

## Lecture on Sociolinguistics

Roadmap: 0. Introduction; 1. Regional dialects; 2. Social dialects; 3. Languages in contact (4...)

## 0. Language and social attitudes

Value judgments about language should be recognized as **socially based**: isolate the **social** aspects from the purely **linguistic** ones. (similar to prescriptivism vs. descriptivism).

Social factors play a very important role in how people actually speak. We examine these factors to understand how they underly linguistic variation.

Reminder: classifying "correctness":

1. **Established criteria of educated written language**
2. **Issues on which educated people differ** (different usage in different genres, also different opinions)
3. **Changes in the spoken language that some people resist**
4. **Pure inventions of self-appointed grammarians with no basis in linguistic structure or historical usage**

Language varieties:

dialect	<u>any language variety shared by a community of speakers,</u> <u>has unique phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, usage, and vocabulary</u>
accent	<u>regional phonological or phonetic distinction (sound in a dialect)</u>
idiolect	<u>the unique characteristics of an individual speaker</u>
slang	<u>informal lexicon (words/expressions) that have not gained widespread acceptability</u>
jargon	<u>specialized vocabulary associated with a trade, profession, sport, etc.</u>

## Dialect variation and its evaluation

Language has a deep social function of defining group identity.

How?\_\_\_\_\_

George Bernard Shaw (1916 preface to his play *Pygmalion*): "It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him."

In Shaw's England, to "spot" someone is a (usually **negative or even hostile**) **evaluation**.

## Remember: shibboleth

People have been killed based on linguistic markers of regional or ethnic dialect: e.g., the Bible, in Judges 12: Jephthah and the Gileadites against Ephraimites:

6 ...If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

Also: in the Dominican Republic in 1937 [tens of thousands of Haitians were massacred](#) on the basis of whether or not they could roll the /r/ in *perejil*, the Spanish word for "parsley."

*American regional and class-based accents are also subject to sometimes harsh evaluation.*

## Social patterns in language

The study of variation in speech that depends on geography, identity, social and economic status is the domain of **sociolinguistics** -- **variation in the form of language**, especially as the result of **social categories**.

## Sociolinguistic judgments

When you hear a speaker of American English (or any other language you know well), you might often ask yourself what kind of person is talking:

what **sex**? what **age**? from **what part** of the country? what **social class**? what **race or ethnicity**?

Most people are **very good at guessing sex and age and individual identity**, and **fair at guessing geographic region**. We're sensitive to **social class markers** in dialect areas we are familiar with.

## 1. Regional dialects

*Dialect differences* - often increase in proportion to communicative isolation (e.g. America, England)

*Dialect leveling* - movement towards greater uniformity. Ease of travel & mass media don't seem to cause dialect leveling (e.g. in UK and US there is an increase in dialects in urban areas, while only a few major dialects are spoken on TV and radio)

### 1.1 Some features that distinguish regional dialects of American English

[William Labov](#) and colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania have used telephone survey techniques to construct a detailed [Phonological Atlas of North America](#).

Here are a couple of simple ways in which dialects of American English vary regarding particular distinctions of pronunciation, taken from the Atlas.

1. Many speakers -- especially those in the northern and western parts of the country -- **don't distinguish the vowels** of *cot / caught*.
2. On the other hand, many southern speakers don't distinguish the vowel in words such as *pin / pen* or *him / hem*: these two lax vowels are **merged before a nasal consonant** (but not in other contexts, such as *pit / pet*).

**"Matched guise" experiments** (listeners hear the same material spoken with different accents) show: **evaluations of traits such as intelligence can be strongly influenced by social stereotypes associated with speech pattern**. Similarly, African-American or Latino speech markers can make the difference between being shown a house/apartment & being told, it is no longer available

### Lexical distinctions between dialects

Aspects of language besides pronunciation ("accent") set speakers apart.

Vocabulary: e.g. 1950s England (S. C. Ross) **U and non-U** vocab. – **arbitrariness** of most sociolinguistic markers

Also: words for carbonated beverage in the U.S. <http://popvsoda.com:2998/images/bigdrawn.gif>

### Syntactic differences

Ozark, MO *John will eat and Mary.* Appalachian English *He might could do it. You might should go home.*

Dialect 1 (SAE): *between you and I.* *Won't he let you and I swim?* *Won't he let me swim?*

Dialect 2 (SAE): *between you and me.* *Won't he let you and me swim?* *Won't he let me swim?*

British English: *I could have done it. I could have done.* SAE. *I could have done it. \*I could have done.*

## 2. Social dialects.

### 2.1 Prestige dialects

"Grammatical" aspects of language use are common in discussions of "good" & "bad" language.

How do arbitrary prescriptive rules arise? – use of language as a social gatekeeper.

### 2.2 Social dialect: g-dropping in English

There are systematic analogical relationships among different social and registral dimensions. E.g., **social class and formality**: case study: g-dropping in English.

#### What is g-dropping?

The **term** comes from the **orthography**: *ng* for the velar nasal [ŋ] ; *n* for the alveolar nasal [n], e.g. *she's opening/openin' the door.* In fact, there is **no [g] sound involved at all.**

Thus in "g-dropping" **nothing is ever really dropped**

#### What words are candidates for g-dropping?

English speakers do **not have a general alternation** between final velar and coronal nasals,

e.g. *boomerang* does not become *boomeran'*, and *ring* does not become *rin*.  
 Only **unstressed -ing** at the ends of words.

In some dialects, g-dropping applies only to the inflectional suffix -ing (e.g. *trying*), and not in nouns such as *wedding* or *morning*.

*They were buildin' a house.* but not *They live in a huge buildin'.*

For most, it's a matter of **frequency**: nouns can do it (as in *mornin'*), but verbs do so more often.

### Where does g-dropping come from?

G-dropping a **more conservative pattern**.

#### Early Middle English:

Present participle inflectional suffix was **-inde** or **-ende**.

Derivational suffix **-ung** turned nouns out of verbs (like present-day "building")

In German this distinction is preserved: **senk-** "sink, lower"

**senk-end** "(to be) lowering" (*Steuer senkende Massnahmen*, "tax lowering measures")

**Senk-ung** "lowering" (*Steuersenkung* "tax cut")

In English, the **-ende** suffix lost its **-de** ending, and the **-ung** suffix was weakened to **-ing**.

This led to a confusion of the two suffixes, and eventually, in some dialects, including the written standard, they **merged into the modern -ing suffix**.

One result is that it's hard to classify -ing as inflectional or derivational.

**they were saying** (inflected verb)                      **a famous saying** (a derived noun)

**Note:** for most speakers, the two suffixes never completely merged.

#### 19th- & early 20th-century England:

G-dropping (really "non-g-adding") marked the **rural aristocracy as well as the lower classes**. The velar pronunciation, a **middle-class innovation** about 200 years ago, was **as much anti-rural as pro-upper-class**. It has become the norm for most educated speakers.

### How does g-dropping work today?

Nearly all English speakers drop g's sometimes, but in a given speech community, the **proportion varies systematically with class**.

In a 1969 study in NYC, Labov found, in casual conversation, g-dropping varied w/ social class:

	Lower class	Working class	Lower middle class	Upper middle class
Percentage of g-dropping	80	49	32	5

In other words, **as class status "rises," percentage of g-dropping falls**.

However, **formality also matters**: members of a given social stratum drop g's more often in less formal speech. Thus for the lower class members:

	Casual speech	Careful speech	Reading
Percentage of g-dropping	80	53	22

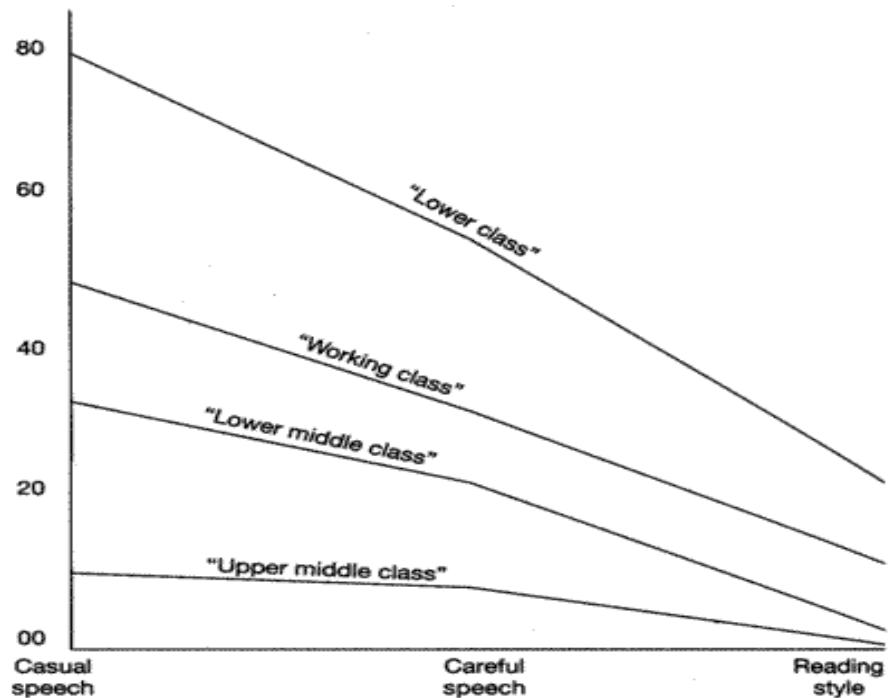
In the 1969 NYC study, **this pattern was maintained across the full interaction of social class and degree of formality** ----->

A **similar pattern** was found in percentage of g-dropping from a study done in **Norwich, England**.

Overall g-dropping rates: **somewhat higher in Norwich** than in New York (**regional dialect differences**).

The general pattern: **double dependence** on social status and formality is maintained.

**Systematic analogy between social class and formality.**



**Gender is also relevant.** Male speakers (other things equal) tend to use more informal/lower-class patterns than females.

**g-dropping, LA, males and females of similar socio-economic status :**

	Joking	Arguing
Males	46	24
Females	28	21

**Two kinds of language change**, partly based on personal identity, in somewhat opposite ways.

### 2.3 Overt vs covert prestige

In the pronunciation of [r] in New York City, a trend was found toward the **overt prestige**.

Overt prestige pattern is \_\_\_\_\_

In the pronunciation of [aɪ] and [aʊ] on Martha's Vineyard, a trend was found toward the **covert prestige**.

Covert prestige pattern is \_\_\_\_\_

### 2.3.1 R-fulness in New York

Social categories marked by pronunciation: **status of [r] in English**, when that sound is not followed by a vowel (i.e. when it's in the **coda** of a syllable).

**r-ful ("rhotic") pronunciation:** **New York** General American (or "Midwestern") prestige pattern

**r-less ("non-rhotic") pronunciation:** **New York** more local (New England) prestige pattern

#### Some background:

When English colonies were founded in America, the prestige form in England was to say all r's.

18th century, the prestige form in England developed the r-lessness that is still standard there.

(Many regional dialects in England still pronounce all the r's.)

On the Atlantic seaboard, in continual contact with England, this form was widely adopted as well,

Port cities such as Boston, New York, and Savannah developed an r-less prestige pattern,

as did British colonies settled later than the Americas (South Africa, Australia).

As the inland population moved west, the non-coastal r-ful dialect became the General American pattern, which is displacing the r-less varieties.

Important exception: Southern dialect area, r-less is a regional prestige pattern.

In the 1960's, William Labov, **NYC:** Three **department stores** catering to different social classes.

**Saks 5th Avenue** (high prestige) *on Fifth Avenue at 50th Street*

**Macy's** (middle prestige) *on Herald Square, at 34th Street*

**S. Klein** (low prestige) *formerly on 14th Street at Union Square*

Labov asked clerks for location of an item, that (he knew) was on the **fourth floor**.

In the answer, note **whether the [r]'s in the words were pronounced**, and

then asked "Excuse me?" to get a more emphatic, **careful pronunciation** as well.

Out of sight, he **jotted down** the pronunciations & basic details about the clerk (sex, age, race, job).

This technique is called a **rapid and anonymous survey**.

RESULTS:

- The clerks pronounced [r] more often in higher-prestige stores (Saks >> Macy's >> S.Klein's).
- In Macy's, Floorwalkers pronounced [r] >> Sales clerks >> Stock clerk (job-prestige)
- In **careful pronunciation**, **the lower the prestige, the greater the increase** in use of [r]. Overall percentage of [r] use in the word **floor** is shown here:

Language change in progress:

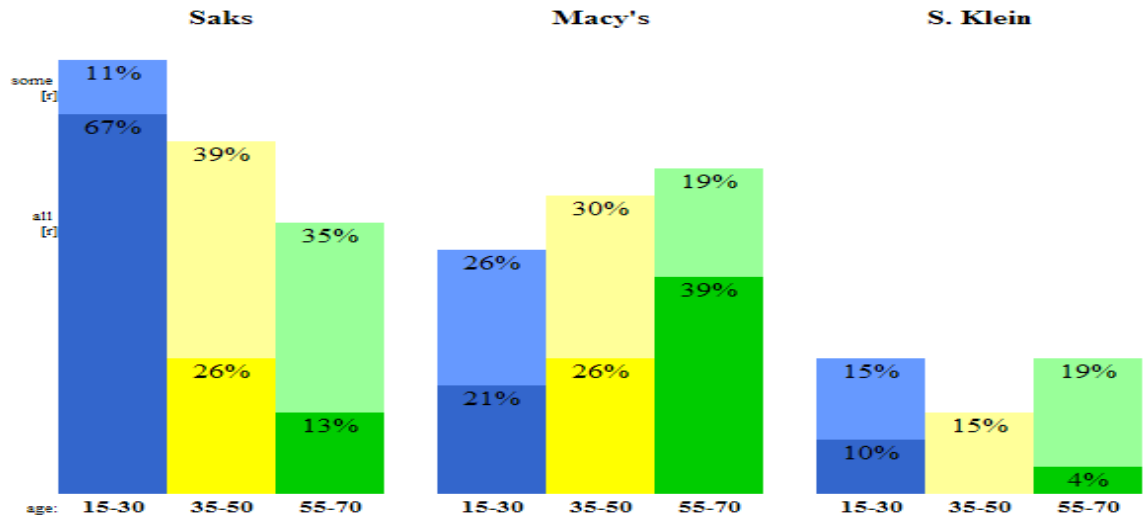
The r-less pronunciation used to be the prestige form. In 20th century, the more general American r-full pattern came to be perceived as the standard.

Compare the speech of younger and older workers at each store.

Older workers at Saks use [r] less,

Older workers at Macy's use it more.

What is going on?



The **older Saks workers**: r-less pronunciation previously prestige in NYC. Linguistically secure.

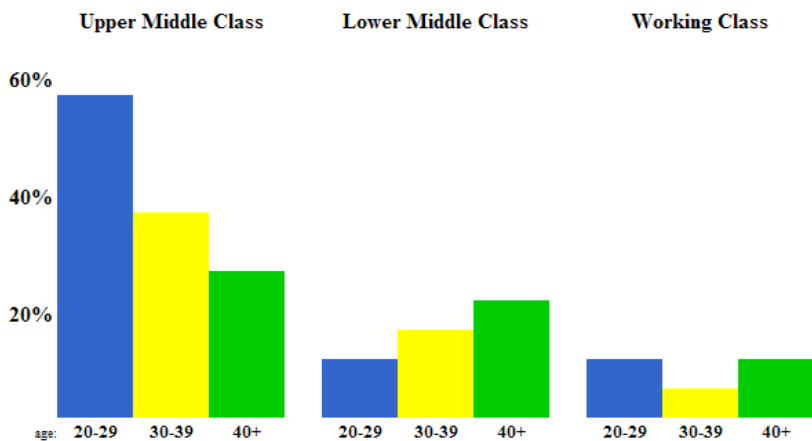
The **younger Saks workers**: grew up as r-full prestige form was being established, and so have adopted it in greater numbers.

The **older Macy's workers**: upwardly mobile, linguistically insecure. Adopted the newer prestige form, using it more than same-aged workers at Saks. This is called **hypercorrection**

The **younger Macy's workers**: less experience with (and less upwardly mobile interest in) the broader prestige pattern, and are only slowly adopting it.

**Hypercorrection by the lower middle class** (result of linguistic insecurity): interviews on the Lower East Side. Similar results - "r" but also for the sounds such as "th" (*the*), "aw" (*awful*), and "a" (*bad*).

**Relatively careful speech** (tape-recorded interviews) approximate overall percentage of r's.



The view of language use by age gives us a **snapshot of change in progress** :

### 2.3.2 Diphthong centralization on Martha's Vineyard

In a separate study also in the 1960's by Labov: the island of **Martha's Vineyard**, in Massachusetts.

Pronunciation of the **diphthongs** [ai] and [au] in words like *lied* and *loud*:

among Vineyarders, these can be pronounced **everywhere** with the centralized value [əɪ] or [əʊ] (for [ai] or [au]) (only before voiceless sound in other dialects, *light & lout*)

RESULTS:

- Centralization **most often among the 31–45 age group (second, 45–60) (not under 30, 60+)**.
- Strong correlation b/w **positive attitudes toward life on the island** & degree of centralization.
- More traditional way of life = more centralization: **up-island**: rural; fishing survives (SW)  
**down-island**: small towns, many summer homes (NE)

Centralization = a marker of solidarity with the island and its traditional ways, in opposition to the mainland and the new service economy.

Because this pronunciation is not the standard, prestige variety, the appeal of the non-standard form is called **covert prestige** -- based on group identity rather than the general norm.

This is one of the important ways in which **groups can diverge in their linguistic practices** despite the trends of the larger society in which they are found. Exposure to different speech norms through personal contact, or through the national media, represents the **overt prestige** form of the language, but does not affect **covert prestige**.

Connections to Language Acquisition:

1. As children are trying to learn their first language, it changes on them! This must really make the task much harder! How do they cope with all this shifting, merging, etc.?
2. Children learn not only the linguistic system, but also the social interpretations of some linguistic markers – they know what's prestigious, what's local and what's not.
3. **Children are the active movers of language change in progress** – if a new form is not learned by babies, it will not survive in the next generation of speakers. Children also introduce new variation as they learn language.

### 3. Languages in Contact.

Bridging the language gap:

- Lingua franca – one language that is used for communication in areas where diverse languages are spoken. Example: Lingua Franca in Middle Ages (a trade language based on Italian & Provençal)
- Pidgins (generally, there is a lexifier language providing most of vocab & grammar)
- Creoles

4. **Situational dialects**: styles or registers.