

Two Aspects of the Sociolinguistic Study of Dialects

I. Social evaluations and/or attitudes related to a particular linguistic feature:

A. Questions

1. What is the nature of the attitudes/evaluations regarding a particular feature?
2. Who holds these attitudes or makes these evaluations? (Is there any relation between social characteristics of an individual and whether they hold a particular attitude?)

B. Different methods for getting at evaluations/attitudes

1. Surveys in which respondents are asked to self-report on questions relating to attitudes/evaluation regarding dialect feature(s).
2. Matched guise tests in which the assessment of a speaker along some social dimension that is made by respondents is purely a matter of the linguistic variable at question.

Do matched guise test with the North Wind.

Variation in the use of a sociolinguistic variable by individuals

A. Questions

1. In what ways (if any) is the usage of a particular linguistic feature by a speaker a function of social characteristics of that speaker? Class (how to define this), ethnicity, group membership (e.g. jocks vs. burnouts), age, etc. [**Between-individual variation**]
2. In what ways (if any) does a speaker's usage of a particular linguistic feature depend on the social context in which the act of speaking is taking place or the "style" that is adopted by the speaker? [**Within individual variation**]

B. Methods of getting at the facts

1. Self-reporting does not give you the full picture: speakers are not always aware of how they are behaving, and may actually have a rather inaccurate picture of what they do, related to their own attitudes
2. Labov 1966 *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* pioneered the **sociolinguistic interview**, an interview with an individual speaker which examined the variation in the speaker's actual use of linguistic features as dependent on context or style.
3. Carrying out a large number of such interviews with a population of speakers with different social characteristics (class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) will provide data

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- from actual speaker behavior on both *between-individual variation* and on patterns of *within-individual variation*.
4. Eckert 2000 *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice* carried out an ethnographic participant observer investigation of the linguistic dialect patterns of high school students in a Detroit suburb, permitting more subtle understanding of both between- and within-individual variation. Sociolinguistic variation is understood in this work as part of an individual's *construction of social identity*.

Watch first sequence of *Spellbound*