

Introduction to the Study of Language

-Ling 1-
Fall 2020

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Week 4 - October 28, 2020

Announcements

- Please take the *Respondus* quiz asap!
 - Midterm: 11/8-9
 - Showing your ID: it can be **any ID**
- Contact CAE, if needed, ASAP
- Please start working on Analysis Paper 1 (due on 11/15)

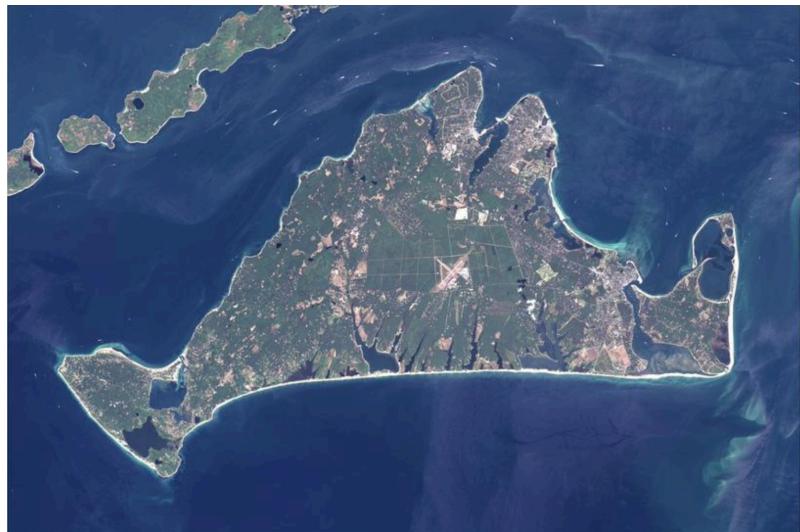
Roadmap for today's class

- 60 minutes in total
- last 10/15 minutes: your time to ask me questions
 - orally by using the raise-hand button
 - or by sending me a **private** message in the Zoom chat
 - questions can be on any topic of any live lecture

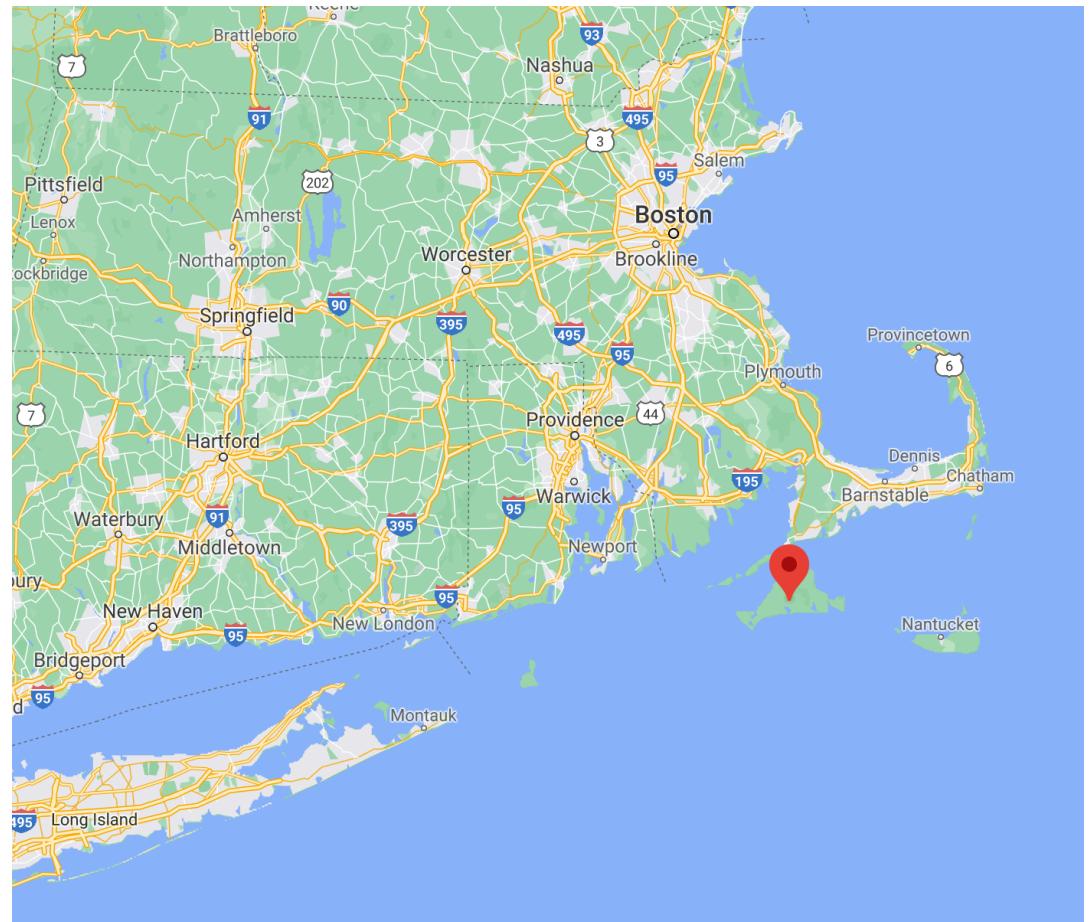
❖ What drives linguistic changes?

The strange case of *Martha's Vineyard*

Martha's Vineyard:
island about 3 miles off New England
on the US East Coast



from GoogleMaps



William Labov: Martha's Vineyard in the Sixties

A. the phenomenon:

shift in the **phonetic** position
of the first elements
of the **diphthongs /ai/ and /au/**

William Labov: Martha's Vineyard in the Sixties

B. goals of his study

1. reconstruct the recent **history** of this sound change
2. to isolate the **factors** which influence the phonetic shift

William Labov: Martha's Vineyard in the Sixties

C. method:

studying the frequency and distribution
of phonetic variants of /ai/ and /au/ in

- several areas
- different age groups
- different occupational groups
- different ethnic groups

Labov's starting point: some data from the *Linguistic Atlas of New England* (1933)

- there it was mentioned that the island speech was characterized by
 - mild centralization of first element of /ai/ in words such as *wife, night, right* etc
 - little to no centralization of first element /au/ in *house, out, about, mouth* etc

'Centralization' of first element of /ai/ and /au/

/ai/ = [aɪ]

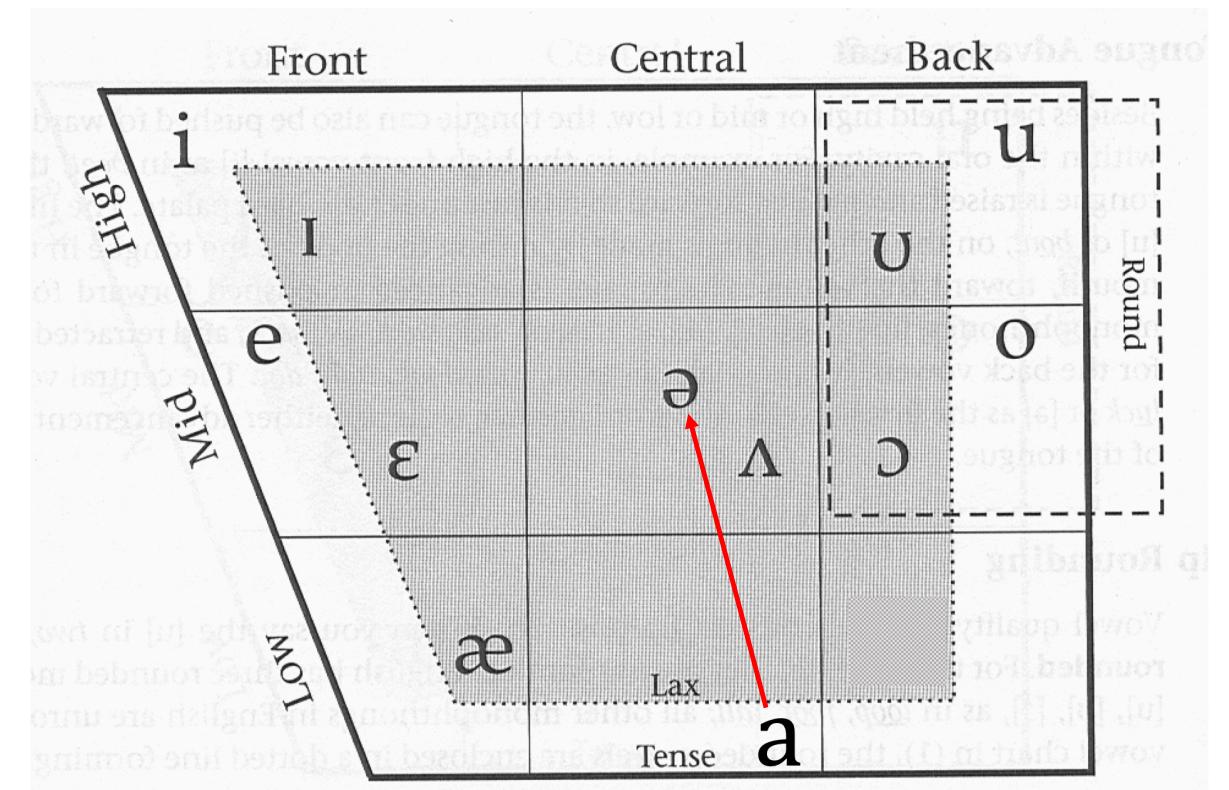
> [əɪ]

w[ai]fe > w[əɪ]fe

/au/ = [aʊ]

> [əʊ]

h[aʊ]se > h[əʊ]se



Midterm Vowel Chart

Martha's Vineyard demographics in the early Sixties (1)

- Permanent population ~ 6,000
- Big influx of visitors in summer ~40,000
- Eastern part of island 'Down Island':
more densely populated, and favoured by visitors
- Western end 'Up Island': more original inhabitants and strictly rural
- Chilmark: centre of once important fishing industry (2.5% of population involved in fishing)
- Chilmark fishermen **antipathetic to the 'summer people'**
- Chilmark fishermen regarded by other islanders as independent, skilful, physically strong, courageous

Martha's Vineyard demographics in the early Sixties (2)

- Permanent population consisted of:
 - Yankees: descendants of early settlers (settled in 17th and 18th c.)
 - Portuguese: more recent arrivals
(from Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde Islands)
 - Native Americans
 - miscellaneous group (15%)

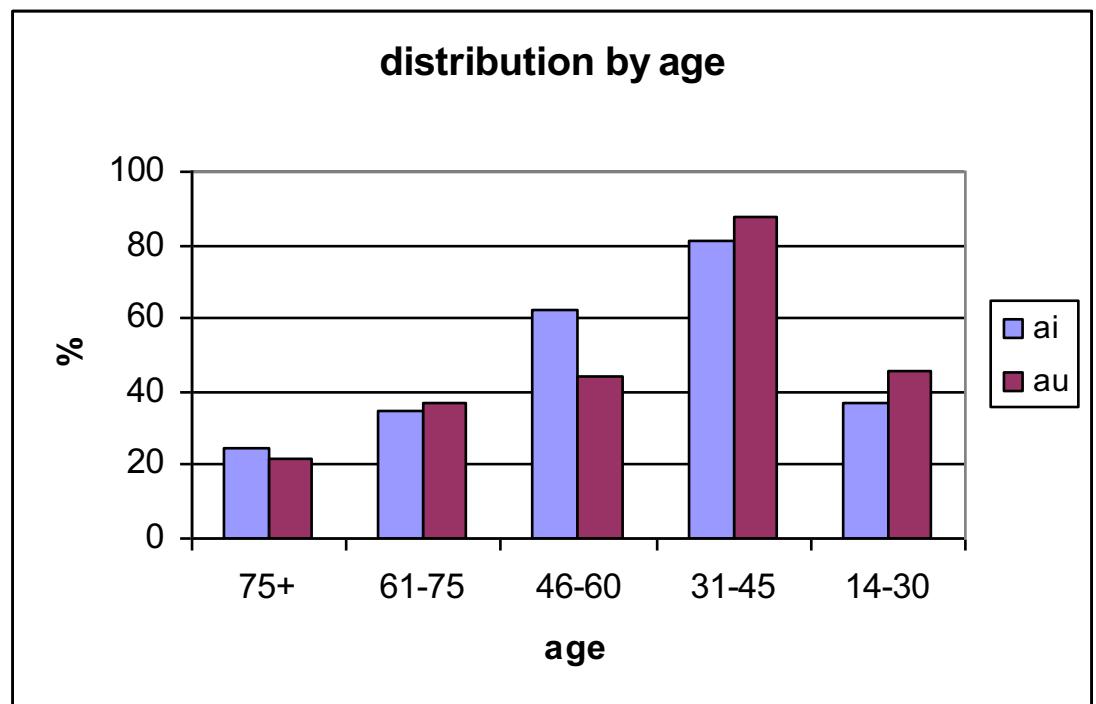
Labov's study: data gathering

- face-to-face interviews to 69 informants
 - lexical questionnaire
 - questions about value judgments (to explore the social orientation of the speaker) AND elicit as many diphthongs as possible
 - e.g.: "... If a man is successful at a job he doesn't *like*, would you still say he was a successful man?"
- recordings of school pupils reading texts
- recordings in very casual situations (bars, stores etc.)

Initial results (1)

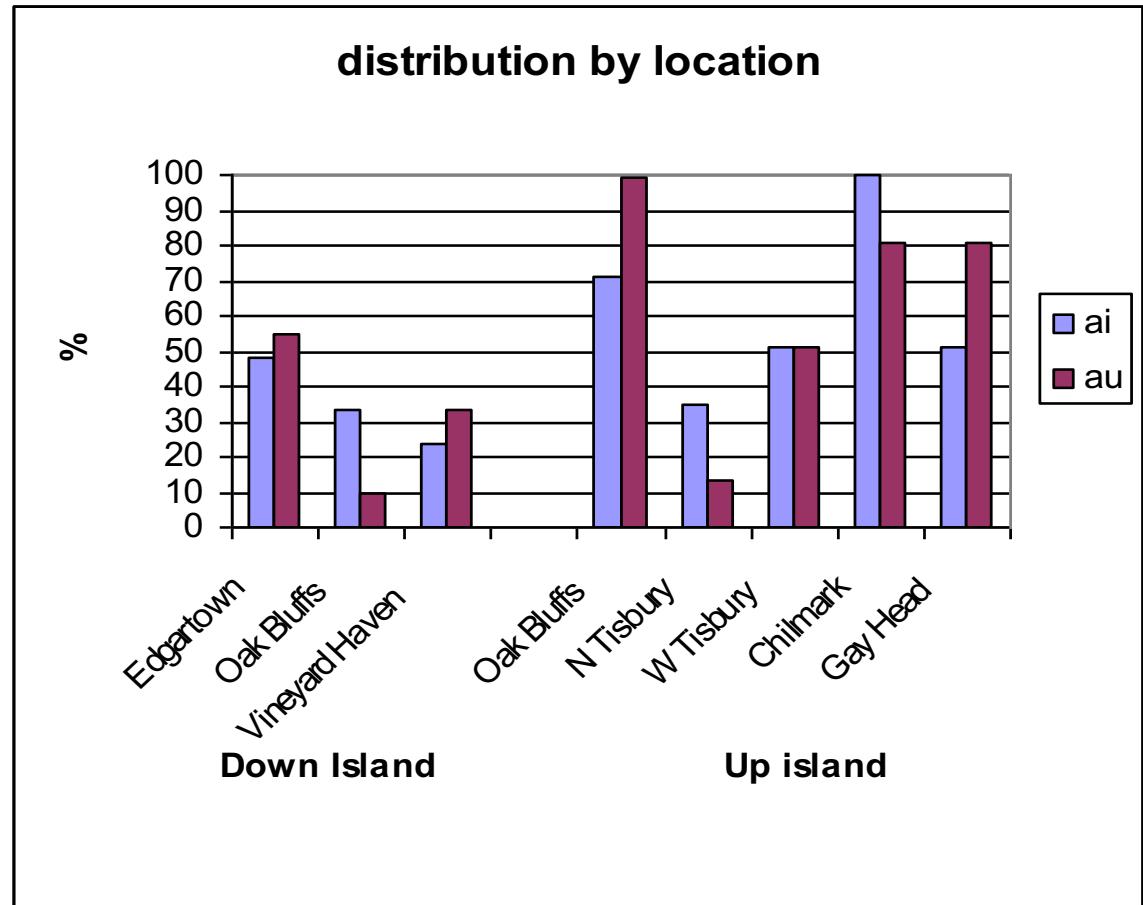
- plotted use of centralized vowel against various parameters:

- age
- population group
- occupation
- location



Initial results (2)

- plotted use of centralized vowel against various parameters:
 - age
 - population group
 - occupation
 - location



Summary of results

- Centralization of diphthongs most prevalent in
 - **age**: 31-45 age group
 - **origin**: Yankees, but only by a little
 - **occupation**: fishermen mostly, less in people working in tourist industry
 - **location**: Up Island residents (esp. around **Chilmark**)

Explanation of results

- Centralizing tendency was actually **diminishing** at the time of **1930s** survey (*Atlas*)
 - But it remained in the dialect of **middle-aged rural fishermen**
 - With the advent of tourists, there was an **unconscious change** among those who most closely identified with the island
- centralization of /ai/ and /au/:
expression of
“strong resistance to the incursions of the summer people”
- summer people did not produce /ai/ and /au/ with a centralized first element

William Labov (1963)
The Social Motivation of a Sound Change

(paper in the ‘Week 4’ Tab)

Why is this study significant?

- Until Labov (1963), dialect studies had focussed on rural speakers and had ignored social factors
- Urban accents were thought to be too diverse and too heterogeneous to study (Labov 1966, New York study)
- Labov's conclusion: **social factors** were in fact the most significant and important

- ❖ What drives linguistic changes?

I will see you next Wednesday -
what can we do in the meanwhile?

- Do the **readings**: - *An Introduction to Language*, pp. 183-202; 208; 217-220.
- Optional **reading**: Labov 1963
- Optional **screening**: Oliver Sacks on amusia
- **Homework 3 due on Sunday 11/1**
- Homework 4 posted on Sunday 11/1
- If you could not attend this class, you will have to take a **small quiz**
 - quiz opens tomorrow morning (10/29) and closes on Sunday (11/1)

STAY SAFE !

- Tips on how to proceed **successfully** every week?

I suggest you take the following **6 steps** in this order:

1. Go through the **readings**.
2. Watch the recorded **lectures** and take detailed notes.
3. Take a look at the **quizzes** to see if you understand all the questions, before completing them.
4. Attend the **live** lecture.
5. Attend the live **discussion** sections.
6. Complete and submit your **assignments**.