

<http://www.stanford.edu/~eckert/Institute2007/index.html>

Central Questions

How does variation take on meaning?

What is that meaning?

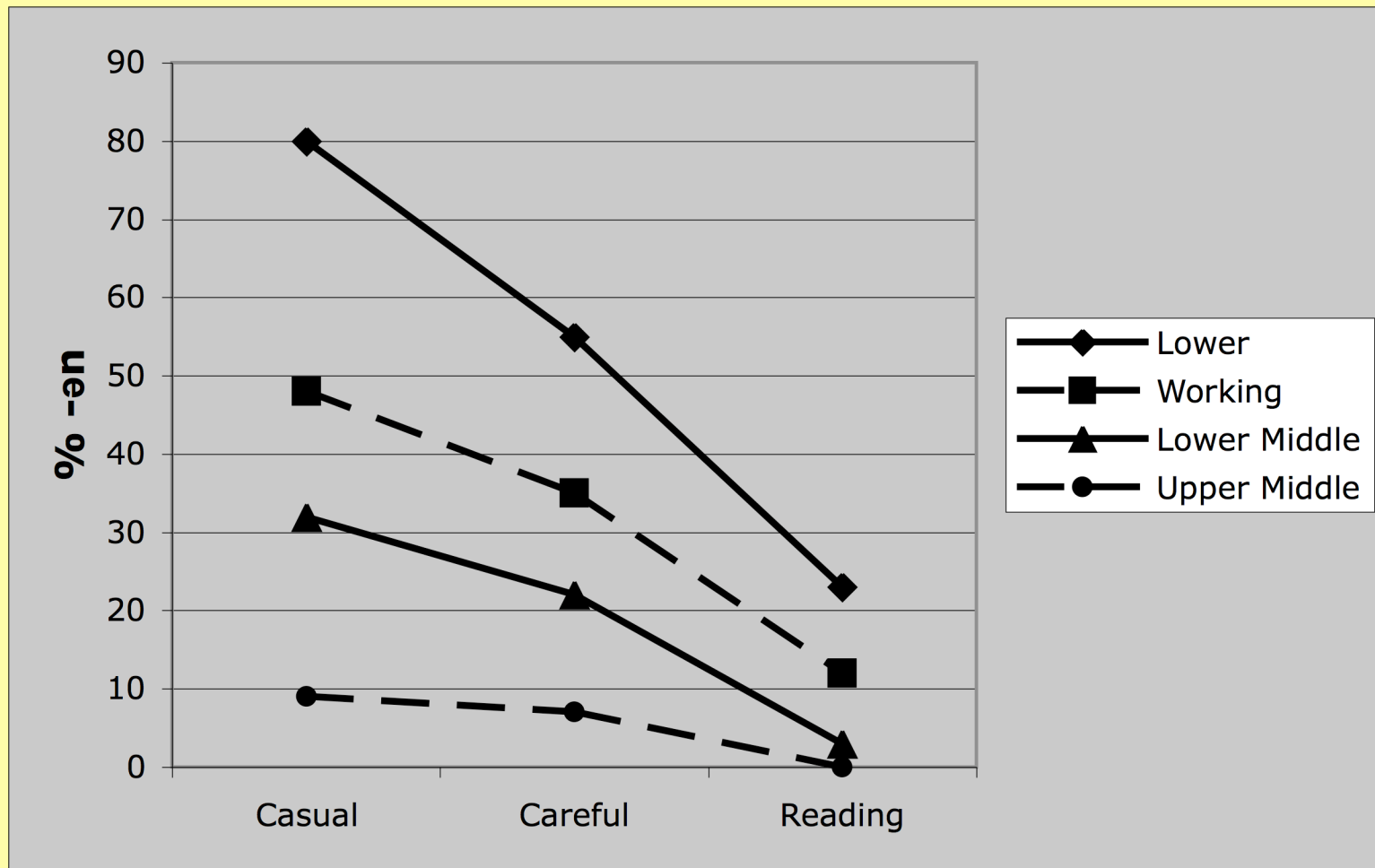
How can we study it?

Variation and ethnography

- Variation analysis is a fundamentally quantitative, correlational, enterprise.
- Ethnography is a fundamentally qualitative, interpretive, enterprise.

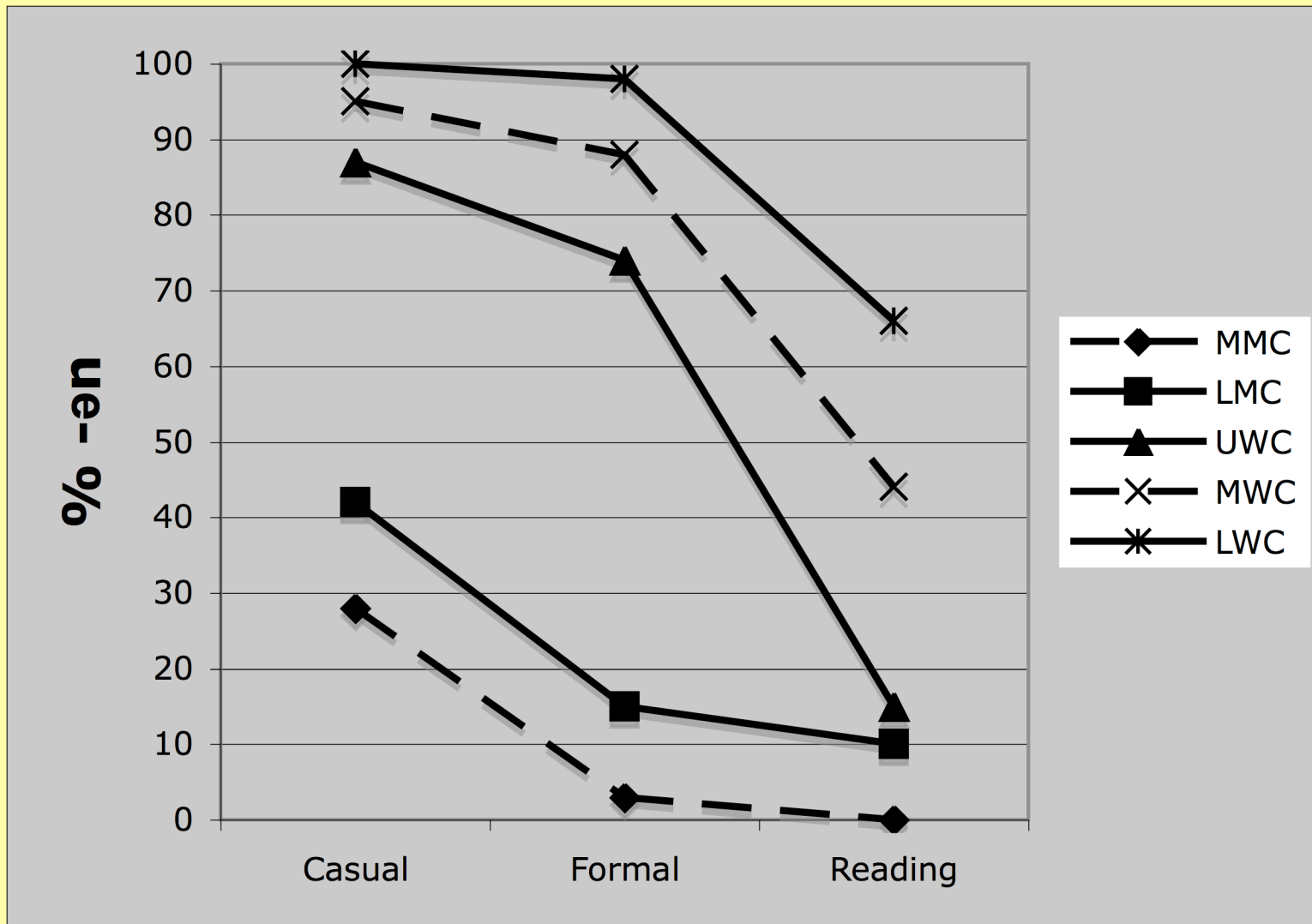
- Combining the empirical rigor established in the study of variation with the interpretive insights of ethnography.
- How can we create systematic categories for quantification without losing the situatedness of linguistic practice?

The Big Picture: (ING) in New York City by SES and style



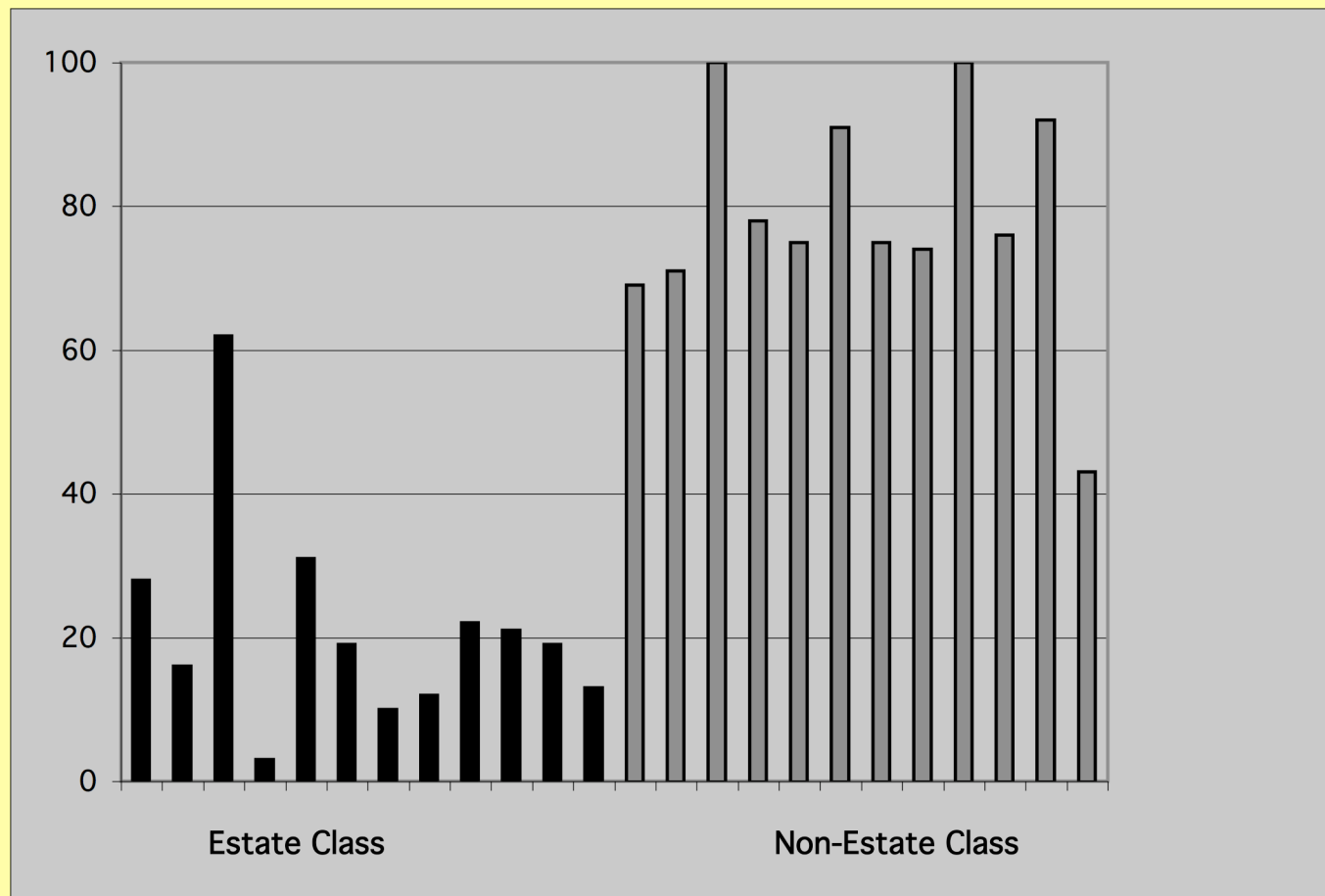
Labov, William. (1966) The social stratification of English in New York City. Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. (2nd Edition 2007, Cambridge University Press)

(ING) in Norwich, England



Trudgill, Peter. 1974. The social differentiation of English in Norwich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Percent use of Standard English (acrolectal) variants in singular pronoun subcategories in Cane Walk, Guyana.



Rickford, John. 1986. The need for new approaches to class analysis in sociolinguistics. *Language and Communication*, 6.215-21.

Two perspectives on variation

- Variation shows a large pattern - a picture of the social order.

The social order is the product of people's everyday social action

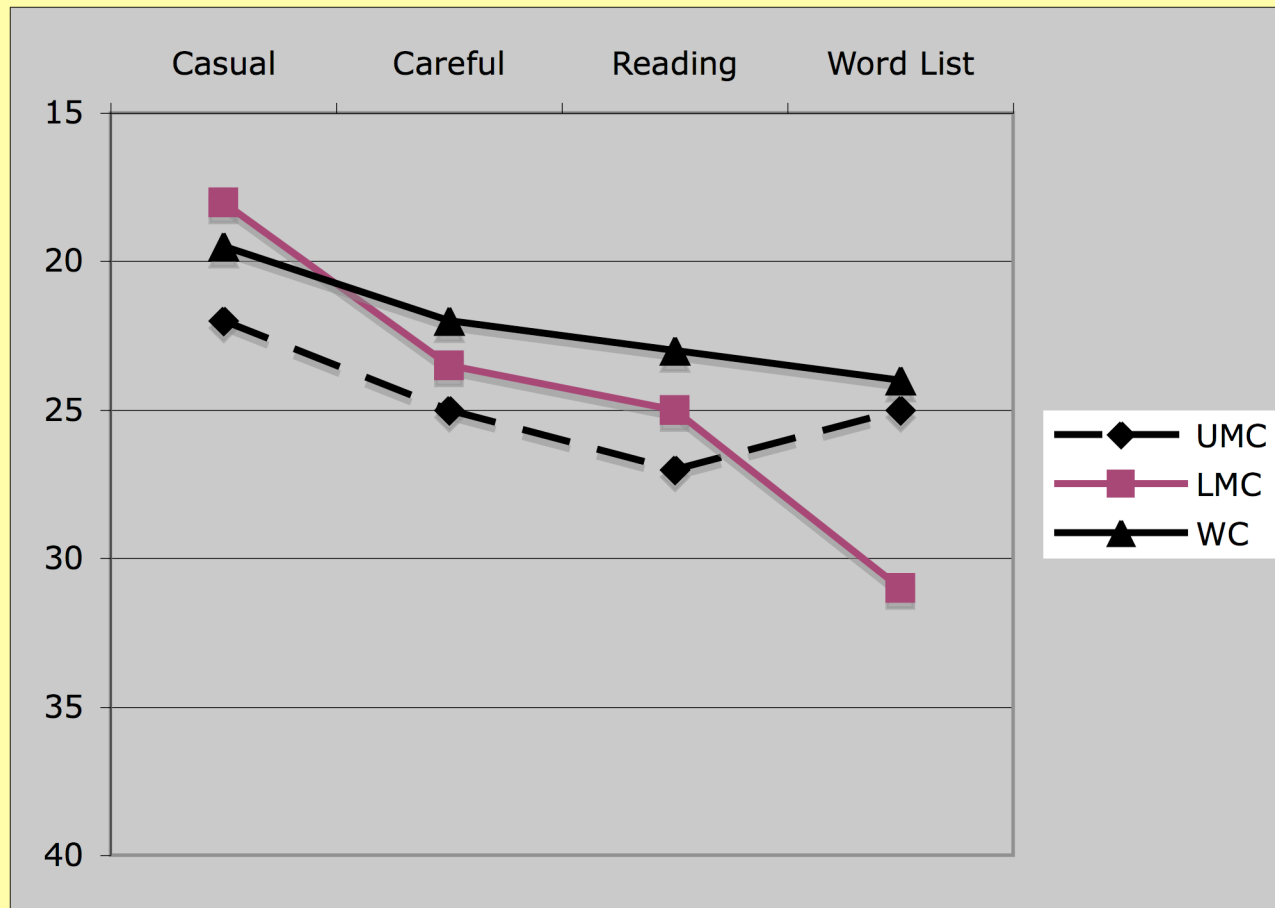
- Variation is a resource for making social meaning on a day-to-day basis.

The actual mechanisms of change are in the everyday action.

- This everyday action is where people's linguistic competence lies
- It's also where we find innovation and creativity.

- What are the processes in which day-to-day social actions produce this particular big picture at the statistical level?

(oh) raising in New York City



Labov, William. (1966) The social stratification of English in New York City. Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics

Social Constructionism

- The big picture approach implies that people talk the way they do because of the categories they belong to.
- Social constructionism says that the category statistics come out the way they do because people are producing and reproducing those categories in their everyday social action.

- The big picture approach implies that variables “mean” or “mark” the categories they correlate with.
- Social constructionism says that variables “mean” more tangible things that make up those categories.

- For a theory of sound change, the difference between these perspectives is trivial.
- For a theory of meaning, it's central.

Central Issues

Ethnography

Indexicality

10 minute break

To focus on meaning...

- We need to re-think some fundamental ideas:
 - vernacular
 - style
 - locus of study (speech community)
- We need to re-think what the variables are.

The Vernacular

First/early learned (individual)

Systematic (individual)

- Natural object
- Source of regular change

Habitual (individual)

- Ingrained
- Unconscious

Located toward the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy (society)

- Local
- Stigmatized

Locus of study

- Speech community
 - Geographically delimited
 - Mutually oriented to language

The larger semiotic system

- If the focus is on meaning, sound changes in progress become a relatively small subset of resources.

Well-known stable variables

- /th,dh/ stopping
- ING
- Negative concord

Other kinds of Resources

- Hyper- hypo- articulation:
 - Stop release
 - Consonant length
 - Fortition (e.g. of /s/)
- Kid (“baby”) talk

Prosodic variables

- Voice quality
- Intonation
- Rhythm

Preview of the course

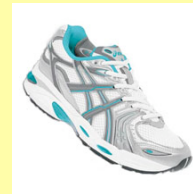
- Indexicality
 - the contingent nature of variation requires that we treat variables as indexes, not symbols.

Style as formality

Formality - a social way of controlling a cognitive parameter:

Attention paid to speech

Style as persona



Space - defining the social unit

- The social unit is taken to structure or contain variation. The dialectology focus has led us to use pre-bounded space and administrative units for this.
- Need to rethink the assumptions behind this and revisit the notion of the speech community.

Reproduction

- How can we incorporate a theory of power into the analysis of variation?
- To do so, we have to revisit how the study of variation conceptualizes agency.
- We have to think of language use, and both stability and change, as part of social and linguistic reproduction.

Indexicality redux

- Examining the role of power in the indexical order.