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*Urban Dialectology:
when social status and gender difference
influence the language.*

Relatore
Prof. Davide Bertocci

Laureanda
Lisa Barolo
n° matr.1225571 / LTLLM

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how the language people speak can be affected by social factors. Therefore, I will conduct my analysis with the support of the urban dialectology discipline, which concentrates on the relationship between language and different social features, referring in particular to Peter Trudgill and William Labov's studies. More specifically, the analysis begins with the first chapter, which introduces the topic of sociolinguistics by defining its origins, the main figures of this research field and the concept of free variation. In addition to that, it is proposed a comparison between traditional dialectology and sociolinguistics, followed by methodologies and findings resulting from the study conducted on the language spoken on Martha's Vineyard, as a model of sociolinguistic investigation. A further area of interest investigated by this analysis is represented by urban dialectology. After outlining its origins, the chapter deals with the issue of representativeness and of obtaining linguistic data and tries to shed light on the importance of the urban context in this research area. The analysis continues, firstly, by investigating the relationship between language and social class, referring to the theory of linguistic codes elaborated by Basil Bernstein and through some case studies, considering the methodologies adopted and the findings; secondly, by exploring the relationship between speakers' sex/gender and the language spoken by them. After defining the beginning of the research and later studies, the chapter shows the various theoretical perspectives elaborated through the years and some findings and concludes by trying to explain why sex differentiation in language occurs.

CHAPTER 1: Sociolinguistics

1.1. Its origins

Sociolinguistics as a science that investigates the relationships between language and society takes shape at the beginning of the 1960s, starting from the sociologist Basil Bernstein and his studies on the importance of language in education on one side, and from William Labov's research on the social correlations of linguistic variation on the other side. The main assumption that brought to the development of the sociolinguistic perspective is that the verbal language, besides being one of the innate abilities of human beings with its own autonomous structure, is realized in the social life and in the interactional behaviours of individuals. Language, therefore, is a social phenomenon and its nature is evident both on the various linguistic phenomena originated or influenced by different social factors, and on the language action on building social realities.

1.2. Main figures

In this context, William Labov, being a prominent voice in American linguistics since the early 1960s, emerges as one of the most important figures and in some cases also as the founding father of sociolinguistics. In addition to studying the relations between language and society, he also developed the field of "variationist sociolinguistics" according to which variation is inherent to linguistic structure. In order to better understand this principle, it is necessary to define what linguistic variation is: linguistic variation, or simply variation, refers to any regional, social or contextual differences in the ways that a particular language is used.

The interest in linguistic variation has developed rapidly since the rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960s, given that it is a vital part of ordinary linguistic behaviour. As a matter of fact, the way individuals speak changes depending on the different contexts and situations in which they are, as well as different speakers of a language will express the same meanings using different forms; indeed, speakers make choices in pronunciation, in morphology, in grammar and also as regards words.

As a confirmation of this, Labov believes that the way a language is spoken or written may differ depending on the individuals themselves, but also depending on the situations

encountered by them. Such differences are normal but also necessary to the language's functioning. Through his studies, Labov demonstrated that linguistic variation is pervasive and highly structured and showed regular patterns of co-occurrence between the language and some social variables, such as socioeconomic classes.

Another important figure in the field of sociolinguistics is the one of the European Peter Trudgill. After Labov introduced his methods in America, various European linguists followed his path, Peter Trudgill in particular. His aim was to demonstrate that there is a correlation between language use and social class, concentrating his studies primarily on the English spoken in Norwich city. He focused his investigations on stylistic variation, which rest on the general assumption that within the language system, the same content can be encoded in more than one linguistic form, willing to show how it might cause language change. A noteworthy work realized by Trudgill about the correlation between language and social factors is *Dialectology*, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

1.3. Free variation

A first and simple definition of what sociolinguistics stands for is: branch of linguistic studies that relates language to society. However, going deeper into this concept, it would be more appropriate to say that sociolinguistics deals with free variation. As a matter of fact, contemporary sociolinguistics stems from the hypothesis according to which free variation does not exist. In order to make clear what free variation is I will make an example:

In Italian language [p] and [b] are two different phonemes, since the presence of the one or the other creates words with different meaning, as in the case of *pere* and *bere*, for example. In this case we talk about **contrastive distribution**. The sounds [r] and [R] (dental and uvular *r*), on the contrary, do not differentiate between meanings. In this context we talk about **free variation**.

Differently from theoretical linguistics, which concentrates on contrastive distribution, contemporary sociolinguistics focuses on the idea that free variation is not really free. The main reason why is that the possibility of saying something in different ways implies

a linguistic choice, which is affected by social factors. The social variables that sociolinguistics studies take into consideration can be various, such as religion, age, ethnicity, status, level of education, gender.

1.4. Traditional dialectology and sociolinguistics

Talking about sociolinguistics, an important distinction to make is the one between traditional dialectology and sociolinguistics. Indeed, even though sociolinguistics shares some common grounds with traditional dialectology, it differs from it for various reasons. Traditional dialectology, as the study of dialect and dialects, arises in the 19th century, taking its impetus from the desire to challenge the Neogrammarian principles of language change. It focuses its linguistic investigations on rural areas, analysing regional variation from a diachronic perspective, that is to say studying the development and the evolution of dialects over time. Traditional dialectology is also referred to as dialect geography and through its studies it permitted to create linguistic maps with isoglosses indicating dialect borders. According to the sociolinguist Peter Trudgill, “it forms one of the main streams of the modern discipline of dialectology”¹.

The other important and influential stream is the one concerned with the study of urban dialects, which is generally referred to under the general heading of sociolinguistics.

Sociolinguistics distinguishes itself from traditional dialectology primarily for concentrating its interest on urban areas, investigating social variation from a synchronic perspective, which implies studying linguistic phenomena at a specific period of time.

A further fundamental distinction is the one that concerns the informants analysed: as a matter of fact, sociolinguistics focuses its studies on diverse social groups within the same community, as its aim is to investigate different social features, such as age, social class, gender, ethnicity, and how they can influence the language.

Traditional dialectology, on the contrary, focuses its studies on NORMS informants, Non-mobile Old Rural Male Speakers, in order to collect the linguistic information looked for. Despite their differences, traditional dialectology and sociolinguistics share the essential subject matter, that is the attention on language in communities and therefore they represent two streams that converge giving shape to a coherent modern discipline.

¹ J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.187.

1.5. Martha's Vineyard: a case of sociolinguistic investigation

A famous and notable study, which displays how a language may differ among its speakers and which specifically gives us the possibility to understand how a sociolinguistic investigation is conducted, is the one carried out at the beginning of the 1960s by the linguist William Labov on Martha's Vineyard speech.

Martha's Vineyard is a small island off the North-eastern coast of America, known for being a holiday destination for many tourists during the summer period.

The island population, which in 1962 counted 6.000 inhabitants, included English-speaking fishermen and Indian and Portuguese immigrants; but during the summer period it was always overwhelmed by 42.000 continental tourists that inevitably determined a change in the economy of Martha's Vineyard.

In this context, W. Labov began investigating the linguistic phenomenon that concerns the centralization of [a], as he noticed that in the island the pronounce of the phoneme /a/ was changing, shifting to a more centralized sound. This implies that the word *house*, for example, began to be pronounced as [həʊs] and no more as [haus].

From a phonetically point of view, we can represent this phenomenon by means of a vowel triangle:

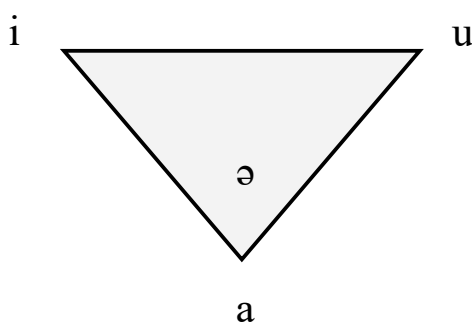


Figure 1: Vowel triangle that shows the centralization of [a].

Graffi G. & Scalise S., *Le lingue e il linguaggio. Introduzione alla linguistica*, Il Mulino, Manuali, 2013

Once identified the variation [haus]/[həʊs], W. Labov's intention was to establish whether this was an occasional variation, or if it had turned into a variable, which means a variation provided with a social meaning that can, therefore, be spread. In order to achieve this

objective, a questionnaire was distributed to a group of speakers, in particular 69, and, in addition to that, they were interviewed through tape recordings.

These tape recordings represent an important and, at the same time, delicate part of the study conducted on Martha's Vineyard speech, but also of the whole linguistic research concerning dialectology, since their aim is to collect samples of genuine and spontaneous speech but interviewing someone implies a formal situation which often makes the interviewed person adopt more formal and controlled registers.

As far as Martha's Vineyard speech is concerned, tape recordings were necessary, as the phenomenon identified by W. Labov was not only underneath the threshold of consciousness, but also because the speakers' considerations about their linguistic behaviour are not reliable enough.

The tests were administered to various social groups, such as fishermen, farmers, professionals, students and housewives, and to the different ethnic groups of the island, that is to say English-speaking people, the Portuguese and the Indians.

They included various questions about the lexis, considerations about life on the island, reading of some passages and attempts of causing natural speech; moreover, certainly the questions were meant to subtly encourage the respondents to use words including the vowel sounds which W. Labov intended to study.

Through the questionnaire and the interviews administered and by means of the vowel triangle, it was possible to define different degrees of centralization and to establish the various linguistic contexts that can influence the phenomenon of the centralization. More specifically, it was shown that, as far as the diphthongs [aj] and [aw] are concerned, a following [t], [h], [l] or [r] produce a centralization of [a]; on the contrary, the phoneme [k] is neutral and the phoneme [m] discourage this phenomenon. This explains how words such as *right* and *light* on the island were pronounced with a high degree of centralization, that is to say [rəjt] and [ləjt].

Another important consideration about this study conducted by W. Labov on Martha's Vineyard speech is that the method used enabled defining the specific degree of centralization of each individual surveyed and, therefore, also the one of a specific social group. As a matter of fact, the study revealed that the speakers who realized the highest degree of centralization were the 35-year-old male fishermen, who shared a positive judgement about Martha's Vineyard Island and a dislike for the so called Yankees, that

is to say the citizens of the United States of America, who filled the island during the summer period.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the phenomenon of the centralization characterizing Martha's Vineyard Island and investigated by W. Labov is the manifestation of the natives identification with the island and of a strong aversion against the summer invasions of the continental Americans and against the resulting economic consequences. "Centralize means belonging to the Island and protecting its values"².

This study is particularly representative of how a sociolinguistic investigation acts, proving that it is possible to measure and quantify linguistic phenomena concerning individuals, age levels, occupational groups and gender, for example. The information gathered through these sociolinguistic studies allows to clearly identify the social stratification of a place.

² G. Graffi & S. Scalise, *Le lingue e il linguaggio*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013, p. 234.

CHAPTER 2: Urban Dialectology

2.1. Its origins

Dialectology has its source in the 19th century and it is the scientific study of linguistic dialects. It studies how words, sounds and grammatical forms vary from a dialect to another within the same language and how different dialectal varieties developed from their direct mother language; also, how speakers use their dialects with respect to other varieties and/or standard languages.

To some extent, dialectology, which studies variation in language focusing primarily on geographic distribution, can be considered as a sub-field of sociolinguistics, as every language presents a number of varieties within it. A language is a system of systems, that is to say, a system in which different possibilities of variability coexist, which are located along axes of variation as follows: diachronic variation, which is also called historic variation as it is the variation through time; diatopic variation, which is based on the geographical position; diastratic variation, which relies on social class of the speaker and diaphasic, or stylistic, variation, which its is revealed on the different communicative situations. A dialect is a variety of a language; therefore, individuals will use it according to their linguistic competence, but in particular according to factors such as geographic area, social status, context, prestige.

However, according to some linguists, Peter Trudgill in particular, the dialectology discipline is autonomous and pursues its own goals with its own methods. Despite this, dialectology has a common ground with other branches of linguistics and, in a particular way, with phonetics, historical linguistics and sociolinguistics. Concentrating on its correlation with sociolinguistics, dialectology began to be influenced by the social sciences when some dialectologists became aware of the fact that the studies conducted until that time concentrated particularly on the spatial dimension of linguistic variation, excluding the social dimension. This was seen as a deficiency, since “social variation in language is as pervasive and important as regional variation”³. As a matter of fact, as P. Trudgill states:

³ J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, cit., p 45.

all speakers have a social background as well as a regional location, and in their speech they often identify themselves not only as natives or inhabitants of a particular place but also as members of a particular social class, age group, ethnic background, or other social characteristic⁴.

Scholars gradually also realized that traditional dialectology only focused on rural areas, missing out on a great deal of data, not considering the speech forms used in towns and cities by most of the population. Hence the necessity of studies on urban dialects brought to the development of urban dialectology.

The beginning of the dialectological work lays in comparative philology and “it was because of this historical emphasis that dialectologists had looked mainly to rural speech forms”⁵. Urban dialects appeared to be less conservative, relatively new and resulting from immigration from rural areas. However, philologists and dialectologists were not interested in social variation, since they wanted to investigate the most conservative variety spoken. When a change in linguistic studies occurred, also dialectology changed. Therefore, “the trend towards the study of social and urban dialects thus reflects the growth in the synchronic approach to the study of language – an approach which showed particularly rapid development from the 1930s onwards”⁶.

2.2. The issue of representativeness

Many early studies on urban dialects, however, were carried out according to the methodology used by traditional dialectology, ignoring the social dimension. The system used by traditional dialectology implied selecting NORMs informants, that is to say Non-mobile Older Rural Males, who were uneducated and untravelled, but were considered to be representative of a genuine dialect. However, this method was not appropriate enough. For the dialectological study this type of ideal speaker does not provide enough information, since it offers significant data for the most conservative varieties, but it does not always allow to portray faithfully how dialects evolve. Dialects, indeed, can be dynamic and can change, regardless of the preservation of the older and stable generations.

⁴ J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, cit., p. 45.

⁵ *Ivi*, p.46.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

In addition to that, this method could not be applied to the urban context, because “what works in the village does not work in the town”⁷. Therefore, linguists began to follow the model proposed by social scientists, taking random samples of the city population. In this way, all members of the community could have the same chance of being selected, so that the speakers investigated could be truly representative of the entire population.

2.3. Obtaining linguistic data

Despite obtaining representative speakers, it was also necessary to acquire representative speech elements, that is to say typical of the everyday reality. In order to avoid that speakers could control their way of speaking, resulting so more formal and “clean”, urban dialect surveys came by the linguistic information they were looking for through tape-recorded stretches of almost conversational speech. However, tape-recorded interviews with a stranger still implies, for the speaker investigated, paying attention to the way of speaking. This is what the linguist William Labov defines as “the observer’s paradox”: linguists want to observe the way people speak when they are not being observed. A solution could be observing the subject in his own natural social context, so interacting with his family or friends, for example. Another possibility could be analysing the public use of language in everyday life, that is to say when there is no explicit observation from the interviewer. Labov in particular, in order to overcome this issue, implemented different tactics, such as recording the conversation at the beginning or at the end of the interview, so outside its formal context, by asking questions which required the speaker’s emotional involvement, or by recording groups of people instead of individuals. Moreover, tape-recorded speech by a large amount of people investigated allows the outcome of a successful work.

Nevertheless, grouping people together is not as simple as it might appear, since age, sex and social stratification have to be taken into consideration. As a matter of fact, the speakers investigated in urban dialect studies are often grouped together according to their occupation, their income, their education and their housing, for instance.

2.4. Language and the urban context

⁷ J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, cit., p. 47.

As affirmed in *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, by Dick Smakman and Patrick Heinrich, the language spoken in city had an influence on the establishment of US sociolinguistics in the 1960s⁸. Before that time, sociolinguistics did not consider the urban contexts, since research was predominantly regionally dialectological. The aim of the studies conducted in the 19th century was to give evidence to historical patterns and cases of disappearing languages and before sociolinguistics was defined as a globally more coherent field, there were limits on the ways in which language spoken in the urban context could be studied.

Despite the origin of mainstream sociolinguistics was in the cities, they were grouped with rural areas in a continuous system into the nation state; but the urban/rural division in a state is not a continuum as it is claimed, “cities may act independently of all kinds of continua”⁹.

The speakers coming from the cities have been ignored for a long time by researchers, as if living in the city was considered less relevant than the original heritage an individual can have. The main reason why is the fact that the dominant sociolinguistics theory was not able to capture the versatility and fluidity of the language spoken in metropolises.

In addition to that, sociolinguistics theories were developed mainly on the basis of studies carried out in the US, Britain and Western Europe. “They thus incorporated influences of European-model nation building ideology in that they studied, for example, speech communities that were typically constituted of people with a shared ethnicity, identity and often locality”¹⁰.

Hence, language ideological constructs were formed according to the language-ethnicity-identity nexus typical of the post-Renaissance period in which the nation was being built. However, such approaches oversimplified the linguistic situation. The distinction between East, West and other mega-regions is built on the wrong premise that people stay where they are, whereas the reality is that “citizens from various parts of the world meet in various other parts of the world, especially urban ones, and they belong there”¹¹.

The kind of life conducted in the cities challenge us to find new theoretical approaches, together with new research methods to investigate the language variation. Cities are

⁸ D. Smakman & P. Heinrich, *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, Routledge, 2018, p 3.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

environments characterized by social mobility, multilingual speakers who cultivate more social relationships featured by different linguistic varieties and, as a consequence, linguistics trends spread more easily and more quickly. All things considered, today city language looks different from what classical sociolinguistics predicted.

As a matter of fact, in large cities is becoming more and more difficult to find non-mobile native speakers of the original local dialect. These subjects are also becoming less relevant and representative of the language life in cities. The traditional sociolinguistic approach of finding the Non-mobile Older Rural Male who is representative of a large group of people and of the most genuine and authentic form of language can be replaced by the approach of “finding agreement amongst the functionalities of individuals’ languages in a constantly changing urban setting”¹².

We could consider the language of the city as a set of concrete activities of concrete speakers and listeners, who have different ways to communicate and to relate to each other through various linguistic structures and repertoires.

¹² D. Smakman & P. Heinrich, *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, cit., p 5.

CHAPTER 3: Language and Social Class

3.1. Introduction to language and social class

We have seen how, differently from traditional dialectology which concentrates on the relationship between language and geography and on the spatial differentiation of language, urban dialectology investigates more the relationships between language and social factors. Some of the social variables taken into account by urban dialect studies are ethnic group, stylistic differentiation and social networks, but the first social factor I will concentrate on in a more specific way is social class.

The relationship between language and social class has always been a key issue in sociolinguistic research, especially in variationist sociolinguistics studies, which have tried to analyse how language variation acts as a marker for social stratification.

3.2. Basil Bernstein: the theory of restricted and elaborated codes

A notable theory concerning the topic of language and social class is the one elaborated by the sociologist B. Bernstein after carrying out a study in the 1970s on working- and middle-class children.

According to B. Bernstein, it was possible to distinguish two different varieties of language use in society: the restricted code and the elaborated code, where code “refers to a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a social group”¹³.

A main distinction between these two codes regards the situation in which they are used: the restricted code is best used when among the speakers there is a great deal of information shared or taken for granted knowledge. Indeed, it conveys a vast amount of meaning through few words, each of which presents a complex set of connotations; the elaborated code, on the contrary, is best suited for contexts in which the information has to be expressed clearly and in a detailed way, so that everyone can understand it. Therefore, this code will be used in situations where there is no prior understanding or knowledge.

¹³ S. W. Littlejohn, *Theories of Human Communication*, Wadsworth, 2002, p. 278.

Going deeper into the definition of these two codes elaborated by B. Bernstein, the former is characterized by short, grammatically simple and in some cases also unfinished sentences, which present a poor syntactic form. It employs little subordination, favouring simple conjunctions used repetitively, the use of adjectives and adverbs is limited, as well as the one of impersonal subject pronouns. Moreover, reasons and conclusions are often blurred and idioms are largely used.

The latter stands out for accurate grammatical order and syntax, complex sentences characterized by a wide range of devices for conjunction and subordination, frequent use of the pronoun I and of prepositions to show relationships of temporal and logical nature and a careful use of adverbs and adjectives.

According to the theory of restricted and elaborated codes developed by B. Bernstein, the language used by people in every day conversations reflects the assumptions of a certain social group and, most importantly, it is affected by the relationships established within the social group. As a matter of fact, B. Bernstein believes that the way a language is used within a specific social class affects the way people assign meaning and importance to what they are speaking about¹⁴. As a confirmation of this, B. Bernstein focused on the social group of the family and on their social control, the way of decision-making and the relationship among the members of the family, realizing a further distinction between position-oriented and person-oriented families.

In the first category, the language use is related to physical contact among the members of the family and, therefore, it is characterized by shared assumptions and a preference for implicit meaning in communication. In these types of families, we will notice a strong sense of social identity with some loss of personal autonomy. In the second one, instead, communication is more explicit and content-free, as it is less dependent on such matters as the physical contact with other members of the social group. In this context, personal autonomy is encouraged.

Bernstein associates position-orientation to the working class, because people coming from this social status are more likely to live in close proximity and this makes their way of speech more deictic. In addition to that, working class individuals appears to be strictly related to the restricted code, since their speech is characterized by short and simple sentences, limited vocabulary, nonstandard forms and frequent use of tags such as ‘you

¹⁴ B. Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, Routledge, 2003, p. 58.

know'. Person-orientation, instead, is connected to the middle class, as individuals of this social status are highly educated, more socially mobile, less context dependent and open to different attitudes. Bernstein relates to middle class the elaborated code, as individuals express themselves through complex sentences, extended vocabulary and more standard forms.

Bernstein's theory certainly represents one of the most challenging theories in sociolinguistics, both supported and criticised by many researchers. Among the criticism made against his theories, it is criticized that he presents a deficit model of language, where the restricted code is seen as lacking, and suggests that language is fixed, when this is not the case as everyone uses both elaborated and restricted code and every family experiences position and person oriented situations.

In spite of this, several scholars, influenced by his ideas, carried out studies on the ways in which adults from different social classes respond linguistically to their children, showing consistent results with the theory elaborated by B. Bernstein.

As a proof, Dorothy Henderson analysed the language used by hundred mothers to their seven-year-old children, after separating them into middle-class and working-class groups. The study revealed that the middle-class mothers favoured the use of abstract and explicit definitions and information giving strategies in answering children's questions.

The same D. Henderson together with B. Bernstein reported social class differences in the emphasis placed on the use of language in two areas of children's socialization: interpersonal relationships and the acquisition of basic skills. They demonstrated that middle-class mothers placed much more emphasis on the use of language in the person area, whereas working-class mothers gave greater emphasis on the use of language in the transmission of basic skills.

Going back to the concepts of restricted and elaborated codes, according to B. Bernstein the working class is more likely to use the restricted code, while instead the middle class has access both to the restricted and the elaborated codes, since as a class is more geographically, socially and culturally mobile. Hence, individuals' way of communication reflects the conditions in which they were raised and the socialization process.

3.3. The social stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores

An important and notable study that proves the existence of a correlation between how individuals communicate and the social class of belonging is the one conducted by the linguist W. Labov in New York City department stores in November 1962.

At the basis of this study there was a series of preliminary investigations, which included 70 individual interviews and many anonymous observations in public places and from which it was possible to notice that the variable [r] in postvocalic position, as happens in *car*, *card*, *four* and *fourth* for example, is sensitive to measures of social stratification.

An important clarification to make is that the term stratification does not imply specific castes, but refers to the fact that the normal workings of society have produced systematic differences between certain institutions or people, which have been ranked in status or prestige by general agreement.

Based on the exploratory interviews carried out, W. Labov was also able to establish firstly, that the linguistic variable (r) is a social differentiator in all levels of New York City speech and secondly, that rapid and anonymous speech events could be used as the basis for a systematic study of language. Starting from these notions, W. Labov elaborated the following hypothesis: “If any two subgroups in New York City speakers are ranked in a scale of social stratification, then they will be marked in the same order by their differential use of (r).”

Occupational groups certainly represent the most important index of social stratification, but comparing them would not go beyond the indications of the preliminary interviews, not testing the hypothesis. This is the reason why W. Labov found a case of stratification within a single occupational group, that is to say the salespeople of large department stores in Manhattan. More specifically, the linguist selected three large department stores from the top, middle and bottom of the price and fashion scale, bargain for a socially stratified outline of the costumers. At this point, the question was whether the salespeople would show a comparable stratification.

Charles Wright Mills, an American sociologist known for writing several books among which “*The Power Elite*” on the class alliances among US political, military and

economic elites, pointed out that salesgirls in large department stores tend to borrow prestige from their costumers¹⁵.

Starting from the hypothesis formulated, the predicted outcomes were the following ones: salespeople in highest-ranked store will have the highest value of (r), those in the middle-ranked store will have the intermediate value of (r), and those in the lowest ranked store will show the lowest value.

It is important to dwell on the characteristics of the stores selected by W. Labov: the stores at issue are Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's and S. Klein, whose specific location represents a fundamental point. As a matter of fact, Saks Fifth Avenue is located near the centre of the high fashion shopping district, along with other high-prestige stores, representing the highest-ranking store; Macy's stands for the middle-ranking store, being near the garment district and other middle-range stores in price and prestige; S. Klein, finally, represents the lowest-ranking store, being located not far from the Lower East Side. Both the advertising and the price policies were clearly stratified; to give a proof of that, Saks and Macy's in 1962 advertised in the *New York Times*, the paper read most by middle-class people, whereas Kleins was a heavy advertiser for the *Daily News*, read first by the working-class. In addition to that, Saks did not mention prices, Macy's featured the prices in large type and Kleins often let the prices speak for themselves.

Another difference among the three stores was the physical plant: Saks was the most spacious, with the least amount of goods displayed and presented a receptionist in some of the floors so that the customers could be greeted and welcomed. Kleins, on the contrary, was a maze of annexes, sloping concrete floors, low ceilings, with the maximum amount of goods displayed at the least possible expense.

Fundamentally, we can state that the differential ranking of the stores was based on several factors, such as: location, advertising, price policies, and the physical plant of the stores. However, the stratification of the employees depended on the prestige of the stores and the working conditions, regardless of the wages. Indeed, it was demonstrated that high prestige stores, such as Saks, paid lower wages than stores at Macy's level.

¹⁵ C. W. Mills, *White Collar*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956.

3.3.1. The method

The method applied was quite simple: the interviewer, that is to say W. Labov, took the role of a customer, asking the salespeople for directions to a particular department which was on the fourth floor. W. Labov's aim was to elicit the pronunciation of the lexical items containing the desired accent feature in the employees' speech, in this case *'fourth floor'*.

A clear illustration could be the following one:

- "Excuse me, where are the women's shoes?"
- "Fourth floor."

He would then ask to repeat in order to have a more careful and emphasised utterance of *'fourth floor'*:

- "Excuse me?"
- "Fourth floor."

The interviewer would then proceed making a written note of the data gathered, beyond the informant's view. In doing so, he took into consideration also the independent variable of the store, the floor within the store, estimated age, sex, occupation, race and foreign or regional accent; together with the dependant variable of (r) used in casual and emphatic occurrences.

This method was applied in each aisle on the floor as many times as possible before the informants could realize that the same question had already been asked before. Each floor of the store was investigated in the same way, with the exception of the fourth floor, where the question was necessarily different.

The interviewing process lasted approximately 6.5 hours, during which 264 subjects were interviewed: 68 in Saks, 125 in Macy's and 71 in Kleins. As far as the informants were concerned, this exchange was a normal salesman-customer interaction, below the level of conscious attention; whereas for the interviewer this exchange represented a systematic elicitation of the forms required and in the desired context.

3.3.2. The results

Considering that, during the investigation process, while annotating the data gathered, the interviewer wrote (r-1) for each plainly constricted value of the variable, (r-0) for unconstructed schwa, lengthened vowel, or no representation and *d* for doubtful cases or partial constriction, the results of the study showed a consistent and clear stratification of (r) in the three stores.

By means of the following bar graph, it is possible to see the use of (r) by the employees of Saks, Macy's and Kleins.

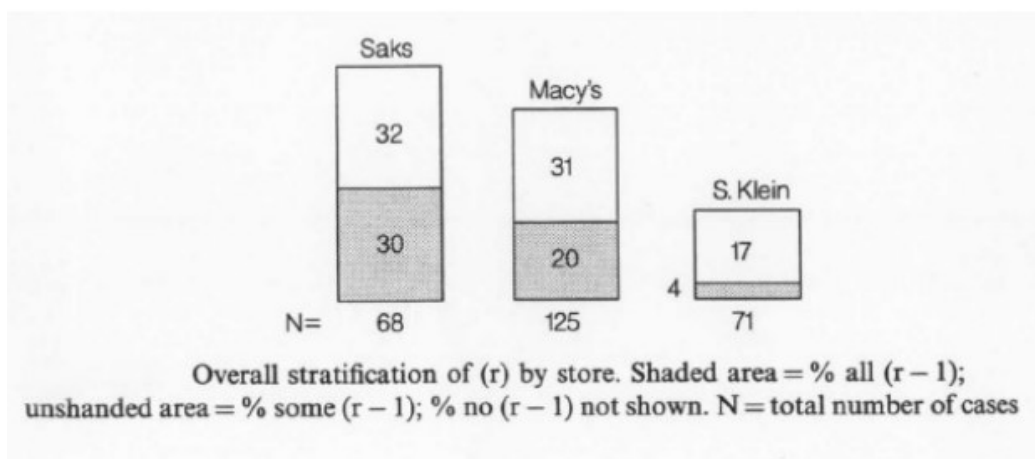


Figure 2: Overall stratification of (r) by store. Shaded area = % all (r-1); unshaded area = % some (r-1); % no (r-1) not shown. N = total number of cases

Labov W., 'The Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores', in *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972

The informants are divided into three categories: all (r-1), those whose records show only (r-1) and no (r-0); some (r-1), those whose records show at least one (r-1) and one (r-0); no (r-1), those whose records showed only (r-0).

The graph shows that 62 percent of Saks employees, 51 percent of Macy's, and 20 percent of S. Klein used all or some (r-1) and proves that the three groups are ranked by their differential use of (r) in the same order they were stratified by social factors.

As far as the distribution of (r) in each of the four standard positions is concerned, we might consider the following graph, from which it is possible to see that the stores are differentiated for each position.

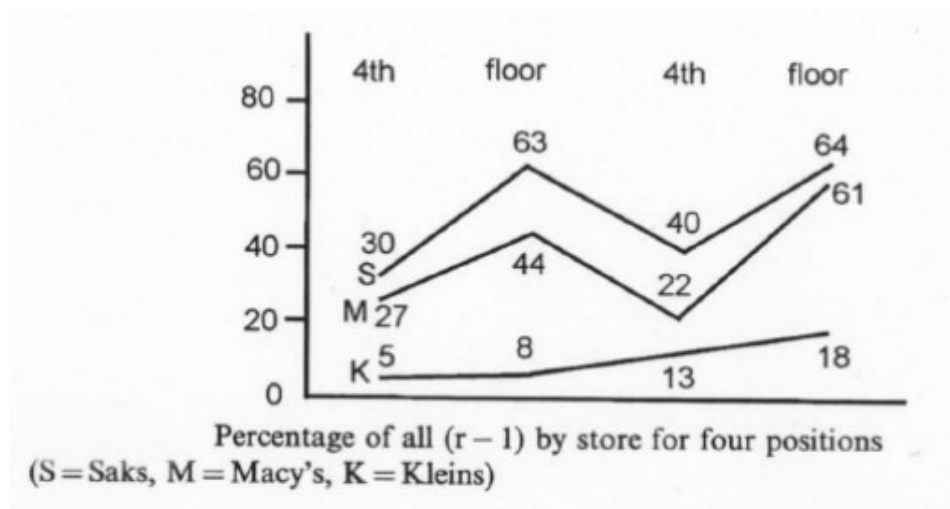


Figure 3: Percentage of all (r-1) by store for four positions (S = Saks, M = Macy's, K = Kleins)

Labov W., 'The Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores', in *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972

In emphatic pronunciation of the final (r), Macy's employees come very close to the mark set by Saks, it seems that r-pronunciation is the norm at which a majority of Macy employees aim, but not the one they use the most.

As regards Saks, it is possible to notice a shift between casual and emphatic pronunciation, even though less marked; that is to say that Saks employees have more security in a linguistic sense.

Kleins employees also participate in the same pattern of stylistic variation of (r) as the other stores. As far as Kleins is concerned, the rise in percentage of r-pronunciation is much greater than the one of the other stores and more regular too.

We might conclude that the hypothesis, which predicted that there was a clear stratification of (r) in the three stores, is confirmed: the pronunciation of /r/ in New York City depends on the social-class of the employees.

3.4. The social differentiation Of English in Norwich

The second case study that proves the existence of a correlation between language and social class I will present is the one conducted by the sociolinguist Peter Trudgill in the 1970s. Particularly influenced by the investigations carried out by W. Labov, he put

forward the idea that the way in which people speak in Norwich, England, is connected to the process of social stratification. His aim was to analyse the relationship between phonological and sociological variables, focusing particularly on the variation in pronunciation of the phonological variable (ng), (t) and (a:).

3.4.1. The method

P. Trudgill analysed a sample of 60 speakers, classifying them into five groups depending on their occupation, their income, their education, their father's occupation, housing and locality. The groups were labelled in the following way: MMC, middle middle class, LMC, lower middle class, UWC, upper working class, MWC, middle working class and LWC, lower working class. To give a clear outline of how the groups were formed, the two middle-class groups included people working in nonmanual occupations, whereas the three working-class groups consisted mainly of people working in manual occupations.

As we might notice, the sample selected by P. Trudgill does not include people belonging to the so called 'upper class' or 'upper middle class', since they tend not to live in Norwich and those who live there are not so many.

After identifying these five social classes, P. Trudgill, inspired by W. Labov's methods, proceeded by means of word lists, reading passages, formal and casual speeches in order to interview the selected informants. He then calculated and portrayed individual and group phonological indices.

3.4.2. Variable (ng) and study results

The first variable investigated by P. Trudgill was (ng), more specifically the pronunciation of the suffix *-ing* in present participles and in placenames, such as *walking*, *going*, *Woking*.

In most varieties of English the final consonant of this suffix is variable, alternating between /ŋ/ and /n/. In Norwich, words like *walking* can be pronounced either /'wɔ: kɪŋ/ or /'wɔ: kn/. The variable thus has two variants:

(ng)-1 = /ŋ/

(ng)-2 = /n/

The results obtained by the investigations can be represented through the following index and graph:

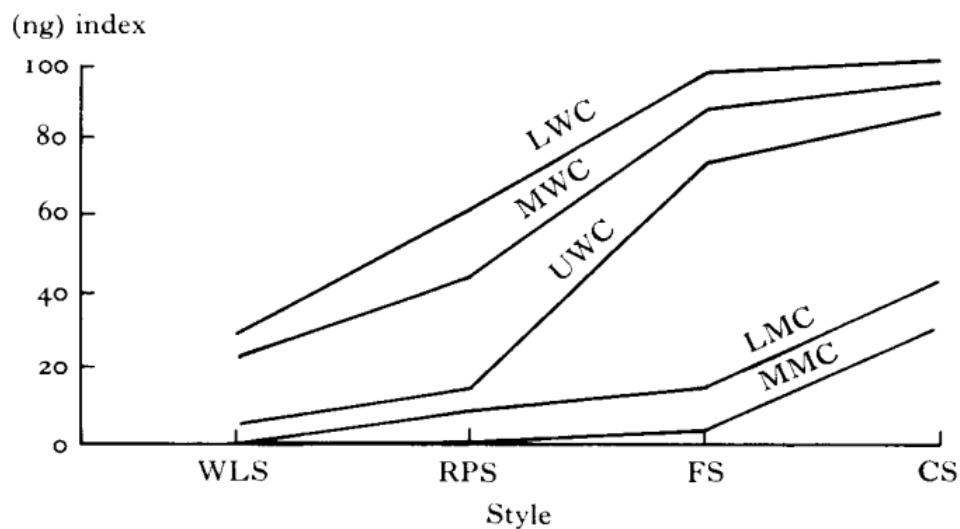


Figure 4: Norwich (ng) by class and style.

J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998

The results obtained show, firstly, that there is a clear relationship between the use of the variable and the social class membership. As a matter of fact, the the (ng)-2 /n/ seems to be much more typical of working-class speech. Secondly, the results indicate that there is a gap in linguistic behaviour between lower middle-class and upper working-class speakers, a difference that “has often been noted in British studies”¹⁶.

Thirdly, they highlight that all groups use both variants, but what makes the difference is the proportion in which they use them.

¹⁶ J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, cit., p. 58.

3.4.3. Variable (t) and study results

The second variable taken into account by P. Trudgill in his study was (t). In many varieties of British English, /t/ is variably realised as either [t] or [ʔ], except for words in which it represents the beginning of the syllable, where it can only be [t]:

tea	[ti:]
between	[bə'twi:n]
bitter	['bɪtə] ~ ['bɪʔə]
bit	[bɪt] ~ [bɪʔ]

This means that in Norwich the variable (t) has three variants:

(t)-1 = [t]

(t)-2 = [tʔ]

(t)-3 = [ʔ]

Variant (t)-2 is a pronunciation involving simultaneous oral and glottal closure, where the oral closure is released, before the glottal closure. In this case, the three variants can quite naturally be arranged in order, since (t)-2 is articulatorily intermediate between the two other variants, moreover it is also socially intermediate.

The results obtained by P. Trudgill's investigations indicate that all groups of working-class speakers use more [ʔ] than any other (t) variant.

3.4.4. Variable (a:) and study results

The last variable analysed by P. Trudgill in his study is (a:), the vowel of *cart*, *path*, *palm*, *banana*. In Norwich the quality of this vowel varies from an RP-like back vowel (where RP means Received Pronunciation, the accent traditionally regarded as standard for British English), around [ɑ:], to a front vowel, around [a:], with an indefinite number of intermediate points.

This variable demanded a different method, which implied isolating the variants in the following way:

(a:)-1 = [ɑ:], i.e. the RP vowel or something close to it

(a:)-2 = something between (a:)-1 and (a:)-3

(a:)-3 = [a:], i.e. the most extreme local pronunciation or something close to it

As regards this variable, the results show that middle-class speakers pronounce the vowel in the first variant, that is to say [ɑ:], while lower working-class speakers pronounce a very front vowel.

3.5. A resignification of the coda /r/ retroflexion: a rural variant of the native Paulistanos' speech

A more current study that show a correlation between language and social class is the one conducted on the language spoken by people living in São Paulo and, in particular on the coda /r/ variant.

The current population inhabiting the city results mainly from foreign and intern immigrants arrived throughout the 19th and the 20th centuries, following the agricultural and industrial development that the region was experiencing. The drastic sociodemographic changes that the city underwent in almost 100 years had an impact not only on the city's landscape and social organization, but also on the language variation patterns.

Moreover, even though the contemporary city of São Paulo appears as a modern and cosmopolitan centre, even nowadays its rural past can be noticed in the language spoken by today's socially ascending working-class youth. This bring us to state that in São Paulo, the stark socioeconomic differences between the working and the upper classes are felt linguistically.

From 2009 to 2013 in São Paulo it was conducted a large sociolinguistic data collection project by Ronald Beline Mendes and Livia Oushiro, during which more than a hundred interviews with native Paulistanos were recorded. These interviews included questions

on various aspects of the speakers' life, such as their neighbourhood, their childhood, family, education, occupation and their opinions on aspects of the city.

From the recordings emerge that São Paulo is a place characterized by mixture and diversity but, despite this, the informants seem to have a well-defined sociolinguistic identity within the country. Indeed, through the project it was possible to understand that Paulistanos elaborated “a distinct set of traits for themselves to create a unique identity among Brazilians”¹⁷.

In addition to that, the projects investigated the persistence of rural variants in native Paulistanos' speech, as the coda /r/ retroflexion for instance, arguing that the persistence of such variants is related to the acquisition of new social meanings and this especially regards working-class youth, who are in contact with both the speech of the native and of the migrants.

The variable realization of coda /r/, in words such as ‘porta’ and ‘mulher’ in Brazilian Portuguese, is one of the most important indicators of geographical identity, with different realizations. Indeed, analysing the speech of educated speakers living in the largest state capital cities in Brazil, it has been identified seven variants:

- (r)-1 = [r] trill
- (r)-2 = [ɾ] tap
- (r)-3 = [ɻ] retroflex approximant
- (r)-4 = [χ ʁ] velar fricatives
- (r)-5 = [R] uvular trill
- (r)-6 = [h ɦ] glottal fricatives
- (r)-7 = deletion

The first three variants can be found in Porto Alegre and São Paulo, the two most southern state capital cities, while the following three are found in Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Recife. Deletion, instead, occurs in all varieties.

A preliminary remark to make is that in phonetic textbook, the tap is usually considered the prototypical Paulistano variant, while the retroflex-/r/ is related to the countryside.

¹⁷ D. Smakman & P. Heinrich, *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, cit., p 61.

Leite in 2004 analysed the language spoken by college students from São José do Rio Preto who had moved to Campinas to attend one of the most prestigious universities. The findings show that the first-year students tended to use retroflex-/r/ more than senior students who, instead, shifted their coda /r/ realization to vocalized variants.

From the investigation also emerged that the students considered retroflex-/r/ as “ugly” and showed the willingness to shift their pronunciation to a more “intermediate” and “ideal” /r/.

However, a recent survey conducted by Oushiro in 2015 found out that retroflex-/r/ is still present in native Paulistanos’ speech. Moreover, it was shown that retroflex-/r/ is favoured by lower social classes, speakers living in peripheral areas, with lower mobility and lower levels of education.

The following table shows the realization of coda /r/ according to the variable of social class:

	<i>Weight</i>	<i>% [r]</i>	<i>Total N</i>
Social class			
Upper and upper-middle	.27	11.2	2,194
Middle	.41	27.9	2,783
Upper-working and working	.68	37.4	4,249
<i>Range</i>	<i>41</i>		

Figure 5: Realization of coda /r/ according to social class variable.

D. Smakman & P. Heinrich, *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, Routledge, 2018

CHAPTER 4: Language and Gender Difference

4.1. Introduction to language and gender difference

The other social variable taken into account by urban dialect studies which I would like to analyse is sex differentiation.

In order to deal with the topic of gender difference or sex differentiation related to language variation, it is important to give a brief explanation about terms and concepts.

As stated by the linguist Penelope Eckert in his book '*Language and Gender*', "sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex."¹⁸

The gender issue is undoubtedly delicate and complicated, especially in this historical phase; as the aim of this thesis is to explore how language changes according to social variables, such as gender difference, I will use the terms sex differentiation and gender difference indiscriminately, except for the situations in which it is required for the purpose of the sociolinguistics explanation.

Now, I would like to mention an interesting consideration about the relevance sex had for linguists at the beginning of their sociolinguistics investigations.

According to the linguist Mary Bucholtz, "within sociolinguistics issues of gender emerged primarily as the study of 'sex differences', in which the focus of analysing was the quantifiable difference between women's and men's use of particular linguistic variables"¹⁹.

The majority of the early work conducted in the field of variationist sociolinguistics and in the one of language and gender considered sex as the basic social variable of women's and men's speech. Differently from other social variables, which represented the main subject of the linguists' investigation, the concept of sex was seen as completely easy to understand and therefore was no considered as requiring a theoretical explanation. This situation is in clear contrast with the one concerning other variables, such as social class, "whose operationalization was and continues to be elaborately discussed and debated"²⁰.

¹⁸ P. Eckert, & S. McConnell-Ginet, *Language and gender*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

¹⁹ M. Bucholtz, *From 'sex differences' to gender variation in sociolinguistics*, University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics, 2002.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

In studying language and gender difference, many linguists, and in a particular way Leonard Bloomfield, McConnell-Ginet, Zhao Yuanren, have agreed that, in different contexts, men and women present differences as regards phonology, vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Eckert McConnell-Ginet, for example, highlights the importance of the role played by men and women in society, affirming that because of the traditional social factors, men have higher social status and therefore also present privileges in speech²¹.

In dealing with this topic, it is also fundamental not to ignore the element of age, which together with gender plays a significant role as well. As a matter of fact, different gender and different age cause diversity in language and the main reasons are two: firstly, different traditional social status implies also different mental state; secondly, the role played by men and women within the society is different, as well as their participation in social activities and the scope of their activities. All these factors have as a consequence the variation of language.

4.2. The beginning of the research

Starting from the 1970s, many researchers coming from different fields, especially linguists and psychologists, began to be interested in the differences between the language spoken by men and the language spoken by women.

As concerns the English context, the investigation concerned with gender differences in the field of linguistics began thanks to Robin Lakoff who, with her book *Language and Women's Place*, published in 1973, aroused the linguists' interest in this topic.

According to R. Lakoff, the language spoken by women is characterized, firstly, by a specialized vocabulary, which appears to be trivial and evidence of the fact that women have been allowed control over unimportant things. Comparing it with the one spoken by men, it seems that women have a preference for words with a close relationship with life and make a larger use of concrete colour words, such as 'mauve', 'yellow', 'beige', 'lavender'.

Secondly, by milder expletives: while men seem to speak with a strong tone, women communicate through a milder tone. A contemporary example could be obtained by the

²¹ P. Eckert, & S. McConnell-Ginet, *Language and gender*, cit.

famous series *Friends*, where the male characters Joe and Chandler often say ‘shit’ whereas the female characters use milder expressions, such as ‘go to hell’²².

Another element characterizing the language spoken by women in the English context are empty adjectives, such as ‘charming’, ‘divine’ and ‘cute’.

As concerns tag questions, for example:

- It is nice, isn’t it?

instead, both men and women use them, but women use them while expressing their opinions, even when they are sure about what they are saying. According to R. Lakoff, the reason is to show they want to get recognized by others²³.

In addition to that, differently from men, women have an inclination for a rising tone while speaking, as well as for more polite forms.

Last but not least, women usually speak in a formal register, avoiding words such as ‘ain’t’, ‘goin’, and lack humor. As a confirmation of this, Mr. Bean and Chaplin are presented as examples of famous and classic comic characters.

R. Lakoff concludes that the linguistic differences she identified, which are determined by the role played by women in the society, create a unique female style, which reflects the features of obedience, uncertainty and passiveness²⁴.

4.3.Later studies

R. Lakoff’s research and findings had a great influence on the later linguists’ research. As a matter of fact, the differences between the language spoken by men and women have been studied in the fields of Anthropology, Dialectology and Sociolinguistics.

According to Jennifer Coates, who wrote *Women, Men and Language*, anthropologists identify the language as a part of the social behaviour of a certain social community. Dialectologists, for their part, investigate the changes of language and the decline of some dialects; sociolinguists, instead, consider gender as a social variable that allows to analyse the relationships between language and gender.

²² L. Gu, *Language and Gender: Differences and Similarities*, Atlantis Press, 2013.

²³ R. Lakoff, *Language and women’s place*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

More specifically, in Anthropology researchers focus on the differences that occur in phonology and lexicon. The linguist Edward Sapir investigated the language used into the tribe Yana in California, describing it through the following forms of dialogue: male-male, male-female, female-female, female-male. According to him, individuals choose a proper form to communicate with others. To make an example: if we consider the form of dialogue male-male, we will notice that people follow this rule: if a word is monosyllabic or it is ended with a long vowel, diphthong or a consonant, males often add the suffix *-na* at the end of the word²⁵.

As stated by Lihong Gu in *Language and Gender: Differences and Similarities*, as far as dialectologists are concerned, those who focused on the language spoken by women, such as Wartburg, believe that women's language is more conservative than the one of men, due to the fact that they never left the place where they lived; moreover, women often stay at home with their relatives, having so no occasions to interact with strangers. In addition to that, other dialectologists, such as Orton, think that males speak dialect more frequently than female do²⁶.

In sociolinguistics, researchers analyse the relationship between language and gender in many aspects, such as gender and language style, gender and politeness, and most of them believe that women are more polite than men. They also believe that women express themselves in an implicit and indirect way, compared with men who, instead, are more direct in communicating.

John Gray proposed his view in the bestseller from the witty title *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, which is about relationship problems. In particular, in the book it is said that the most common relationship problem between men and women are a result of fundamental psychological differences between the two sexes. Fundamentally, J. Grey believes that since men and women come from different planet, therefore there must be some differences between them.

In the final analysis, scholars overall hold that there are some innate differences between the language men and women speak. What distinguish men from women is expressed also in their way of communicating with others.

²⁵ E. Sapir, *Text analyses of three yana dialects*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1923.

²⁶ L. Gu, *Language and Gender: Differences and Similarities*, cit.

A fundamental aspect to take into account is that this field of research should not be approached only considering gender; indeed, as communication occurs in different and various contexts, contextual factors, such as the relationship between the speakers and their communicative objective, are necessary to understand the relationship between language and gender.

Deborah Tannen for example, known for writing *You Just Don't Understand*, a book where she illustrates that even in the closest of relationships women and men live in different worlds made of different words, tried to identify the language differences considering the aspect of culture, concluding that males and females belong, or at least come, from different cultural backgrounds, where culture is meant as a sub-culture. As a matter of fact, they are part of the same national culture, since they belong to the same nation, but their transcultural differences bring them to have different language and behaviour.

This suggests that language is in a dynamically changing social context and therefore it is not determined only by gender, but also by social, cultural and psychological factors.

This is the reason why this research topic should be approached in all-around view and dynamically.

4.4. Theoretical perspectives

In order to better explain the relationship between the speaker's sex/gender and the speaker's language used in spoken interaction, throughout the years five main theoretical perspectives have been developed and proposed.

To begin with, the 'deficit approach', which was developed by Lakoff in the second half of the 20th century, puts forward the assumption that women's language reflects women's inferior status²⁷. Related to this approach there is the 'dominance approach', which is based on the idea that men's and women's language use varies according to their social power differences. The studies that agreed with this theory, often suggest that the male social dominance is performed through the language use, for example by means of interruptions. In this regard, Zimmerman believed that men play an authoritarian role in the society and therefore interrupting other's conversations is the expression of their

²⁷ R. Lakoff, *Language and women's place*, cit.

social power and controlling force²⁸. At the same time, women's subordinate role results in the ruled position in conversations, more specifically in listening and sharing emotions with others.

During the 80s, it was proposed the 'difference approach', according to which the differences between men's and women's language use represent the sociocultural differences between men and women conceived as two distinct subcultures.

The 'dynamic' approach arose in the 90s, was initiated as a counterreaction to the essentialist idea according to which gender is a fixed factor inherent to biological sex. Indeed, this approach promotes the idea that gender is not determined by sex, whereas it is a social accomplishment constructed through behaviour and discourse, and interacts with other categories such as age, social class, and ethnicity.

The most noteworthy perspective on sex/gender and language that has been developed in the 21st century is based on the 'dynamic approach' and focuses on the ways in which men and women use language in order to reconstruct and present themselves in various contexts that imply a linguistic interaction²⁹.

Another explanation to the different use men and women make of language which, however, is not much considered, is the 'biological approach'. This perspective proposes the idea that evolutionary processes and brain differences are the cause of differences between men and women, for example in vowel duration or in pitch range.

Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that human brains are 'unique mosaics of features' and that the human brain structure can not be distinguished in male or female brain.

Some notable handbooks, realized by scholars such as Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, Tannen et al., Coates, Holmes & Meyerhoff, have critically reflected on the empirical findings concerning the relationship between the speaker's sex/gender and his/her use of linguistic variables. They concluded by confirming the 'dynamic approach', considering gender as constructed through interaction and not as a fixed factor determined by sex.

At the moment, a systematically research and a summary of the recent empirical discoveries about the various linguistic variables used by women and men are lacking.

²⁸ D. H. Zimmerman, and C. West, *Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation*, Language and sex: Difference and dominance, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975.

²⁹ I. Plug et al., *Do women and men use language differently in spoken face-to-face interaction? A scoping review*, Review of Communication and Research, 2020

4.5. Some findings

A study already mentioned and valid for the variable of social class, but which also illustrates the relationship between language and gender is the one conducted by P. Trudgill on the English spoken in Norwich.

The research conducted which focused on the (ng) variable demonstrated that in each social class group, male speakers show higher scores for more low-status /n/ variants. This situation has been outlined also by many other studies which also investigated many other variables. In other words, “women on average tend to use more higher-status variants than men do”³⁰. According to P. Trudgill, “this is perhaps the most strikingly consistent finding of all to emerge from sociolinguistic dialect studies in the industrialised western world”³¹.

This thesis is confirmed also by the study focused on the French spoken in Montreal. The variable investigated is (l) and, in particular, deals with the presence of the consonant /l/ in the pronunciation of the pronouns *il* ‘he, it’, *elle* ‘she, it’, *ils* ‘they’, *la* ‘her, it’, *les* ‘them’, but also the definite articles *la* (feminine singular) and *les* (plural). This variable presents two variants:

(l)-1 = [l]

(l)-2 = zero

The first variant, (l)-1 = [l], appears to be socially more prestigious and more correct than the second variant, (l)-2 = zero, as in the case of *il* [il]. This variable is related to the social status; indeed, the study shows that the zero variant is most typical of speakers belonging to the working-class. However, it is also related to the sex of speakers; in particular, the findings demonstrate that men are more likely to use the lower-prestige variant than women.

Lastly, sex differentiation in language has been shown to occur also in the speech of children. Scholars investigating the pronunciation of postvocalic /r/ in Edinburgh English found out that there was a pattern of sex differentiation even in the language spoken by

³⁰ J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, cit., p. 61.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

six-year-old children. From this study emerged that the linguistic variable (r) in Edinburgh presents three variants:

(r)-1 = [r] a tap

(r)-2 = [ɹ] a frictionless continuant

(r)-3 = zero

The results of the study, which surveyed in particular children aged 6, 8 and 10, show that in all the three age groups, boys favour [r], differently from girls that favour [ɹ]. It is also interesting to notice that in Scotland the variant [ɹ] is associated with the middle-class speech.

4.6. Why does sex differentiation in language occur?

According to P. Trudgill, “what we know of the relationship between sex and language tells us that if a linguistic change is taking place in the direction of the prestige variety it will be spearheaded by middle-class women, while changes away from the prestige norm³²” will be spread by working-class men.

This awareness lead us to interrogate ourselves more about the reason why sex differentiation in language occurs and why men and women play different roles in determining linguistic changes. There is not a widely accepted explanation, but there are different factors that have been proposed in order to clarify these questions.

To begin with, in our society women have fewer opportunities and this brings them to signal their social status through their appearance and their linguistic behaviour, rather than by what they do.

As an explanation to women’s bent for formal speech style, it has been proposed that, because of the fewer occupational opportunities, they tend to participate in less cohesive social networks, being so more likely to “finding themselves in situations that are ‘formal’ in the sense that they are not particularly well-acquainted with the people they are talking to”³³.

³² J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, cit., p. 84.

³³ *Ibidem*.

Another possible theory is that “in societies where roles are sharply differentiated, as they tend to be in ghettos and enclaves of many kinds”³⁴, women seem to have greater mobility than men, for shopping, work or recreation. As a consequence, women have more social contacts beyond the community and develop a wider repertoire of linguistic variants.

In addition to that, as women are encouraged to be correct, discreet, quiet and polite in their behaviour, this is reflected also in the way they speak. Men, on the contrary, are allowed to act tough, rough and to break the rules; hence, they appear as more likely to express themselves through a low-status speech, associated with working-class language.

³⁴ J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, cit., p. 84.

Conclusions

The primary aim of this dissertation was to demonstrate how social factors can determine language variation, focusing in particular on social class and gender differentiation.

Investigating the fields of Sociolinguistics, which explore the connections between language and society, and Urban Dialectology, which studies language variation concentrating on the urban context, it was possible firstly to show that a language is not a monolithic system, closed and independent, but on the contrary, it can be considered as a system in which different possibilities of variability coexist; and secondly to deal with the main difficulties that the research had to face, such as the issue of representativeness and of obtaining linguistic data.

In order to analyse the relationship between language and social class and to demonstrate how social status can determine a linguistic variation in the way individuals communicate, I referred to the studies conducted by the linguists William Labov and Peter Trudgill. Particularly relevant are the findings resulting from the study conducted by W. Labov on the social stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores, which showed that in New York City the pronunciation of /r/ depended on the social-class membership of the employees investigated. Indeed, those with higher socioeconomic status pronounced /r/ more frequently than those with lower socioeconomic status.

I then proceeded by investigating the relationship between speakers' sex/gender and the way in which they speak. After defining how the research in this field began, I mentioned the various theoretical perspectives elaborated and, with the support of thesis proposed by different scholars, I tried to find an answer to why sex differentiation in language occurs. However, a widely accepted answer does not exist; many scholars hold that there are some innate differences in the way males and females speak, but what emerged most is that at the basis of the different linguistic behaviour between males and females there is the cultural background which they belong to and, therefore, the role they are called to play in society. A further important aspect to consider is that traditional sociolinguistic studies conducted on the relationship between language variation and gender difference treat gender as a category comparable to variables, such as social class, which explain directly how variation occurs in society. However, this approach quite simplifies the linguistic situation when dealing with gender, since it does not take into account the social dimension of individuals, the various roles they play and their

perception towards these roles. As analysed in *Urban Sociolinguistics: The city as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, “some of these roles are constrained by biology or culture, while others are subject to an individual’s choice to abide by certain prescribed or proscribed roles and by that individual’s communicative actions towards making their life a better one”³⁵. As nowadays, and in the dynamism of the urban context more than ever, people come into contact with many different realities for which they play many different roles and develop identities that make them as different from each other as possible, research in sociolinguistic filed should consider more the linguistic choices that individuals make depending on all the factors mentioned above, rather than only considering speech communities on the whole.

All things considered, it is interesting to observe how language is dynamic and constantly changing; social factors play an important role in determining language variation, as language evolves with society. What specifically emerges is that linguistic variation is certainly determined by social class and gender difference; however, it is not influenced by them in an independent way, but rather by the various social factors implied by the context in which speakers are. Therefore, while investigating linguistic variation, researchers should consider not only social class and gender differences independently, but also factors such as age, employment, social networks, ethnicity and cultural background, in order to provide a complete view of the linguistic situation.

I would like to conclude by saying that I consider language a fundamental tool for individuals, therefore I believe that researchers should continue investigating this field.

³⁵ D. Smakman & P. Heinrich, *Urban Sociolinguistics: The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, cit., p 2.

Dialettologia urbana: quando la classe sociale e la differenza di genere influenzano il linguaggio

Lo scopo primario di questa tesi è dimostrare come il linguaggio sia determinato da diversi fattori sociali, in particolar modo mostrare come la classe sociale e il genere dei parlanti possa influenzare la variazione linguistica e il loro diverso modo di comunicare. L'analisi si articola principalmente in quattro capitoli:

- Sociolinguistics
- Urban dialectology
- Language and Social Class
- Language and Gender Difference

Il primo capitolo intende definire che cosa sia la sociolinguistica, delineando le sue origini, le figure principali, il concetto di variazione libera e ciò che la distingue dalla dialettologia tradizionale.

Nello specifico, la sociolinguistica è una scienza sviluppatasi a partire dagli anni Sessanta del XX secolo, quando gli studi sull'importanza del linguaggio nel processo educativo condotti dal sociologo Basil Bernstein e quelli sulla relazione tra i vari fattori sociali e la variazione linguistica realizzati dal linguista William Labov emersero nel panorama nazionale degli Stati Uniti d'America. È una disciplina scientifica che ha come obiettivo quello di investigare le relazioni tra linguaggio e società e muove dall'ipotesi che il linguaggio, oltre ad essere un'abilità innata dell'essere umano, si realizzi nei rapporti sociali tra individui e per questo sia influenzato da fattori sociali. Si basa sull'idea che la variazione libera non sia realmente libera in quanto la capacità dei parlanti di dire qualcosa in modi diversi implica sempre una scelta linguistica e tale scelta è determinata da diversi fattori sociali. In questo contesto il linguista americano William Labov, anche definito padre della sociolinguistica, e lo studioso europeo Peter Trudgill emergono come le principali figure dell'ambito sociolinguistico.

Sebbene la sociolinguistica presenti basi comuni con la dialettologia tradizionale, ciò che la distingue è innanzitutto il campo d'azione, che nel caso della sociolinguistica è la società delle aree urbane, studiata secondo la prospettiva della variazione sincronica; la dialettologia tradizionale, al contrario, si focalizza sul contesto rurale, che viene

analizzato dal punto di vista della variazione diacronica. Inoltre, le due discipline indagano due categorie di parlanti diverse: la sociolinguistica concentra i propri studi su diversi gruppi sociali, mentre la dialettologia tradizionale indaga la lingua di parlanti che si caratterizzano per essere maschi, anziani, abitanti di aree rurali per tutto il corso della propria vita.

Il secondo capitolo esplora il campo della dialettologia urbana, sviluppatasi nel corso del XX secolo, quando la dialettologia tradizionale inizia a subire l'influenza delle scienze sociali e gli studiosi realizzano come le ricerche condotte fino a quel momento si fossero focalizzate esclusivamente su aree rurali e sulla sola dimensione spaziale della variazione linguistica, trascurando le forme di linguaggio della città, dove viveva la maggior parte della popolazione, e la dimensione sociale che, invece, ricopre un ruolo fondamentale nella vita di tutti gli individui. Questa presa di consapevolezza porta alla nascita della dialettologia urbana che nel primo periodo, però, deve interfacciarsi con il problema della rappresentatività. Tra i primi studi condotti in ambito urbano, infatti, molti continuarono a seguire le metodologie proprie della dialettologia tradizionale che, tuttavia, risultavano inadatte per il contesto urbano in quanto ignoravano la dimensione sociale e non erano in grado di rappresentare fedelmente come i dialetti evollevano. Oltre a ciò, vi è anche il problema di come ottenere le informazioni linguistiche ricercate; gli studiosi, infatti, volevano raccogliere elementi linguistici che fossero il più possibile rappresentativi della realtà linguistica, senza che i parlanti controllassero il proprio modo di comunicare.

Uno dei modi individuati da W. Labov per sovrastare il problema fu quello di intervistare gruppi di persone, invece che singoli individui, così da avere delle informazioni linguistiche più conformi alla realtà.

Il capitolo termina evidenziando come, nell'ambito della dialettologia urbana, la città ricopra un ruolo fondamentale in quanto luogo caratterizzato da dinamismo, mobilità sociale e parlanti multilingue che instaurano relazioni contraddistinte da diverse varietà linguistiche.

Il terzo capitolo analizza nel dettaglio il rapporto tra linguaggio e classe sociale introducendo la teoria sviluppata da Basil Bernstein del codice ristretto ed elaborato, secondo cui i parlanti appartenenti alla classe operaia si servono di un codice linguistico ristretto, che realizza significati semplici, impliciti e dipendenti dal contesto; mentre i parlanti provenienti dalla classe media utilizzano un codice elaborato, basato su significati

resi espliciti e indipendenti dalla situazione. Successivamente vengono presentati tre studi, i metodi di realizzazione e i risultati ottenuti, particolarmente emblematici di come l'appartenenza ad una determinata classe sociale possa determinare il diverso modo di esprimersi dei parlanti. Il primo, condotto da W. Labov, riguarda la stratificazione sociale di (r) nei grandi magazzini di New York e dimostra come la pronuncia di /r/ dipenda dalla classe sociale di appartenenza degli impiegati intervistati: quelli con una condizione socioeconomica migliore pronunciano /r/ più frequentemente. Analogamente, lo studio condotto da P. Trudgill sulle variabili fonologiche (ng), (t) and (a:) dell'inglese parlato a Norwich mostra come il modo di realizzare le diverse varianti possibili per ogni variabile fonologica dipenda dalla classe sociale da cui provengono i parlanti.

L'ultimo studio, infine, condotto a San Paolo, Brasile, e riguardante la realizzazione della retroflessione di /r/ in coda sillabica, oltre a dimostrare che la persistenza di tale variante rurale nei parlanti nativi di San Paolo si deve all'acquisizione di nuovi significati sociali, conferma che la realizzazione di una determinata variante rispetto ad un'altra all'interno della stessa comunità di parlanti è influenzata da diversi fattori sociali, tra cui la classe sociale di provenienza.

Il quarto capitolo, infine, indaga la relazione tra linguaggio e il genere del parlante.

Le ricerche relative a questo ambito iniziano negli anni Settanta, specialmente grazie alla linguista Robin Lakoff che, con il suo libro *Language and Women's Place*, stimola l'interesse degli studiosi verso questo campo di ricerca.

R. Lakoff, più nello specifico, sostiene che il linguaggio parlato dalle donne sia determinato dal ruolo che ricoprono nella società e che si caratterizzi per degli elementi precisi, come un lessico distintivo, imprecazioni più lievi, aggettivi 'vuoti', l'uso di domande anche quando si è già certi della risposta, inclinazione per un tono più alto e per forme cortesi e l'utilizzo di un registro più formale, privo di humor.

Le analisi condotte da R. Lakoff hanno influenzato gli studi successivi, i quali hanno cercato di portare alla luce le differenze tra il modo di esprimersi maschile e quello femminile, rimanendo piuttosto coerenti con quanto individuato da R. Lakoff.

Successivamente, il capitolo presenta le diverse prospettive teoriche che nel corso degli anni di ricerca sono emerse, illustra come lo studio condotto da P. Trudgill sulle variabili fonologiche dell'inglese parlato a Norwich dimostri che le diverse realizzazioni delle varianti sono strettamente connesse anche al genere dei parlanti e, infine, si propone di

chiarire il motivo per cui maschi e femmine, uomini e donne, si esprimono in maniera diversa tra loro pur appartenendo alla stessa comunità linguistica.

Sebbene non vi sia una risposta universale, ciò che emerge dal capitolo è che alla base del diverso modo di esprimersi tra maschi e femmine vi è, oltre a delle differenze innate, principalmente il diverso background culturale di appartenenza e il diverso ruolo che maschi e femmine sono chiamati a ricoprire all'interno della società. Infatti, una delle teorie elaborate a tal proposito propone che le donne, in quanto meno privilegiate rispetto agli uomini dal punto di vista delle opportunità lavorative, cercano di emergere attraverso la loro apparenza e il loro comportamento linguistico.

Infine, viene evidenziato come al momento una ricerca sistematica e una sintesi delle scoperte empiriche più recenti riguardanti questo tema manchino e come la ricerca debba approcciare questo ambito di indagine in modo più dinamico e trasversale, poiché il linguaggio si trova inserito in un contesto sociale in continuo cambiamento.

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