

Social & Linguistic Factors in Language Variation & Change

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Major Factors Studied

Today we'll focus on two of the main social factors in LVC: Social class and Gender

We'll then proceed to look at some important linguistic factors

Social Class: Key concepts and terms 1

Social class: see following.

Status: According to Max Weber, class is measured by lifestyle and choices in addition to wealth and occupation.

Cross-over effect: As we have seen, many studies have shown clear social stratification. However, this stratification sometimes breaks down and in formal styles, speakers in an interior group suddenly use a higher percentage of a prestige variant than speakers in the highest social group. We see this in the case of lower middle class speakers in Labov's study of /r/ in NYC.

Fine stratification: A distribution of variants across different groups of speakers in different styles that shows groups differing minimally from one another in each style. Labov's larger study of /r/ is a good example.

Broad stratification: A distribution of variants that shows speakers differing greatly from one another according to speech style. See, e.g. the class distinctions in the use of ING by New Yorkers reported by Labov.

Social Class: Key concepts and terms 2

Change from above: Changes taking place in a speech community above the level of speakers' conscious awareness, e.g., the introduction of innovative quotatives as in "She was like, 'Why are you talking like that?'"

Change from below: Changes taking place in a speech community below the level of speaker's conscious awareness, e.g. (u) or GOOSE fronting in California.

Hypercorrection: the use of a more "prestigious" form where it doesn't belong in prescriptive grammar, e.g. "She gave a present to John and I."

Linguistic insecurity: Speakers' beliefs that the way they speak is somehow improper or incorrect.

Negative concord: in English, double (or multiple) negation, e.g., "I don't want none." In many languages negative concord is required, e.g. Spanish, "No quiere nada" (S/he doesn't want anything). "No quiere algo" is ungrammatical.

Multiple influence on linguistic variation

As we have seen, a great deal of research has documented the fact that a speaker's (or signer's or writer's) choice of one or another variable form is conditioned by a wide range of factors, both linguistic and social.

Possible social influences include characteristics of the speaker as well as of the speech situation.

- Situational characteristics include the nature of the audience, the purpose of the interaction, etc.
- Speaker characteristics include: age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, sexual orientation, and, importantly SOCIAL CLASS.

Labov's study of variable /r/ deletion in NYC department stores is perhaps the clearest study of the role of class, however, there are many others, as we will see.

Defining class 1

Although many studies have looked at the role of social class, a basic question arises:

How should we define social class?

In sociolinguistics, a number of approaches have been used, some of which seem limited to particular communities.

Early work: Most of the pioneering studies of language variation were conducted in major North American or European cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, Norwich (UK), Edinburgh, Montreal, etc. Models of social class were based on indices that included income, education, area of residence, occupation, etc. In many studies women's social class was determined by the class of their husbands or fathers.

Defining class 2

Early work, however, raises a number of questions.

- First, the class structures of North American and European cities are not universal.
- For example, in Bolivia there are many very entrepreneurial indigenous women who travel around the country to sell at various markets (handicrafts, coca products, whisky, perfume, etc.). Many of these women are quite well-off financially, but they lead fairly traditional lives. How do they fit in?
- Another example, in China, Zhang Qing has documented language differences between high level functionaries in state enterprises and public service and employees of foreign firms. In traditional terms, the groups would be considered to belong to the same class. How do we deal with this?
- What about independent women in North America, Asia, and Europe? Things have changed since the 1960s.

Defining class 3

Recent sociolinguistic work has engaged in ethnographic analysis in an effort to understand a community's own definitions of social class.

Four examples:

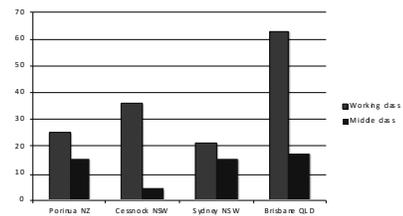
- Otto Santa Ana and Claudia Parodi of UCLA have developed a model of the speech community based on work in Michoacán, Mexico, that considers a whole range of social variables (status in the community) that are usually ignored in most studies.
- John Rickford in a study of Guyanese Creole went beyond simple definitions and looked at how class, degree of rurality, and ethnicity interacted in influencing speakers' perceptions of social class.
- Our work on ASL relied on definitions current in the Deaf community rather than on standard definitions developed for the North American hearing community.
- Our work in Latinx communities in Texas and California considered not only speakers' current status, but also their family backgrounds in Mexico and their prestige in the local community.

Moving to empirical work....

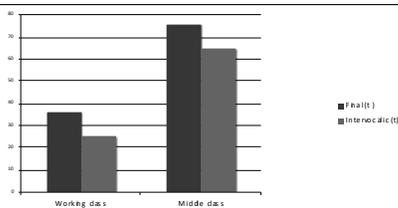
Despite problems with definitions, numerous sociolinguistic studies have shown that social class profoundly affects the way we speak.

However, recall that the results you see lead to statistical generalizations. Obviously there are individuals who diverge from the patterns of their class.

Stable variation: Use of [ɪn] by working and middle class speakers in four communities (Holmes et al. 1991: 59)



Frequency of word final (t) as a glottal stop and intervocalic (t) as a voiced flap by young New Zealanders (Holmes 1995: 59, 63)



Cross-over pattern: Reactions of New Yorkers to speakers using /r/ and raised short a (Labov 1966/2006)

Class	SEC	% positive response to r-ful speech	% negative response to raised short a
Lower class	0-2	50	63
Working class	3-5	53	81
Lower middle class	6-8	86	86
Upper middle class	9	75	67

CCR in representative English dialects (%) (Wolfram & Schilling 2016)

Variety	Followed by consonant		Followed by non-cons.	
	Not -ed	-ed	Not -ed	-ed
"Standard" English	66	36	12	3
Northern Anglo WC	67	23	19	3
Southern Anglo WC	56	16	25	10
Appalachian WC	74	67	17	5
Northern AA WC	97	76	72	4
Southern AA WC	88	50	72	36
Chicano WC	91	61	66	22
Puerto Rican WC (NYC)	93	78	63	22
Italian Amer. WC (Boston)	67	39	14	10
Native Amer. Puebloan E.	98	92	88	81
Vietnamese English	98	93	75	60

(ING) by class and style in Norwich, England

Class	WLS	RPS	FS	CS	N
MMC	000	000	003	028	6
LMC	000	010	015	042	6
UWC	005	015	074	087	16
MWC	023	044	088	093	22
LWC	029	066	098	100	8

Source: Trudgill (1972). Note that a higher number = greater use of the informal variant. N = number of speakers.

An Extended Example: Labov's NYC Department Store Study

Background:

In early work, William Labov demonstrated that several ongoing vowel changes on Martha's Vineyard, an island off the coast of Massachusetts, were conditioned by both social and linguistic factors, in particular the speaker's attitude towards traditional life on the island.

The NYC Department Store study served as a pilot study for work to apply the insights gained on Martha's Vineyard to an urban setting.

Research Questions

Does the use of a sociolinguistic variable exhibit stratification correlated with the prestige of the workplace?

Do speakers shift to a more "prestige" variant in more careful speech?

What are the effects of linguistic constraints on speakers use of a sociolinguistic variable?

Method

Labov selected presence or absence of postvocalic /r/ as the variable of interest;

Selected three NYC department stores:

- Kleins (a discount store, the equivalent of Walmart)
- Macy's (midrange)
- Saks Fifth Avenue (upscale)

Conducted rapid and anonymous survey in which he asked employees at each store the location of an item he knew was on the fourth floor. He then said "Excuse me." He most cases respondents repeated the answer in a more emphatic style.

Data

Labov obtained data from 68 people at Saks, 125 at Macy's, and 71 at Kleins

Variables examined:

Independent:

- store, floor within the store, age (estimated), occupation (floorwalker, sales, cashier, stockboy), race, foreign or regional accent.

Dependent: use of /r/ in four occurrences:

- Normal: fourth floor
- Emphatic: *fourth floor*

Notes on terminology

Dependent variable: What you are measuring, in the department store study presence or absence of postvocalic /r/.

Independent variable: A variable that is thought to affect a speaker's use of the dependent variable, e.g. prestige of the store, speech style, linguistic environment, etc.

/r/ -- the phoneme /r/

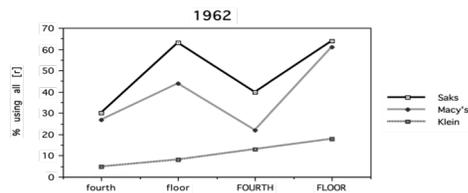
(r) – the sociolinguistic variable, including all variants. In this case, there are only two: /r/ or /Ø/, i.e. presence or absence of /r/. Like the phoneme, this is an abstraction.

[r] – the phonetic realization of the sound

Results: Percentage of /r/ by store, style, and environment

Normal					
Kleins		Macy's		Saks	
4th	floor	4th	floor	4th	floor
5	8	27	44	30	63
Emphatic					
Kleins		Macy's		Saks	
4th	floor	4th	floor	4th	floor
13	18	22	61	40	64

Results: Use of /r/ by stress and position



Summarizing the results

Speakers in all three stores pronounce /r/ more frequently when it is followed by a pause (floor) than when it is followed by a consonant (fourth).

In general, speakers in all three stores pronounce /r/ more frequently in emphatic than in more normal speech. However, later statistical analysis has shown that the difference in speech style is not significant.

The percentage of use of a prestige variant increases with the prestige of the store. The difference is greatest between Macy's and Kleins employees. The difference between Macy's and Saks employees is somewhat less.

Social Class: Summary

Results of many studies have shown that language variation is influenced in a profound way by social class.

The forms used by those in power are the prestige forms and these are the forms that are normally taught in schools, found in formal use, etc.

In general, change begins with the interior social groups. The reasons? The lowest social classes have little influence; the highest social classes have little incentive to change.

From a purely linguistic point of view, we have no basis for saying the one variant is "better" than another. However, since people's life chances are affected by the variety(ies) they speak, many sociolinguists like John Baugh, William Labov, John Rickford, and Geneva Smitherman have advocated programs to help speakers of stigmatized varieties to become bidialectal. That is, the orientation is additive, not replacive.

Language & Gender: Sex vs. Gender

Sex: biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential (something you HAVE)

Gender: social categorization constructed through social actions (something you DO)

Sex categories taken for granted

Biology gives us sex or “dichotomous male and female prototypes”, but people are born who vary from these generalizations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013)

Binary Classification

- If a binary classification of sex is problematic, a binary classification of gender is even more so.
- Gender is a social identity that should perhaps be considered on a continuum rather than as two simplistic categories.

Sex does not determine gender

Chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, etc. do not determine occupation, manner of walking or sitting, or language use.

Gender is something we learn to do.

Gender is a social and cultural identity and a decision we make every day.

We actively engage in the reproduction of or the resistance to societal and cultural expectations of gendered behavior.

Indexing

Indexing is a way of connecting a person to a language form.

A feature or word form DIRECTLY INDEXES a social trait (like gender) if you infer from the meaning that the speaker (or person spoken of) carries this particular semantic trait.

Examples:

- Features used only by or to speakers of a particular gender (aunt/uncle)
- The words “aunt” and “uncle” DIRECTLY INDEX gender.
- Part of the basic meaning of the word includes a reference of a particular gender.

Direct indexing: Examples

You say, “I had lunch with my friend yesterday. She just moved here from San Francisco.”

Because of your pronoun choice (she), your statement carries a CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURE that your friend is/identifies as a girl or woman.

Note that not all languages have different forms for male and female pronouns (at least in the spoken language). In Mandarin, for example, *ta* is the third person singular pronoun and it’s used for both males and females.

Similarly, in many languages, e.g. Spanish, Italian, etc., nouns have grammatical gender and when they describe a person, grammatical gender follows natural gender. Hence, *amiga* can only refer to a person who is/identifies as female.

Challenging expectations

In many cases, speakers deliberately challenge expectations for a variety of reasons, e.g.

“Proud to call you ladies policemen” (policemen directly indexes the meaning of man while ladies directly indexes women)

“PMSing like a lumberjack” (lumberjack indirectly indexes men and PMSing indexes women)

Quantitative gender differences 1

Features used more frequently by or to speakers of a particular gender. These particular features or speech acts may indirectly index gender.

Much more common than exclusive gender differences.

- These variables are probabilistic rather than deterministic. Their use is mediated by the following (among other factors):
 - their use in certain speech acts (such as orders or requests);
 - their association with certain stances (such as hesitancy or assertiveness);
 - their association with particular social practices or discourse activities (such as making public speeches or soothing someone who is upset).

Quantitative gender differences 2

- We can understand what it means for particular speech types to be “gendered” by understanding how those speech types are associated with particular gender identities in particular communities.

Gender is included as a variable in most sociolinguistic studies, dating back to Wolfram (1969), Labov (1972), Trudgill (1972), Adamson & Regan (1991), Eckert (2000), and so on. However, given what’s been said about gender as a social identity, is it really gender that’s included as a variable, or is it biological sex?

Here is an example from Wolfram’s work on African American Vernacular English in Detroit.

Negative Concord in Detroit AAVE by Gender and Social Class

	Upper Middle	Lower Middle	Upper Working	Lower Working
Male	10.4	22.3	68.2	81.3
Female	6.0	2.4	41.2	74.3

Source: Wolfram 1969: 162

How does class interact with gender? Further data on (ING) from Norwich, England

Class	Sex	WLS	RPS	FS	CS
MMC	M	000	000	004	031
	F	000	000	000	000
LMC	M	000	020	027	017
	F	000	000	003	067
UWC	M	000	018	081	095
	F	011	013	068	077
MWC	M	024	043	091	097
	F	020	046	081	088
LWC	M	060	100	100	100
	F	017	054	097	100

(z)-Devoicing in Chicano English

Gender	N	% devoiced
Female	953	46.4
Male	874	30.8

Source: Bayley & Holland, 2014

Gender and Variation: Some Empirical Generalizations 1

Labov’s Principle I. Stable sociolinguistic variables: women use the standard more than men (of the same socioeconomic class), e.g.

- (ing) variable
- (dh) variable
- negative concord

Why should this be the case?

- Are women more aware of what is standard?
- Are women evaluated more on how they appear?
- Are women evaluated more on how they speak?

Gender & Variation: Empirical Generalizations 2

Principle Ia. Change in progress **above the level of awareness**: women use the standard more than men, e.g. (r) in New York City in Labov’s work or the replacement of glottal stops by oral stops [t] in Newcastle, as reported by Lesley Milroy

Principle II. Change in progress below the level of awareness: women use more of the incoming form than men, e.g. Eckert on the Northern City Shift, merger of the diphthongs in NEAR and SQUARE in New Zealand English, terminal rising in New Zealand English.

Why should women lead in changes below the level of awareness?

Exceptions to the general principles

The cultural context in which data are collected must be considered.

Data from Iraqi Arabic show that women use more of the non-standard (or at least non-prestige) variants than men. She notes that similar results have been found in Damascus and Hama in Syria. How do we explain this apparent reversal of a pattern that has been demonstrated in numerous other studies?

Consider issues of diglossia and educational opportunities available to men and women in the Arabic-speaking world.

What kind of results would you predict for Saudi Arabia?

Moving Beyond Labov's General Principles

Although Labov's general principles have been demonstrated repeatedly in many studies of Western urban communities, in more recent years they have been criticized on a number of grounds:

- The principles result in a paradox: women are more likely to use standard forms and more likely to use innovative vernacular forms. If women are more standard, why should they use more vernacular forms?
- Does women's speech conform to all speech community targets?
- Do gender categories erase other identities and social groups?
- It's not at all clear that the principles apply to non-Western societies, especially if such societies are matriarchal.

Does gender bias exist in English?

Gendered nouns vs. gender-neutral nouns

- Mankind vs. people or humanity
- Man-made vs. machine-made or synthetic
- To man vs. to operate or staff
- Mail man vs. mail carrier

Gendered morphology: Marked forms

Often masculine forms are unmarked, while feminine forms are marked, e.g. heir(ess); prince(ss); bachelor(ette).

Unmarked forms are dominant or ordinary.

Semantic change: pejoration

The process by which a word starts to represent something less favorable than it did before, e.g.

- Vixen: 'female fox' > 'spiteful woman'
- Bitch: 'mature female dog' > 'disagreeable human female'; something difficult
- Madam: 'polite form of address to women' > 'female head of a brothel.'

Word order

Masculine forms often come first in standard phrasing, e.g. men and women; husband and wife; his and her; Jack and Jill; boys and girls; Mr. and Mrs.

Do these collocations affect how we perceive reality or do they merely reflect our perception of reality?

Number of available forms

How many words can you think of that mean “sexually promiscuous woman”? What connotations do they carry?

How many words can you think of that mean “sexually promiscuous man”? What connotations do they carry?

Misrepresentation and (mis)use of non-sexist terms

Labov (1972): The spread of a particular linguistic innovation is determined by the status of the social subgroup leading the change.

Hence, the success of gender-based language reform will be determined by the extent to which high-status subgroups within a speech community adopt non-sexist values.

Evidence suggests that innovative non-sexist terms undergo deprecation, resulting in misuse and misinterpretation of non-sexist terms.

Examples: Ms to refer to single (or divorced) women, Mrs to refer to married women, Miss to refer to single women.

Chairperson to refer to a woman holding to position; chairman to refer to a man in the same job.

For Discussion

Are there examples of sexist language use in other languages that you're familiar with?

If so, provide examples.

Can language be reformed without first reforming social institutions?

“Sexist language is not simply a linguistic problem. The existence of unmarked expressions ‘in the language’ does not mean that these will be used and interpreted in a neutral way. This may lead one to question the value of the linguistic reforms advocated in writers’ and publishers’ guidelines” (Graddol & Swan 1989).

“... in the interests of accuracy we should strive to include the female half of the human race by replacing male terms with neutral ones. But the ‘reality’ to which language relates is a sexist one, and in it there are no neutral terms In the mouths of sexists, language can always be sexist” (Cameron 1985).

Successful and unsuccessful reform

Academic publishing is one area where language reform has been generally successful. Academics must publish to achieve tenure and editors have the power to enforce non-sexist usage. See, for example, the guidelines of the American Psychological Association.

Language reform has been less successful in the mainstream media, particularly in popular culture.

One area that may be changing concerns the indefinite 3rd person singular pronoun. “they” has now become the default singular and is starting to appear even in more formal writing, e.g. “if a student wants a good grade, THEY should study a lot.”

Gendered speech: Dude



Internal (Linguistic) Factors in Language Variation and Change

Language change

Old English:

Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum; Si þin nama gehalgod

Middle English:

Oure fadir þat art in heuenes, halewid be þi name

Early Modern English:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Modern English:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Language change 2

Overall, it's fairly difficult to find texts from all periods of English, hence the use of The Lord's Prayer.

The examples in the previous page illustrate a number of changes in the language. These include loss of nominal inflections (e.g. OE *heofonum* becomes ModE *heaven*), loss of some pronominal forms (OE *þin* becomes ModE *your*), changes in the form of the past participle (OE *gehalgod* becomes ModE *hallowed*), and changes in the copula (OE *si* becomes ModE *be*), among many others.

In this respect, English is like every other living language – it constantly undergoes change and different dialects and sometimes different languages develop as a result.

Language change 3

We can read Middle English (after practice and sometimes with the help of a glossary). How about Old English? Consider the following, from the Old English epic Beowulf:

<http://faculty.virginia.edu/OldEnglish/BeowulfReadings/Prologue.html>

Clearly, we've moved a long way.

So, what are the processes involved in language change and dialect differentiation?

Internal and External Factors

Thus far, we've looked mostly at external factors in dialect differentiation, e.g., social stratification, gender, etc. However, internal (or linguistic) factors also constrain variation and contribute to dialect formation and to language variation.

Among the factors to be considered are processes of rule extension, regularization, analogy, and grammaticalization. We'll explore some of these processes today.

First.... Some Data

This taxi driver just *had went* through tolls at 80 mph.

Amber *had went* to the US for a medical leave.

My ex-husband *had went* through the courts and had my daughter emancipated in 2010.

I *had went* in at about 2 pm today and looked around but didn't see anything that was quite what I had in mind.

I *had went* to get gas the other day....

Everyone *had went* to a party at Dweezil's.

If Cinderella *had went* back to pick up her shoe, she wouldn't have become a princess.

What if Steve Jobs *had went* for something else than 'Apple Computers'?

What's happening here?

Rule Extension

English pronouns

- English distinguishes between subject and object pronouns. However, over time that distinction has been weakened in some dialects so that we find examples like: "It's me" or, in a more vernacular example, "Me and Charlie went to the store."
- Indeed, someone who responds "It is I" to the question, "Who's there?" sounds pretentious, archaic, or both.

Pronunciation

- There is a good deal of evidence that speakers in New York and elsewhere in the US, increase the rate of postvocalic /r/ use in more formal styles. As W & S note, however, in some r-less dialects we also find examples of intrusive /r/, i.e. "the idear of it" or "pizzar and beer". Here we have an extension of a rule that applies only when /r/ is followed by a consonant (e.g. pahk for park). /r/ is preserved – or sometimes – inserted in words that end with a vowel.

Analogy

The process of taking forms that are similar in some way, e.g. meaning or function, and making them more similar in form based on an existing pattern (W & S-E, p. 47).

Examples include plural regularization, e.g. oxes, deers, i.e. a process of regularization that is also found in child language.

Types of analogy:

- Four part analogy**, e.g. cow, cows :: ox, oxes, or cow, cows :: sheep :: sheeps
- Paradigm leveling**, the use of "is" or "was" for all persons of the present and past tense of "to be".

Analogy: Exercise

For each of the following, state whether the regularization is due to four-part analogy or leveling:

- This class is even badder than the last one.
- Joe helped hisself to more mashed potatoes.
- He just don't understand me.
- Kate brung me a present.
- She weren't there yesterday.
- That's the beaufulest cat I've ever seen.

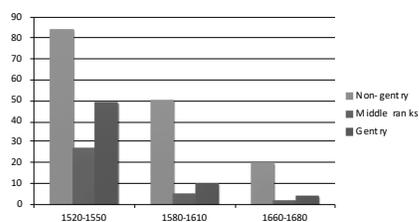
Transparency

Transparency principle: The need to make meaning obvious.

Thus, /s/ may be eliminated from 3rd person present singular without changing the meaning, but a negative can't be eliminated without changing the meaning. Related to this is the issue of multiple negation (or negative concord) to reinforce transparency of meaning. Consider the following example, provided by John Baugh:

"It ain't no way no girl can go to no amusement part in no platform shoes."

Decline of negative concord in English (from Nevelainen 1999)



Grammaticalization 1

The process by which new grammatical markers are created, often out of existing material, e.g. double modals in Southern American English. Consider the following:

- I might go with you.
- I could go with you.
- I might could go with you.

What's the difference?

Grammaticalization in AAE 1

Consider the following pairs of sentences:

1. ___ a. They usually be tired when they come home.
___ b. They be tired right now.
2. ___ a. When we play basketball, she be on my team.
___ b. The girl in the picture be my sister.
3. ___ a. James be coming to school right now.
___ b. James always be coming to school.
4. ___ a. Wanda be going to school everyday.
___ b. Wanda be in school today.
5. ___ a. My ankle be broken from the fall.
___ b. Sometimes my ears be itching.

Exercise: Done

What kinds of verb forms are covered by the form *done* in the following sentences?

1. They done their homework last night.
2. They done what they said they would do.
3. She was done with her homework.
4. Are you done with your homework yet?
5. They done ate all of the food in the refrigerator.
6. They done finished all of their homework.
7. They done did their homework last night.
8. They done done their homework last night.