

Homework 2
Ling 154
McGuire
Due 11/24/09

Social stratification of a linguistic variable in California

In this homework, you are to replicate the Labov 1972 methodology to examine a linguistic variable you are interested in. Labov was interested how socioeconomic stratification affected the use of coda *r* by New Yorkers. Your goal is to do the same, but for a linguistic variable in California English that you think is socially stratified. You **must work with at least one other person**, but you may work with up to two others. Remember: your write-up must be your own work!

What you have to do:

- First, come up with a linguistic variable that you can test. This can be phonetic, syntactic, lexical, etc.
- Second, plan out where you will gather data and how you will ask in order to get it (reread Labov for ideas)
- Third, arm yourself with a notepad and gather the data! “Interview” at least 20 people per group member, i.e. you should have at least 40 data points
- Fourth, analyze the data and write it up...

The write-up should consist of:

- an introduction which frames the relevant issues (what's the variable? why do you expect it to vary?)
- methodology (esp. how you gathered and organized your data, why'd you choose the locations you did, and who you pooled data with)
- a summary and discussion of the data
- references (if applicable)

Expectations:

- The goal is to explore effects of SES on speech, but other factors may intrude (gender, region, etc.); examine them to the extent that you can but don't lose focus on the main point.
- Analyze your results in a way which sheds light on the research questions. Decide if your predications were upheld.
- Write a paper explaining and defending your conclusions. Tie your paper closely to your data. Cite specific examples. Explore details. Because this methodology is observational, and not experimental, your conclusions will likely be impressionistic. Graph your data like Labov did!

Possible variables to explore:

- [stɹ] vs. [ʃtɹ]
- l-vocalization
- creaky voice
- See class discussion for more!

Notes on the Graphical Representation of Data

Many people, myself included, find data that is presented in visual form to be much easier to understand than numerical form. This homework is an excellent opportunity to practice graphing data.

Things to do and not to do

- Clearly label both axes and use scales that make sense (remember that: y-axis = vertical; x-axis = horizontal)
- If you have similar data you are comparing in different graphs, use the same y-axis scale on all of them, if possible
- Don't mislead the eyes; be honest (e.g. a big scale can make differences seem small, a small scale can make differences seem large)
- Don't make them too fancy (no unnecessary 3-D charts, please!)
- Simple is good! Clutter is bad!
- Color is fine (I'm not color blind), but be reasonable; hatching, shading also work
- Avoid pie-charts; if you need one, give raw numbers, not just proportions
- Don't be afraid to hand draw them, just be precise!
- Excel charts work, but are ugly and hard to change