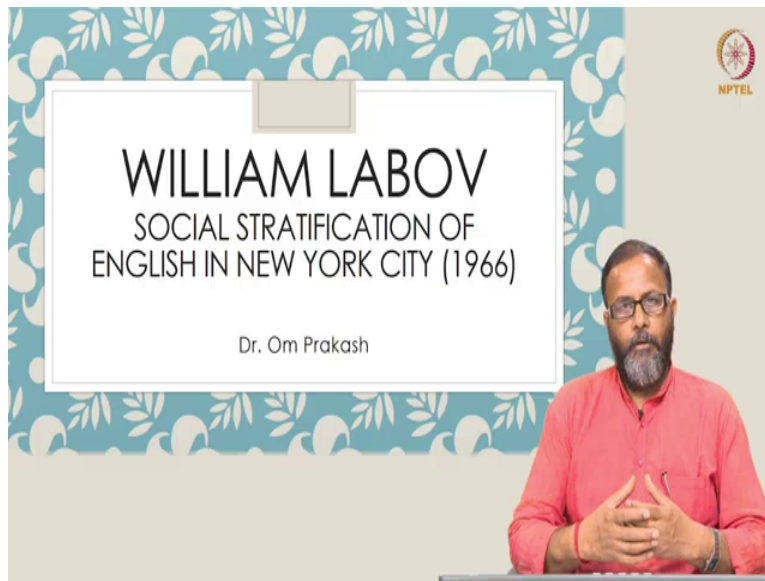


Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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William Labov Social Stratification of English in New York City (1966)

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Welcome to class. We will talk about William Labov's "Social Stratification of English in New York City", 1966. We have already talked about William Labov as a sociolinguist, as a variationist, as the pioneer of the variationist tradition in sociolinguistics. Today we will talk about the second case study and a very influential work by Labov carried out in New York City.

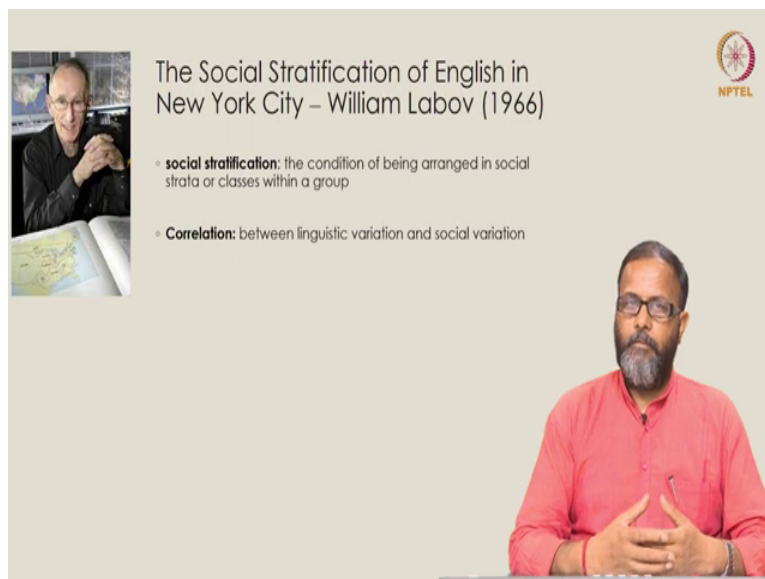
As we talked about in our earlier video as well, Labov was born in 1927 in Rutherford, New Jersey, USA, and he had a family business. So, he studied, he majored in English, philosophy and also studied chemistry at Harvard. And he worked as an industrial chemist for quite a long time before moving to linguistics in '61. He carried out his first study from '61 to '63 in Martha's Vineyard Island, three miles off the East Coast in the US.

This study used a novel technique, method and approach, which would become prominent with his next case study in New York city. And then he becomes an influencer and a pioneer in carrying out all kinds of research on speech and variation with different scholars imitating and drawing major techniques and procedures and approaches from his work, scholars in England

and other parts of America, and in Canada. The major work by Peter Trudgill as his PhD work, Peter Trudgill's work that is based on Labov's methods and techniques, Sankoff, D. Sankoff and G. Sankoff's project on French in Canada for that matter, works on Yorkshire's speech like in Petit.

So, lots of people drew from these methods and his method would inspire a variety of works which now act as the major source of inspiration and literature in sociolinguistics. So, in that series, we will talk about Labov's "Social Stratification of English in New York City", the 1966 work. That is the second case study he carried out.

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The Social Stratification of English in New York City – William Labov (1966)

- **social stratification:** the condition of being arranged in social strata or classes within a group
- **Correlation:** between linguistic variation and social variation

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Social stratification, what do we mean by that? So, the condition of being arranged in social strata or classes within a group, so hierarchy, lower social class, upper social class, middle social class, socioeconomic class, upper, lower-middle, and so on. So, a variety of factors determine the placing of a particular group at a particular strata in the society within the group. And what is the correlation? The linguistic structure and the social structure; do they correspond to each other? Is there any connection between the two? Do they correlate?

So, Labov's study establishes the fact that social determinants like gender, age, class, etc. do have influence, and are embedded in the linguistic structures. So, he was the one who demonstrated empirically, with data, that linguistic structures are correlated with social

structures. So linguistic structures and social structures are correlated. This is the major finding that was established in his two case studies.

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The Locations of Study

S. Klein Macy's Saks Fifth Avenue

Labov's sample of participants included a variety of social classes. He conducted the study in three department stores: **Saks Fifth Avenue** (the highest social ranking), **Macy's** (middle social ranking), and **S. Klein** (lowest social ranking) to collect his ranging sample.

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This is, look at the pictures. These are three locations he chose for his study, where stores like Saks Fifth Avenue, which was the highest in social ranking socioeconomic class, Macy's store that was middle social ranking and S. Klein with a lower social ranking were located, respectively. So, very categorically he chose three kinds of locations and three kinds of stores which correspond to socioeconomic class. So, Saks Fifth Avenue, the highest socioeconomic class, then Macy's store, which is a middle socioeconomic class and S. Klein store, which was the lowest socioeconomic class.

So, after choosing three locations and three stores based on the socioeconomic class, the customers and the people who were there, they belong to, so people and the regular visitors of the store at S. Klein belong to lower socioeconomic class. The employees, salesman, sales woman and the customers who visited Macy's store belong to middle socioeconomic class. And the employees or the salesmen and women and visitors belong to the highest socioeconomic class at Saks Fifth Avenue.

So, after considering this class, by the way, before he moved into these locations, he also carried out informal pilot studies across New York by tape recording a lot of casual speech of different

people. And after identifying the variable, linguistic variable, he tried to empirically verify that those variables in these three locations and this is popularly known as the “New York City Survey” or the “Fourth Floor Survey”. In literature also you find the “Fourth Floor Survey” by Labov.

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Labov's study of the varieties of English in New York City

- the three department stores show different levels of **PRESTIGE**:
Saks Fifth Avenue
Macy's
S. Klein
- the work at either store is valued accordingly
- prediction: the persons will be stratified according to these levels and will show respective linguistic features

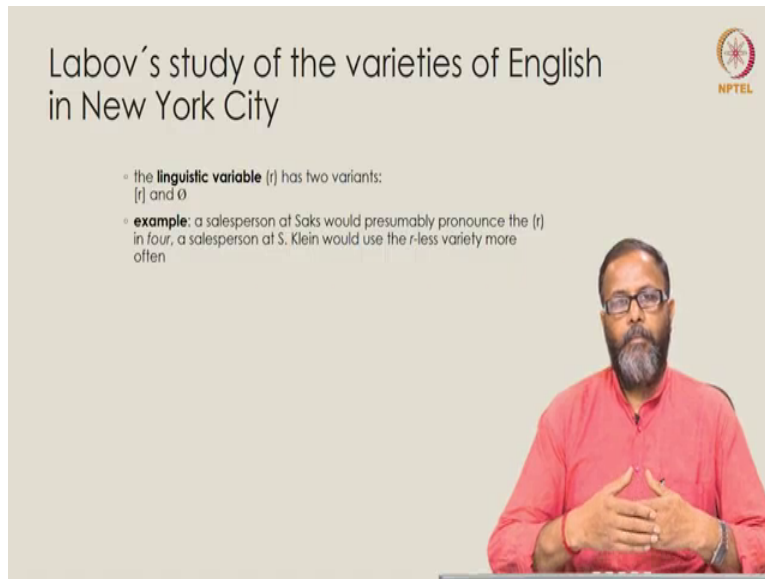
The slide features a vertical arrow pointing downwards from the store names to the prediction point. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red shirt, speaking.

So, the three departmental stores showed different levels of prestige, so Saks Fifth Avenue, the highest one, Macy's the middle one and S. Klein the lowest one. And the work at either store is valued accordingly in the study. And what is the prediction, the persons will be stratified according to these levels and will show respective linguistic features.

So, the people belonging to these three different socioeconomic classes will also, they can be ranked, if they can be ranked in terms of socioeconomic class, their linguistic structures and use of language can also be ranked according to this hierarchy.

So, this linguistic hierarchy and social hierarchy, linguistic structures and ranking and social structures and ranking are correlated. That was the hypothesis and principle with which he started working on this case study.

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Labov's study of the varieties of English in New York City

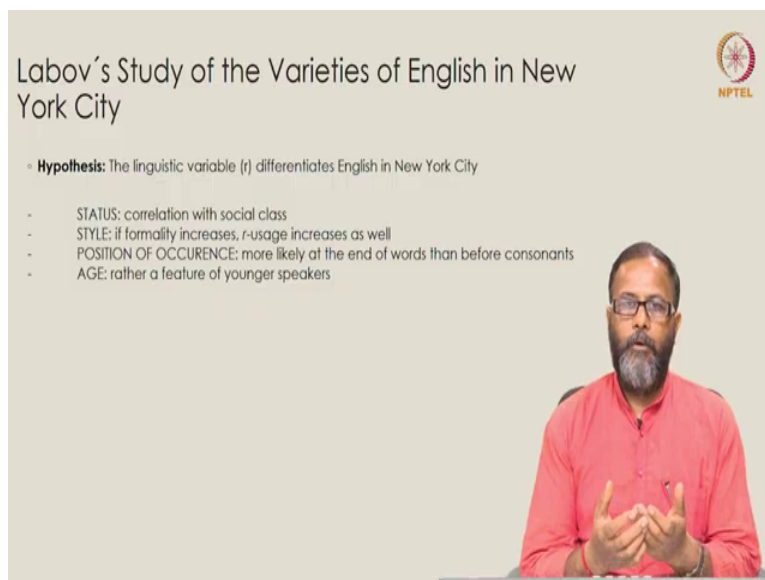
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- the **linguistic variable** /r/ has two variants: [r] and 0
- **example:** a salesperson at Saks would presumably pronounce the /r/ in *four*, a salesperson at S. Klein would use the r-less variety more often

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red shirt, is speaking and gesturing with his hands.

Now, for this study Labov looked at the sound /r/, the true sound /r/ and the prediction was that this /r/ sound in the words like *four*, *car*, etc. will be more prominent and used more at Saks Fifth Avenue than the people at S. Klein. So, the people in the higher social strata will tend to use this sound more as compared to the people at the lowest strata. This was the idea.

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Labov's Study of the Varieties of English in New York City

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- **Hypothesis:** The linguistic variable /r/ differentiates English in New York City
- STATUS: correlation with social class
- STYLE: if formality increases, r-usage increases as well
- POSITION OF OCCURENCE: more likely at the end of words than before consonants
- AGE: rather a feature of younger speakers

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red shirt, is speaking and gesturing with his hands.


So, the hypothesis was that the linguistic variable /r/ differentiates English in New York City and in terms of, differentiation in terms of style, status, position of the occurrence and the age group.

So, the status, it correlates with social class. So, people at Saks Fifth Avenue will tend to use it more than the people at S. Klein, with the lower socioeconomic class.

Style, if formality increases, I will tell you, he used to go and ask where I could find the lady's shoe, for example, and it was on the fourth floor. So, here we have the /r/ sound, the true sound in both the words *fourth* in the middle of the word, and in *floor*, at the end of the word, so post-vocalic. So, he would go and ask randomly to these salespeople, where can I find the ladies shoe or he would ask a particular shoe or a particular floor and then he would see, he would record and sometimes he will say, excuse me, I did not hear it and then the person would loudly repeat it again, but this time the mode was more formal. So, the first time it was casual, but when you say 'excuse me' again, then it becomes more formal.


So, if formality increases, /r/ usage increases as well. Position of occurrence, more likely at the end of the words than before the consonants. This word becomes, this sound becomes prominent more at the word final position than in the middle position or non-initial position, non-final position. With regards to age, this feature or this tendency of hyper-correction, this tendency of pronouncing it prominently was found more in young age groups, or lower age groups. So, this was the hypothesis and this was the idea with which he started.

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Data Collection

- usage of rapid and anonymous speech events to circumvent the "observer's paradox"
- as **informal** and **casual** as possible
- in this case:
 - interviewer in the role of a customer
 - informants do not know that their language is being investigated
- "Where can I find lady's shoes?"
"Fourth floor."
- **Repetition** → emphatic speech



Data collection was done very cleverly. He maintained the observer's paradox. And what is that? Observer's paradox is all about creating a situation, which is non-threatening, non-hostile and which allows the speaker to come up with natural speech, that means you are not intimidating the presence of the interviewer and the presence of the observer, the presence of tape recorder, all these things intimidate and forces a high degree of humanity. So, you do not find natural speech at natural speed.

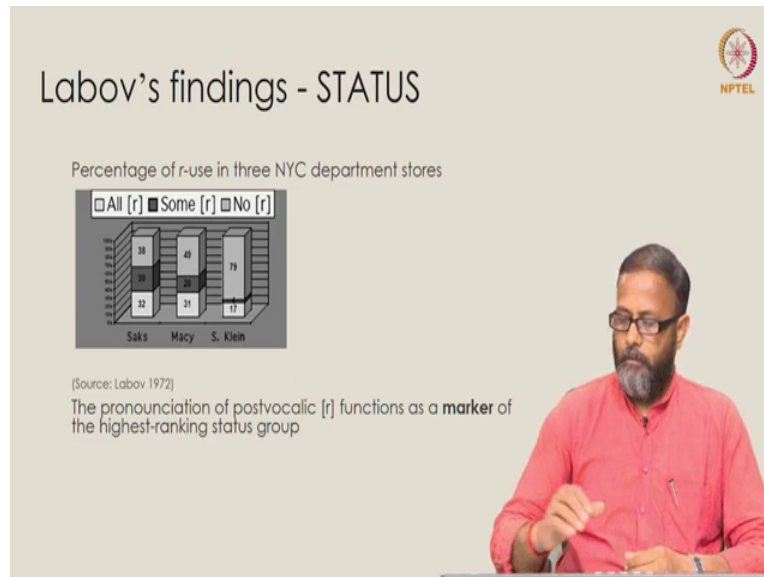
So, it is important to maintain that to minimize the effect of the conscious presence of the observer. So, he maintained that. And all the speeches he recorded, all the samples he recorded, were natural and they could never know, the respondents or the people whom he recorded could never make out that he is recording and that he is doing it deliberately. And he multiplied it many times with many different people at all levels, all floors.

So, he tried to find informal and casual speech. And in this case, the interviewer was in the role of a customer. So, he would disguise, pretending to be a customer looking for a particular product and as one who is not aware of the location where he can find the product. So, he would go and ask and he would get a response to each question and he would record.

Sometimes he would make the person or the interviewee repeat what he or she said and he would cleverly record it. So, the interviewer in the role of a customer and the informants did not know that their language was being investigated and recorded. So, questions like where can I find ladies shoes? A normal question to any salesperson on any floor, any particular floor and it was located on the fourth floor. So, he was more interested in the response "fourth floor", where you find the /r/ sound in the middle of the word and in the second word where it is at the word-final position.

So, the occurrence of the /r/ sound that is in the middle and post-vocalic and the final position and he would see the prominence of /r/ in the speech and he would make them repeat by asking it again and it became more emphatic and clear. So, this was the technique used in data collection.

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Now, if you look at this finding and the status, percentage of use of /r/ sound in the three New York City department stores, you can find the pronunciation of the post-vocalic /r/ functions as a marker of highest ranking status. It was prominent in Saks, Macy's and S. Klein. You can see the graph where you have all /r/ that is denoted with a dark shade. Some /r/ pronunciation that is denoted with a little lighter shade and no /r/ at all denoted in white shade. And what you see.

In S. Klein, in this repeated emphatic speech we find some /r/ sound. It is a sense of hypercorrection among the young people at this lower socioeconomic class. At Saks, you find here an even distribution and at Macy's, somewhat more. So, it is almost like it can be predictable that what hypothesis with which he started is confirmed in terms of the status.

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Labov's findings - STYLE

R-pronunciation in NYC by social class & style of speech

(Source: Labov 1966)

The more formal the situation, the more usage of postvocalic [r].
→ exception: **hypercorrection**

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Then the style, so the more formal the situation, the more the usage of post-vocalic /r/. And that denoted the social class and style of speech in these three departmental stores as far as /r/ pronunciation is concerned.

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Labov's findings - POSITION OF OCCURENCE


Percentage of /r/ in 1st & 2nd utterances of 'South (and/or four cases)'

The r-pronunciation is more common at the end of a word than before a consonant

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If we look at the position of occurrence, the /r/ pronunciation is more common at the end of the word than before a consonant. So, post-vocalic /r/ was more prominent than its occurrence elsewhere with the consonant for that matter.

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Labov's findings - AGE

- Saks and S. Klein: older people used less *r*-pronunciation than younger people
- Macy's: older people used more *r*-pronunciation than younger people
- conclusion:
 - variable [r] is not generally a feature of young people
 - members of middle social groups tend to change their pronunciation after adolescence; not prominent in highest and lowest social groups



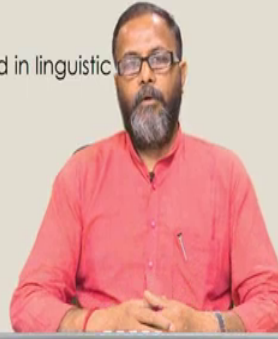
When you look at the age, Saks and S. Klein, older people used less /r/ pronunciation than the younger people. So, it was a tendency at Macy's, that older people used more /r/ pronunciation than the younger people. And what we can conclude out of it, variable /r/ is not generally a feature of young people, number one. Number two, members of the middle social age group tend to change their pronunciation after adolescence. So these younger people, when they grow up, the pronunciation changes and it is not prominent in the highest age group and the lowest social groups.

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Deductions



- Speakers who are ranked in a scale of social stratification will be ranked in the same order by their different use of a linguistic variable
- Socio-economic differences cannot be ignored in linguistic studies



What can we deduct from it? So, speakers and look at the hypothesis with which he started, they all came true and they were all empirically verified in this study. So, if we look at the methods, approach and technique that is separate, but look at the main outcome or the deduction that we can make out of it, the whole idea of establishing a correlation between linguistic structure and social structure is established and verified in this study.

The speakers who are ranked in a scale of social stratification will be ranked in the same order by the different use of linguistic variables. And in this case, it was the /r/ sound. Socioeconomic differences cannot be ignored in linguistic studies. This is the major claim, which is empirically verified and that opened a new frontier in sociolinguistics and became the core central thrust in the study of variation and change.

Because if you recall, linguistic changes were studied before such studies as by Will Labov, and these were done in terms of dialectology. And in dialectology, no reference or no attention was paid to the social aspect of language use. So, there it was more of a geographical location and geographical distance and the linguistic variability and variation in linguistic structures.

This started with rural untraveled old aged people as their sample and it was a biased sample, of course, because I believe that if there are people who have not traveled, they will preserve the original form of the speech. Old people will preserve, because young people travel and their speech may vary and have been influenced by the other varieties.

So, in dialectology, they focused on older people, remote locations, rural locations they are located in and people who did not travel. Later on in the 20th century we see urban dialectology, where they are focused on speech samples of the urban cities. And this study, particularly New York City study and another case study, Martha's Vineyard Island study, both the studies carried out by William Labov with a different approach and technique established the fact that linguistics is, variation in linguistic structures are not random.

Linguistic structures reflect the social structures. And the social determinants like age, gender, class, they do have influences and are embedded in the linguistic structure. So, they are correlated through linguistic variation and social variation, they are correlates and that is what we can deduct out of this study as well, where speakers who are ranked in a scale of social stratification will be ranked in the same order by the different use of a linguistic variable.

The important point is how to recognize or identify these linguistic variables, and then how these linguistic variables become social variables and how they are ranked, how they are correlated. So, Labov established a very direct relationship between linguistic structure and social structure. And this is the major original contribution by William Labov in the study of language use, which is known as the variationist tradition, language and variation and he initiated a new practice and a new technique, a new approach for looking at language and its use in the real sociocultural context.

And here he brings in the variation in linguistic structure that corresponds to variation in social structure or vice versa, because variation in social structure through these linguistic variables can be predicted. And what he hypothesized was completely verified in his New York study.

So, finally, what we can deduce is that socioeconomic differences in class within the same speech community cannot be ignored in linguistics studies and that they become a factor. And this is how a newly emerging discipline called sociolinguistics got a major thrust, a central thrust on studying language and variation and variation became, studies in variation became a central theme of social linguistics.

So, this is the contribution of Labov and his other works like "Language in the Inner City" for that matter, where he studied Afro-American Vernacular English and he argued that it should not

be treated as a perverted version of standard English, but it should be treated as a variety of English in its own right which has a clear pattern, grammatical pattern and social uses of it.

He worked on narratives. He also worked on people's accounts of their lives. And the methods and techniques he used inspired many others to replicate the same study at different locations with different samples. And that is why he is regarded as one of the founding fathers of sociolinguistics, who gave a new technique, a new approach, a new method to look at language and its use in the real sociocultural context.

His approach and technique stands in opposition to Chomskyan approach and technique to understand and study language. So, though he never started any movement against Chomsky, his methods, approach and techniques definitely created a separate category of scholars who looked at language from this perspective.

In this continued series, we will talk about people like Dell Hymes, people like Gumperz, people like Basil Bernstein who worked on code and class, people like Joshua Fishman who worked on the sociology of language, and people like Charles Ferguson whose major contributions are on diglossia.

So, in our next video, we will take up all these people one by one and we will talk about their journey as sociolinguists and we will also talk about their major contributions in the discipline and the influence of these works in the overall understanding of language. So, this is it for now. We will meet in the next video and talk about some other scholar. Thank you very much.