Fergus O’Dwyer’s *Linguistic Variation and Social Practices of Normative Masculinity* presents a cutting-edge analysis of identity-driven linguistic variation in a Dublin sports club. The study is situated within the small but ever-growing field of sport linguistics, which seeks to understand sociolinguistic happenings within sporting institutions, underscored by the place of sport as a widespread social institution and cultural artefact (e.g. Wolfers, File and Schnurr 2017; Schnurr et al. 2021). The monograph contributes to this field by providing a case study of the relationship between different linguistic phenomena and the varying social meanings they index, which constitute performances of male identity.

O’Dwyer terms the club that he works with *Club Fingal* (for reasons of anonymity). While the club offers an array of sports, those with the highest level of participation are the Irish sports of Gaelic football and hurling. He rationalises the decision to study linguistic variation in a sports club on account of it being ‘an excellent place to observe social interaction and identity moves in Irish society’ (1). Indeed, while sport clubs are first and foremost places of sport, they are also ‘fertile ground for identity construction and observation of social interaction’ (3). Hence, they have a secondary function of constructing and maintaining interpersonal relations and
personal identities, among which is masculinity. To that end, these clubs provide a rich area of inquiry for sociolinguists.

The author gives a detailed account of his theoretical approach to identity, drawing on the three waves of variationist study. As he describes it, the first wave was primarily concerned with quantitative analysis of how macro social categories exhibit certain linguistic features. The second wave built on the first, connecting these macro identities to local communities, often adopting an ethnographic methodology in doing so. The third wave is rooted in the dynamic, contextually dependent positions speakers take in communication, rather than the macro or local categories that interactants may align with. Thus, indexical meanings are interactionally and culturally grounded, focusing on the positions and stances interlocutors take across social spaces. O’Dwyer effectively synergises these three variationist waves in his analysis, explaining how local and macro identities are indexed by interactional positioning and stance taking, which, in turn, are indexed by a linguistic variable. A fascinating analytical move the author makes is the inclusion of linguistic markets. These serve as a meso-level identity construct whereby speakers can adopt variants in interaction based on their social and symbolic value. The markets in question are Posh, Proper and Pillar, each comprising different sociolinguistic variables which connect to social or personal attributes, such as education, occupation and sporting choice. Linguistic markets provide a liminal conceptualisation of identity between local, interactionally grounded positions and macro identities, such as broader classifications of age and gender.

Having conceptualised identity in this way, O’Dwyer adopts an ethnographic methodology in order to understand local and interactionally specific positions. He demonstrates how three variables – two phonetic and one discursive – are employed by the players to index different interactional identities that construct their overall masculinities. The first two analytical chapters deal with the phonetic variables – the offset of the PRICE vowel and the realisation of word-final /t/. The author argues that differing phonetic features of these two variables index different interactional stances, which, in turn, construct alignment with a linguistic market. For example, in the case of the PRICE vowel offset, a higher and more advanced realisation indexes a ‘tough’ interactional identity, while the lower and retracted variant indexes an authoritative stance. Furthermore, the word-final /t/, especially when combined with a low and retracted PRICE vowel offset in the lexical item alright, appears to index higher epistemic status. O’Dwyer supports these claims with an extensive acoustic analysis accompanied by a more qualitative examination of these variants in interaction. To round off the discussion, the author undertakes a discourse analysis of humorous practice in the sports club. He demonstrates the multifunctionality of
conversational humour, which achieves varying functions such as indexing solidarity, challenging peers and underscoring one’s masculinity.

The volume makes a number of important contributions to sociolinguistic inquiry. One of the study’s key contributions is its original expansion of a steadily growing field – sport linguistics. O’Dwyer presents the first notable study of linguistic variation in a sports club, integrating a number of theoretical, analytical and methodological approaches in a cogent and insightful work. For instance, he demonstrates the efficacy of drawing on the advances of all three variationist waves, connecting interactional positioning to meso and macro identity claims. In addition, the amalgamation of quantitative and ethnographically-informed qualitative techniques, mirrored by the rapprochement of sociophonetics and discourse analysis, presents an attractive methodological alternative to exclusively qualitative approaches. Given that studies in sport linguistics tend to emphasise qualitative analysis, O’Dwyer’s work may pave the way for a broader adoption of mixed method techniques in this area. Finally, the monograph presents fascinating and enlightening empirical findings, further advancing our collective understanding of how language constructs masculinity in sporting contexts. Of particular interest is the relationship between interactional identities, linguistic markets and masculinity; for O’Dwyer, masculinity is the cumulative result of a number of micro-level interactional positionings, indexed by differing linguistic variables and mediated by varying linguistic markets.

In sum, the book is a convincing and important sociolinguistic work, and will be essential reading for those whose scholarly interests lie in sociolinguistics, linguistic ethnography and language and gender studies.

References
