

Leaving aside the question of whether these inferences constitute “meaning” *stricto sensu* (as meaning_{NN}),⁵ one might point out that speaker intention remains relevant even in such cases. That is because the hearer needs to consider this dimension in order to adjudicate between the “unwilling to say” vs. “unable to say” pragmatic inference that gives rise to the social inference (of competence, likeability, warmth etc.) down the line. The speaker who knew/could be more informative/

² What methods are most suitable is of course not an “either-or” choice; more on this in section 3 below.

³ While this picture has been revised many times since Grice, the central idea that pragmatic inference requires propositional input and yields propositional output remains the same.

⁴ This makes these social inferences a type of “hearer’s meaning” (Hansen and Terkourafi 2023), as argued by Hansen (2025).

⁵ Terkourafi (2021) introduces the term “inferences occasioned by the speaker’s utterance” to distinguish them from Gricean meaning_{NN}.

more precise and wasn't, did nothing to prevent their listener from reaching this (uncooperative) assumption about them. The speaker who didn't know/couldn't be more informative/precise had no choice and is therefore less severely penalized for that failure. This brings the social inferences discussed in this experimental pragmatics literature in line with Generalized Conversational Implicatures (GCIs), which have, since their inception by Grice and further development by neo-Griceans, been attributed to "normal circumstances" (Grice 1975/1989: 37) or "expectations about how language is normally used" (Levinson, 1995: 93). GCIs are Gricean implicatures that don't rely on speaker intention, in the sense that intention isn't taken into account *unless* something in the context or the speaker's behaviour indicates that it should be.⁶

While the social inferences discussed in the experimental pragmatics literature briefly reviewed above could be fashioned as taken-for-granted GCIs which can be cancelled by context or by the speaker saying so, the same is not possible for the Vineyarders' centralized diphthongs meaning "Vineyarder", the original case of social meaning discussed by Labov (1963). The "immediate" inference from the centralized variant to the meaning "Vineyarder" first identified by Labov seems to be so tightly attached to its carrier form that it appears to be virtually inextricable from it, i.e. non-cancellable⁷: even if the speaker explicitly states that they are not a Vineyarder, to the knowledgeable bystander, their centralized diphthongs will suggest otherwise.⁸ While in all of these cases social meaning arises because one variant has been used instead of another – a centralized diphthong in place of a non-centralized one (Labov 1963), a precise expression in place of an imprecise one (Solt et al., 2025), an informative/relevant response in place of a less informative/relevant one (Beltrama and Papafragou 2023) – only in the last two cases does the social inference (of competence, likeability, warmth, etc.) remain cancellable. It is, then, not in the extent to which they involve some kind of rudimentary reasoning over alternatives but rather in their cancellability (the fact that they can be overridden by the speaker's intention in the same context) that mediated-by-semantic-meaning social inferences differ from the more "immediate" type of social meaning Labov had in mind, which is seemingly impervious to the speaker's intention for its generation as well as for its cancellation.⁹

At the same time, that does not mean that, in a different context, diphthong centralization could not point to a different social meaning. Cancellability is different from arbitrariness. The social inferences more recently highlighted by experimental pragmatics are cancellable but they are not arbitrary; the opposite is true of social meaning as envisaged by Labov. Take the shifting association of postvocalic /-r/ with different social groups in American English over the past couple of centuries. Imported from the British metropolis, its absence initially became a marker of higher social class, then of lower class and black ethnicity, while its presence later resurfaced as a marker of higher SES in NYC and a generalized marker of mainstream AmE distinguishing it from (Southern) BrE, with a variety of other meanings surfacing locally (Labov, 1972; Mather 2012).¹⁰ Conversely, social meaning understood as rationally calculated using Gricean maxims stays stable across not only time but also place. A speaker, whose failure to "be as informative [or relevant] as is required" (Grice 1975/1989) is attributed to unwillingness, will be perceived as less warm, no matter what the time or place of inference. That is so because the link between unwillingness and lack of warmth is not built incrementally via enregisterment, which is a time- and place-bound process, but derived inferentially based on maxims of rationality which transcend time and place. Similarly, if one is willing to give a second chance to an under-informative speaker because of their non-native status (Fairchild et al., 2020), this willingness will manifest itself no matter what the specific non-native accent used to arrive at that conclusion.¹¹ In sum, the social inferences discussed in the experimental pragmatics literature, being the product of an individual rationality using Gricean maxims, are not changeable (or detachable, in Gricean terms). Although they concern an aspect of the speaker's personality and constitute social information in this sense, they are *not socially constituted*: getting from what is explicitly stated to what is understood does not depend on what is customary among a group at a certain time and place but rather on maxims of rationality, rules of inference which remain the same across time and place.

Arguably, what is missing from these social inferences is their integration into a larger system of style, defined as "a socially meaningful clustering of features within and across linguistic levels and modalities" (Campbell-Kibler et al., 2006). As Moore and Podesva (2009) emphasize,

styles are clusters of features rather than singular and isolated forms divorced from other language. They are embedded in social practice and occur across linguistic levels, such that syntax, phonology, and discourse work

⁶ Ghezzi (2025) takes a view of social meaning as a GCI.

⁷ This observation lends support to Salmon's (2022, 2025) analysis of social meaning as a conventional implicature.

⁸ The use of shibboleths such as "Scheveningen" to identify German spies in The Netherlands during WWII is one of many historical examples of this (Economist, 2013).

⁹ An exception to this is stylization (Silverstein's third-order indexicals), where a Labovian social meaning can become the target of a particularized conversational implicature purposefully intended by the speaker to achieve locally contingent effects (e.g., mockery, humour, toughness etc.; see Snell 2010 and the references therein).

¹⁰ Another term for the relevant notion of arbitrariness is "alienability" (Grondelaers and Marzo, 2023). An alienable social meaning being "no longer inherent to a specific population [...] can be appropriated by other speakers" to express new social meanings. The characterization of social meaning as "alienable" highlights the fact that the social meaning of a variant can shift over time precisely because it is arbitrary and not rationally calculated. Citing Sneller and Roberts (2018), Grondelaers and Marzo attribute "the diffusion of linguistic phenomena [to] a combination of neutral mechanistic processes (such as interactional frequency) AND the availability of alienable social meaning" (2023: 317; original emphasis). Conversely, the social inferences discussed by experimentalists, being rationally calculated, cannot result in language change in the same way. Considering the original accounts of social meaning aimed at explaining language change (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog, 1968), this is a major shift in the *raison d'être* of social meaning in the first place.

¹¹ I provide a fuller analysis of this example in section 5 below.

synergistically rather than independently of one another. [...] style is not simply an array of meaningful signs, because such arrays do not take on meaning unless they contrast against another array of signs. (2009: 448–9)

Negative concord (Eckert 1989) or tag questions (Moore and Podesva 2009), despite being meaning-bearing units, still participate in such larger systems of signification. However, the social meanings they generate do not capitalize on what they mean but rather on their paradigmatic alternation with other variants in that system of style. Crucially, their logical/semantic meanings stay inert in this process. That is why, like postvocalic /r/, their indexicalities can shift over time and place. This is different from the social inferences described by Beltrama and Papafragou (2023) and Solt et al. (2025). Because these last ones are triggered by the logical/semantic meaning of the competing variants, they remain stable: the same logical/semantic meanings lead to similar social inferences about the speaker, even if the place or time changes.

In the previous paragraphs, I have described three ways in which the social inferences discussed in the recent experimental pragmatics literature are different from social meaning as originally conceived by Labov. In a nutshell, the two types of social meaning are: a) represented differently (indexically vs. propositionally), b) constituted differently (via association/enregisterment vs. by Gricean inference), and c) differ in their arbitrariness or alienability, with the latter remaining stable across time and place, such that they cannot result in language change. Yet, in all cases, there are at least two competing variants and it is the use of one variant rather than the other – no matter how conscious or intentional – that generates social meaning for the hearer capable of identifying the relevant alternatives. What does the hearer's ability to call up these alternatives depend on?

This question brings us to the heart of the matter and has consequences also for how social meaning should be studied. Social meaning in the sociolinguistic tradition is constituted by the practices of a group: the alternative forms find themselves in competition for no other reason than because they are used by groups which are distinct also in their other practices. It is usage that turns these forms into variants of the same variable and it is because of this that their social significance (the group that they index) is arbitrary and can shift over time. The alternative forms analyzed more recently by experimental pragmatics, on the other hand, are in competition because of what they already logically/semantically mean in the language, quite independently of the practices of a certain group. Only in the first case does the “legibility” (to use Eckert's 2019 term) of a variant *qua* carrier of social meaning (and which social meaning) depend on the ears of the hearer and the hearer's familiarity with the practices of a group. In the second case, any rational hearer can derive the social inference, given their knowledge of the language in general.

This has consequences for how social meaning should be studied. If social meaning is constituted by the practices of a group, then it also plays a central role in including and excluding, community formation, and belonging, processes which are all accompanied by (strong) emotions. This means that, next to its cognitive effects, social meaning also has affective effects (Wharton and de Saussure 2023).¹² This does not mean that social meaning cannot be studied experimentally (as is done by Acton and Hunt, 2025; Kuperwasser and Shetreet, 2025) but it does make behavioural measures, which do not elicit metalinguistic judgements but rather measure participants' performance on a non-linguistic task (Veenstra and Katsos 2018), more suitable for studying it.

4. Putting the “social” back into “social meaning”

Before proceeding, it is worth highlighting that the evolution in understandings of “social meaning” traced in the last section reflects the evolution in understandings of the “social” across the three waves of variationist work. From macro-social categories such as region, gender, and class into which speakers were placed by the analyst, interest over the years has shifted to personae intersubjectively constructed in interaction (Podesva 2007) and to underlying dimensions such as desire (Eckert 2002), which allow for speaker agency. From the vantage point of this more recent variationist work, taking speaker subjectivity and intention to be a matter of degree creates the space for these notions to come into social meaning more than previously acknowledged (cf. Hall-Lew et al., 2021: 12).¹³

At the same time, considering the range of speaker-relevant information “social meaning” now covers, from demographics, sexual orientation, and ideological affiliation, to personality and interpersonal dimensions such as competence and warmth, one may wonder whether they all equally constitute “social meaning” in the sense of inferences not only *derived* in a social manner (see also the next paragraph) but also of being *about* a group of people. I believe that this last question is best phrased as a question about “when [these inferences constitute “social meaning”], not “whether” they do so. In my view, any information about the speaker qualifies as “social meaning” so long as it is presented as a group trait rather than an individual personality one (for instance as part of a cultural stereotype such as, *Southerners are lazy, warm* etc. in the US). At the same time, these diffuse social indexicalities, which are “not so much an indicator of [...] style as a resource that is exploited in the stylisation [of a trait]” (Bohmann, 2016:175, cited in Grondelaers and Marzo, 2023: 300) can be particularly difficult to quantify.

¹² For a methodological framework that attempts to take affective effects into account, see Gadanidis et al.'s (2023) ‘stance framework’.

¹³ Similarly, when Grondelaers and Marzo (2023) speak of 1st, 2nd and 3rd order indexicality as one inducing the other and thereby, through a process of increasing the scope of a variant resulting in “social-meaning induced diffusion”, they acknowledge the possibility for speaker intention to be variably infused into social meaning and ultimately play a role in language change as well.

Social meaning, however, is constrained not only by motivation (to join a group) but also by access (to the group) and by the ability to control or modify one's behaviour. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985: 182) early definition of acts of identity is worth keeping in mind here (see also Campbell-Kibler 2016: 217):

We can only behave according to the behavioural patterns of groups we find it desirable to identify with to the extent that: (i) we can identify the groups; (ii) we have both adequate access to the groups and ability to analyse their behavioural patterns; (iii) the motivation to join the groups is sufficiently powerful, and is either reinforced or reversed by feedback from the groups; (iv) we have the ability to modify our behaviour.

In Labov's original understanding of social meaning, both (ii) access (to different groups and their linguistic forms) and (iv) the ability to modify one's behaviour can be low: a Vineyarder may not have access to other ways of pronouncing their /a/'s – and may in that sense not be able to modify their behaviour – yet their realization of these sounds will carry the social meaning of “Vineyarder” to someone familiar with the relevant alternatives – so it is in the ears of the hearer (rather than the mouth of the speaker) that the choice between alternatives gives rise to social meaning.¹⁴

What makes all of this relative is the fact that the relevant groupings are not externally imposed labels but rather dynamic, continuously defined and re-defined by the behaviours and perceptions of language users themselves (recall that (i) concerns the speaker's/hearer's ability to identify the groups). Talk of “identifying” groups here may make it sound as if these groups are pre-existing but that is hardly ever the case, or else this process of group formation would end up being as deterministic as the imposition of macro-social category labels it tries to break free from. Rather, speaker/hearers perform this group-identification process on the fly driven by top-down ideologies, bottom-up perceptual evidence and their goals in the interaction all at the same time. To the extent that speaker and hearer performatively identify the same groups, they will attribute the same social meaning to the same linguistic form. In other words, the speaker's use of a form will be “legible” by the hearer in the way anticipated by the speaker.

This, of course, is also the way in which lexical meanings in general are constituted and shift in the first place, namely by convention. Yet lexical meaning, as the kind of meaning found in dictionaries (including classic conventional implicatures such as contrast carried by *but* in English; Grice, 1975/1989), is widely agreed upon among speakers of a language. Social meaning is less robust than that. There may be disagreement about the social indexicalities of an expression among speakers of a language who coalesce in different groups.¹⁵ But also for the same speaker, the same expression can have different indexicalities depending on context, which jointly constitute its indexical field (Eckert 2008); conversely, the same expression hardly ever carries several conventional implicatures. Understanding social meaning as a kind of truth-conditionally inert lexical meaning akin to a conventional implicature, then, fails to capture its chameleonic nature and essential dependence on the hearer. Social meaning is inherently multi-modal and buttressed by its co-occurrence with other (linguistic and non-linguistic) practices. To the extent that it patterns like a conventional implicature, it is one that varies across social groupings of speakers of the ‘same’ language. It is, therefore, not as robust as classic conventional implicatures, although it may be a new variant thereof.¹⁶

5. Social meaning as input and as output

Given the limitations of traditional typologies of (pragmatic) meaning, is there a better way of theoretically capturing social meaning that does justice to its performative, multi-modal, and hearer-dependent aspects highlighted above? In this section, I consider the different roles, namely as input and as output, that social meaning can play in the inferential process, as a possible way forward.

Understanding social meaning as the output of an inferential process identifies it with what is understood about a person's identity and worldview AFTER and BASED ON their use of language: the information about social categorization (of the speaker, the situation and so on) is arrived at *because* someone has said something the way they said it. Both the original Labovian understanding of “social meaning” and its more recent understanding by experimental pragmatics treat social meaning as output. Social meaning in these cases is the output of inference undertaken by the hearer regarding the speaker's chosen form and it is this choice (unintended as it may be) that serves to position them in social space. This inference may be automatic (indexical)¹⁷ or scrutinize the speaker's motivation (reasoning based on Gricean maxims). What

¹⁴ That is not to say that these second-order indexicals (Silverstein 2003) cannot become third-order indexicals, intentionally used to mean “Vineyarder” on occasion. But their ability to mean “Vineyarder” in the first place does not depend on this intentional recruitment.

¹⁵ In social psychology, Jussim et al. (2016) distinguish autostereotypes (positively slanted stereotypes members of a group entertain about their own group) from heterostereotypes (negatively slanted stereotypes one entertains about groups one does not belong to). Horn, 2025 provides a linguistic illustration of this phenomenon and suggests a pragmatic analysis of the divergent evaluations of the same (non-mainstream) constructions in US English.

¹⁶ Specifically, social meaning could be modelled as a conventional implicature valid for subsets of speakers of a language, with the specification of the group that holds this conventional implicature being part of one's knowledge about the corresponding expression. Two attempts at representing this formally are Terkourafi's (2005) GCIs_{MC} (minimal-context Generalized Conversational Implicatures) and Copestake and Terkourafi's (2010) formalization of conventional speech act formulae in HPSG. Matsui (2025) analysis of the Japanese causative-benefactive construction can be described in this way.

¹⁷ Mercier and Sperber (2017) use the term “intuitive inference” to refer to inferences we draw based on regularities in our environments.

is important is that social meaning on both of these accounts would not exist without variation (choice between forms), since it is the use of one form rather than the other that gives rise to it.

An important limitation of this view is that it fails to account for social meaning generated in the absence of any alternatives. These days, especially in youth language and in social media discourse, certain behaviours appear to carry hardly any denotational meaning yet they perform a social-binding function by creating a community of practice among those who are “in-the-know”. Because they carry little or no identifiable denotational meaning to begin with, such forms do not pattern with others as “two ways of saying the same thing”, since nothing is “said” (descriptively meant) in the first place. Examples are Six Seven, defined as “a nonsensical expression used especially by teens and tweens that is connected to a rap song and also to a 6’ 7” tall basketball player”¹⁸ and the Loss meme, discussed by Dancygier and Vandelanotte (2025: 164–166) as an example of a “memetic form for form’s sake” with “no specific meaning[; rather] the satisfaction emerging from composing Loss memes and recognizing images as Loss memes is what constitutes the point of the meme.” Clearly, the function of such behaviours lies in the potential for mutual recognition as members of the same community of practice that they create for their users. Understanding social meaning as output allows us to account also for this kind of social meaning, generated without alternatives, a kind of social meaning *par excellence*, where the sole function of an expression is its social one.

Social meaning as input to the inferential process, on the other hand, concerns social information and/or beliefs about the social identity of the speaker available BEFORE they have produced a particular utterance, which can narrow down the search space for its interpretation – a possibility highlighted in the articles by Weissman (2025) and by Hansen (2025). Such social information can become available in various ways, linguistic as well as non-linguistic. Hansen, for instance, claims that the “speaker’s appearance, interests, [and] home décor” can carry social meaning which can in turn affect propositional (descriptive) meaning. Similarly, in Weissman’s experiments, it is information about the speaker’s political affiliation communicated linguistically that serves to guide expectations regarding their use of gender-neutral nouns. Treating social meaning as input is rather non-traditional, since now social information comes first and affects language processing, instead of a speaker’s linguistic behaviour furnishing the basis for deriving social information about them. That is why Weissman (2025) characterizes it as “social meaning in reverse”. Social meaning as input thus constitutes yet another expansion of “social meaning” beyond the two understandings contrasted in section 3 and captured under social meaning as output above.

Of course, most of the time, social meaning as input and as output empirically overlap. In the real world, it is flesh-and-blood people who produce language, allowing us to integrate our assumptions about them based on what they *say AND sound like* with our assumptions about them based on how they *look AND what they do* as we go along, in a continuous back-and-forth online process, drawing on multiple modalities in parallel. This process is only artificially pulled apart via experimentation in the lab.

An example of how social meaning as input and output can be inter-leaved is provided by Fairchild et al. (2020). In their experiments, the social inference from the speaker’s name and accent to their native speaker status is drawn on associative grounds and serves as input to the pragmatic inference that they are “unwilling to say” from which the further social inference of unhelpfulness is in turn calculated on Gricean grounds. In this case, we have an (associative) social inference as input to the Gricean inferential process and a different (calculated) social inference as output. While this second calculated inference remains stable and is the one experimentalists called “social meaning”, it is preceded by a first associative inference from name + accent to native speaker status which is equally a type of social meaning, albeit of the associative/indexical kind (hence arbitrary and alienable). Similarly, Salmon (2025) shows how additional conversational implicatures (involving maxim-based reasoning) can take as input an initial conventional implicature of Southernness (involving no inference but rather indexically associated with /ɑ:/ monophthongization in Southern US and Texas English).

Viewing social meaning as both input and output allows us to bring still more phenomena under this umbrella and go deeper into its complexities. But which one comes first? Considering that word learning does not happen in a vacuum and that children don’t learn language from just one source, meaning can be associated with the sources and (social) contexts in which it is learned from the start. Social meaning is there from the get-go.

6. A multiplicity of social meanings

Since Grice (1975/1989), meaning in pragmatics has traditionally been equated with what is meant by the speaker. On this view, the speaker’s intention is used to circumscribe the audience for whom their message is formulated. Only meaning intended in this way is “meaning” proper (*stricto sensu*). Social media, in particular, have put a dent in this picture: in the internet-verse, language producers are often unknown to language recipients and vice versa, and both sides may be more or less aware of that. At the same time, social media offer plenty of examples where language recipients (whether envisaged or not by language producers) derive content from hearing/reading/seeing a chunk of language. How and why do they extract from this chunk of language precisely the content that they do? While the case of social media highlights the renewed urgency for studying social meaning, the questions it raises apply more generally to processes of meaning-making through language.

¹⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/slang/six-seven>; accessed 19-11-2025.

In its most inclusive, social meaning is an umbrella term for inferences about the speaker, irrespective of how these inferences arise, are represented or change over time/place.¹⁹ However, once these differences are heeded, what various authors have called “social meaning” turns out to share little beyond this general definition. Should we unify these conceptualizations under a single umbrella-term “social meaning” or does the use of a single term obscure crucial differences between them such that we would be better off studying them separately, each on its own terms? Posing the question in this way makes the matter appear more black-or-white than it actually is. That is because there is more subjectivity in social meaning and more social constituting in linguistic meaning than the previous paragraphs may appear to suggest. As a result, the answer is more of the “it-depends-on-your-goals-for-studying-social-meaning” kind rather than an unqualified “yes” or “no”.

7. The articles in this issue

The eight articles presented below approach these questions from an empirical perspective. Drawing on data from, next to (varieties of) English, Hebrew, Italian, and Japanese, they offer case-studies that illustrate both how social meaning may be modelled in pragmatic terms as well as the challenges this poses. In this way, they push the boundaries of meaning more generally, encouraging us to develop new ways of thinking and talking about it.

In “Stereotyped social meaning, /aɪ/ monophthongization, and Gricean implicatures” **William Salmon** revisits [Smith, Currie Hall, and Munson’s \(2010\)](#) seminal paper on social meaning and semantics, in which the authors argued that /aɪ/ monophthongization in Southern US English carries a conventional meaning of “Southern identity.” Taking a critical look at the meaning diagnostics used by them, Salmon employs a battery of further diagnostics leading him to argue that the social meaning identified by Smith et al. does indeed seem to be conventional, specifically patterning as a Gricean conventional implicature ([Grice 1975/1989](#)).

A different angle, considering social meaning not as conventional but as it can arise pragmatically, is taken by **Eric Acton and Matthew Hunt**. In “Pragmatic alternatives and social meaning”, they rely on a key insight of pragmatic theory—i.e. the notion that an utterance’s meaning in context depends not just on its entailments but also on what could have been said instead—to explore social meaning as it arises from pragmatic interaction. Specifically, Acton and Hunt show that singular definites of the form *the X* (e.g., *the family*) in competition with possessive definites (e.g., *your family*) can convey a social relation between speaker and addressee that is “at once more casual and chummy and less intimate and personal” via Gricean reasoning over pragmatic alternatives.

Using data from the Yale Grammatical Diversity Project surveys, in “The stigma enigma: When the personal (dative) is political”, **Laurence Horn** explores the variable stigmatization of two constructions in non-mainstream US English (i.e., positive *anymore* and the personal dative) in in/out group contexts. What Horn refers to as a “stigma enigma” is the fact that these constructions are recognized and accepted among their respective in-groups, while stigmatized by out-groups. This divergent behavior of constructional social meaning and stigma is then compared to the variable social meanings surrounding racial and ethnic slurs, especially regarding questions of appropriation and of who has the right to use them. Horn argues ultimately, extending [Nunberg \(2018\)](#), that the derogation associated with both slurs and appropriated constructions can be understood as ventriloquistic Manner implicatures.

In the next article, “Social meaning in reverse: Expectations of English role noun use based on speaker identity”, **Benjamin Weissman** explores whether a hearer’s belief about a speaker’s social identity can license predictions about that speaker’s utterances, and then whether these expectations affect language processing in real time. He runs two experiments. In the first, he tests gender-neutral role nouns (e.g., *salesperson* versus *salesman/saleswoman*) in a forced-choice task, in which participants were required to associate role nouns with politically described fictitious characters (e.g., MAGA Mary and Progressive Pam). It was found that speakers assign gender-neutral forms at significantly higher rates for progressive speakers (Progressive Pam) than for conservative speakers (Maga Mary). In the second experiment, a reading task, there were no significant language processing effects observed with respect to the role nouns, which Weissman interprets as the pattern from the first experiment not manifesting in real-time processing. This experiment also found that participants who were ideologically aligned with the fictitious character read significantly faster than those who were not so aligned. Weissman interprets this result in terms of in/out group effects, lending support to the findings of the next article in this special issue by Kuperwasser and Shetreet.

In their article, “Beyond stereotypes: Cognitive abilities underlying social meaning”, **Inbal Kuperwasser and Einat Shetreet** in turn explore ways in which social meaning affects listener processing of scalar implicatures within in/out group interactions. The study departs from preceding work in that it doesn’t rely on the kinds of stereotypical knowledge that is often utilized; rather, the authors argue for a wider, more general role of social meaning in pragmatic processing, proposing that Theory of Mind abilities—influenced by in/out group identities—can mediate social meaning effects on listener processing. They conclude that social meaning is ingrained in pragmatic processing.

¹⁹ This is the definition of social meaning given by Hall-Lew et al. (2021: 3): “Social meaning is the set of inferences that can be drawn on the basis of how language is used in a specific interaction [...] We also rely on inferences about the sort of person who produces the utterance, the situation they are in, the nature of the relationship between interlocutors, the speaker’s orientation to the content of the talk, and more”.

In the next article, ““Off-the-shelf” features and pragmatic trajectories: The years of *cioè* in Italian”, **Chiara Ghezzi** investigates how social meaning changes over time by focusing on the Italian discourse marker *cioè*, ‘that is’, and its development from 1976 to the present. Ghezzi illustrates a trajectory of indexicality and in-group status among youth of the 1970’s, to a subsequent emblematic status and identity of the group, to then stigmatization and an ultimate decline in use and loss of the social status it once held. Relying on corpus data collected from recordings of call-ins to a radio show in Milan, she further argues that *cioè*’s structural status as a discourse marker (i.e., left and right peripheries) contributed to its “off the shelf” availability to participate in this path of social meaning growth and contraction in the first place.

A diachronic perspective is also taken by **Kimiyo Matsui** in “Grammaticalization and social meaning in the Japanese causative-benefactive construction: Celebrities crafting connections with their audience”. Using data from the celebrity television talk show *Tetsuko’s Room*, Matsui investigates the development of social meaning via grammaticalization (Hopper and Traugott, 2003) and shows that the talk show participants use the causative-benefactive construction to create a sense of involvement among multiple layers of audiences. Specifically, she shows that, as the referentiality of the causative benefactor itself is weakened, the social meaning of involvement with the audience becomes more prevalent.

Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen’s article, “Social meaning as Hearer’s Meaning: Integrating social meaning into a general theory of meaning in communication”, opens with a critique of traditional speaker-centered, intention-based theories of meaning, which she sees as ill-equipped to handle various kinds of social meaning that often depend on hearer assumptions about a very wide range of speaker traits and identity/ies falling outside of anything intended by the speaker. This leads her to assume that a general theory of meaning should include a (sub)theory that “specifically seeks to account for the interpretations derived by hearers.” Hansen argues that the model of Hearer’s Meaning presented in Hansen and Terkourafi (2023), which was influenced by Peircean semiotics, can be used to provide such an integrated account of semantic and pragmatic meaning but also of non-intentional social meaning. The article includes a detailed discussion of linguistic realms in which social meaning affects hearer interpretations as well as problems with incorporating social meaning into mainstream, intention-driven theories of meaning. It also lays out the relevant components of Hansen and Terkourafi’s (2023) theory of Hearer Meaning for these present purposes.

In her Afterword, “Meaning is change”, **Penelope Eckert** provides a bird’s eye view of the history and function of social meaning, leading her to conclude that “the study of social meaning must be a study of change,” something that she sees manifested in the ways speakers create, perform, and maintain identities continually, in constant change, as they move through contexts, relationships, and time. The topics addressed in each of the eight articles in this special issue, across languages and communities, dimensions of semantic and pragmatic meaning, perspectives of interpretation, and across methodologies and types of data, are each a piece of this larger picture of change that Eckert describes, each illuminating its own small corner of the larger question of the nature and roles of social meaning in communication.

Our own goal, with this special issue, has been to highlight the gamut of uses of “social meaning” in the literature, without necessarily advocating for one of them. The eight articles featured here were first presented at the 18th International Pragmatics Conference held in Brussels in 2023. We are very grateful to all the participants who travelled the long road from presentation to publication with us and we offer this special issue in the hope that it will inspire new insights to study social meaning (also) from a pragmatic perspective.

The Special Issue “Social Meaning: Between Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics, but Where Exactly?” contains the following articles.

- 1) “Stereotyped social meaning, /aɪ/monophthongization, and Gricean implicatures” by William Salmon
- 2) “Pragmatic alternatives and social meaning” by Eric Acton and Matthew Hunt
- 3) “The stigma enigma: When the personal (dative) is political” by Laurence Horn
- 4) “Social meaning in reverse: Expectations of English role noun use based on speaker identity” by Benjamin Weissman
- 5) “Beyond stereotypes: Cognitive abilities underlying social meaning” by Inbal Kuperwasser and Einat Shetreet
- 6) “Off-the-shelf” features and pragmatic trajectories: The years of *cioè* in Italian” by Chiara Ghezzi
- 7) “Grammaticalization and social meaning in the Japanese causative-benefactive construction: Celebrities crafting connections with their audience” by Kimiyo Matsui
- 8) “Social meaning as Hearer’s Meaning: Integrating social meaning into a general theory of meaning in communication” by Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen
- 9) “Meaning is change” by Penelope Eckert

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Marina Terkourafi: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

References

- Acton and Hunt, 2025. Pragmatic alternatives and social meaning. *J Pragmat* 243, 42–52.
- Agha, Asif, 2003. The social life of a cultural value. *Lang. Commun.* 23, 231–273.
- Beltrama, Andrea, Papafragou, Anna, 2023. Pragmatic violations affect social inferences about the speaker. *Glossa Psycholinguistics* 2 (1), 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.5070/G601197>.
- Bohmann, Axel, 2016. Language change because Twitter? Factors motivating innovative uses of because across the English-speaking Twittersphere: Variation, representation, and change. In: Lauren Squires (Ed.), *English in computer-mediated communication: Variation, representation, and change*. Gruyter Mouton, Berlin: De, pp. 149–178.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 1990. Structures, habitus, practices. In: *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press, Redwood City, pp. 52–65.
- Braun, David, 2017. In: Zalta, Indexicals, Edward, N. (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/indexicals/>.
- Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn, Eckert, Penelope, Mendoza-Denton, Norma, Moore, Emma, 2006. The Elements of Style. Poster Presented at New Ways of Analyzing Variation 35. Columbus. Retrieved from. https://www.asc.ohio-state.edu/campbell-kibler.1/HMB_poster.pdf.
- Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn, 2016. Towards a cognitively realistic model of meaningful sociolinguistic variation. In: Babel, Anna (Ed.), *Awareness and Control in Sociolinguistic Research*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 123–151.
- Copestake, Ann, Terkourafi, Marina, 2010. Conventional speech act formulae: from corpus findings to formalization. In: Peter, Kühnlein, Benz, Anton, Candace, Sidner (Eds.), *Constraints in Discourse 2*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 125–140.
- Dancygier, Barbara, Vandelanotte, Lieven, 2025. *The Language of Memes: Patterns of Meaning Across Image and Text*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Eckert, Penelope, 1989. *Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School*. Teachers College Press, New York.
- Eckert, Penelope, 2002. Demystifying sexuality and desire. In: Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn, Podesva, Robert, J., Roberts, Sarah J., Wong, Andrew (Eds.), *Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice*. CSLI Publications, Stanford, pp. 99–110.
- Eckert, Penelope, 2008. Variation and the indexical field. *J. Sociolinguistics* 12 (4), 453–476.
- Eckert, Penelope, 2019. The individual in the semiotic landscape. *Glossa: A J. General Linguistics* 4/1, 14.
- Economist, 2013. Schibboleth: the Dutch Make it Difficult to Learn their Language by Speaking Such Excellent English, May 31st 2013. <https://www.economist.com/johnson/2013/05/31/schibboleth>.
- Fairchild, Sarah, Mathis, Ariel, Papafragou, Anna, 2020. Pragmatics and social meaning: understanding under-informativeness in native and non-native speakers. *Cognition* 200, 104171, 1–10.
- Gadanidis, Timothy, Kiss, Angelika, Konnelly, Lex, Pabst, Katharina, Schlegl, Lisa, Umbal, Pocholo, Tagliamonte, Sali A., 2023. Integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses of stance: a case study of English that/zero variation. *Lang. Soc.* 52 (1), 27–50.
- Grice, Herbert Paul (1975) *Logic and conversation*. In: Cole, Peter and Jerry Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and semantics*. Vol. III: Speech acts. New York: Academic Press. 41–58. Reprinted in Grice, H.P. (1989) *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 22–40.
- Ghezzi, 2025. Off-the-shelf" features and pragmatic trajectories: The years of cioè in Italian. *J Pragmat* 247, 120–138.
- Grondeelaers, Stef, Marzo, Stefania, 2023. Why does the shtyle spread? Street prestige boosts the diffusion of urban vernacular features. *Lang. Soc.* 52 (2), 295–320.
- Hall-Lew, Lauren, Moore, Emma, Podesva, Robert J., 2021. Social meaning and linguistic variation: theoretical foundations. In: Hall-Lew, L., Moore, E., Podesva, R.J. (Eds.), *Social Meaning and Linguistic Variation: Theorizing the Third Wave*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 1–24.
- Hansen, 2025. Social meaning as Hearer's Meaning: Integrating social meaning into a general theory of meaning in communication. *J Pragmat* 241, 81–91.
- Hansen, Maj-Britt Mosegaard, Terkourafi, Marina, 2023. We need to talk about Hearer's Meaning. *J. Pragmat* 208, 99–114.
- Hopper, Paul J., Traugott, Elizabeth C., 2003. In: *Grammaticalization*, second ed. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Horn, 2025. The stigma enigma: When the personal (dative) is political. *J Pragmat* 246, 1–13.
- Jussim, L., Crawford, J.T., Anglin, S.M., Chambers, J.R., Stevens, S.T., Cohen, F., 2016. Stereotype accuracy: one of the largest and most replicable effects in all of social psychology. In: Nelson, T. (Ed.), *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination*, second ed. Psychology Press, New York, pp. 31–63.
- Kuperwasser and Shetreet, 2025. Beyond stereotypes: Cognitive abilities underlying social meaning. *J Pragmat* 242, 1–11.
- Labov, William, 1963. The Social Motivation of a Sound Change, pp. 273–309. *Word* 19/3.
- Labov, William, 1972. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Le Page, Robert, Tabouret-Keller, Andrée, 1985. *Acts of Identity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Levinson, S.C., 1995. Three levels of meaning. In: Palmer, F. (Ed.), *Grammar and meaning: Essays in honour of Sir. John, Lyons*, pp. 90–115.
- Mather, P.-A., 2012. The social stratification of/r/in New York City: labov's department store study revisited. *J. Engl. Ling.* 40 (4), 338–356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0075424211431265>.
- Matsui, 2025. Grammaticalization and social meaning in the Japanese causative-benefactive construction: Celebrities crafting connections with their audience. *J Pragmat* 241, 130–143.
- Mercier, Hugo, Sperber, Dan, 2017. *The Enigma of Reason*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Moore, Emma, Podesva, Robert J., 2009. Style, indexicality, and the social meaning of tag questions. *Lang. Soc.* 38 (4), 447–485.
- Nunberg, Geoffrey, 2018. The social life of slurs. In: Fogal, Daniel, Harris, Daniel, Moss, Matt (Eds.), *New Work on Speech Acts*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 237–295.
- Podesva, Robert J., 2007. Phonation type as a stylistic variable: the use of falsetto in constructing a persona. *J. Sociolinguistics* 11, 478–504.
- Salmon, William, 2022. Social markers and dimensions of meaning. *J. Pragmat* 192, 98–115.
- Salmon, 2025. Stereotyped social meaning. /aɪ/monophthongization, and Gricean implicatures. *J Pragmat* 247, 29–41.
- Silverstein, Michael, 1976. Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description. In: Basso, Keith H., Selby, Henry A. (Eds.), *Meaning in Anthropology*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, pp. 11–55.
- Silverstein, Michael, 2003. Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Lang. Commun.* 23 (3–4), 193–229.
- Smith, E. Allyn, Currie Hall, Kathleen, Munson, Benjamin, 2010. Bringing semantics to sociophonetics: social variables and secondary entailments. *J. Laboratory Phonology* 1, 121–155. <https://doi.org/10.1515/labphon.2010.007>.
- Snell, Julia, 2010. From sociolinguistic variation to socially strategic stylisation. *J. Sociolinguistics* 14 (5), 630–656.
- Sneller, Betsy, Roberts, Gareth. Why some behaviors spread while others don't: A laboratory simulation of dialect contact, *Cognition*, Volume 170, 2018, Pages 298–311, ISSN 0010-0277, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2017.10.014>.
- Solt, Stephanie, Mühlendernd, Roland, Burbelko, Mariya, 2025. Social meaning and pragmatic reasoning: the case of (im)precision. *Proceedings of ELM*. 3, 371–382.
- Terkourafi, Marina, 2005. Pragmatic correlates of frequency of use: the case for a notion of 'minimal context'. In: Nikiforidou, Kiki, Marmaridou, Sophia, Antonopoulou, Eleni (Eds.), *Reviewing Linguistic Thought: Converging Trends for the 21st Century*. de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 209–233.
- Terkourafi, Marina, 2011. The pragmatic variable: toward a procedural interpretation. *Lang. Soc.* 40 (4), 343–372.
- Terkourafi, Marina, 2015. Conventionalization: a new agenda for im/politeness research. *J. Pragmat* 86, 11–18.

- Terkourafi, Marina, 2021. Pragmatics as an interdisciplinary field. *J. Pragmat.* 179, 77–84.
- Veenstra, Alma, Katsos, Napoleon, 2018. Assessing the comprehension of pragmatic language: sentence judgment tasks. In: Jucker, Andreas, Schneider, Klaus, Bublitz, Wolfram (Eds.), *Methods in Pragmatics*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 257–279.
- Weinreich, Uriel, Labov, William & Herzog, Marvin, 1968. Empirical foundations for a theory of language change. In: Lehmann, Winfred; Malkiel, Yakov (Eds.), *Directions for Historical Linguistics*. Austin: U. of Texas Press, pp. 97–195.
- Weissman, 2025. Social meaning in reverse: Expectations of English role noun use based on speaker identity. *J Pragmat* 242, 141–155.
- Wharton, Tim, de Saussure, Louis, 2023. *Pragmatics and Emotion*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Marina Terkourafi is chair of sociolinguistics at Leiden University in The Netherlands. Her interests include semantics/pragmatics, sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics and a broad range of issues in the socio-pragmatics of Greek and its varieties. Recent and forthcoming publications include *The Handbook of Sociopragmatics* (CUP, 2021; co-edited), a special issue on *Ethics in Linguistics* (*Linguistics*, 2025), and a textbook on *Methods in Pragmatics* (CUP, 2026; co-authored).