

Sociolinguistic aspects of language change

Principles of language change

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The language system

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| SINGULAR 1. person 2. person 3. person | ich du er/sie/es |
| PLURAL 1. person 2. person 3. person | wir ihr sie |

The language system

Swahili (Niger-Congo)

| | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| u-ta-ni-penda | You will like me |
| a-ta-ni-penda | He will like me |
| a-ta-ku-penda | He will like you |
| a-ta-m-penda | He will like him |
| a-ta-ku-penda | I will like you |
| a-ta-m-penda | I will like him |
| u-ta-m-penda | You will like him |

SUBJ – FUT – OBJ – VERB

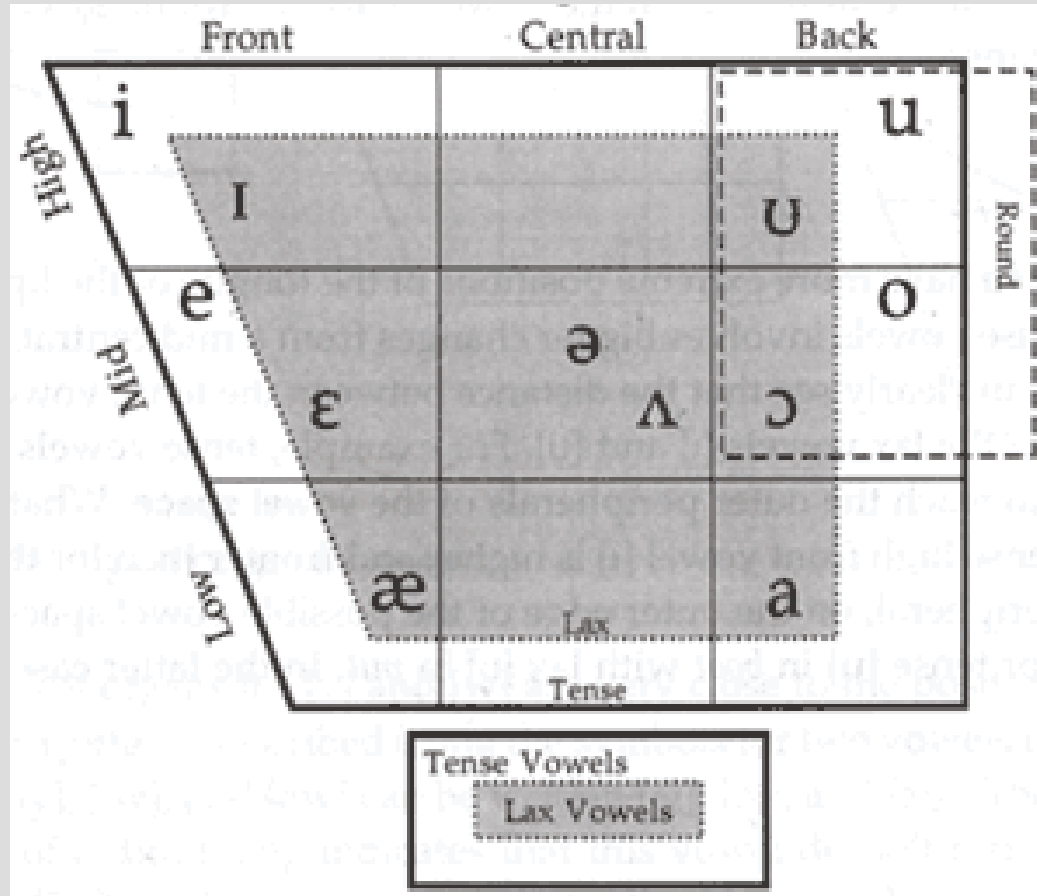
The language system

| | Demonstratives | Interrogatives |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Person | that (one) | who |
| Thing | that (one) | what |
| Place | there | where |
| Direction:to | thither | whither |
| Direction:from | thence | whence |
| Time | then | when |
| Manner | thus (that way) | how |

The language system

| Lezgian | Demonstratives | Interrogatives |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Person/Thing | im | him |
| Place | inag | hinag |
| Place:at | ina | hina |
| Place:on | inal | hinal |
| Place:in | inra | hinra |
| Direction:to | iniz | hiniz |
| Direction:from | inaj | hinaj |
| Manner | ik' | hik'(a) |
| Amount | iq'wan | hiq'wan |
| Quality | ixftin | hixftin |

English vowels



English consonants

| | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Inter-dental | Alveol. | Alveol.-palatal | Velar |
|-----------|----------|--------------|--------------|---------|-----------------|-------|
| Stop | p b | | | t d | | k g |
| Affricate | | | | | tʃ dʒ | |
| Fricative | | f v | θ ð | s z | ʃ ʒ | h |
| Nasal | m | | | n | ŋ | |
| Lateral | | | | l/r | | |
| Glide | w | | | | y | |

Saussurean paradox

If language/grammar consists of interlocking elements, how can language/grammar change?

How can language continue to be used effectively for communication when it is in the middle of a change, i.e. when the system is disrupted?

Labov's hypothesis

Language variation is the vehicle of language
(i.e. system) change.

Language variation

- Social variation
- Contextual variation
- Regional variation
- Ethnic variation

Language variation

Aren't you going home?

[arənt yʊ ɡɔɪŋ hɒm] careful

[arntʃə ɡɔɪn hɒm] casual

Structuralist linguistics:

Linguists describe the 'linguistic norm' and ignore variation ('free variation').

Labov – Martha's Vineyard

Light [aɪ] vs [əɪ]

House [aʊ] vs [əʊ]

Labov – Martha's Vineyard

| Age | Degree of centralization [ai] | Degree of centralization [au] |
|-------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 75+ | 0.25 | 0.23 |
| 61-75 | 0.35 | 0.37 |
| 46-60 | 0.62 | 0.44 |
| 31-45 | 0.81 | 0.88 |
| 14-30 | 0.37 | 0.46 |

Labov – Martha's Vineyard

Generational change or age-grading?

| | | |
|------|------|-------|
| 1933 | [əɪ] | 0.86% |
| | [əʊ] | 0.06% |

Labov – Martha's Vineyard

| Age | Degree of centralization [ai] | Degree of centralization [au] |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Occupation</i> | | |
| Fisherman | 1.00 | 0.79 |
| Farmers | 0.32 | 0.22 |

Labov – Martha's Vineyard

| Age | Degree of centralization [ai] | Degree of centralization [au] |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Occupation</i> | | |
| Fisherman | 1.00 | 0.79 |
| Farmers | 0.32 | 0.22 |
| <i>Environment</i> | | |
| Towns | 0.35 | 0.33 |
| Rural areas | 0.61 | 0.66 |

Labov – Martha's Vineyard

| | Degree of centralization [ai] | Degree of centralization [au] |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Positive (40 subjects) | 0.63 | 0.62 |
| Neutral (19 subjects) | 0.32 | 0.42 |
| Negative (6 subjects) | 0.09 | 0.08 |

Labov – Martha's Vineyard

- Linguistic variables often display social stratification.
- The quantitative approach to variation can reveal systematic differences.
- A change in progress is reflected in linguistic variation.
- Linguistic variation is the vehicle of language change.

Labov – Rhoticity in NYC

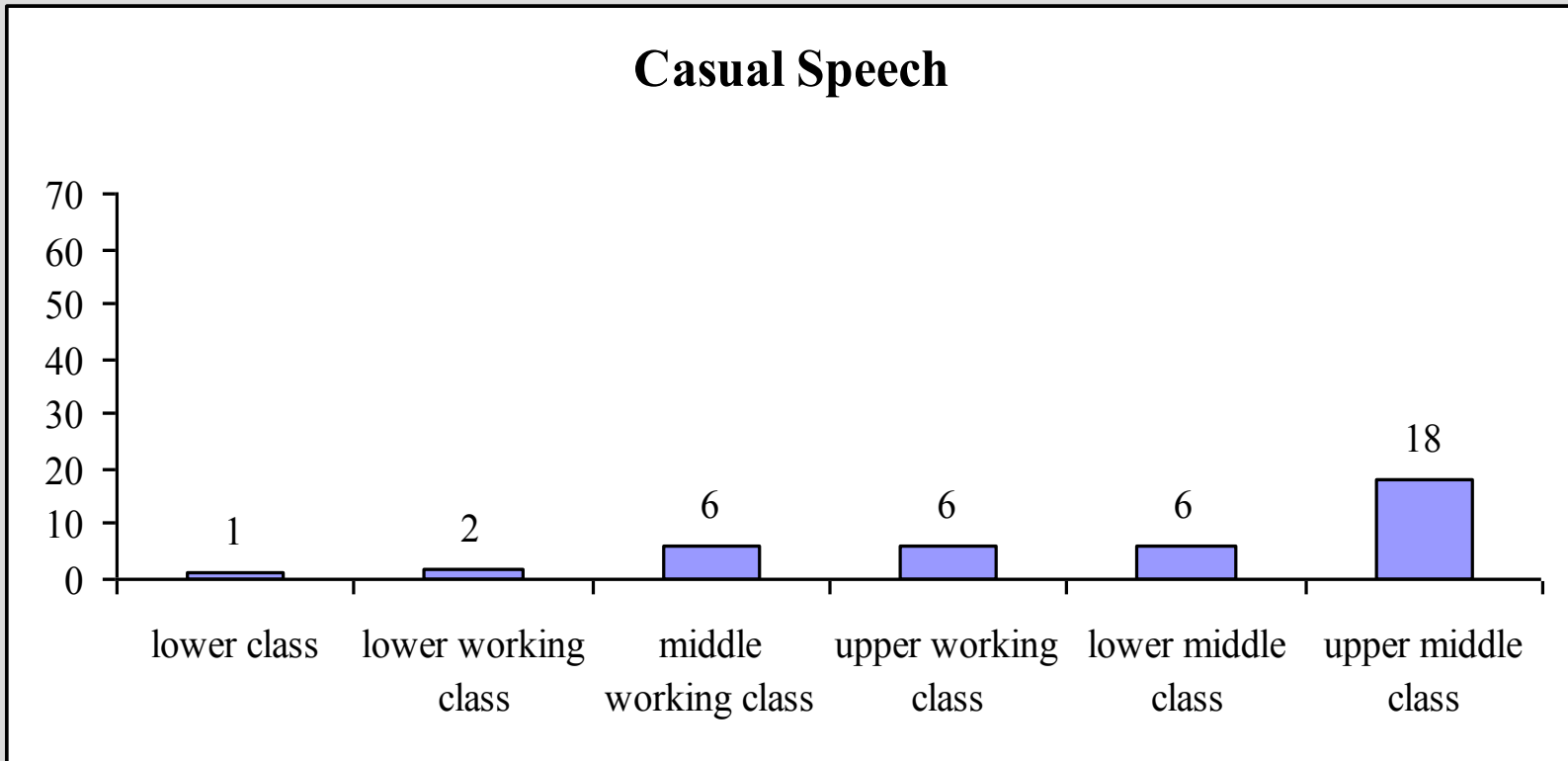
Car

Dark

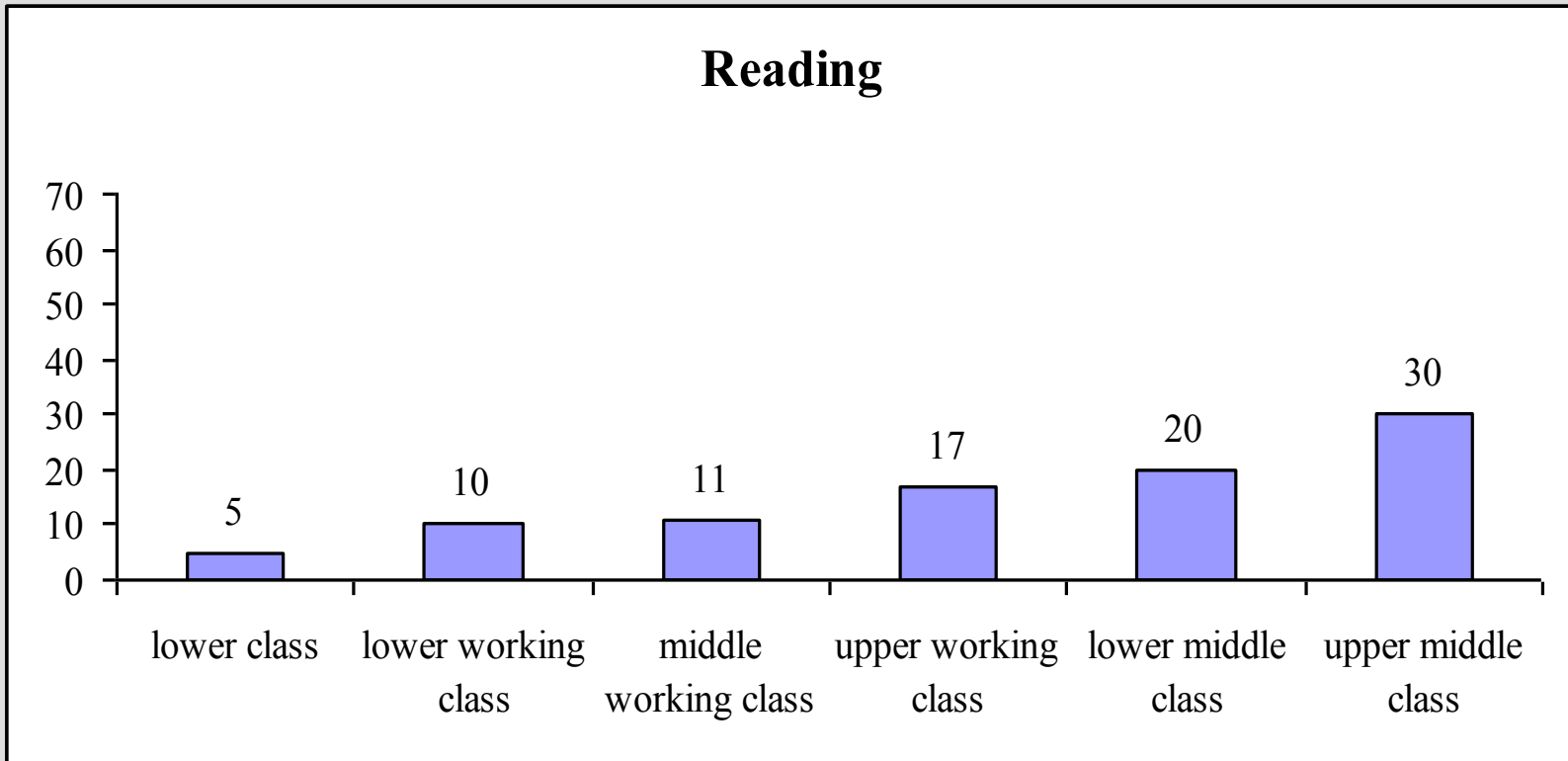
More

Shirt

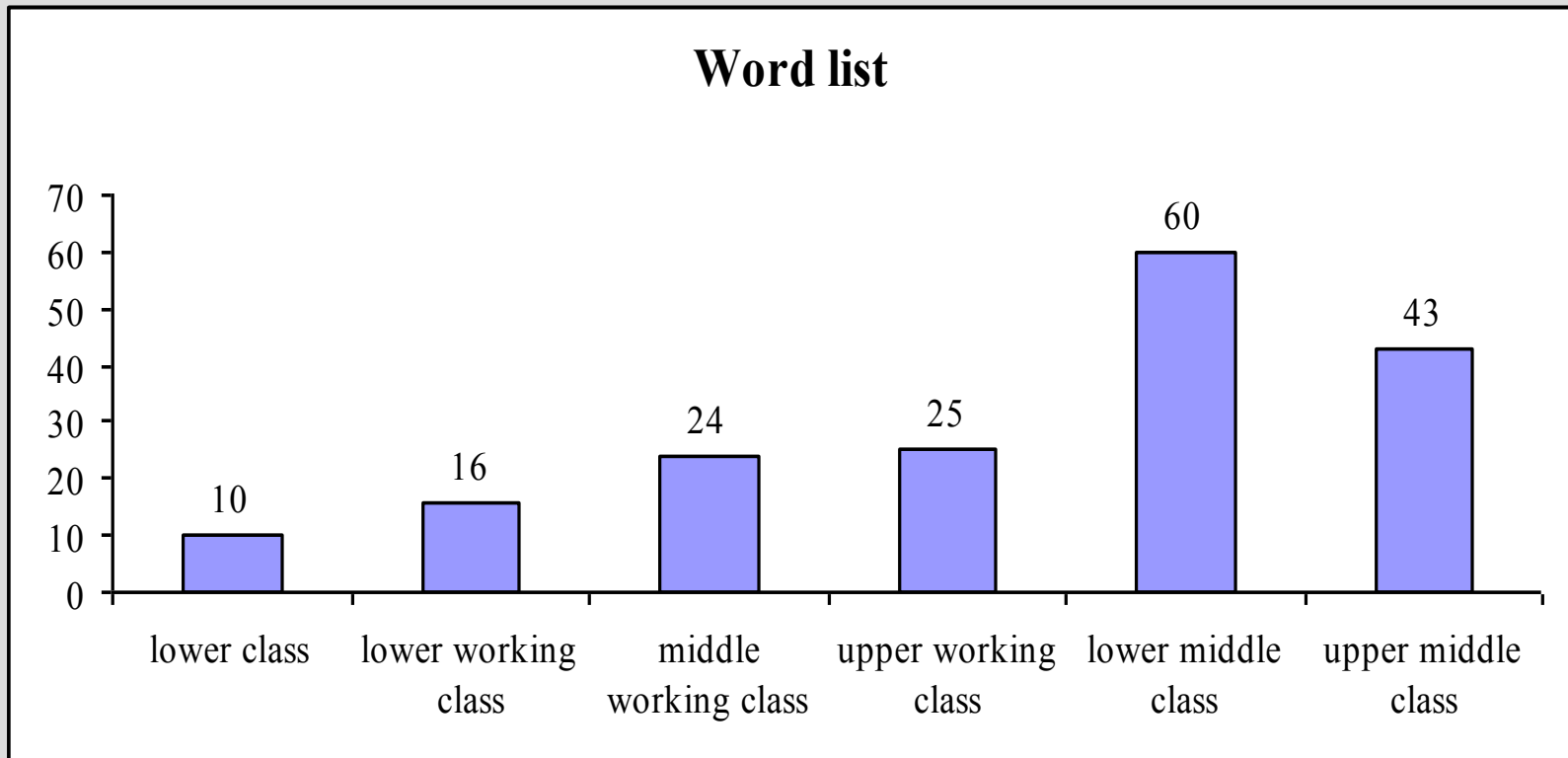
Labov – Rhoticity in NYC



Labov – Rhoticity in NYC



Labov – Rhoticity in NYC



Labov – Rhoticity in NYC

Hypercorrection (Labov):

The socially lower class (notably the ‘lower middle class’) surpasses the socially highest class in formal situations.

Trudgill – ‘ing’ in Norwich

[gɔɪŋ] going

[gɔɪn] goin’

Trudgill – ‘ing’ in Norwich

| | Word list | Reading | Formal speech | Casual speech |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|---------------|
| Middle class | 0 | 0 | 3 | 28 |
| Lower middle class | 0 | 10 | 15 | 42 |
| Upper working class | 5 | 15 | 74 | 87 |
| Middle working class | 23 | 44 | 88 | 95 |
| Lower working class | 29 | 66 | 98 | 100 |

Trudgill – ‘ing’ in Norwich

Women thought they were using the standard form more often than they did, and men thought they were using the non-standard form more often than they did.

Overt prestige vs. Covert prestige

Aitchison – Teenage age talk in Reading

- (1) I **knows** how to handle teddy boys.
- (2) You **knows** my sister, the one who's small.
- (3) They **calls** me all the name under the sun.

Aitchison – Teenage age talk in Reading

| | Casual speech | Formal |
|-------|---------------|--------|
| Boys | 60% | 31% |
| Girls | 49% | 13% |
| Total | 50% | 22% |

Noddy 81%

Kevin 14%

Conclusion

Variation is the vehicle of language change.

Variation explains how a new form may spread through the speech community (progapagtion or implementation) but it does not explain how new forms emerge (actuation).

Actuation

Factors triggering language change:

- Communicative need for new forms
- Expressivity
- Ease of pronunciation
- Drive for symmetry
- Analogy
- Habituation and routinization