Week 6 Assignment

Before class on Friday, Oct. 2:

Download the following article from the Assignments page:

Labov, William (1963). The social motivation of a sound change. *Word* 19. 273-309

Read the article, and answer the following questions, *citing in each case the page number where you found the relevant information*. The relevant page number is the one in the text, not the one in given by your PDF reader program.

> *Note*: When Labov refers to /ai/, he is referring to the diphthong that in General American is [aɪ], with a low central onset and a high front offset. The variants he refers to as *centralized* differ from [aɪ] in the height of the central vowel onset, with [ə] higher than [ɐ], and [ɐ] in turn higher than [a]. All of these nuclei are central. Centralization should thus be interpreted as referring to a change in the direction of the mid central vowel [ə].

This unassuming article about one sound change in a small Massachusetts community is one of the most important papers in the history of linguistics. It is one of the first to establish that it is possible to observe sound change in progress. It is one of the first to use acoustic measurements to explore sound change and accent differences. It is one of the first to sample speech variation across different groups within the community, and across different speaking situations. All of these innovations have proved to be very productive, and have been adopted in subsequent work.

(1) *Background on Martha's Vineyard*

   (a) Where is Martha's Vineyard?

   (b) At the time that this article was written, was the year-round population of the island generally rich or poor?

   (c) What were the major sources of income on the island at that time?

   (d) What were the 3 major ethnic groups represented on the island?

   (e) What was the population of Martha's Vineyard in 1960?

   (f) During the summer, what proportion of the people on Martha's Vineyard were nonresident visitors from elsewhere?

   (g) Was the dialect of Martha's Vineyard rhotic or nonrhotic? For this distinction, see Handouts #4 and #9.

(2) *Methods*

    (a) How many speakers were included in the study?

    (b) What's an "up-islander", and how many of the speakers in the study were belonged to this group?

    (c) How many of the speakers in the study were farmers?

    (d) How many of the speakers were of Portuguese descent?

    (e) How many instances of the /ai/ diphthong were collected in the study?

    (f) What were the three kinds of material that were recorded for each speaker?

(3) *Results*

    (a) Which kinds of consonants tend to follow more centralized (i.e. more [ə]-like) variants of the /ai/ diphthong?

    (b) The centralization index was the mean grade (0 – 4) in Scale II on p. 286. Which age group has the highest centralization index?

    (c) How is the centralization index related to the age of the speaker?

    (d) Which area of the island had the highest centralization index for /ai/: up-island or down-island?

    (e) Which profession had the higher centralization index for /ai/: fishermen or farmers?

    (f) Generalizing across ages, which ethnic group had the highest centralization index for /ai/?

    (g) How did a speaker's attitude toward Martha's Vineyard relate to their centralization index?

    (h) The shift toward more centralized variants of these diphthongs was begun among settlers of English descent (p. 299). What is the evidence that speakers of Portuguese and Indian descent also participated in this change?

In class on Friday, Oct. 2: Discussion about class

In the break-out groups, discuss the following questions and come up with a joint answer for your group, drawing on all your experiences.

(4) In Handout #9, about Labov's studies of English in New York City, we talked briefly about how he defines the notion of "class". He used a pretty conventional composite scale, locating each family in a hierarchy of classes according to their profession, their education level, and their income level. What he's trying to get at is how your place in the social, political and economic hierarchy of your community affects who you interact with. Based on your experience growing up, how was your speech community (the people you talked with every day) shaped by your family's place in hierarchical social structure?

- Labov gives a hierarchy of professions, from managers and professionals at the high end, to the sporadically employed or unemployed at the low end. In the families you interacted with when you were growing up, did the adults belong to all different levels of profession, or did they all mainly have similar kinds of professions?
- Labov gives a hierarchy of education levels, from college-educated at the high end to people who did not complete high school at the low end. In the families you interacted with when you were growing up, did the adults have a mixture of all these educational levels, or did most residents have a similar level of education?
- Labov gives a hierarchy of income levels, from rich to poor. In the families you interacted with when you were growing up, was there that full range of income levels, or did most families belong to the same range of income levels?
- In your experience growing up, which of these factors was the most important in terms of determining who you ended up interacting with?
- In your experience, are these hierarchies real? In other words, do you think there's really a scale that has affected you personally that ranges from more powerful positions with more opportunities to less powerful positions with fewer opportunities?

By 6 PM on Friday, Oct. 2, submit the following through Canvas:

A single PDF document, including the answers to the questions in (1)-(4) above.