

“Attitudes towards a group’s language reflect attitudes towards a group.” (Mooney and Evans, 2015)

Sociolect: language used by a particular social group

- Perspective on one’s class leads to linguistic discrimination based on people’s class, accent and variety of English spoken

Concepts associated with class:

- Prestige
- Linguistic discrimination
- Accommodation
- Class as “other”
- Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital: intangible assets such as education, connections, mastery of prestigious languages or ability to speak multiple languages, family background, etc. that a person can accumulate to improve their position in a group or society

Labels used to index social class in different societies:

- “Bogan” in Australia
- “Chav” in the UK: (Mooney and Evans, 2015) refers to “a young person of a type characterised by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a lower class status
  - (Bennett, 2012) Study on Chavespeak
    - “Muvvaa” as Mother
    - “Ave” as have
    - “Aun’ie” as Auntie
    - “Aahyagaahndaahntaahnlayhtaah?” as Are you going downtown later?
    - (Slurring)
- “White Trash” in the US
- “Minah / Ah Lian” in Singapore

The social stratification of English in New York City

(Labov, 1966) Rhoticity had been a feature of prestige since the 1940s, Labov hypothesised that rhoticity would feature more heavily in the speech of those with higher socio-economic status. He selected 3 department stores that served as an index of social stratification and asked questions to first elicit the answer “fourth floor” as a natural response, he then pretended to mishear to elicit a more carefully spoken and emphasised response of fourth floor; in this way, Labov could record 4 occurrences of /r/ pronunciation.

- Labov's results showed generally more occurrences of rhoticity among those representative of the higher class as compared to the lower class, confirming the prestige value of rhoticity and its class stratification
- He also found that there is greater /r/-stress when the speaker repeated, and was more emphatic and self-aware
- More interestingly, among those representative of the middle class there was a much stronger emphasis on the final /r/ than expected from the steadily rising scale from lower to higher class; this group also showed a heavy emphasis on /r/-pronunciation when they were more aware of their own usage
  - Labov noted the same phenomenon in his larger New York study and termed the over-compensation in pronunciation as hypercorrection – a manifestation of linguistic insecurity in the lower-middle social group

Overt prestige: usually the standard variety has the most overt prestige; it is generally socially acknowledged as “correct” and is therefore, valued highly among all speakers of the language

- Creates pressure for convergence towards the standard (all other varieties are now compared against the standard established by those in power), reduces linguistic diversity

Upward convergence: language users emphasis on standard variety, emphasising its prestige, exercised when speaking to someone and converging to their standard (recognising that the interlocutor is from an inner circle country)

Covert prestige: often ascribed to non-standard varieties by their speakers, a small specific group that shows positive evaluation of and orientation towards a certain linguistic variety usually without the speakers' awareness; the varieties are usually not accepted in all social groups

- Youthspeak

Rhoticity was, until relatively recently, the norm for pronunciation for all English speakers but in the 18th century some people in south-east England dropped the /r/ whenever they were not followed by a vowel. This non-rhotic style of speech arose among working-class speakers in the metropolitan London area, and for a long time it was considered substandard and even vulgar; educated speakers were then careful to retain the pronunciation of their /r/s in their speech. However, as time passed, non-rhoticity continued to spread and gradually climbed its way up the social scale because it was considered fashionable and daring. Finally, the condemnation of non-rhoticity ceased and it came to be a fully-accepted feature of elegant speech in England.

Style-shifting may not be a result of class (Trudgill, 1972)

Lower working class group in Norwich drop more 'g' for '-ing' endings than other working class and middle class groups above it but all groups were consistent in dropping 'g' in less formal settings