

Ling 001  
Introduction to  
Linguistics



# Lesson 14. Sociolinguistics

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# Overview of Today's lecture

1. What is Sociolinguistics?
- + 2. Sociolinguistic fieldworks
3. Language variation according to  
social factors
4. Language change in progress
5. Summary

## + Sociolinguistics explores...

- The connections between language and society
- How the use of language varies according to different social factors.
- The way we use it in different social situations.



# + Innovative Sociolinguistics



## Sociolinguistics

- Has its roots in dialectology
- Emerged in the 1960s partly as a result of inadequate methods in earlier approaches to the study of dialect.
- Uses recordings of informal conversations as its data (and occasionally reading exercises to examine the role of formality in dialect use)
- Argues for the role of quantitative analysis in highlighting dialect differences

# + Sociolinguistic fieldworks

- The most systematic grammar of a dialect resides in the vernacular language of the speech community ([Labov 1972](#)).
- The rapid anonymous surveys (short surveys investigating one linguistic feature from many people in a short space of time)
- Subsequent sociolinguistic interviews and analysis in a relevant community.

For more details, please refer to Milroy (1987) and Milroy and Gordon (2003)





# Language Variation

according to social factors



## Regional Background – Canadian Raising

• Certain diphthongs are "raised" before voiceless consonants (e.g., /p/, /t/, /k/, /s/, /f/).

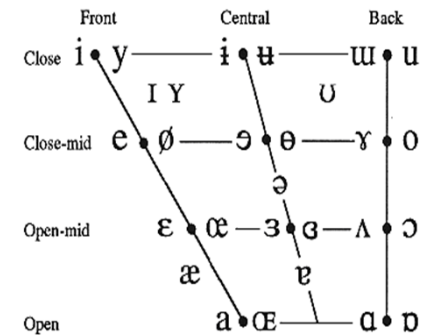
- /aɪ/ > [ʌɪ] or [eɪ]  
e.g. five, like

/aʊ/ > [ʌʊ] (in the west)  
[ɛʊ] (in Central Canada)  
e.g. loud

• In any case, the /a/-component of the diphthong changes from a low vowel to a mid-low vowel ([ʌ], [ɛ] or [ɛ]).

■ <http://www.ic.arizona.edu/~lsp/Canadian/canphon3.html#diphthongs>

### VOWELS



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.



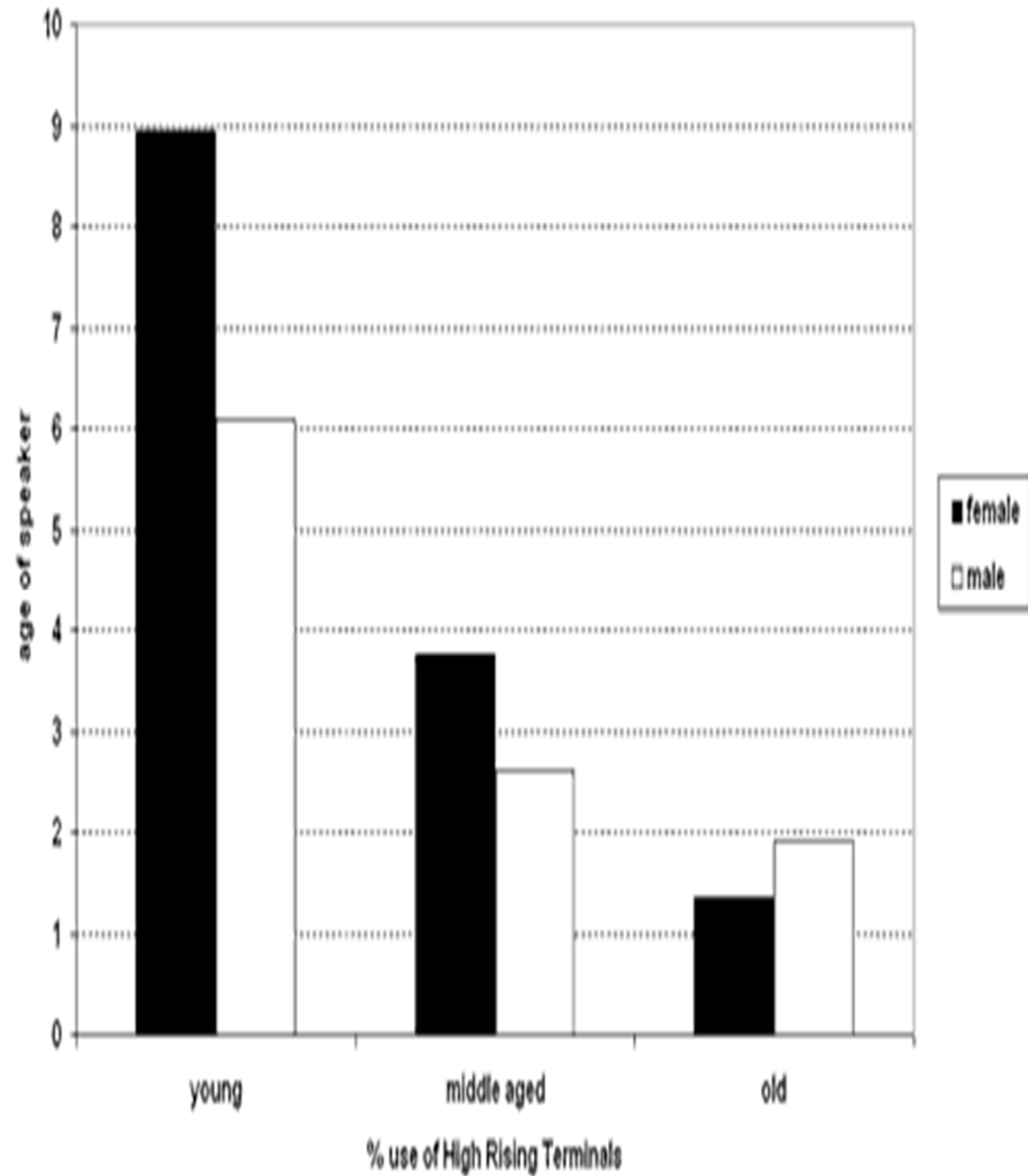


## Gender -HRT

High Rising Tones (HRT)  
(using question intonation  
in statements) in New  
Zealand English (NZE)  
([Britain 1998](#))

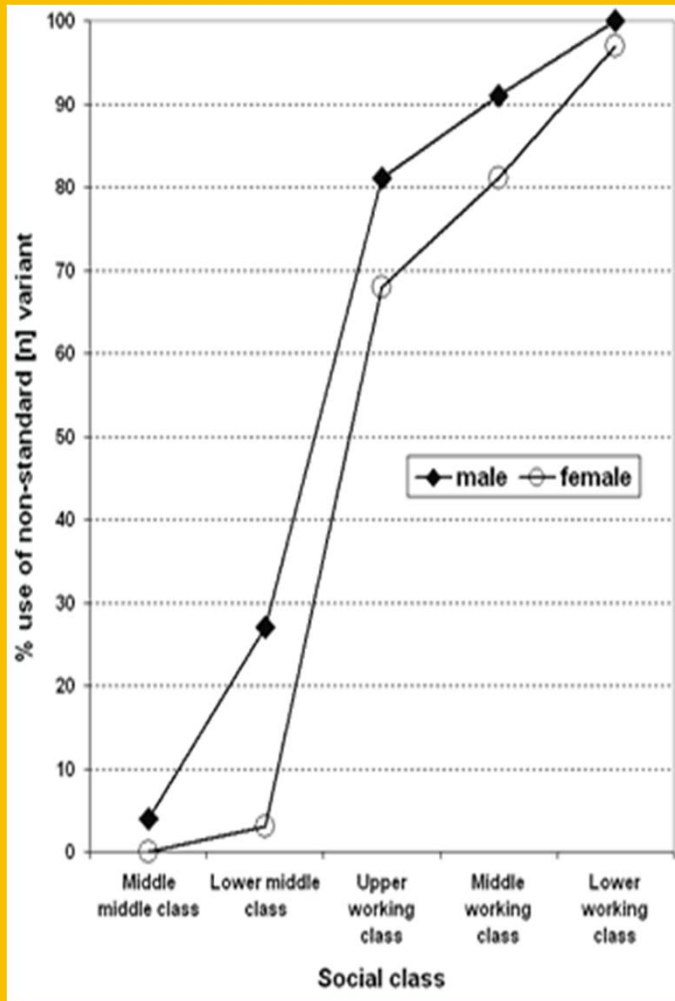
In NZE the use of HRT is very strongly associated with young women, yet they only use the HRT 3% percent more often than young men.

Small quantitative differences can signal quite important social information about a linguistic variable.



# Gender -g-dropping

Trudgill's (1974) research in Norwich



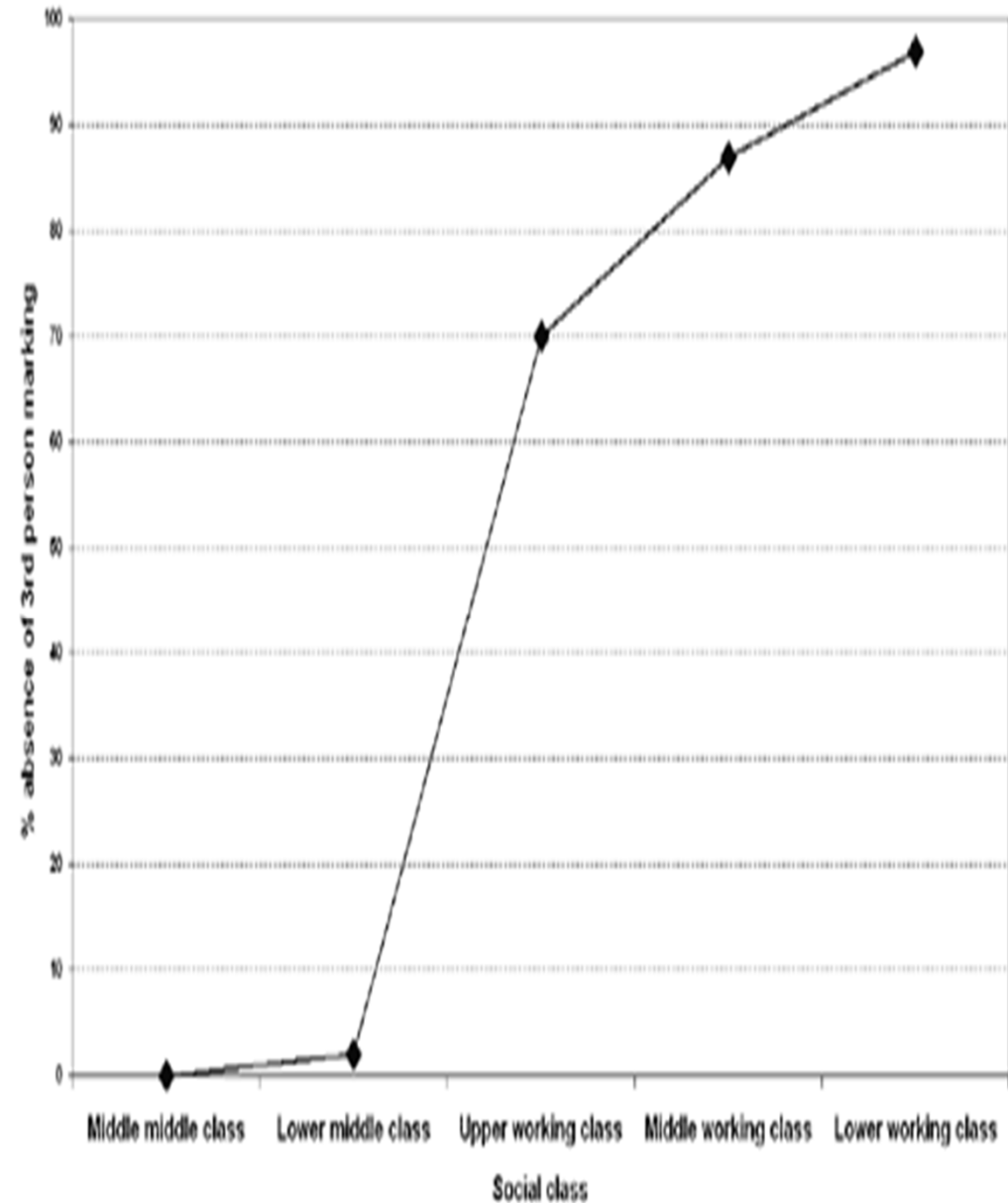
- G-dropping: (ing) vs. (in)
- Women use standard forms of stable dialect features more frequently than men.
- Within each social class group, women consistently use less of the non-standard pronunciation than men.
- It is the regularity of these (and other) patterns that lends weight to the argument that variability is 'structured' socially ([Chambers and Trudgill 1998](#))



## Social class -Absence of 3sg

The **absence** of third person present tense marking (e.g. 'she play', 'the boy sing') with social class membership in the city of Norwich in England ([Trudgill 1974](#))

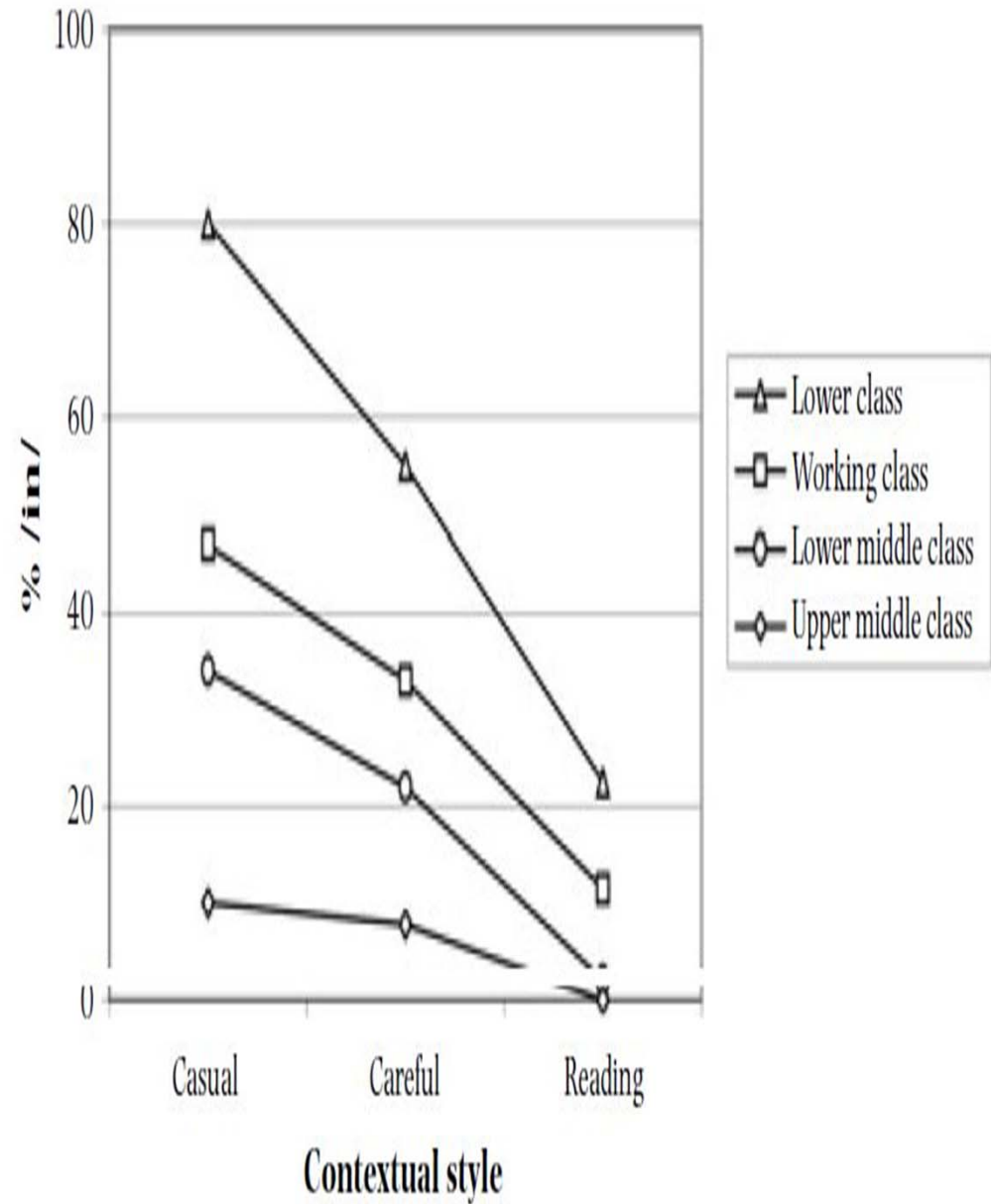
The 'higher' the social class of the speaker, the lower the absence of -s marking.



**+ Register  
( Formal vs.  
Informal)  
– g-dropping**

The percent of /in/ variant  
Casual > Careful > Reading

Labov (1966)  
Podesva (2004)





## Listener Variation- Audience Design

Speakers adjust their speech primarily towards that of their audience in order to express solidarity or intimacy with them, or away from their audience's speech to express distance.

### ■ Speech accommodation theory

Speakers accommodate their speech style to their hearers (Giles&Powesland 1975)

e.g. talking to a baby or a foreigner

- Accommodation theory also attempts to specify the motivations which lie behind use of particular accommodative strategies. Approval seeking has been recognized as a prime motive in accommodation. This is very powerful in mass communication, where we assume that communicators are always in some sense trying to win the approval of the audience (McQuail 1969b)

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# Language Change In Progress

# + How do we study language change in progress ?

- We know language has changed over time...
  - Great Vowel Shift in Middle English:  
/mu:s/ → /maʊs/ 'mouse'
  - Do-support:  
*I know not* → *I **do**'t know*
- Track down the speech of the same speakers for 30 years?
- Studying diachronic changes only?

Takes a long time

Hard to follow individual speakers

# + Apparent time method

- We can view synchronic age patterns as a window on what has happened in a community over the last few generations
- Basic assumption: Adults speak the language they learned as children - Critical Period Hypothesis  
e.g. Noam Chomsky b. 1928 : He speaks the language he learned 60-70 years ago.
- Compares speakers of different ages (who had acquired language at different points in time)
- Shortens the length of time required to conduct the research,.

(Labov 1963, 1966)

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## Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

: Basic assumption of Apparent time method

- People's dialect remains fairly stable from adolescence onwards
- But questions have been raised about CPH.
- The Opposition to CPH
- **e.g. English t/d deletion (Guy 1980, Guy & Boyd 1990)**  
Alveolar stop → ∅ after a consonant at the end of a syllable  
e.g. best friend → /bɛs frɛn/



# Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

: Basic assumption of Apparent time method

- 'Semiweak' verbs have a vowel change as well as a suffix in the past tense...
  - *keep* → kept, *tell* → told, *sell* → sold, *feel* → felt...
- With semiweak verbs in particular, age plays an important role in t/d deletion
- The older the speakers, the less likely they were to delete t/d in semiweak verbs
- Observed speech in a ~4-year-old girl:
  - and then I started /startI**d**/ crying...
  - and then I screamed /skrim**d**/...
  - and then daddy yelled /yɛ**d**/ at me..
  - but I kept /**kɛp**/ on crying...



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## Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

: Basic assumption of Apparent time method

**t/d deletion is a case of late acquisition, showing age-grading effect**

- Kids don't realize that there's a past-tense *-ed* on semiweak verbs at all – they think the past tense of *keep* is just /kɛp/
- Much later in life – perhaps well past the critical period – speakers learn that semiweak verbs do have a *-ed* suffix.
- Speakers then apply t/d deletion at the same (low) rates as with the regular past-tense *-ed*.



# + Example of Apparent time method

## ■ The use of intensifier in English

e.g. He is  $\emptyset$  smart.

He is (very) smart.

He is (really) smart.

He is (so) smart.



## Apparent time method – The use of intensifier in Toronto English

*Very* is the most frequently used intensifier in the speakers over 50, but declines rapidly thereafter particularly among speakers under 30.

In contrast, *really* increases steeply from oldest to youngest speakers, with a peak among the 20- to 29-year-olds.

While *so* is a minor variant, it exhibits an incremental increase from the 50+ age group to the 9- to 29-year-olds but is most frequent among the 13- to 29-year-olds. A similar pattern is found for *pretty*.

Tagliamonte (2008)

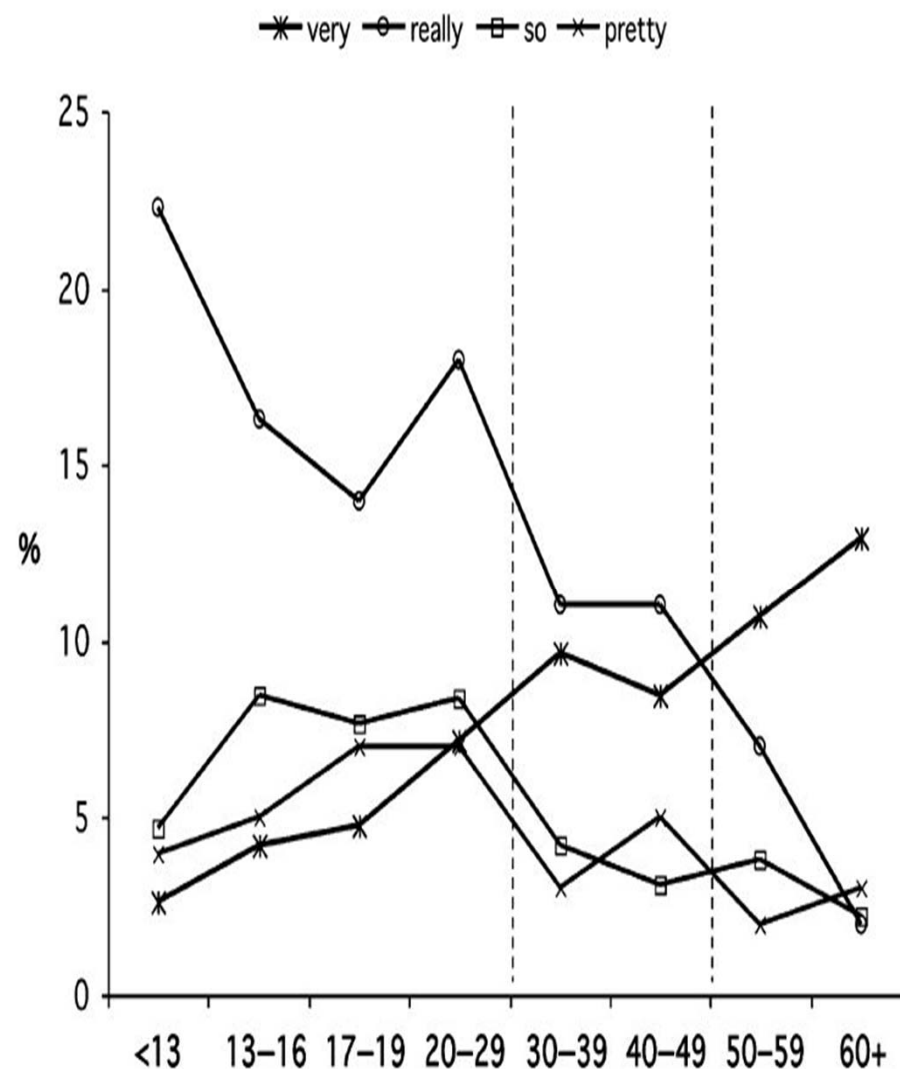


Figure 3. Overall distribution of main intensifiers by age



## Possible Interpretations from Apparent time studies of intensifiers

- 1) A generational change of intensifier use in progress in Toronto

*Very* is declining.

*Really* is rapidly rising.

*So/pretty* are gradually rising.

- 2) Toronto speakers change their use of intensifier across their lifespan

(Age-grading)

They use *really*, *so* or *pretty* more frequently than *very* when they are young but they use *very* more frequently as they get older.

Can reject the 2nd interpretation based on CPH

## + Real-time Method

- Another way to tease apart generational change-in-progress and age-grading interpretations: **Real-time studies!**
  - Go back and re-study a community after some time has passed.
  - **Trend study** (resample a community with comparable speakers)
  - **Panel study** (locate and re-interview the same speakers)



# + Real time studies support apparent time method!

- Panel study results have largely vindicated the apparent-time method.
- People generally remain stable – and when they do change, it's in the direction of the community change



+ Leaders of language change in progress

Linguistic changes tend to be led by certain social groups

Men/ Women?

Teenagers/ College students/

People in 40s/ People in 60s?

Lower working class

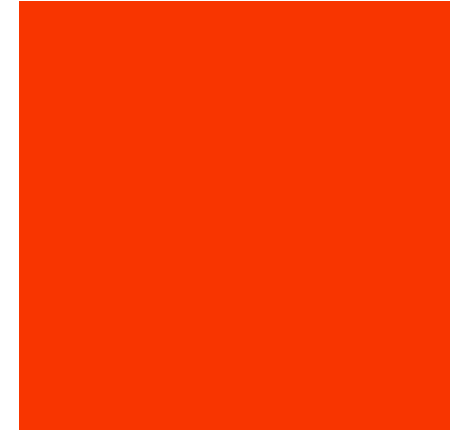
/ Upper working class

/ Lower middle class

/ Upper middle class

or Upper class?

([Labov 1972](#), [Chambers and Trudgill 1998](#), [Chambers 2003](#) )



# + Summary



## ■ Sociolinguistics:

The connections between language and society, vernacular speech of speakers, quantitative analysis, systematic variation

## ■ Language variation

- Regional background, gender, social class, style, listener, etc.

# + Summary



If a synchronic observation of a community shows a steady increase/ decrease in the frequency of a variable with age, there are at least **two interpretations**:

- **Generational change in progress**  
(apparent-time interpretation)
- **Age grading**

**Real-time studies** (trend or panel) can help disentangle these two interpretations.