



Study of Language

In
Its Social Context

- Locating and Contacting informants
- Getting them to talk in a recorded interview
- What are the questions to be asked?
- How do we get informants to talk freely?

5 Methodological Axioms:

1. Style Shifting
2. Attention
3. Good Data
4. Vernacular
5. Formality

Style Shifting:

- Shift of some linguistic variables as social context & topics change
- Some can be detected qualitatively in minor self corrections of the speaker
- Almost always in a uniform direction

Attention:

- Styles can be ranged along a single dimension based on amount of attention paid to speech
- Audio monitoring one's own speech
- Same level for many important linguistic variables observed in scenarios when minimum attention is paid to one's own speech

Good data:

- Individual tape recorded interview- Most obvious kind of systematic observation

Not that good data:

- Group sessions, anonymous observations
- Candid recording

Vernacular:

- ‘Vernacular’- Style in which minimum attention is paid to speech
- Most systematic data for analysis of linguistic data
- Other styles may show irregular phonological and grammatical patterns & hypercorrection
 - not of much interest to linguists

Formality:

- Any systematic observation defines a formal context in which more attention is paid to speech
- Not exactly the vernacular
- \exists a more casual style in which the speaker jokes with her/his friends

Observer's Paradox

And

How we deal with It

Observer's Paradox:

- Aim: To find how people talk when they are not being systematically observed
- But: This data can only be obtained by systematic observation

Ideas to Overcome Observer's Paradox:

- Break through constraints of interview situation by various devices
- Divert attention away from speech
- Allow vernacular to emerge

Ask: “Have you ever cheated death?”

- Avoid Boolean answers, ask him/her about it
- Usually shows shift away from careful speech towards vernacular

Observe Normal Interactions of a peer group

- Gumperz recorded sessions with natural groups to obtain linguistic data (1964)
- Labov's work in South Central Harlem (1968) :
 - Long term participant observation
 - Individual interviews
 - Adolescents behaved normally, Effect of systematic observation reduced to a minimum

Systematic Observations via Conversation

Not exactly interview

- Social Identity & demographic position of subject should be well known
- Strategic location
- Great many sample points obtained in a short period of time

William Labov's New York Study: Use of post-vocalic 'r'
Say "fourth floor"

Unsystematic Observations:

- Candid observations of speech at various strategic points
- Record features from various people in public places, say buses, trains, lunch counters, ticket lines, etc
- Valuable as a corrective bias to the interview situation

Pinch of Salt:

Loud and less educated talkers are likely to be strongly selected

Data from Mass Media

- Usually very strong stylistic constraints
- Conversation programs, public speeches:
 - Look at a considerable cross section of population
 - But style is even more formal than a face-to-face interview

Direct interview at scene of disaster:

- Too strongly under the immediate influence of the event
- Negligible monitoring of speech

The background is a dark blue gradient with faint, light blue concentric circles and a scale. The scale is a semi-circular arc on the left side, with numbers ranging from 140 to 260 in increments of 10. There are also several smaller concentric circles and arrows scattered across the background, creating a technical or scientific feel.

RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT SPEECH ITSELF

***RANGE OF STYLES TOWARDS THE MORE FORMAL END OF THE
SPECTRUM***

Study what happens when more attention is given to speech:

- *Wide stylistic range within different types of reading texts*
- *List of isolated words: Formal*
- *Well written text - Reads well – Focuses on Adolescent themes*
 - ✓ *Much less Formal*

Embed minimal pairs in:

- *Well written text: Speaker not fully aware of the contrast*
- *Isolated minimal pairs: Attention directed towards the variable being studied*

Pronounce 2 words: Ask speaker if they sound same or different

5 stylistic ranges for the study of post vocalic 'r'

- 1. Casual Speech*
- 2. Careful Speech*
- 3. Reading*
- 4. Word Lists*
- 5. Minimal Pairs*

Levine and Crockett (1966), Anshen (1969)

- *Embed variables within the sentences*
- *Insert blanks to fill in lexical items*
 - ✓ *Diverts attention from variables*
- *Pronunciation of lexical items shows less 'r'*
- *Extends the stylistic range of readings*

Formal Tests to isolate social attitudes towards language

- *Play taped sections of 'typical' speakers*
 - *Ask subjects to guess their ethnicity, race, social class*
 - *Raises questions such as 'Can listeners obtain social information from speech?'*
-
- ✓ Social information is carried within dialect forms
 - ✓ But almost impossible to understand where this information is encoded i.e whether in the speaker's grammar, phonology, intonation or voice quantifiers.

Subjective Reaction Tests:

- Separate Linguistic variables from personal factors
- Matched Guise Technique (Lambert, 1968):
 - Tape-recorded sections
 - Same speakers use different languages or dialects
 - Subjects must judge the speakers' personalities
 - Subconsciously translate social attitudes towards language into Differential judgements of speakers' abilities
- Ask Questions such as:
 - ✓ 'What is the highest job the speaker could hold?'
 - ✓ 'How likely would he/she come out on top in a street fight?'

Self Evaluation Tests:

- ❖ Identify speaker's attitudes towards well established linguistic variables
- ❖ Ask: "Which form do you use in speech?"
- ❖ Usual Answer: The form which is more 'standard' rather than the one which the speaker actually uses

Catch: One needs to identify the form which the speaker uses in casual speech

Vernacular & Classroom Correction

Tests:

- Classroom correction: Correct a sentence departing from the “standard” form
- Vernacular correction: Standard form to Vernacular
 - Subject cannot accurately perceive non standard rules
 - Audio-monitoring norm governs production of the non-standard form in childhood
 - Replaced by the prestige norm in a formal setting

Axiom of Vernacular Shifting:

Subordinate dialect in contact with a
Superordinate dialect



Answers in a formal test scenario will shift
towards **Superordinate**

In an **ir**regular & **un**systematic manner

What if we educate informant about **the** experiment's goal?

- Use knowledge of prestige dialect
- Go completely against the prestige norms
- Produce stereotyped forms: collection of most different & dissimilar or 'worst' possible sentence types

Linguistic Insecurity Test:

- A list of socially marked variants
- Subject has to mark the form she/he considers to be 'correct' or 'standard'
- & the form which she/he uses
- Index of linguistic insecurity = Number of items for which these 2 differ

The speakers who are more aware of the correct standard show a greater style shift.

Sociolinguistic Structure

- Sociolinguistic Variable- Correlated with non linguistic variable of social context
- Indicators: Regular distribution over socio-economic, ethnic or age groups- but used by everyone in similar ways

- Social contexts have hierarchy
⇒ Stratified

- Stylistic differentiation + Social distribution
⇒ Markers



Stable Marker ‘t^h’

- Prestige Form: Fricative ‘θ’
- Stigmatized Forms: Stop ‘t’ & Affricate ‘tθ’
- Same status for about 2 centuries

Points

‘t’ : 2

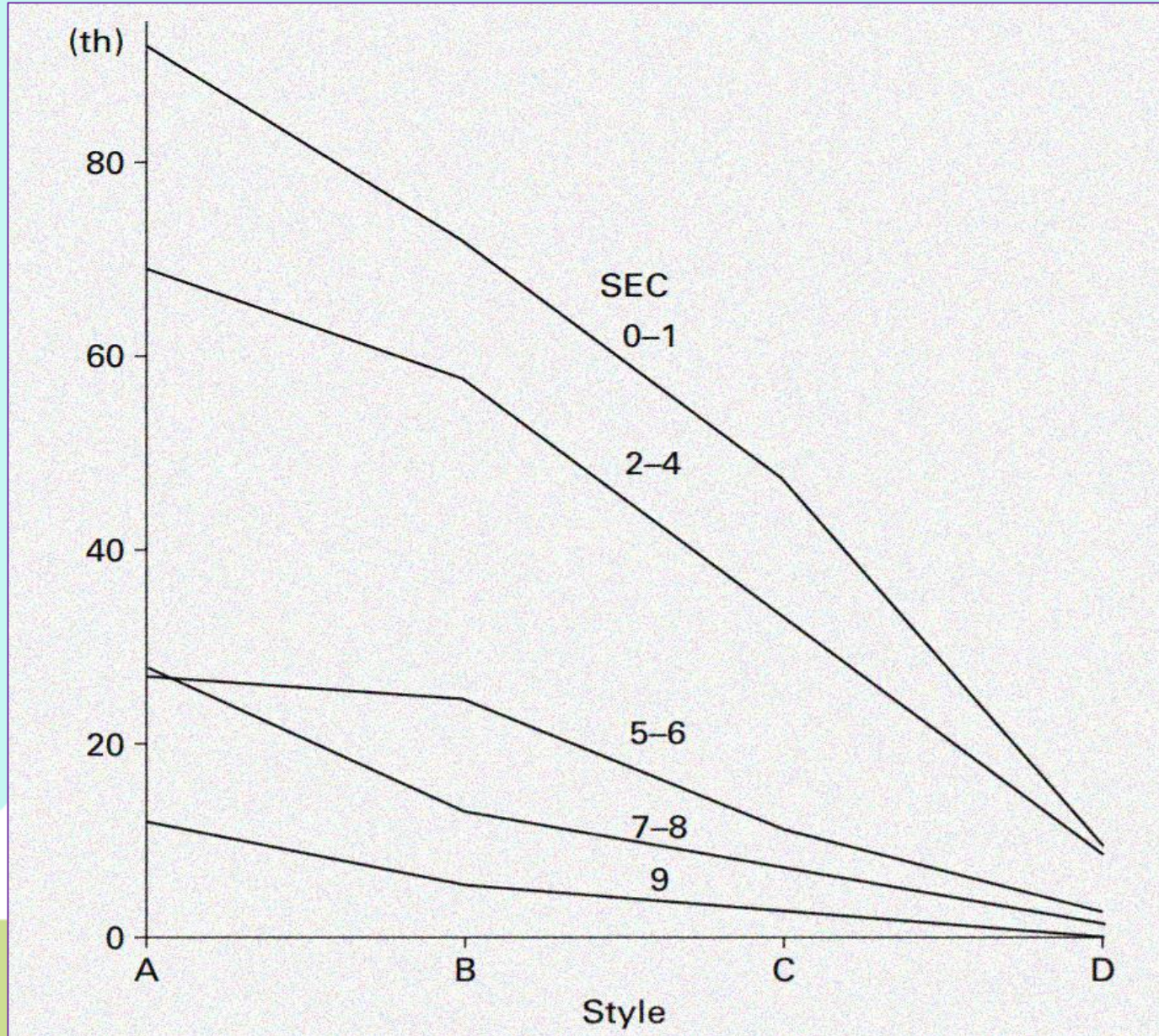
‘tθ’ : 1

‘θ’ : 0



Regular Stratification for 'th' - NYC (1966)

A: Casual
B: Careful
C: Reading
D: Word List



Classes:

0-1: Lower
2-4: Working
5-8: Lower Middle
9: Upper Middle

Labov, 1966



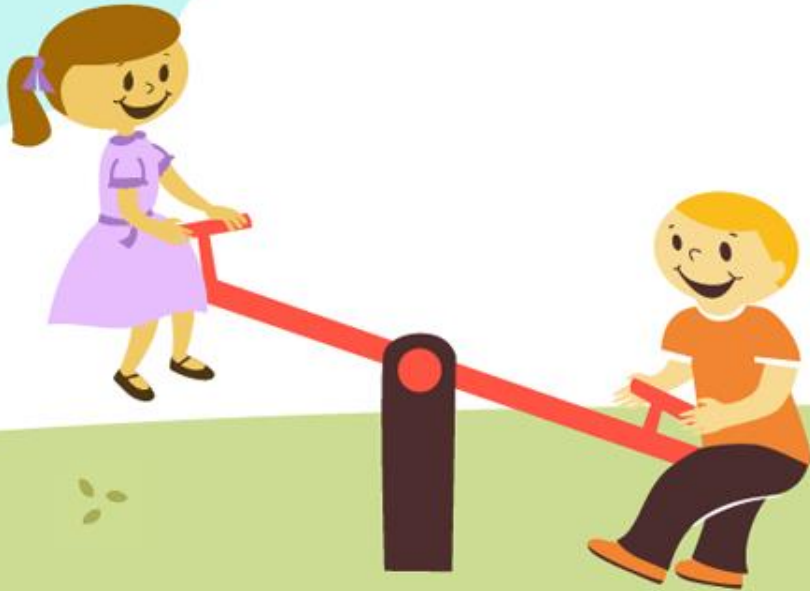
- Sharp beak, little overlap between working and middle class
 - May reflect discontinuities in overall pattern of socio-economic stratification
- Members of speech community differentiated by use of 'th'
- Same style shift in each group
 - Individual speakers unaware of this fact
- Similar stable patterns observed for:
 - ✓ Unstressed 'iŋ': 'in' being the non-standard
 - ✓ Voiced Interdental fricative 'ð': 'd^h' - stigmatized



Women and Men:

- Women use fewer stigmatized forms
- Sharper style shift slope, specially at more formal ends
- Most extreme form shown by lower middle class women
- Lower class women more sensitive to social speech?

➤ Not really clear

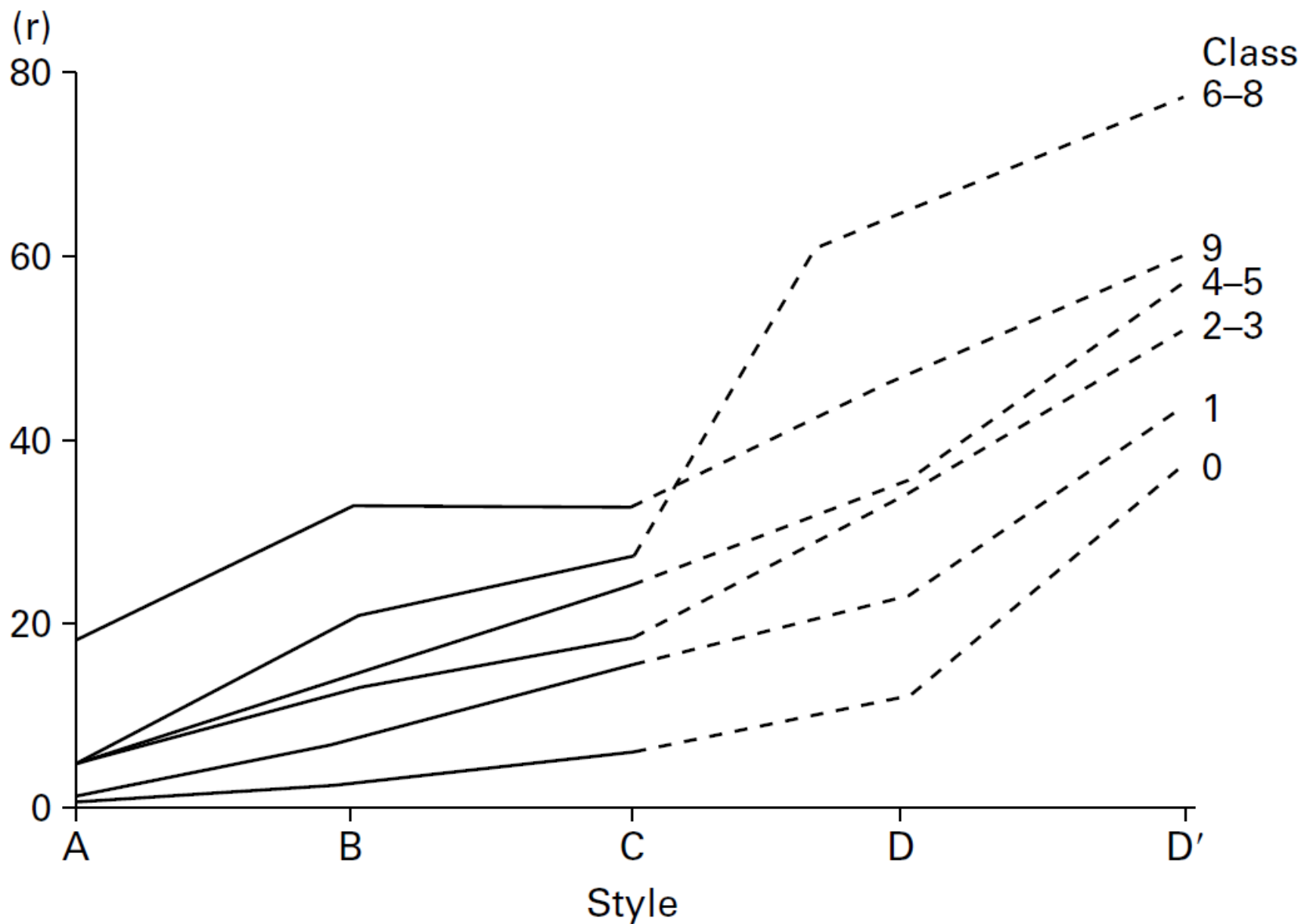


P.S: This has been confirmed
innumerable number of times.

- ❖ Shuy & Fasold's work in Detroit
- ❖ Anshen's study of Hillsboro
- ❖ Levine and Crockett
- ❖ Fischer (1958)

Study of usage of Pre-Consonantal ‘r’

- NYC, 1900s: Practically ‘r’ less vernacular
- RULE: “Central consonant ‘r’, variably loses consonantal character after a vowel or glide if a vowel or glide doesn’t follow directly”
- Shortly after WW2, ‘r’ pronunciation became prestige norm
 - Labov’s New York study: Class stratification of ‘r’ in guard, beer, beard, etc. for native NYC adults
 - Levine & Crockett: ‘r’ scores by sentence & word-list according to education & gender in Hillsboro, North Carolina



A: Casual
 B: Careful
 C: Reading
 D: Word List
 E: Minimal Pairs

9: Upper Middle
 6-8: Lower Middle
 2-5: Working
 0-1: Lower

Y-axis:
 Average 'r' indexed
 scores, % constriction
 Higher the value, more
 amount of 'r' sound

Hypercorrection

- 2nd highest status group
- Most extreme style shift
- Goes beyond the highest status group

	Sentence List	Word List	Net Increase
Education			
Any College	52.7	58.9	6.2
High School Graduate	54.6	65.6	11.0
Some High School	50.0	57.0	7.0
Grade School or None	52.6	57.3	4.7
Gender			
Female	52.9	61.1	8.2
Male	52.3	57.4	5.1

'r' scores

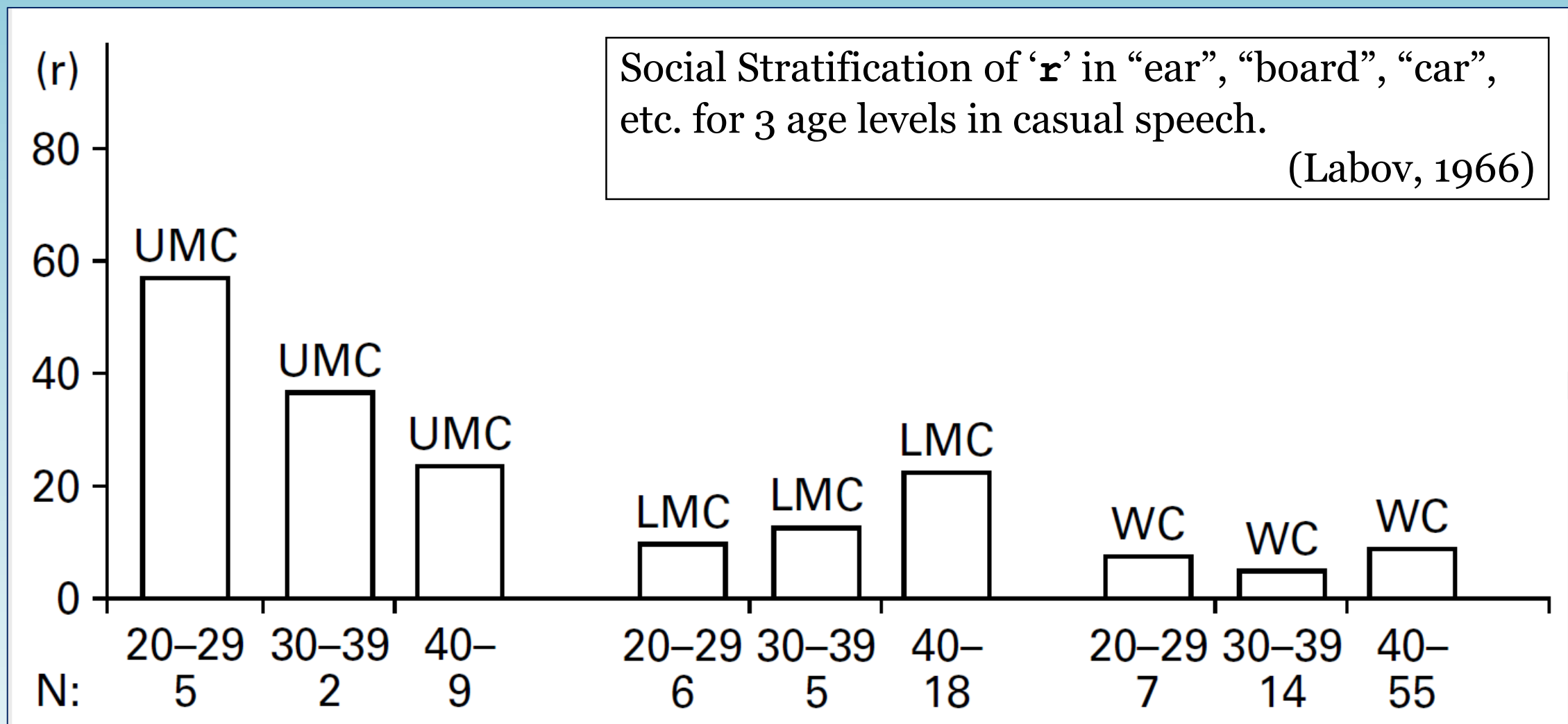
Source: Levine & Crockett, 1966

Social attitudes towards language
are
Extremely uniform throughout a speech community

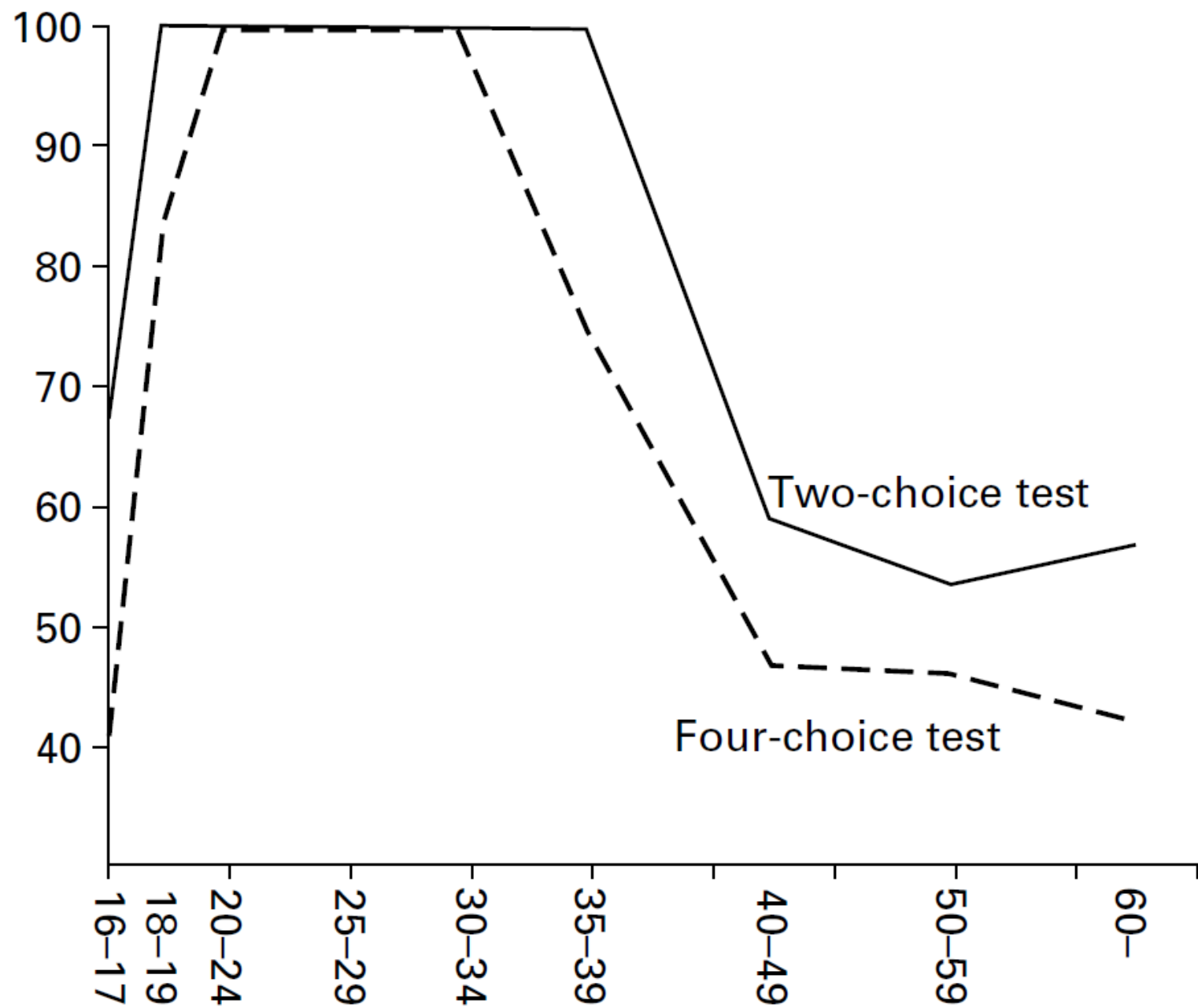
Strong correlation exists-

- *Regular Stratification of a socio-linguistic variable in behavior*
- *Results of Subjective Reaction Tests towards that variable*

Compare behavior and subjective reactions for 'r' in NYC



>= 40: no particular correlation between 'r' and social class
< 40: striking difference between UMC & other classes



% showing 'r' (+) response on subjective reaction test by age level in NYC

(Labov, 1966)

≥ 40 : Random responses
 < 40 : Complete Unanimity

*42/42 subjects showed responses which unconsciously registered prestige status of 'r' pronunciation

For stable linguistic marker:

Why is the hierarchy maintained for such a long time?

Why doesn't everyone use the norm they feel is more “correct”?

- ✓ Laziness
- ✓ Lack of Concern
- ✓ Isolation from prestige norm
- ? **Vernacular Norms are easier to pronounce**
 - Vernacular vowel shifts in NYC, Detroit, Chicago towards **TENSE** vowels – more muscular effort compared to the standard

Impetus for Continuous Linguistic Evaluation:



Generative Grammar: Great progress in working out invariant relations within linguistic structure – **Wholly neglects social context**

Major Advance towards understanding mechanism of language change
Will require serious study
Of
Social Factors which Motivate Linguistic Evolution