

8. Social Varieties

Ling 380/Soc 427 (Spring 2023)

Joseph Pentangelo

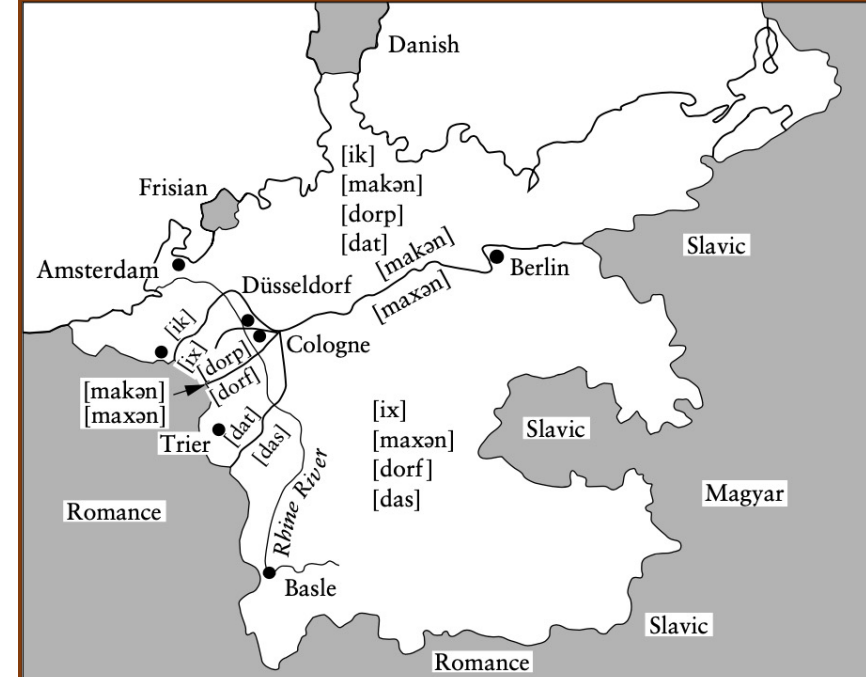
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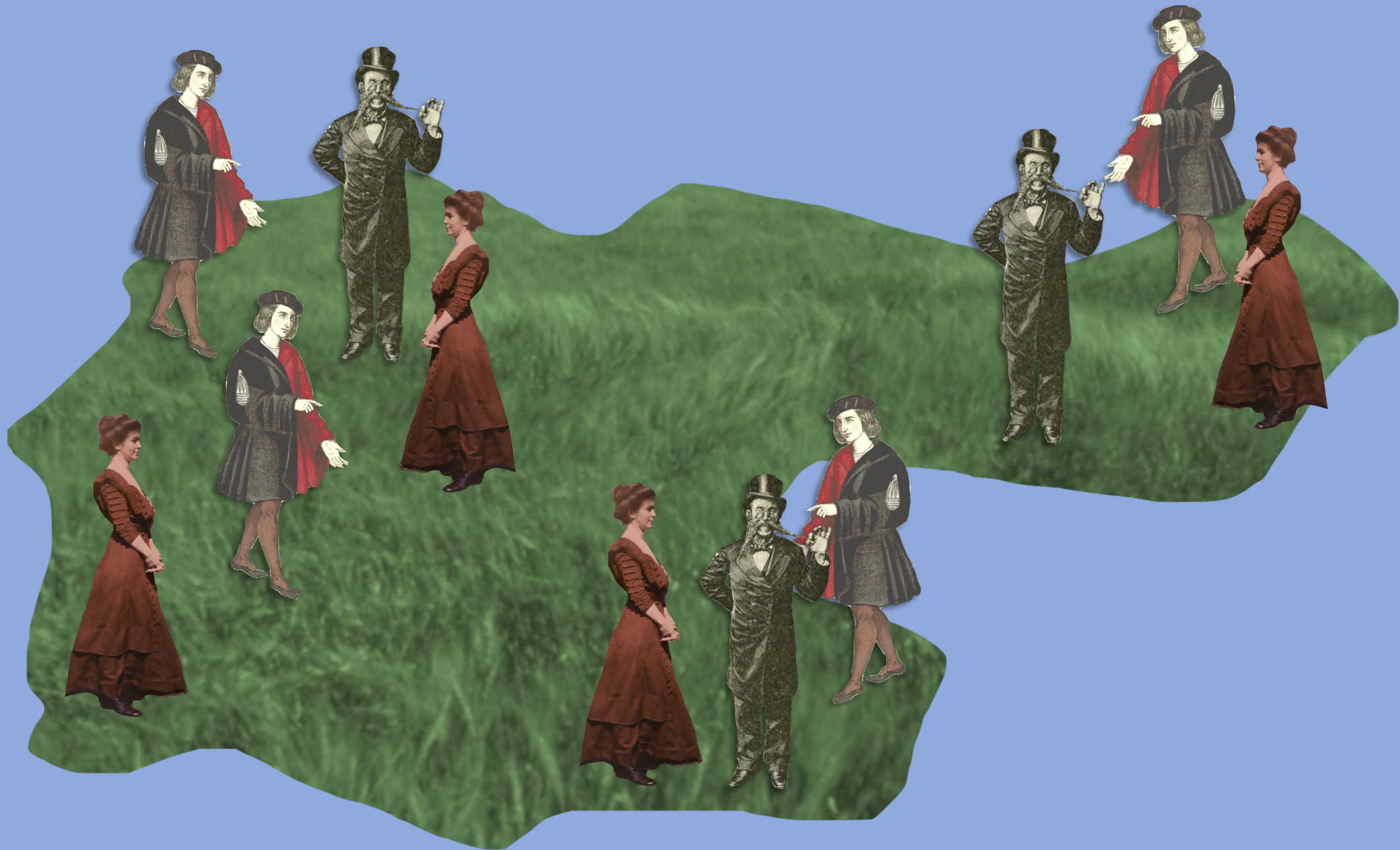
Quiz #9

1. What is the linguistic variable that Fischer (1958) examined in New England?
2. What is the linguistic variable that Labov (1966) examined in New York City?
3. What social factors in Norwich, England, was Trudgill (1974) interested in?

Variation

- Two basic types of variation: regional variation and social variation.
- Last time, we talked about *regional variation* and *dialect geography*.
- What is one of the potential limitations of dialect geography?
- It assumes that people within a given region are mostly consistent in their speech, which is often not true.
- In other words, it doesn't account for *social* differences.





Regional Dialects



Social Dialects



Men's dialect

Social Dialects



Women's dialect

Social Dialects



Moustache dialect

Social Dialects



How else might this population be grouped?

Social Variation

- What are some possible drivers of social variation?

Race

Gender Identity

Sexuality

Ethnicity

Class

Socioeconomic Status

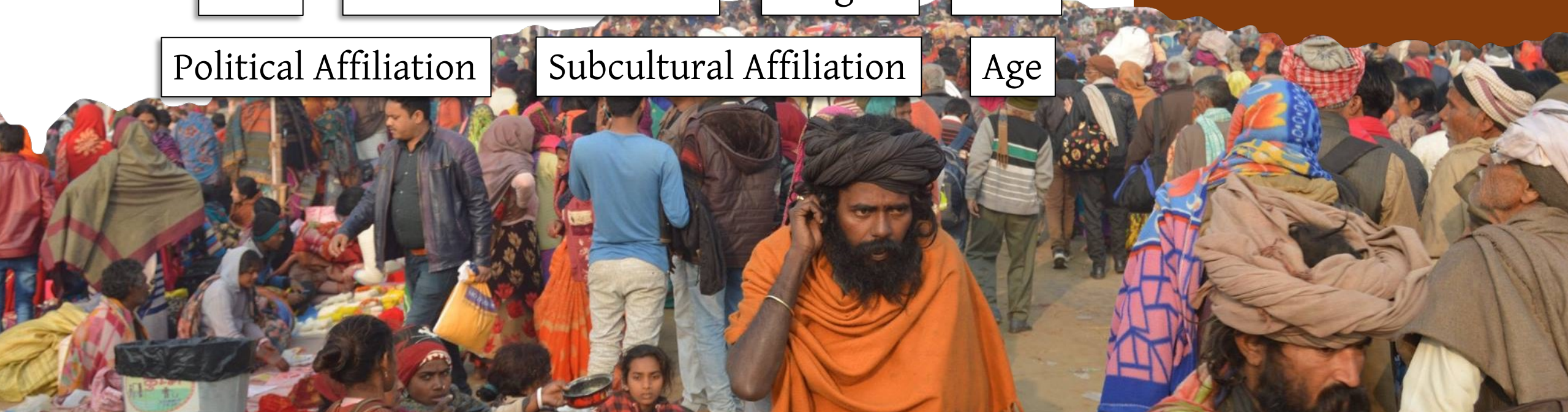
Religion

Caste

Political Affiliation

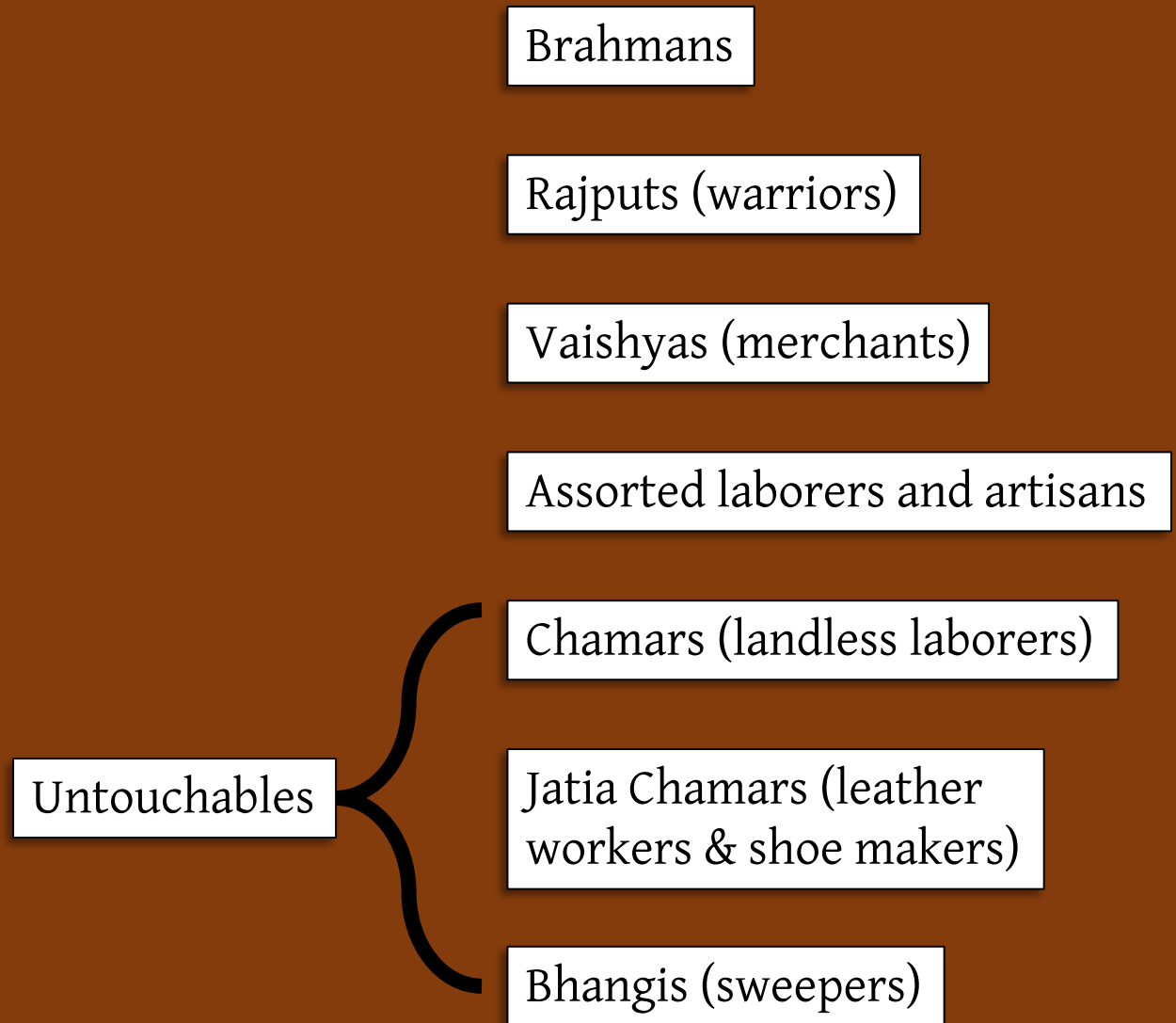
Subcultural Affiliation

Age



Gumperz (1958)

- Study done in Khalapur, India.
- Caste is the dominant social factor among the Hindu population (90% of Khalapur). The Muslim population (10%) is outside the caste system.
- Untouchables “are restricted to living in certain neighborhoods and have less freedom to move in the village than do members of the upper castes.”



Gumperz (1958)

“Bhangis do not make certain phonological contrasts that speakers of all the other castes make. Chamars and Jatia Chamars also lack certain phonological contrasts made by all others, and some, in attempting to make such a contrast, actually hypercorrect; that is, they over-extend a particular usage in trying to emulate others. Jatia Chamars have a characteristic pronunciation of words that end in [æ] in all other village varieties. Each of the three untouchable castes therefore has speech characteristics that clearly set it off both from the other two untouchable castes and from the touchable castes in the village.”

What is a phonological contrast?

What does Gumperz say about the speech of Muslims in Khalapur?

Brahmans

Rajputs (warriors)

Vaishyas (merchants)

Assorted laborers and artisans

Chamars (landless laborers)

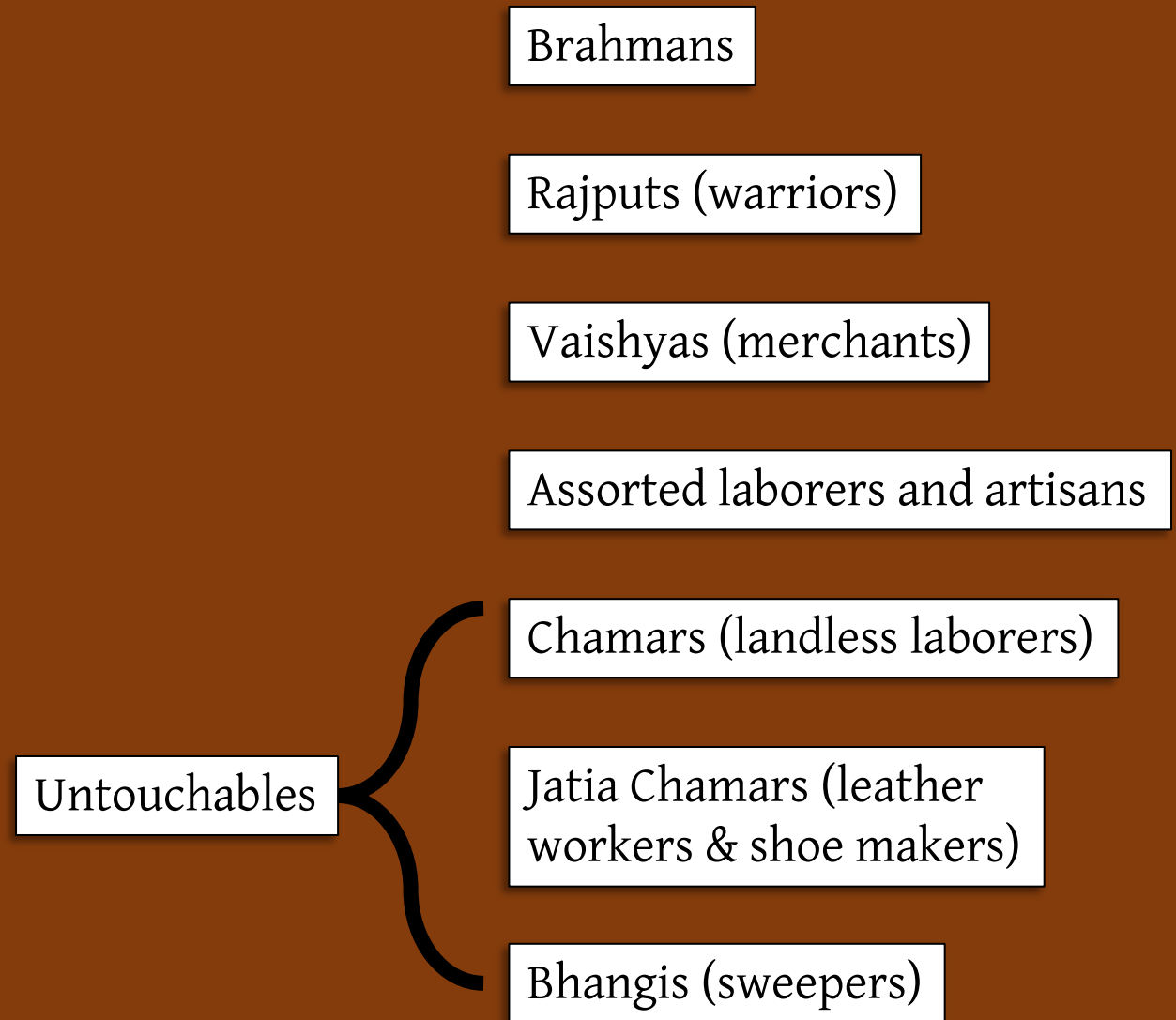
Jatia Chamars (leather workers & shoe makers)

Bhangis (sweepers)

Untouchables

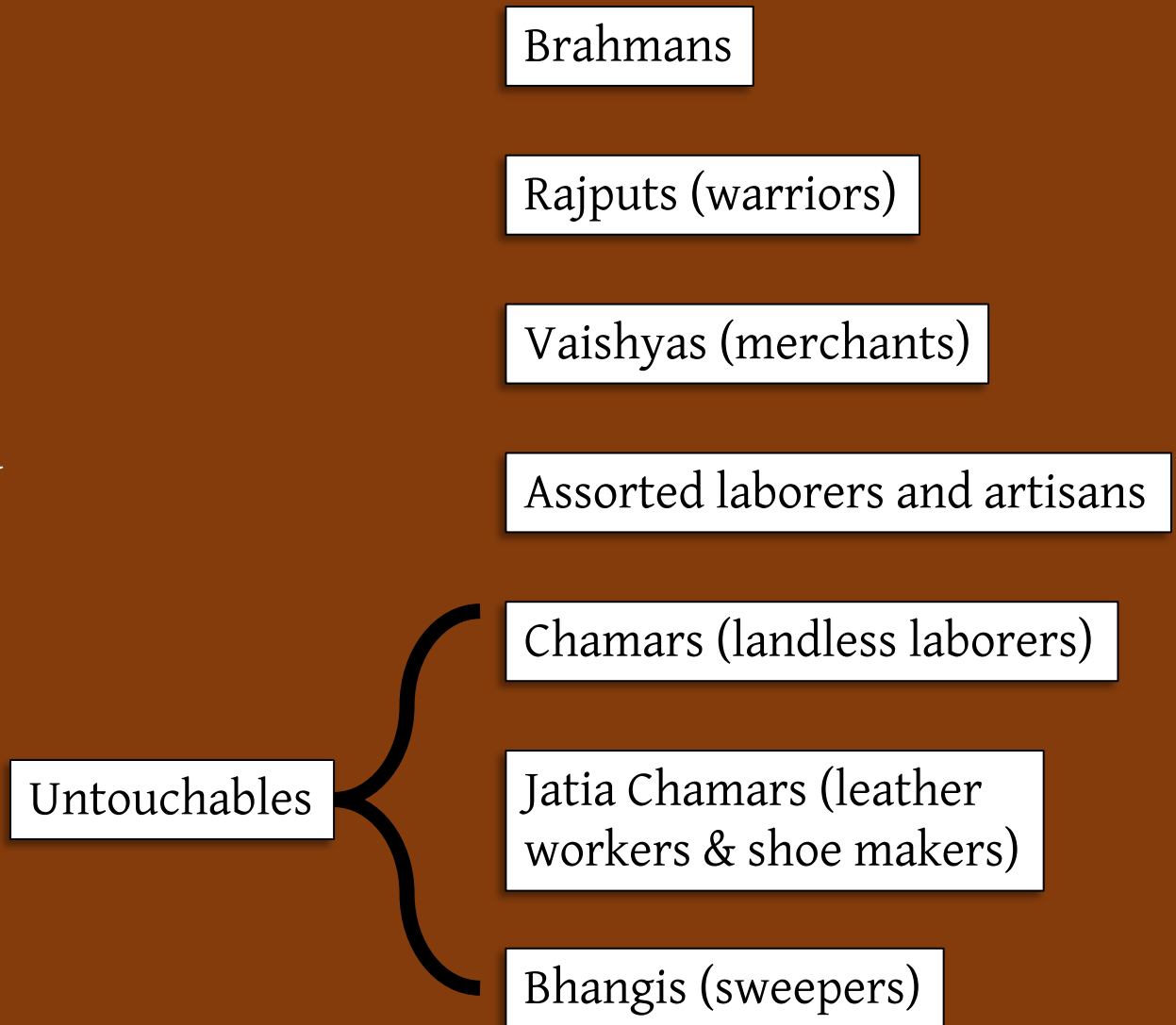
Gumperz (1958)

- Interesting social phenomenon: the Bhangis' speech is "closest to the dialect of the region in which Khalapur is situated."
- Touchables want to emphasize their difference from untouchables.
- Untouchables want to reduce that distinction.
- As a result, what happens?



Gumperz (1958)

- Upper caste people “are forced to innovate away from the regional variety.”
- Since the untouchables generally adopt the traits of UC speech, this means *everyone* is moving away from the regional variety, but for different reasons.



Social variation

- Gumperz's study shows a clear correlation between a social factor (caste) and several linguistic variables (phonological contrasts).
- But most of the world doesn't *have* a system as clearly stratified as caste.
- So, while we might find speakers whose linguistic variables differ, it can be hard to tell what social factors that correlates with.
- In other words, why might one person say *singin'* and another *singing*? *He go* vs. *he goes*? *He doesn't know anything* vs. *He don't know nothing*?

Social variation

“Once a linguistic variable has been identified, the next issue becomes that of collecting data concerning its variants in such a way that we can draw certain conclusions about the social distribution of these variants. To draw such conclusions, we must be able to relate the variants in some way to quantifiable factors in society, e.g., social-class membership, gender, age, ethnicity, and so on.”

- Some New Yorkers say “you guys” when others say “y’all.” Can we relate these variants to any social groups?
- Some New Yorkers say “thank you” when others say “good looks.” Can we relate these variants to any social groups?
- Some New Yorkers say “you’re welcome” when others say “no problem.” Can we relate these variants to any social groups?
- What are some other linguistic variables we can associate with certain groups?

Class

- Class is “the most complicated factor of all.”
- Sociologists use “a number of different scales” when deciding how to identify someone’s social class.
- What is an occupational scale? (p.148)
- What about an educational scale?
- How about income level?
- Because there’s no standard method of identifying one’s class (especially in a post-feudalist society), “the resulting social-class designation given to any individual may differ from study to study.”

Class

- Do people really see themselves as members of classes divided up in this way?
- What do you think? What classes would you say there are?
- What do the following mean to you:

Lower class	Working class	Middle class	Upper class
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- How do you identify what class someone belongs to?



Class

- Often, we use a number of different scales when assigning someone to a particular class, controlling for local factors.
- What makes someone “upper class” in West Virginia may not be the same as what makes someone “upper class” in London.
- Some factors almost always taken into account are education, professional training, job, money, where one lives, race, and ethnicity. These different factors are then given different weight.
- These classifications may not correspond to classes that people actually recognize.

Labov (1966)

In his study of linguistic variation in New York City, Labov (1966) used the three criteria of education, occupation, and income to set up ten social classes. His class 0, his lower class, had grade school education or less, were laborers, and found it difficult to make ends meet. His classes 1 to 5, his working class, had had some high school education, were blue-collar workers, but earned enough to own such things as cars. His classes 6 to 8, his lower middle class, were high school graduates and semi-professional and white-collar workers who could send their children to college. His highest class 9, his upper middle class, were well educated and professional or business-oriented. In this classification system for people in the United States about 10 percent of the population are said to be lower class, about 40 percent working class, another 40 percent lower middle class, and the remaining 10 percent fall into the upper middle class or an upper class, the latter not included in Labov's study. In his later study (2001) of variation in Philadelphia Labov used a socio-economic index based on occupation, education, and house value.

Class

- What are some of the problems with class discussed in this way?

[Sociologists] treated class as a key independent variable, with variations in speech dependent upon class variations, yet they never considered the meaning of the independent variable. In consequence, they seldom attempted anything like a theory of why class should have an impact, and even more rarely examined their measures of class to see if they were methodologically defensible. (Bainbridge 1994)

As we have seen, at any particular moment, an individual locates [themselves] in social space according to the factors that are relevant to [them] at that moment. While [they] may indeed have certain feelings about being a member of the lower middle class, at any moment it might be more important to be female, or to be a member of a particular church or ethnic group, or to be an in-patient in a hospital, or to be a sister-in-law. That is, self-identification or role-playing may be far more important than some kind of fixed social-class labeling.

Sociolects and idiolects

- What is a sociolect?

The speech characteristics of members of a social group.

- What is an idiolect?

The speech characteristics and linguistic behavior of an individual.

- How does the reality of idiolects create a problem for linguistic fieldwork?

Class: U and non-U English

- Alan S.C. Ross (1954) identified the differences between the sociolects of the upper class (U) and upwardly-aspirant upper-middle class (non-U) in England.
- He finds that many words and pronunciations which were U in 1954, were non-U (or irrelevant) 160 years prior.
- Take a look at his article, posted on our class website. (Skip the footnotes and the section on The Written Language, pp. 24–34.)

able to an extent which makes them capable of expansion beyond the limits of their original function.

Since the recent war, two developments have taken place which should have a bearing on the future of Finnish. In the first place, attention is being directed for the first time outside purely linguistic and literary circles to considerations of style. Recent articles in *Ylioppilaslehti*¹ bear witness to the fact; the first hand-books on style have also made their appearance. Secondly, German has now been displaced — by English — as the first foreign language (Swedish is of course one of the two official languages), and a long tradition of German academic and cultural influence has thus to some extent been interrupted. It will be interesting to observe the outcome.

NORMAN DENISON

LINGUISTIC CLASS-INDICATORS IN PRESENT-DAY ENGLISH²

To-day, in 1953, the English class-system is essentially tripartite — there exist an upper, a middle and a lower class. It is solely by its language that the upper class is clearly marked off from the others. In times past (e. g. in the Victorian and Edwardian periods) this was not the case. But, to-day, a member

¹ See e.g. 'Tyylitalto muotivitsausko?' by Matti Hako in Issue No. 36, 1952, p. 8 — apparently inspired by Martti Rapola, 'Äidinkielen tyylitaidon opetuksesta', *Suomalainen Suomi* 7, 1951, p. 310 — and the unsigned article in *Ylioppilaslehti* 40, 1952, p. 8.

² *Phonetic notation*. Length is indicated by a suffixed colon ([ka:d] *card*), stress by a prefixed (closing) inverted comma (*increase* is ['inkrijs] as a noun, [in'krijs] as a verb). In rare cases, a difference between primary and secondary stress is indicated by two, as against one, (closing) inverted commas. Symbols: — [ŋ] as *singer*, [θ] as *thought*, [ð] as *breather*, [ʃ] as *fisher*, [z] as *leisure*, [j] as *yacht*, [i:] as *beat*, [e] as *bet*, [ei] as *paid*, [æ] as *cat*, [eə] as *there*, [ɔ] as *hot*, [ɔ:] as *lord*, [ou] as *bone*, [uw] as *boot*, [ʌ] as *cut*, [ə:] as *turn*, [aɪ] as *ride*, [aʊ] as *found*, [ɔɪ] as *boil*, [ə] as *china*, — and the rest self-evident.

Class: U and non-U English

- What does Ross say about class in England?

To-day, in 1953, the English class-system is essentially tripartite – there exist an upper, a middle and a lower class. It is solely by its language that the upper class is clearly marked off from the others. [...] To-day, a member of the upper class is, for instance, not necessarily better educated, cleaner or richer than someone not of his class. Nor, in general, is he likely to play a greater part in public affairs, be supported by other trades or professions, or engage in other pursuits or pastimes than his fellow of another class.

Class-distinction is very dear to the heart of the upper class and talk about it is hedged with taboo.

Class: U and non-U English

- On page 35, Ross discusses spoken English.
- What are some of the linguistic variables he mentions?

Linguistic Class-indicators

41

	U	non-U
<i>acknowledge</i>	[ək'nɒlɪdʒ]	[ək'nouɪdʒ] ¹
<i>Catholic</i>	(['kɑ:θɪk]) ²	['kæθɪk]
<i>either</i>	['aɪðə]	['ijðə]
<i>extraordinary</i>	[ək'strɔ:dɪnri]	['ɛkstrə'ɔ:dɪn(ə)ri]
<i>forehead</i>	['fɔrɪd]	['fɔ:hɛd]
<i>geyser</i>	['geɪzə]	['gɪzə]
<i>handkerchief</i>	['hɛnkətʃɪf]	['hɛnkətʃɪf], ['hɛnkətʃɪv]
<i>hotel</i>	([ou'tɛl])	[hou'tɛl]
<i>humour</i>	(['juwmə])	['hjuwmə]
<i>mass</i>	([ma:s]) ²	[mæs]
<i>medicine</i>	['mɛdsən]	['mɛdɪsən]
<i>a nought</i>	[ə / nɔ:t]	[æn / ɔ:t] ³
<i>tortoise</i>	['tɔ:təs]	['tɔ:tɔɪs], ['tɔ:tɔɪz] ⁴
<i>vase</i>	[vɑ:z]	[vɔ:z], [veɪz]
<i>venison</i>	['vɛnzən]	['vɛnɪzən]
<i>W.</i>	['dæbəlju]	['dæbɪju] ⁵
<i>waistcoat</i>	['wɛskət]	['weɪstkəʊt] ⁶

Discussion!

- Do you think the following expressions are U or non-U, according to Ross's study?

chamber pot

jerry (meaning 'chamber pot')

to take a bath

to have one's bath

corsets

stays (meaning 'corsets')

bike

cycle

motorcycle

motorbike

lunch (meal at midday)

dinner (meal at midday)

greens ('vegetables')

ill

sick

sick

mirror

looking-glass

jam

preserve (for 'jam')

rude ('indecent')

wealthy

rich

studying for an exam

working for an exam

Wow enjoy congrats!

- 10 minute break!!!!

Social Variation

- So far, we've discussed Gumperz's (1958) study involving caste in Khalapur, India. What were the important takeaways of his study?
- We've talked about how difficult it can be to define "class," and even whether it's linguistically relevant, even though it is often taken as a given within sociolinguistics.
- We also discussed Ross's (1954) study of U and non-U English. What social factor was Ross concerned with?
- Now, we're going to go over some other important studies together to unpack them a little bit.



Fischer's study

- What is the linguistic variable that Fischer (1958) examined?

[ɪŋ] vs. [ɪn] (or *-in'* vs. *-ing*)

- Fischer found a whole constellation of factors influenced the use of [ɪŋ] vs. [ɪn]. What is the main social factor that he considered?

sex (boys vs. girls)

- He also found “class, personality [...], and mood [...] of the speaker, to the formality of the conversation and the specific verb spoken.”

Fischer's actual study can be found on our Readings page.



Fischer's study was conducted among children in New England.

Fischer's study

“As part of a study of child-rearing practices in a New England community, Fischer conducted interviews with young children, twelve boys and twelve girls, aged 3–10. He noted their use of [ŋ] and [n] in a very formal situation [...], in a less formal interview, and in an informal situation.”

Table 7.1 Preferences for *-ing* and *-in'* endings, by sex

	<i>-ing</i> > <i>-in'</i>	<i>-ing</i> < <i>-in'</i>
Boys	5	7
Girls	10	2

Source: Fischer (1958, p. 48)



Fischer's study was conducted among children in New England.

Fischer's study

“Fischer also compared the use of [ŋ] and [n] of a boy described by his teachers as a ‘model’ boy with that of a boy described as a ‘typical’ boy. The model boy worked well in school and was described as being popular, thoughtful, and considerate; the typical boy was described as being strong, mischievous, and apparently unafraid of being caught doing something he should not be doing.”

Table 7.2 Preferences of two boys for *-ing* and *-in'* endings

	<i>-ing</i>	<i>-in'</i>
‘Model’ boy	38	1
‘Typical’ boy	10	12

Source: Fischer (1958, p. 49)



What are possible issues with this “model” vs. “typical” dichotomy?



Fischer's study was conducted among children in New England.

Fischer's study

“In the most formal situation these two boys produced the numbers of instances of *-ing* and *-in'* reported in table 7.2. However, Fischer further observed that the model boy also used *-in'* more as the formality of the situation decreased, as can be seen in table 7.3.”

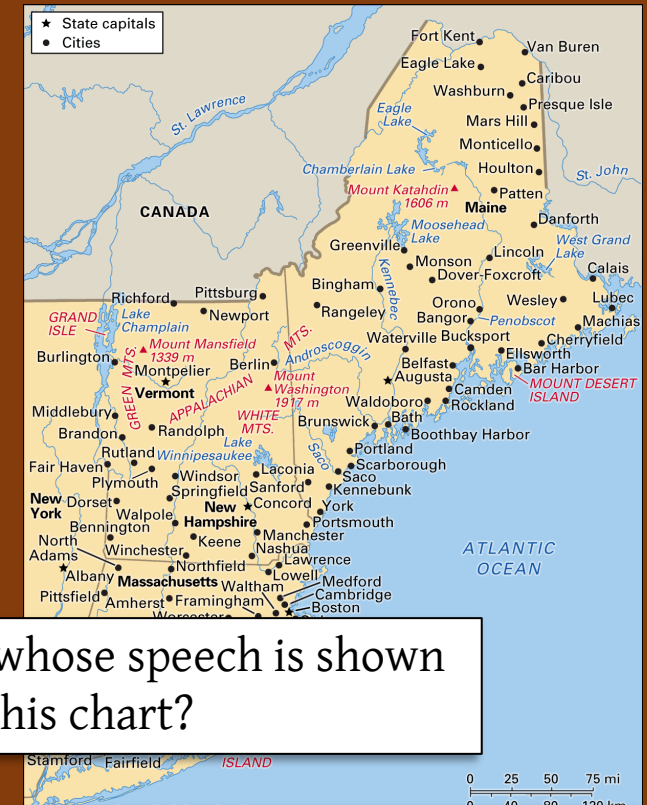
Table 7.3 Preferences for *-ing* and *-in'* endings, by formality of situation

	<i>Most formal</i>	<i>Formal interview</i>	<i>Informal interview</i>
<i>-ing</i>	38	33	24
<i>-in'</i>	1	35	41

Source: Fischer (1958, p. 50)

So whose speech is shown in this chart?

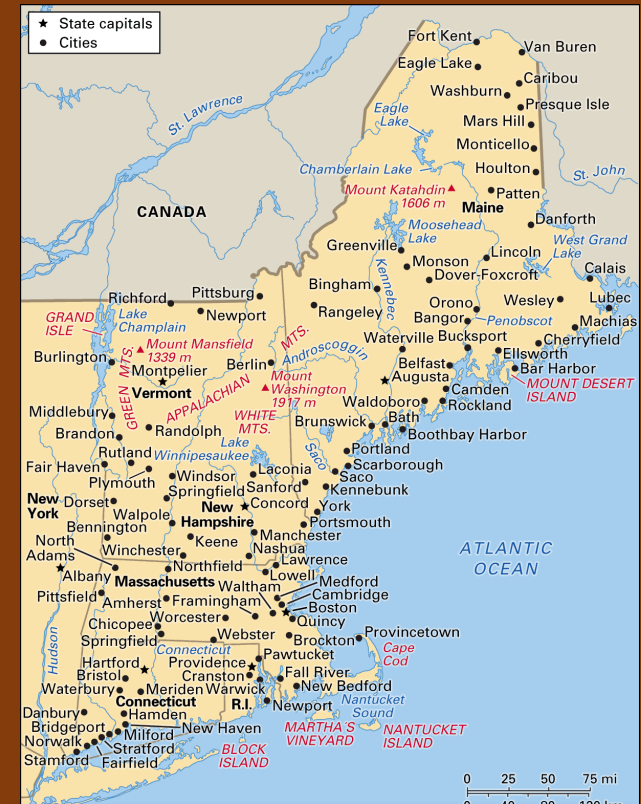
Fischer's study was conducted among children in New England.



Fischer's study

Something that I thought was really interesting:

- Usage was “associated with specific verbs,” so that some verbs were more likely to appear with the *-in'* form than others.
 - a) hit, chew, swim, punch
 - b) criticize, correct, read, visit
- Words in group (a) “were much more likely to be given *-in'* endings” than the verbs in group (b). Fischer contended that the verbs in group (b) were themselves more “formal.”
- What's another possible explanation?

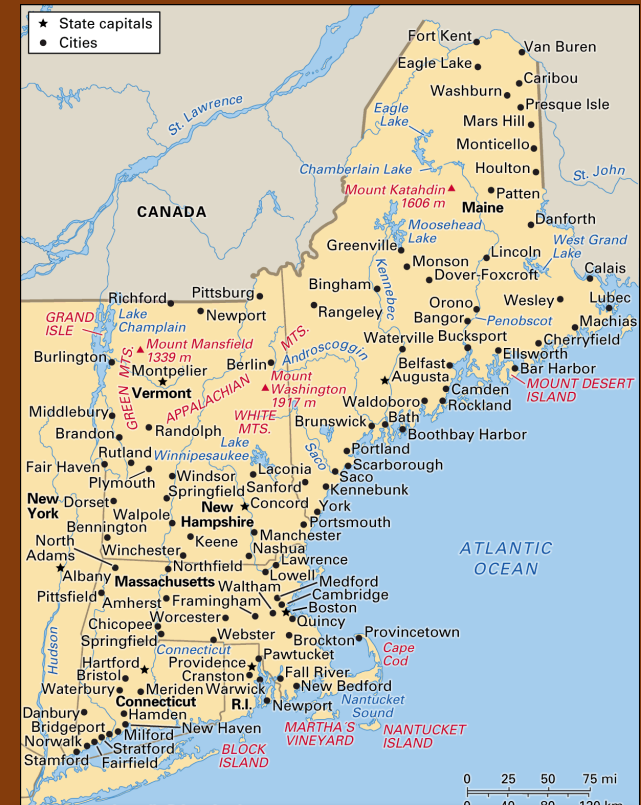


Fischer's study was conducted among children in New England.

Fischer's study

In Fischer's actual study (rather than the summary in the textbook), he wrote that:

The ['model' boy] used *-ing* in *criticizing, correcting, reading, visiting, interesting* and used *-in* in *punchin, flubbin, swimmin, chewin, [and] hittin*. For some common verbs, however, such as *play, go, and do* he used both alternatively. Probably only a few verbs are formal or informal enough in their connotations so that the same variant would always be used with them.



Fischer's study was conducted among children in New England.

Fischer's study

In Fischer's study, he makes a very important observation:

While these are “free variants” in the standard type of description of languages [...] if we widen our scope of study to include the meaning of these variants to the conversants we might call them “socially conditioned variants,” or “socio-symbolic variants,” on the grounds that they serve to symbolize things about the relative status of the conversants and their attitudes toward each other, rather than denoting any difference in the universe of primary discourse (the “outer world”).



Fischer's study was conducted among children in New England.

Discussion! (p.164, q.1)

- If you were interested in the same phenomenon as Fischer, the (ng) variable among young children, how would you design an investigation so that you would be in a position to make much stronger claims than Fischer was able to make?

Discussion! (p.164, q.2)

- What particular difficulties do you think there are in investigating children's language that do not exist in investigating adults' language? How might you try to get around these difficulties?

Labov (1966) in NYC

- What linguistic variable was Labov interested in?

The pronunciation of postvocalic [ɹ].

- What was the social factor that Labov was interested in?

Class (high, middle, and low)

- Labov conducted his study in three department stores. Which ones were they, and how did they correspond to class?

Saks (high), Macy's (middle), S. Klein (low)



Labov conducted his study in three department stores associated with particular social classes.

Labov (1966) in NYC

- Labov conducted his experiment by getting shop assistants in these stores to say “fourth floor.” He did this by asking for the location of departments he knew to be located on that floor, and then asking them to repeat themselves.
- Why did he do it this way, rather than just by asking them outright to say “fourth floor”?



Labov conducted his study in three department stores associated with particular social classes.

Labov (1966) in NYC

Table 7.4 Percentage of *r*-use in three New York City department stores

	<i>Saks (%)</i>	<i>Macy's (%)</i>	<i>S. Klein (%)</i>
All [r]	32	31	17
Some [r]	30	20	4
No [r]	38	49	79
Number	68	125	71

Source: based on Labov (1972b, p. 51)



Labov conducted his study in three department stores associated with particular social classes.

- If we assume that Labov is correct about the relative class status of these stores, what can we say about this linguistic variable and class?

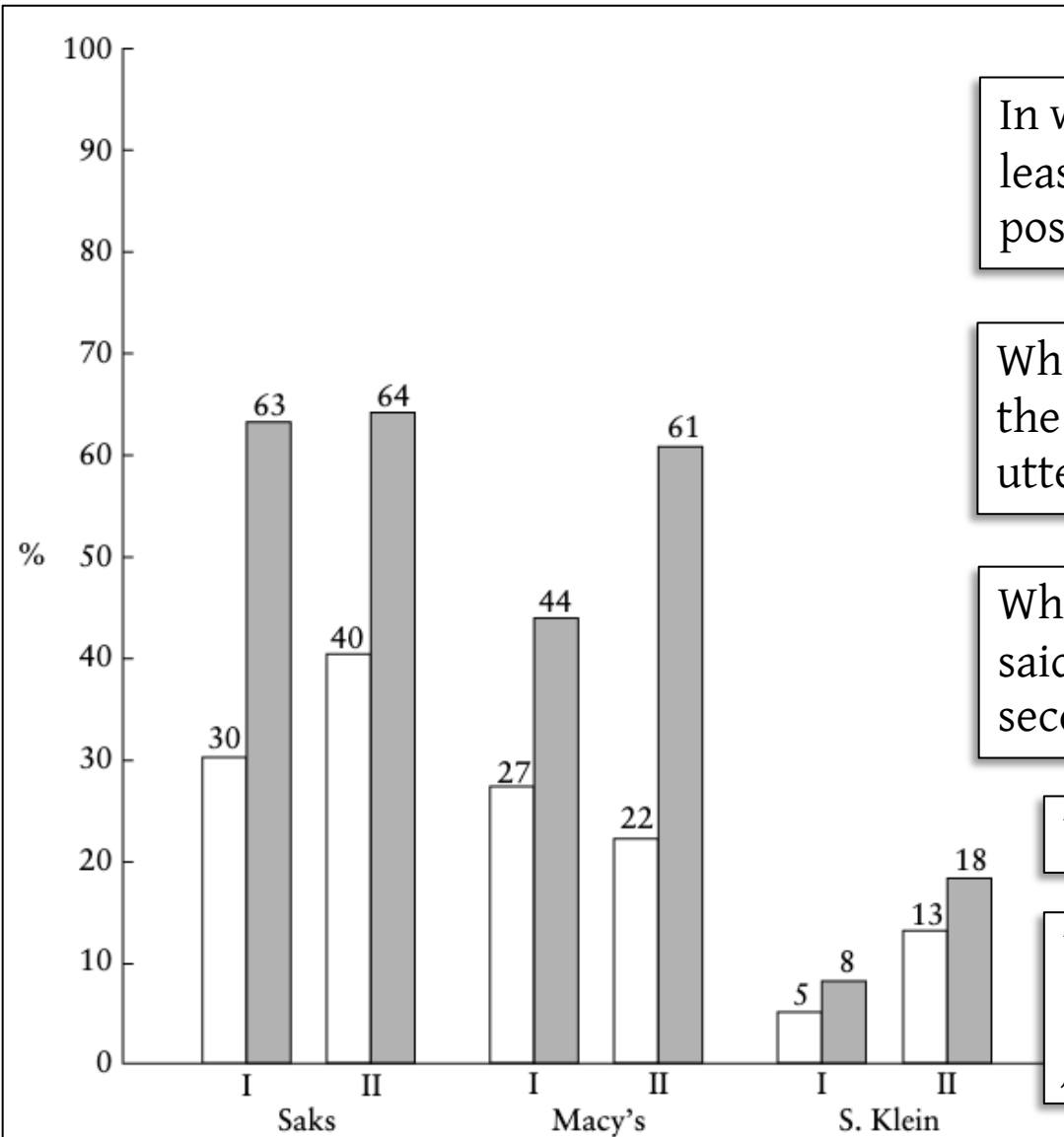


Figure 7.1 Percentage of (r); [r] in first (I) and second (II) utterances of *fourth* (white) and *floor* (solid) in three New York City department stores
 Source: based on Labov (1972b, p. 52)

In which store were speakers least likely to pronounce postvocalic *r*?

What % of speakers in Saks said the *r* in *floor* on their first utterance?

What % of speakers in Macy's said the *r* in *fourth* on their second utterance?

Why is this unusual?

What can we say is true about *r*-pronunciation in *fourth* vs. *floor*, in all cases?



Labov conducted his study in three department stores associated with particular social classes.

Labov (1966) in NYC

“[...] *r*-pronunciation has not always been highly valued in New York City. New York City was *r*-pronouncing in the eighteenth century but became *r*-less in the nineteenth, and *r*-lessness predominated until World War II. At that time, *r*-pronunciation became prestigious again, possibly as a result of large population movements to the city; there was a shift in attitude toward *r*-pronunciation, from apparent indifference to a widespread desire to adopt such pronunciation.”

- How do we feel about the social esteem afforded *r*-pronunciation today?



Labov conducted his study in three department stores associated with particular social classes.

Labov (1966) in NYC

This desire is clearly demonstrated on subjective reaction tests carried out in the 1960s. These tests required subjects to evaluate speech with and without *r*-pronunciation by asking subjects to judge the job prospects of people who differed only in their pronunciation of words containing *r*, and to say which of two pronunciations they used of words containing *r*. The tests showed that New Yorkers in the upper middle class and under the age of 40 almost unanimously approved *r*-pronunciation even though fewer than half actually used *r* in all possible instances. People below the age of 20 also used more *r*-pronunciation than people between the ages of 20 and 40, a fact that would suggest *r*-pronunciation to be on the increase. Above the age of 40, approval fell off to about 60 percent and use showed a dramatic decline to less than 10 percent. Other classes exhibited much the same pattern of approval and use, though, in all cases except one, at much lower levels. In one case – that of the lower middle class – the use of *r* actually exceeded such use in the upper middle class in certain circumstances. Not only did lower middle-class speakers approve of *r*-pronunciation, but they also tended to exceed what appear to be the norms for its use in the next highest class in reading word lists and in pronouncing minimal pairs of words.

Why might lower middle-class speakers value *r*-pronunciation so highly?

How can we connect this to Gumperz's work on caste?



Labov conducted his study in three department stores associated with particular social classes.

Labov (1966) in NYC

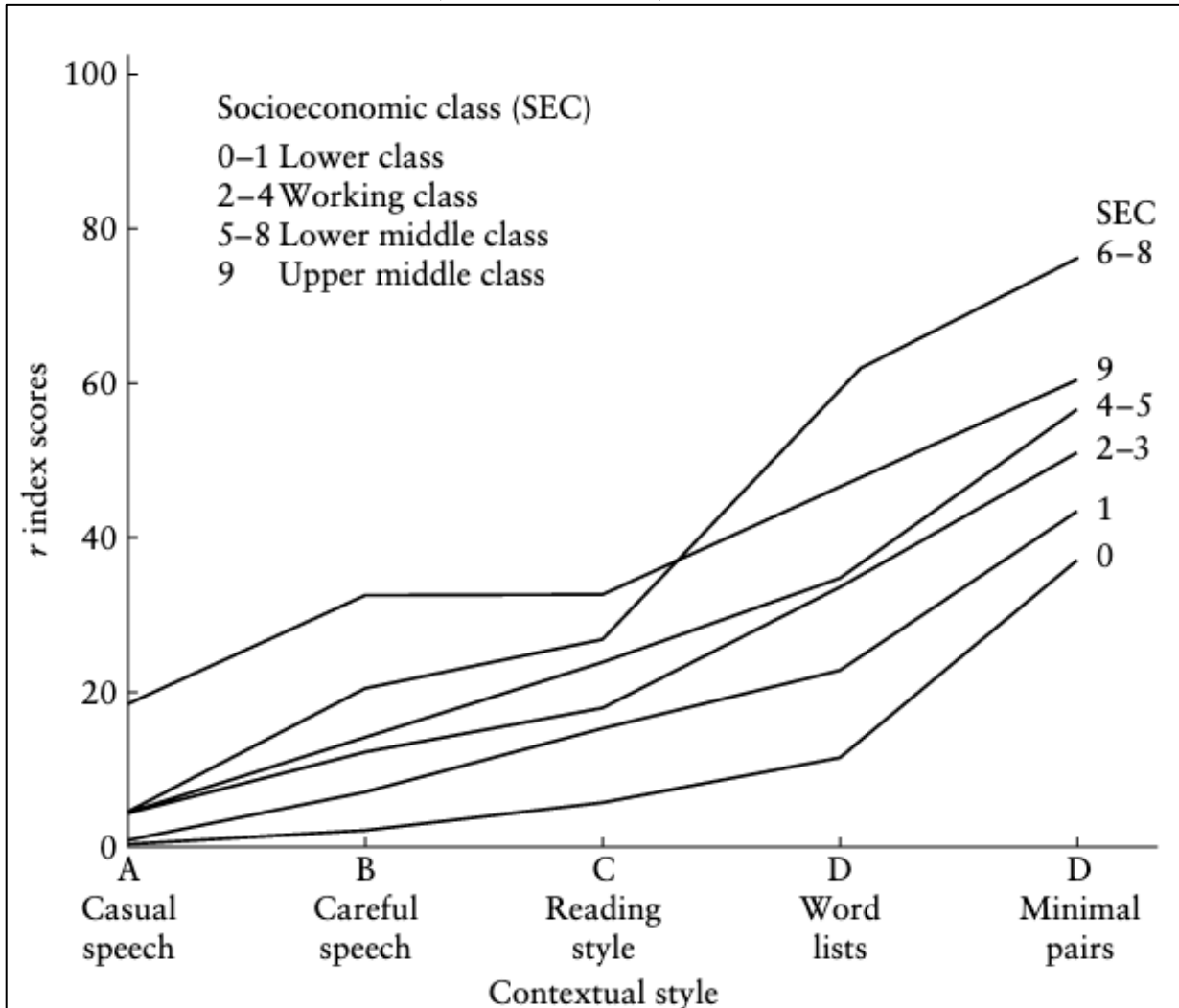


Figure 7.2 R-pronunciation in New York City by social class and style of speech
Source: Labov (1966, p. 240)



What is happening here?



In what context(s) do lower middle class people exceed upper middle class people in *r*-pronunciation?

Labov conducted his study in three department stores associated with particular social classes.

What is *hypercorrection*?

Discussion! (p.170, q.4)

- *Hypercorrect* linguistic behavior is not at all unusual. What examples do you know of? Who gives evidence of such behavior, and on what occasions?

Trudgill (1974) in NYC

- What linguistic variables was Trudgill interested in?

16 phonological variables, including:

- [ŋ] vs [n] as in *singing*
- [t] vs. [ʔ] as in *butter*
- [h] vs. ø as in *hammer*

- What social factors was Trudgill interested in?

Class and gender.



Trudgill conducted his study in Norwich, England.

Trudgill (1974)

- Trudgill found two “very important points.”
 1. When style is kept constant, the lower the social class the greater the incidence of the nonstandard variant
 2. When class is kept constant, the less formal the style the greater the incidence of the nonstandard variant

How can we relate these findings to what we know about standardization?

Does any class really consistently speak the standard variety of English?



Trudgill conducted his study in Norwich, England.

The Detroit Studies

- What linguistic variable were Shuy et al. interested in?

Multiple negation

- What is multiple negation?

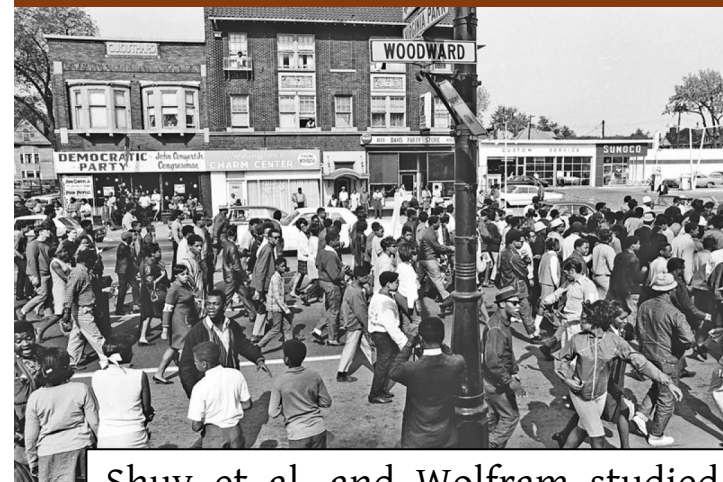
The “double negative,” as in *I haven't got no X*

- What was the social factor that Shuy et al. were interested in?

Social class

- How did class and multiple negation correlate?

Higher class corresponded with less multiple negation.

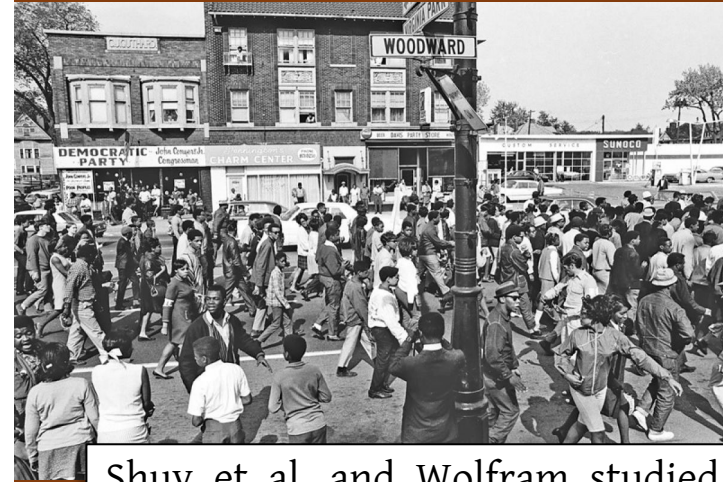


Shuy et al. and Wolfram studied variation in Detroit.

The Detroit Study

Wolfram expanded drastically on Shuy et al.'s study by considering “social class, gender, age, and racial origin.” He also considered eight variables:

1. word final consonant cluster simplification
2. medial and final *th*, as in *nothing* and *path*
3. syllable final *d*
4. postvocalic *r*
5. zero copula (*He tired*)
6. invariant be (*He be tired*, as opposed to *He is tired*)
7. the -s suffixes (*girls*, *boy's*, *goes*)
8. multiple negation



Shuy et al. and Wolfram studied variation in Detroit.

The Detroit Study

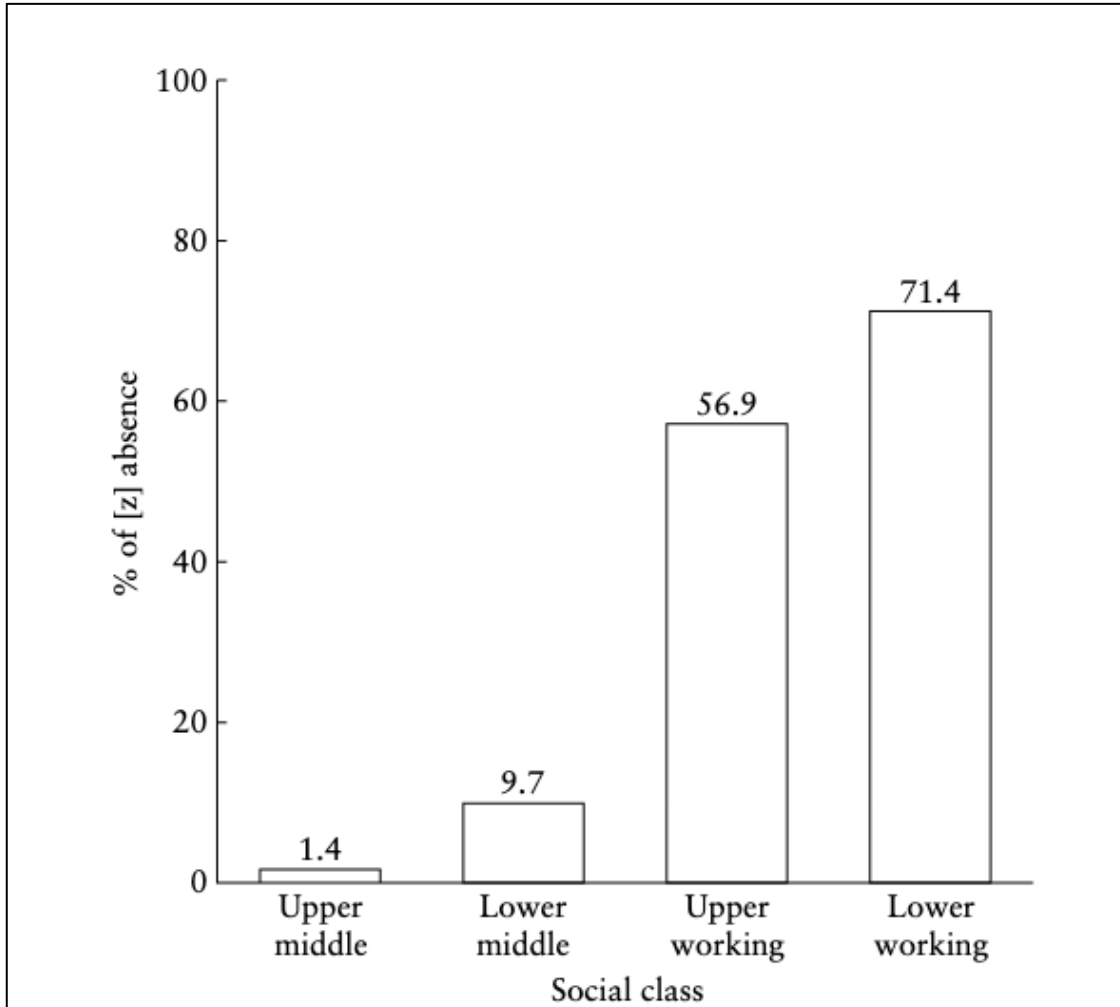
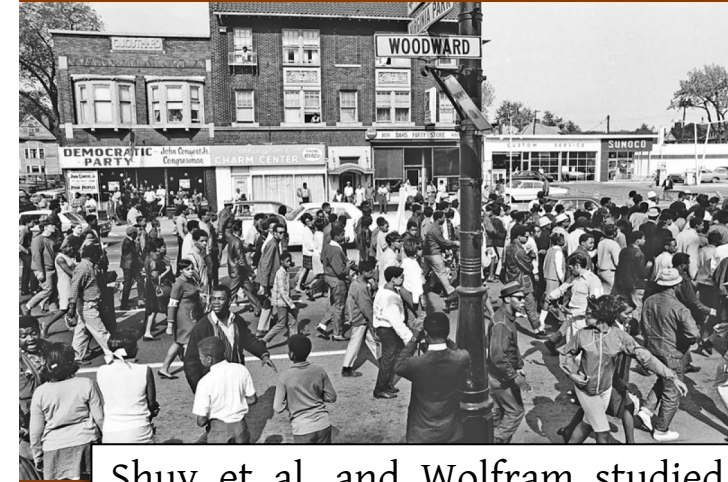


Figure 7.4 Percentage of (z) absence in third-person singular present tense agreement in Detroit black speech

Source: based on Wolfram (1969, p. 136)



Shuy et al. and Wolfram studied variation in Detroit.

What does this chart show?

What trend do we see here?

What is *sharp stratification*?

The Detroit Study

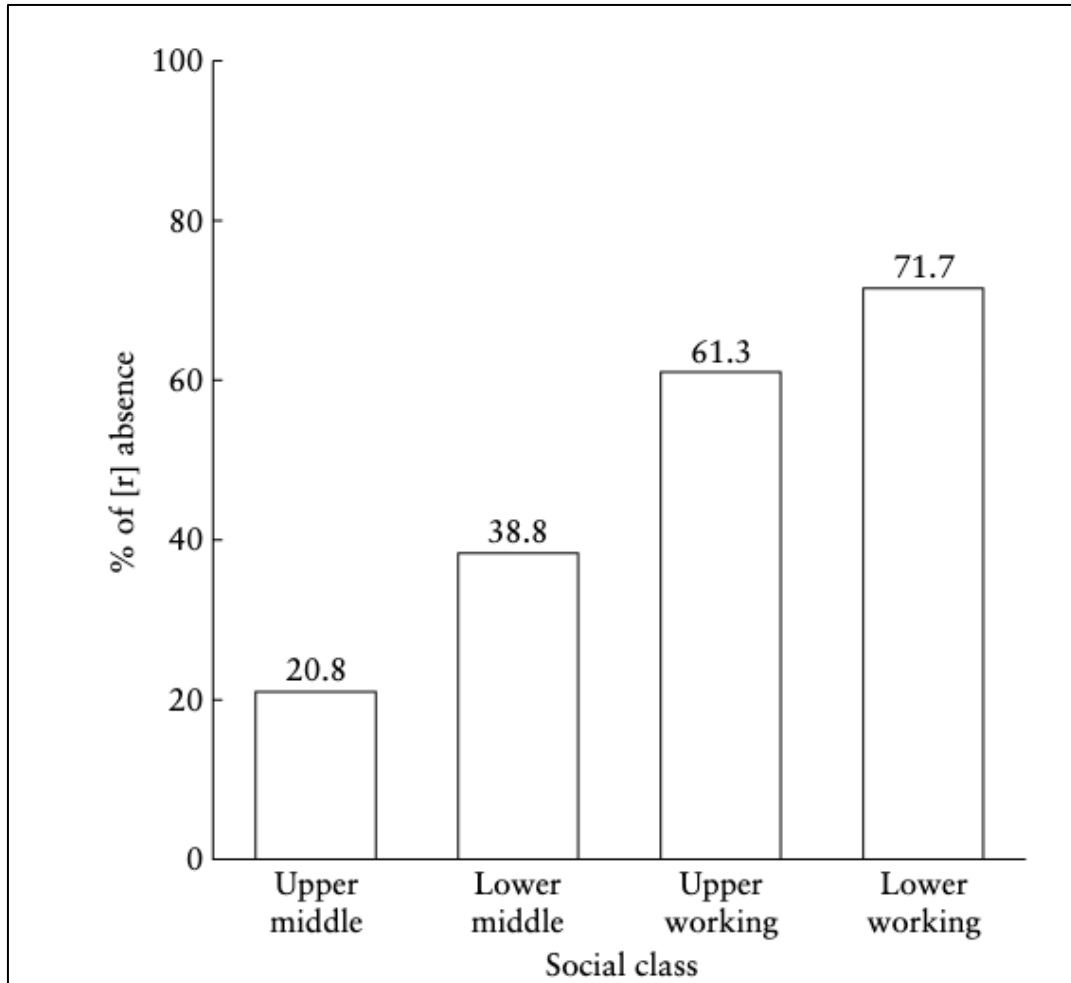
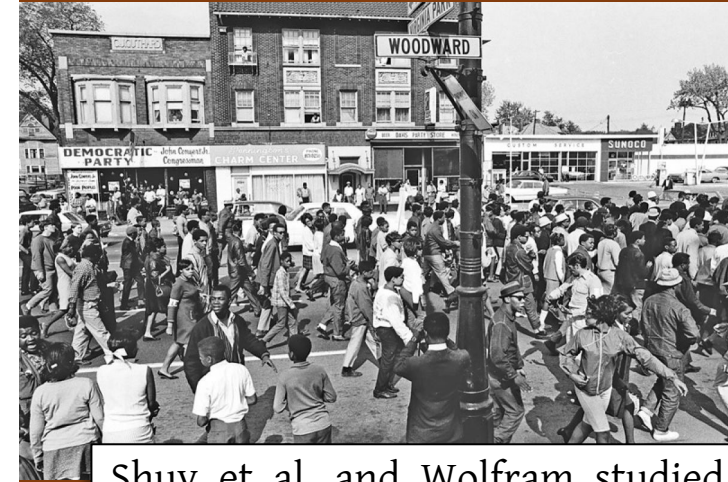


Figure 7.5 Percentage of (r) absence in words like *farm* and *car* in Detroit black speech

Source: based on Wolfram (1969, p. 110)



Shuy et al. and Wolfram studied variation in Detroit.

What does this chart show?

What trend do we see here?

What is *gradient stratification*?

The Detroit Study

What does this say about the -s (as in *goes*) linguistic variable vs. the postvocalic-*r* variable?

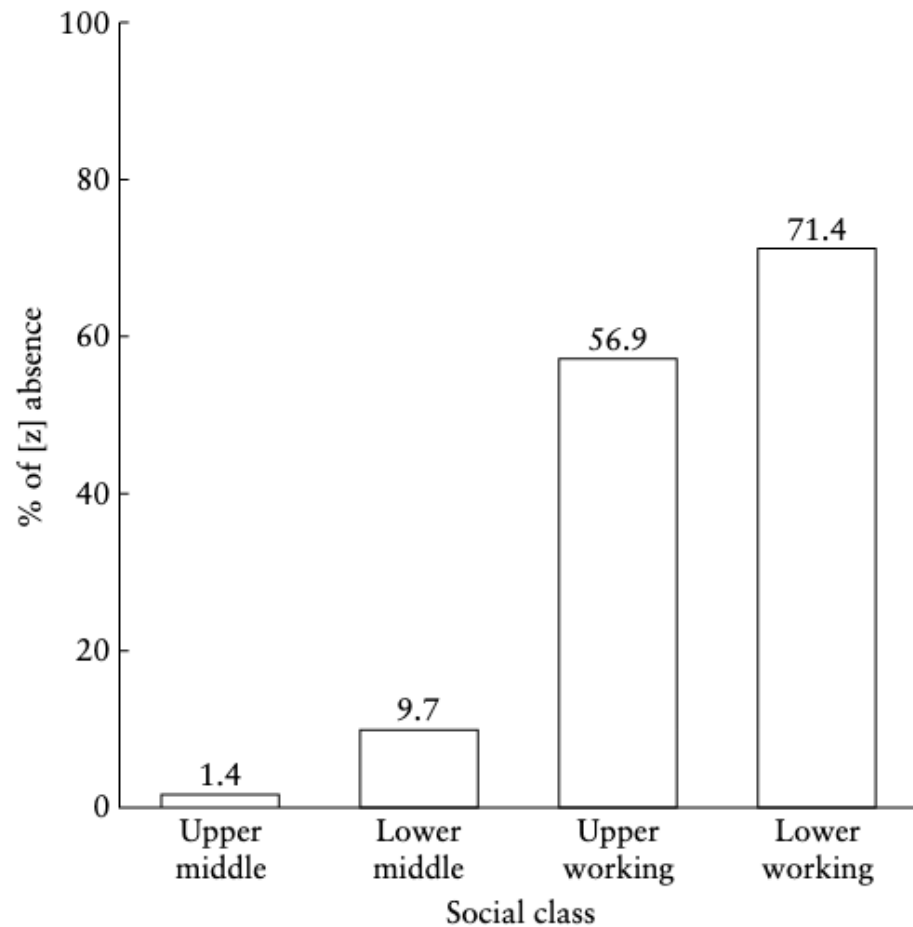


Figure 7.4 Percentage of (z) absence in third-person singular present tense agreement in Detroit black speech
Source: based on Wolfram (1969, p. 136)

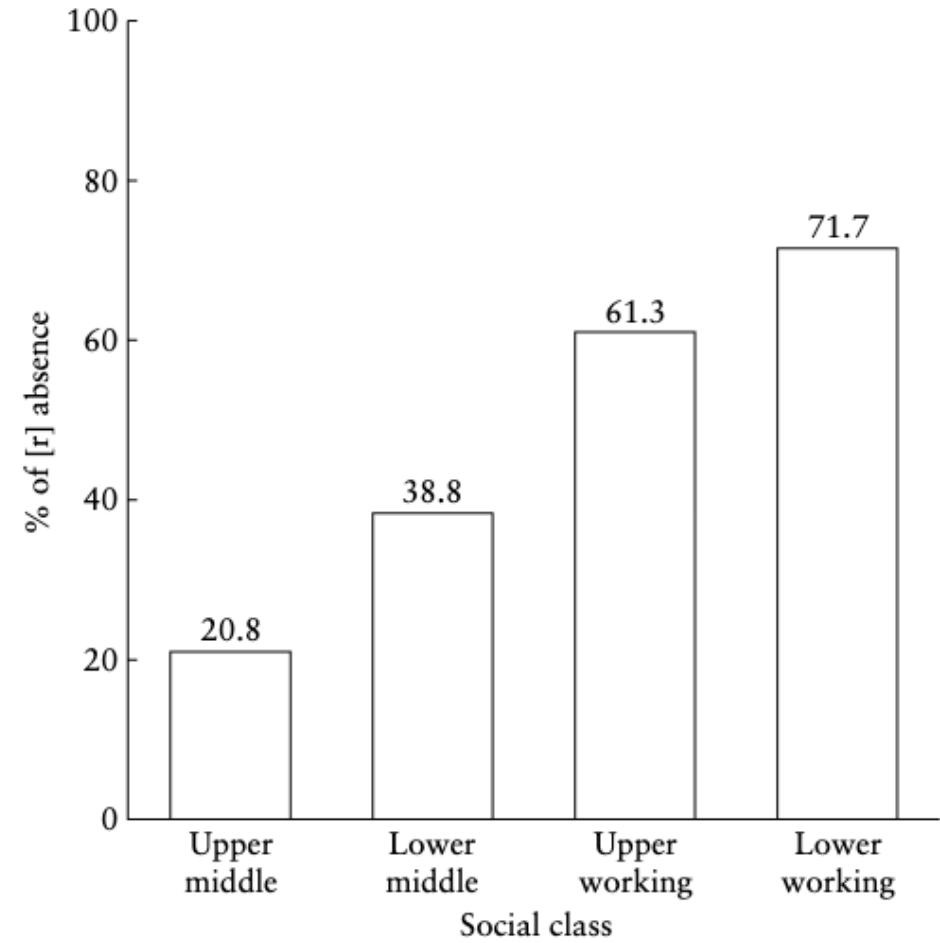


Figure 7.5 Percentage of (r) absence in words like *farm* and *car* in Detroit black speech
Source: based on Wolfram (1969, p. 110)

Discussion!

- What trend can we observe in going from studies like Fischer's to studies like Wolfram's?

Discussion!

While these are “free variants” in the standard type of description of languages [...] if we widen our scope of study to include the meaning of these variants to the conversants we might call them “socially conditioned variants,” or “socio-symbolic variants,” on the grounds that they serve to symbolize things about the relative status of the conversants and their attitudes toward each other, rather than denoting any difference in the universe of primary discourse (the “outer world”).

- In linguistics, “free variation” refers to the situation where a speaker can freely choose between two variables, with no difference in meaning. Bearing in mind Fischer’s note about “free variants,” and considering what we’ve learned from the other studies discussed today, what can we say about the notion of “free variation”?
- Can you think of any true free variables?

For next week...

- Do Writing Assignment #3:

How would you try to place individuals according to their social position in the community in which you live? What factors would you consider to be relevant, and how would you weight each? What class designations would seem appropriate? Where would you place yourself? What aspects of your language usage do you think follow from your class membership, rather than some other regional or social affiliation?

- Please read pp. 191–207 in the textbook by next week's class.