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3 Language and social class

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3.0. **Introduction**

In all human societies individuals will differ from one another in the way they speak. Some of these differences are idiosyncratic, but others are systematically associated with particular groups of people. The most obvious of these are associated with sex and developmental level: women speak differently from men, and children differently from adults. These two dimensions of social variation in language are in part biologically determined (e.g. differences in laryngeal size producing different pitch levels for adult men and women), but in most societies they go beyond this to become conventional and socially symbolic. Thus men and women differ by far more in language use than mere pitch. (In fact, even their pitch differences are more pronounced than can be anatomically explained.) Such sociosymbolic aspects of language use serve an emblematic function: they identify the speaker as belonging to a particular group, or having a particular social identity.

In many societies some of the most important of these sociolinguistic divisions are associated with differences in social prestige, wealth, and power. Bankers clearly do not talk the same as busboys, and professors don't sound like plumbers. They signal the social differences between them by features of their phonology, grammar, and lexical choice, just as they do extralinguistically by their choices in clothing, cars, and so on. The social groups at issue here may be harder to define than groups like 'men' and 'women,' but they are just as real. They are the divisions of a society along lines of SOCIAL CLASS.

Class divisions are essentially based on status and power in a society. Status refers to whether people are respected and deferred to by others in their society (or, conversely, looked down on or ignored), and power refers to the social and material resources a person can command, the ability (and social right) to make decisions and influence events. Differences of status and power are the essence of social class distinctions, and it is these that we

will have to examine in order to understand class differences in the use of language.

The questions we will be addressing deal mainly with how and why social classes differ in their use of language. Such questions are often considered to be interdisciplinary, in that they involve concepts and problems from more than one traditionally defined academic field: class is the province of sociology and political science, while language belongs to linguistics. A common response to such interdisciplinary issues is to define them out: some linguists will say these questions do not fall within linguistics because they are primarily concerned with social structure, or because they appeal to extralinguistic explanations, or, more subtly, because they involve performance rather than competence. While such views may rightly be considered narrow and sectarian, it is nevertheless incumbent upon us to show the relevance of these problems to linguistic science and its theoretical concerns, and also to other disciplines, and to society at large.

Writing as a linguist, I will focus primarily on the first issue, significance for linguistics, but the general social relevance of these questions seems substantial. The linguistic data will help illuminate the structure of our society and identify social divisions and points of conflict and convergence. They will illustrate the class-based nature of standard varieties of language and the subjective nature of linguistic prejudice. And they will help reveal the sources of social innovation and the motivations of the innovators. The questions of what we as a society have in common, what things divide us, and where we are going are vital ones for any human society, and linguistic answers to these questions should be a very useful source of insight.

The significance of class for linguistics is rooted in the fundamentally social nature of language: language exists so that people can communicate, not for private, individual pursuits. So language is quintessentially a social product and a social tool, and our understanding of any tool will be immeasurably enhanced by a knowledge of its makers and users and uses. If class is one of the main organizing dimensions of society, then this fact should be reflected in the evolution and utilization of language. And if the task of linguistics is to describe and explain language in all of its aspects, then the issue of class will loom large in a number of ways, as we shall see below.

3.1. Central problems

There are four central problems underlying current work on language and class. One of these, the definition of class, is specific to this field, and will be discussed at length in the next section. But the other three each reflect general problems for linguistics. They are: the description of language use,

the explanation of language change, and the construction of linguistic theory.

Class is involved in the description of language use for the most obvious of reasons: the existence of social variation in language. Linguists have not yet achieved even a minimal observational level of adequacy in respect of sociolinguistic variation, and class will be an important dimension in the organization and explanation of these facts. Class is involved in the study of language change because of the long-recognized link between social change and linguistic change. Many linguistic innovations can now be shown to have been socially motivated, to have originated in a particular class, and to have spread through society along predictable social lines. And class is relevant to the construction of linguistic theory because of the relevance of sociolinguistic variation to the definition of the object of study and the competence–performance distinction. The 'orderly heterogeneity' which appears in class variation in language use reveals a communicative competence which must be incorporated in our theoretical accounts. These three areas, each a central problem for modern linguistics, will be the focus of the last three sections of this chapter.

3.2. Defining class

One of the problems facing researchers dealing with these issues is the definition of class. While our social intuitions about differences in status and power may enable us to distinguish professionals from unskilled laborers, or white-collar workers from blue-collar, they are not adequate for empirical research. More objective definitions of the categories are required. While such definition is fundamental to our enterprise, it is hardly uncontroversial. A variety of approaches to the problem have been taken, using as measures of class such things as wealth, income, education, occupation, place of residence, and so on. We cannot hope to represent the full range of scholarly thinking on this subject, but let us briefly survey two major approaches.

3.2.1. Marxism and class conflict

One of the most influential thinkers on the subject of social class is of course Karl Marx (1906). Marx's theory of class and political economy is a rich and complex one, which we cannot hope to do justice to here, but no discussion of class and language would be complete without at least a brief consideration of some important points.

In Marx's view, the basic dynamic of human history is conflict between classes. Classes are groups of people who share common economic inter-

ests; that is, they are defined by their common role in the economic system, their 'relationship to the means of production.' In a capitalist economy, the principal class division is between those who own productive capital (the capitalists or bourgeoisie) and those who do not (mainly the workers). Capitalists can live off the earnings of their capital – profits, rents, interest – while workers can support themselves only by their own labor. The conflict between the two arises from exploitation: the capitalists' earnings constitute an expropriation of some of the value produced by the labor of workers.

The Marxist definition of class thus focusses on conflicting interests and differences in power, and not on status. The bourgeoisie do not constitute a class because they occupy some uniformly high position of status and esteem in society, but rather because of their common economic interests through the private ownership of capital, and their social and political power to maintain and defend those interests against the conflicting interests of the many who do not gain similar benefits from the system.

Although the basis of the class system is thus seen as economic, it has direct ramifications in the non-economic social 'superstructure,' including things such as public mores and standards, religion, and status. Generally these areas of public life will reflect the taste and ideology of the dominant classes. This is where the issue of language enters. While a given sound, sign, or syntactic structure clearly bears no intrinsic relationship to class or the organization of the economy, the *social evaluation* of language differences between people obviously depends directly on differences of power, status, and class. The clearest instance is in the notion of a 'standard.' The belief in the existence of some 'inherently good' variety of their language is one of the most deeply held tenets of public ideology in most Western countries. Yet a cursory inspection of the facts will reveal that these standard varieties are nothing more than the social dialect of the dominant classes.

Beyond the fundamental class division in Marxist thought between owners and workers, other important distinctions are made which will be relevant in interpreting sociolinguistic differentiation. One is that people's conditions of work deeply affect their ideology and social outlook. 'Conditions of work' refers to such things as whether one works in isolation or as part of a group, whether one is relatively autonomous or closely supervised, and whether one's daily work routine is fixed and regimented or varied and flexible. In the Marxist view, industrial workers in modern factories are at an extreme on all of these counts: they work together with hundreds of others, following a rigidly prescribed and closely supervised routine. These life experiences should engender class consciousness and an ideology of solidarity and cooperation. But the same cannot be said of certain other groups who are neither capitalists nor industrial workers: managers, professionals, clerical workers – the groups that are commonly called the 'middle class.'[1] These groups benefit more from the system as it is, have more autonomy and flexibility at work, and work in relative isolation. Hence they value an ideology of individualism, and are politically more conservative.

How does such a view of class relate to language? Many of the findings and debates of sociolinguistics are illuminated by these concepts, as we will see below. An example is the very existence of social dialects. These are not an *a priori* given of linguistics; in fact, Chomsky and many others assume that the development of linguistic theory can proceed as if they do not exist. But sociolinguistic studies reveal them wherever we look. This needs explanation. From a Marxist viewpoint the existence of class dialects is a consequence of the divisions and conflicts between classes. Social barriers and social distance give rise to class differences in language in the same way that geographic barriers and spatial distance generate geographic dialects.

Other problems which the Marxist view of class illuminates are the social motivation of linguistic change, the continued existence of nonstandard forms, and the unity or disunity of the speech community. Generally, the important aspect of this theory for linguistics is the emphasis on class interests and class conflict. It sometimes provides a more coherent explanation of language phenomena arising from social division than the alternative definitions of class, to be discussed below, which tend to emphasize social unity.

3.2.2. Class and status

The major alternative to a Marxist definition of class focusses on social unity and status more than on conflict and power. This view sees class as a relatively continuous scale on which individuals are ranked according to assorted personal characteristics such as level of education, income, occupation, etc., which collectively imply a certain degree of social esteem. Since the one status hierarchy encompasses all of society, this viewpoint emphasizes social unity, implying that all groups share common social evaluations in terms of prestige and behavioral norms, and perhaps even common goals and aspirations, in the sense that everyone knows what it means to get ahead (principally to make more money) and how one is supposed to go about doing so (work hard, save money, etc.). Class conflicts are minimized, individual competition is emphasized. The distribution of socially symbolic characteristics such as sociolinguistic variables should, from this standpoint, be relatively gradient, finely stratified, without the sharp breaks in the social fabric that Marx perceives.

[1] In a Marxist analysis an important distinction would be made between 'white-collar' workers and the petty bourgeoisie, or small capitalists (shopkeepers and small businessmen), although both would probably be lumped together as 'middle class' on the status scales discussed here.

This approach is common in Western sociology, and has been a major influence in sociolinguistics. Methodologically it has one clear attraction: it facilitates the development of objective, quantifiable measures of social class, and allows us to rank everyone in an empirical study on such a scale. Such methods were first introduced in linguistics (as far as I am aware) by Labov in his classic pioneering study of the '*Social stratification of English in New York City*' (*SSENYC*, 1966).

In this work Labov relies extensively on the class rankings developed by Michael (1962) for a sociological survey called the 'Mobilization for Youth' (MFY), which was conducted in the same area that Labov studied about one year before he began his research. Labov and Michael thoroughly discuss the problem of defining social class, and emphasize the importance of using criteria based on production rather than consumption. But most of Labov's linguistic analysis utilizes Michael's linear scale of social rank – a hierarchy of status rather than a dichotomy of power and interest: 'most of the approaches which we will attempt will involve the matching of linguistic variables against a linear social ranking' (1966: 208). As the title of the work states, *SSENYC* deals with SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: the fine-scale linguistic layering of people along the 'linear social' scale which in this book is usually termed 'socioeconomic class' (SEC).[2]

SEC is quantified by Labov on the MFY scale by means of 'a ten-point socioeconomic index' which combines 'three objective characteristics – occupation, education, and family income – into a single linear scale' (1966: 171). Each individual studied was classified into one of four ranks on each of the three dimensions mentioned. Thus on the education scale a person is at step 0 if he or she completed only primary school, step 1 for part of high school, step 2 for completing high school, and step 3 for any college-level education. The individual's SEC score is simply the sum of the rankings on the occupation, education, and income scales. SEC can thus range from a low of 0, for those who rank at the bottom of all three scales, to a high of 9, for those with the highest rankings in occupation, education, and income.

Labov does not always attempt to discriminate all ten points of this index in his analysis of the linguistic data in *SSENYC*. Classes 7 and 8 are usually combined (due to the paucity of informants in class 8), and various other combinations are used, according to whether they illuminate or obscure aspects of the overall structure of the data. The most common groupings used are 0–1, sometimes labeled 'lower class'; 2–5, labeled 'working class'; 6–8, labeled 'lower middle class'; and 9, the 'upper middle class.' Furthermore, he also uses another 4-point scale called 'social class' (SC, contrasting with the 10-point SEC), based only on education and occupation, and not income. For some purposes Labov contends that this organization of the data reveals regularities that the finer scale obscures. To some extent this kind of redefinition of the groupings from figure to figure can be criticized as forcing a desired result from the data, but in the main it represents an admirable attempt to explore the major social correlates of linguistic variation.

[2] A common variant used in other studies is SES – socioeconomic status.

For Labov, the question of whether class divisions are dichotomous or continuous is reducible to the empirical problem of fine versus sharp stratification:

> If we think of class as a rigid series of categories, in which the marginal cases are rare or insignificant, then a proof of class correlation with language would require equally discrete categories of linguistic behavior (in our terminology, *sharp stratification*). Language traits characteristic of Negro and white groups in the United States, for example, would [show this pattern]. If, on the other hand, we think of class as a continuous network of social and economic factors, in which every case is marginal to the next one, we would expect that language would also show a continuous range of values, and the number of intermediate points of correlation would be limited only by the consistency and reliability of the data (in our terminology, *fine stratification*). . . . It is clear that class and language relationships will be somewhere between these two extremes. . . . The cutting points where the linguistic evidence shows the greatest internal agreement will be indicated as the most natural divisions of the class continuum – to the extent that language is a measure of class behavior. (1966: 235–7)

In his quantitative analysis of the New York City data Labov finds both kinds of stratification: post-vocalic /r/, and the vocalic variables (eh) and (oh) show relatively fine stratification, while the interdental fricatives are fairly sharply stratified: stop articulations are overwhelmingly confined to the lower and lower-working classes. The interesting social difference between the two types of cases is that (r) and the vowel variables show evidence of being changes in progress, while the variation between stop and fricative articulations of (th) and (dh) is a long-standing one found in many English dialects. This correlation is an interesting one which finds some support in other studies as well: changes in progress in Norwich (Trudgill 1974: 104–10) and Australia (Guy *et al.* 1986: 37) also show relatively fine stratification.[3] If this is

[3] There are cases in the literature of stable sociolinguistic markers showing relatively fine stratification – see for example Trudgill's study of (-ing) and (t) (1974: 92–6). But what seems to be lacking are changes in progress showing relatively sharp stratification, although the fronting of the nucleus of (aw) in Philadelphia, reported in Labov 1980, may be an example of this. It might be necessary to distinguish between changes from above, such as NYC (r), and changes from below, as this could certainly influence the type of stratification which emerges.

a general pattern, it may shed some light on the nature of class relations. Newly emerging variables might separate people finely according to their social status, but when the dust settles after the long haul, sharp and fundamental class divisions emerge. The long-established form acquires a firm, even indexical, class identity, while the new form may be merely trendy.

Most sociolinguistic studies of the last two decades rely on some kind of scalar index like Labov's for their operational definition of social class. Labov himself has continued to use this kind of approach in his work in Philadelphia and elsewhere. Trudgill (1974) uses an even finer scale in Norwich: a 30-point composite of 6 separate scales (Labov's three plus locality, father's occupation, and housing). The scale used in Sydney by Horvath (1986) and Guy *et al.* (1986) is simpler, however, involving just a 3-point scale (MC, UWC, LWC) defined exclusively in terms of occupation, using, as is standard practice in such studies, a sociological scale of occupational prestige, in this case Congalton 1962. This is clearly the minimum scale for useful work on language and social class; a scale which distinguishes only two groups is to be avoided, as it will not address many of the important questions to be discussed below.

3.2.3. The linguistic marketplace

No matter what approach we use to define class, there is one way in which it does not correlate simply and directly with linguistic variation along the standard/nonstandard dimension. That is that people in certain occupations tend to use more standard varieties of language than other people at the same level of status, income, or education. The occupations in question are ones such as teacher, journalist, or receptionist, which involve two kinds of activities: projecting a public image, and linguistic socialization (promulgating norms). This has been clear in sociolinguistic studies since Labov's department store survey, which showed that behind-the-scenes employees like stockboys used far fewer prestige variants than employees who dealt with the public (1966: 63–89). Furthermore, the same study showed that speakers use of prestige variants also correlated with the prestige of the store they worked in, even among employees doing the same kind of job and earning about the same income! Facts like these suggest that the type of linguistic demands an individual faces at work may involve other factors beyond the ones we have used to define class.

Considerations such as these have led to the development by some scholars of a concept known as the *linguistic market*, which is operationalized by Sankoff and Laberge as 'an index which measures specifically how speakers' economic activity, taken in its widest sense, requires or is necessarily associated with competence in the legitimized [or] standard . . . language' (1978: 239). This index was a composite of the subjective rankings

which eight judges (all trained sociolinguists) assigned to speakers based on descriptions of their 'socioeconomic life histories.' While open to some criticism on methodological grounds,[4] this approach nonetheless represents an interesting attempt to modify the definition of social class so as to take into account these partly independent sociolinguistic requirements of occupation.

3.2.4. Defining class in nonindustrial economies

The studies we have cited so far deal with speech communities in advanced industrial countries, all characterized by similar capitalist economies and class systems in which the major actors are an urban working class, a professional/managerial/white-collar middle class, and a capitalist upper class. What about countries with different economies and class profiles? How is class to be defined there and what relationship does it have to language? These problems are not as well understood, but some relevant work has been done.

The social and economic structures of the nations of the 'third world' show several important differences from those that we have been considering. One is that most have a comparatively tiny industrial sector, and a proportionately much larger agricultural sector. Socially this means there is a large class of peasants and landless agricultural laborers (most with little or no formal education), and a relatively small industrial working class. It also means that until quite recently most of the population has lived in the countryside. In the last two decades many third world countries have undergone explosive urbanization, but there is still a much larger fraction of the population living on the land than in the USA or Europe.

Linguistically these facts have a number of implications. In the first place, the number of 'nonstandard' speakers is vast, typically constituting a large majority of the population. Second, urbanization is bringing together people who speak many different dialects (or even different languages), creating a linguistic cauldron unparalleled in the industrial world. Thirdly, the extremes of class (wealth and poverty) and the ethnic diversity of many areas means that the range of sociolinguistic variation (the degree of difference between standard and nonstandard varieties) is much greater than we are accustomed to working with in the more homogeneous industrial nations.

These facts challenge some of our fundamental sociolinguistic notions. For example, based on his work in the USA, Labov defines the speech

[4] For example, the descriptions of speakers' life histories, on which judges based their evaluations of a speaker's standing in the linguistic market, were not strictly comparable across speakers, and could conceivably have been written so as to bias the judges' rankings.

community partly in terms of shared linguistic norms. If we look at cities like São Paulo, Lagos, or Jakarta, where perhaps a majority of the present population was born elsewhere, and many may not even speak the official language, let alone the standard dialect, it seems unlikely that they will constitute speech communities in the same sense as New York City. Like the community as a whole, the social classes might be expected to be less cohesive, because of these pronounced ethnic and regional divisions.

Another challenge is to our theories of language change. As we shall see in section 3.4, Labov, Kroch, and others emphasize the role of the working class in linguistic innovation in industrial countries. Is this also true in nations where industrial workers are a tiny minority of the population? Studies of sociolinguistic variation in the third world suggest a somewhat different picture. For example, research in Rio de Janeiro (Guy 1981) and Brasilia (Bortoni-Ricardo 1985) suggest that the main ongoing change for working class speakers is one of increasing standardization: they are becoming more like the dominant social groups rather than innovating and moving away from them. Bortoni-Ricardo demonstrates that this results from urbanization; rural immigrants to Brasilia acquire more and more features of the urban standard the longer they are there. This would seem to be a general consequence of the early stages of industrialization, urbanization, and improved education, all of which should have standardizing effects. But other studies reveal that standardization is not the only kind of change occurring. Cedergren's data (1972) on the lenition of /tʃ/ in Panama show a change that has moved away from the historic norm, beginning in the working class and lower middle class – the type of class distribution that Labov considers typical of change in progress.

One overriding aspect of the social history of most of the third world which has had great impact on class and language is colonialism. The language problems of newly independent, mostly multilingual countries have received a great deal of attention from linguists (Fishman, Ferguson & Das Gupta 1968), and class issues are inherent in these problems.

Under colonial regimes the 'ruling classes' in these countries were foreigners, who spoke a language unrelated to those of the indigenous peoples. These colonialists drew national boundaries at their own convenience, creating multilingual states, in which all administrative, legal, and educational functions were normally carried out in the European language of the rulers. Among the virtues of this arrangement was that it centralized power in the hands of this social and linguistic elite, and excluded the other classes from access to even the most elementary tools of political debate and institutional change: a common language, literacy, education, etc. Interestingly, after independence this situation was often maintained, in that the emerging indigenous elite adopted the language of the ex-colonial power and maintained it in most of its previous social functions. In class terms the colonial language serves the same exclusive purpose for the domestic dominant class as it did for the foreign one. As long as organizing and governing is seen to demand fluency in a foreign language such as French or English, how can mere peasants and workers hope to achieve even a modicum of political power?

3.2.5. Pidgins, creoles, and class

One area in which all of these issues come together is the study of pidgin and creole languages. The very existence of such languages is derived from class conflict and the capitalist economy: most arose from the enslavement of African or Melanesian peasants by European capitalists to produce sugar and other crops for the markets of an industrializing Europe. Slave societies started out as multilingual and multiethnic communities *par excellence*, in which a 'standard language' and the development of a speech community were imposed by force. Modern societies with this history still exhibit the most extreme kind of sociolinguistic variation: the post-creole continuum.

As for the social origins of change, in their formative days such languages were changing at a phenomenal rate, and most of the changes originated with the slaves, who constituted the working class in these communities. But from the standpoint of the speakers, the general direction of change has been towards the European standard, which makes it a kind of targeted change in which the highest status 'acrolectal' speakers are in the lead.

One scholar in this field whose work has led to substantial insights into the problem of language and class is Rickford. In his work on Guyanese creole, particularly in the village of Canewalk (1979, 1986), he has pointed out the inherent limitations of the multiscale index approaches to social class, and emphasized the necessity of 'emic' (i.e. locally meaningful) definitions of class. In a small Guyanese village like Canewalk the classificatory scales of occupational status, education, and income that were discussed above are basically irrelevant; if applied unaltered they would probably put everyone together in one of the lowest categories. But this does not mean that local class distinctions do not exist. On the contrary, Rickford demonstrates that people in Canewalk have a lively awareness of class distinctions, and identify two principal local groups, which he calls the Estate Class (EC), who are mostly cane-cutters on the local sugar plantation or 'estate,' and the non-Estate Class (NEC) made up of shop-owners and tradesmen of the village, plus the estate's foremen and drivers.

Membership in these classes is thus defined in part by income, occupation, and so on, but also by rather dramatic differences in social attitudes

and ideology. One instance is their views of standard language: the NEC views language in a normative way, believing that use of standard English helps one get ahead, while the EC members 'see the assigned value of English as just another aspect of ruling class ideology' (1986: 218), which is irrelevant to self advancement since the system is stacked against them in any case.

These class differences are dramatically reflected in linguistic usage. For example, the two groups show virtually non-overlapping distributions in their use of acrolectal (standard English) varieties of personal pronouns. Overall, EC speakers use only 18% of such pronouns, while the NEC uses 83%. If we view this in stratificational terms, as a community with shared norms but different levels of prestige or achievement, we would obscure the fundamental conflict of goals and interests which obtain in this community.

Findings of this nature lead Rickford to call for increased attention in sociolinguistics to conflict models of class such as those of Marx and Weber. The issue is more than just a distinction between 'fine' and 'sharp' stratification; the whole assumption of fundamental unity and shared norms in a speech community is questioned by the fact of class differences in ideology, especially their ideology of language.

3.2.6. Class and other social dimensions

Another challenge that confronts us in defining class is the interaction between this and other social dimensions, such as race, ethnicity, and sex. Class involves differences in prestige and power. If men and women, or blacks and whites, are differentiated by prestige and power by virtue of their sex or race, then separating these effects may be difficult.

A number of studies now exist showing that men and women at the same social class level do not necessarily behave linguistically in parallel ways. For example, in Guy *et al*. 1986, which describes the social distribution of an intonational change, there is a sharp split between men and women in the lower working class (illustrated in Figure 2, see below, p. 59). Women at this level show the highest rate of use of this innovation, higher than any other portion of the sample population, while their male counterparts show a very low rate of use – not only less usage than any of the female groups, but also substantially less than upper working class men.

Just assigning a class ranking may require different procedures for men and women. The criteria used in an index scale – occupation, income, education, etc. – would often assign very different class levels to husband and wife in the same family, if applied individually. It would not be the least unusual to find a doctor at the top of all three scales whose wife had only a moderate level of education and had no occupation or income outside of the

home (which in these scales is usually taken as no occupation or income at all). The normal solution to this problem is to assign the class ranking of the head of the family (usually the husband) to all members of the family, including spouse and children. So for many married women, their class ranking on one of these scales does not depend on their individual achievements, but instead is a family attribute. Defining the class of two-income families, or of women who enter and leave the labor force repeatedly due to childbearing, is still more complicated. In any case it is clear that class and sex cannot be treated as entirely orthogonal social dimensions.

Similar problems arise in connection with race and ethnicity. Where racism and prejudice exist, the power and status of an individual may depend more on color or nationality than on personal achievements. In fact, one's occupational and educational prospects may be greatly circumscribed by race. In the United States, as in many Western countries, the class distribution of races is markedly skewed: blacks are far more likely to be found at the bottom of the scale. And linguistically, many Afro-Americans are set clearly apart from surrounding white communities by the way they talk. So to try to treat race and class as independent phenomena clearly misses some fundamental truths, as well as some obvious historical facts. Under slavery Africans were forcibly assigned a position at the very bottom of society by virtue of their race, regardless of individual characteristics, and this situation continues, at least in part, because of ongoing racism. The linguistic differences, the existence of Black English, reflect this history.

3.3. Class and language use: current trends

One of the principal concerns of sociolinguistics over the past decades has been describing language in use. The study of sociolinguistic variation is essentially the description of the differential use of language by different social groups – particularly social classes. A number of important concepts and findings have emerged from this work on class and the use of language which now form part of the basic currency of the discipline. Accordingly we will begin this section with a rapid survey of some of these basic notions.

One of the most fundamental is the concept of the *speech community*. This is the basic unit or object of study for a linguistics that is cognizant of the social setting of language. It has been given many different definitions by linguists going back to Bloomfield 1933 and beyond, but these generally converge on two main defining characteristics: density of communication and shared norms. By *density of communication* is meant simply that members of a speech community talk more to each other than they do to outsiders; the boundaries of communities will normally fall at troughs in the pattern of communication. This is a commonplace observation in dialect

geography: mountain ranges, dense forests, and other barriers to communication are often the boundaries of dialect regions.

The other, equally important, criterion – *shared norms* – refers to a common set of evaluative judgements, a community-wide knowledge of what is considered good or bad and what is appropriate for what kind of (socially defined) occasion. Such norms may exist for all aspects of social behavior, but our interest of course is in linguistic norms.

One reason that shared norms form part of the definition of the speech community is that they are required to account for one of the principal sociolinguistic findings regarding variation by class and style, namely that the same linguistic variables are involved in the differentiation of social classes and speech styles. Study after study has shown that variables stratified by class are also the object of *style shifting*: a variant favored by high status speakers is used more by everyone in the community in their careful styles. These points are illustrated in Figure 1, showing Labov's data on the pronunciation of post-vocalic /r/ in New York City (1966: 240). A consonantal realization of this variable is used more by the higher classes, and by all classes in their more formal styles. (The (r) index equals the percentage of consonantal pronunciations, and the class groups are defined according to the SEC scale explained above, p. 42.)

How can we account for this uniformity of behavior except by some community-wide interpretation of the social meaning of this variable, a shared norm? In this case the norm assigns high status to consonantal pronunciations of (r). This has consequences in two dimensions at once: high status people talk this way all the time, and all strive to talk this way when they are on their 'best linguistic behavior.' Of course this means that a given level of consonantal pronunciation of (r) does not equate directly to a speaker's class; some lower class (SEC 1) speakers use this variant about as

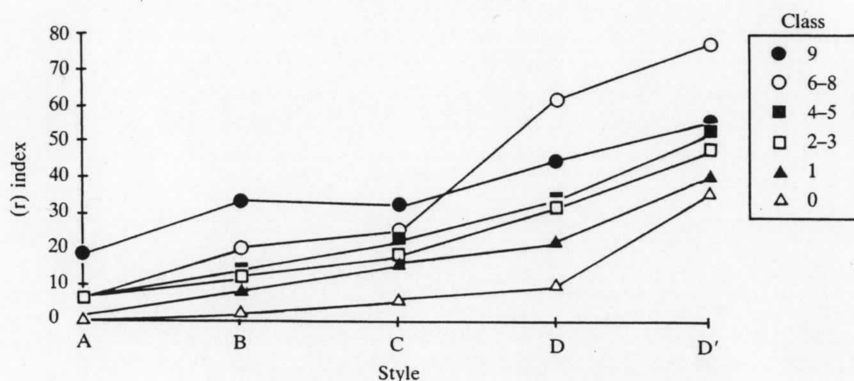

Figure 1. Class stratification of (r) in NYC (after Labov 1966).

much in reading wordlists as the upper middle class (SEC 9) does in casual speech.

The pronunciation of (r) is thus a *social marker* for this community: an arbitrarily defined feature of language that indicates something about the social status of speakers and the situational context in which they are speaking. Knowledge of these social facts marks membership of the speech community; the social significance of a New Yorker's pronunciation would be totally lost on Chicagoans (although they might be able to locate it geographically).

But one question arises immediately: if everyone in the community knows the norm, knows the high-prestige forms and can use them in style shifting, why don't they all adopt them completely, and thus acquire for themselves the implied cachet of status? This harks back to the problem of social unity versus social conflict we discussed in connection with defining class. A linguistic norm is a unifying feature of a community: everyone knows it and knowing it sets insiders apart from outsiders. But even though everyone may know what the high-status variants are, it is not necessarily true that all would want to adopt them in their everyday speech. For working class people with no expectation of achieving higher social status, the use of such variants may be considered snobbish, effete, and an act of hostility to one's family, friends, and neighbors. A number of studies have shown that subjective reactions to sociolinguistic variables are thus differentiated by class, and involve more than just a single scale of prestige (e.g. Labov 1972b; Guy & Vonwiller 1984).

Labov (1972a: 249) makes a distinction between overt and covert norms. The high-status variants we have referred to possess *overt prestige*: they are associated with the undeniable social power of upper class speakers, may be required for higher-status jobs and upward mobility, and are promulgated by the agents of standardization in society, such as the mass media and school teachers. But for many working class or lower middle class speakers, the 'nonstandard' linguistic variables associated with their groups may also possess *covert prestige*. The basic social significance of these covertly prestigious variables is one of solidarity: a person who uses them is considered to belong, to be 'one of the boys,' to be suitable as a friend, etc. Also for certain groups these forms may signify toughness or masculinity: nonstandard speakers were considered more likely to win a street fight by respondents in Labov 1972b.

Emphasizing the unifying norms that appeal to overt prestige may thus obscure important conflicts in the speech community. The fact that nonstandard speakers have not historically rushed to adopt the dominant linguistic norms shows that these do not have the same force for all classes, and that different classes may have different social and linguistic goals.

The kind of systematic patterning of linguistic usage that we have seen in Figure 1 is also an example of another important finding of sociolinguistics, which Labov has termed *orderly heterogeneity*. Viewed from the standpoint of an asocial and categorical linguistics, these data would constitute nothing but messy alternation between two realizations of a single systematic unit – /r/. No rule could be given predicting which variant would be used when, so the best one could do would be to call such cases 'free variation' or 'optional rules,' and leave them alone. But it is clear from the figure that the variation is highly structured and systematic, albeit in a quantitative, probabilistic way. Different classes and different styles are finely differentiated, and bear stable, uniform relationships to one another. These facts can be discerned only by systematic study of the community, and of language in use, and would seem to form part of the linguistic competence of each speaker. The implications of this for linguistic theory, for the competence/performance distinction and so on, will be discussed in section 3.5.

3.3.1. Stratification studies

What may be considered the 'mainstream' of work dealing with language and class are the studies that look at the social stratification of particular speech communities. The classic, seminal work of this type is Labov's monumental study of New York City (1966). This work is far too multifaceted for us to do it justice here. As can be gathered from the foregoing discussion, Labov pioneers in it many of methods that are now considered fundamental in this field, and discovers or defines many basic concepts and findings. We have already discussed a number of these issues, so for the moment we will confine ourselves to two further points regarding class differentiation of English in New York City, referring again to Figure 1.

The first point is that 'stratification' is an apt term for the pattern. Distinguishing 6 class groups here, we find that they maintain discrete non-overlapping levels of (r) use across all but the most casual speech styles. Only in style A is there convergence, and even here 3 discrete levels can be distinguished. This implies a remarkable fine tuning in people's linguistic behavior, an extraordinary sensitivity to the self-identifying social symbolism inherent in the pronunciation of this variable, and the contextual constraints of different speech situations.

The second point about this graph is the one deviation from regular ordering of the groups: the crossover by the second highest group in the most formal styles. Labov has termed this 'hypercorrection by the lower middle class' (1972a: 122ff.), and demonstrates that it is associated with a high level of linguistic insecurity. These are people who aspire to social

and linguistic upward mobility, are very conscious of their own linguistic 'shortcomings' (in terms of use of prestige variants), and overdo their attempts to remedy them. Such a pattern is often repeated in this and other studies.

Since *SSENYC*, Labov has gone on to do a number of other studies bearing on the question of language and social class. His work in Harlem on Black English (Labov *et al.* 1968, Labov 1969, 1972b) explores questions of class, status and race. His work on sound change (Labov, Yaeger & Steiner 1972, Labov 1980, 1981) illuminates the role of class in language change, as will be discussed below. And his long-term study of the Philadelphia speech community has revealed important new insights into internal divisions in the speech community, social networks, and the interaction between class and sex and race. A number of works (including several already cited) by Labov and his associates and students draw on this research, but the definitive work has yet to appear.

Since Labov's pioneering work, many stratification studies of other speech communities have been carried out by other linguists. We have space here to cite only a few of the most significant in regard to language and class. One of these is Trudgill's 1974 study of Norwich, which, as we have seen, incorporates a very fine measure of class. It also looks at several different neighborhoods, and so explores the interaction between class and residence patterns. Another major study is the one of Montreal French, undertaken by G. Sankoff, D. Sankoff, Cedergren, and a number of associates (G. Sankoff & Cedergren 1971, D. Sankoff & Laberge 1978, G. Sankoff, Kemp & Cedergren 1980). This is important for being one of the first in-depth studies of a language other than English, and for examining what was historically the low-status language in a bilingual country. Significantly for the development of sociolinguistic theory, this work confirms the major findings we have cited above, such as orderly heterogeneity, style shifting, etc., despite the different social and linguistic history of this community. Further work of similar significance is being conducted by Poplack in Ottawa (to appear).

The work of Horvath and her associates in Sydney breaks important new ground in dealing with problems of class, ethnicity, and nonnative speakers (Guy *et al.* 1986, Horvath 1986). It includes a large corpus of recent (first and second generation) immigrants and examines their linguistic impact on the sociolinguistic structure of the community.

Moving out of the industrialized world, we have already had occasion to mention the significant work done by Cedergren in Panama and Rickford in Guyana, both of which shed new light on the class situation in those countries. Other work of importance in the third world includes a number of

studies in Brazil (Lemle & Naro 1977, Scherre 1978, Guy 1981, Naro 1981, De Oliveira 1982), Modaressi's work in Teheran (1978), and a number of studies of creole speaking communities (e.g. Bailey 1966, Bickerton 1975).

3.3.2. Network studies

A somewhat different approach to the problem of language and social groups is found in a body of studies focussing on personal networks. Labov used this approach with adolescent peer groups in Harlem (Labov *et al.* 1968), and has continued to use it in studying adult networks in Philadelphia, especially interracial ones. The method has been particularly emphasized by Milroy (1980) in her work in Belfast. At first glance these works might seem in opposition to the class approach to sociolinguistic differences, in that they emphasize the uniqueness of each individual's life experiences and contacts. But I would suggest that in fact the difference is merely one of scale. Network studies are microsociological in focus, while class studies are macroscopic. Across a class there are incontrovertible similarities in economic circumstances and linguistic behavior, but within it there are individual differences in experience and activity which, if properly described, may lead to important new insights into social processes in language, especially the process of linguistic change.

3.3.3. Bernstein

One scholar who has had a great deal to say about language and class is Bernstein (1964, 1971), who is also one of the most controversial figures in this field. He attempts to account for the linguistic differences between social classes in terms of his concept of 'code,' which encompasses many features of language but is essentially a kind of semantic and pragmatic style. There is an 'elaborated code,' relatively independent of context and social roles and relatively explicit, and a 'restricted code,' which is high in context dependency and leaves more meaning implicit in social relationships and situation. The basic difference Bernstein sees between social classes is the range of codes they command: working class people, he thinks, tend to be confined to the restricted code, whereas middle class speakers are also versatile in using an elaborated code. Since the elaborated code is required for writing (because of its decontextualized nature), and since it is also the variety preferred by the schools, working class children start out in these arenas at an inherent disadvantage, which might explain their relative lack of success in school, and in subsequent social advancement.

This theory has proven to be open in a number of ways to both misuse by its supporters and criticism by its detractors. Misuse of the theory often

begins by equating elaborated with 'good' and restricted with 'bad,' and by losing track of the distinction between what people do and what they can do. From there it is a short step to labeling working class people linguistically and intellectually deficient, incapable of an elaborated code, and perhaps incapable also of the logical and rhetorical clarity of thought which is presumed to require the elaborated code for its expression. Such propositions are rejected by Bernstein himself, but they are not uncommon in work inspired by his ideas (for a survey see Dittmar 1976, Chapters 1–3).

Criticism of Bernstein follows several lines. First, he appears to accord a rather exalted status to the social consequences of linguistic differences. It seems a perverse logic to imply that the class system is maintained by code differences between speakers; the reverse is far more plausible. Secondly, the theory overlooks the importance of class conflict in linguistic differentiation. Bernstein implies that the restricted code of the working class arises from the role-oriented social psychology and family relationships he assumes characterize working class people. But as we have seen, language attitude studies show evidence (such as covert prestige, the solidarity semantic of working class linguistic markers) suggestive of class conflict, which would provide a far simpler, more straightforward explanation of class differences in language. Finally, the whole theory is essentially based on a middle class ideology. Learning the elaborated code is portrayed as the ticket out of the working class. This depends on two patronizing and erroneous assumptions: first, that everyone in their right mind would want to move out of the working class, if they could; and second, that individual action is the way to achieve this. The first is contradicted by a mass of evidence showing that most people have a strong allegiance to their network, neighborhood, and class, and the second is disputed by the historical fact that the lot of workers has mainly been improved by collective action (strikes, unions, political parties and campaigns). So in conclusion, although Bernstein has been an influential thinker on language and class, his motives and methods have been questioned by many scholars in the field.

3.4. Class and language change

One of the most important areas in class and language studies is the description and explanation of linguistic change. Some of the oldest questions in linguistics are how and why languages change, and the best answers often come from outside a language, from the social history of its speakers. The history of English cannot be understood without reference to the Norman Conquest, nor the genesis of creoles without reference to slavery. Thus in so far as class is an issue in social change, it is an issue for historical linguistics.

In linguistic theory, twentieth-century scholars have generally separated

historical questions from the problem of synchronic description and explanation. Following Saussure, the synchronic and diachronic perspectives have been considered diametrically opposed. While this division has led to great advances in our understanding of language, it leaves unresolved the problem of integration. Most of our synchronic theories are structural and static, and not very compatible with what we know about language change. If we conceive of language structurally, as an edifice built of phonemes and lexemes, features and rules, it is hard to see how and why it could change. Buildings do not evolve into other buildings, but languages change all the time, primarily because of changing social conditions within their communities of speakers. In order to heal the Saussurean division of our discipline and construct a dynamic or organic theory of language accommodating both structure and change, we must address issues of social class and sociolinguistic variation.

3.4.1. Change in progress

Broadly speaking, social change seems to give rise to language change. But the details of this historical interplay between language and society are not fully understood. One reason for this is that traditionally historical linguistics has been concerned more with the broad sweep of linguistic evolution across the centuries, rather than with studying the social spread of particular innovations. Indeed the latter is nearly impossible to do given the usual limited data of historical linguistics: a small selection of written documents surviving from earlier periods. To adequately trace the social origins and motivations of linguistic innovation requires looking at change *in progress*, preferably in an environment where our access to data is, at least in principle, unlimited. Thus such studies are ideally done on the language of the present, using spoken data gathered from the community around us, rather than on earlier stages of the language using written materials. Until this century such research was difficult or impossible, but with the invention of sound recording devices, and modern developments in sociolinguistic survey methodology, we are now in a position to address these questions empirically.

The essential questions are: 'Which social groups originate changes?' and 'What is their motivation for doing so?' The first question presupposes one fact which should perhaps be made explicit: namely that innovations are not adopted uniformly and simultaneously across society; rather, some groups are innovators or early adopters, while others lag behind. This clearly means that linguistic change involves social variation: at a given point in time in the course of a change there will be some members of the

speech community using the new form and some using the old form.[5] In fact, it is likely that many individuals will vary in their usage, alternating between old and new forms, perhaps influenced by audience, social context, etc.

Given these facts, who are the innovators? Most answers to this question have been phrased in terms of social class. One idea that received a certain currency was that members of the dominant class originate innovations, motivated by an elitist desire to set themselves apart from the masses (the 'flight of the elite'). Such changes would spread because people with the highest status are the ones that others are most likely to emulate. This theory may account for some historical changes, such as the spread of innovations from dominant social centers in medieval European languages (e.g. the spread of Parisian French – the language of the French court – across France). But in modern sociolinguistic work one striking fact emerges: not a single case has been recorded of untargeted innovation originating in the highest social class! Those few cases identified in the literature of changes in progress starting at the top all involve the borrowing of some external prestige norm, i.e. *targeted change*. An example of such a targeted change introduced from the top is the consonantal pronunciation of post-vocalic /r/ of New York City, discussed above, which is being imported into NYC English from the socially dominant 'General American' dialect. The agents of this change are the upper classes. The important thing to notice is that this 'innovation' does not bring anything new into the language, but just involves dialectal redistribution of variants.

Untargeted changes, on the other hand, internally developed and not borrowed, do bring in something completely new, and tend to originate among the working class. Accounting for them has been a major concern of linguistics throughout its history. Modern studies of change in progress appeal mainly to social class dynamics as the driving force of such innovation. Two main theories have been proposed, one focussing on active innovation and the other on resistance to change.

The first of these theories is Labov's, developed in a number of works (1966, 1974, 1980, 1981, Labov, Yaeger & Steiner 1972). He calls this 'change from below the level of conscious awareness,' and in a series of studies of changes in progress has found a social class distribution that he believes characterizes this type of innovation. This is the *curvilinear pattern*, in which the innovation peaks in the 'interior' groups (the working class or lower middle class), and falls off at either extreme. These interior groups

[5] Of course it should be emphasized that sociolinguistic variation does NOT necessarily imply change in progress. Many stable sociolinguistic variables appear to have persisted in certain languages for generations without one form winning out over the other.

are the innovators, and in Labov's view they have a positive social motivation to innovate, which is group solidarity or 'local identity.' As a sociosymbolic device, a marker of belonging to their locality, their community, perhaps their class, emerging distinctive characteristics of their local dialect are favorably evaluated and adopted and extended by these groups. The changes serve a positive function of contrastive self-identification: members of the group have them, and outsiders are marked by their absence.

We might ask why just these groups are so motivated; why don't other classes innovate to mark their identity? In his early work Labov allows such a possibility, but from his Philadelphia studies a more precise account has emerged: the interior groups lead because they are the ones for whom this local solidarity is strongest. The lowest class (the chronically unemployed, the homeless, etc.) have little or no local ties or group allegiance, and the highest classes do not depend on locality or group for their identity, but move in national or international circles.[6] We might note that although Labov does not use these terms, this interpretation is in tune with the Marxist concept of class ideology: the solidary, cooperative ideology of the working class versus the competitive, individualistic ideology of other classes.

The other principal theory of class and language change has been articulated by Anthony Kroch (1978). Whereas Labov focusses on the question of why some people are motivated to innovate, Kroch asks why others RESIST innovation. He suggests that change is the natural condition of language, but that some social groups avoid or suppress innovation. The motivation for this linguistic conservatism is the same as for political conservatism: a favorable position in the existing *status quo*. In other words, linguistic change should correlate directly with position in the class hierarchy, generally beginning at the bottom and being adopted only late, or never, at the top. This theory also has an interpretation in Marxist terms. The conservatism of dominant groups stems from a need to defend their favorable position against democratic demands, and in so far as their conservative standards for language use are publicly accepted, their social status and power will be enhanced by their possession of this 'social capital.'

The one substantial difference in these theories is in their predictions about what should happen at the lower end of the class hierarchy. In Labov's view, as we have seen, the lower class lags in sound change, but according to Kroch these people have the least investment in the *status quo* and should innovate freely, probably even more so than the working class. These are empirically testable claims: what do the facts show? In fact they show both patterns. A number of studies cited by Kroch show a simple

[6] This account arises primarily from the network and neighborhood studies in Philadelphia cited previously, and is in part my own interpretation based on personal communications.

linear pattern with peak use of a new form at the bottom, whereas Labov relies on another, quite substantial, body of work showing his curvilinear pattern. How can we resolve this contradiction?

The answer appears to lie in the difference in focus of the two theories. They are looking at different sides of the innovation issue, Labov asking what motivates people to innovate, and Kroch asking what motivates them to resist an innovation. So the two theories are not inherently contradictory, but rather complementary. The study of intonational change in Australian English, mentioned above (Guy *et al.* 1986), makes this point clearly. The social class distribution of this innovation, reproduced here as Figure 2, shows both the curvilinear and the linear pattern separated by sex. Both men and women show higher use in the working class than in the middle class, but in the lowest class the men slope down while the women go even higher. Subjective reaction studies in this community also show that the innovation in question has both kinds of social significance: it is perceived as being unsuitable for high-status occupations – the negative evaluation accorded the innovation by the dominant classes, but simultaneously given favorable rankings on solidarity scales such as friendliness – the positive symbolism of the 'interior' groups.

This suggests a synthesis of the theories of Labov and Kroch, in which conflicts over the sociosymbolic significance of linguistic innovations are seen as a consequence of the conflicting interests of different social classes. The working class (broadly defined to include the lower-paid and lower-status levels of the middle class such as secretaries, clerical workers, bookkeepers, etc.) are the basic source of untargeted innovations, and for many of them these new forms will acquire a positive symbolic value as markers of

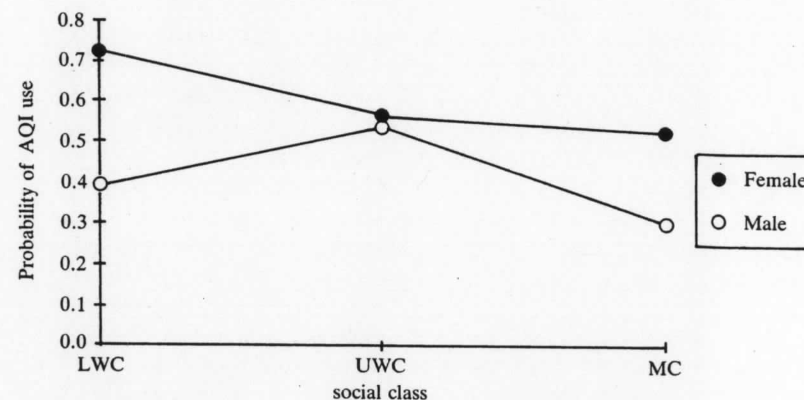

Figure 2. Australian questioning intonation by class and sex. (Guy *et al.* 1986)

group solidarity. Higher-status groups however, not belonging to the working class and wishing to defend their social position, will naturally resist and denigrate such innovations. The ultimate outcome for any particular change will depend on the balance of these social forces. In the end this comes down to a common sense view of social change. In our own everyday experiences no doubt we have all encountered situations where some people attach themselves to an innovation and actively promulgate it, while others, perhaps with something to lose, resist the change. While perhaps greatly simplified, this would seem to be a basic dialectic of human societies.

3.5. Class and linguistic theory

Class differentiation of language is ultimately of great importance for linguistic theory. It is true, of course, that much of modern linguistic thought has disputed this position, taking as its object of study a hypothetical object wildly at odds with linguistic reality. As Chomsky formulates it: 'linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker–listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly . . .' (1965: 3) But if we wish to achieve even a minimal level of adequacy for our theories, it is necessary to move beyond this imaginary monostylistic idiolect and confront the problem of sociolinguistic variation. There are three principal areas where this will be an issue for linguistic theory. First, there is the form of the grammar, which should be designed so as to accommodate systematic lectal differences. Second, there is the problem of variation in meaning. And finally, there is the fundamental distinction between *langue* and *parole*, or competence and performance, which is called into question by some of the basic findings of sociolinguistics.

One of the basic concerns of modern linguistics is writing grammars. A grammar is supposed to be a formal account of the structure and workings of some language. An adequate grammar must address the question of the scope of its object of description, the language, in that it will have to define the limits of the language community it is attempting to account for, and to accommodate, at least some kinds of social differences in language. We cannot write a grammar of English unless we are prepared to say what is and is not English, or perhaps what is only partly English, and to account for the linguistic differences which this great abstraction encompasses.

Studies of language and social class help us to do this in several ways. First, they help delimit the language by identifying speech communities, dialects and sociolects. An instance is the behavior of different social classes within one speech community that we have considered above. While these classes may differ linguistically in many respects, they do so in an orderly,

systematic fashion, all sharing the same norms for language use, and all shifting the same way in more formal contexts. Findings such as these are vital for the task of identifying the unity of a language from among the enormous diversity of dialects (and idiolects?) that we find in the world. If a group of lects displays this kind of 'orderly heterogeneity,' if a group of speakers displays this kind of common attitudes to language use, in a way that other lects and speakers do not, then we have begun to identify the limits of what our grammar must account for.

Furthermore, the very form of the grammar should be partly determined by the nature of such variation. As an example, suppose that we had two competing theories of the syntax and semantics of negation in English, both of which adequately account for the common intuitions of their upper middle class authors, who only use single negation. Suppose further that one of these theories fails completely if applied to structures involving multiple negation (perhaps because it assumes that multiple negatives cancel each other out, as in symbolic logic), while the other theory, via some simple alternative setting of a parameter or feature, provides a straightforward account of multiple negation. Given our knowledge of class dialects of English, which tells us that multiple negation is used every day by most working class speakers of English, the latter theory is obviously to be preferred, although a linguist who postulates a fictional homogeneous speech community might easily choose the inadequate alternative.

The second problem for linguistic theory is variation in the meaning systems of language. Studies have shown class differences in syntax (Lavandera 1975, 1978), lexical choice (Sankoff, Thibault & Bérubé 1978), discourse (Horvath 1986), and intonation (Guy & Vonwiller 1984) which could all affect the meaning of a text. This presents a challenge for our theories of semantics and communication. Do such mismatches in semantic systems lead to ambiguity and miscomprehension? If not, is there some higher level analysis which allows people to interpret semantic systems different from their own? Such questions can be addressed only by looking at class differences.

Finally there is the problem of *langue* and *parole*, recast by Chomsky as competence and performance. *Langue* and competence are supposed to incorporate the features of a language common to all speakers, the knowledge they must share in order to use the language appropriately. But as we have seen, speakers share more than mere grammaticality judgements. They also have a passive knowledge which allows them to recognize and interpret other social class varieties of the language, and an active knowledge which allows them to adapt their own syntax, phonology, and lexicon to different situations, audiences, topics, etc. In other words they have a

communicative competence, common to all members of a speech community, which encompasses sociolinguistic variability. An adequate linguistic theory should be able to account for this ability of native speakers.

Ultimately this calls into question the very utility of the competence–performance, *langue–parole* distinction. If these are oppositions between unity and diversity, between design and execution, then they are difficult to maintain in the face of two fundamental findings of sociolinguistics. On the one hand we have orderly heterogeneity, which identifies *unity and system within parole/performance*, and on the other hand we have inherent variability, which is *diversity within langue/competence*. Thus the study of language and class may lead the way to an ultimate synthesis of the second great Saussurean dichotomy.

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tic forms are produced. Moving from sex to gender can make the investigation more subtle: gender categories are not restricted to the male/female dichotomy, females need not be feminine, and femininity can be a matter of degree.

Nonetheless, focus on gender as just involving properties of individual linguistic agents can obscure important insights into how gender affects language production. For example, there might be no connection at all between agent's sex or gender and patterns of language produced but significant interactions between forms produced and sex or gender of the audience (Brouwer, Gerritsen & de Haan 1979 discusses one such case). Production patterns might show systematic dependence on the sex/gender relations between agents and their audience, e.g. same-sex versus cross-sex situations of language use, or the Yana data reported in Sapir 1929 in which what mattered was whether or not the group was male only. Or they might show dependence on other features that make gender more or less salient in particular situations of language use, e.g. my colleague Eleanor Jorden reports that a Japanese woman can use a relatively low level of so-called 'feminine' speech markers when speaking to a male classmate about their studies but a much higher level when talking with that same classmate at a party. In a real sense, agents are responsible for what is produced. But this does not mean that it is only through agents' sex or other individual gender characteristics that sex/gender systems can affect linguistic production.

There are two reasons why we might tend to view the study of linguistic production as the study of speakers. The first is a general psychological phenomenon observed in our strongly individualistic culture. Language production is a form of behavior, and the 'ultimate attribution error' (Pettigrew 1979) is to explain a person's behavior as due to intrinsic properties of the person – e.g. her grammatical knowledge or her intellectual capabilities – without reference to contextual factors that might play a role. Those involved in language/gender studies have not been immune to this error. The second reason lies in linguistics itself. Linguists have primarily studied grammars, systems instantiated in the minds of the linguistic agents. Linguistic production is *prima facie* evidence only for the grammar (or grammars) in the mind of the agent responsible for the production. For many linguistic purposes (e.g. writing grammars), there is little reason to look beyond the speaker to her audience or her situation. But to look at language in interaction with gender (or with other socio-cultural phenomena for that matter), it is not enough to observe how features of linguistic production connect to characteristics of the producers. The study of how gender affects linguistic production is not exhausted by the study of how the gender characteristics of speakers affect their speech (of writers their writing). Yet this is all that the prevalent sex-difference approach considers.