

# Social Class and Dialects

LINGUIST 159 - American Dialects

November 18, 2014

# Joseph Fruehwald on *Slate*

## What's wrong with "America's ugliest accent"

- What *is* wrong with it?

“It's a working class language, probably, is what it amounts to”

“Idealized” vernacular – exoticization of the working class.

# Labov (1972)

- What is the research question?
- Where was the research conducted?
- Who were the speakers?
- How was data elicited?
- Why were these methods chosen?
- Which variable (or variables) is investigated?
- What were the findings?

# Labov (1972)

What is the research question?

“First, that the linguistic variable (r) is a social differentiator in all levels of New York City speech, and second, that rapid and anonymous speech events could be used as the basis for a systematic study of language.” (p. 169)

# Labov (1972)

What is the hypothesis?

“if any two subgroups of New York City speakers are ranked in a scale of social stratification, then they will be ranked in the same order by their differential use of (r).” (p. 169)

# Labov (1972)

Who were the speakers?

264 subjects

Where was the research conducted?

3 different department stores:

Kleins (n = 71)

Macy's (n = 125)

Saks (n = 68)

# Labov (1972)

Why these particular stores?

They are very clearly stratified. By *location*, by *advertising*, and *price strategy*.

No. of pages of advertising October 24–27, 1962

	<i>NY Times</i>	<i>Daily News</i>
Saks	2	0
Macy's	2	15
S. Klein	1/4	10

	<i>Macy's</i>	<i>S. Klein</i>
dresses	\$14.95	\$5.00
girls' coats	\$16.99	\$12.00
stockings	\$0.89	\$0.45
men's suits	\$49.95–\$64.95	\$26.00–\$66.00

# Labov (1972)

## Why these particular speakers?

Two aspects of stratification (Barber 1957):

Social Differentiation

Social Evaluation

Controlling for other class-indexing variables: occupation, income, education

“the hypothesis will predict the following result: salespeople in the highest-ranked store will have the highest values of (r); those in the middle-ranked store will have intermediate values of (r); and those in the lowest-ranked store will show the lowest values.” (p. 170)



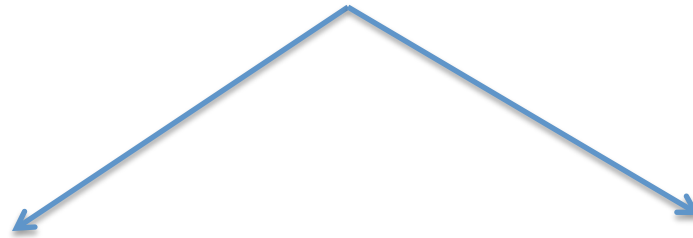
# Labov (1972)

How was data elicited?

Where can I find women's shoes?

Excuse me?

*fourth floor*



Casual

Emphatic

Why were these methods chosen?

# Labov (1972)

Which variable is investigated?

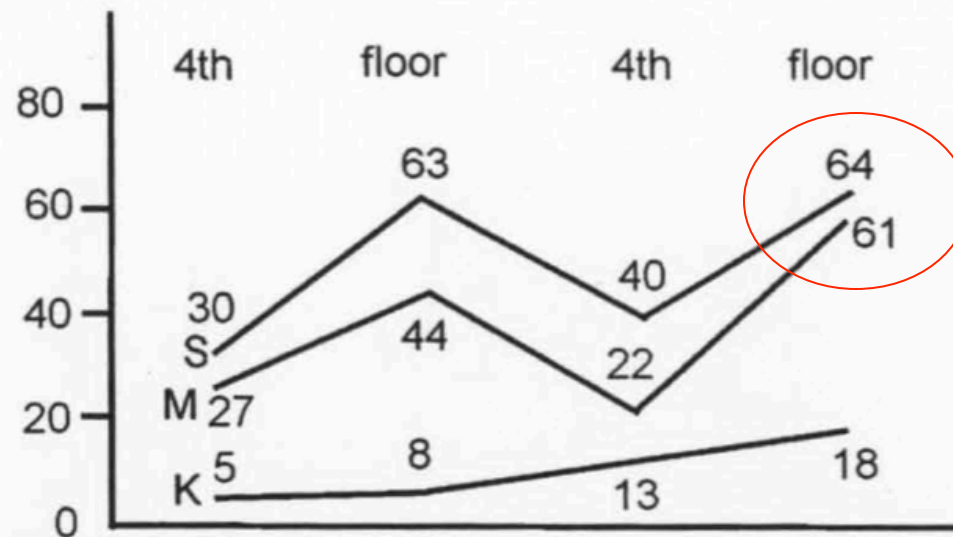
The dependent variable is the use of (r) in four occurrences:

casual: fourrth floorr

emphatic: *fourrth floorr*

# Labov (1972)

What were the findings?



*Figure 13.2:* Percentage of all (r - 1) by store for four positions (S = Saks, M = Macy's, K = Kleins)

# Other RAS\* studies

Mather (2012)

Reporting also on Fowler (1986)

Longitudinal (trend) study – the same locations,  
but different speakers

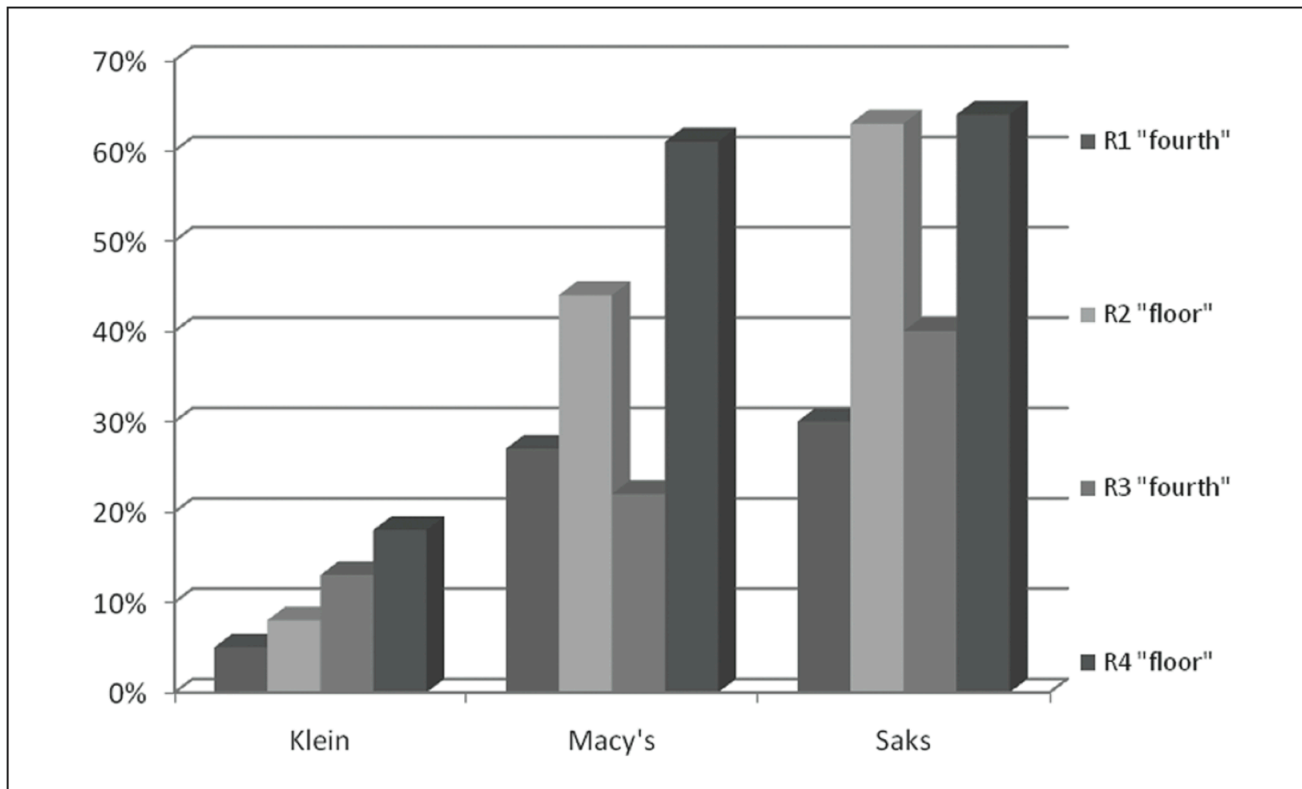
Are these really studying the same thing?

# Mather 2012

(Not enough floor clerks)

Saks, Macy's, Loehmann's, and Filene's Basement

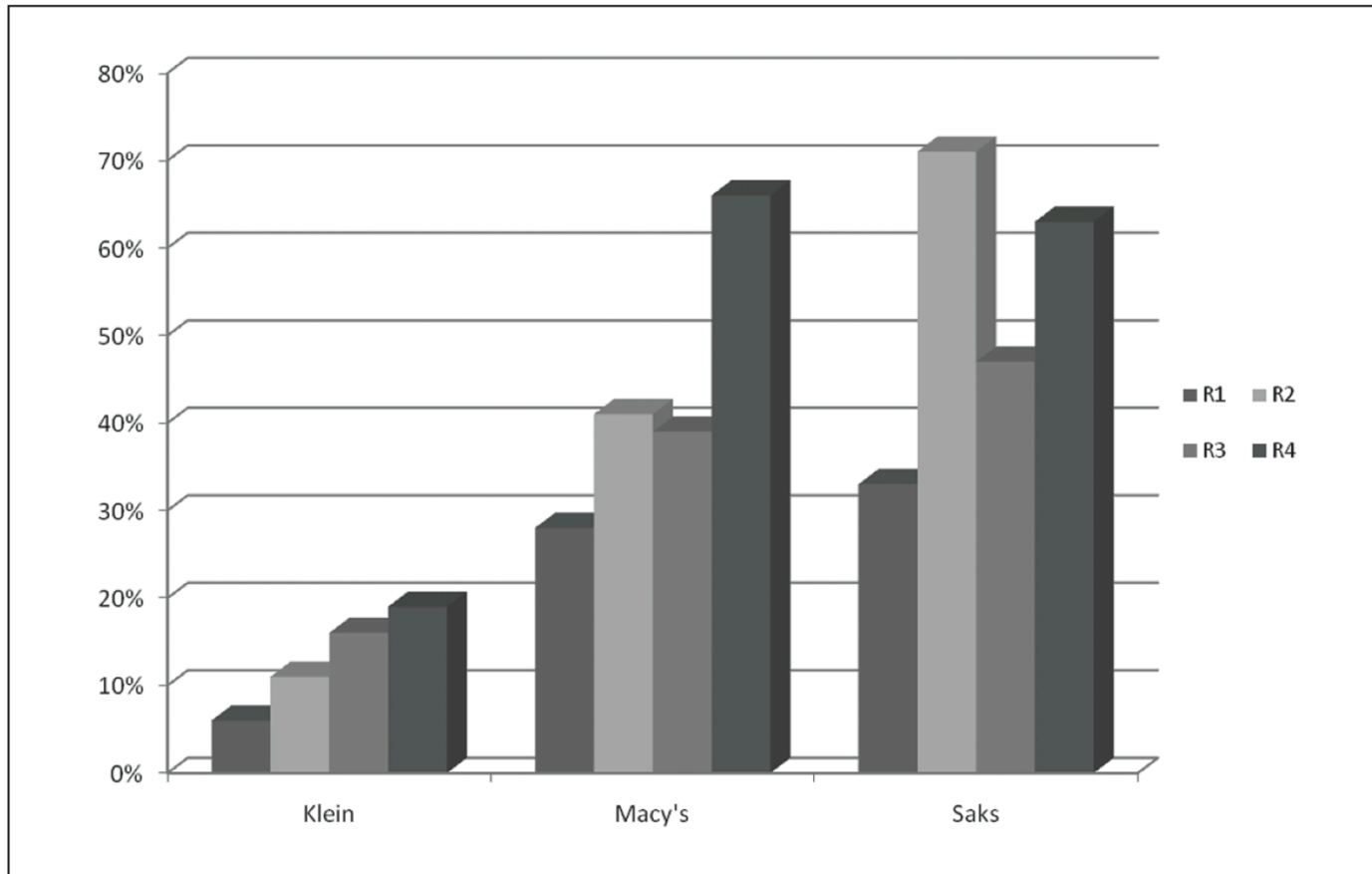
1966



**Figure I.** Percentage of all [r-l] by store for four positions (R1, R2, R3, and R4 from left to right) in Labov's ([1966] 2006) original study

# Mather 2012

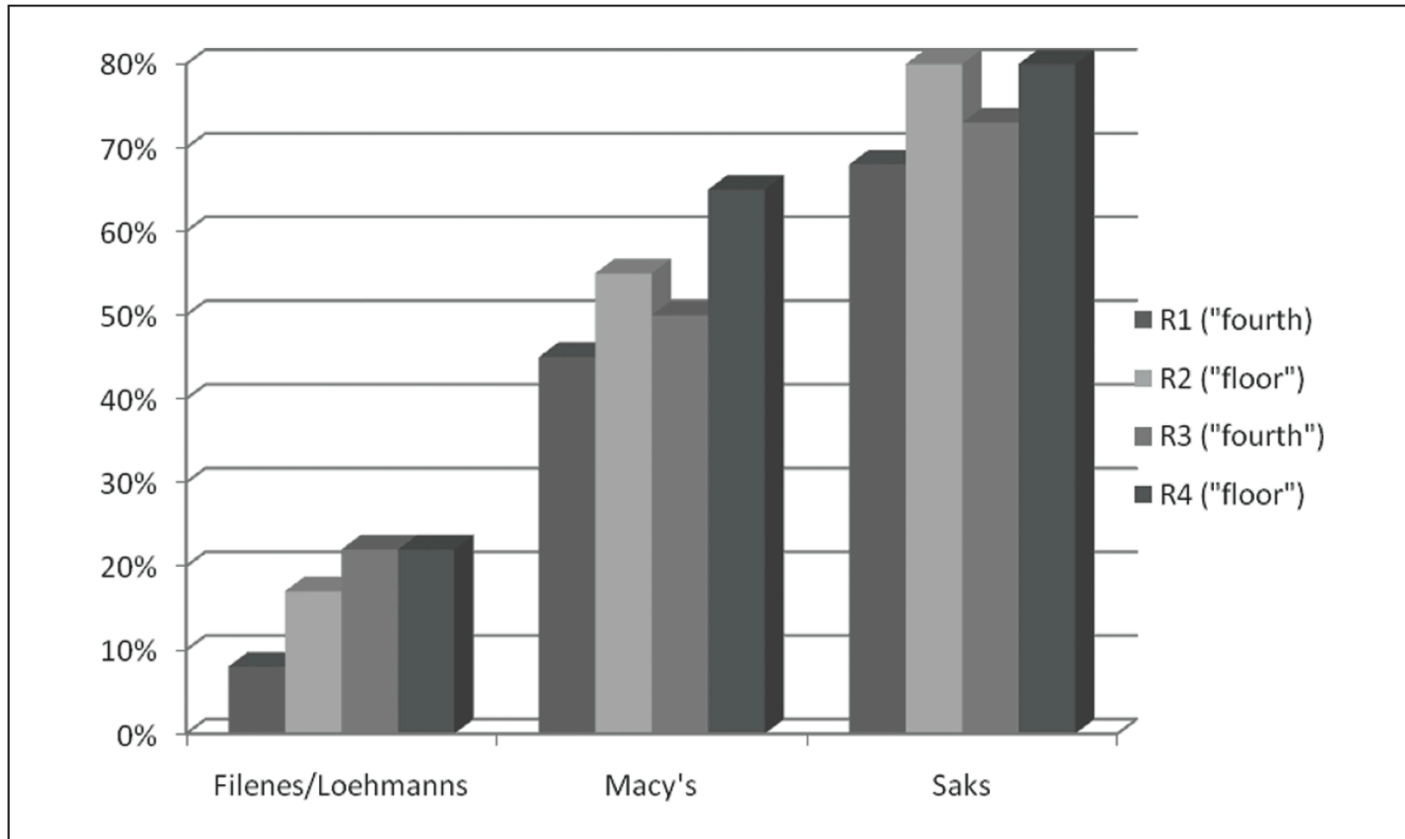
1986



**Figure 2.** Percentage of all [r-l] by store for four positions (R1, R2, R3, and R4 from left to right) in Fowler's (1986) restudy

# Mather 2012

2009



**Figure 3.** Percentage of all [r-l] by store for four positions (R1, R2, R3, and R4 from left to right) in the 2009 restudy

# Other RAS studies

Baranowski (2007) – Charleston, SC

“four o’clock”

“George Avenue; Wentworth Avenue”

TABLE 5.1

Incidence of Constricted /r/ by Age and Social Class in O’Cain (1972, 93)

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	<i>Age</i>						
	<i>70</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>10</i>
Percentage of Constricted /r/	1.0	3.0	4.0	13.8	10.2	23.1	19.6
	<i>Class</i>						
	<i>Upper</i>	<i>Middle</i>		<i>Lower</i>			
Percentage of Constricted /r/	0.7	9.7		14.2			



# Other RAS studies

Baranowski (2007) – Charleston, SC

ALL RESPONSES WERE 100% R-FUL!

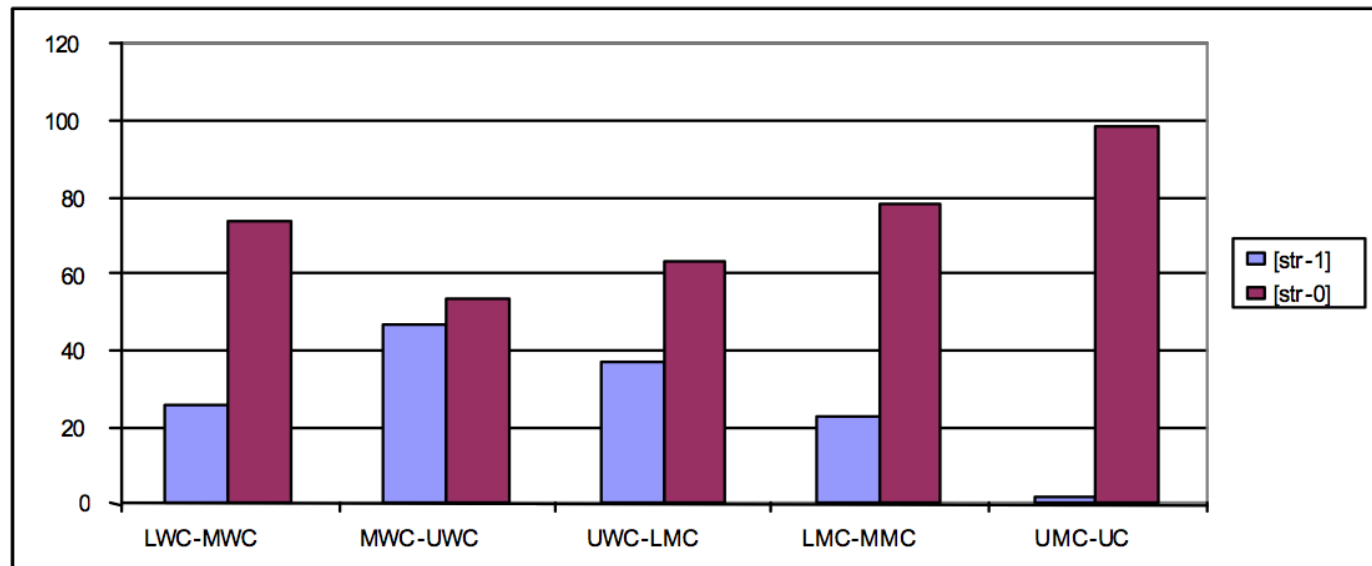
Another study:

“five o’clock” What variable was he eliciting?

Only 5% of responses were monophthongal.

# Other RAS studies

Durian (2004, 2007) – Columbus, OH  
“street” and “straight”



**# of tokens**      26% 74%   47% 53%   37% 63%   23% 78%   2% 98%  
                         [9/34][25/34][18/38][20/38][11/30] [19/30][18/80] [62/80] [1/58] [57/58]

Figure 1: Distribution of (str) by combined class scale [n= 240 tokens total]

# Other RAS studies

Durian (2004, 2007) – Columbus, OH  
“street” and “straight”

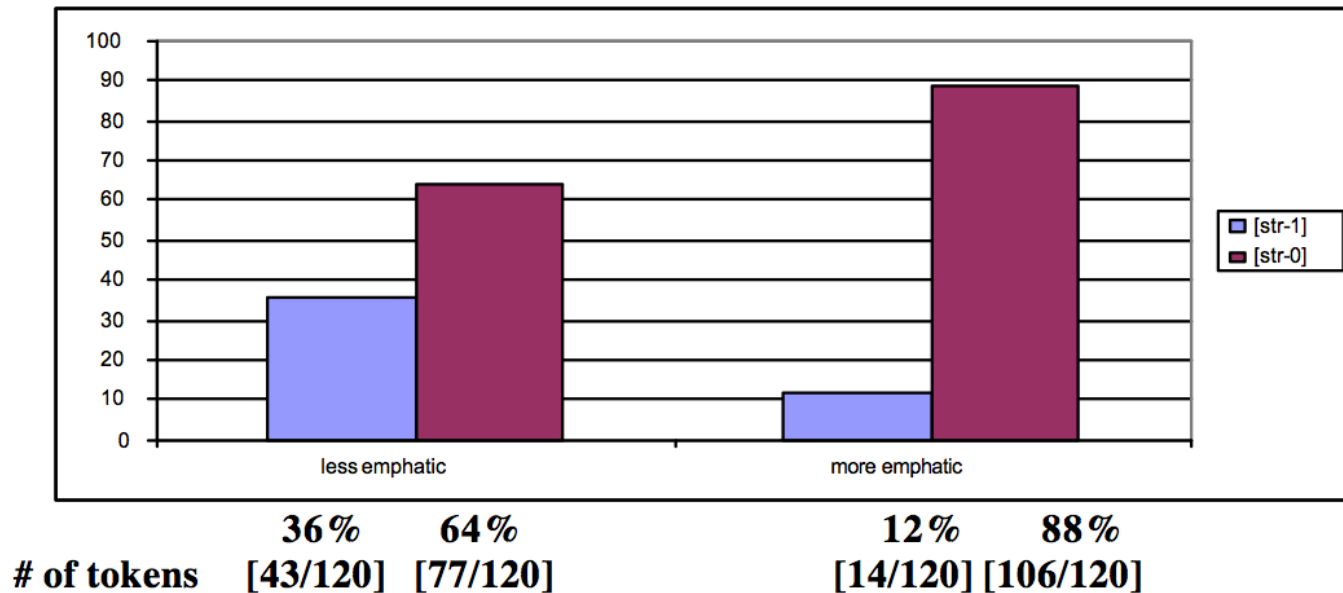
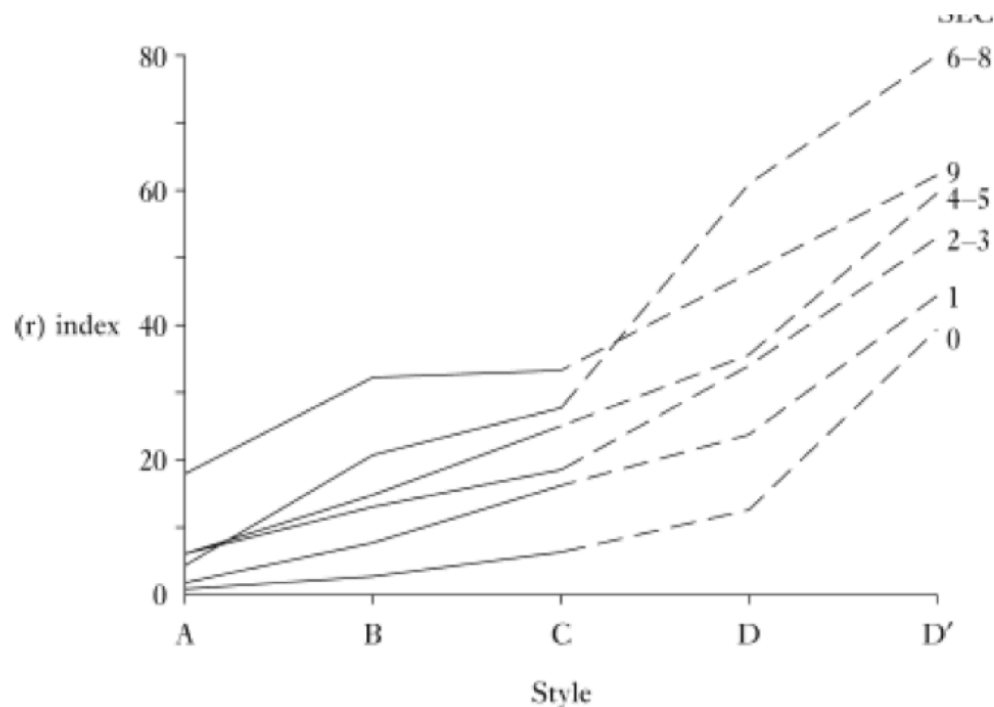


Figure 5: Distribution of (str) by speech environment [n= 240 tokens]

# Attention to Speech

## *Social stratification of English in NYC (Labov 1966)*



SEC scale: 0-1, lower class; 2-3, working class; 4-5, 6-8, lower middle class; 9, upper middle class. A, casual speech; B, careful speech; C, reading style; D, word lists; D', minimal pairs.

# Combined-class indices

Usually based on *occupation*, *education*, and *income*.

**Table 14.2 Educational rankings used in the linguistic survey of the Lower East Side of New York City**

<i>Educational rank</i>	<i>Description</i>
3	Completed some college or more
2	Finished high school
1	Completed some high school
0	Finished grade school or less

Source: Labov (1966a: 139)

**Table 14.1 Occupational rankings used in the linguistic survey of the Lower East Side of New York City**

<i>Occupational rank</i>	<i>Description</i>
3	Professionals, managers, and officials (salaried and self-employed)
2	Clerks and salesmen
1	Craftsmen and foremen; self-employed white- and blue-collar workers
0	Operatives, service workers, labourers, and permanently unemployed persons

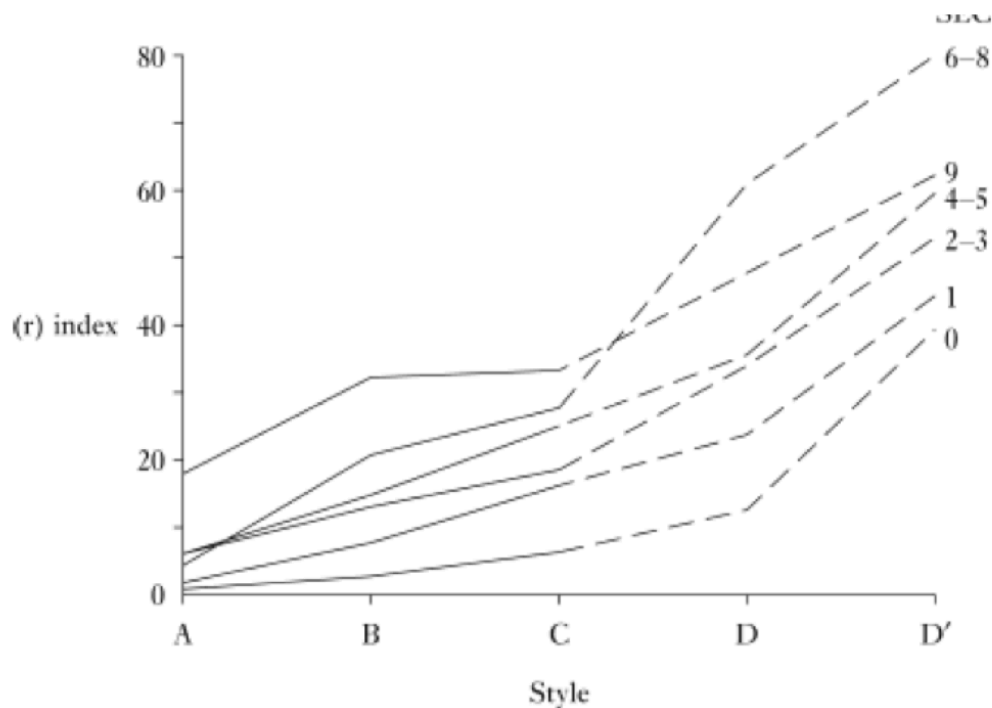
Source: Labov (1966a: 139)

**Table 14.3. Income rankings used in the linguistic survey of the Lower East Side of NYC New York City**

<i>Income rank</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Adjusted weekly income per equivalent adult</i>
3	More than nation's median	\$37.32 and above
2	More than Lower East Side median, but less than nation's median	\$25.01 to \$37.31
1	More than minimum wage, but less than Lower East Side median	\$18.01 to \$25.00
0	Less than minimum wage	\$18.00 and less

Source: Labov (1966a: 140)

# Social Stratification of English in NYC (Labov 1966)



SEC scale: 0-1, lower class; 2-3, working class; 4-5, 6-8, lower middle class; 9, upper middle class. A, casual speech; B, careful speech; C, reading style; D, word lists; D', minimal pairs.