

16 Social Class

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Social class is a central concept in sociolinguistic research, one of the small number of social variables by which speech communities are stratified. Trudgill (1974: 32) states that “most members of our society have some kind of idea, intuitive or otherwise, of what social class is,” and most people, both specialists and laypeople, would probably agree with this. It is ironic, then, that social class is often defined in an ad hoc way in studies of linguistic variation and change, and linguists do not frequently take advantage of the findings of disciplines that make it their business to examine social class, particularly sociology, to inform their work. Still, social class is uniformly included as a variable in sociolinguistic studies, and individuals are placed in a social hierarchy despite the lack of a consensus as to what concrete, quantifiable independent variables contribute to determining social class. To add to the irony, not only is social class uniformly included as an important variable in studies of linguistic variation, but it regularly produces valuable insights into the nature of linguistic variation and change. Thus, this variable is universally used and extremely productive, although linguists can lay little claim to understanding it. Most sociological definitions include the notion of the “life-chances” of an individual or a class, as does, for example, Michael (1962), the basis of Labov’s (1966) study of the Lower East Side of New York City. Here social class is defined as “an individual’s life chances stated in terms of his relation to the production and acquisition of goods and services.”

1 Sociological Background

The theoretical consideration of the notion of social class in modern times was sparked by the dramatic reorganization of society resulting from the industrial revolution. This overhaul of the social and economic order, which transformed a disseminated, agricultural population into an urbanized one as workers

gathered in factory centers, brought about the system of industrial capitalism, beginning in England in the second half of the eighteenth century. It spread to other western countries in the nineteenth century, notably France, Germany, and the United States, and expanded world-wide as the twentieth century progressed.

The term *sociology* was coined in 1838 by Auguste Comte (1798–1857), a French philosopher and social reformer, in his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830–42). Nearly a century and a half later Wright quoted Stinchcombe as saying that “Sociology has only one independent variable, class” (Wright 1979: 3). This may be an extreme position, but sociologists certainly agree on the centrality of social class to the understanding of social structures, and the sociological literature on class is vast, reflecting the diversity of views on the subject.

Karl Marx (1818–83) is considered by many scholars to be the founder of economic history and sociology, and he developed the first and one of the most influential theories of social class.¹ Marx was a theoretician, but he was an activist as well. Within his larger project of writing the history of all human societies, he took as his object of special study the newly developed system of industrial capitalism. With his theme of the history of society as the history of class struggles, he emphasized the economic aspect of class stratification. His goal was social reform: he believed that the polarization of the owners of the means of production versus the labor force would increase, that revolution would ensue, that the workers would be victorious, private ownership of the means of production would be abolished, and a classless society would be established.

Max Weber (1864–1920) is the second “classical” theorist of social class. While Marx promulgated socialism, Weber supported industrial capitalism and was opposed to socialism. He agreed with Marx that ownership or non-ownership of property is fundamental in determining the life-chances of an individual or a class, but he added the dimensions of power and prestige as interacting factors creating hierarchies. He introduced the concept of social stratification and elaborated a complex, multi-factored social structure.

Two central components of social class, then, are (1) the objective, economic measures of property ownership and the power and control it confers on its possessor, and (2) the subjective measures of prestige, reputation, and status. The most simplistic social classification is based on occupational categories, with non-manual (“white collar”) occupations being rated higher than manual (“blue collar”) occupations. This factor combines the objective and subjective components, demonstrating that factors other than income are important in the assessment of social status, since skilled tradesmen such as plumbers and carpenters typically earn more income than lower-level white collar workers such as clerks and cashiers. Similarly, a highly trained professional such as an architect may well earn less than the builder who executes his designs. The reliance on occupational categories as a measure of social class is very common in social science research.

The task of the researcher interested in linguistic variation is to find a way to determine, with reliability and validity, the social ranking, social class, or both, of the members of the speech community under investigation. One sociologist who is frequently quoted as a guide is W. Lloyd Warner, although his work is, in practice, not fully utilized by sociolinguists.

Warner and his associates represent the view that status groups form the foundation of social stratification. As a social anthropologist, he set out to study in detail (published in six volumes) contemporary American society by examining a single, self-contained city. The fieldwork in the small New England city of Yankee City, population about 17,000, involved from five to fifteen researchers at any given time. They interviewed 16,785 individuals, most of them repeatedly, over the period from 1930 to 1934. Following the methods of social anthropology, they combined interviewing with observation, gathering a wealth of detailed information that reaches astonishing proportions. In the matter of social class, they followed the indications of their informants, who exhibited a keen sense of the relative social rank of their acquaintances. The researchers quickly learned that neither income nor occupation was the sole predictor of rating on the social scale. The characteristics that were called into play included education, occupation, wealth, income, family, intimate friends, clubs and fraternities, manners, speech, and general outward behavior.

Warner generalized the methods used in Yankee City and in later studies and published a set of procedures for determining social class by two alternative methods: Evaluated Participation and the Index of Status Characteristics (Warner et al. 1960). The explicit purpose of this work was to provide tools for researchers in other fields to use in assessing social class among the populations of their respective interest. The method of Evaluated Participation provides a set of instructions for, in effect, eliciting the types of information that were gathered in the Yankee City study to determine how community members rated each other on the social scale. The Index of Status Characteristics is designed to be simple and inexpensive to use, requiring little skill, little time, and the elicitation of limited, easily obtained information. It was empirically derived and, following testing and refinement, it was validated against the scale of Evaluated Participation which had been calculated for 303 families in a small Midwestern city that had been studied in depth. In these respects Warner's Index of Status Characteristics seems to be eminently suited to use in survey-type studies of speech communities.

The writings of Warner et al. (1960) are firmly grounded in an awareness of the necessity of tailoring any study to the particular characteristics of the community being investigated. They advise against a blanket, unthinking application of their procedures to any social science research project. At the same time, their methods rest on solid research, and they have carefully tested their results and made sensible modifications accordingly. As a tool for judging social class, in a survey study in North America (and, perhaps with adjustments for local conditions, in other industrialized societies), it offers a set of procedures that a linguist could defensibly rely on.

One alternative to Warner's ISC is provided by the occupational prestige ratings and the Socioeconomic Index (SEI) developed by the National Opinion Research Council (NORC). In 1947, the NORC published the North-Hatt scale of occupational prestige, which listed prestige ratings for 90 occupational titles.

In 1950 the US Census Bureau began collecting data on income and education for incumbents of certain occupations, of which 270 were listed that year. To address the need for a ranking of the social status of all occupations, Duncan (1961) calculated a Socioeconomic Index by performing a multiple regression of the NORC prestige ratings on the income and educational levels for those occupations that were common to both the NORC and the Census listings and then extrapolating to occupational titles listed by the Census but not included in the NORC study.

This work has been updated, most recently in 1989. The NORC has reported prestige ratings (Nakao and Treas 1990) for the 503 occupational titles on which the Census Bureau gathered data in 1980, and they also report SEI assignments (Nakao and Treas 1992), using the methods developed by Duncan, with adjustments made for current levels of educational attainment and income. This scale has the advantage of being applicable to speakers on the basis of occupation alone.

2 Treatments of Social Class

To illustrate the variety of treatments of social class and some of the considerations that it raises in studies of linguistic change and variation, we turn now to a review of some of the studies that have included social class as an independent variable.

2.1 *The New York City department store survey*

This study by Labov (1972) is unique in that three strata defined by prestige were established first, and then subjects were randomly (and as exhaustively as possible) recruited from within each stratum. Stratification was defined by the prestige of the three New York City stores that were studied, Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's, and Klein's. The relative prestige of the stores was in turn established by a number of independent factors: the location of the store; the amount of advertising in the *New York Times*, with its middle-class readership, and in the *Daily News*, a working-class newspaper; the relative cost of goods in the three stores, the form of prices quoted in advertising copy, and the relative emphasis on prices; the physical plant of the three stores; and information on the regard held by employees for working conditions at the three stores. Thus the social stratification of the three sites was firmly established, while, in this

unusual case, the study controlled for occupation: the interviewees were predominantly salespeople, plus a small sample of floorwalkers, cashiers, and stockboys.

2.2 *The Lower East Side*

Labov's study of the Lower East Side of New York City (1966) had the benefit of following in the footsteps of a survey of the same area by the Mobilization for Youth program (MFY), which had been conducted the year before Labov's exploratory interviews. MFY was a publicly funded agency with the mission of attacking the problem of juvenile delinquency. The research design for the MFY study was developed by faculty at the New York School for Social Research at Columbia University, who offered Labov the opportunity to use both the demographic data that had been collected for MFY and the roster of interviewees. Thus, he had access to far more exact information on the prospective speakers than linguistic researchers are normally able to gather on their own.

The MFY approach to social class explicitly chooses to rely on factors of production – that is, on objective factors – rather than on consumption, or status – the expression of choices of lifestyle (Michael 1962). Warner, as we have seen, and also the NYC department store survey, rely instead on factors that reflect status. Persuasive arguments seem to be possible for both sides.

The MFY survey established a 10-point scale of socioeconomic class, based on the occupation, education, and income of the informants. The occupational rank was determined by four categories (Michael 1962: 213):

- 1 professionals, managers, and officials (salaried and self-employed);
- 2 clerks and salesmen;
- 3 craftsmen and foremen; self-employed white and blue-collar workers – including small shopkeepers;
- 4 operatives, service workers, laborers, and permanently unemployed persons.

The levels for education were as follows (Michael 1962: 214):

- 1 completed some college or more;
- 2 finished high school;
- 3 completed some high school;
- 4 finished grade school or less.

The MFY staff determined each family's income, and from that they calculated an "adjusted weekly income per equivalent adult" by a procedure that counted children as carrying less weight than adults. The actual income figures are out of date, but the qualitative description can be applied at any time:

- 1 more than the national median;
- 2 more than the Lower East Side median but less than the national median;
- 3 more than the minimum wage but less than the LES median;
- 4 less than the minimum wage.

The three factors of occupation, education, and income were weighted equally in calculating the index score, which ranged from 0 to 9. The resulting range of index scores was grouped into four categories, when grouping was desired: lower-class, working-class, and middle-class, the last of which was divided into lower middle class and upper middle class when such a division was indicated. It is notable that Labov varied the assignment of index ranges to social classes, depending on what groupings provided the best fit with the data. Thus his approach was to draw on both the possibilities of greater precision offered by the 10-point scale and the possibilities of greater generality offered by the four- or three-class scale, reserving the right to alternate between the two.

2.3 *Philadelphia: The neighborhood study*

The work of the Language Change and Variation project in Philadelphia in the 1970s, reported by Labov (2001), strives to discover the social location of the innovators of linguistic change and therefore focuses on the embedding of individuals in their neighborhoods. To this end, five neighborhoods were selected to represent the range of community types within the urban area, and one block in each neighborhood was selected as an entry point to the community. They are (1) Wicket Street, in a mill and factory section settled by Irish immigrants in the middle of the nineteenth century; (2) Pitt Street, in a neighborhood settled by the overflow of Irish immigrants from the area of Wicket Street; (3) Clark Street, in an Italian neighborhood of the part of the city which has become the stereotype of working-class Philadelphia; (4) Mallow Street, in a lower middle-class suburb adjoining the city to the west; and (5) Nancy Drive, in a middle- and upper middle-class suburban community.

For purposes of this study, Labov constructed a socioeconomic status index based on education, occupation, and residence value. For each factor, six levels were defined, and an individual's index was calculated as the unweighted sum of the scores for each factor. The categories are as follows:

Education	5	Professional school
	4	College graduate
	3	Some college
	2	High school graduate
	1	Some high school
	0	Grammar school

Occupation	6	Professional, owner-director of large firm
	5	White collar – proprietor, manager
	4	White collar – merchant, foreman, sales
	3	Blue collar – skilled
	2	Blue collar – unskilled
	1	Unemployed

Residence value was ranked in increments of \$5,000, with the lowest level being up to \$4,900 and the highest being \$25,000 and above. Much more than education and occupation, this factor is critically dependent on time and place and must be set separately for each community to be studied.

As attention was also focused on the neighborhoods themselves as units to be studied, Labov seeks to characterize each neighborhood on a socioeconomic scale to judge the adequacy of the sampling of the range of block types in the urban area as a whole. As might be expected, the neighborhoods are most clearly differentiated by house value, although the two Irish neighborhoods, at the lowest levels of the scale, are about equal on this dimension. Occupation shows a similar distribution. The modal value for Wicket and Pitt Streets is unskilled blue collar jobs; Clark Street residents are concentrated in skilled blue collar jobs; Mallow Street is characterized by the lower level of white collar positions; and Nancy Drive is inhabited predominantly by professionals, proprietors, and managers. Interestingly, education does not distinguish the neighborhoods well, since for all neighborhoods, the modal level of educational attainment is high school graduate.

Thus house values rank a neighborhood by social status, but occupation ranks an individual by social status. Education in this case does not contribute to the social stratification of speakers. This is a provocative finding, since it is intuitively understood that education affects an individual's speech. To pursue this issue, linguists might treat education as a separate independent variable, independent of social class.

The Philadelphia study also considered two additional factors in the effort to assess the full character of an individual's social position within the community: house upkeep and social mobility. House upkeep is important to a person's local identity, but it does not apply outside the immediate area. It is judged in relation to local norms of what is expected, and it relates to the inhabitants' age and perceived ability to work on the house. In the five neighborhoods studied, the proportion of houses rated "Improved" as compared to the lower standard "Kept up" increases regularly from the lowest-ranked neighborhood to the lower-middle-class block of Mallow Drive.

Social mobility is judged as a comparison of the head of household's occupation with that of his or her parents, whether higher, equal, or lower. The proportion of upwardly mobile to stable speakers increases regularly across the three working class communities, but the lower-middle-class neighborhood of Mallow Drive had only one upwardly mobile speaker. The upper-middle-class neighborhood had a very high proportion of upward mobility, as is

expected at the higher levels in a society where individuals can rise through the ranks on their merits. This distribution suggests that social mobility may *not* be useful as a predictor of linguistic variation, since the two groups that are expected to be most innovative are opposed in their levels of social mobility. But a conclusive result has yet to be obtained.

2.4 *Norwich, England*

For Trudgill's study of Norwich (1974), he set up a social class index based on six parameters: (1) occupation; (2) father's occupation; (3) income; (4) education; (5) locality; and (6) housing. Each parameter was rated on a scale from zero to five, and the scores for all categories were summed without weighting.

The occupational scale presents a familiar ranking:

- 1 professional workers;
- 2 employers and managers;
- 3 other non-manual workers;
- 4 foremen, skilled manual workers, and own account workers;
- 5 personal service, semi-skilled, and agricultural workers;
- 6 unskilled workers.

To obtain information on the sensitive subject of income, Trudgill employed the ingenious technique of showing speakers a card on which salary and wage ranges had been written and asking which range described the income of the person whose occupation was the determinant of occupational status for that speaker (that is, self, husband, or father). With this technique, there were no refusals to give the requested information when it was known to the speaker.

Dividing the educational spectrum into ranges depends in large part on the natural breaking points in the educational system of the place under study. It also has a parallel to the problem of setting up ranges of income in that, since the ideal ranking will maximally differentiate the population under study, it will depend in part on the expected levels of attainment, especially at both ends of the spectrum.

Trudgill's "Locality" is the neighborhood in the city of Norwich where the speaker lives, subjectively ranked for desirability on the basis of the author's native knowledge of the city. Indeed, any researcher who conducts an in-depth study of a speech community ought to be able to judge the relative prestige of neighborhoods within that community.

Trudgill's measure of housing is rather complex, based on three factors: house ownership, age of the house, and building type, with levels selected as measures of the relative prestige of this most conspicuous aspect of a speaker's attainment of lifestyle. Under ownership, he distinguishes council-rented, privately rented, and owner-occupied, with prestige ascending in that order. For the age of the house, he judges a newer house to be more prestigious than an

older house, a correlation that would not hold in many communities. The relative prestige of a house as a function of age needs to be assessed with respect to the neighborhoods and communities being studied. For building type, Trudgill distinguishes terraces and flats (rowhouses and apartments), semi-detached, and detached. The three factors are arranged in a grid in which an index of relative prestige is assigned for the joint effect of all three. Of the combinations that actually occur in the sample, the low end of the scale is represented both by council-rented, pre-1939 terraces and flats and by privately rented pre-1914 terraces and flats, and the highest index is assigned to owner-occupied post-war detached houses.

With an index of prestige assigned to each of the six factors, the social class index for each speaker can be calculated. In Trudgill's sample, the actual range of the index is 3–26, out of a possible 0–30. Among the 60 speakers, there are a maximum of eight with any one score, with a concentration of speakers in the lower half of the range, from 6 to 13.

Trudgill observes that with multiple measures contributing to a socio-economic index, it would be possible to examine each one separately and determine which one, or which combination, provides the greatest explanatory power for the study of linguistic variation. This is a tantalizing point; such a study would be invaluable, but, to the best of my knowledge, it has never been done.

With a social class index that takes on such a wide range of values, it is necessary to group the speakers. Trudgill turns to a syntactic variable, the realization of third person singular verb forms with no third person singular marker, to examine the correlation between social class index and linguistic variation. Based on the percentage of markerless forms in formal and casual style for the pooled speakers ranked with each social class index, he is able quite persuasively to divide the spectrum of social class into five groups, which he labels Middle Middle Class, Lower Middle, Upper Working, Middle Working, and Lower Working. Although he declares that occupation is not a critical factor in arriving at this grouping, since its weight is only two-fifths of the index (own occupation and father's occupation), he nevertheless finds that the occupational range of each class is highly systematic. The highest class (MMC) consists mainly of professional people, including teachers, managers, employers, bank clerks, and insurance workers; the next group, the LMC, consists of non-manual workers such as typists, commercial travelers, and office workers; the third (UWC) includes foremen and skilled workers; the fourth (MWC) consists of manual workers; and the fifth and lowest (LWC) consists mainly of unskilled workers.

2.5 *Anniston, Alabama*

Feagin (1979) used her knowledge as a native of Anniston, Alabama, to select upper-class and working-class informants, using an informal Evaluated

Participation procedure. She is exceptional among sociolinguistic researchers in that she checked her class assignments by calculating Warner's Index of Status Characteristics (Warner et al. 1960) for all the speakers in her primary sample, using the scale that Warner established for Jonesville to define the social classes. The exercise is as much a confirmation of Warner's method as of Feagin's, since, as Warner says, the points of demarcation of the social classes properly should be established for each individual community by the methods of Evaluated Participation. Even so, there is very good agreement between Feagin's classification of her speakers and Warner's categorization. Her 27 upper class speakers include four who would be rated only as strongly upper-middle-class on Warner's scale, and her 41 working-class speakers include five who would be classified as lower-middle-class by Warner, plus one who would be classified as lower-class by Warner.

2.6 *Sydney, Australia and Paris, France*

While most researchers do not seem to think that occupation by itself is a sufficient determiner of social class, Horvath (1985) used it alone effectively in her study of variation and change in Sydney. She categorized speakers on the basis of occupation, following Congalton (1962, 1969), in which a random sample of 303 Sydney citizens ranked 135 occupations, and the rankings were later confirmed in a follow-up study of university students. Horvath conflated Congalton's four classes to three, which she termed Middle Class, Upper Working Class, and Lower Working Class. The Middle Class consists of professionals and skilled workers who are professional-like, including, for example, accountants, real estate agents, and pharmacists. The Upper Working Class consists of less skilled workers, e.g. flight attendants, arc welders, builders, chefs, and salesmen; and the Lower Working Class consists of unskilled workers such as truck drivers, metal workers, and factory workers.

Like Horvath, Lennig (1978) also used occupation alone as a measure of social class in his study of variation and change in the vowel system in Paris, and he too divided his sample into three categories:

- 1 Working Class: Manual workers who are not self-employed
- 2 Lower Middle Class: Office employees, secretaries, service personnel, self-employed manual workers, and artisans
- 3 Upper Middle Class: Corporation managers, professionals, and students in academic high schools

The main difference between the two is that Horvath has one middle-class and two levels of working-class, while Lennig has one working-class and two levels of middle-class. Horvath's upper-working-class seems to be the same as Lennig's lower-middle-class.

2.7 *Panama City, Panama*

Cedergren reports that Biesanz and Biesanz's (1955) sociological study of Panama City established a three-class system in Panama, consisting of an upper-class, a middle-class, and a lower-class, comprising 2 percent, 23 percent, and 75 percent of the population, respectively. Upper-class membership requires having the proper family background as well as occupation; middle-class membership is achieved through education and includes white collar workers; and the large lower-class consists of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Cedergren's study did not attempt to follow this division, but rather derived a finer ranking of speakers by an index calculated without weighting based on education, occupation, and barrio of residence. Education ranges from less than junior high school to at least some college. Occupation is a simple four-point scale of managers, professionals, and proprietors; white collar workers; skilled workers; and unskilled laborers and domestic workers. The ranking of the barrio differs the most from the criteria that are encountered in North America and Europe: each barrio was ranked on the basis of the average number of persons per room in each household, the proportion of households with a private toilet, and the proportion of households with a refrigerator. With an index calculated for each speaker, Cedergren divided her sample of 79 subjects into four groups. As it happens, these groups map onto the distribution of population laid out by Biesanz and Biesanz rather well, with the subdivision of the lowest group into two; the top group consists of less than 10 percent of the sample, the next two groups are each about a quarter of the sample, and the lowest group is just under half the sample.

2.8 *Cairo, Egypt*

In studying linguistic variation and change in the diglossic setting of Cairene Arabic, Haeri (1997) used a weighted index of social factors which was then translated into a small set of social classes. In this case, the factors are father's or mother's occupation, with a weight of 0.5; whether the speaker attended a private language school, a private Arabic school, or a public school, with a weight of 0.25; the speaker's neighborhood, with a weight of 0.15; and the speaker's occupation, with a weight of 0.1. The weighted factors are summed, and the resulting index values are grouped into social classes designated Lower Middle Class, Middle Middle Class, Upper Middle Class, and Upper Class.

Thus there are many different ways to stratify a society, both in number of strata and in criteria for stratification. The researcher should try to employ an approach that has validity for the goal of the particular project and type of community. Most researchers, however, are not in a position to measure the validity of any approach. As Warner demonstrated, that is a study in itself. In practice, researchers typically formulate an index of social class, usually based

on a combination of measures, which are likely to include both objective and subjective indices. The index is divided into larger categories, and correlations are calculated between the dependent variable and both the index, with its finer scale, and the larger categories, with its grosser scale.

3 The Linguistic Market

Sankoff and Laberge (1978) took a new approach to the ranking of speakers on the basis of their place in society, one which was geared to be specific to language use in a way that social class itself may not be. They adapted the notion of “linguistic market” from Bourdieu and Boltanski (1975) to construct an index intended to measure the extent to which a speaker’s situation in life requires the use of the standard language. While the 1989 recalculation of occupational prestige in the United States (Nakao and Treas 1990) employed 1,250 lay judges, Sankoff and Laberge based their index on ratings by just eight judges. However, these were not lay judges; they were practicing sociolinguists who were intimately familiar with the sociolinguistic relationships within the Montreal francophone community. They were each asked to rank the 120 speakers of the Montreal corpus on the basis of “the relative importance of the legitimized language in the socioeconomic life of the speaker.” As a basis for making their decisions, they were provided with a description of the socioeconomic life history of each speaker. This included all the information available to provide as full a picture of each individual’s economic context as possible, including occupation, job description, details about parents or spouses, and occupation of the head of the household. The agreement among judges on the ranking of individuals was strikingly high, with a rate of disagreement ranging from less than 2 percent to less than 10 percent for all pairwise comparisons of judges. This finding echoes the observation by researchers on occupational prestige that such rankings are highly reliable.

From the rankings, Sankoff and Laberge (1978) calculated a linguistic market index for each speaker, and then they examined the correspondence between the index and a parameter indicating the tendency to use the standard variant for each of three linguistic variables. An extension of this method would be to use the same kind of ranking technique to develop a linguistic market index and match it to occupation, just as the NORC socioeconomic index is matched to the occupations listed by the US Census Bureau. This would respond to the objection many linguists have raised that indices of social class do not adequately relate to linguistic behavior. Like virtually every measure of social class, it would be strongly tied to an individual’s occupation, but it would embody other dimensions as well.

The goal of studies of linguistic change and variation is to determine what can be learned about language from the differences in linguistic behavior of people of different social positions. Therefore, the determinants of social position that

a linguist considers must be ones that are actually relevant to linguistic variation. This problem is akin to that of dividing the age continuum into linguistically relevant groups. Where age is concerned, the linguist can (usually) easily determine exactly what the chronological age of a speaker is. However, Eckert (1997) argues convincingly that a composite of factors relating to the life stage and social identity of an individual are more significant to the determination of linguistic behavior than simple chronological age. Such turning points as the formation of peer groups and joining the workforce, which can demonstrably be shown to affect linguistic behavior, should be taken into account in dividing the age continuum into linguistically relevant categories. Likewise, social factors that can realistically be judged – or better, can positively be demonstrated – to affect linguistic behavior are ones that should be included in a measure of social class. These might include an index of the linguistic market, as discussed above. Social mobility is another factor that would plausibly have a strong effect on a person's speech and could be incorporated into a linguist's conception of social class. The same holds for orientation towards or away from the local community, which was found to play a major role in Labov's (1972) study of Martha's Vineyard and has been shown to carry weight elsewhere as well (Wolfram et al. 1999, Feagin 1998). In the spirit of Warner's work on Evaluated Participation, another possible component of "sociolinguistic class" might be judgments by peers of who is an "effective speaker." In Labov's search (2001) for the innovators in sound change, where all indications point to people who are central figures in their local neighborhoods, the ranking by individuals of their peers as "good", "average", or "poor" speakers could be a promising avenue for investigation.

4 Subcommunities

Milroy (1980) objects that the large groupings derived from calculation of an index or other means "do not necessarily have any kind of objective, or even intersubjective, reality" (1980: 14) and that membership in a particular group, while serving as an expedient for the researcher, does not necessarily form an important part of the speaker's own definition of his social identity. She introduces the notion of community in a specific, technical sense, as a cohesive group to which people have a sense of belonging, that is rooted to a particular locale. Indeed, there are numerous studies of such small, closely knit, territorially based communities or subpopulations within larger speech communities. They are on a different scale from the survey-type studies of entire urban areas, and they clearly call for different methods, as she amply demonstrates in her own work in Belfast.

In one such case, Dayton (1996) studied a network of African-American Vernacular English speakers in Philadelphia. She observes that in the broad perspective, her speakers would be classified as urban working-class. A more

detailed view would note distinctions that are significant to the speakers themselves. For one, the women were more upwardly mobile than the men. The women had high school diplomas, some of them had some college education, and they expected their children to go to college. Among the men, on the other hand, only half had high school diplomas, and none had completed any years of college. Most of the speakers had full-time jobs, and the women's jobs tended to be of higher status. They held administrative, secretarial, and clerical jobs, while the men were factory workers, janitors, restaurant workers, and maintenance men. The locally meaningful perspective relates to the African-American definition of class, which differentiates between those who hold a job (and are therefore working-class) and those who do not. The men in her sample described the women as "middle class", recognizing their upward mobility.

Eckert (1989, 2000) provides another example of a case in which the circumscription of the community under investigation compels a focus on local values. Her study of a high school cohort in suburban Detroit reveals the self-defined social groups of Jocks and Burnouts to be fundamentally opposed to each other in multiple ways. The Jocks are oriented toward the corporate structure of the school and stand to gain rights, privileges, and power by cooperating with the middle class, adult-oriented institutions around them. The Burnouts see little advantage in what the school offers them, as they will not go on to the college and professional training that the Jocks look forward to. The Burnouts are connected rather to the world outside the school, which is where they will work and find entertainment and social life after graduation, and in the meantime the school offers them only restrictions. This opposition of relationship to the school and all the structure it embodies sets the stage for a permanent state of conflict between the two groups, which is expressed in all the symbolic behavior the students have at their command, including language.

Rickford's (1979, 1986) fieldwork in Cane Walk, Guyana, provides a final example of a small community of speakers that must be understood on its own terms. In the context of an East Indian sugar estate community, the social class divisions that are appropriate to an industrialized economy were not applicable. Instead, Rickford found that there were two groups, which could be called social classes, except that they were motivated by such opposed ideologies that they could be taken for different universes. On the one hand, there was the Estate Class, composed of fieldworkers on the sugar estate who performed unskilled, labor-intensive jobs and occupied the lower stratum of the local society. The opposite group was the Non-estate Class, consisting of drivers and foremen on the sugar estate, as well as clerks, shopowners, and skilled tradesmen.

Like the Jocks and Burnouts in Eckert's study, the two groups differ dramatically in their opportunities for advancement. Members of the Non-estate Class are able to gain increments in income and power, while the efforts of the Estate Class to better their situations are rarely successful. At the same time, the speech of the Estate Class members is overwhelmingly creole, while the speech of the Non-estate Class members is much closer to standard English. Rickford proposes that members of the Estate Class use creole by choice, "as

a revolutionary act" (1986: 218), to express solidarity with their class and opposition to the system that deprives them of upward mobility.

5 Social Class and Linguistic Variation

In determining the relationship between social class and variable language use, there are three cases to consider: stable variation, change from above (that is, from above the level of consciousness or social awareness), and change from below the level of social awareness. The linguistic variants that may be involved in stable variation or change from above may be prestige forms or stigmatized forms. In change from below, "there is no important distinction between stigmatized and prestige forms: the speech form assumed by each group may be taken as an unconscious mark of self-identification" (Labov 1966: 331).

Stratification by social class is not enough to diagnose linguistic change in progress. Since "change" means increasing use with the passage of time, the distribution of variants in apparent time is essential in determining whether a linguistic variable is undergoing change. The distribution of variants across contextual styles also provides strong evidence for the processes that are at work. Labov (1966) schematizes the expected distribution of linguistic variants for the possible cases:

1 A stigmatized feature (from Labov 1966: 325)

(a) Stable variation – e.g. the [əŋ] variant of (ing); see below.

	Lower class	Working class	Lower middle class	Upper middle class
Younger	<i>high</i>	<i>higher</i>	<i>higher</i>	<i>low</i>
Older	<i>high</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>low</i>

(b) Change from above the level of social awareness

	Lower class	Working class	Lower middle class	Upper middle class
Younger	[<i>lower</i>]	<i>lower</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>low</i>
Older	[<i>higher</i>]	<i>higher</i>	<i>higher</i>	<i>low</i>

An example of this case is centralized, upgliding variants of the nucleus in *bird*, *curl*, and *verse* in New York City, realized as [ɹɪ], registered in the shibboleth "Toity-Toid Street." This scenario also holds for the relic forms examined by Trudgill (1974), the backing of (ir) in *bird*, *hurt*, *fern*; the shortening to [ʊ] of (ō) which had been raised to [u:] in *comb*, *alone*, *boat*; and the shortening to [ʊ] of the (ū) in *boot*, *spoon*, *roof*.

It is evident that without distinguishing age groups, the difference between stable variation and change from above for a stigmatized feature would likely be lost. The lowest class could demonstrate a difference between the two types, but only a slight one.

2 A prestige feature (from Labov 1966: 327)

(a) Stable variation

	Lower class	Working class	Lower middle class	Upper middle class
Younger	<i>low</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>high</i>
Older	<i>low</i>	<i>higher</i>	<i>higher</i>	<i>high</i>

This case is simply the inverse of stable variation involving a stigmatized feature, schematized above in (1a). It holds for the standard or prestige members of a pair of variants in a state of stable variation: the [ɪŋ] variant of (ing), the interdental variants in the alternation of [θ] and [t], [ð] and [d] in *think* and *this*, and so on.

(b) Change from above the level of social awareness – e.g. NYC post-vocalic /r/

	Lower class	Working class	Lower middle class	Upper middle class
Younger	<i>low</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>high</i>
Older	<i>higher</i>	<i>higher</i>	<i>higher</i>	<i>low</i>

This process is also suggested by the pattern of stratification by contextual style. In what is probably the most-reprinted diagram in the history of linguistics, Labov presented the crossover pattern by which the lower middle class exceeds the upper middle class in the production of constricted (r) in word-lists and minimal pairs (Figure 11: Re-defined class stratification of (r): Six class groups, 1966, p. 240). It also displays fine stratification, in contrast to the finding of sharp stratification that is typical of stable linguistic variables.

3 Change from below the level of social awareness – early stage (from Labov 1966: 330)

	Lower class	Working class	Lower middle class	Upper middle class
Youngest	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>
Young adults	<i>medium</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>medium</i>	<i>low</i>
Middle aged	<i>low</i>	<i>medium</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>low</i>
Oldest	<i>low</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>low</i>	<i>low</i>

The predominant characteristic of linguistic changes from below is the curvilinear pattern of social distribution. Early observations of this pattern were Labov's study (1966) of the raising of (oh) in New York City, Cedergren's (1973) description of the lenition of (ch) in Panamanian Spanish, and Trudgill's (1974) investigation of the backing of (e) and the centralization and backing of (i) in *right, ride, rye* in Norwich. Labov's studies of the Philadelphia speech community show further evidence of innovation by the interior social classes for the fronting and raising of (aw) in *house, south*; the raising and backing of (ay) preceding voiceless segments, as in *right, bike*; the raising and fronting of checked (ey) in *made, take*; and the fronting of (uw) and (ow) in *move, boo* and *phone, go* (Labov 1980).

Over time, a change from below may become subject to social stigmatization, as is the case, for example, with the tensing and raising of short *a* in Philadelphia and New York City. This development complicates the picture of social class and age, as the middle social and age groups are caught between longer duration of exposure to the advancing change on one hand and the inclination to produce more prestigious forms on the other. The evidence of style shifting across the social spectrum is a considerable aid in untangling the picture of the processes at work. Evidence from the distribution of the variants with respect to other social factors, such as ethnicity and gender, is also called into play.

Stable variation shows sharp stratification, with monotonically increasing or decreasing use of the marked variant with ascending social class. (Of course, if you increase the number of designated social classes, you necessarily decrease the distances between them. The designations of sharp and fine stratification depend in part on the number of social classes.) This relation holds across social contexts (styles) as well: in more formal styles, speakers use less (or more, for a prestige feature) of the marked variant. The alternation of the velar and apical variants of the variable (ing) is a well-known example. These generalizations were found by Fischer (1958) in his study of New England schoolchildren, and they have been repeated in many successive studies of this variable. Labov (1966) presents the same findings for the adult white New York City speakers (Figure 3: Class stratification of (ing), p. 398). At every point, the ordering of social classes shows that lower classes use the [ɪn] variant more than higher classes. The finding is reinforced by being repeated three times, in the three contextual styles that are presented on the graph. Trudgill (1974) arrived at the same picture, with sharp stratification between the middle class and the working class in spontaneous speech (Figure 14: Variable (ng) by class and style, p. 92). It is also notable that the social class lines are quite widely and regularly separated. (The meeting at the zero point of the two highest classes in the most formal style does not disturb the regularity of the picture.) For a stable prestige feature, one would expect the social distribution to follow the same principles, except the slope of the lines is reversed.

When linguistic variation is part of a change in progress, the greatest use of the incoming variant is expected to be found in the innovating social group, with levels of use falling off progressively in adjacent social groups of increasing

distance. However, beyond this, the levels of use of a variant for different age groups must be taken into account. In change from above, a simple plot of overall use of the incoming variant would not distinguish it from stable variation involving a prestige feature. Change from below is characterized by the curvilinear pattern of social distribution.

6 Understanding Social Class

Researchers interested in linguistic variation and change have been wrestling with the problems of defining and implementing the notion of social class as long as they have been studying the social embedding of language. Regrettably, there is as yet very little contact between sociolinguists and sociologists, nor has there been systematic study of social class itself within the field of sociolinguistics, and the use of the variable of social class is still quite mechanical and naive in the hands of many researchers.

That said, it cannot be denied that the dimension of social class is not only important, but it is also highly productive in sociolinguistic research. One might only imagine that it could be more so if it were used more systematically, applied in comparable ways by researchers working in different communities.

If social class is determined by a combination of features, the single indicator that accounts for by far the greatest portion of the variance is occupation. Some researchers use occupation alone as a determiner of social class, and it is hard to imagine a composite index that excludes occupation. Even the cross-cultural applicability of occupation as an indicator of social class may be greater than researchers are inclined to expect. Inkeles and Rossi (1956) found the ranking of occupations to be approximately the same in a cross-section of industrialized nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, New Zealand, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Further, judgments of occupational prestige seem to be fairly stable over time, at least in the short run. Hodge et al. (1964) report a correlation of 0.99 between scores from the original North-Hatt study ranking occupational prestige in 1947 and a replication in 1963. The systematic small changes that were found include an increase in the prestige of scientific occupations, a decrease for culturally oriented occupations, and an upward trend for artisans. This stability is explained as a consequence of presumed stability in the prestige associated with the criteria on which the ratings are likely to be based, such as education, income, and functional importance. Nakao et al. (1990: 7) go so far as to state that "Occupational evaluations are clearly part of the core value system of American society." This is based on the findings that assessments of occupational prestige are consistent from one subgroup to another, are learned at a relatively early age, are relatively stable over time, and "are close to immutable in the short run."

Still, it is usually the case that occupation is not allowed to stand as the sole indicator of social class. When additional factors are included, they should be

used in a motivated way, with an awareness of the distinction between objective factors of economic power and ownership as opposed to matters of status and prestige.

A second issue that comes from sociological theory is the distinction between a conflict model of class structure and a functional, or consensus model. As Rickford (1986) shows, both conflict and consensus can occur within one speech community. Linguists frequently express concern over the importance of tailoring the notion of social class to the particular community under study, and such customization extends to deciding whether a conflict or a consensus model applies to a community. In practice, though, a researcher working intensively in a community almost always does take the norms, values, and special characteristics of the community into account, though the understanding of local dynamics may take time to acquire. If the researcher is truly engaged in the community, if he or she has talked and listened to its members enough to visit in their homes, to ask about their families, to know what topics are of burning local interest and concern, then he or she will learn how the members of the community regard each other and will tailor the formulation of all social variables to describe the community in its own terms.

NOTE

- 1 Much of the material in this section is drawn from Edgell (1993) and Tumin (1967).

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