

On the Mechanism of Linguistic Change

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Some thirty years ago Edward Sapir objected that "In linguistics, abstracted speech sounds, words and the arrangement of words have come to have so authentic a vitality that one can speak of 'regular sound changes' and 'loss of genders' without knowing or caring who opened their mouths, at what time, to communicate what to whom" (1949d:579). Sapir criticized the arbitrary boundaries drawn by "the many kinds of segmental scientists of

man," arguing that "we need never fear to modify, prune, extend, redefine, rearrange, and reorient our sciences of man as social being, for these sciences cannot point to an order of nature that has meaning apart from the directly experienced perceptions and values of the individual" (1949d:578, 581). Much of the study of linguistic change has continued to deserve Sapir's stricture. Labov shows how research not afraid to "extend, redefine, rearrange, and reorient" current segmentations of the study of man can succeed in observing what has been pronounced unobservable, find regularity in what was thought to be confusion, and begin to answer some of the fundamental questions posed by the universal fact of linguistic change.

The present chapter begins and ends with reference to data from the speech community. The implication is that data on the internal structure of the language, i.e., linguistic forms collected by the traditional elicitation procedures, in which these forms are abstracted from ordinary verbal interaction, do not provide a proper basis for the explanation of linguistic change. One must have data on attitudes and use as well. Indeed the phrase means more than that. It is not enough simply to add (or correlate) information from the speech community to the linguistic analysis. The two kinds of data are interlocked and must be obtained and analyzed together. Note that the speech community is defined not by the presence or absence of a particular dialect or language but by the presence of a common set of normative values in regard to linguistic features. (One might speak of a criterion of social rather than merely "referential" intelligibility.)

This concept of the data and conception of the speech community has led to the development of new and highly ingenious elicitation techniques capable of simulating some of the significant variations in social context which characterize everyday verbal interaction. Labov discovered that although individual speech varies greatly, New Yorkers are alike in the way in which they adapt their pronunciation and grammar in differing social situations and in the way in which they judge or evaluate the social significance of the forms they hear. (See Labov 1966b for a full account of field techniques and results.) Previous investigators who had confined themselves simply to recording linguistic forms in formal interview sessions had been defeated by the heterogeneity of what

they found and thought of New York only as a locale of great mixture of speech. Labov showed that underneath the heterogeneity of what people say is a considerable homogeneity of social meaning and of evaluation of what is said. New York City shows in perhaps extreme form what is true for any community (see e.g., that described by Blom and Gumperz, Chapter 14); a synchronic description cannot be static, but must take the perspective called by Jakobson (1962) "dynamic synchrony."

Labov's concern in this chapter is to develop a theory of some of the processes that contribute to the diversity within speech communities, while at the same time reflecting the common evaluations that unite them. He is concerned first to show that *sound change*, a classic locus of linguistic theory, can indeed be observed and be described (as against some neogrammarian views), and then to show that its occurrence can be explained (a possibility dismissed, or trivialized, by some generative grammarians (Postal 1968:283-284)). Central to the approach is recognition of a new concept, the *linguistic variable*, as the unit of change (see the Introduction and also Ervin-Tripp, Chapter 7). The linguistic variable is by definition a feature subject to social evaluation, hence requiring data from the speech community for its description, and at the same time making explanation possible (through concomitant variation between the linguistic and social data). At any one time some features of a language will be subject to social evaluation, moving through the statuses of *indicator*, *marker*, and perhaps *stereotype* indicated in the outline of states of change.

Linguistic change is seen as an adaptive process, as linguistic evolution. Its adequate study must deal with three problems, *transition*, *embedding*, and *evaluation*—finding the route, the sociolinguistic matrix, and the social meaning of a change. In both the studies reported here (Martha's Vineyard and New York City) self-identity is found to be at the root of linguistic change (see the Norwegian study by Blom and Gumperz, Chapter 14, and Bernstein, Chapter 16). In the first, native status as a Vineyarder is the key. In New York City socioeconomic class and, most of all, ethnic identity are most important. In both, of course, age enters (other work of Labov has formalized generation as one of the contextual features to which a linguistic rule is sensitive).

Notice the necessity of placing data in terms of the identity of the speaker and the context of speech. Only by treating data as situated in these two respects could the patterning be discerned. Survey techniques were used to place the New York City speakers in terms of socioeconomic class. Diverse modes of elicitation were used to deal with contextual style. Recognizing self-consciousness as the crucial factor, whose effects could not be eliminated, Labov proceeded to control for it, and indeed, to turn it to advantage. Four contextual styles were differentiated, reading of isolated words from a list giving the most self-conscious speech, the telling of an incident in which one's life had been in danger giving the least self-conscious. Statistical techniques were, of course, required to show the stable patterns that emerged, for these were patterns not of presence and absence of features but of greater and lesser incidence. Notice that it is not the absolute values of the percentages of a feature according to class and context but the reliable (and valid) pattern of relationship between values that counts. Another investigator or another day might show a different absolute but not a different relative incidence.

Like Blom and Gumperz, Labov found people unaware of their own usage of language and holding values about speech in terms of which their usage would be stigmatized by the larger community. Such research gives a dynamic dimension to the thesis of the unconscious patterning of linguistic and other behavior developed by Boas, Sapir, and Lévi-Strauss and indicates some specific explanations of that dimension, e.g., the relationship between hypercorrection and position just below the highest social level. The conflict between two sets of values (see Bernstein, Chapter 17) is significant. In his general monograph Labov (1966b) speaks of the great linguistic insecurity of the average New York speaker. Participation in a particular linguistic change may be a sensitive index of social mobility and struggle.

Labov's research disproves the recurrent view that linguistic change can be bifurcated between a purely internal process of the origin of changes and an external process of their spread, such that social factors enter only into the second (see, most recently, Postal 1968:284). The other view can be seen as an attempt to avoid recognition of linguistics as partly a social science, as a field

whose problems require some use of social science methods for their solution. Such a view must ignore clear cases of social motivation of sound change (see Fischer 1958; Hymes 1964d:450; as well as the Martha's Vineyard case in this chapter), and retreat to a position from which the meaningfulness of linguistic change to "the directly experienced perceptions and values of the individual" is either invisible or explained away (cf. Postal 1968:283: "There is no more reason for languages to change than there is for automobiles to add fins one year and remove them the next").

If the description and explanation of linguistic change require data beyond that with which most linguists are used to dealing, it is not, Labov stresses, multiplication of data in itself that matters but theoretically motivated selection of data, and rigor in its analysis. Additional related readings are provided by Malkiel (1960) and Martinet (1952).

Introduction

This chapter outlines the approaches to the explanation of linguistic change which are being followed in our current research within the context of the speech community. It is now clear that many theoretical problems of linguistic structure cannot be resolved without data from the speech community. This point of view is developed in detail in Labov 1964a. Here I will focus on the converse proposition—that linguistic change cannot be explained by arguments drawn from purely internal relations within the system, even if external, sociolinguistic relations are recognized as additional conditioning factors. In the mechanism of linguistic changes which we have observed, the two sets of relations are interlocked in a systematic way.

The investigations which form the basis for the present discussion are studies of linguistic change on the island of Martha's Vineyard, and in New York City; the principal focus will be on the process of sound change. The chief techniques used in this research have been described in several previous papers and publications, along with a certain amount of the data and the findings (see Labov 1963, 1964a, 1964b, 1965, 1966a, 1966b, 1968). The data to be presented here may be considered representative of a much larger set of facts and correlations derived from these studies.

The problems of linguistic evolution. Despite the achievements of

nineteenth century historical linguistics, many avenues to the study of linguistic change remain unexplored. In 1905, Meillet noted that all of the laws of linguistic history that had been discovered were merely possibilities (Meillet 1921:16): "It remains for us to discover the variables which permit or incite the possibilities thus recognized."

The problem as we face it today is precisely that which Meillet outlined sixty years ago, for little progress has been made in ascertaining the empirical factors which condition historical change. There has actually been a retrograde movement in this respect in the sense that treatments of linguistic change which are essentially ahistorical have become popular. Chronological detail is deliberately set aside in such articles as those by Pilch (1955) and Halle (1962).

The chief problems of linguistic evolution might be summarized as five questions:

1. What are the causes of the continual origination of new linguistic changes?
2. By what mechanism do changes proceed?
3. Is there an adaptive function to linguistic evolution?¹
4. Is there an over-all direction of linguistic evolution?
5. What are the universal constraints upon linguistic change?

One approach to linguistic evolution is to study changes completed in the past. This has, of course, been the major strategy of historical linguistics, and it is the only possible approach to the last two questions—the direction of linguistic evolution, and the universal constraints upon change. On the other hand, the questions of the mechanism of change, the inciting causes of change, and the adaptive functions of change, are best analyzed by studying in detail linguistic changes in progress. The mechanism of linguistic change will be the chief topic of the discussion to follow; however, many of the conclusions will plainly be relevant to the questions of inciting causes and adaptive functions of change, and it will be apparent that more complete answers to these three questions will require methods similar to those used here.

An essential presupposition of this line of research is the claim that the same mechanisms which operated to produce the large scale changes of the past may be observed operating in the current changes taking place around us.

¹ This question is all the more puzzling when we contrast linguistic with biological evolution. It is difficult to discuss the evolution of the plant and animal kingdoms without some reference to adaptation to various environments. But what conceivable adaptive function is served by the efflorescence of the Indo-European family? On this topic, see Labov (1964a) and Hymes (1961a).

A Strategy for the Study of Linguistic Changes in Progress

Although answers to the first three questions given above are the ultimate goals of our current research, they do not represent the actual strategy used. For the empirical study of changes in progress, the task can be sub-divided into three separate problems which jointly serve to answer the questions raised above.

1. The *transition* problem is to find the route by which one stage of a linguistic change has evolved from an earlier stage. We wish to trace enough of the intervening stages so that we can eliminate all but one of the major alternatives. Thus questions of the regularity of sound change, of grammatical influence on sound change (Malkiel 1960), of "push chains" versus "pull chains" (Martinet 1952), of steady movement versus sudden and discontinuous shifts, are all aspects of the transition problem.
2. The *embedding* problem is to find the continuous matrix of social and linguistic behavior in which the linguistic change is carried. The principal route to the solution is through the discovery of correlations between elements of the linguistic system and between those elements and the non-linguistic system of social behavior. The correlations are established by strong proof of concomitant variation: that is, by showing that a small change in the independent variable is regularly accompanied by a change of the linguistic variable in a predictable direction.

The concept of the linguistic variable is that developed in Labov 1964c. The definition of such a variable amounts to an empirical assertion of co-variation, within or without the linguistic system. It appears that the fundamental difference between an explanation of a linguistic change and a description is that a description makes no such assertion. In terms of a description of change, such as that provided by Halle (1962), there is no greater probability of the change taking place in the observed direction as in the reverse direction. Note that the embedding problem is presented here as a single problem, despite the fact that there are two distinct aspects: correlations within the linguistic system and with elements outside the system. The main body of this chapter provides justification for this decision.

3. The *evaluation* problem is to find the subjective (or latent) correlates of the objective (or manifest) changes which have been observed. The indirect approach to this problem correlates the general attitudes and aspirations of the informants with their linguistic behavior. The more direct approach is to measure the unconscious subjective reactions of the informants to values of the linguistic variable itself.

With tentative solutions to these problems in hand, it would be pos-

sible to provide an explanation of a linguistic change which answers the three questions of inciting cause, mechanism, and adaptive function. As in any other investigation, the value of an explanation rises in relation to its generality, but only to the extent that it rests upon a foundation of reliable and reproducible evidence.

The Observation of Sound Change

The simplest data that will establish the existence of a linguistic change is a set of observations of two successive generations of speakers —generations of comparable social characteristics which represent stages in the evolution of the same speech community. Hermann (1929) obtained such data at Charmey in 1929 by developing the original observations of Gauchat (1905), obtained in 1899. We have such data for Martha's Vineyard, adding the 1961 observations to the 1933 data of the *Linguistic Atlas* (Kurath 1941). For New York City, we add the current data of 1963 to the *Linguistic Atlas* data of 1940; in addition, we have many other reports, including the excellent observations of Babbitt in 1896, to add further time depth to our analysis (Frank 1948; Kurath and McDavid, Jr. 1961; Hubbell 1949; Babbitt 1896).

Solutions to the transition problem proposed here will depend upon close analysis of the distribution of linguistic forms in *apparent time*—that is, along the dimension formed by the age groups of the present population. Such an analysis is possible only because the original simple description of change in *real time* enables us to distinguish age-grading in the present population from the effects of linguistic change (Hockett 1950).

The evidence obtained in the research reported here indicates that the regular process of sound change can be isolated and recorded by observations across two generations. This process is characterized by a rapid development of some units of a phonetic sub-system, while other units remain relatively constant. It affects word classes as a whole rather than individual words: yet these classes may be defined by a variety of conditions, morphophonemic and grammatical as well as phonetic. It is regular, but more in the outcome than in its inception or its development. Furthermore, it appears that the process of sound change is not an autonomous movement within the confines of a linguistic system but rather a complex response to many aspects of human behavior.

Some comment is required on the possibility of observing regular sound change since arguments inherited from the neogrammarian controversy have impeded the progress of empirical research in this area. The inheritors of the neogrammarian tradition, who should be most interested in the empirical study of regular change in progress, have abandoned the arena of

meaningful research in favor of abstract and speculative arguments. Indeed, Bloomfield (1933:347, 365) and Hockett (1958:439, 444) have maintained that phonetic change cannot in principle be observed by any of the techniques currently available. Hockett writes: "No one has yet observed sound change: we have only been able to detect it via its consequences. We shall see later that a more nearly direct observation would be theoretically possible, if impractical, but any ostensible report of such an observation so far must be discredited." His theoretical proposal is that "over a period of fifty years we made, each month, a thousand accurate acoustic records . . . all from the members of a tight-knit community." The suggestion to multiply the data in this way is not necessarily helpful, as the experience of sociological survey analysts has shown: for relatively small numbers are needed to measure change in a population if the bias of selection is eliminated or minimized. Otherwise, we merely multiply the errors of measurement.

Hockett proceeds to identify sound change with a level of random fluctuations in the action of the articulatory apparatus, without any inherent direction, a drift of the articulatory target which has no cognitive, expressive, or social significance. According to Hockett, the variables responsible for sound change include "the amount of moisture in the throat, nose and mouth of the speaker, random currents in his central nervous system, muscular tics . . . the condition of the hearer's outer ear [presence of wax or dirt]" (1958:443-444). All of the empirical observations of change in progress which have been reported are explained as the results of a complex process of borrowing, and are relegated to a type of linguistic behavior known as the fluctuation or conflict of forms. No claims are made for the regularity of this process, and so the basic tenet of the regularity of sound change has been deprived of all empirical significance. Furthermore, the changes which actually are observed are regarded as unsystematic phenomena, to be discussed with anecdotal evidence, subject to forces "quite outside the linguist's reach," factors which "elude our grasp," fluctuations "beyond our powers" to record (Bloomfield 1933:343-368).

The evidence of current research suggests that this retreat was premature, that the regular process of sound change can be observed by empirical methods. The refinements in methodology called for are not the mechanical elaborations suggested by the writers cited above; for the mere multiplication of data only confounds analysis and perpetuates the bias of selection. It is rigor in the analysis of a population and in the selection of informants which is required. Furthermore, we need ingenuity in the resolution of stylistic variation, to go beyond the sterile method of endless dissection into idiolects. With such techniques, we find that regularity emerges where only confusion was seen before. Random fluctuations in articulation can certainly be found: indeed, this is the level of

"noise" which prevents us from predicting the form of every utterance which our informants will make. But it would be an error to ascribe a major role to such fluctuations in the economy of linguistic change. The forces which direct the observed changes appear to be of an entirely different order of magnitude, and the changes take place much more rapidly than any process of random drift could account for.

Thus the following table contrasts the two points of view:

Neogrammarian:	Sound change	Fluctuation of forms	Ultimate regularity
Present discussion:	Sublinguistic fluctuations	Sound change	Ultimate regularity

A single example of a sound change recently observed will be used to illustrate the general approach to solving the transition, embedding, and evaluation problems. This example is one of the simplest cases—that of the centralization of (aw) on Martha's Vineyard. In the development of this case, some new evidence will be presented on the mechanism of sound changes which has not been published before.

The Centralization of (aw) on Martha's Vineyard

We begin with a clear-cut case for the existence of a linguistic change from observations in real time. In 1933, Guy Lowman found no more than the barest trace of centralization of /aw/; the significant variation observed was the fronting of /aw/ from [aU] to [æU]. In 1961, a comparable set of older eighth generation descendants of Yankee settlers from the same villages showed a very pronounced centralization of /aw/—now clearly the variable (aw). (In the notation used here, parentheses indicate the linguistic variable, while slashes indicate bi-unique phonemes and brackets phonetic notation as usual. Thus (aw) represents the variable in general; (aw-2) is a particular value of the variable; (aw)-22 is an average index score for the variable.)

The transition problem is studied through a detailed examination of the distribution of forms through apparent time—that is, through the various age levels in the present population. In this case, as in many others, the original sample was too small to allow us to study differences in age levels; only four informants were chosen on Martha's Vineyard in 1933. The first step in the analysis is to construct a quantitative index for discrete values of the variable. The original impressionistic scale for discrete instrumental measurements of a sample of these ratings indicated that four levels could be distinguished with a high degree of conformity to

- aw-0 [aU]
- aw-1 [a ⊥ U]
- aw-2 [əU]
- aw-3 [əU]

The index of centralization was constructed from this scale by averaging the numerical values assigned to each variant. Thus (aw)-00 would mean no centralization at all, while (aw)-3.00 would mean consistent centralization at the level of [əU]. This index was applied to interviews with 69 informants by rating each of the words in which (aw) occurred. The first approach to the transition problem can then be made by correlating average (aw) index scores for these interviews with the age level of the speakers. The first three columns of Table 19.1 show a regular correlation, in which the centralization index rises regularly for four successive age levels.

table 19.1

Centralization Indexes by Age Level			
Generation	Age level	(aw)-	(aI)-
1a	Over 75	0.22	0.25
1b	61-75	0.37	0.35
IIa	46-60	0.44	0.62
IIb	31-45	0.88	0.81

The over-all tendency of Table 19.1 represents an amalgamation of many different types of speakers and many different trends in the use of (aw). Figure 19.1 presents a more detailed analysis of the transition problem for a critical sub-group. Here are displayed the percentage distribution of lexical items for eight individuals from 92 to 31 years of age. The horizontal axes show the four coded levels of the variable (aw). The vertical axes are the percentages of lexical items used with each variant. The vocabulary is broken into two sections that are tabulated separately: the solid line represents words in which (aw) is followed by a voiceless obstruent, as in *out, house, about, mouth*; the broken line represents all other words (and principally those ending in a nasal, as in *town, found*, or with no consonant final, as in *now, how*, etc.) [The phonetic conditioning was actually much more complex than this, and both following and preceding consonants are involved (Labov 1963:290).]

The first diagram, a, in Fig. 19.1 is not that of an individual but shows the composite results for the four *Linguistic Atlas* informants interviewed in 1933. They show only the barest trace of centralization. The second

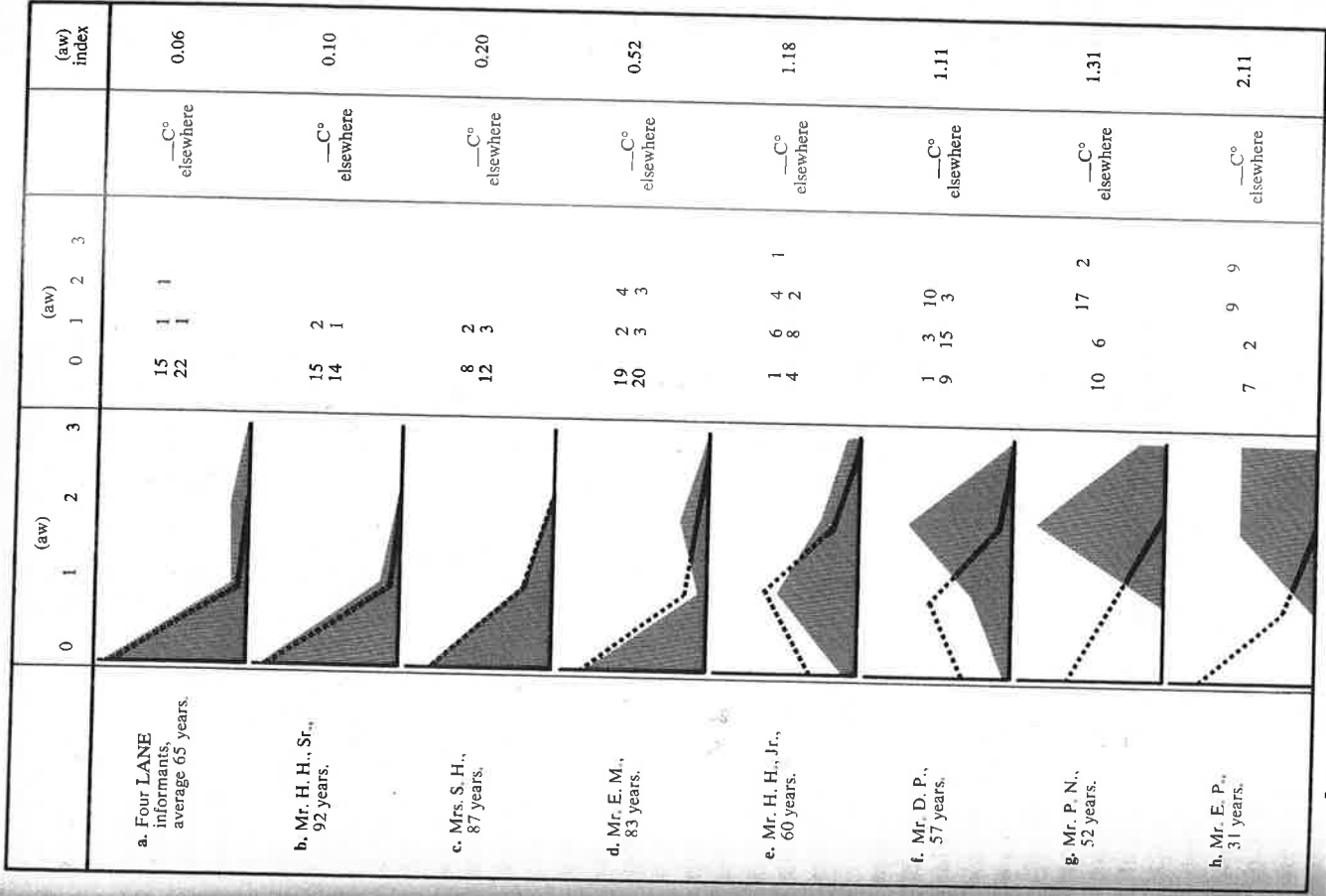


figure 19.1

Stages in the centralization of (aw) on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts

diagram, *b*, is that of the oldest informant of 1961, a man 92 years old. The average age of the *Atlas* informants was 65 years; Mr. H. H., Sr., would have been 64 years old in 1933, and so he is of the same age group. His centralization profile is quite similar to that of the *Atlas* informants in *a*. In *c*, we have an 87-year-old woman who shows only a slight increase in centralization. Diagram *d*, Mr. E. M., 83 years old, indicates a small but distinct increase in the occurrence of variant (aw-2). Mr. H. H., Jr., in *e*, is considerably younger; he is 61 years old, the first representative of the next generation since he is the son of Mr. H. H., Sr. Here we have a marked increase in centralization, with both classes of words centered about a norm of (aw-1). In *f*, Mr. D. P., 57 years old, shows a distinct difference between words ending in voiceless obstruents and all others; the first are now centered about a norm of (aw-2), while the second group is concentrated at (aw-1). This process is carried further in *g*, the speech of Mr. P. N., 52 years old, who shows perfect complementary distribution. Before voiceless obstruents, /aw/ has an allophone which is almost always (aw-2), while before other terminals it is usually uncentralized. And at this point, there is no overlap in the distribution. Finally, in *h*, the most extreme case of centralization, we see an even sharper separation: this is Mr. E. P., 31 years old, the son of Mr. D. P. in *f*.

On the right hand side of Fig. 19.1 are the figures for the actual numbers of lexical items observed, and the composite index scores for each of the eight cases. It may be noted that (aw) is only one-third as frequent as (ay); the regularity which appears here does not require a vast corpus of observations. The regularity emerges through the controlled selection of informants, methods of elicitation, and of recording the data.

The eight diagrams of Fig. 19.1 represent the most homogeneous type of population. All of the speakers are Yankee descendants of the original settlers of the island, all are interrelated, many from the same families, with similar attitudes towards the island. All had rural upbringing, and worked as carpenters or fisherman, with one exception. Thus the continuous development of centralization represents the very model of a neogrammarian sound change, accomplished within two generations.

The *embedding* problem was first approached by correlating the centralization of the obviously related variables (ay) and (aw)—that is, the change of (aw) was embedded in the system of upgliding diphthongs. The *Atlas* records indicate a moderate degree of centralization in the 1930s, so that we know that the centralized forms of (ay) preceded the rise of (aw). The fourth column of Table 19.1 shows a close correlation of the two variables, with (ay) slightly in the lead at first, but (aw) becoming more dominant at the end. This pattern was repeated when the variables were correlated with a number of independent extra-linguistic factors: the occupation, education, and geographic location of the speaker; and most importantly, the ethnic group to which he belonged. The significant dif-

ferences in the transition rates of these various sub-groups allowed the following statement of a solution to the embedding problem:

The centralization of (aw) was part of a more general change which began with the centralization of (ay). This initial change proceeded from a moderate level of (ay) centralization which was probably a regional recessive trait inherited from the original settlers of the island. The increase of centralization of (ay) began in a rural community of Yankee fisherman descended directly from these original settlers. From there, it spread outward to speakers of the same ethnic group in other occupations and in other communities. The structurally symmetrical variable (aw) began to show similar tendencies early in this process. The change was also adopted by the neighboring Indian group at Gay Head, and a generation later, spread to the large Portuguese group in the more settled sections of the island. In these two ethnic groups, centralization of (aw) overtook and surpassed centralization of (ay).

Figure 19.1 would lead us to believe that the phonetic environment of (aw) was a powerful factor in the initiation of the sound change. Moreover, we can observe that the centralization of (ay) also showed a strong tendency towards phonetic conditioning in Generation Ib, similar to that displayed for (aw) in Generation IIb.² However, phonetic restriction on (ay) was overridden in the following generation, so that Generation II shows a uniform norm for (ay) in all phonetic environments. This development would support the view that phonetic conditioning does not play a significant role as an inciting cause of the centralization of (aw), but acts rather as a conditioning factor which may be eliminated by further change.

On Martha's Vineyard, the *evaluation problem* was approached by analyzing a number of clues to the subjective attitudes towards island life which appeared in the course of the interviews. Attitudes toward summer tourists, toward unemployment insurance, toward work on the mainland, toward other occupational and ethnic groups, were correlated with data obtained from community leaders and historical records, and then with the linguistic variables. It appeared that the rise of (aw) was correlated with the successive entry into the main stream of island life of groups that had previously been partially excluded. It was concluded that a social value had been (more or less arbitrarily) associated with the centralization of (ay) and (aw), and that social value could best be expressed as "native status as a Vineyarder." Thus to the extent that an individual felt able to claim and maintain status as a native Vineyarder, he adopted increasing centralization of (ay) and (aw). Sons who had tried to earn a living on the mainland, and afterwards returned to the island

² This phonetic conditioning is more in the nature of a continuum than that for (aw). The complete data for a speaker of the same age and background as Mr. H. H., Jr. of Fig. 19.1 are given in Labov (1963:289).

developed an even higher degree of centralization than their fathers had used. But to the extent that a Vineyarder abandoned his claim to stay on the island and earn his living there, he also abandoned centralization and returned to the standard uncentralized forms.

The solution to the evaluation problem is a statement of the social significance of the changed form—that is, the function which is the direct equivalent of the meaning of the form in its grammatical function. In the developments described here, the grammatical function of /ay/ and /aw/ has remained constant. It is plain that the non-grammatical (or non-referential) functions which are carried by these phonological elements are the essential factors in the mechanism of the change. This conclusion can be generalized to many other instances of more complex changes in which the net result is a radical change of grammatical function. The sound change observed on Martha's Vineyard did not produce phonemic change, in which units defined by grammatical function were merged or split. But many of the changes in progress that have been observed in New York City did produce such mergers and splits on the level of the bi-unique phoneme.³ One such change is the raising of (oh), the vowel of *law*, *talk*, *off*, *more*, etc., which will serve to illustrate many aspects of the mechanism of linguistic change not relevant to the simpler example on Martha's Vineyard.

The Raising of (oh) in New York City

It was not possible to make a direct attack upon the transition problem in New York City. Although the records of the *Linguistic Atlas* showed sporadic raising of (oh) at a fairly low level, the *Atlas* informants in New York City were not selected systematically enough so that we could construct a comparable sample in 1963.

Convenience was apparently a greater factor in the selection of *Atlas* informants in New York than on Martha's Vineyard. The great bulk of the New York population was poorly represented in the sample, including the working class and lower middle class. The old-family stock used for *Atlas* interviews represents only a very small fraction of the ethnic composition of the city, at most 1 or 2 percent. Furthermore, an over-all comparison of the usage of this variable by older and younger speakers did not show the clear-cut and regular progression which we saw for (aw) on Martha's Vineyard. It was suspected that the reason for this difficulty was

³ The far-reaching shifts and mergers observed in the long and ingliding vowel system of New York City, to be discussed here, do not affect the morphophonemic system. The detailed distribution of the variables in the process of change appear to provide evidence for the systematic status of the bi-unique phoneme. See Labov (1964a) for discussion.

the greater tendency towards stylistic variation among New Yorkers, and the heterogeneity of the population in terms of socio-economic class and ethnic membership. Therefore it was necessary to attack the embedding problem first, before the transition problem.

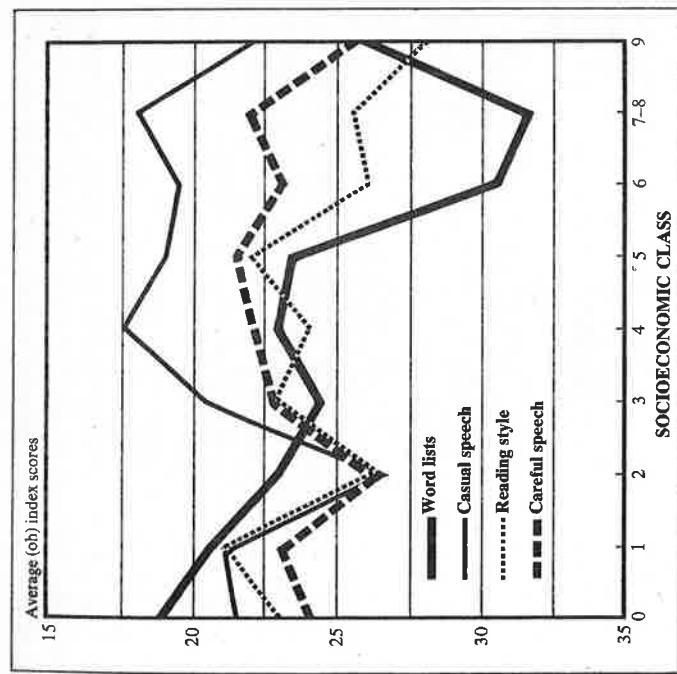
The variable (oh) is a part of the system of long and ingliding vowels in the vernacular pattern of New York City speech which is essentially *r*-less: that is, where final and pre-consonantal /r/ does not occur as a consonantal glide. Thus (oh) occurs in the word class of *law*, *talk*, *broad*, *caught*, *off*, and *more*, *four*, *board*, etc. To establish a quantifiable index, five variants were coded as follows:

(oh-1)	[U: ^ə]
(oh-2)	[O: ¹ ɔ: ^{1-ə}]
(oh-3)	[ɔ: ¹ ɔ: ^{1-ə}]
(oh-4)	[ɔ: ¹]
(oh-5)	[ɔ: ¹]

The codification of these variants can be assisted by the use of some modal reference points. (oh-1) is at the level of the vowel of (r-less) *sure*; (oh-3) is the level of the most common Northern vowel in (r-pronouncing) *or*, *nor*; (oh-4) at cardinal I.P.A. [ɔ]; (oh-5) at the level of eastern New England *cor*. The (oh) index score was established by taking the numerical average of the variants recorded in any given portion of speech, and multiplying by ten. Thus the consistent use of (oh-2) would give a score of (oh)-20, and a consistent use of (oh-4), a score of (oh)-40.

A method was developed in the New York City study for isolating a range of well-defined contextual styles in the speech of individual informants, and average index scores were determined for each style. A systematic approach to the sampling of a large urban population was utilized, embodying the techniques of survey methodology, and average index scores for various sub-groups of the sample population were determined for each style. The embedding problem was then attacked by correlating the five chief linguistic variables each with each other, and with other elements of the linguistic system, with the level of stylistic variation in which they were recorded, and with the independent variables of socio-economic class (occupation, education and income), sex, ethnic group, and age level. (The embedding problem is treated here as one problem, not two, in accordance with the general logic of this chapter.)

Correlations of (oh) with socio-economic class revealed that the irregular distribution of (oh) in the population as a whole was partly due to the fact that the change had not yet affected all social classes. Figure 19.2 is a style stratification diagram for (oh) in which the transition state of this variable can be seen in synchronic section. The horizontal axis represents the ten socio-economic levels used for this analysis, grouped informally into lower class, working class, lower middle class, and upper



Socioeconomic class	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7-8 9								
	Lower class			Working class			Lower middle class		Upper middle class
Stylistic stratification	None			Slight			Extreme		Moderate
(oh) in casual speech	Low			High			High		Low

figure 19.2

Style stratification of (oh) for nine socio-economic sub-classes

middle class. The vertical axis represents the average (oh) index scores; the lower values of (oh) are at the top, representing the higher, closer vowels, and the higher values of (oh) are at the bottom, indicating more open vowels. The index scores for each socio-economic group are entered on the diagram for each stylistic context, and values for the same style are connected along straight lines.

Figure 19.2 indicates that (oh) is not a significant variable for lower class speakers, who do not use particularly high values of this vowel and show no stylistic stratification at all. Working class speakers show a recent stage in the raising of (oh): very high vowels in casual speech, but otherwise very little stratification in the more formal styles, and little tendency towards the extreme, hypercorrect (oh-4) and (oh-5). But lower middle

class speakers show the most developed state of the sound change, with high values in casual speech, and extreme stylistic stratification. Finally, the upper middle class group is more moderate in all respects than the lower middle class, still retaining the pattern of stylistic stratification. The ethnic group membership of New York City speakers is even more relevant to their use of (oh) than socio-economic class. Figure 19.3 shows the differences between speakers of Jewish and Italian background in the

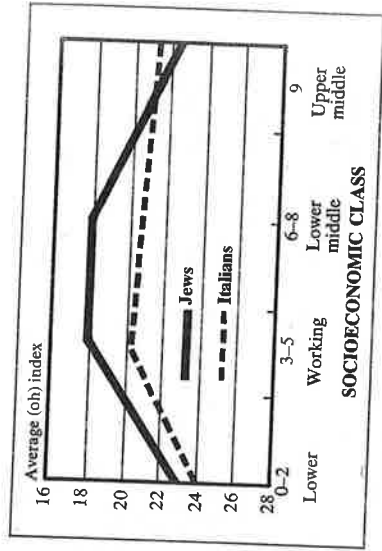


figure 19.3

Class stratification diagram for (oh) by ethnic group in casual speech

treatment of (oh) in casual speech. For all but the upper middle class, the Jewish group uses higher levels of (oh). The Negro group does not show any significant response to the variable (oh), and shows a constant index of performance at a low level. As noted above, the lower class in general is similarly indifferent to (oh). Table 19.2 shows Jewish and Italian ethnic groups only, with the lower class excluded. Table 19.2 shows that both Jewish and Italian speakers have participated in the raising of (oh), but the increase seems to have reached its maximum early for the Jewish group, and later for the Italian group. A separate solution for the transition problem is therefore required for each ethnic group.

The transition problem for the Italian group can be seen analyzed in Figure 19.4. The procession of values is not absolutely regular since socio-economic membership, sex, and other factors affect the values; nevertheless, there is a steady upward movement from the oldest speakers on the right to the youngest speakers on the left. Within the present sample of New York City speakers, this is the finest resolution of the transition problem which can be obtained.⁴

⁴ Figure 19.4 includes Italian informants who refused the original interview, and whose speech patterns were sampled by the television interview, as described in Appendix D of Labov (1966b).

table 19.2

Average (oh) Indexes by Age Level and Ethnic Group in Casual Speech		
Age	Jews	Italians
8-19	17	18
20-35	18	18
36-49	17	20
50-59	15	20
60-	25	30

The *embedding problem* for (oh) requires an intricate set of correlations with other elements in the linguistic system, in addition to the extralinguistic correlations exemplified above. We find that (oh) is firmly embedded within the sub-system of long and ingliding vowels, and also related structurally to other vowel sub-systems. Quantitative studies of these relations fall into five sets:

1. There is a strong correlation between the height of (oh) and the height of the corresponding front ingliding vowel (eh) in the word class of *bad, ask, dance*, etc. This variable originated as a raising of /æh/, but

early in the evolution of New York City speech it merged with /eh/, the word class of *bare, bared, where*, etc. The relation between (eh) and (oh) is strikingly parallel to that of (ay) and (aw) on Martha's Vineyard, the variable (oh) became specialized in the usage of a particular ethnic group: to the extent that the Italian group shows higher use of (eh) in casual speech, the Jewish group shows higher values of (oh), until the difference is largely resolved in the youngest age level by merger of (eh) and /ih/, (oh) and /uh/.

2. The variable (oh) also has close relations with the higher ingliding vowel /uh/. As we observe higher and higher variants of (oh) in the casual speech of the younger informants, it becomes apparent that a merger of (oh) and /uh/ is imminent. This merger has undoubtedly occurred in the youngest speakers in our sample from the working class and lower middle class. In fact, we have many informants who show the merger even in the most formal styles, in the reading of isolated word lists, and we can conclude *a fortiori* that the merger exists in casual speech. Close study of the variants of their casual speech shows the merger as an accomplished fact: though most listeners who are not conscious of the overlap will hear *beer* as higher than *bear*, it is in fact indistinguishable out of context.

3. There is also a close correlation between (oh) and /ah/, the long tense vowel heard in *guard, father, car*, etc. The variable (ah) represents the choice of back or center options for the subclasses of *hot, heart, hod*, and *hard* (with the last two generally homonymous); lower values of (oh) are correlated with low center positions of the vowels in these word classes. This correlation is independent of socio-economic class or ethnic group. Whereas (oh) is firmly embedded in the socio-linguistic structure of the speech community, /ah/ is not. As a linguistic variable, (ah) seems to be a function only of the height of (oh): a purely internal variable. [The quantitative correlations are given in Chapter 12 of Labov 1966b. The relationship of (oh) and (ah) held even within a single ethnic group.]

4. (oh) is also related to the variable height of the vowel in *boy, coil*, etc., (oy) in the front upgliding system. The height of the vowels in *coil* and *call* seem to vary directly together in casual speech, but only (oh) is corrected to lower values in more formal styles. (oh) carries the major burden of social significance, and is the focus of non-systematic pressure from above.

5. Finally, we find that (oh) and (oy) are jointly correlated with the variable (ay), which represents the backing or fronting of the first element of the diphthong in *my, why, side*, etc. High values of (oh) and (oy) are correlated with back values of (ay), and low values of (oh) and (oy) with low center values of (ay).

Beyond these immediate correlations, there are more indirect, diffuse relations with such variables as (aw) and /ih/, through which (oh) is connected with all of the other vowels in the vernacular system of New York

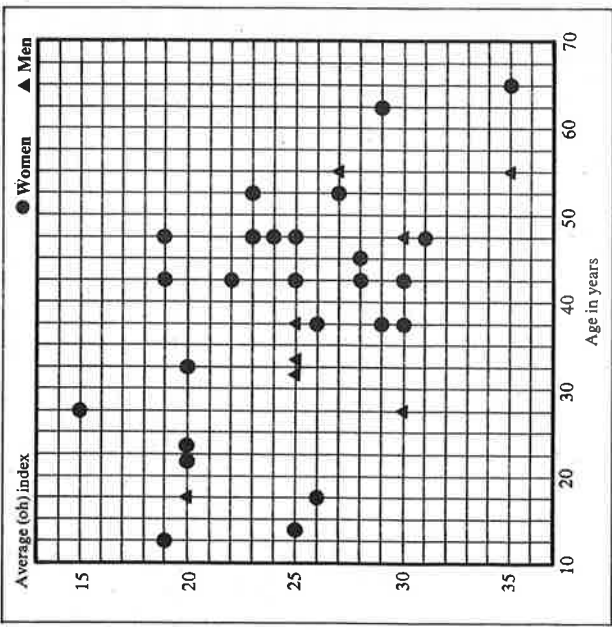


figure 19.4
Distribution of (oh) index scores for Italian subjects by age

City speech. This is not the place to pursue the full details of this intricate set of structural correlations within the linguistic system; however, it should be apparent that a full solution to the embedding problem will reveal the ways in which the internal relations of linguistic elements determine the direction of sound change, in a manner which provides empirical confirmation for the view of linguistic structure expressed by Martinet (1955). (See the Appendix.) We can summarize the most important relations that center about (oh) in the following notation, which defines the structural units on the left hand side of the equations as linguistic variables:

$$\begin{aligned} (oh) &= f_1(St, C, E, A, Sx, (eh)) & St &= \text{Style} \\ (ah) &= f_2((oh)) & C &= \text{Socio-economic class} \\ (oy) &= f_3((oh)) & E &= \text{Ethnic group} \\ (ay) &= f_1((ah)) = f_4(f_2((oh))) & A &= \text{Age level} \\ (ay) &= f_5((oy)) = f_5(f_3((oh))) & Sx &= \text{Sex} \end{aligned}$$

In New York City, the *evaluation problem* was approached more directly than on Martha's Vineyard. The unconscious subjective reactions of the informants to each of the variables were determined. The details of this method have been presented elsewhere.⁵ In general, we can say that the reliability of the tests can be measured by the high degree of uniformity showed by New Yorkers in contrast to the scattered results from those raised outside of New York City.

The subjective reaction responses to (oh) give us a clear view of the social significance of the variable, as shown in Table 19.3. The majority of informants responded to the test in a way consistent with the stigmatized status of high (oh).⁶ Just as the solution to the embedding problem showed no significant stylistic response to (oh) for lower class speakers, here we find that lower class speakers showed no significant (oh)-negative response. The other groups showed (oh)-negative response in proportion to the average height of (oh) used in their own casual speech, and to the degree of stylistic stratification in their speech patterns. This result illustrates a principle which holds quite generally in New York City: that those who used the highest percentage of a stigmatized form in casual speech were the most sensitive in stigmatizing it in the speech of others. Thus the lower middle class speakers between the ages of 20 and 39, who use the highest values of (oh) in their own casual speech, show 100%

⁵ In addition to Chapter XI of Labov (1966b), the most detailed presentation of this method is in "Subjective Dimensions of a Linguistic Change in Progress," a paper given before the Linguistic Society of America in Chicago, December, 1963.

⁶ The (oh)-negative response shown here consisted of rating three speakers lower on a scale of job suitability when they pronounced sentences with high, close (oh) vowels, as compared to sentences with no significant variables. Those making the ratings were unaware that they were rating the same speakers.

table 19.3

Percentage of (oh)-Negative Response by Socio-economic Class and Age Level

Age Level	Lower Class [SEC 0-2]	Working Class [SEC 3-4]	Lower Middle Class [SEC 5-8]	Upper Middle Class [SEC 9]
20-39	25	80	100	60
40-59	18	60	62	57
60-	33	[00]	—	—

N				
4	10	11	5	
11	15	13	7	
6	1	—	—	

(oh)-negative response. Similarly, we find that the percentages of (oh)-negative response among Jewish and Italian speakers is proportionate to the height of (oh) in casual speech.

This solution to the evaluation problem can hardly be called satisfactory. It is not clear why a group of speakers should adopt more and more extreme forms of a speech sound which they themselves stigmatize as bad speech. (Many subjects reacted to the test with violent and unrealistic ratings; as, for example, marking a person who used high vowels for *coffee* and *chocolate* as not even speaking well enough to hold a factory job.) Some further explanation must be given.

First of all, it has become clear that very few speakers realize that they use the stigmatized form themselves. They hear themselves as using the prestige forms which occur sporadically in their careful speech and in their reading of isolated word lists. Secondly, the subjective responses tapped by our test are only the overt values—those which conform to the value systems of the dominant middle class group. There are surely other values, at a deeper level of consciousness, which reinforce the vernacular speech forms of New York City. We have not yet measured these more obscure forms systematically, but through anecdotal evidence we can be sure of their existence—values which cluster about the themes of group identification, masculinity, friendship ties, and so on.

In the case of the alternate preference of Jewish and Italian ethnic groups for (oh) and (eh), we can put forward a reasonable suggestion based upon the mechanism of hypercorrection. *Hypercorrection* is used here not to indicate the sporadic and irregular treatment of a word class but the movement of an entire word class beyond the target point set by the prestige model. This mechanism is evident on Martha's Vineyard, as well as in New York. The influence of the Yiddish sub-stratum leads to a loss of the distinction between low back rounded and unrounded vowels

in first-generation Jewish speakers of English, so that *cup* and *coffee* have the same vowel. In second-generation speakers of Jewish descent, the reaction against this tendency leads to a hypercorrect exaggeration of the distinction, so that (oh) becomes raised, tense, and over-rounded. A parallel argument applies to Italian speakers. This suggestion is all the more plausible since hypercorrection has been demonstrated to be an important mechanism of linguistic change in a variety of circumstances. (I am indebted to Marvin Herzog for this suggestion.)

The Mechanism of Sound Change

Solutions to the transition, embedding, and evaluation problems have been illustrated by two examples, drawn from Martha's Vineyard and New York City. It is possible to apply the results of our work with these and other variables to a provisional answer to the question: what is the mechanism by which sound change proceeds? The following outline is based upon analysis of twelve sound changes: three on rural Martha's Vineyard, and nine in urban New York City. The stages suggested here are necessarily ordered in approximately the manner listed, but there are some re-arrangements and permutations in the data observed.

1. The sound changes usually originated with a restricted sub-group of the speech community, at a time when the separate identity of this group had been weakened by internal or external pressures. The linguistic form which began to shift was often a marker of regional status with an irregular distribution within the community. At this stage, the form is an undefined linguistic variable.

2. The changes began as generalizations of the linguistic form to all members of the sub-group; we may refer to this stage as *change from below*, that is, below the level of social awareness. The variable shows no pattern of stylistic variation in the speech of those who use it, affecting all items in a given word class. The linguistic variable is an *indicator*, defined as a function of group membership.

3. Succeeding generations of speakers within the same subgroup, responding to the same social pressures, carried the linguistic variable further along the process of change, beyond the model set by their parents. We may refer to this stage as *hypercorrection from below*. The variable is now defined as a function of group membership and age level.

4. To the extent that the values of the original sub-group were adopted by other groups in the speech community, the sound change with its associated value of group membership spread to these adopting groups. The function of group membership is now re-defined in successive stages.

5. The limits of the spread of the sound change were the limits of the

speech community, defined as a group with a common set of normative values in regard to language.

6. As the sound change with its associated values reached the limits of its expansion, the linguistic variable became one of the norms which defined the speech community, and all members of the speech community reacted in a uniform manner to its use (without necessarily being aware of it). The variable is now a *marker*, and begins to show stylistic variation.

7. The movement of the linguistic variable within the linguistic system always led to readjustments in the distribution of other elements within phonological space.

8. The structural readjustments led to further sound changes which were associated with the original change. However, other subgroups which entered the speech community in the interim adopted the older sound change as stage 1. This *re-cycling* stage appears to be the primary source for the continual origination of new changes. In the following development, the second sound change may be carried by the new group beyond the level of the first change.

(Stages 1-8 dealt with *change from below*; stages 9-13 concern *change from above*.)

9. If the group in which the change originated was not the highest status group in the speech community, members of the highest status group eventually stigmatized the changed form through their control of various institutions of the communication network.

10. This stigmatization initiated *change from above*, a sporadic and irregular correction of the changed forms towards the model of the highest status group—that is, the *prestige model*. This prestige model is now the pattern which speakers hear themselves using: it governs the audio-monitoring of the speech signal. The linguistic variable now shows regular stylistic stratification as well as social stratification, as the motor-controlled model of casual speech competes with the audio-monitored model of more careful styles.

11. If the prestige model of the highest status group does not correspond to a form used by the other groups in some word class, the other groups will show a second type of *hypercorrection*: shifting their careful speech to a form further from the changed form than the target set by the prestige group. We may call this state *hypercorrection from above*.

12. Under extreme stigmatization, a form may become the overt topic of social comment, and may eventually disappear. It is thus a *stereotype*, which may become increasingly divorced from the forms which are actually used in speech.

13. If the change originated in the highest status group of the community, it became a prestige model for all members of the speech community. The changed form was then adopted in more careful forms of

speech by all other groups in proportion to their contact with users of the prestige model, and to a lesser extent, in casual speech.⁷

Many of the stages in the mechanism of sound change outlined here are exemplified in the two detailed examples given above. The centralization of (aw) on Martha's Vineyard did not provide the evidence to decide this question. There is no doubt, however, that the centralization of (aw) is a secondary change, produced by the re-cycling process when the centralization of (ay) reached stage 8.

To place the raising of (oh) in this outline, it is necessary to consider briefly the evolution of the New York City vowel system as a whole. The first step in the historical record is the raising of (eh). We have reason to believe that the merger of /æh/ with /eh/ began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (see Babbitt 1896). The upward movement of the linguistic variable (eh) continued beyond this merger, leading to the current cumulative merger of /eh/ with /ih/ among most younger New Yorkers. For the entire community, (eh) is subject to the full force of correction from above: the change has reached stage 11, so that the linguistic variable is defined by co-variation with social class, ethnic membership, age level, and contextual style. The raising of (oh) was the first re-cycling process which began when (eh) reached stage 8. The major burden of the raising of (oh) has been carried by the Jewish ethnic group; the extreme upward social mobility of this group has led to a special sensitivity to (oh) in the lower middle class. Thus the merger of /oh/ and /uh/ has gone quite quickly, and (oh) has reached stage 11 for the lower middle class; yet it has hardly touched stage 1 for the lower class.

The third stage in the re-cycling process occurred when (oh) reached stage 8. The structural re-adjustments which took place were complex: (oy) and (ah) were closely associated with (oh), and were defined as linguistic variables only by their co-variation with (oh). Thus the raising of (oy) and the backing of (ah) were determined by internal, structural factors. Change from above is exerted upon (oh), but not upon (oy). In careful speech, a New Yorker might say [Its ɔ:1 tIn fU:11], *It's all in foil*. But the shift of (ah) and (oy) have in turn led to a shift of (ay), and this process has apparently begun a third re-cycling. Indeed, the backing of (ay) has reached stage 8 itself, and produced an associated fourth re-cycling, the fronting of (aw). There are indications that (ay) has evolved to stage 9, with the beginning of overt correction from above, although (aw) has reached only stage 4 or 5 (for details, see Labov 1966b, Chapter 12).

It is evident that the type of structural re-adjustments that have been considered here require a linguistic theory which preserves the geometry

of phonological space. The structural relations found here are strikingly parallel to those established by Moulton (1962) in his study of co-variation of mid and low vowels in Swiss German dialects. The techniques, the area, the societies studied are quite different, and the coincidence of results provides strong empirical evidence for the view of phonological structure advanced by Martinet. Both studies show strong evidence for co-variation of low vowels along the front-to-back dimension with back vowels along the dimension of height. Distinctive feature theory, in the form utilized by Halle (1962), dissolves the geometry of phonological space into a set of independent dimensions. Even if a phonetic form of distinctive features is provided with scalar values, distinctive feature theory has no rationale for co-variation of grave and acute with compact and diffuse. Nevertheless, the purely internal equilibria projected by Martinet do not provide a coherent theory of the mechanism of sound change. In the scheme that has been outlined here, they are only part of a more comprehensive process, embedded in the sociolinguistic structure of the community.

Conclusion

This discussion has focused on the theme that internal, structural pressures and sociolinguistic pressure act in systematic alternation in the mechanism of linguistic change. It can no longer be seriously argued that the linguist must limit his explanations of change to the mutual influences of linguistic elements defined by cognitive function. Nor can it be argued that a changing linguistic system is autonomous in any serious sense. Here I have attempted to carry the argument beyond the mere cataloguing of possibilities by introducing a large body of evidence on sound changes observed in progress. On the basis of this evidence, we can make the stronger claim that it is not possible to complete an analysis of structural relations within a linguistic system, and then turn to external relations. The re-cycling process outlined here suggests the kind of answer we can make to the basic questions of the inciting causes of linguistic change, and the adaptive functions of change, as well as the mechanism by which change proceeds. We can expect that further investigations will modify the outline given here, but that data from the speech community will continue to form an essential part in the analysis of linguistic change.

⁷ We find some support in these observations for the idea that people do not borrow much from broadcast media or from other remote sources, but rather from those who are at the most one or two removes from them in age or social distance.

Discussion

The following excerpt from the discussion of Mr. Labov's paper reprinted in Kreidler (1965) may clarify the problem of linguistic determinants of sound change:

MR. GUMPERZ: I have another question for Professor Labov. You say that your studies show a connection between the movement of /ay/ and /oy/. Is there any reason why you could predict that /ey/ will not be affected?

MR. LABOV: In terms of the concept of phonological space I have developed here, nothing could be more clear than that /ey/ would not rise. First, there is a system of long vowels and/or centering diphthongs, which originally were related like this:

ih	uh
eh	oh
	ah

In the community investigated, the high-front and mid-front have merged, and the high-back and mid-back have merged, forming a triangular system:

[i:]	eh	oh	[U:]
			ah

Then, there is a system of forward-upgliding diphthongs, originally like this:

iy	oy
ey	ay

There is a hole in the high-back position since there is no /uy/ (very few New Yorkers say *buoy* or *chop*) *suey* as one syllable). As /oy/ moves upward to fill the hole, /ay/ moves to the back. The result is that a skewed system becomes perfectly symmetrical:

iy	oy	[U]
ey	ay	[α]

The pronunciation [mɔ' bu'] 'my boy' is the most extreme form, but it shows the direction in which the change is headed. This is repeated in the system of backward-upgliding diphthongs, in which we have:

iw	uw	ow
		aw

Our theory of phonological space would predict that /aw/ would move forward to [æ] paralleling the movement of /ay/ to [α]. And this, in fact, is what happens — there is detailed quantitative evidence to show that to the extent that /ay/ moves to the back, /aw/ moves to the front, yielding:

iw	uw
aw	ow

There is no reason for /ey/ to rise, because it is now structurally parallel to /ay/, not /oy/. I think we have here a remarkable demonstration of the internal structural pressures that Martinet has discussed in his *Économie*.⁸

⁸ Andre Martinet, *Économie des changements phonétiques* (1955).

appendix 1
Background Reading

1. Predecessors in general linguistics
2. General linguistics: current trends
3. Historical linguistics
4. Dialectology and social dialectology
5. Methods of fieldwork and description
6. Sociological perspective
7. A short list of principal collections, monographs and journals

1. Predecessors in General Linguistics

Modern sociolinguistics is in many ways a renewal of long-standing interests. The three great American contributors to general linguistics in the first half of the century are also the three men of most importance in shaping interests relevant to the study of language as an aspect of social life: Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Leonard Bloomfield. The major statement by Boas is his "Introduction" to the *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (Bulletin of the Bureau of American Ethnology 40, Part 1) (Washington, D.C.: 1911). Sapir's *Language* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1921) is still read for its insights as to the relation of language to culture, as are his seminal essays, collected in D. G. Mandelbaum (ed.), *Selected writings of Edward Sapir* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949). Bloomfield's *Language* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1933) was the standard text for a generation, establishing orientations to the speech community and its description, and is still read for its masterful presentation of historical linguistics. On these pioneers, see discussion and bibliography in Hymes (ed.), *Language in culture and society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); a more detailed analysis of the development of American work with regard to a linguistic approach to social life is given in Hymes, "Linguistic method of ethnography," in P. L. Garvin (ed.), *Method and theory in linguistics* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970). On the Sapir tradition, see Hymes, "Morris Swadesh and the first Yale School" in Swadesh, *Origin and diversification of languages* (Chicago: Aldine, 1971).

An early classic by a Danish scholar is Otto Jespersen, *Mankind, nation and the individual from a linguistic point of view* (Oslo, 1925; now reprinted, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964). In England the central earlier figures were Bronislaw Malinowski, especially his *Coral gardens and their magic*; *Part 2: The language of gardening* (London: Allen Unwin, 1935; reprinted, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), and J. R. Firth. For Firth's views, see his *Papers in linguistics 1934-1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) and F. R. Palmer (ed.), *Selected papers 1952-1959* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969). In France, Antoine Meillet took a social point of view in major writings, such as the famous essay, "Comme les mots changent leur sens," *L'année sociologique* (1905-1906). Meillet and Ferdinand de Saussure (*Cours de linguis-*

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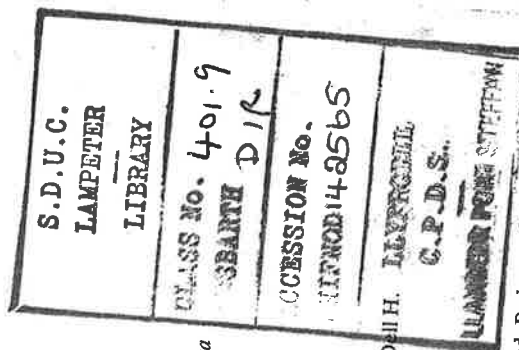
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Preface

The present work integrates in a single volume some major direc-
tions of research on the social basis of verbal communication, a subject
which has become of considerable interest to social scientists working at
both theoretical and applied levels. In recent years most linguists, in their
concern with formal methods of description, have concentrated on the
internal relations of linguistic signs, ruling out consideration of extra
linguistic factors. Today, semantics is once more a legitimate subject, and
syntax is seen to raise questions of the status of sentences as acts of
speech and parts of discourse. Basic theoretical problems of the nature of
grammar and its relation to speakers' verbal competence are therefore
once more becoming relevant. Similarly, questions of the functions of
language are again receiving serious attention.

The importance of language in social problems, especially education
and national development, also is drawing linguistics into wider concerns.
The last decade has seen an increasing number of conferences, inter-
disciplinary symposia, and monographs attempting to stimulate serious
behaviorally oriented research on stylistics and expressive speech, intra-
societal diversity of language, attitudes to language, language politics and
policy, and other similar peripheral subjects (Sebeok 1960; Bright 1966;
Lieberson 1966b; Capell 1966; Haugen 1966; MacNamara 1967;
Fishman *et al.* 1968).

Although sustained empirical work is only beginning, the response so
far seems highly promising. Social scientists are showing interest in
linguistic data as a means of studying behavior independently of overtly
expressed attitudes, while linguists are beginning to see that many impor-
tant questions of language change, education, and policy cannot be solved
without information on the social factors affecting speech. Almost over-

