MODERN DIALECT STUDIES

Traditional dialectology studied geographical variation, generally using elderly, untravelled, and uneducated speakers from rural areas. Modern dialectology has moved in other directions.

Social factors now provide the focus of investigation. Speech variation can be partly understood with reference to regional location and movement, but social background is felt to be an equally if not more important factor in explaining linguistic diversity and change. Modern dialectologists therefore take account of socio-economic status, using such indicators as occupation, income, or education, alongside age and sex. Ideally informants are found in all social groups, and the traditional focus on the language of older people of working-class backgrounds has been replaced by the study of speakers of all ages and from all walks of life (§10).

Dialect studies have moved from the country to the city. The description of rural dialects led to fascinating results, but only a small proportion of a country's population was represented in such studies. In many countries, over 80% of the population live in towns and cities, and their speech patterns need to be described too – especially as linguistic change so often begins when people from the country imitate those from urban areas. This approach, accordingly, is known as *urban dialectology*.

Informants are now randomly selected. In the older studies, small numbers of speakers were carefully chosen to represent what were thought of as 'pure' forms of dialect. Today, larger numbers of people are chosen from the whole population of a city – perhaps using the electoral register or a telephone directory. Also, the earlier approach generally asked for one-word responses to a range of carefully chosen questions. This produced useful data, but these speech patterns were unlikely to have been typical. When people have their attention drawn to the way they speak, they usually adopt a more careful and unnatural style. Attempts are therefore now made to elicit speech that is more spontaneous in character by engaging informants in topics of conversation that they find interesting or emotionally involving (p. 334). The questionnaire has been largely replaced by the tape recorder.

LINGUISTIC VARIABLES

Traditional dialectology studied the fact that different people do not speak in the same way. Contemporary dialectology adds to this study the fact that the same person does not speak in the same way all the time. Individuals vary in their pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Is there a reason for this variation, or is it random – 'free' variation, as it is often called? The current belief is that most of the variation is systematic, the result of the interplay between linguistic and social factors.

In the 1970s, the notion of the *linguistic variable* was developed, as a means of describing this variation. A linguistic variable is a unit with at least two variant forms, the choice of which depends on other factors, such as sex, age, social status, and situation. For example, in New York City, speakers sometimes pronounce /r/ in words like *car* and sometimes they do not. This unit can thus be seen as a variable, (r), with two variant forms, /r/ and zero. (It is usual to transcribe linguistic variables in parentheses.) It is then possible to calculate the extent to which individual speakers, or groups of speakers, use /r/, and to determine whether there is a correlation between their preferences and their backgrounds. Several interesting correlations have in fact been found (see also p. 334).

DROPPING THE /h/

In British English, the accent which carries most prestige (p. 39) pronounces /h/ at the beginnings of words such as *head*. But in most other accents of England and Wales, it is common to omit /h/ in this position. Regions do not pronounce or omit /h/ with total consistency, however, as can be seen from the results of two studies of this variable carried out in Norwich and Bradford.

The speakers were grouped into five social classes, based on such factors as their occupation, income, and education. The proportion of /h/-dropping was calculated, with the following results:

Class	*Bradford*	*Norwich*
Middle middle (MMC)	12%	6%
Lower middle (LMC)	28%	14%
Upper working (UWC)	67%	40%
Middle working (MWC)	89%	60%
Lower working (LWC)	93%	60%

The correlation is clear. In both areas, there is more /h/-dropping as one moves down the social scale. Moreover, the proportion is always greater in Bradford, suggesting that the phenomenon has been longer established in that area. (After J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, 1980.)

READING ALOUD IN NORWICH

People of different social levels were asked to read aloud a list of isolated words (A) and a piece of continuous text (B), and their pronunciations when reading were compared with their formal (C) and casual (D) speech.

The table shows whether the variable (ng) in such words as *walking* was pronounced /ŋ/ or /n/. (0 = no use of /n/; 100 = 100% use of /n/.)

Class	A	B	C	D
MMC	0	0	3	28
LMC	0	10	15	42
UWC	5	15	74	87
MWC	23	44	88	95
LWC	29	66	98	100

The consistency with which speakers increase their use of /n/ as their language becomes more spontaneous and casual is reflected at every social level. (After P. Trudgill, 1974.)

/l/ -DROPPING IN MONTREAL

The consonant /l/ is often dropped in the pronunciation of *il* ('he, it'), *elle* ('she, it'), *ils* ('they'), *la* ('her, it, the'), and *les* ('the, them'). The prestige forms retain the /l/. When usage is analysed by sex of speaker, a clear pattern emerges. (The numbers represent the percentage of /l/-dropping.)

	Male	*Female*
il (impersonal)	99	97
ils	94	90
il (personal)	94	84
elle	67	59
les (pronoun)	53	41
la (article)	34	25
la (pronoun)	31	23
les (article)	25	15

Women are much more likely to use the higher-prestige variant than men – a pattern of differentiation that has often been found in studies of urban dialectology. (After G. Sankoff & H. Cedergren, 1971.)

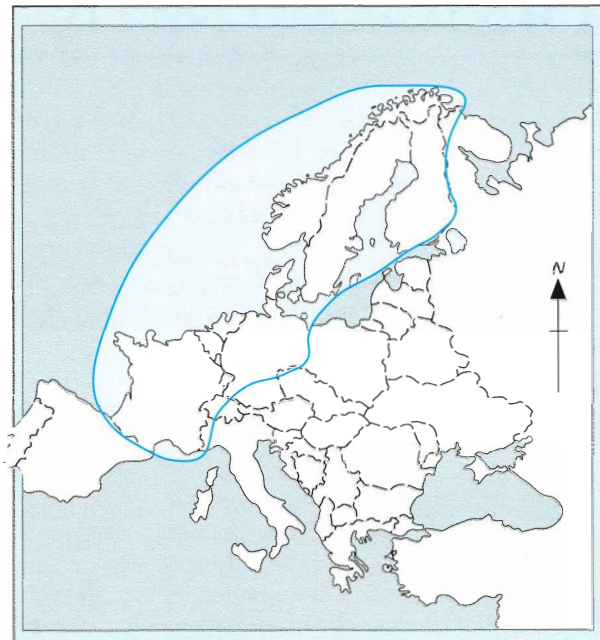
LINGUISTIC AREAS

Geographical identity can sometimes be established within a broader context than that provided by rural or urban dialectology. Certain features of speech can identify someone as coming from a particular part of the world, but the area involved may extend over several countries, languages, or even language families (§50). The study of 'areal features' of this kind is sometimes referred to as *areal linguistics.*

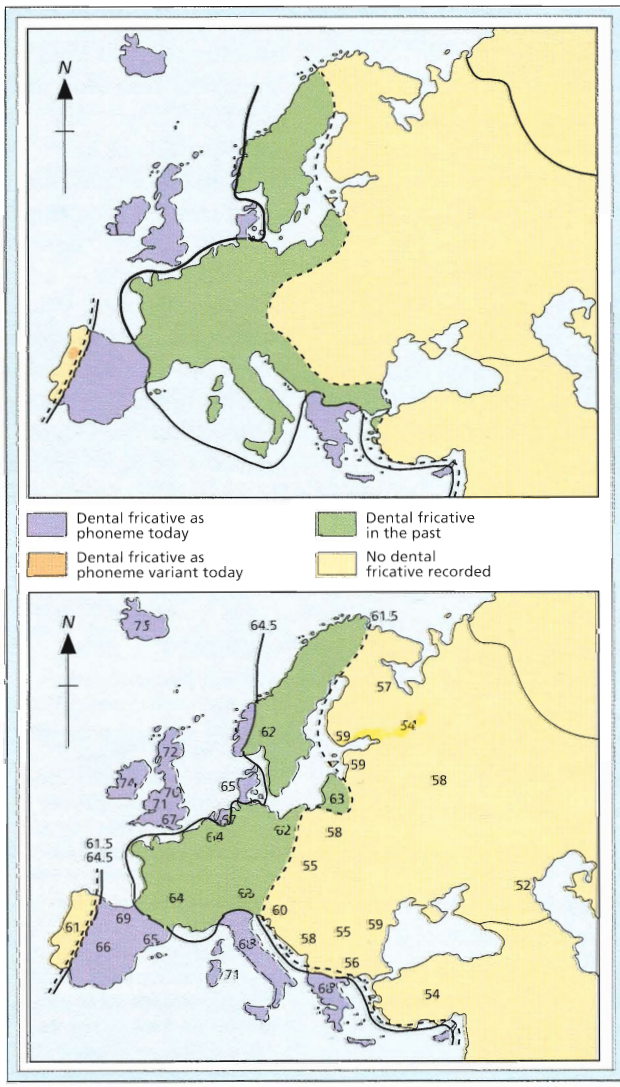
Features of pronunciation are often shared by adjacent, but historically-unrelated languages. In the indigenous languages of southern Africa (p. 317), the use of click sounds in speech identifies speakers of the Khoisan languages as well as of local Bantu languages, such as Zulu and Xhosa. In the Indian sub-continent (p. 310), languages that belong to different families (such as Indo-European and Dravidian) have several important phonological features in common – the use of retroflex consonants (p. 157) is particularly widespread, for example. In Europe the distribution of the affricate [ʧ] is interesting: it is found in many of the languages on the periphery of the area, such as Lapp, Romanian, Hungarian, Spanish, Galician, Basque, Italian, Gaelic, English, and the Slavic languages. The languages within this periphery, such as Danish, German, and French, do not use it.

Grammatical features can also cross linguistic and national boundaries. The use of particles to mark different semantic classes of nouns (§16) can be found throughout South-east Asia. In Europe, the Balkans constitutes a particularly well-defined linguistic area. For example, Albanian, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Macedonian all place the definite article *after* the noun, as in Romanian *lup* ('wolf') and *lupul* ('the wolf'), whereas historically-related languages outside of the Balkans area (such as Italian) do not.

How do areal features develop? In some areas, dialect chains (p. 25) have probably helped to diffuse a linguistic feature throughout an area. Concentrations of bilingual speakers along lines of communication would also play a part, and political factors will have exercised their influence. Sometimes, the progress of an areal feature can be traced – an example being the uvular pronunciation of /r/. Originally, speakers of European languages pronounced /r/ with the front of their tongue; but, in the 17th century, Parisians began to use a uvular variant. The variant caught on, spreading first throughout most of France, then to parts of Italy, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark, and (by the end of the 19th century) to southern Norway and Sweden. Spain, Austria, England, and other countries were not affected. The historical reasons for this complex state of affairs are little understood, and require investigation on several fronts. In such cases, the facts of dialectology, social history, and political history merge.



Front-rounded vowels
These vowels, such as in German *müde* ('tired') or French *soeur* ('sister'), are found along an axis which runs diagonally across northern Europe. They are heard in French, Dutch, German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish. The feature cannot be explained on historical grounds: German and English are closely related, but the latter does not have front-rounded vowels; nor does Spanish, which is closely related to French. The main factor seems to be geographical proximity – as further illustrated by the way in which many south German dialects lack these vowels, whereas they are found in north-west Italy.
(J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, 1980, p. 185.)



A genetic explanation?
The distinctive European distribution of such sounds as front-rounded vowels, affricates, and dental fricatives has been studied from a genetic point of view. The geneticist C. D. Darlington (1903–) proposed in the 1940s that the genetic composition of a community would partly determine its preferences for types of sound. The maps show the distribution of dental fricatives in western Europe (above, left), and the frequency with which the O blood-group gene is distributed in the population (below, left). There seems to be an intriguing correlation: in populations where fewer than 60% have the gene, there is no history of these sounds; and in those where more than 65% have the gene, the sounds are well represented. Unfortunately, proposals of this kind have not been followed up, and remain only suggestive. There are also exceptions (e.g. /θ/ is used in Galician, in NW Spain). Social explanations of such distributions are currently felt to be far more likely. (After L. F. Brosnahan, 1961.)

10 · SOCIAL IDENTITY

In addition to the questions 'Who are you?' and 'Where are you from?', which have been addressed from a linguistic viewpoint in §§6–9, there is also '*What* are you, in the eyes of the society to which you belong?' It is a complex and multi-faceted question, to which there is no easy answer. People acquire varying status as they participate in social structure; they belong to many social groups; and they perform a large variety of social roles. As a consequence, no single system of classification is likely to do justice to the task of defining a person's social identity in linguistic terms, especially when the vast range of the world's cultural patterns is taken into account. This section, therefore, has to be extremely selective, in order to represent the range of sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic variables involved.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

One of the chief forms of sociolinguistic identity derives from the way in which people are organized into hierarchically ordered social groups, or *classes*. Classes are aggregates of people with similar social or economic characteristics. Within sociology, the theoretical basis of social class has been a controversial subject, and it has not always proved easy to work consistently with the notion, especially when cross-cultural comparisons are involved. Factors such as family lineage, rank, occupation, and material possessions often conflict or are defined with reference to different criteria. But for most sociolinguistic purposes to date, it has been possible to make progress by recognizing only the broadest distinctions (such as high vs low, or upper vs middle vs lower) in order to determine the significant correlations between social class background and language. Examples of some of these correlations are given below and also on p. 32.

One does not need to be a sociolinguist to sense that the way people talk has something to do with their social position or level of education. Everyone has developed a sense of values that make some accents seem 'posh' and others 'low', some features of vocabulary and grammar 'refined' and others 'uneducated'. We have a large critical vocabulary for judging other people's language in this way. But one does need to be a sociolinguist to define precisely the nature of the linguistic features that are the basis of these judgments of social identity. And it is only as a result of sociolinguistic research that the pervasive and intricate nature of these correlations has begun to be appreciated.

CASTES

Probably the clearest examples of social dialects are those associated with a caste system. Castes are social divisions based solely on birth, which totally restrict a person's way of life – for example, allowing only certain kinds of job, or certain marriage partners (p. 405). The best-known system is that of Hindu society in India, which has four main divisions, and many sub-divisions – though in recent years, the caste barriers have been less rigidly enforced. The Brahmins (priests) constitute the highest class; below them, in descending order, are the Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (farmers and merchants), and Sudras (servants). The so-called 'untouchables', whose contact with the other castes is highly restricted, are the lowest level of the Sudra caste.

Linguistic correlates of caste can be found at all levels of structure. For example, in Tamil, there are several clear-cut distinctions between the phonology, vocabulary, and grammar of Brahmin and non-Brahmin speech. The former also tends to use more loan words, and to preserve non-native patterns of pronunciation.

Brahmin		**Non-Brahmin**
	Vocabulary	
tūngu	'sheep'	orangu
alambu	'wash'	kaḷuyu
jalõ	'water'	taṇṇi
	Phonology	
krāfu	'haircut'	krāppu
jīni	'sugar'	cīni
vārepparo	'banana'	vāreppolo
		vāleppolo
	Grammar	
–du	'it'	–ccu
vandudu	'it came'	vanduccu
paṇra	'he does'	pannuhã

(After W. Bright & A. K. Ramanujan, 1964.)

SPEECH AND SILENCE IN KIRUNDI

In the Central African kingdom of Burundi, age and sex combine with caste to constrain the nature of linguistic interaction in several ways. Seniority (*ubukuru)* governs all behaviour. There are clear caste divisions; older people precede younger; and men precede women. The order in which people speak in a group is strictly governed by the seniority principle. Males of highest rank must speak first, regardless of age. Females do not speak at all, in the presence of outsiders, unless spoken to.

Upper-caste speakers seem never to raise their voices, or allow emotion to show. In group discussion, for the senior person to be silent implies disapproval. As others must then also stay silent, any further proceedings are effectively negated.

To speak well is considered a mark of good breeding in men. From their tenth year, boys in the upper castes are given formal speech training – how to use social formulae, talk to superiors and inferiors, and make speeches for special occasions. Upper-caste girls do not take part in public speaking, but they do develop effective bargaining skills, for use behind the scenes. They are also trained to listen with great care, so that they can accurately recount to the men of the family what has been said by visitors. (After E. M. Albert, 1964.)

The John Betjeman poem, 'How to get on in society', originally set as a competition in *Time and Tide,* was included in the book *Noblesse Oblige* as part of the U/non-U debate (see facing page).

HOW TO GET ON IN SOCIETY

Phone for the fish-knives, Norman,
As Cook is a little unnerved;
You kiddies have crumpled the serviettes
And I must have things daintily served.

Are the requisites all in the toilet?
The frills round the cutlets can wait
Till the girl has replenished the cruets
And switched on the logs in the grate.

It's ever so close in the lounge, dear,
But the vestibule's comfy for tea,
And Howard is out riding on horseback
So do come and take some with me.

Now here is a fork for your pastries
And do use the couch for your feet;
I know what I wanted to ask you –
Is trifle sufficient for sweet?

Milk and then just as it comes, dear?
I'm afraid the preserve's full of stones;
Beg pardon, I'm soiling the doilies
With afternoon tea-cakes and scones.