Sociolinguistics
A Reader and Coursebook

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13 The Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores

William Labov

As this letter is but a jar of the tongue,...it is the most imperfect of all the consonants.

(John Walker, *Principles of English Pronunciation*, 1791)

Anyone who begins to study language in its social context immediately encounters the classic methodological problem: the means used to gather the data interfere with the data to be gathered. The primary means of obtaining a large body of reliable data on the speech of one person is the individual tape-recorded interview. Interview speech is formal speech – not by any absolute measure, but by comparison with the vernacular of everyday life. On the whole, the interview is public speech – monitored and controlled in response to the presence of an outside observer. But even within that definition, the investigator may wonder if the responses in a tape-recorded interview are not a special product of the interaction between the interviewer and the subject. One way of controlling for this is to study the subject in his own natural social context – interacting with his family or peer group (Labov, Cohen, Robins, and Lewis 1968). Another way is to observe the public use of language in everyday life apart from any interview situation – to see how people use language in context when there is no explicit observation. This chapter is an account of the systematic use of rapid and anonymous observations in a study of the sociolinguistic structure of the speech community.[1]

This chapter deals primarily with the sociolinguistic study of New York City. The main base for that study (Labov 1966) was a secondary random sample of the Lower East Side. But before the systematic study was carried out, there was an extensive series of preliminary investigations. These included 70 individual interviews and a great many anonymous observations in public places. These preliminary studies led to the definition of the major phonological variables which were to be studied, including (r): the presence or absence of consonantal [r] in postvocalic position in *car, card, four, fourth*, etc. This particular variable appeared to be extraordinarily sensitive to any measure of social or stylistic stratification. On the basis of the exploratory interviews, it seemed possible to carry out an empirical test of two general notions: 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. The study of (r) in New York City department stores which I will report here was conducted in November 1962 as a test of these ideas.

We can hardly consider the social distribution of language in New York City without encountering the pattern of social stratification which pervades the life of the city. This concept is analyzed in some detail in the major study of the Lower East Side; here we may briefly consider the definition given by Bernard Barber: social stratification is the product of social differentiation and social evaluation (1957: 1–3). The use of this term does not imply any specific type of class or caste, but simply that the normal workings of society have produced systematic differences between certain institutions or people, and that these differentiated forms have been ranked in status or prestige by general agreement.

We begin with the general hypothesis suggested by exploratory interviews: *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)*.

It would be easy to test this hypothesis by comparing occupational groups, which are among the most important indexes of social stratification. We could, for example, take a group of lawyers, a group of file clerks, and a group of janitors. But this would hardly go beyond the indications of the exploratory interviews, and such an extreme example of differentiation would not provide a very exacting test of the hypothesis. It should be possible to show that the hypothesis is so general, and the differential use of (r) pervades New York City so thoroughly, that fine social differences will be reflected in the index as well as gross ones.

It therefore seemed best to construct a very severe test by finding a subtle case of stratification within a single occupational group: in this case, the sales people of large department stores in Manhattan. If we select three large department stores, from the top, middle, and bottom of the price and fashion scale, we can expect that the customers will be socially stratified. Would we expect the sales people to show a comparable stratification? Such a position would depend upon two correlations: between the status ranking of the stores and the ranking of

parallel jobs in the three stores; and between the jobs and the behavior of the persons who hold those jobs. These are not unreasonable assumptions. C. Wright Mills points out that salesgirls in large department stores tend to borrow prestige from their customers, or at least make an effort in that direction.[2] It appears that a person's own occupation is more closely correlated with his linguistic behavior – for those working actively – than any other single social characteristic. The evidence presented here indicates that the stores are objectively differentiated in a fixed order, and that jobs in these stores are evaluated by employees in that order. Since the product of social differentiation and evaluation, no matter how minor, is social stratification of the employees in the three stores, 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. If this result holds true, the hypothesis will have received confirmation in proportion to the severity of the test.

The three stores which were selected are Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's, and S. Klein. The differential ranking of these stores may be illustrated in many ways. Their locations are one important point:

Highest-ranking: Saks Fifth Avenue
> at 50th St and 5th Ave., near the center of the high fashion shopping district, along with other high-prestige stores such as Bonwit Teller, Henri Bendel, Lord and Taylor

Middle-ranking: Macy's
> Herald Square, 34th St and Sixth Ave., near the garment district, along with Gimbels and Saks-34th St, other middle-range stores in price and prestige.

Lowest-ranking: S. Klein
> Union Square, 14th St and Broadway, not far from the Lower East Side.

The advertising and price policies of the stores are very clearly stratified. Perhaps no other element of class behavior is so sharply differentiated in New York City as that of the newspaper which people read; many surveys have shown that the *Daily News* is the paper read first and foremost by working-class people, while the *New York Times* draws its readership from the middle-class.[3] These two newspapers were examined for the advertising copy in October 24–27, 1962: Saks and Macy's advertised in the *New York Times*, where Kleins was represented only by a very small item; in the *News*, however, Saks does not appear at all, while both Macy's and Kleins are heavy advertisers.

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

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

We may also consider the prices of the goods advertised during those four days. Since Saks usually does not list prices, we can only compare prices for all three stores on one item: women's coats. Saks: $90, Macy's: $79.95, Kleins: $23. On four items, we can compare Kleins and Macy's:

	Macy's	S. Klein
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

The emphasis on prices is also different. Saks either does not mention prices, or buries the figure in small type at the foot of the page. Macy's features the prices in large type, but often adds the slogan, 'You get more than low prices.' Kleins, on the other hand, is often content to let the prices speak for themselves. The form of the prices is also different: Saks gives prices in round figures, such as $120; Macy's always shows a few cents off the dollar: $49.95; Kleins usually prices its goods in round numbers, and adds the retail price which is always much higher, and shown in Macy's style: '$23.00, marked down from $49.95.'

The physical plant of the stores also serves to differentiate them. Saks is the most spacious, especially on the upper floors, with the least amount of goods displayed. Many of the floors are carpeted, and on some of them, a receptionist is stationed to greet the customers. Kleins, at the other extreme, is a maze of annexes, sloping concrete floors, low ceilings; it has the maximum amount of goods displayed at the least possible expense.

The principal stratifying effect upon the employees is the prestige of the store, and the working conditions. Wages do not stratify the employees in the same order. On the contrary, there is every indication that high-prestige stores such as Saks pay lower wages than Macy's.

Saks is a non-union store, and the general wage structure is not a matter of public record. However, conversations with a number of men and women who have worked in New York department stores, including Saks and

Macy's, show general agreement on the direction of the wage differential.[4] Some of the incidents reflect a willingness of sales people to accept much lower wages from the store with greater prestige. The executives of the prestige stores pay a great deal of attention to employee relations, and take many unusual measures to ensure that the sales people feel that they share in the general prestige of the store.[5] One of the Lower East Side informants who worked at Saks was chiefly impressed with the fact that she could buy Saks clothes at a 25 percent discount. A similar concession from a lower-prestige store would have been of little interest to her.

From the point of view of Macy's employees, a job in Kleins is well below the horizon. Working conditions and wages are generally considered to be worse, and the prestige of Kleins is very low indeed. As we will see, the ethnic composition of the store employees reflects these differences quite accurately.

A socioeconomic index which ranked New Yorkers on occupation would show the employees of the three stores at the same level; an income scale would probably find Macy's employees somewhat higher than the others; education is the only objective scale which might differentiate the groups in the same order as the prestige of the stores, though there is no evidence on this point. However, the working conditions of sales jobs in the three stores stratify them in the order: Saks, Macy's, Kleins; the prestige of the stores leads to a social evaluation of these jobs in the same order. Thus the two aspects of social stratification – differentiation and evaluation – are to be seen in the relations of the three stores and their employees.

The normal approach to a survey of department-store employees requires that one enumerate the sales people of each store, draw random samples in each store, make appointments to speak with each employee at home, interview the respondents, then segregate the native New Yorkers, analyze and resample the nonrespondents, and so on. This is an expensive and time-consuming procedure, but for most purposes there is no short cut which will give accurate and reliable results. In this case, a simpler method which relies upon the extreme generality of the linguistic behavior of the subjects was used to gather a very limited type of data. This method is dependent upon the systematic sampling of casual and anonymous speech events. Applied in a poorly defined environment, such a method is open to many biases and it would be difficult to say what population had been studied. In this case, our population is well-defined as the sales people (or more generally, any employee whose speech might be heard by a customer) in three specific stores at a specific time. The result will be a view of the role that speech would play in the overall social imprint of the employees upon the customer. It is surprising that this simple and economical approach achieves results with a high degree of consistency and regularity, and allows us to test the original hypothesis in a number of subtle ways.

THE METHOD

The application of the study of casual and anonymous speech events to the department-store situation was relatively simple. The interviewer approached the informant in the role of a customer asking for directions to a particular department. The department was one which was located on the fourth floor. When the interviewer asked, 'Excuse me, where are the women's shoes?' the answer would normally be, 'Fourth floor.'

The interviewer then leaned forward and said, 'Excuse me?' He would usually then obtain another utterance, '*Fourth floor*,' spoken in careful style under emphatic stress.[6]

The interviewer would then move along the aisle of the store to a point immediately beyond the informant's view, and make a written note of the data. The following independent variables were included:

the store
floor within the store[7]
sex
age (estimated in units of five years)
occupation (floorwalker, sales, cashier, stockboy)
race
foreign or regional accent, if any

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

casual: fou<u>r</u>th floo<u>r</u>
emphatic: *fou<u>r</u>th floo<u>r</u>*

Thus we have preconsonantal and final position, in both casual and emphatic styles of speech. In addition, all other uses of (r) by the informant were noted, from remarks overheard or contained in the interview. For each plainly constricted value of the variable, (r-1) was entered; for unconstricted schwa, lengthened vowel, or no representation, (r-0) was entered. Doubtful cases or partial constriction were symbolized *d* and were not used in the final tabulation.

Also noted were instances of affricates or stops used in the word *fourth* for the final consonant, and any other examples of nonstandard (th) variants used by the speaker.

This method of interviewing was applied in each aisle on the floor as many times as possible before the spacing of the informants became so close that it was noticed that the same question had been asked before. Each floor of the store was investigated in the same way. On the fourth floor, the form of the question was necessarily different:

'Excuse me, what floor is this?'

Following this method, 68 interviews were obtained in Saks, 125 in Macy's, and 71 in Kleins. Total interviewing time for the 264 subjects was approximately 6.5 hours.

At this point, we might consider the nature of these 264 interviews in more general terms. They were speech events which had entirely different social significance for the two participants. As far as the informant was concerned, the exchange was a normal salesman–customer interaction, almost below the level of conscious attention, in which relations of the speakers were so casual an anonymous that they may hardly have been said to have met. This tenuous relationship was the minimum intrusion upon the behavior of the subject; language and the use of language never appeared at all.

From the point of view of the interviewer, the exchange was a systematic elicitation of the exact forms required, in the desired context, the desired order, and with the desired contrast of style.

OVERALL STRATIFICATION OF (r)

The results of the study showed clear and consistent stratification of (r) in the three stores. In Figure 13.1, the use of (r) by employees of Saks, Macy's and Kleins is compared by means of a bar graph. Since the data for most informants consist of only four items, we will not use a continuous numerical index for (r), but rather divide all informants into three categories.

all (r-1): those whose records show only (r-1) and no (r-0)
some (r-1): those whose records show at least one (r-1) and one (r-0)
no (r-1): those whose records showed only (r-0)

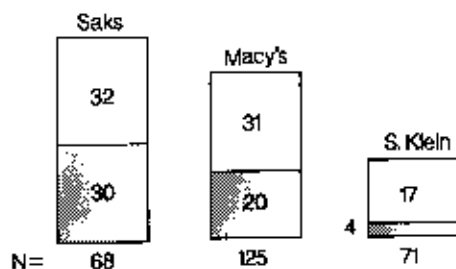*Figure 13.1:*   Overall stratification of (r) by store. Shaded area = % all (r − 1); unshaded area = % some (r − 1); % no (r − 1) not shown. N = total number of cases
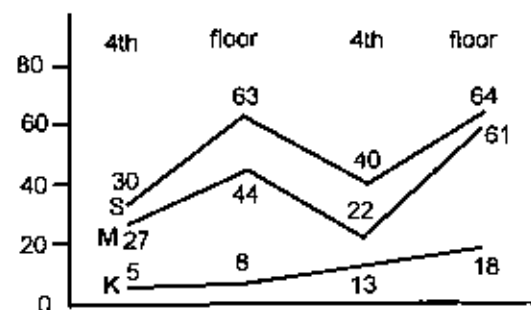
Figure 13.2:   Percentage of all (r − 1) by store for four positions (S = Saks, M = Macy's, K = Kleins)

From Figure 13.1 we see that a total of 62 percent of Saks employees, 51 percent of Macy's, and 20 percent of Kleins used all or some (r-1). The stratification is even sharper for the percentages of all (r-1). As the hypothesis predicted, the groups are ranked by their differential use of (r-1) in the same order as their stratification by extralinguistic factors.

Next, we may wish to examine the distribution of (r) in each of the four standard positions. Figure 13.2 shows this type of display, where once again, the stores are differentiated in the same order, and for each position. There is a considerable difference between Macy's and Kleins at each position, but the difference between Macy's and Saks varies. In emphatic pronunciation of the final (r), Macy's employees come very close to the mark set by Saks. It would seem that r-pronunciation is the norm at which a majority of Macy employees aim, yet not the one they use most often. In Saks, we see a shift between casual and emphatic pronunciation, but it is much less marked. In other words, Saks employees have more *security* in a linguistic sense.

The fact that the figures for (r-1) at Kleins are low should not obscure the fact that Kleins employees also participate in the same pattern of stylistic variation of (r) as the other stores. The percentage of r-pronunciation rises at Kleins from 5 to 18 percent as the context becomes more emphatic: a much greater rise in percentage than in the other stores, and a more regular increase as well. It will be important to bear in mind that this attitude – that (r-1) is the most appropriate pronunciation for emphatic speech – is shared by at least some speakers in all three stores.

Table 13.1 shows the data in detail, with the number of instances obtained for each of the four positions of (r), for each store. It may be noted that the number of occurrences in the second pronunciation of *four* is considerably reduced, primarily as a result of some speakers' tendency to answer a second time, 'Fourth.'

Table 13.1: Detailed distribution of (r) by store and word position

(r)	Saks				Macy's				S. Klein			
	Casual 4th floor		Emphatic 4th floor		Casual 4th floor		Emphatic 4th floor		Casual 4th floor		Emphatic 4th floor	
(r-1)	17	31	16	21	33	48	13	31	3	5	6	7
(r-0)	39	18	24	12	81	62	48	20	63	59	40	33
d	4	5	4	4	0	3	1	0	1	1	3	3
No data*	8	14	24	31	11	12	63	74	4	6	22	28
Total no.	68	68	68	68	125	125	125	125	71	71	71	71

*The 'no data' category for Macy's shows relatively high values under the emphatic category. This discrepancy is due to the fact that the procedure for requesting repetition was not standardized in the investigation of the ground floor at Macy's, and values for emphatic response were not regularly obtained. The effects of this loss are checked in Table 13.2, where only complete responses are compared.

Since the numbers in the fourth position are somewhat smaller than the second, it might be suspected that those who use [r] in Saks and Macy's tend to give fuller responses, thus giving rise to a spurious impression of increase in (r) values in those positions. We can check this point by comparing only those who gave a complete response. Their responses can be symbolized by a four-digit number, representing the pronunciation in each of the four positions respectively (see Table 13.2).

Thus we see that the pattern of differential ranking in the use of (r) is preserved in this subgroup of complete responses, and omission of the final 'floor' by some respondents was not a factor in this pattern.

Table 13.2: Distribution of (r) for complete responses

(r)		% of total responses in		
		Saks	Macy's	S. Klein
All (r-1)	1 1 1 1	24	22	6
Some (r-1)	0 1 1 1	46	37	12
	0 0 1 1			
	0 1 0 1 etc.			
No (r-1)	0 0 0 0	30	41	82
		100	100	100
N =		33	48	34

NOTES

1 I am indebted to Frank Anshen and Marvin Maverick Harris for reference to illuminating replications of this study (Allen 1968, Harris 1968).

2 C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 173. See also p. 243: 'The tendency of white-collar people to borrow status from higher elements is so strong that it has carried over to all social contacts and features of the work-place. Salespeople in department stores . . . frequently attempt, although often unsuccessfully, to borrow prestige from their contact with customers, and to cash it in among work colleagues as well as friends off the job. In the big city the girl who works on 34th Street cannot successfully claim as much prestige as the one who works on Fifth Avenue or 57th Street.'

3 This statement is fully confirmed by answers to a question on newspaper readership in the Mobilization for Youth Survey of the Lower East Side. The readership of the *Daily News* and *Daily Mirror* (now defunct) on the one hand, and the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune* (now defunct) on the other hand is almost complementary in distribution by social class.

4 Macy's sales employees are represented by a strong labor union, while Saks is not unionized. One former Macy's employee considered it a matter of common knowledge that Saks wages were lower than Macy's, and that the prestige of the store helped to maintain its nonunion position. Bonuses and other increments are said to enter into the picture. It appears that it is more difficult for a young girl to get a job at Saks than at Macy's. Thus Saks has more leeway in hiring policies, and the tendency of the store officials to select girls who speak in a certain way will play a part in the stratification of language, as well as the adjustment made by the employees to their situation. Both influences converge to produce stratification.

5 A former Macy's employee told me of an incident that occurred shortly before Christmas several years ago. As she was shopping in Lord and Taylor's, she saw the president of the company making the rounds of every aisle and shaking hands with every employee. When she told her fellow employees at Macy's about this scene, the most common remark was, 'How else do you get someone to work for that kind of money?' One can say that not only do the employees of higher-status stores borrow prestige from their employer – it is also deliberately loaned to them.

6 The interviewer in all cases was myself. I was dressed in middle-class style, with jacket, white shirt and tie, and used my normal pronunciation as a college-educated native of New Jersey (r-pronouncing).

7 Notes were also made on the department in which the employee was located, but the numbers for individual departments are not large enough to allow comparison.

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14   The Social Differentiation of English in Norwich

Peter Trudgill

MEASUREMENT OF CO-VARIATION

One of the chief aims of this work is to investigate the co-variation of phonological and sociological variables. In order to measure this type of correlation, a record was first taken of each occurrence of all the variables in the four contextual styles for each informant. Index scores for each informant in each style could then be developed, and, subsequently, the mean index score for each social group calculated. [The following abbreviations are used in this chapter in relation to the social and stylistic stratification of the variable (ng): LWC – lower working-class; MWC – middle working-class; UWC – upper working-class; LMC – lower middle-class; MMC – middle middle-class; WLS – word lists; RPS – reading passages; FS – formal style; CS – casual style – Eds.] By means of these scores we are able: (i) to investigate the nature of the correlation between realisations of phonological variables and social class, social context, and sex; (ii) to discover which variables are subject to social class differentiation and which to stylistic variation; and (iii) to find out which variables are most important in signalling the social context of some linguistic interaction, or the social class of a speaker.

The methods we are using of calculating and portraying individual and group phonological indices were initially developed by Labov (1966). In some respects, however, the present work represents a development of Labov's techniques in that use is made of phonological indices for investigating problems of surface phonemic contrast, and for studying aspects of what is usually termed 'phonological space'. ...

Let us take as an example the phonological variable (ng), the pronunciation of the suffix *-ing*. This is well known as a variable in many different types of English, and seems likely to provide a good example of social class and stylistic differentiation.

THE VARIABLE (ng)

Table 14.1 shows the average (ng) index scores for the five social classes in each of the four contextual styles: Word List Style (WLS), Reading Passage Style (RPS), Formal Speech (FS), and Casual Speech (CS). Tests of significance have not been carried out on this, or on the data for the other variables. As Labov (1970) has said concerning other sociolinguistic data: 'It is immediately obvious to the sophisticated statistician that tests of significance are irrelevant . . . even if a particular case were below the level of significance, the convergence of so many independent events carries us to a level of confidence which is unknown in most social or psychological research.' Table 14.1 demonstrates that:

(i)   the Norwich questionnaire has in fact been successful in eliciting four hierarchically ordered and discrete contextual styles, since, for each class, the scores rise consistently from WLS to CS;

(ii) the social class index has provided a successful basis for the establishment of discrete social classes as these classes are reflected in their linguistic behaviour, since, for each style, the scores rise consistently from MMC to LWC;

(iii) the method of calculating index scores for phonological variables is a successful one and is likely to be useful in the study of Norwich English; and

(iv) the phonological variable (ng) is involved in a considerable amount of social class and contextual variation, with scores ranging over the whole scale from 000 to 100.

The information given in Table 14.1 is more clearly portrayed in Figure 14.1 Index scores, from 000 representing consistent use of [n], to 100 representing consistent use of [ŋ], are plotted along the ordinate. The four contextual styles, from WLS, the most formal, to CS, the most informal, are shown along the abscissa. The lines on the graph connect scores obtained by each of the five social classes in the four contextual styles.

Table 14.1:   (ng) index scores by class and style

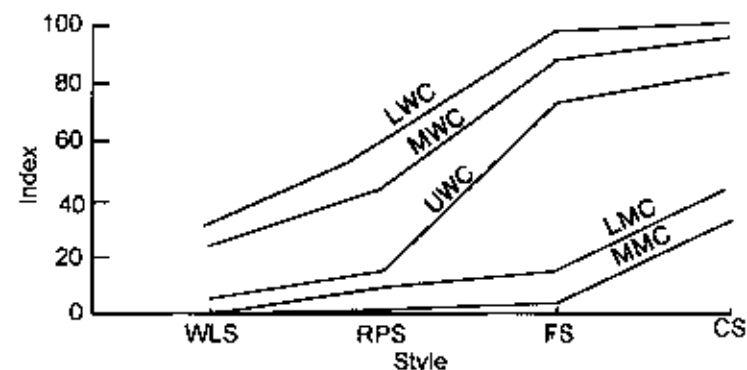| | Class | *Style* | | | |
		WLS	*RPS*	*FS*	*CS*
I	MMC	000	000	003	028
II	LMC	000	010	015	042
III	UWC	005	015	074	087
IV	MWC	023	044	088	095
V	LWC	029	066	098	100

Figure 14.1:   Variable (ng) by class and style

The stylistic variation of this variable is portrayed in the consistent downward slope of the lines from right to left across the graph, representing an increase in [ŋ] endings as we move from everyday speech to more formal styles. The variable (ng), it can be seen, is a very good indicator of social context, with scores ranging, as we have already noted, from 000 (MMC and LMC in WLS; MMC in RPS) to 100 (LWC in CS). Note that stylistic variation is greatest in the case of the UWC, whose range is from 005 to 087, and whose line on the graph consequently has the steepest gradient. The greater awareness of UWC speakers of the social significance of linguistic variables (shown in Figure 14.1) can be explained by the 'borderline' nature of their social position (see Trudgill 1974, chapter 5). The linguistic insecurity revealed here in the large amount of UWC stylistic variation for (ng) is clearly part of the same tendency.

The social class differentiation of (ng) is, of course, shown on the graph by the clear separation of the lines connecting the scores for each class, and by the hierarchical ordering of these lines, LWC–MMC. The amount of differentiation can be gauged from the spatial separation of the lines on the graph. Thus the greatest amount of differentiation occurs in FS, where the two MC groups appear to have the ability to control (ng) forms to a level nearer that of the more formal styles, whereas the three WC groups have scores which more closely approach their CS level. Note that in CS, which we can assume to be reasonably representative of normal, everyday speech in familiar social environments, the three WC groups show only a small amount of differentiation one from the other, 087–100. This is also true of the two MC groups, 028–042. There is, on the other hand, a very significant difference between the (ng) level of the WC as a whole and that of the MC. This underlines once again the importance of this particular social division in the social structure.

We have shown, then, that the proportion of [n] to [ŋ] suffixes that occurs in speech is a function of the social class of the speaker and of the social context in which he is speaking. Moreover, although (ng) quite clearly differentiates between all five social groups, it is most important in distinguishing MC from WC speakers. UWC speakers have the greatest amount of stylistic variation, and MMC speakers the smallest, although it is instructive to note that even this class uses an average of 28 per cent of forms with [n] in CS.

Sex Differentiation of (ng)

Fischer, in his study of this variable in an American locality (1958), found that males used a higher percentage of [n] forms than females. Generally speaking, this is also the case in Norwich, as Table 14.2 shows. In seventeen cases out of twenty, male scores are greater than or equal to corresponding female scores.[1] We can therefore say that a high (ng) index is typical of male speakers as well as of WC speakers. This link between the linguistic characteristics of WC speakers and male speakers is a common one. Almost all the Norwich variables have the same kind of pattern as that shown in Table 14.2, with women having lower index scores than men. This is a fact which is not, on the face of it, particularly surprising, but one that is at the same time in need of some explanation. There would appear to be two interconnected explanatory factors:

1. Women in our society are more status-conscious than men, generally speaking, and are therefore more aware of the social significance of linguistic variables. There are probably two main reasons for this:

Table 14.2: (ng) indices by class, style and sex

Class		WLS	RPS	FS	CS
			Style		
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	066	100	100	100
	F	017	054	097	100

Table 14.3: Sample of ten informants: average scores, word-internal and word-final (t) by style

(t)	WLS	RPS	FS	CS
Word-internal, e.g. *better*	029	052	113	134
Word-final, e.g. *bet*	028	089	151	161

(i) The social position of women in our society is less secure than that of men, and, generally speaking, subordinate to that of men. It is therefore more necessary for women to secure and signal their social status linguistically and in other ways, and they are more aware of the importance of this type of signal.

(ii) Men in our society can be rated socially by their occupation, their earning power, and perhaps by their other abilities: in other words, by what they *do*. For the most part, however, this is not possible for women, who have generally to be rated on how they *appear*. Since they cannot be rated socially by their occupation, by what other people know about what they do in life, other signals of status, including speech, are correspondingly more important. This last point is perhaps the most important.

2. The second, related, factor is that WC speech, like many other aspects of WC culture, has, in our society, connotations of masculinity, since it is associated with the roughness and toughness supposedly characteristic of WC life, which are, to a certain extent, considered to be desirable masculine attributes. They are not, on the other hand, considered to be desirable feminine characteristics. On the contrary, refinement and sophistication are much preferred.

This discussion is of course necessarily at a rather simple level, but it is clear that we have reflected in these phonological indices part of the value system of our culture as a whole. From the point of view of linguistic theory, this means that, as far as linguistic change 'from below' is concerned, we can expect men to be in the vanguard. Changes 'from above', on the other hand, are more likely to be led by women.[2] The type of sex differentiation shown in Table 14.2 is, in any case, usual. Only a reversal of this pattern, or a large increase in the normal type of male/female differentiation can be considered to be significantly unusual in any way.

NOTES

1   The low score obtained by male LMC speakers in CS requires some comment. The score is clearly unrepresentative, being lower than both the RPS and

FS scores and the male MMC score, and is due to the fact that only a very small number of instances of this variable happened to be obtained for this group in CS.

2 Labov's terms 'change from below' and 'change from above' refer respectively to changes from below and above the level of conscious awareness. Usually, however, changes from above involve the downward dissemination of prestige features, i.e. they are social changes 'from above' as well. Changes from below, moreover, very often start among lower class groups (see Trudgill, 1972).

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15 Linguistic Variation and Social Function

Jenny Cheshire

INTRODUCTION

The fact that linguistic variation is correlated with a wide range of sociological characteristics of speakers has been extensively documented over the last 15 years by the many studies that have been inspired by the work of William Labov. It is well established, for example, that the frequency with which speakers use non-standard linguistic features is correlated with their socioeconomic class. More recently, studies involving speakers from a single socioeconomic class have been able to reveal some of the more subtle aspects of sociolinguistic variation. It has been found, for example, that the frequency of use of non-standard phonological features in Belfast English is correlated with the type of social network in which speakers are involved (see Milroy and Margrain 1980). This chapter will show that the frequency with which adolescent speakers use many non-standard morphological and syntactic features of the variety of English spoken in the town of Reading, in Berkshire, is correlated with the extent to which they adhere to the norms of the vernacular culture. It will also show that linguistic variables often fulfil different social and semantic functions for the speakers who use them.

The chapter will consider nine non-standard features of Reading English:

1. the present tense suffix with non-third-person singular subjects
    e.g. we *goes* shopping on Saturdays
2. *has* with non-third-person singular subjects
    e.g. we *has* a little fire, keeps us warm
3. *was* with plural subjects (and singular *you*)
    e.g. you *was* outside
4. multiple negation
    e.g. I'm *not* going *nowhere*

5.   negative past tense *never*, used for standard English *didn't*
     e.g. I *never* done it, it was him
6   *what* used for standard English *who*, *whom*, *which*, and *that*
     e.g. there's a knob *what* you turn
          are you the boy *what's* just come?
7   auxiliary *do* with third-person singular subjects
     e.g. how much *do* he want for it?
8   past tense *come*
     e.g. I *come* down here yesterday
9   *ain't*, used for negative present tense forms of *be* and *have*, with all
     subjects
     e.g. I *ain't* going
          I *ain't* got any

Many, though not all, of these features function as markers of vernacular loyalty for adolescent speakers in Reading, though some are more sensitive markers than others. *Ain't*, in particular, is able overtly to symbolize some of the important values of the vernacular culture. Furthermore, some features are markers of loyalty to the vernacular culture for adolescent boys but not for adolescent girls, and vice-versa.

THE DATA

The analysis is based on the spontaneous, natural speech of three groups of adolescents, recorded by the method of long-term participant-observation in adventure playgrounds in Reading. The aim was to record speech that was as close as possible to the vernacular, or most informal style, of the speakers. Thirteen boys and twelve girls [the section of Cheshire's original chapter which discussed the speech of girls has been omitted in this version for reasons of space, not because we deem female talk as less important than that of males – *Eds*.] were recorded over a period of about eight months.

Some of the speakers were subsequently recorded at school, by their teacher, with two or three of their friends. The fieldwork procedures are discussed in detail in Cheshire 1978.

THE VERNACULAR CULTURE INDEX

Labov (1966) maintains that the use of non-standard features is controlled by the norms of the vernacular subculture, whilst the use of standard English features is controlled by the overt norms of the mainstream culture

in society. Any analysis of variation in the occurrence of non-standard features needs to take this into account, for it means that an adequate sample of non-standard forms is more likely to be found where speakers conform more closely to vernacular norms than to the overt norms of the dominant mainstream culture. The speakers who were chosen for the present study were children who often met at the adventure playgrounds when they should have been at school, and the boys, in particular, were members of a very well-defined subculture. In many respects this culture resembled a delinquent subculture (as defined, for example, by Andry 1960; Cohen 1955; Downes 1966; Willmott 1966 and many other writers). Many of the boys' activities, for example, centred around what Miller (1958) calls the 'cultural foci' of *trouble, excitement, toughness, fate, autonomy and smartness* (in the American English sense of 'outsmarting').

Since the vernacular culture was in this case very clearly defined, it was possible to isolate a small number of indicators that could be used to construct a 'vernacular culture index', in the same way that socioeconomic indices are constructed. It seemed reasonable to assume that those aspects of the peer-group culture that were sources of prestige for group members and that were frequent topics of conversation were of central importance within the culture. Six factors that met these requirements were selected. Four of these reflect the norms of trouble and excitement; three directly, and one more indirectly. *Skill at fighting, the carrying of a weapon* and *participation in minor criminal activities*, such as shoplifting, arson, and vandalism, are clearly connected with trouble and excitement. Though interrelated, they were treated as separate indicators because not all boys took part in all the activities to the same extent. The job that the boys hoped to have when they left school was also included as a separate indicator, for the same reason. Again, acceptable jobs reflect the norms of trouble and excitement, though perhaps more indirectly here, and the job that the boys hoped to have when they left school (or, in a few cases, that they already had) was an important contributing factor to the opinion that they formed of themselves and of other group members. Some jobs that were acceptable were slaughterer, lorry driver, motor mechanic, and soldier; jobs that were unacceptable were mostly white-collar jobs. A fifth indicator was 'style': the extent to which dress and hairstyle were important to speakers. Many writers stress the importance of style as a symbolic value within adolescent subcultures (see, for example, Cohen 1972; Clarke 1973), and for many of the boys in the group it was a frequent topic of conversation.

Finally, a measure of 'swearing' was included in the index, since this appeared to be an extremely important symbol of vernacular identity for both boys and girls. Swearing is, of course, a linguistic feature, but this does not affect its use as an indicator here, since it involves only a few lexical items which could not be marked for any of the non-standard features of Reading English.

The behaviour of the boys with regard to each of these factors could be shown on a Guttman scale. The coefficient of reproductability was 0.97, which confirms that the data are scalable (see Pelto 1970, Appendix B).

The boys were then given a score for each of the indicators, and were divided into four groups on the basis of their total score. Group 1 consists of those boys who can be considered to adhere most closely to the norms of the vernacular culture, whilst group 4 consists of boys who do not adhere closely to vernacular norms. Groups 2 and 3 are intermediate in their adherence, with group 2 adhering more closely than group 3.

LINGUISTIC MARKERS OF ADHERENCE TO THE VERNACULAR CULTURE

Table 15.1 shows the frequency of occurrence of the nine non-standard features in the speech of the four groups of boys.

The features are arranged into three classes, which reflect the extent to which they mark adherence to the vernacular culture. Class A contains four features whose frequency is very finely linked to the vernacular culture index of the speakers. The most sensitive indicator is the non-standard present-tense suffix, which occurs very frequently in the speech of those boys who are most firmly immersed in the vernacular culture (group 1), progressively less frequently in the speech of groups 2 and 3, and rather

Table 15.1: Adherence to vernacular culture and frequency of occurrence of non-standard forms

		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Class A	non-standard -s	77.36	54.03	36.57	21.21
	non-standard *has*	66.67	50.00	41.65	(33.33)
	non-standard *was*	90.32	89.74	83.33	75.00
	negative concord	100.00	85.71	83.33	71.43
Class B	non-standard *never*	64.71	41.67	45.45	37.50
	non-standard *what*	92.31	7.69	33.33	0.00
Class C	non-standard aux. *do*	58.33	37.50	83.33	—
	non-standard *come*	100.00	100.00	100.00	(100.00)
	ain't = aux *have*	78.26	64.52	80.00	(100.00)
	ain't = aux *be*	58.82	72.22	80.00	(100.00)
	ain't = copule	100.00	76.19	56.52	75.00

Note: Bracketed figures indicate that the number of occurrences of the variable is low, and that the indices may not, therefore, be reliable. Following Labov (1970) less than five occurrences was considered to be too low for reliability.

infrequently in the speech of boys who are only loosely involved in the culture (group 4). This feature, then, functions as a powerful marker of vernacular loyalty.

The features in Class B (non-standard *never* and non-standard *what*) also function as markers of vernacular loyalty, but they are less sensitive markers than the features in Class A. Significant variation occurs only between speakers in Group 1 and speakers in Group 4, in other words, between the boys who adhere most closely to the vernacular culture, and the boys who adhere least closely. This type of sociolinguistic variation is not unusual: Policansky (1980) reports similar behaviour with subject-verb concord in Belfast English, where significant variation is found only between speakers at the extreme ends of the social network scale (cf. also Jahangiri and Hudson 1982).

The fact that there is some correlation between the vernacular culture index and the frequency of use of Group B features can be clearly seen if the speakers in Groups 2 and 3 are amalgamated into a single group.

Table 15.2 shows that non-standard *never* and non-standard *what* now show regular patterns of variation. These features, then, do function as markers of vernacular loyalty. But they are less sensitive markers than the features in Class A, showing regular patterning only with rather broad groupings of speakers.

Features in class C, on the other hand, do not show any correlation with the speakers' vernacular culture index. For the most part, figures are completely irregular. All these features, however, are involved in other, more complex, kinds of sociolinguistic variation, and this could explain why they do not function as straightforward markers of vernacular loyalty. There is convincing evidence, for example, that non-standard auxiliary *do* is undergoing a linguistic change away from an earlier dialect form towards the standard English form (see Cheshire 1978. See also Aitchison, 1981, for some interesting ideas concerning the mechanism of the change). Some forms of *ain't* appear to function as a direct marker of a vernacular norm, as we will see. We will also see that the use of non-standard *come* bears an interesting relation to the sex of speakers: it functions as a marker of vernacular loyalty for adolescent girls, but for boys it is an invariant feature, occurring 100 per cent of the time in their speech, irrespective of the extent to which they adhere to the vernacular culture.

Table 15.2: Frequency indices of group 1, groups 2 and 3, and group 4

	Group 1	Groups 2 & 3	Group 4
non-standard *never*	64.71	43.00	37.50
non-standard *what*	92.31	18.00	0.00

STYLISTIC VARIATION

We will now consider what happens to the frequency of occurrence of these linguistic features when the boys are at school. The Labovian view of style-shifting is that formality–informality can be considered as a linear continuum, reflecting the amount of attention that speakers give to their speech. As formality increases, the frequency of occurrence of some non-standard linguistic features decreases (see Labov 1972, Chapter 3). This approach has been questioned by a number of scholars. L. Milroy (1980) and Romaine (1980), for example, found that reading, where attention is directly focused on speech, does not consistently result in the use of fewer non-standard features. And Wolfson (Chapter 10, this volume) points out that in some situations speakers will monitor their speech carefully to ensure that they use *more* non-standard features, in order to produce an appropriately informal speech style.

The present study also found difficulties in applying the Labovian approach to the analysis of style, for the ability of some linguistic features to signal vernacular loyalty affects the frequency with which they occur in different speech styles.

The recordings made at school were clearly made in a more formal setting than the recordings made in the adventure playgrounds. The speakers were in school, where the overt norms of mainstream society are maintained (see, for example, Moss 1973), the teacher was present, the speaker knew that he was being recorded, and there had been no 'warm-up' session with the tape-recorder before the recording was made. On the other hand, the speaker did have two (at least) of his friends present. This was in an attempt to stop him 'drying up', as he may have done in a straightforward interview situation, and although the intention was to make the situation somewhat more relaxed, it nevertheless clearly represents a more formal setting than the adventure playground.

Unfortunately only eight of the thirteen boys could be recorded at school. Four boys had recently left school, and the fifth was so unpopular with the teacher that she could not be persuaded to spend extra time with him.

Table 15.3 shows the frequency of occurrence of the non-standard linguistic features in the vernacular style and in the school style of these eight speakers. We can see that those features that are sensitive markers of vernacular loyalty (class A) all occur less often in the boys' school style than in their vernacular style, though the difference in frequency is very small in the case of non-standard *was*.

Non-standard *never*, in class B, also occurs less often in the school recordings. Non-standard *what*, however, does not decrease in frequency; instead, it increases slightly in occurrence. The remaining features in the table do not decrease in frequency in the school style, either. Non-standard

Table 15.3: Stylistic variation in the frequency of occurrence of non-standard forms

		Vernacular style	School style
Class A	non-standard -*s*	57.03	31.49
	non-standard *has*	46.43	35.71
	non-standard *was*	91.67	88.57
	negative concord	90.70	66.67
Class B	non-standard *never*	49.21	15.38
	non-standard *what*	50.00	54.55
Class C	non-standard *do*	—	—
	non-standard *come*	100.00	100.00
	ain't = aux. *have*	93.02	100.00
	ain't = copula	74.47	77.78

come remains invariant, and *ain't* increases in frequency by quite a large amount. (There were no occurrences of third-person singular forms of auxiliary *do* in the school recordings).

So far, of course, this is quite in accordance with the Labovian view of the stylistic continuum. Labov classifies linguistic variables into 'indicators' and 'markers', which differ in that indicators show regular variation only with sociological characteristics of speakers, whereas markers also show regular correlation with style. We could, therefore, class the linguistic variables in class A, together with non-standard *never*, as markers in Reading English, and class the other variables as indicators. But this would be oversimplistic. As we will see, there are some more complex factors involved in stylistic variation, which only become apparent if we compare the linguistic behaviour of individual speakers, rather than of groups of speakers.

Table 15.3 expressed the frequency of occurrence of the non-standard features in terms of group indices; in other words, the speech of the eight boys analysed together, as a whole. There are many practical advantages to the analysis of the speech of groups of speakers, particularly where morphological and syntactic variables are concerned. One advantage is that variables may not occur frequently enough in the language of an individual speaker for a detailed analysis to be made, whereas the language of a group of speakers will usually provide an adequate number of occurrences of crucial forms (cf. also the discussion in J. Milroy 1982).

The school recordings consisted of only about half an hour of speech for each boy. This did not provide enough data for an analysis in terms of individual speakers, and in most cases it did not even provide enough data for a group analysis. There was one exception, however. Present-tense verb forms occur very frequently in speech, so that even within a half-hour recording there were enough forms for an analysis of their use by individual speakers to

Table 15.4: Frequency of occurrence of non-standard present tense verb forms

	Vernacular style	*School style*
Noddy	81.00	77.78
Ricky	70.83	34.62
Perry	71.43	54.55
Jed	45.00	0.00
Kitty	45.71	33.33
Gammy	57.14	31.75
Barney	31.58	54.17
Colin	38.46	0.00

be made. This enables us to investigate some of the more subtle aspects of sociolinguistic variation, that would be overlooked in a group analysis.

Table 15.4 shows the frequency of occurrence of non-standard present-tense verb forms in the speech of each of the eight boys, in their vernacular style and in their school style. Noddy, Ricky and Perry are Group 1 speakers, with a high vernacular culture index; Kitty, Jed and Gammy are group 2 speakers, and Barney and Colin are in group 3.

There are considerable differences in the use of the non-standard forms by the different speakers. Noddy's use of the non-standard form, for example, decreases by only 3.22 per cent in his school style, whereas the other group 1 speakers (Ricky and Perry) show a much greater decrease. Jed (a group 2 speaker) does not use the non-standard form at all in his school style, although the other group 2 speakers (Kitty and Gammy) continue to use non-standard forms, albeit with a reduced frequency. Colin, like Jed, does not use the non-standard form in school style; Barney's use of the form, on the other hand, actually increases, by quite a large amount.

Present-tense verb forms are sensitive markers of vernacular loyalty, as we have seen; and a group analysis of their occurrence in different speech styles showed that they were also sensitive to style. We saw that the feature could be classed as a marker, in the Labovian sense. Individual analyses, however, reveal that two speakers do not show the decrease in frequency that we would expect to find in their school style: Noddy, as we have seen, shows only a slight decrease, unlike the other boys in his group, and Barney's frequency actually increases. Their linguistic behaviour does not seem to be related to the vernacular culture index, for Noddy is a group 1 speaker, showing strong allegiance to the peer-group culture, whilst Barney is a group 3 speaker. One factor that could explain Noddy's behaviour is age: Noddy was only 11, whilst the other boys were aged between 13 and 16. Noddy may, therefore, have simply not yet acquired the ability to style shift. Labov (1965) suggested that children do not acquire this ability until the age

of about 14, and there is some empirical evidence to support this (see Macaulay, 1977). Other recent studies, however, have found evidence of stylistic sensitivity at a rather younger age (see Reid 1978; Romaine 1975), so that we cannot conclude with any certainty that this is a relevant factor here. In any case, Barney's behaviour cannot be explained this way, for he was 15, and old enough to show some signs of stylistic sensitivity. We need to explore further, then, to discover an explanation for this irregular behaviour.

Barney was recorded with Noddy and Kitty, by their teacher. The teacher was asking them about their activities outside school, and the boys were talking about a disco that they were trying to organize. The teacher was making valiant efforts to understand the conversation, but was obviously unfamiliar with the kind of amplifying equipment and with the situation that the boys were telling him about. It is worth noting that Barney and Noddy hated school and made very derisory remarks about their teachers. Barney had only just returned to school after an absence of a whole term, and Noddy attended school only intermittently. Kitty, on the other hand, attended school more regularly – his father was very strict, and he did not dare to play truant as often as his friends did.

These factors suggest an explanation for the boys' linguistic behaviour. A great deal of insight into linguistic behaviour has been gained from recent research by social psychologists, working within the framework of speech accommodation theory. It has been shown that speakers who are favourably disposed towards each other and who are 'working towards a common goal' adjust their speech so that they each speak more like the other, whereas speakers who are not working towards a common goal may diverge in their linguistic behaviour. One way in which speech convergence is marked is the frequency of occurrence of certain linguistic variables (see Thakerar, Giles and Cheshire 1982).

An explanation along these lines gives some insight into the behaviour of Noddy, Kitty and Barney in the school situation. Kitty knows the teacher, attends school fairly regularly, and we can imagine that he accepts the constraints of the situation. As a result his speech converges towards the teacher's, and he uses fewer non-standard linguistic forms than he does normally. Noddy, on the other hand, hates school and dislikes the teacher; as a result he asserts his allegiance to the peer-group culture rather than to the school, by refusing to acknowledge the situational constraints. The frequency with which he uses the nonstandard form, therefore, does not change (or changes only slightly). Barney, who has only returned to school, asserts his total independence and hostility to the school by using more non-standard forms than he does usually. This is a very clear example of speech divergence. As we saw earlier, Barney is not closely involved in the vernacular culture, and this is reflected in his speech by a relatively low use of non-standard present tense forms. When he wants to assert his

independence from the school culture, however, he is able to exploit the resources of the language system, by choosing to use a higher proportion of non-standard forms than he does usually.

Can an explanation in these terms account for the linguistic behaviour of the other boys in this study? For at least three of the boys, it seems that it can.

Ricky, Perry and Gammy were recorded together, by a teacher that they knew and liked. He had taken them on camping and fishing weekend expeditions, with some of their classmates. The conversation was initially about one of these weekends, and then moved on to racing cars and motorbikes, subjects that interested both the teacher and the boys. Speech accommodation theory would predict that in this situation the linguistic behaviour of the boys would converge towards that of their teacher (and, of course, vice-versa). This is precisely what happens -- all three boys use a lower proportion of non-standard present tense forms here than they do in their vernacular speech style. The fact that they continue to use *some* non-standard forms, however, means that they are still able to show their allegiance to the vernacular subculture.

Jed and Colin behave rather differently from the other boys, for in their school recordings they do not use any non-standard forms at all. This is surprising, particularly in the case of Jed, who is a Group 2 speaker, like Kitty and Gammy. There are, however, some striking similarities between the linguistic behaviour of these two boys, and the situations in which the school recordings were made. They were recorded at different times, with a different speaker, but both recordings were made in a classroom situation, with about 20 pupils and the teacher. Both Jed and Colin participated a great deal in the discussions, partly because the teacher had purposely chosen topics on which they had strong views (football hooliganism, in Jed's case, and truancy, in Colin's case), and partly because they were encouraged to take part by the teacher. It is possible, though, that the situation was so drastically different from the situation in the adventure playground that the overall formality overrode the option of displaying linguistically their allegiance to the vernacular culture. Or perhaps the fact that no other members of the peer-group were present meant that the boys were more susceptible to the pressures of the norms of the school culture.

It seems, then, that a simple analysis in terms of the formality or informality of the situation cannot fully explain stylistic variation here. A better explanation can, perhaps, be achieved if we think in terms of situational constraints on exploiting the resources of the linguistic system. The non-standard present tense suffix is a powerful indicator of vernacular loyalty, and in some cases this function overrides other situational constraints on linguistic behaviour (as in the speech of Noddy and Barney, for example). In other cases, (as with Jed and Colin), the situational constraints exclude the possibility of using the feature in this way. ...

THE DIRECT REFLECTION OF VERNACULAR NORMS

Non-standard features can sometimes reflect vernacular norms in a more direct way; not just in terms of the *frequency* with which different speakers use the non-standard forms, but also in terms of the specific *form* of a variable that speakers choose to use.

For example, *ain't* has a number of different phonetic realizations in the speech of the adolescent groups. These include [ɪnt], [ænt] and [eɪnt], and can be divided into two main groups – those approximating to *ain't*, and those approximating to *in't*. It is reasonable to expect that [ɪnt] would correspond to standard English *isn't*. This is not the case, however: [ɪnt] forms are used with all subjects, and they are used when the verb is auxiliary *have*, as well as when it is *be*.

The use of *ain't* forms rather than the corresponding standard English forms is subject to a linguistic constraint in Reading English: *ain't* occurs more often in a tag question than it does in any other syntactic environment. The usual function of tag questions is to seek confirmation or corroboration from the hearer for the proposition expressed in the main sentence (see Stockwell, Schachter and Partee 1973). Some tag questions, however, are used by the adolescent groups in a way that does not seek confirmation, but that expresses instead feelings of aggression and assertion. These tags do not require an answer from the hearer, and in most cases the hearer would be unable to provide one.

An example can be found in the interchange below. The boys were going to be taken on a camping weekend by the social worker who was in charge of the adventure playground, and all boys aged 16 and over were supposed to help put up the tents. I was having trouble understanding whether Roger was going on the trip or not, and he was getting impatient:

1   *Jenny*:   Aren't you going to help, though?
2   *Roger*:   No, I ain't going. I ain't going to help. Bugger that!
3   *Jenny*:   Are you staying here?
4   *Roger*:   Eh?
5   *Jenny*:   Are you staying here?
6   *Colin*:   No, he's going camping.
7   *Roger*:   No, I'm going, mate, *in I*?
8   *Jenny*:   You're going, but you're not going to help?
9   *Roger*:   No, I'm not going to help. Bugger that.
10 *Jenny*:   Aren't you over 16, though?
11 *Roger*:   Yeah, I'm 17.

The effect of Roger's tag question (line 7), which was addressed specifically to me, was (intentionally) to make me feel that I had asked a foolish question, and the general impression was one of aggression. I did not

know the answer to his question; in fact, I had been trying to obtain the answer from him.

Another example occurs in the interchange below, between Colin, Puvvy and Roger:

1 *Roger:* He might be taking Britt, he says.
2 *Colin:*   Oh, what a thrill. What a name, Britt.
3 *Puvvy:* Who started calling her it?
4 *Roger:* It's her proper name, *in it?*

Again, the effect of Roger's tag question (in line 4) is aggressive: he conveys the impression that Puvvy is foolish not to know that 'Britt' is a real name; and he is *telling* him that it is her proper name, rather than asking for confirmation.

Assertion and aggression, of course, are important elements in the vernacular subculture. Street fights, swearing, shouting and stealing are all aggressive acts. It is significant, therefore, that those tag questions that contain a negative present tense form of *be* or *have* and that are assertive and aggressive in meaning are marked linguistically by the categorical use of the form *in't*. Other phonetic realizations of *ain't* never occur in these tag questions; nor do the corresponding standard English forms. *In't* is used with all subjects, and as both *be* and *have*. In other kinds of tag question, however, *in't* occurs variably with *ain't* and the standard forms.

A full discussion of the use of *ain't* in Reading English can be found in Cheshire 1981. It should be clear, though, that this is an example of a non-standard form that can overtly reflect the norms of the vernacular culture. The use of *in't* in a tag question, then, can fulfil a semantic function for speakers of Reading English.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the social function of linguistic variation in the speech of adolescent peer-groups. We have seen that non-standard linguistic features function in a number of different ways. Some are very sensitive markers of vernacular loyalty, showing a regular correlation in frequency with the extent to which speakers adhere to the vernacular culture. Others are less sensitive markers of vernacular loyalty. We have also seen that the social function of non-standard features can vary with the sex of the speaker, and that this social function can sometimes override the constraints imposed on speakers by the formality of the situation. Finally, in one case at least, linguistic variation is able to fulfil a semantic function, in that a speaker's choice of a variable form can directly reflect some of the values of the vernacular culture.

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