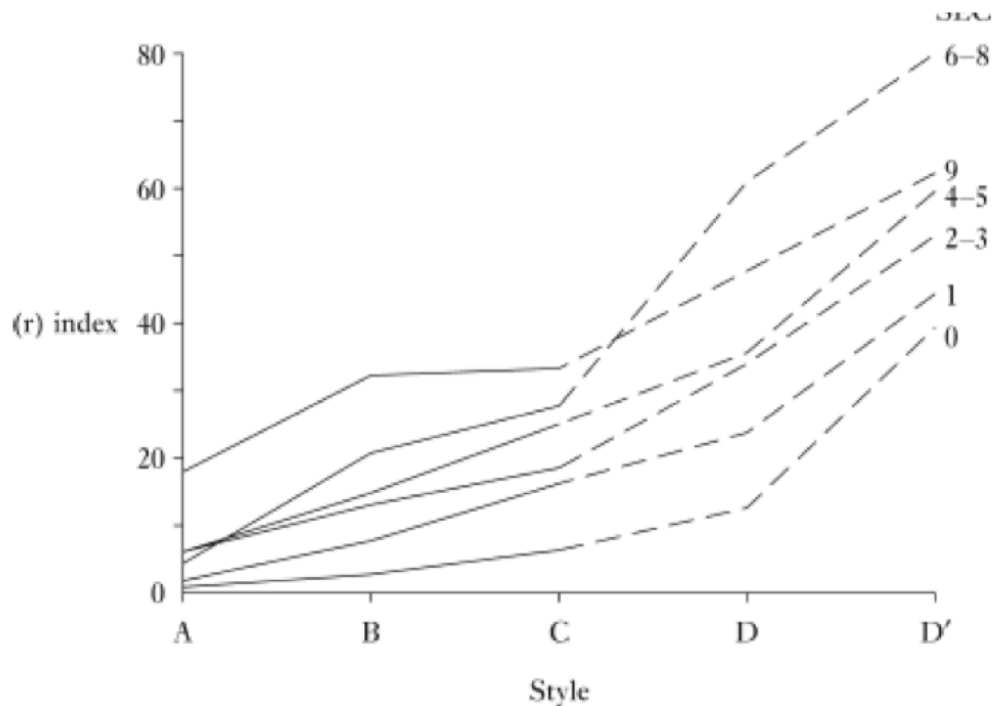


Social Class and Dialects

LINGUIST 159 - American Dialects

November 20, 2014

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.

Social Stratification of English in NYC (Labov 1966)

Labov's general hypothesis was that variables would show class stratification.

- 1) word-final and pre-consonantal /r/
- 2) BAT-height (short /a/ system)
- 3) BOUGHT – height
- 4) (th) (stopping)
- 5) (dh) (stopping)
- 6) (ING) (fronting)
- 7) BOW frontness
- 8) BIDE backness

Stable Variables and Class

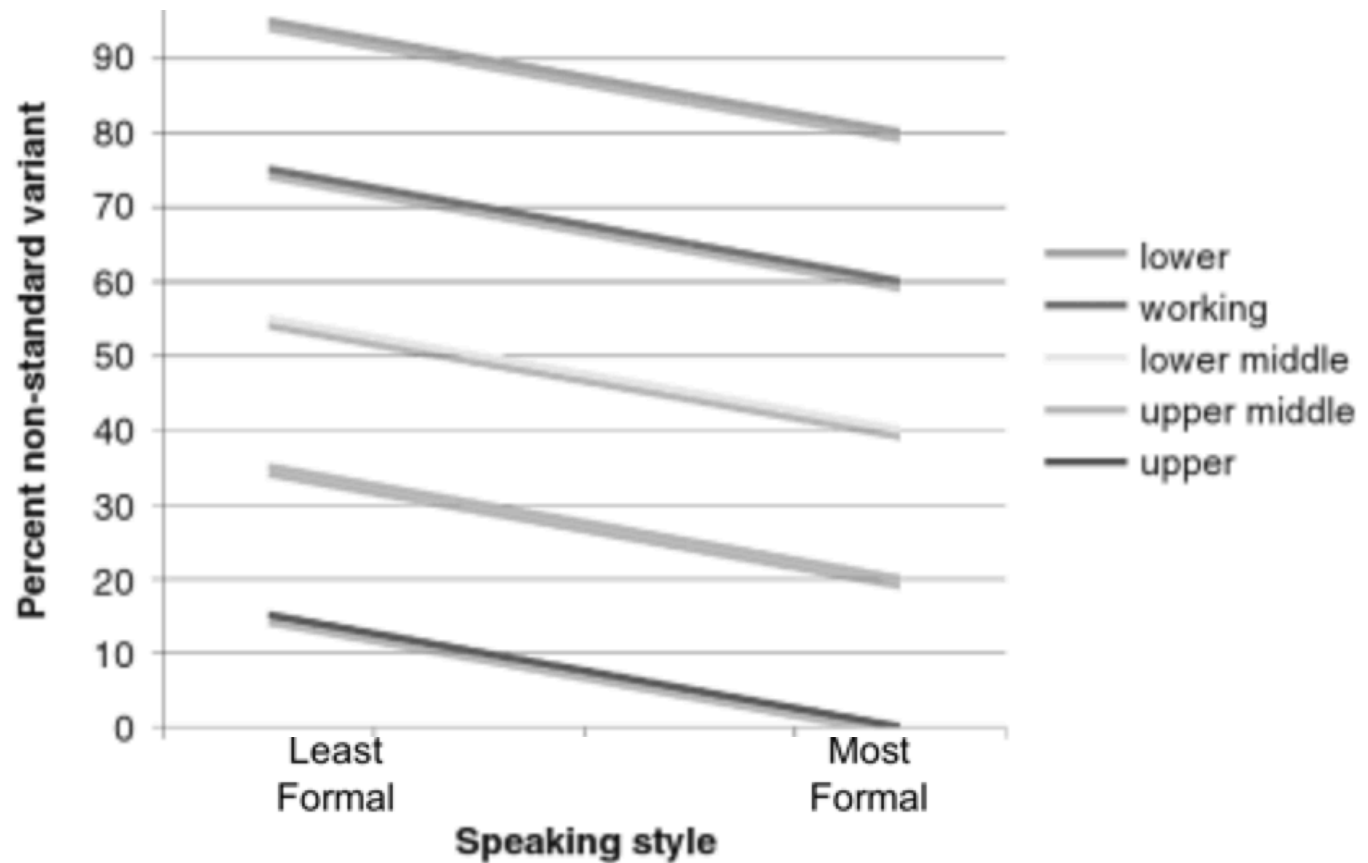
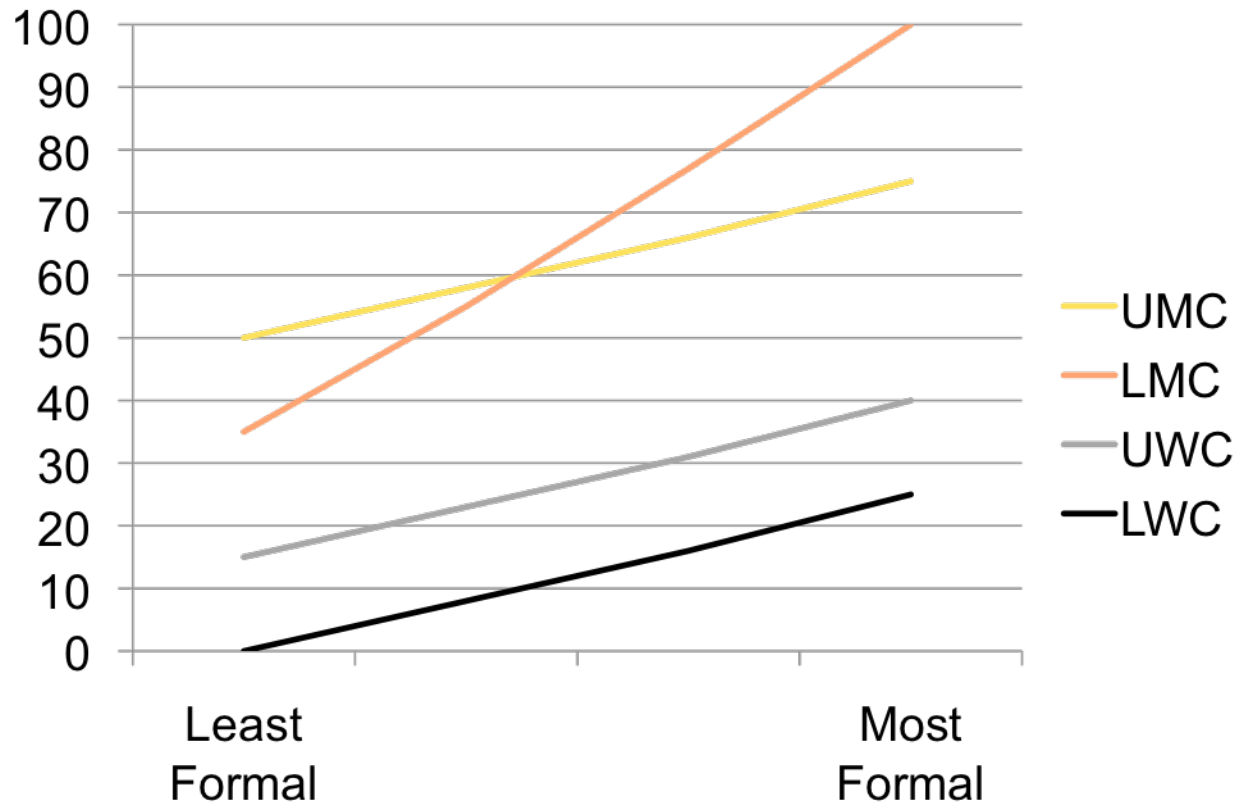


Figure 14.3 Class pattern for stable linguistic variables.

Unstable Variables and Class

Change from above



Unstable Variables and Class

Change from above: Above the level of consciousness

(also tends to originate in upper classes and moves downward)

Unstable Variables and Class

Change from below

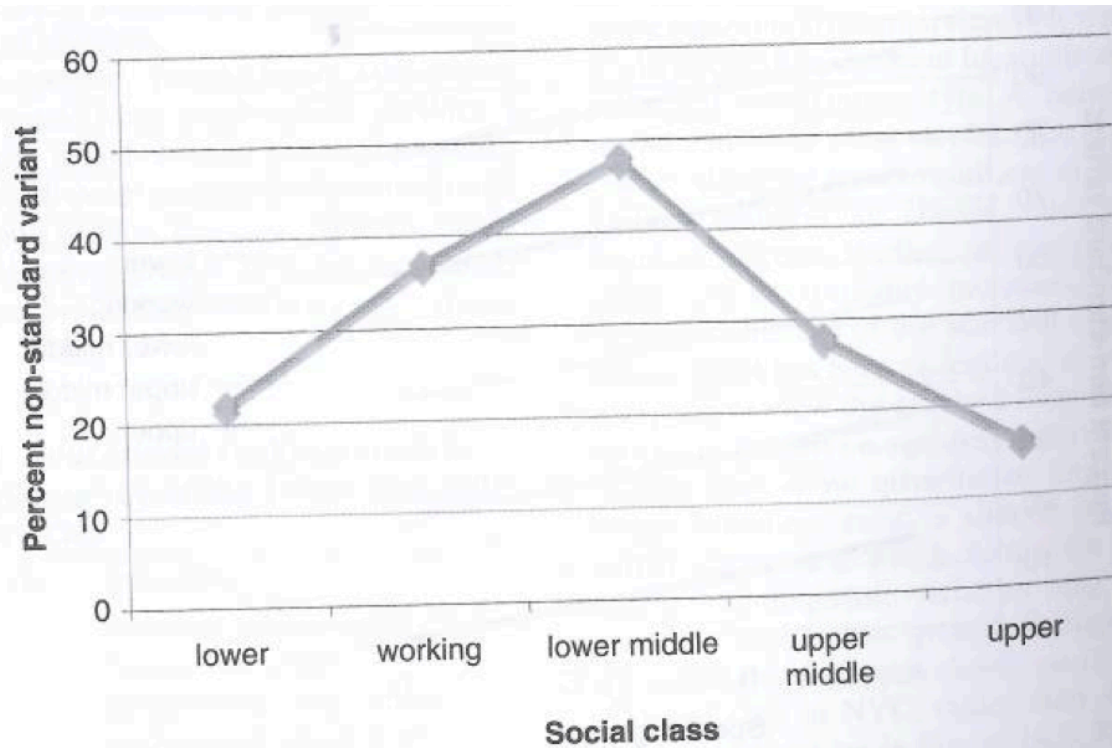


Figure 14.4 Curvilinear pattern for changes from below.

Sound changes led by the LMC?

Does this make sense?

Potential counterexamples?

Unstable Variables and Class

Change from above: Above the level of consciousness

(tends to originate in upper classes and moves downward)

Change from below: Below the level of consciousness

(tends to originate in lower classes and moves outward)

Wolfram 1969

AAVE in Detroit

(composite index included *residency*)

Consonant cluster reduction (CCR)

(dh)-stopping

(d) – word-final devoicing/deletion

(r)

Wolfram 1969

Variation-wise, class differences are *quantitative* rather than *qualitative*.

i.e., middle-class and working-class dialects differ chiefly in their **frequencies** of non-standard linguistic forms, rather than in the presence/absence of these forms.

Is this evidence for a
prestige model of class-based variation?

Prestige and language variation

“One can’t avoid the implication that in New York City we must have an equal and opposing prestige for informal, working-class speech – a *covert prestige* enforcing the speech pattern. We must assume that people in New York City want to talk as they do, yet this fact is not at all obvious in any overt response that you can draw from interview subjects.” (Labov 1966, p. 108)

Types of Prestige (Eckert 1989)

Overt (Global) Prestige: forms that have *widespread* recognition of positive social significance. Based on norms imposed by the standard language marketplace.

Covert Prestige: forms that are positively valued apart from, or even in opposition to, their social significance for the wider society. Opposed to standard language norms.

Local Prestige: forms that have *local* recognition of positive social significance. Based on locally-imposed norms, orthogonal to the standard language marketplace.

Consensus vs. Conflict models

“...instead of positing a sociolinguistic continuum with a local vernacular at the bottom and a prestige dialect at the top, with linguistic movement of individuals in a generally upward direction, we may view the vernacular as a positive force: it may be in direct conflict with standardized norms, utilized as a symbol by speakers to carry powerful social meanings and so resistant to external pressures.” (Milroy 1980, p. 19)

What has incorporating social class
gained us in the study of dialect
variation?

(so far)

Slide on networks?

Quickly - milroy

Dodsworth and Prichard

Acker

Response – how a community of practice approach can illuminate this

After which discuss Mallinson and Childs.

Acker (2006)

1. Social relations and structures are active practices, occurring in specific historical and geographic places.
2. White male class actors are not the only representatives of class structure.
3. Class is inextricably linked with gender and race.
4. Economic relations that constitute class go beyond production. (*symbolic capital*, Bourdieu)

Mallinson 2007

“Thus, Acker may provide for sociolinguists a theoretically and analytically strong, integrationist and intersectional, relational framework to social class. It incorporates individual and group attitudes, values, lifestyles, and cultures, while centering on how the development of these subjectivities are an outgrowth of differential relationships to economic resources that determine life chances (in ways that also relate to gender, race, etc.).” (p. 155)

Mallinson and Childs (2007)

- 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?

Mallinson and Childs (2007)

Community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998):

- 1) mutual engagement of members
- 2) a jointly negotiated enterprise
- 3) shared repertoire

Mallinson and Childs (2007)

Table 1: Five sociolinguistic variables

Variable	Example	Associated variety
3 rd singular -s absence	She <i>like</i> to eat	AAE CL: AE norms PS: AAE norms
Copula absence with <i>is</i> and <i>are</i>	<i>She nice,</i> <i>They running</i>	AAE with <i>is</i> and <i>are</i> ; AE with <i>are</i> CL: AAE norms (less) PS: AAE norms
past tense <i>be</i> leveling	We <i>was</i> running, We <i>wasn't</i> home	AAE and AE CL: use it (much less) PS: use it (much more)
prevocalic syllable-coda consonant cluster reduction	<i>bes' one</i> for <i>best one</i> , <i>wes' end</i> for <i>west end</i>	AAE Both use it (no CofP difference)
postvocalic <i>r</i> lessness	<i>brotha</i> for <i>brother</i> , <i>cah</i> for <i>car</i>	AAE Both do not use it (no CofP difference)

Mallinson and Childs (2007)

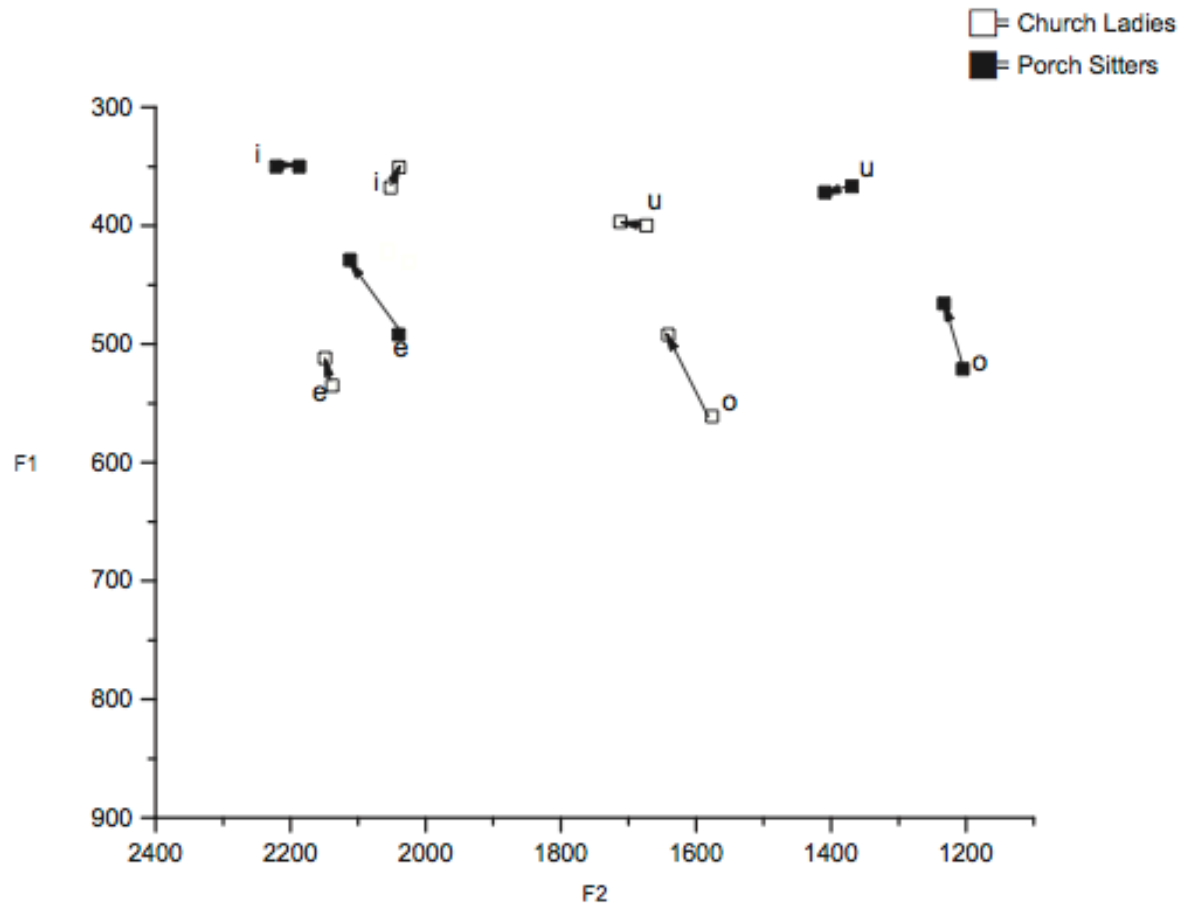


Figure 2: /u/ and /o/ vowel plots by community of practice

Mallinson and Childs (2007)

Table 11: Positive and negative identity practices of church ladies and porch sitters

	Positive identity practices	Negative identity practices
CHURCH LADIES		
Linguistic		
<i>Phonological</i>		More fronted /u/ and /o/
<i>Morphosyn.</i>		Avoid nonstandard AAE forms (copula absence, etc.)
<i>Syntactic</i>		Avoid habitual <i>be</i>
<i>Lexical</i>	Use honorifics, double names	Avoid/stigmatize dialect features
Social		
<i>Personal</i>	More formal clothing Older hairstyles Talk about housekeeping Attend church	Avoid public smoking
<i>Group</i>	Attend devotional group Lead in church/community Are interested in genealogy	Resist outsider/urban influence
PORCH SITTERS		
Linguistic		
<i>Phonological</i>		Less fronted /u/ and /o/
<i>Morphosyn.</i>	Use nonstandard AAE forms (e.g., copula absence)	
<i>Syntactic</i>	Use habitual <i>be</i>	
<i>Lexical</i>	Use nicknames	Avoid honorifics
Social		
<i>Personal</i>	Informal clothing More elaborate/African hair	
<i>Group</i>	Attend/talk about parties	Do not lead in church or community
		Stigmatize racist whites

What has incorporating social class
gained us in the study of dialect
variation?