

Variation and style

Key terms in this chapter:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ■ accents | ■ monotonic |
| ■ dialects | ■ trend |
| ■ variety | ■ rapid and anonymous |
| ■ speech community | ■ speech community |
| ■ style-shifting | ■ overt prestige |
| ■ attention to speech | ■ covert prestige |
| ■ audience design | ■ observer's paradox |
| ■ triangulation | ■ participant observation |
| ■ sociolinguistic interviews | ■ speaker design |
| ■ stratified | |

Accent

Where speakers differ (or vary) at the level of pronunciation only (phonetics and/or phonology), they have different accents.

Their grammar may be wholly or largely the same. Accents can *index* a speaker's regional/geographic origin, or social factors such as level and type of education, or even their attitude.

Dialect

A term widely applied to what are considered sub-varieties of a single language. Generally, dialect and *accent* are distinguished by how much of the linguistic system differs. Dialects differ on more than just pronunciation, i.e., on the basis of morphosyntactic structure and/or how semantic relations are mapped into the syntax. (See also *Variety*.)

INTRODUCTION

'And what do you do for a living?' her new acquaintance asked. Feeling somewhat pained by the man's inability to see she wasn't interested in talking to him, she replied tersely, 'I'm a sociolinguist.'

He doesn't get the message. 'Oh, yes?' (An ingratiating smile.) 'And what does a sociolinguist do?'

She pauses, then levels a steely look at him: 'It means I listen to the way people talk and I judge them on it.'

In general, the judgements sociolinguists make about other people's speech are pretty innocuous. Some sociolinguists know a lot about what features typify the **accents** or **dialects** of speakers from different regions, and these sociolinguists are pretty good at identifying speakers' origins from the way they speak. When linguists talk about *accents*, they are referring only to how speakers pronounce words, whereas they use *dialect* to refer to distinctive features at the level of pronunciation and vocabulary and sentence structure. So, for example, the English used by many Scots would be considered a dialect because it combines recognisable features of pronunciation, e.g., a backed short /a/ sound in words like *trap* or *man*, with constructions like *This data needs examined* . . . (i.e., 'needs to be examined') and the use of the preposition *outwith* (meaning 'beyond, outside'). Since all of

Variety

Relatively neutral term used to refer to languages and dialects. Avoids the problem of drawing a distinction between the two, and avoids negative attitudes often attached to the term *dialect*.

Speech community

Various defined on subjective or objective criteria. Objective criteria would group speakers together in a speech community if the distribution of a variable was consistent with respect to other factors (e.g., style). Subjective criteria would group speakers as a speech community if they shared a sense of and belief in co-membership.

Style-shifting

Variation in an individual's speech correlating with differences in addressee, social context, personal goals or externally imposed tasks.

Attention to speech

Labov proposed that the different distribution of forms in different styles was motivated by the amount of attention the speaker was paying to the act of speaking. In activities, such as reading aloud,

these features occur even in quite formal styles of speaking, they are quite reliable cues that the speaker comes from or has lived a long time in Scotland.

Outside linguistics, the term *dialect* may have quite negative connotations. These may be revealed implicitly rather than explicitly. For example, on Bequia (the Caribbean island mentioned in Chapter 2), people speak a variety of English which differs radically from the Standard English used in North America, the UK or Australasia. Bequians generally call the variety they speak *Dialect*. When researchers ask people to describe the local variety, locals will often contrast *Dialect* with what they call *proper* or *good English*. The opposition between *good* and *dialect* forms of English implies that dialect is bad and is linked to all sorts of attitudes about the local variety, such as where and when it is appropriate to talk Bequian.

Many linguists avoid the term 'dialect' because of these complicated, and sometimes negative, connotations in everyday speech. However, where they do use it, they intend it to be a neutral description or a cover-all term for a variety that differs systematically from others on the basis of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. (In Chapter 4 we will look at the ways in which people's perceptions and beliefs about different varieties can also be relevant factors in identifying different dialects.) I will often simply use the term **variety** because potentially it is less loaded.

Sometimes the kinds of judgements that sociolinguists make are about whether a person is speaking formally or informally, whether they sound like they grew up in a working-class or a middle-class neighbourhood – many of the judgements non-linguists make all the time about the people they are talking to.

Sociolinguists differ from the average listener, though, in trying to develop an awareness of language that goes below the level of social stereotypes. They are concerned with trying to determine how very subtle patterns of variation provide a systematic basis by which speakers can indicate or mark social cohesion and social difference. (We defined stereotypes, markers and indicators in Chapter 2.)

STUDYING VARIATION IN SPEAKERS' STYLE

In Chapter 2 we looked at the methods and findings used to identify this systematic variability on Martha's Vineyard. In this chapter we begin by looking at the next study Labov undertook, a social dialect survey in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. We will focus on Labov's finding that, for a number of variables, all speakers in the survey show the same general patterns in formal and informal styles. This apparent orientation to the same norms became critical for what he defined as a **speech community**. This consistency in the patterns between and within speakers across different styles provides further evidence against the notion of free variation (thereby developing the arguments introduced in Chapter 2).

We will look at three possible accounts for the consistency of **style-shifting** across individuals in a speech community. The first is the suggestion that people pay more or less **attention to their speech** when they are engaged in different kinds of verbal tasks. The second is the idea that speakers have an **audience** in mind, and they **design** their speech to suit that audience. The third is the idea that different linguistic styles present different personas that the speaker identifies with. We will consider the first two in most detail since they differ most radically and have been subject to the most careful empirical study.

After considering Labov's findings and the way he manipulated style in the Lower East Side study, we will examine two other studies that manipulated and examined speaker style somewhat differently. These focus on the speakers' relationships with their interlocutors.

This audience design account of style-shifting emphasises the dual role played by language variation in use: reflecting and constituting social meaning (see Chapter 2).

The Martha's Vineyard study established some basic methods for social dialect research and these remain well-used tools in sociolinguists' toolbox. However, Labov and other sociolinguists have subsequently added other creative methods for gathering the kinds of sociolinguistic information we seek. In this section, we look at some of the other methods he devised for reliably identifying the patterns underlying language variation and we focus on ways a researcher can manipulate data collection so as to elicit different styles of speech. We will consider what variation across different styles might tell us about the orderliness of language variation in a community of speakers.

THE NEW YORK CITY SOCIAL DIALECT SURVEY

After the success of the Martha's Vineyard study, Labov turned his attention to variability in the speech of New Yorkers. New York City (NYC) is an interesting site for fieldwork because historically it is a dialect pocket on the eastern coast of the United States; that is, it is surrounded by other varieties of US English from which it differs quite perceptibly. Generally speaking, the NYC accent is highly stereotyped in the United States; that is, residents and non-residents find the distinctive characteristics of the NYC accent highly salient and they are readily stereotyped (as defined in Chapter 2).

Historically, one of the more salient features that sets NYC speech apart from varieties spoken nearby (e.g., in New Jersey), and from the more general variety of Standard American, is that NYC has been *r*-less. This means that unless an orthographic 'r' occurs before a vowel, it is not pronounced as a constricted 'r' – in this respect NYC speech differs from most northern and western varieties of North America. Like British English, the post-colonial Englishes of the Pacific and southern Atlantic and some varieties of Caribbean English, words like *car*, *port*, *garden*, and *surprise* (i.e., words where the 'r' is in what phonologists call the coda of a syllable) do not get pronounced with a constricted, consonant [r]. This feature of the New York accent is widely stereotyped and is one that New Yorkers themselves may have quite negative feelings about – some of them say they dislike it even if they, their families and friends are all *r*-less speakers.

Labov's study of NYC was more ambitious than the study of Martha's Vineyard, and he looked at a wider range of variables. Some of these, like the (r) variable, were ones that speakers were consciously aware of; some of the others, though, were ones that speakers were much less aware of and seemed to be perceptible only to a trained linguist. (We will see results for some of the other variables in subsequent chapters.) However, even though speakers' level of awareness differed for the variables Labov identified, he found that there were some consistent patterns in the way the variables patterned across different groups of speakers and in different styles or activities.

Labov obtained his data on (r) using several different methods. The idea behind this is called **triangulation** and is basic to science. If, using different methods, you get results that are consistent with the same analysis or conclusion, then your conclusion is much stronger than it is if you arrive at it using only one means of measurement.

reading word lists or minimal pairs, Labov argued that speakers are paying more attention to their speech than they are in interviews and in interviews they pay more attention than when conversing with friends and family. Contrasts with accommodation-based accounts of style-shifting such as *audience design*. Also contrasts with more agentive theories of style-shifting such as *acts of identity*.

Audience design

Derived from accommodation theory. Proposal that *intraspeaker variation* arises because speakers are paying attention to who they are addressing or who might be listening to or overhearing them, and modify their speech accordingly.

Triangulation

A researcher's use of several independent tests to confirm their results and aid in the interpretation of their results. For example, use of data from *sociolinguistic interviews* and a *rapid and anonymous study*.

The sociolinguistic interview

Labov extended the basic interview paradigm he had used on Martha's Vineyard. He added several language tasks that he would ask people to do during the interview, and in the free conversation part of the interview he separated out speech directed at the interviewer and speech directed at friends and family members. A good interviewer can get several hours of speech from a single speaker and because the interviews are almost always conducted in the interviewee's home or somewhere they feel comfortable, a skilled (and somewhat lucky) interviewer may also have the chance to record the interviewee talking to other people who pass through while the interview is taking place.

Labov interviewed a random sample of people from the Lower East Side in New York in their own homes. The **sociolinguistic interviews** consisted of four structured parts. The interviewee was asked to:

- (i) read a list of minimal pairs (pairs of words that have different meanings but only differ from each other in one sound);
- (ii) read a list of words in isolation (some of which contain the variables under investigation and some of which do not);
- (iii) read aloud a short narrative (carefully constructed to contain the variables in as many linguistic environments as possible);
- (iv) talk with the interviewer about their life, some of their beliefs, and their life experiences.

Labov was aware that for a variable like (r) there were clear differences in which variant was considered appropriate for formal and informal speech. But there are problems with investigating the spontaneous production of different styles of speech. One problem is agreeing what constitute different 'styles' in the first place, another is agreeing which ones are more or less formal, and even if those problems can be overcome there can be problems with recording enough people using language in all those styles to allow the researcher to make valid generalisations.

Labov tackled these problems in defining and working with style by proposing that the formality or informality of styles was a function of speakers' attention to their own speech: in more formal styles they pay more attention; in more casual styles they pay less attention.

The activities in (i)–(iv) were intended to elicit different speech styles: (i) and (ii) require the speaker to pay much more attention to language, while in (iv) a good interviewer will foster quite animated and lively conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. This kind of speech can be called 'informal' speech, and Labov found that he had a lot of success in getting informal conversation by asking people questions about things like fights, dangerous situations the speaker had been in, the supernatural, their first girlfriend or boyfriend, and important events in their childhood. Side conversations that the interviewee might have with friends or family during this part of the sociolinguistic interview are presumed to involve the least attention to their speech, and these can be called 'casual' speech.

A minimal pair for the (r) variable would be *god* and *guard* – when *guard* is pronounced without a constricted /r/, it sounds just like *god*. *Dock* and *dark* are also minimal pairs in this variety of English because the vowel is the same, so only the presence or absence of an /r/ differentiates them. The layout of minimal pairs helps to focus the speaker on the form of the words. If you present someone with a card that looks like Figure 3.1 and ask them to read each line carefully and clearly, the speaker will be concentrating considerable attention on how they pronounce each word.

Sociolinguistic interview

An interview, usually one on one, in which different tasks or activities are used to elicit different styles of speech. (You will sometimes hear it used simply to refer to a one-on-one interview lasting at least an hour covering a range of topics.)

Connections with theory

Labov has never claimed that reading aloud, especially reading words in isolation or in minimal pairs, is related to conversational speech. He acknowledged that they are qualitatively different activities from having a conversation. The activities in (i)–(iii) are artificial strategies that enable the researcher to control how much attention the speaker pays to their speech. They therefore allow the researcher to test the hypothesis that attention to speech is an important constraint on variation.



Please read across each line carefully and clearly:

guard	god
dock	dark
pin	pen
sauce	source
...	...

Figure 3.1 Example of a presentation of minimal pairs used to elicit most careful and attentive pronunciations.

The hypothesis is that if a speaker focuses all their attention on the pronunciation of a word in a task like this, then here, of all places, they will use a constricted /r/ – even if they don't usually do so in their casual speech. The reading list and the reading passage tasks were intended to require somewhat less attention to the form of individual words. Consequently, you would find progressively more of the local r-less variants in these activities.

Designing materials for a social dialect survey

It is not all that easy to create a plausible and moderately interesting narrative that includes a variable in a wide range of linguistic environments, e.g., sentence-finally, before a vowel, before different kinds of consonants, in common and in less common words, etc. (Sociolinguistic interview activity (iii), discussed on p. 34.)

Pick a sound that shows variability in your own speech or the dominant speech community you live in and try to construct a short (100–200 word) narrative that showcases this variable in as many environments as possible.

exercise

facts

Interviewees can become surprisingly oblivious of a microphone even if they are attached to it, getting up to show you things, etc.

However, even someone you have got to know quite well may surprise you by showing they are paying attention to the recording, for instance by saying something like, 'That's enough for tonight.'

Finally the distinction between informal and casual speech in the interviews was also taken to reflect a (natural and spontaneous) difference in attention to speech. No matter how hard interviewers work or how skilled they are, unless they have invested a considerable amount of time in getting to know the interviewees, we assume that their conversations will always be subject to somewhat more attention than conversation with friends and family. Because of this, it was expected that they would also use the constricted variant of (r) less in casual conversation than in the informal part of the interview.

Labov's findings supported his hypothesis. On average, everyone used pronunciations with an [r] more when they were reading the narrative aloud than they did in casual conversation. They used even more [r] when they were reading the word lists, and they were most likely to use [r] variants when they were reading minimal pairs.

This sensitivity to style shows up in all the variables Labov examined. This is illustrated in Figure 3.2, where the frequency of constricted variants for (r) is shown in the four different styles averaged across everyone who was interviewed in the NYC study.

Figure 3.2 shows that the variants associated with these variables are **stratified** by style. This means that there is a consistent order for the styles across speakers. The rate of [r] presence drops steadily as you go left to right along the bottom axis of this figure. We can also say that the relationship between style and the variants is **monotonic**, or that the data show a **trend**, i.e., a consistent tendency to use less of the constricted variant as the researcher has manipulated the formality of the talk or the speaker's overt attention to speech.

The same monotonic relationship between style and linguistic variation can be seen in Figure 3.3, which plots the frequency of vernacular, raised variants in two vowel variables short (a) and (oh) (the TRAP and CLOTH vowels respectively – we'll return to these variables again in Chapter 8).

Stratified
See *Broad and Fine stratification*.
The systematic and consistent patterning of a variant with respect to some independent factor

Monotonic
A steady increase or decrease in a feature along the x-axis of a graph.

Trend
Steady increase or decrease in the frequency of a form across a scale or set of measures.

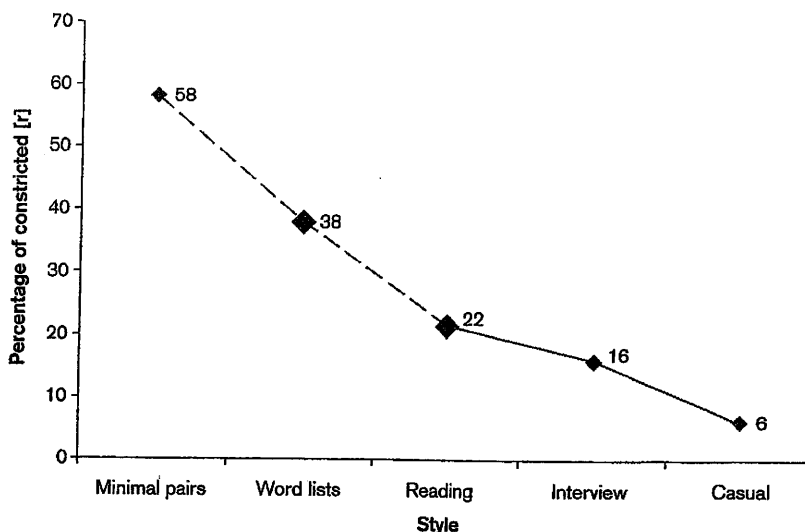


Figure 3.2 Occurrence of constricted [r] in New York City English in five speech styles. (Dashed line indicates the qualitatively different activities involving the use of unconnected speech.) (Source, Labov 1966: 221.)

Connections with theory

The results from the NYC study are frequently used to illustrate the systematic patterning of different groups of speakers from different social classes *across* different styles. As we will see in Chapter 8, the results for style and social class show patterns that are startlingly similar. The similarity of these trends was central to the analysis of the social meaning of the (r) variable in NYC.

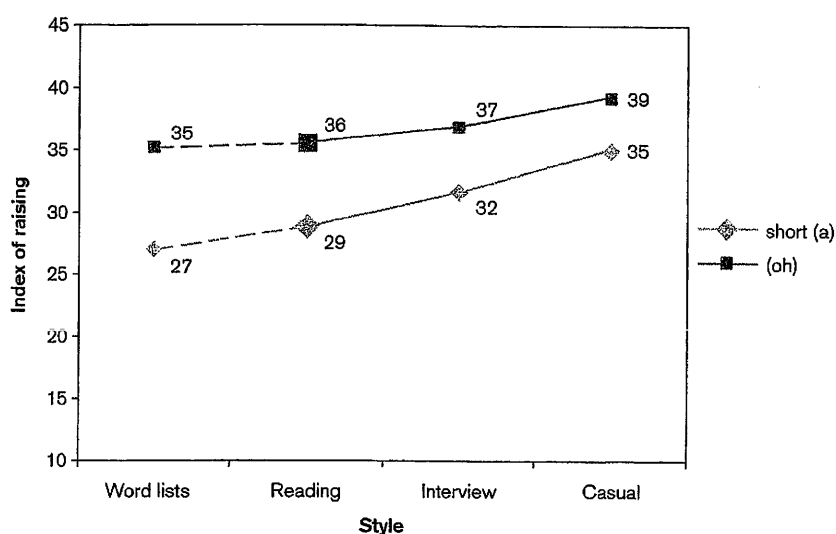


Figure 3.3 Raising index for short (a) and (oh) variants in New York City speech in four styles (TRAP and CLOTH vowels). Higher index means a more raised vowel. (Source, Labov 1966: 221.)

This monotonic relationship supports Labov's conjecture that the three artificial linguistic tasks that he included in the sociolinguistic interviews were, indeed, an effective means of modelling changes in stylistic formality. The trend that emerges between informal and casual speech in the free conversation part of the interview is continued in the manner predicted if style differences manifest a speaker's different level of attention to their speech.

A note on graph notation

Notice that the frequency with which the constricted tokens, [ɹ], are used in each style in each activity is joined with a line. The line becomes a dashed line at the point where it is clear that there is a qualitative break between the kinds of activity represented. It is nevertheless continuous. This is very important because it makes a claim about the relationship *between* each of those points. The use of a continuous line asserts that style is a continuum. In other

words, there might be an infinite number of degrees of attention to speech, of which these five activities or styles represent only a sample. If you were able to devise some other task that required a little bit more attention to speech than informal speech, but a little bit less attention than reading out loud, you would expect that the frequency with which speakers use constricted [r] would fall somewhere on or very close to where the line in Figure 3.2 runs between these two styles.

Rapid and anonymous surveys

A second method that Labov pioneered for studying variation was the use of rapid and anonymous surveys. The rapid and anonymous survey of the realisation of (r) in three department stores is one of the most famous studies in sociolinguistics. As well as trialling a novel and easily replicable methodology, the department store survey has made a significant theoretical contribution to variationist sociolinguistics. Together with the sociolinguistic interviews in the Lower East Side, it demonstrates that quite different methods for gathering data, including quite different ways of manipulating attention to speech, can produce similar and mutually informative results.

We noted that one advantage of the interview format for data collection is that it generates a large amount of information for subsequent analysis. Moreover, because the interviewer spends a fair amount of time getting to know the interviewee, they can make more sensitive evaluations when they come to assessing variation in and across social groups (we will return to the use of sociolinguistic interviews to gather this kind of data in Chapters 7–10). But one of the disadvantages of interviews is that they can take a long time to arrange and conduct. So it is often helpful to be able to complement them with methods that collect data more speedily.

Labov chose three department stores as the venue for some quick fieldwork. He tried to elicit as many tokens of the phrase *fourth floor* as possible from staff working in the three stores. This phrase was a good one from a linguistic point of view because it has one token of the (r) variable before a consonant and one token word and phrase finally. The decision to ask staff (and not, for instance, customers) was practical – staff were more likely to be able to give the desired answer. He would find some item on the store directory boards that was sold on the fourth floor, e.g., lamps or shoes, and he would ask staff where lamps, or shoes, were. They would say, 'Fourth floor', and then he'd pretend he hadn't heard and ask them to repeat it. With slightly more care, the staff member would repeat 'Fourth floor'. Labov would walk off and write down how often they had and had not used a constricted [r], and a few basic social facts about the speaker (their occupation in the store, their sex, a rough estimate of their age).



Connections with theory

Labov chose the three department stores according to the general socioeconomic level of their target customers. Because of this, he was able to employ his rapid and anonymous data to also check on the effects of social class found in the interviews. Social class is discussed further in Chapter 8.

This strategy was extremely productive. It provided:

- two casually uttered tokens of the (r) variable;
- two tokens of the variable uttered more carefully;
- tokens of the variable in different linguistic contexts (one preconsonantal environment, *fourth*, and one at the end of a word); and
- a speedy source of the information.

For these reasons the methodology is known as a **rapid and anonymous** survey.

In all three department stores, speakers were more likely to use the Standard American pronunciation with a constricted [r] when they repeated *fourth floor* carefully for a second time than they were the first time they uttered it. Because the pattern emerged across a considerable number of staff in all three stores, this supported the empirical findings in the interviews, and widely held attitudes about the (r) variable. The use of constricted variants with careful speech was consistent across several measures. The parallels between the findings in the department store survey and the interview data can be seen in Figure 3.4.

Notice that in Figures 3.2–3.4 it is clear that even if style has a strong correlation with the use of [r], it doesn't *determine* which variant will be used. The results from these studies tell us about the probability with which a particular variant will occur. It is more likely that a person will use the constricted variant of (r) in a word list than in casual conversation. But in all styles, a speaker might use the other variant.

On the basis of the evidence accumulated in the New York studies, Labov argued that speakers could be considered co-members of a **speech community** if they share:

Rapid and anonymous study

A questionnaire used to gather data quickly in the public domain. (See also *Sociolinguistic interview*; *Triangulation*.)

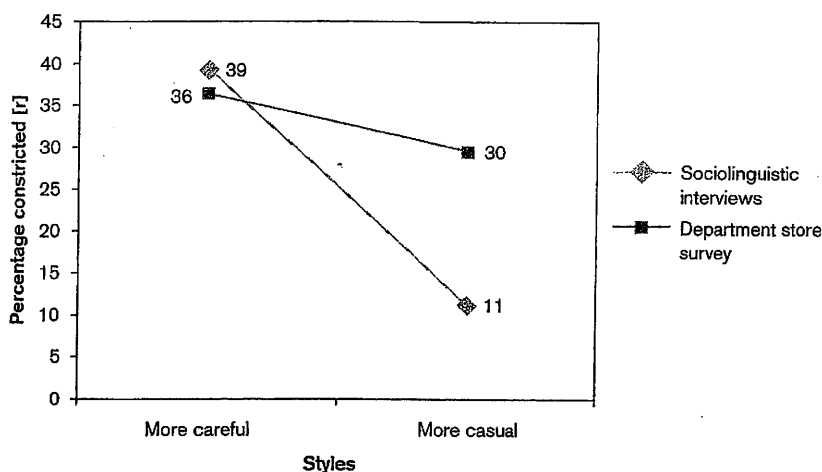


Figure 3.4 Frequency of constricted [r] in more careful styles of the sociolinguistic interview (reading passage, word lists and minimal pairs combined) and more casual styles (informal and casual combined) compared with careful and casual styles in the department store survey. (Source, Labov 1966: 74, 221.)

- the same variants in their repertoire, and
- the same, consciously or unconsciously held, attitudes to those variants.

In the case of (r), consciously held attitudes were reasonably accessible, but in the case of other variables, where speakers did not have much or any conscious awareness of the variation, consistent patterns of stratification in different speech styles provided crucial evidence that speakers share underlying attitudes about the variable.



Connections with theory

Labov assumed that when he got department store staff to repeat, 'Fourth floor', that he was getting them to pay more attention to their speech. This analysis focuses on style from the perspective of the researcher.

The analysis can be turned around so that it takes the perspective of the staff and focuses on the addressee, Labov himself. In this case, their variation might not be a function of an increase in the attention they paid to their own speech, but an increase in the attention they paid to their addressee. We will return to this alternative analysis shortly.

exercise

The effect of topic on style

There have been some efforts to break down the styles within the informal/casual speech parts of the sociolinguistic interviews. This has been done with some success on the basis of topic. It seems that when people are getting a bit preachy (about any topic) or when they are talking about 'language' itself, you elicit more careful styles than you do when the person is talking about, say, childhood memories.

Suppose you had been talking to someone for a few hours about their life history, their beliefs and their personal hopes. Make a list of some of the topics you might expect to come up. Would you expect some topics to elicit speech that is more careful and some to elicit speech that is more casual? Which ones? Why?

To sum up, each of the methods Labov used has its advantages. The rapid and anonymous survey quickly generates a lot of tokens of a restricted kind, and it is easily replicated. The interviews mean that the analysis can draw on more detailed facts about the interviewees and can be based on a wide range of tokens. They also enable the analyst to find out what kinds of social facts are important to the people being interviewed and what their attitudes are to different variables. Although both methods have advantages, it was the combination of the two that allowed Labov to forward a very strong claim that a person's attention to speech was an important constraint on the variable (r) in NYC.

Connections with theory

Attention to speech postulates a single grammar, of which the variation is an integral component: this is the notion of inherent variability. This highlights a fundamental difference between variationist sociolinguists and formal linguists. Sociolinguists consider intraspeaker variation to be evidence of inherent variability in a communal grammar. Formal linguists generally prefer to explain intraspeaker variation in terms of alternations between different grammars (akin to a bilingual speaker alternating between languages).



PRESTIGE OF A VARIABLE

It is tempting to think about the consistent orientation of speakers to a particular variant in more formal contexts, or careful tasks in terms of the relative **prestige** of the variants. But sociolinguists recognise *prestige* as a complex value that speakers orient to in different ways. In particular, we have to be careful that we do not define a *prestige* variant as 'a variant which has more status' if the only evidence we have for the variant being statusful is that it is used more by members of a speech community who themselves have more status (e.g., the upper class). If that is our only evidence, then our definition of *prestige* is circular and we might more accurately say that we have a variant that marks higher social class rather than a variant that is prestigious. Prestige is not necessarily something speakers are consciously aware of, nor something that is associated with the highest social classes or more powerful speakers in a community. These observations have led sociolinguists to make a distinction between **overt** and **covert prestige**.

Overt prestige

The prestige associated with a variant that speakers are aware of and can talk about in terms of standardness, or aesthetic and moral evaluations like being 'nicer' or 'better'. (See also *Covert prestige*.)

Overt vs covert prestige

Overt prestige is understood to be the prestige associated with a variant that people are highly aware of and which is associated more with the speech of higher-status speakers. This would include a variant like the constricted [r] in NYC, which speakers will describe in evaluative terms as sounding 'better' or 'nicer' than the r-less variant.

But it is equally apparent that speakers orient themselves to other kinds of prestige. So, for example, most speakers of German have command over at least their local vernacular variety of German and Standard German (*Hochdeutsch*). They will have learnt their local vernacular variety with its characteristic pronunciations and lexical items at home, and continue to use it there, whereas Standard German is something they are taught at school and they use when they are speaking or writing in public (situations like this are discussed further in Chapter 6 in the section on diglossia).

The local variety carries strong connotations of naturalness and straightforwardness because it is acquired naturally and used in people's most informal and intimate styles. Standard German, on the other hand, may sound stilted and distant because it is so seldom used in intimate and friendly contexts. Politicians and other professional salespeople make strategic use of the positive connotations of different varieties, for example, by using the vernacular when they think it will be advantageous to sound like an everyday person and

Covert prestige

A norm or target that is oriented to without the speaker even being aware of and can be found in mismatches between speakers' self-report of using one variant and actual use of another variant. Often used (wrongly) to refer to the value associated with non-standard or vernacular varieties.

the Standard when they want to sound authoritative. (We return to perceptions about different linguistic varieties, and the connotations associated with them, in Chapters 4 and 6.)

This kind of local prestige is sometimes referred to as covert prestige, but in fact the use of the term for the value speakers associated with local or working class pronunciations is often far from covert. They can explain it to you quite clearly: 'I'd never talk like that with m' mates, they'd think I was a tosser.' Hence, there is often very little that is covert about the persistence of non-standard or highly regionalised vernacular varieties.

The term **covert prestige** more accurately refers to cases where speakers' positive evaluation of a variant is genuinely covert or hidden. Peter Trudgill's (1972) early work on Norwich English found that some speakers recognise and overtly talk about one variant as being 'better' than another; furthermore, they claim to use the 'better' form, but in fact do not.

In this particular case, many of the men (not so many of the women) that Trudgill interviewed said that the Standard Southern British English pronunciations of *tune* and *dune*, i.e., [tjun] and [djun], were better than the local Norwich variant without the [j], i.e., [tun] and [dun], and reported to him that it was the form they used. That is, they were overtly oriented to the supra-local prestige of [tjun] and recognised the [tun] variants as being distinctively local and non-standard. Nevertheless, they used the local variant most often in their interviews with Trudgill. So their orientation to the local variant was covert: they believed they were doing something different from what they actually were doing.

Trudgill suggested that this *mismatch* between what the speakers say they do and what they actually do should be considered evidence of covert prestige. Chapter 4 discusses other examples of mismatches between how people think they are talking and how they are actually talking, and when we consider the notion of language vitality in Chapter 6, we will see another basis for distinguishing between institutionally based prestige and more locally based prestige.

Observer's paradox

The double-bind researchers find themselves in when what they are interested in knowing is how people behave when they are not being observed; but the only way to find out how they behave is to observe them.

IN SEARCH OF THE UNKNOWNABLE: THE OBSERVER'S PARADOX

The paradox every sociolinguist faces in trying to account accurately for variation within a speech community is that they want to know what people say and do in their everyday lives, but as soon as they start to record them they change the dynamic even slightly. So what they want to know is, in one sense, unknowable. This has come to be known in sociolinguistics as the **observer's paradox**. Labov's rapid and anonymous surveys were an attempt to overcome this problem, as was his practice of trying to turn interview conversations to more lively and personal topics.



Connections with theory

The observer's paradox makes the same kind of generalisation about studying language that Heisenberg's uncertainty principle makes about studying particles. That is, we cannot observe something without changing it. One reason for the uncertainty principle in physics is that particles do not exist independently as *things*, they exist as sets of *relationships*. Sociolinguists, too, are actually studying sets of relationships when they look at variables. This will become more apparent as we progress.

Connections with theory



Some sociolinguists think that researchers have overemphasised the importance of speakers' everyday, most casual speech. They argue that, among other things, this creates a cult of 'authenticity' where speakers using the most non-standard forms are seen as the 'real' speakers of a vernacular variety. (These issues are discussed in Schilling-Estes (1998a) and a special issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* in 2003.) Nonetheless, they still agree on the fundamental integrity of spoken, spontaneous discourse as a source of data. Sociolinguists and functional linguists share a respect for discourse-based data (though they differ radically in how they understand variation in such a discourse-based system). Most formal linguists and psycholinguists, on the other hand, consider discourse-based data to be less than informative, as it is uncontrolled and subject to gaps.

Some sociolinguists take a leaf out of anthropologists' books in an attempt to overcome the observer's paradox. They spend long periods of time working and/or living with the people whose speech they are interested in, and they hope that by doing this they will eventually achieve insider status themselves. This is known as **participant observation**.

It is also possible to turn the observer's paradox to good use. It has also been pointed out that sometimes the way people talk when they are aware of being recorded can be sociolinguistically illuminating too. Natalie Schilling-Estes (1998a) noticed that some of the speakers she recorded from Ocracoke, an island off the North Carolina coast, seemed to enjoy giving quite flamboyant performances of stereotypes of the local accent. She found that these highly self-conscious performances of the local accent didn't produce anything that was inconsistent with what the same speaker produced in less self-conscious conversation. Moreover, the relatively extreme variants that one speaker produced in his performances provided telling evidence about the underlying system of phonological contrasts.

A widely recognised stereotype of Ocracoke speech is (ay), the diphthong in PRICE, which has a noticeably raised onset in the traditional Ocracoke brogue, e.g., [ʌ^ɪ]. This is commented on by both islanders and outsiders. A comparison of one man's, Rex's, performances of (ay) and tokens of the variable in conversation showed that raising certainly was one dimension on which the (ay) variable contrasts with other Ocracoke vowels and with the non-raised variants, e.g., [ɑ^ɪ], more typical of non-Southern varieties of American English. However, Rex also shortened the nucleus of (ay) in his performance speech (1998a: 67). Schilling-Estes argues that this means that Rex is maintaining a contrast between the Ocracoke diphthong and the Southern monophthong, e.g., [ɑ:], which is typical of North Carolina and other Southern varieties of English.

Schilling-Estes points out that this is interesting because when Rex talks about the local variant he only ever contrasts his performance with non-raised variants, and gives no indication that the monophthongs associated with Southern accents are a relevant contrast for him in this variable. In other words, performance styles can provide otherwise unknowable information about the social and linguistic significance of a variant.

Participant observation

The practice of spending longer periods of time with speakers observing how they use language, react to others' use of it, and how language interacts with and is embedded in other social practices and ideologies. A means of gathering qualitative data rather than quantitative data.

Surreptitious recording and other ethics issues

It is not possible for a sociolinguist to avoid the observer's paradox by gathering their data in secret. Surreptitious recording, i.e., using a hidden audio or video recorder without the speakers' knowledge, is not condoned by professional linguistic associations. It is also illegal in many parts of the world. Surreptitious recording is an abuse of the privacy of the people you are recording. You might think (as one linguist I know did) that it's OK to hang the headphones of your personal stereo around your neck, and give the impression that you have just paused in your listening, but in fact have the machine in record mode.

You might assume, as he did, that because you are just recording your family and friends, they would certainly give consent after the fact. But consent given after the fact is seldom free from some degree of coercion, and it may be especially hard for friends and family to assert their rights or preferences in this respect because they may fear doing (further) damage to the relationship.

Jennifer Coates, one of Britain's leading sociolinguists, has talked quite frankly about her attempt to get retrospective consent from a group of close friends that she had secretly recorded. She found that some of them were furious at her for the breach of trust.

There are some forms of talk which it is generally agreed can be used as data without getting express permission from the speaker(s). This is talk that is already in the public domain, such as media broadcasts, or oral history archives. Standards vary as to whether or not recordings made for one purpose can be used freely for another, or whether permission has to be sought again from the speakers. Most universities have research ethics committees and specific staff in departments who can advise on all these questions.

CHALLENGING STYLE AS ATTENTION TO SPEECH

Many people were impressed by the consistency of the effects Labov had found across the four different activities that he included in his sociolinguistic interviews. However, not everyone was persuaded that the differences observed indicated that speakers were paying attention to their own speech. The British social psychologist Howard Giles had begun to look closely at the role language plays in shaping the dynamics of interaction between groups and between individuals.

Giles drew on principles that social psychologists had determined play a significant role in how people behave in intergroup and interpersonal interactions quite generally. Research had shown, for example, that people tend to favour other members of their group (ingroup members) at the expense of members of another group (outgroup members), especially in situations that involve some form of competition.

Giles therefore suggested that Labov was wrong in attributing speech differences across different styles to the effect of speakers' attention to their own speech. He argued that social behaviour is seldom so egocentric, and that interviewees would have interpreted their sociolinguistic interviews as intergroup or interpersonal interactions. The distinction Labov made between informal speech (to the interviewer) and casual speech (to family and friends) was a move in the right direction, but Giles argued that Labov's paradigm did not fully grasp or deal with the effects that our interlocutors may have on the way we talk.

Giles suggested that all the stylistic variation was actually caused by speakers attuning, or accommodating, to the norms associated with different addressees. Attunement and

Table 3.1 Number of sentences in which Sale omitted a pronoun subject as a percentage of all clauses in the conversation (two different audiences).

Speaker	Addressees			
	Extended family		MM only	
	Omitted pronoun	All clauses (%)	Omitted pronoun	All clauses (%)
Sale	N = 50	71	N = 40	62

accommodation will be explained in detail in Chapter 4. For our purposes at the moment, we can adopt a common-sense understanding of the terms; that is, speakers fine-tune the way they talk according to the situation they find themselves in. And an important factor in determining how speakers make adjustments to their speech is *who* they are talking to. We are all aware that we are expected to speak differently when talking to friends than when talking to a teacher, a judge, a call centre, etc. Learning to make the expected attunements to others is part of the process of becoming socialised in a community of speakers, so it is very reasonable to assume that such processes might play a role in determining how respondents speak in sociolinguistic interviews.

Table 3.1 shows how a change in the addressee alone may be associated with quite marked changes in the way a speaker talks. This shows how often a speaker of Bislama (the English-based creole spoken in Vanuatu) omitted subject pronouns when telling a story, first to his extended family after dinner one evening, and then to me only.

In Bislama, as in many languages, you don't have to have a subject in every sentence. Instead of repeating a subject with a pronoun like you do in English (1), when the subject stays the same across sentences, you can have a gap as in (2):

- (1) **The captain** told everyone to stay quiet. **He** waited until **he** thought it was safe. Then **he** signalled an advance.
- (2) The captain told everyone to stay quiet. _ Waited until _ thought it was safe . . .

Table 3.1 shows that Sale generally omitted subjects in both tellings of the story, but you can see that he used more full subjects when he was telling me the story (even though it was, in fact, the second time he had told it to me). There are a number of reasons why he might use more subject pronouns with me than he does with his family. But one plausible factor is that by using more pronouns he is providing a non-native speaker with more overt information about who he is referring to in any given sentence. That is, he is trying to make the story clearer and easier to follow for the specific person he is addressing.

Style as 'attention to others'

Giles suggested that many of the effects observed in the New York studies might be caused by speakers attuning their speech to the more salient aspects of the context. These include the interviewer himself, a university-educated person (conducting a 'study', no less!). Giles noted that by inviting such a person into their home to conduct a study, the interviewee had already established a willingness to help out and accommodate the needs of the researcher.

It would therefore be a small step indeed (in terms of interpersonal relations) for the interviewee to continue their accommodating manner and to attempt to produce the kind of speech they perceive to be most appropriate for the different tasks of the interview.

This means that the difference between informal and casual speech can be seen quite simply as a function of who the speaker is addressing, rather than pushing this dynamic to one remove (as Labov did) by proposing that a change in addressee changes how much attention the speaker pays to her/himself. Furthermore, when asked to perform non-conversational tasks like reading aloud, an accommodating person would be very likely to attune their behaviour to the norms they have been socialised to associate with reading aloud; that is, careful, school, or testing environments.

An important aspect of this alternative view of the way speakers shift between styles is that it foregrounds the importance of the speaker's and addressee's relationship and their attitudes towards one another. It presents a picture of speakers in which they come across more as thinking agents with interpersonal goals and desires than they do in the attention to speech model. In subsequent chapters, we'll see that an emphasis on agency and the dynamic quality of group and personal identities has become very influential in sociolinguistics. Many sociolinguists believe that people are really *doing* different things when they use different variants (see, in particular, discussions of communities based on shared practices in Chapter 9).

However, Giles's work – and most of the work following his lead – has been done within the experimental traditions of social psychology; that is, it has relied on data elicited under highly controlled circumstances rather than on the kind of naturally occurring speech favoured by sociolinguists. This is one reason why it has proved difficult to convince some sociolinguists that a speaker's attitude to and relationship with their addressee can and should be incorporated into models of variation and change.

One of the best-known proponents of the Gilesian view of variation has been Allan Bell, the sociolinguist who refined Giles's insight and tailored it more directly to the predictive and explanatory interests of sociolinguists. Bell believed that Giles's arguments captured a very powerful dynamic in sociolinguistic variation. Moreover, he saw its applicability beyond face-to-face interaction, and he argued that it could even account for phonological variation in radio broadcasts where announcers have no single or immediate addressee, and instead must be speaking with some kind of *Gestalt* idea about their audience as a group. He called this broader framework for analysing variation audience design.

Audience design

Audience design

Proposal that
intraspeaker variation
arises because
speakers are paying
attention to who they
are addressing or who
might be listening to
or overhearing them.

The term **audience design** both classifies the behaviour (the speaker is seen as proactively *designing* their speech to the needs of a particular audience) and encapsulates the presumed motive for the behaviour (who is the speaker's audience).

Bell had recorded several newscasters working for the national radio news network in New Zealand. These news readers would read on two of the government-owned stations, one of which was a middle-of-the-road, popular music station, and one of which was the classical station. The classical station generally attracted an audience from higher socioeconomic brackets, while the popular station attracted a broader range of listeners, including those from lower social classes.

Bell examined the occurrence of several variables, including the realisation of intervocalic /t/. Between vowels, (t) can be realised as either a stop or a flap in New Zealand English.

This means words like *better* and *city* can either be pronounced [bɛtə] or [bɛrə] (*better* or *bedder*) and [sɪti] or [sɪri] (*city* or *ciddy*). Although the news was essentially the same on both stations, and although the newscasters were exactly the same speakers, Bell found that there were more of the conservative, stop variants when the newscasters were reading on the classical station than when they were reading on the popular one. He argued that because the topics were held constant, and because the activity was the same, a plausible way to account for the differences was to assume that the newscasters were attuning their speech to what they believed the norms were for the different radio audiences.

This rather modest assertion actually has a very strong theoretical claim embedded within it. It claims that an individual's style-shifting (intraspeaker variation) derives from the differences probabilistically associated with different groups of speakers (interspeaker variation). If this is in fact true, then it means we can make a very specific prediction about the newscasters. If we compare the frequency of the innovative flapped variant of (t) in a single newsreader's speech on the popular and the classical shows, this intraspeaker variation will be *less than* the difference between the frequency of the innovative variant in the two target audiences. We will return to this prediction shortly and see what support has been found for it in empirical studies.

Different audience types

Bell's framework made another helpful contribution to the way sociolinguists might apply principles of accommodation and convergence to sociolinguistic variation. This was to distinguish between several kinds of audience that a speaker might be thinking about. He suggested that a person we are directly talking to has the greatest impact on how we talk. This person is our 'addressee'. But we also have to take other listeners into account when we are speaking, and he proposed that we distinguish between 'auditors', 'overhearers' and 'eavesdroppers'. Each of these other kinds of listeners would have progressively less and less influence on the way you speak, as is shown in Figure 3.5.

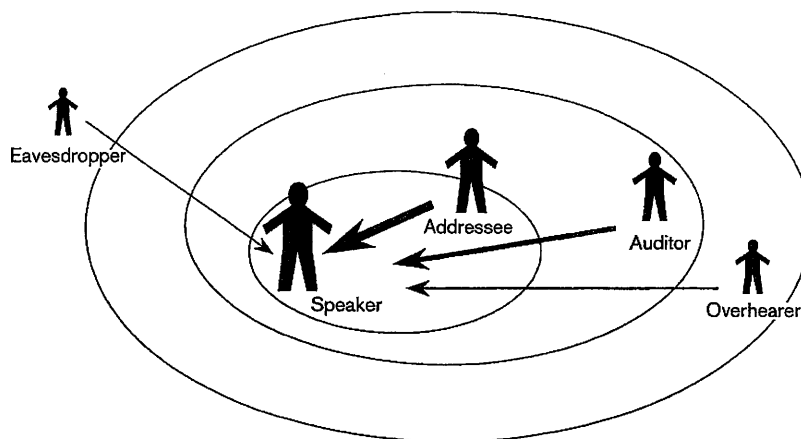


Figure 3.5 The strength of the effect of different interlocutors (known, ratified and addressed) on a speaker's choice of variants and different styles. (This representation is based on a figure in Hay *et al.* 1999, with kind permission of the authors.)

Table 3.2 Different types of audience according to their relationship with the speaker.
(Bell 1984: 160, table 3.)

	<i>Known</i>	<i>Ratified</i>	<i>Addressed</i>
Addressee	+	+	+
Auditor	+	+	-
Overhearer	+	-	-
Eavesdropper	-	-	-

CHAPTER 2, RSR

Bell proposed a system for distinguishing between these different kinds of addressee by using three criteria, whether someone is *known*, *ratified* or *addressed*. This is summarised in Table 3.2. An addressee is *known* to be part of the speech context, *ratified* (that is, the speaker acknowledges their presence in the speech context) and is *addressed* (that is, 'I'm talking to you'). If a teacher praises a student in front of the whole class she or he is communicating with both the student and the rest of the class (for whom the student is being held up as a model). Both the student and the class are the audience. The student is the addressee (known, ratified and addressed) and the rest of the class are auditors (known and ratified, but not addressed).



Connections with theory

The distinction between listeners who are addressed, ratified and known builds on earlier work by Erving Goffman (1981). Goffman also distinguished different types of speaker: the *animator* (the person who utters the words), the *author* (the person who is responsible for the sentiment of the words) and the *principal* (the person 'whose position is established by the words that are spoken', Goffman 1981: 144). Angermeyer (2005) shows that differentiating these roles can be especially problematic for court interpreters who are required, by virtue of their job, to animate the discourse that someone else is author of. Angermeyer shows that complications can arise when the courtroom discussion (or the interpreters themselves) makes the role of principal fuzzy, or when interpreters break frame and speak in their own authorial voice.

So audience design predicts that the speaker will attune their speech most to an addressee, next to an auditor, and then to any overhearers who the speaker thinks might be lurking around. The speaker will attune their speech less to auditors, overhearers and eavesdroppers because the speaker's relationship with them is more attenuated, and consequently the speaker has less clear relational goals. The speaker may also have much less detailed ideas about what kinds of people their auditors and overhearers might be, and this in turn means that the speaker will have less specific ideas about how they might attune their speech. By the time we move to the effect of eavesdroppers, we are talking about an audience that the speaker can probably only conceptualise in very rudimentary ways, so their effects will be very superficial in linguistic terms, e.g., we might be careful about the general topic or we might try to avoid swearing, but we won't alter our pronunciation or syntax much at all. Finally,

Bell argued, any effect that the topic of conversation might have would also be extremely limited. Under this framework, topics would derive their effects from a speaker's stereotypes about *who* they are likely to be talking to when a topic comes up.

Connections with theory

A related approach to the idea of style-shifting as audience design is Coupland's (2001) suggestion that speakers use different styles to present themselves differently according to the context or who they are talking to. We might call this **speaker design**. The main differences between speaker and audience design models of style-shifting lie in what kinds of motives or goals are ascribed to the speaker and which are assumed to drive variation. For example, speaker design is readily compatible with the *accentuate the positive* and *eliminate the negative* motives (Chapter 2), but less so with the idea that one is testing hypotheses about others (*It's a jungle out there*). Speaker design is also compatible with style-shifting where there is no independent evidence of a change in the speaker's attention to their speech or their audience.

CHAPTER 4, RSR



Relationship between social and linguistic constraints

Figure 3.6 summarises how Bell conceptualised the relationship between social variation (that is, variation between groups of speakers) and stylistic variation (that is, variation in a single speaker). This figure shows how, according to Bell, intraspeaker variability derives from the variability that differentiates social groups:

(variation between groups) > (variation in individuals)

Speaker design

A further approach to analysing *style-shifting*. Stresses the speaker's desire to represent her/himself in certain ways. (See also *Acts of identity*.)

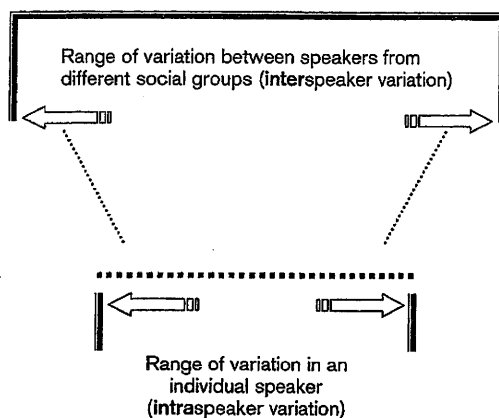


Figure 3.6 Bell's predicted relationship between linguistic differences across social groups and an individual's variability across styles.

Bell predicted that because it derives from social group differences, the variation any one individual shows in their speech will never be greater than the differences between the groups that their style-shifting is derived from. This may seem somewhat odd, since a group is made up of many individuals, but one reason for it is that when a speaker attunes their speech to the norms of a group that they do not personally identify with, they will be approximating a target that they have only limited firsthand knowledge of. The variability triggered by topic alone should be even less than an individual's stylistic variation since topic effects are supposed to derive from the speaker's pre-existing variation space.

A few linguists have tried to test the details of Bell's audience design framework. Dennis Preston (1991) reviewed some of the data available to him using this framework and found that his data generally concurred with Bell's proposed ranking of constraints on variation. However, he also considered the relative strength of purely linguistic constraints on a variable. As is generally the case with a linguistic variable, the linguistic constraints have the most powerful effect of all on a variable (we noted this, in passing, for the Martha's Vineyard data in Chapter 2).

This means that, for instance, the nature of the following or preceding sound, or whether the variant is a subject or an object, accounts for far more of the variation we can observe than any social factors, such as who a speaker is talking to. The effect of any social constraints defines a smaller range of variation than the linguistic constraints do:

(linguistic factors) > (variation between groups) > (variation in individuals)

However, overall, empirical support for this ordering of factors is still rather shaky. Other researchers have found evidence that leads them to conclude the opposite to Bell and Preston – namely, that for some variables the range of a speaker's style-shifting exceeds the differences between social groups. John Baugh's work on African American Vernacular English in Los Angeles seemed to indicate that certain variables may rank social and individual factors differently. Some variables may show the relationship between interspeaker and intraspeaker variation that Bell suggested, but for some variables speakers' style-shifting may outweigh even the effects of linguistic constraints (Baugh 1979, cited in Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994). Thus, for the variable use of third-person singular *-s* and non-prevocalic (*r*), Baugh found that:

(variation in individuals) > (variation between groups)

Baugh suggested that whether a variable shows greater effects for linguistic or non-linguistic constraints depends on whether it carries much semantic information. He suggested that the two variables showing this pattern – (*r*) in non-prevocalic environments (the same variable as Labov studied in NYC) and third-person singular agreement on verbs (which may or may not be marked with *-s*, i.e., *she walks* or *she walk_*) – do not carry any crucial information.

For instance, there are relatively few minimal pairs created by variable presence or absence of [*r*] in English, so they will seldom cause confusion in conversation. Third-person singular agreement on verbs is actually redundant in English because there are very few contexts in which we do not have a full noun or pronoun as the subject of a sentence. So this, too, plays a very limited semantic role. Baugh suggested that when a variable carries limited informational or semantic load, it might show more variation within the speech of individuals than it does between groups.

Note that by invoking linguistic factors as a primary consideration in order to account for the reversal of the non-linguistic constraints on style-shifting, Baugh implies a fuller ordering of factors than even Preston did:

(linguistic factors: high information/semantic load) > (variation between groups)
> (variation in individuals)

(linguistic factors: low information/semantic load) > (variation in individuals)
> (variation between groups)

We still lack a lot of the detailed comparisons between individuals and groups to test Bell's framework thoroughly. A lot more research needs to be done in order to find out whether Bell is right in suggesting that there is a systematic or predictable relationship that derives intraspeaker variation from interspeaker variation. In the next two sections we examine empirical studies that have tried to test the predictions of Bell's framework.

Integrating topic shifts in audience design

Many people have found that in the informal part of a sociolinguistic interview, speakers use more of the standard or more conservative variants when they are talking about language than when they are talking about the supernatural. How could you account for this in terms of Bell's notion of audience design?

Do you think this is a more satisfactory account than one based on attention to speech?

exercise

'Attention to speech' vs 'audience design'?

Labov sees style-shifting as a linguistic reflex of changes in the amount of attention a speaker pays to their speech.

Do you think Bell's audience-design approach simply restates style-shifting in terms of how much attention speakers are paying to real or possible listeners? Or do you think the differences between the two approaches are more fundamental?

exercise

Reciprocal audience design?

Before leaving the topic of audience design, it is worth noting that the interviewer may also be attuning their speech to the audience. Peter Trudgill conducted a major social dialect study in his home town of Norwich and he found that, quite unconsciously, he had used more regional Norwich variants when he was talking to speakers who were themselves high users of those variants than he had when he was interviewing Norwich speakers who were low users of those variants (Trudgill 1986).

This raises the question of whether people consciously make these kinds of attunements or accommodations, and how much control they have over the success of their attunement. We will come back to these questions in the next chapter, where we examine some case studies showing that what people do and what they *think* they are doing may be somewhat at odds.



Attunement to different addressees: Foxy Boston's case study

The most serious test of Bell's audience design has been undertaken by John Rickford and Faye McNair-Knox in a case study involving repeated interviews over a period of years with a single speaker, a young woman they call Foxy Boston. Rickford and McNair-Knox's (1994) study represents an important milestone in the study of variation, and of stylistic variation in particular, because it draws both on detailed knowledge of an individual and quantitative information on the linguistic behaviour of the relevant social groups that the speaker's addressees represent.

Rickford and McNair-Knox decided to use the interviews that had been conducted with Foxy Boston as the basis for a rigorous test of Bell's proposals. They compared Foxy's use of a number of sociolinguistic variables when she was talking to Faye, an African-American, and when she was being interviewed (on very similar topics) by an Anglo-American interviewer, Beth. Rickford and McNair-Knox looked at several variables that are well known to favour one variant in African-American English and a complementary variant in White American English. Audience design predicts that with variables like these, Foxy would accommodate to the norms of the different groups when her addressee is a member of one or other of these groups. That is to say, she would use more of the variants that are typically used by African-American speakers (as a group) when she was talking to Faye, whereas she would use more of the variants typical of White American English when she was talking to Beth (and therefore fewer of the African-American variants). This follows from Bell's idea that style-shifting derives from social differences.

Two of the variables they looked at are shown in Table 3.3. They are the presence or absence of the verb *BE* and the presence or absence of third-person *-s* agreement on verbs. Examples of the variables and the variants that are statistically more likely to realise them in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and White American Vernacular English (WAVE) are shown in Table 3.3.

There is a considerable body of work on AAVE showing that absence of third-person agreement and absence of *BE* are reliable markers of African American Vernacular English, differentiating speakers of varieties of AAVE from the vernacular varieties of White Americans. Because the differences between AAVE and WAVE are so extreme for these variables, Rickford and McNair-Knox had to determine that Foxy wasn't just switching between different

Table 3.3 Two variables studied in Foxy Boston's speech, showing the variants statistically more likely to be used by speakers of African-American Vernacular English and speakers of White American Vernacular English.

Variable	Variant more common in:	
	African American Vernacular English	White American Vernacular English
Copula and auxiliary <i>BE</i>	<i>BE</i> absent	<i>BE</i> present
	He _ a teacher.	He is (He's) a teacher.
	She _ going downtown.	She is (She's) going downtown.
	You _ crazy.	You are (You're) crazy.
Third-person <i>-s</i> agreement	Subject agreement absent	Subject agreement present
	She think you don't care.	She thinks you don't care.

grammars (one AAVE syntax and one WAVE syntax) when she was talking to Faye and Beth (see Chapter 6 for more on code-switching). They took a lot of care to make sure that they really were comparing the same variables in the two interviews.

They did this by determining that when Foxy *did* use third-person singular agreement or BE that she did so in the same linguistic contexts in both interviews. Having determined that they were in fact comparing Foxy's use of the same variables in both interviews, they examined the frequency of the variants associated with AAVE norms; that is, absence of agreement and absence of BE. They found that Foxy did, indeed, have more absence of BE and -s agreement when she was talking to Faye than when she was talking to Beth. They interpreted these results as support for the notion of attunement through audience design.

But audience design made a stronger claim than simple attunement. Bell argued that the range of variation covered by a single speaker's accommodation to different addressees will be *less than* the range of variation between the groups that those addressees represent. Rickford and McNair-Knox found support for this crucial component of the audience design framework. The difference between how often Foxy omitted BE and -s agreement when she was talking to Faye compared to when she was talking to Beth was less than the differences between the frequency of these variants in African and White American Vernaculars taken from larger social dialect studies. This is shown in Table 3.4, where the final column shows the difference (in percentage points) between when Foxy was addressing a speaker of AAVE and a speaker of WAVE.

Data from these variables in the vernacular speech of White Americans shows that rates for third-person singular -s absence are very low, and the rates of copula deletion are virtually zero. If we sample across a group of speakers, AAVE has a rate of about 65 per cent third-person singular -s absence and a rate of about 38 per cent copula deletion (these figures are taken from studies reported by Rickford and McNair-Knox, and in Labov 1972b). This means that the difference between the group averages for AAVE and WAVE speakers is greater than the range Foxy shows in her speech to an African-American and then a White American addressee.

There was less support for Bell's hypothesis about the effect of topic changes on an individual's style-shifting. We noted earlier that Bell proposed that the influence of topic would not exceed audience-based shifts. In fact, the frequency with which Foxy used the AAVE variants of BE and -s absence varied more within each interview (that is, depending on what topic she was talking about) than they did between the interviews overall (that is, depending on who she was talking to). So this result did not support Bell's hypothesis. The role that topic plays in style-shifting still needs a good deal of study.

Table 3.4 Differences in frequency of copula and -s agreement absence for Foxy Boston talking to African-American and White American Vernacular English-speaking addressee. (Source, Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994, table 10.2 [modified].)

	Speaker of AAVE	Speaker of WAVE	Difference (in % points)
Foxy Boston's averages for absence with different addressee:			
<i>copula</i>	70% (N=283)	40% (N=176)	30 points
-s agreement	73% (83/114)	37% (46/124)	36 points

Testing assumptions about topic-induced shift

Sumittra Suraratdecha tried to test audience design's predictions about the effect of topic in the speech of Thai university students living in the United States. She recorded them with different interlocutors and compared how often they switched back and forth between Thai and English during their group conversations.

She found that code-switching from English into Thai happened most often when the students were speaking about the supernatural, and switching from Thai into English happened more often when they were talking about travel and what they wanted to do after university.

Why do you think the code-switching might have gone in that direction for those topics?

So Rickford and McNair-Knox's study with Foxy provided a fine example of the ways in which quantitative studies of variation in groups and detailed analyses of one person's stylistic repertoire could complement each other. As far as testing audience design is concerned, it provided mixed support for the specific hypotheses of the framework. In addition, Rickford and McNair-Knox were cautious about claiming that their data from Foxy showed that she was attuning her speech for her addressee because they realised they had not controlled all social variables in their study.

The interviewers, Faye and Beth, certainly differed from each other in their ethnicity, but they also differed in how well they knew Foxy. Faye and Foxy had met before and knew each other pretty well by the time they had the conversation on which Rickford and McNair-Knox based their study. However, Beth and Foxy had never met before their interview. So, as Rickford and McNair-Knox point out, it is possible that differences in Foxy's speech in the two interviews were due to differences in how familiar her addressee was, rather than differences in their ethnicity. In the next section, we will see how sociolinguists might go about teasing these factors apart.

Attunement to groups or familiarity?

A lengthy and ongoing study of a speech community in a small town in Texas provided Patricia Cukor-Avila and Guy Bailey (2001) with exactly the opportunity to attempt to tackle the outstanding problem from the Foxy Boston study. Cukor-Avila and Bailey have been working in a small community, which they call Springville, since 1988. Over the years they have developed close friendship networks in the community and are now recognised by many locals as insiders themselves. They started out collecting data in recordings similar to the classic Labovian sociolinguistic interview, but over the years their recordings have become increasingly informal and are often controlled by the residents themselves. Cukor-Avila and Bailey realised that they were almost uniquely placed to try and resolve the ambiguities left from Rickford and McNair-Knox's study. Most of the residents of Springville are African-American, and this meant that they could examine the same AAVE variables in the Foxy Boston study. But their lengthy involvement with Springville meant they could also control for speech with familiar and unfamiliar WAVE-speaking addressees. This was important

because the closer they could match the social and linguistic variables of Rickford and McNair-Knox's study, the more valid and the more informative the comparison between the two sets of data would be.

They decided to focus on the speech styles used by two African-American teenagers and one elderly African-American woman when talking to other African-Americans and with a White fieldworker. The teenagers, Samantha and Lashonda, had known both their interviewers for some time (and the interviews span a period of several years) so their familiarity with the two interviewers was high. Audrey, the older woman, was interviewed by her nephew and then also by two White fieldworkers that she had not met before. The differences in social factors characterising their interviews and Foxy's interviews are summarised in Table 3.5. For completeness, Cukor-Avila and Bailey also indicate whether the speakers share community membership, and whether other people were present during the interview, in case these non-linguistic factors might be relevant.

Cukor-Avila and Bailey found that there were minimal differences between Lashonda's and Samantha's styles in the interviews conducted by an African-American and a White interviewer, both of whom had known them for a long time. In other words, there was no evidence that, when talking to a White addressee, they attuned their speech so as to use more of the variants typical of White varieties of American English. The familiarity of the interviewer appears to have overridden any effect that her ethnic identity might have had. However, Audrey did exhibit style-shifting similar to Foxy's. Since they only found the same addressee effects that had been found with Foxy in Audrey's interviews, Cukor-Avila and Bailey suggested that this indicates that Foxy's lack of familiarity with Beth was more likely to have been the salient factor constraining Foxy's style-shifting than Beth's ethnicity.

As stated originally, Bell's audience design framework requires speakers to be aware of variation in the linguistic behaviour of different social groups in the larger speech community. An addressee is then perceived and categorised as a representative of one of those groups, and the speaker's understanding of the characteristic features of the group's speech is then used as the basis for designing a style appropriate to that addressee. This formulation

Table 3.5 Comparison of social features characterising the interviews with African-American interviewees conducted by Rickford and McNair-Knox and Cukor-Avila and Bailey. (Source, Cukor-Avila and Bailey 2001: 256, 263, tables 1–3.)

	<i>Foxy's interviews</i>		<i>Samantha and Lashonda's interviews</i>		<i>Audrey's interviews</i>	
	<i>Faye</i>	<i>Beth</i>	<i>Local teen</i>	<i>Fieldworker</i>	<i>Audrey's nephew</i>	<i>Fieldworkers</i>
Race of interviewer	Afr.-Am.	White	Afr.-Am.	White	Afr.-Am.	White
Familiar?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Community member?	Yes	No	Yes	No (but 7 years' association)	Yes	No
Other people present?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

of the framework gives primacy to social groups. However, the Springville data indicates that speakers may principally perceive their audience in interpersonal terms (e.g., as a familiar friend or not), and that this kind of personal information trumps group information in constraining intraspeaker variation.

A lot more work is needed testing and replicating these kinds of studies in order to determine whether their findings are robust and whether the conclusions drawn from them are generalisable across speakers and communities. Many sociolinguists today believe that style-shifting is part of ongoing interpersonal negotiations, and it is these interpersonal negotiations that ultimately give reality and meaning to group identities and group memberships. The studies with Foxy and in Springville provide us with a basis for evaluating the relative importance of group factors and interpersonal factors for a sociolinguistic theory of style. The difficulty that they demonstrate in controlling for all the non-linguistic factors that might be relevant shows that this kind of careful comparative work often requires a long-term commitment to research in a community of speakers.

In turn, this is a good reminder to us of the importance of having sound information about the social backgrounds of our speakers, and an understanding of how they see themselves in relation to others in the larger social matrix. Because Cukor-Avila and Bailey have years of friendships and experiences in Springville based on extensive participant observation, they can draw on this information to add social and interpersonal meaning to their analysis of variation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced stylistic variation – that is, variation within the speech of a single speaker – as a locus of sociolinguistic enquiry. It began by looking at the way in which style has been operationalised in social dialect surveys, including both the rapid and anonymous surveys and the different tasks built into a longer sociolinguistic survey. The fact of stylistic variation is undisputed in sociolinguistics, but there are some disagreements about its underlying causes and therefore the way in which this kind of variation should be characterised. Intraspeaker, or stylistic, variation can be characterised as the amount of attention the speaker is paying to their speech, or as the speaker's desire to attune their speech to their addressee's perceived norms. We have reviewed some of the more significant studies that reflect both frameworks. In doing so, we have highlighted differences in the methods required to test the two perspectives, but we have also drawn attention to the fundamental difference in the role of the speaker. The attention to speech framework presents a picture of the speaker that is fairly egocentric, while the attunement and audience design frameworks see speakers as co-participants in social and conversational interactions.

These different views of the speaker underpin a tension in sociolinguistics between generalisations made across large social groups such as social class or age (as is associated with the study of a speech community), and generalisations relevant only to much smaller, and sometimes quite idiosyncratic, communities that are constituted through members' shared practices (these 'communities of practice' are defined and discussed in more detail in Chapter 9). As Rickford and McNair-Knox showed, patterns that differentiate groups can be used to inform the details of an individual speaker's performance. The potential for such complementarity will recur again in later chapters.

This chapter has devoted considerable space to explaining the methods used to analyse style-shifting. These different methods are very important because they have implications

beyond the study of style alone. The methods associated with the attention to speech accounts of style-shifting model variation as something that reflects non-linguistic information (e.g., how much attention the speaker is paying to their speech). The methods associated with audience (or speaker) design, on the other hand, treat variation as constitutive of non-linguistic factors (e.g., as selecting an intended audience, or attempting to stress similarity and identity with an audience). These differences are central to ongoing debates about how sociolinguistics should develop. This is why we have started this introductory text by examining research on style; several of the methodological and theoretical issues raised here have echoes in later chapters, where we will turn our attention to other social constraints on variation.

In the next chapter, we develop further the notion of accommodation that was introduced in the discussion of audience design. Although the focus in Chapter 4 is more solidly on attitudes that speakers have to other *groups* of language users and the varieties of language that they associate with those groups, discussions of multilingualism and code-switching in Chapter 6 again show how speakers balance considerations about the immediate needs of their conversation with their acquired knowledge about what is typical or expected across society as a whole.

FURTHER READING

In addition to the references provided in this chapter, you may find the following specific readings helpful:

- Biber (1995) – a corpus linguistics approach to register and style; uses principal components analysis.
- Bell (1991) – a more wide-ranging linguistic analysis of the forms and styles used in the news media.
- Giles and Coupland (1991) – on linguistic accommodation and attunement.
- Coupland (1984) – a study looking at one speaker's stylistic variation with different addressees.
- Schiffrin *et al.* (2001) – a range of articles providing different perspectives on discourse analysis. Chapters in section III deal with styles of discourse in different domains or contexts.
- Jaffe (2009) – collected articles looking at style in terms of the stances speakers take up in relation to what they're saying and who to.

