

Mustansiriyah University

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

3rd Year Linguistics

Textbook: Linguistics (Aichison, 2010)

Lecture 6: Studying Language Variation

- The aim of this lecture is to introduce the student the main concepts and methodologies to deal with linguistics variation across different social and cultural contexts.
- Speakers vary not only their vocabulary and syntax, but also the sound structure. Phonological variation, both between speakers and within a single speaker, is important as a reflection of various social factors.
- Speakers vary not only their vocabulary and syntax, but also the sound structure. Phonological variation, both between speakers and within a single speaker, is important as a reflection of various social factors.
- American sociolinguistics Williams Labov showed that sociolinguistic variation is not random, and can be reliably charted.
- He investigated the link between linguistics variation and the social context, focusing on how the pronunciation of the [r] sound is associated with social status in New York.
- Later on Labov found out that lower-middle-class speakers are more consciously aware of speech as an indicator of social class, and are making efforts to improve their status.
- Labov's study of differing pronunciations can reveal social stratification, and also social aspirations, since people sometimes try to talk like those they would like to emulate.
- A similar study conducted in Norwich in England found out that phonological variation is not only associated with social class but also with gender.
- This suggests that human beings tend to cluster into social networks, groups of people who regularly interact with one another. A detailed study of the social networks within one particular speech community can provide a useful corrective to Labov-type studies, which tend to suggest humans are rigidly stratified.
- Social network studies can provide a useful picture of how members of a community interact with one another.
- Social networks can be of high density, when the same people tend to work, play and live together. On the other hand, they can be of low density, when people only have a small amount of contact with any one network, in that they may live in one area, work in another, and travel elsewhere for their social life.

- The findings of different sociolinguistic studies suggest that linguistic variation needs to be considered from at least two angles: from the point of view of a broad Labov-type survey based on a random sample of people, but also from a close-up view of a number of social networks.