

Dialect and Style in the Speech of Upper Class Philadelphia¹

Anthony Kroch
Department of Linguistics
619 Williams Hall
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19119-6305

email: kroch@change.ling.upenn.edu
fax: (215)573-2091
phone: (215)898-3212

to appear in: Gregory Guy, John Baugh, Deborah Schiffrin & Crawford Feagin, eds.
(1995) *Towards a Social Science of Language: Papers in Honor of William Labov*.
Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

1. Introduction

This paper reports a study of the speech of a local prestige community, the upper class of metropolitan Philadelphia, that I carried out in 1977 and 1978 under an NIMH postdoctoral fellowship. My informants were primarily older speakers of the upper class community, who at that date retained a characteristic speech style distinct from that of other Philadelphians. The work was conducted to complement an extensive investigation of the Philadelphia speech community, the Project on Linguistic Change and Variation (LCV), that William Labov and his collaborators were then engaged in (Labov 1980, 1981, 1984, 1989, 1990). The results of my study were made available to the LCV project and have circulated informally in the years since it was completed, but they have never been published separately.

I selected the upper class as a target for investigation in order to answer two questions. The first was whether there is a social class boundary beyond which the characteristic local pronunciations of an urban vernacular, here the Philadelphia dialect, are not found. We know that there are well-defined geographic boundaries to contemporary urban dialects, and ethnic boundaries as well. Thus, the Philadelphia vernacular is confined to the local metropolitan area and does not extend into the countryside beyond the Philadelphia suburbs. Furthermore, it is not generally spoken by African-American residents of the city. By comparing instrumental measurements of working and middle class vowel pronunciations carried out by the LCV project to similar measurements of upper class vowels, I hoped to determine whether the exclusiveness and isolation of upper class social life had insulated that group from the local vernacular. At the same time, I expected to find out whether its isolation had caused the group to develop characteristic dialect features of its own, either idiosyncratic ones or features shared with the upper classes of other East Coast cities. That such pan-regional dialect features might exist was rendered plausible by the fact that the eastern, even the national upper class, through various social institutions, constitutes an active social network. At issue is the question of how a speech community is socially demarcated. No resident of Philadelphia would consider the upper and working classes to speak alike; but differences in speech are not inconsistent with membership in a single speech community, as Labov's work has taught us. A speech community is defined, not by identity of linguistic behavior but by orderly heterogeneity; that is, by a shared linguistic system and by shared norms of evaluation. It was unclear, before this study, whether the flux of communication across the undoubtedly strong social boundary that separates the Philadelphia upper class from the rest of the local population was dense enough to support a shared system or, on the other hand, whether the strong ties that bind the local upper class to its peers in other cities induced sufficiently intense communication to support a speech community.

My second primary research question was what makes the upper class voice recognizable to others as such. Given that Philadelphians can pick out the speech of the upper class as different from that of other city residents, it must have objective features which distinguish it. Indeed, the upper class voice is, or was until recently, a publicly acknowledged way of speaking in eastern U.S. cities (Wolfe 1976). It often has a humorous name, in Philadelphia "Main Line" or "Chestnut Hill Lockjaw;" and its speakers are known to belong to an exclusive social group. Furthermore, this speech has a clear social impact in interaction, causing people to orient to it as the speech of a hereditary elite. However, the

fact that upper class speech is recognizable does not of itself tell us how recognition occurs. I was interested in discovering what features mark that speech and carry its social meaning. In particular, I wanted to know how upper class speakers could be distinguished from equally well educated and substantially privileged members of the upper middle class. The speech of this latter group certainly does not sound working class; but it also does not sound upper class and does not generate the same orienting effect.

The investigation reported below yielded at least partial answers to both of my questions. I found, first of all, that the vowel pronunciations of upper class speakers, while phonetically much less extreme in their local coloring than the pronunciations of working class speakers, preserved the same word class distinctions. Fundamentally, therefore, the upper and the working class speak a single phonological dialect. On the other hand, I found the prosody of upper class speech to be distinctive and to allow a listener easily to distinguish its speakers from even their most similar counterparts in the upper middle class. The prosodic distinctiveness of upper class speech is evident on casual exposure, but it is not immediately clear where this distinctiveness lies. Systematic observation reveals, however, that the most consistent prosodic marker of upper class speech is its great use of emphatic stress. This use of stress does not reflect any grammatical peculiarity of upper class language but comes rather from a widening of the range of discourse circumstances under which emphasis is employed .

2. A definition of the upper class

There exists in the major cities of the eastern United States a well-defined class of social aristocrats which sociologists call the "upper class" (Baltzell 1958; Domhoff 1967, 1970). Unlike classes defined by sociologists or sociolinguists on the basis of statistical indices, the upper class is a self-recognized group whose members frequently meet face-to-face in social institutions of their own. The group is extremely self-conscious and demarcates itself sharply from the middle class. Digby Baltzell, the pre-eminent sociologist of the Philadelphia upper class, notes:

Most Americans vent their snobbery by branding uncouth manners and speech patterns in others as 'lower class'; within the upper class the derogatory epithet 'middle class' is used to dismiss so-called inferiors. (1958:50)

One of my own informants remembers as a child referring to someone's family as "middle class people like us" and being corrected by her mother in the following words: "We're not middle class. We're upper class." Membership in the upper class is limited to families who meet its financial, ethnic, and religious standards. Financially, the upper class is based on inherited wealth; ethnically it is white and Anglo-Saxon; and since the Civil War, its religion has been Episcopalian. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Social Register has provided an index of membership in the group. All members of the Philadelphia group are listed there, and they use it as an address book and telephone directory. The process by which names are added to and deleted from the Social Register is an indication by just how seriously the group guards its exclusivity. To be listed, a prospective subscriber must both make application and obtain references from current subscribers. In addition, the applicant must be seen as socially acceptable to the group. Almost any objection that comes to the attention of the Social Register Association will lead them to reject an application.

Members who marry out of the appropriate class may be dropped from the Register, something which happened to one of my informants when he married into the middle class.

In the generation that grew up before the second World War, from which I drew my primary sample, the social life of the upper class was at once strikingly privileged and remarkably isolated from society at large. Upper class households were staffed with servants, often a full complement from butler and cook to maids, gardener and chauffeur. Young children went to exclusive local private schools with others of their class; and boys often went on in adolescence to equally exclusive New England boarding schools, where they met peers from other east coast cities. College education came at one of a small group of socially prominent universities, for Philadelphians most often Princeton. Girls' education was more local and limited but no less exclusive. They were less likely to go to boarding school, instead attending one of the exclusive girls' schools in the Philadelphia area. Upper class women did not, as a rule, go to college in this generation, instead marrying shortly after "coming out" as debutantes, at the age of eighteen or nineteen. Men of the upper class were likely to work as the managers of large business enterprises or, especially in Philadelphia, as lawyers with prestigious practices. Women did not work in the outside world but rather managed the household and carried on an active life of social engagements and charitable works. Men and women belonged to sexually segregated social clubs, which acted as downtown meeting and dining venues and whose membership was limited to the upper class.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the most interesting feature of upper class life during the pre-war period was its insularity. Baltzell (1958:59) points out that the upper class was the only social class small and well-defined enough for its members generally to know one another as individuals and have "intimate access to one another." Because of the exclusivity of upper class education and social interaction, one might have expected the group to have developed dialectal peculiarities in its speech. At the same time, however, it is important to remember that upper class children in the formative years of their linguistic development had broader access to speech from outside their own class than might appear from a brief sketch of their way of life. Perhaps most significantly, children had intimate contact with servants and with other employees of their families and neighbors. These other adults, moreover, often had children with whom upper class youngsters would play. Given the importance of peer groups in the transmission of language and the relative insensitivity of young children to class distinctions, these contacts with age mates from other classes could have served as a conduit for local dialect features to enter the speech of the upper class. They were certainly important enough to have come up often in my interviews. One of my informants remembered his early childhood play experiences as follows:

I had a pony and I had a friend, Bill D., and he had a pony, too. And there was a long period, quite a long period, when we played with those ponies. We had places to ride around and we just had a great time with those ponies and then that disappeared. I had friends in the neighborhood, too. We lived in the middle of the A. Nurseries and these were mostly kids whose fathers worked in the nurseries, Italian kids, mostly, and we played baseball, we played mumbley peg. Mumbley peg is the one I remember.

Of course, once any dialect feature had entered the upper class speech community it would spread within the community through contacts among its members, though one would expect strong inhibition of the diffusion of working class vernacular features once they became recognized as such.

3. Sampling and methods

The primary sample of speakers I report on here consists of ten upper class adults, six men and four women, whom I interviewed in their homes. All were native Philadelphians and had lived in the area throughout their lives, except for periods away at school or in the military. They were born between 1910 and 1923 and so had reached adulthood by the time of World War II. I imposed this age restriction on the speakers studied because the social isolation of the upper class has declined steadily, in Philadelphia at least, since the end of that war. By selecting informants whose speech patterns were formed before the decline began, I hoped to be able to characterize upper class speech at its most distant from that of the rest of the city. Three criteria were used to define upper class status: 1) listing in Social Register; 2) membership in an exclusive upper class Philadelphia social club; and 3) receipt of an annual invitation to the Assembly Ball, a privilege restricted to long-established and socially prominent Philadelphia families. For comparison with the primary sample, I also interviewed and analyzed the speech of five adult children of the primary sample group, three men and two women born between 1937 and 1949. Toward the end of my research project, I added, also for purposes of comparison, an additional sample of ten upper middle class men.² These men were chosen to be as similar to the upper class males as possible in education, occupation and social background. They were mostly professionals (lawyers and bankers), were all of Protestant religion (Presbyterian and Episcopalian) and all attended private preparatory schools and colleges. Like the upper class sample, they came from two generational groups, being born either between 1910 and 1920 or between 1935 and 1940.

The interviews that I obtained in my fieldwork was all recorded on tape using a high quality Nagra recorder in one-on-one conversations. I used the interview protocol developed by the LCV project for its Philadelphia interviews (Labov 1984), making only minor changes in the questions. As was true with other informants, questions on childhood games and danger of death situations were generally successful in eliciting fluent speech. The former were also helpful in revealing informants' social contacts as young children outside their own class. Questions about family background also elicited both extensive speech samples and important social information. One difference between my approach to informants and that of the LCV project was my method of entry into the community. Given the exclusivity of the group, I could not approach people out of the blue as Labov's fieldworkers initially did. Instead, I obtained an introduction to an upper class man through an acquaintance and obtained his agreement to an interview. I interviewed both him and his wife; and after these interviews, I asked my informants to suggest other possible interviewees. In each case, we chose one particularly appropriate person for me to interview next and I asked the informant to contact that person by phone on my behalf. I then set up the next interview in a follow-up telephone call to the prospective informant. I repeated this approach with each informant, as I found it extremely successful. No one I approached in this way refused an

interview. Using this method of recruiting informants, I wound up with a sample of men and women belonging to a single social network. The older men were all members of the most prestigious upper class men's social club in the city, while the women and younger men were all immediate family members of members of the club. I also found it useful to modify my explanation of the interview project from the one given by LCV project interviewers. To avoid making informants more self-conscious about their speech than the tape-recorded interview itself already did, these interviewers initially explained their project as a study of Philadelphia local culture and de-emphasized the linguistic dimension of their study until the end of the interview. I found, on the contrary, that my informants were more relaxed when I made it clear to them that the goal of my project was to study speech patterns rather than social life.

In studying the vowel pronunciations of the speakers in my sample, I closely followed the methods of the LCV project in order to maintain comparability with the larger study. I measured instrumentally between 150 and 200 vowel nuclei (three or more vowels for each of 30 word classes) for each recorded interview in a two step process, first performing a preliminary frequency analysis on a real-time frequency analyzer (RTA) and then applying a computerized linear predictive coding algorithm to the spectra output by the RTA to estimate the pitch (F0) and first three formant frequencies (F1, F2, F3) of the vowels. The formants (resonant frequencies) of a vowel determine its perceived phonetic quality, with the magnitude of the first formant varying inversely with the perceived height of the vowel and the second formant varying directly with the vowel's perceived frontness. For further technical details, see Lennig (1978). Once the formant frequencies for each vowel were determined, the average formant values for each speaker were computed for each word class; and the data for my upper middle class and upper class speakers were combined with data from 94 working and middle class speakers analyzed by the LCV project. On the basis of this combined data, the average formant values for each speaker and word class were normalized using Nearey's uniform scaling method (1977) to reduce the effect on formant values of vocal tract size differences among speakers. I used the data produced by these procedures to compare systematically the vowel pronunciations of my upper class sample with those of other Philadelphians. The results of these comparisons are presented in section 4.1 below.

To study the prosody of the upper class, I coded the stress patterns and use of modifiers in all of the adjective and noun phrases appearing in one section of each of twelve interviews with informants over fifty years old, four with upper class women, four with upper class men, and four with upper middle class men. The section of the interviews coded was the informants' answer to the question "How is the current mayor of Philadelphia different from those who were mayor before him?" Because the then mayor, Frank Rizzo, was a politician of working class origins who was unpopular with the professional classes and because two recent prior mayors had come from the upper class, I expected this question to elicit clear statements of opinion. I also thought that expressions of political opinion might be a discourse context in which differences in directness of speech would be particularly apparent. I compared the coded stress patterns by class and gender. The results of these comparisons are presented in section 4.2 below.

4. Results

4.1. Philadelphia upper class vowel pronunciation

Among the patterns of vowel pronunciation that the LCV project found to be characteristic of Philadelphia, the following are perhaps the most important:

- 1) the tensing and raising of short *a* (/æ/) in words like *man*, *fast*, and *bad*;
- 2) the fronting and raising of the nucleus of /aw/ in such words as *house* and *now*;
- 3) the fronting of the nucleus of /ow/ and /uw/ in *boat* and *go*, *boot* and *do*, etc.;
- 4) the raising of the back nuclei of /oy/ and /ohr/, /oh/, /ahr/, in *boy*, *shore*, etc.;
- 5) the raising of the nucleus of /ay/ before voiceless consonants in *tight*, *like*, etc.;
- 6) the fronting and raising of the nucleus of /ey/ before consonants, as in *gate*, *made*, etc.

These patterns entered the Philadelphia dialect at different times, with the last two being relatively recent (Labov 1990). The patterns are apparent in figure 1 below, which gives the average formant values for a number of word classes in the speech of a 23 year old working class man whom I interviewed as part of the LCV project in 1978. For clarity, I have put a representative member of each word class next to the diamond that marks its position in the first by second formant vowel space (F1 x F2). The scales are, as is standard, in Hertz. The tensing of short *a* is revealed in the positions of the vowels in *man*, *fast*, and *bad*, etc. as compared to the position of the lax vowel of other short *a* words, here represented by *cat*. The fronting and raising of /aw/ also appears in the figure in the position of its representative (*house*) as compared to the canonical short *a* of *cat*. The fronting of /ow/ and /uw/ is apparent in the extremely forward position of their representatives (*boot* and *boat*) by comparison to the back of this speaker's vowel space, represented by the positions of *school* and *caught*.³ The raising of the nuclei of back diphthongs appears in our figure as the similarity in the heights of *sure*, *boy* and *shore*. The raising of /ay/ before voiceless consonants appears in the different positions of *tight* and *tide*; and, finally, the fronting of /ey/ in closed syllables shows in the different positions of *gate* and *day*.

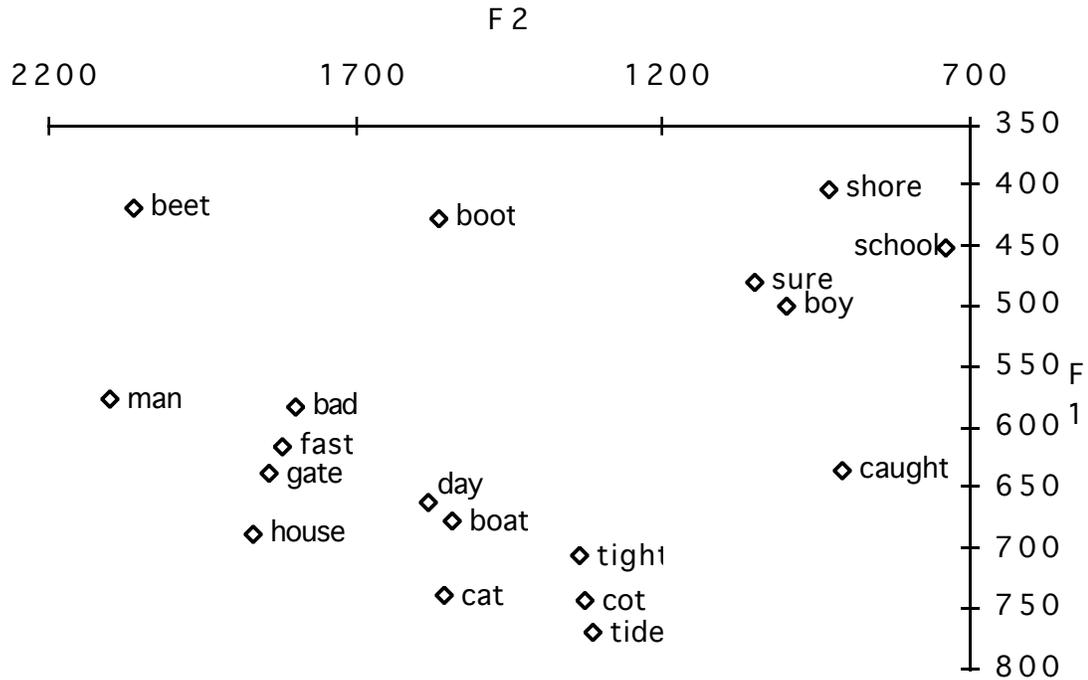


Figure 1: The vowel space of a working class Philadelphia man.

Comparison of the instrumental analyses of upper class and working class speakers shows clearly that the upper class speakers share the vowel system of other Philadelphians. In particular, these speakers exhibit all of the above listed features that the LCV project found to be characteristic of the Philadelphia speech community. Comparing the older and younger generation upper class speakers reveals that even the newest changes in the Philadelphia vowel system, the raising of /ay/ and the fronting and raising of /ey/, have entered upper class speech to some extent. However, as figure 2 below shows, the upper class realization of some Philadelphia variants is minimal; that is, the moving vowels are so close to their original positions that the local color in the pronunciation may be imperceptible. Thus, for the speaker displayed here, a 56 year old upper class man, *boot*, *boat*, and *gate* are only slightly fronted and *tight* is only very slightly raised. These small movements are often not statistically significant for individual upper class speakers; but they are present in all of the speakers in my sample.

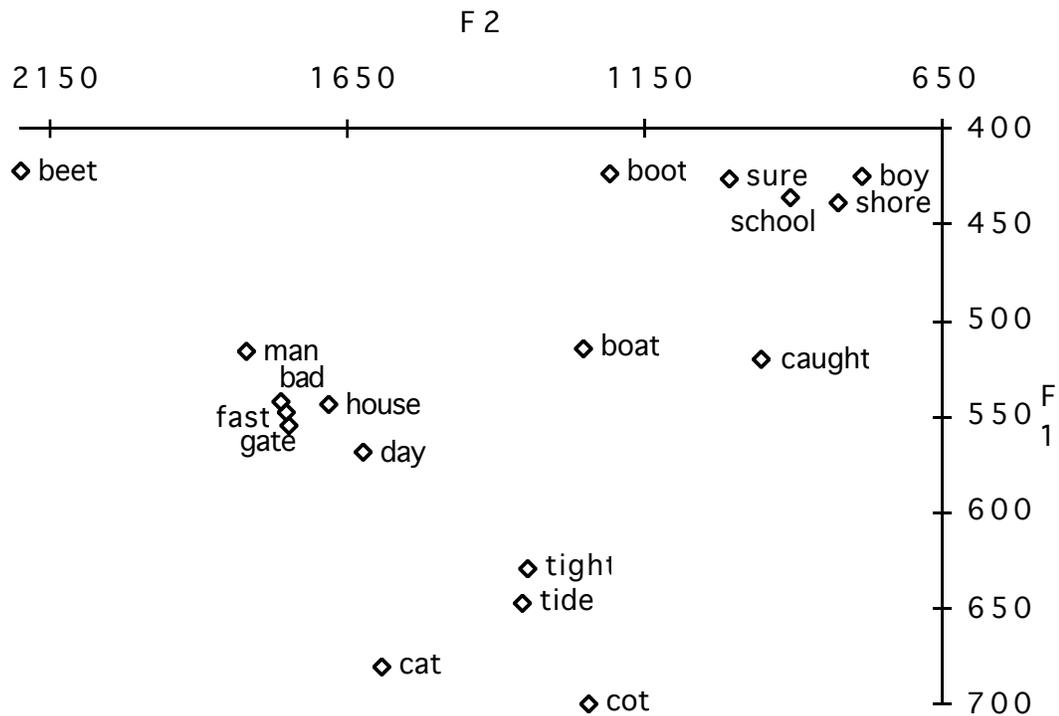
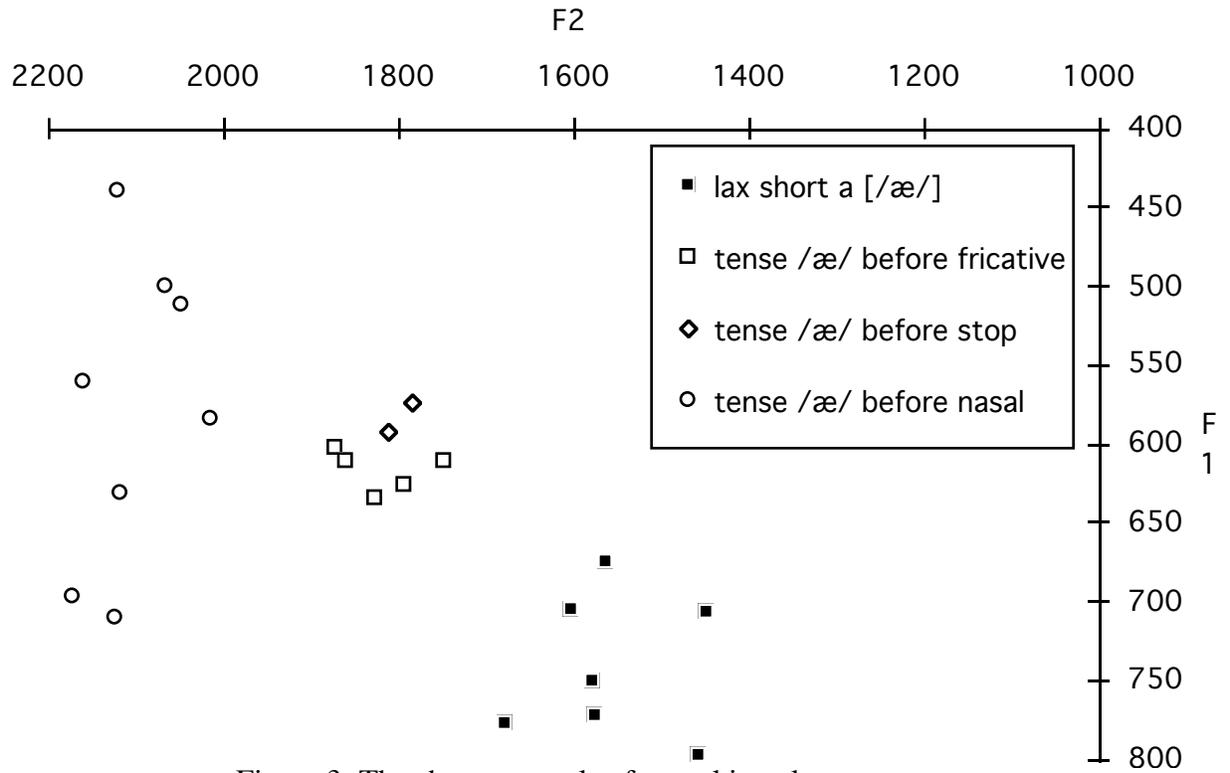


Figure 2: The vowel space of an upper class Philadelphia man.

Of special interest to us is the fact that the tensing pattern for short *a*, which is quite irregular in Philadelphia, is the same for upper class as for other speakers; that is, short *a* becomes tense (phonetically peripheral and often raised) before tautosyllabic front nasals (m, n), front voiceless fricatives (f, s, th), and in exactly three words ending in /d/ – *mad*, *bad* and *glad*. Elsewhere it is lax. It is also lax exceptionally in three common verbs ending in front nasals – *ran*, *swam* and *began*. Figures 3 and 4 show the distribution of the short *a* vowels for the representative working class and upper class speakers whose complete vowel spaces were shown in figures 1 and 2. In figure 3 we see the standard Philadelphia pattern. The short *a* vowels are markedly raised and peripheral before nasals and somewhat less so before fricatives and stops. All of the tense vowels, however, are clearly separated from the lax ones. Figure 4 shows that, like the working class speaker, the upper class speaker has a clear distinction between the vowels belonging to the tense class in Philadelphia and those belonging to the lax class. The upper class speaker, and members of his class generally, even distinguish the three words ending in /d/ that are tense in Philadelphia from the others. In spontaneous speech, I found this distinction to be observed perfectly, although in reading word lists some upper class speakers, like some from the working class (Labov 1989), showed variability in categorization.

Figure 3: The short *a* vowels of a working class man.

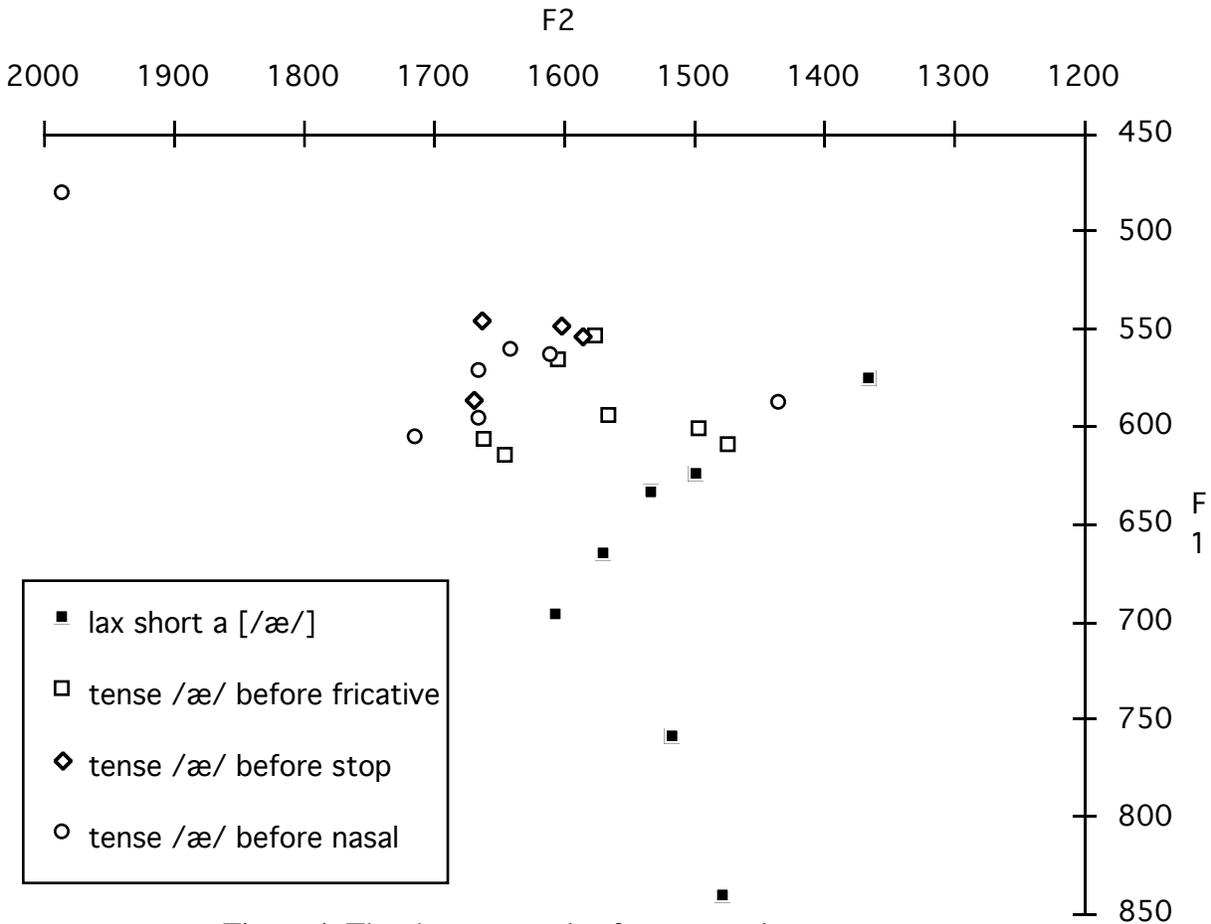


Figure 4: The short *a* vowels of an upper class man.

Except in the case of one pre-nasal tense vowel, the upper class speaker's realization of the tense/lax split is minimal; that is, the two phonemes are immediately adjacent in the vowel space. Other upper class speakers show a similarly minimal distinction between tense and lax vowels. The vowels are, however, distinct. Indeed, the upper class speakers as a group contrast nicely with a single exceptional case in my sample – one upper class speaker for whom the two short *a* vowel classes are not consistently distinct. This speaker, a man belonging to the younger generation of my informants, did not, for some reason, acquire the Philadelphia short *a*. Thus, he does not consistently or correctly separate tense from lax short *a* according to the Philadelphia pattern; and it is immediately apparent in the results of an instrumental study of his vowels, given here in figure 5, that his tense and lax short *a* classes overlap almost entirely:

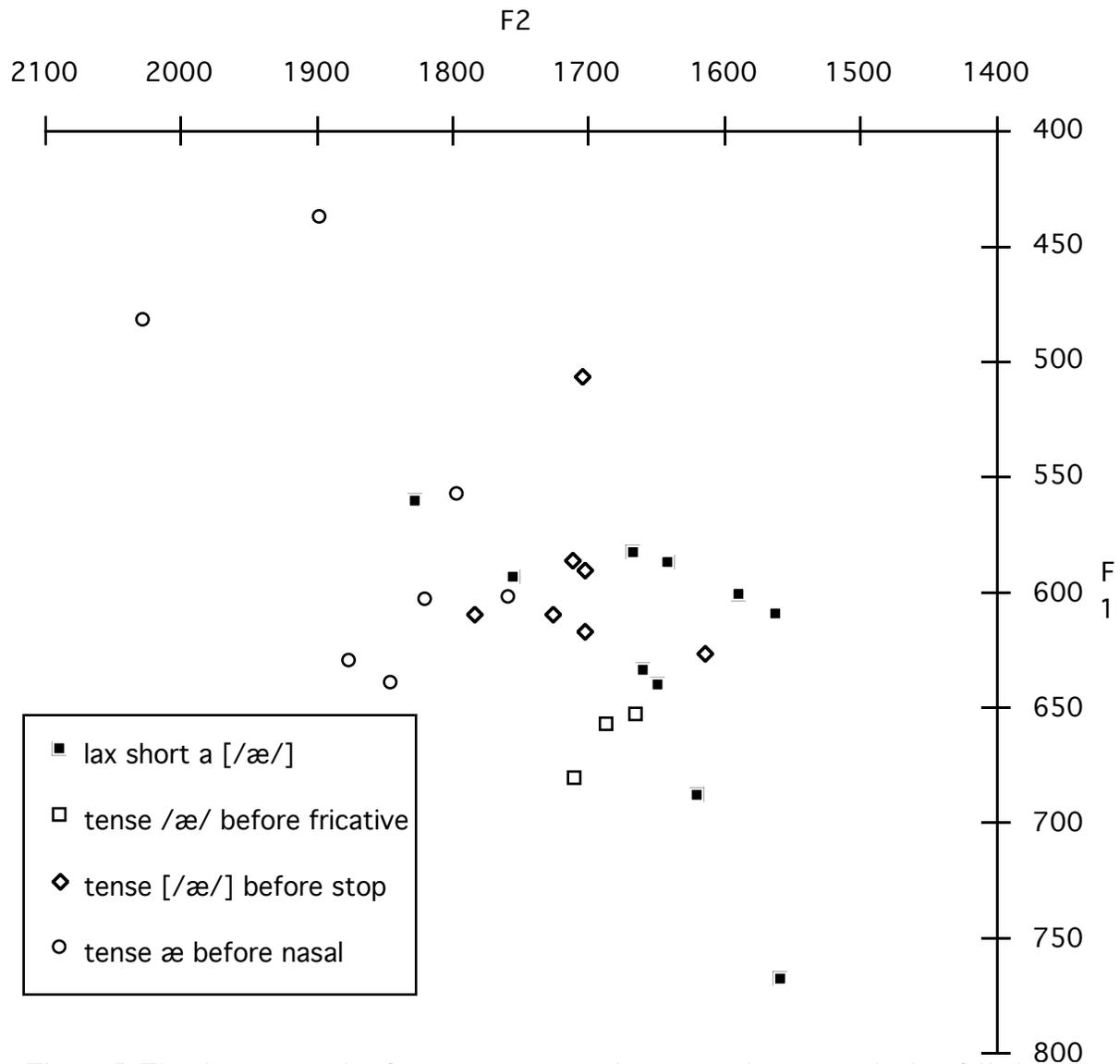


Figure 5: The short *a* vowels of a post-war generation upper class man who has failed to acquire the Philadelphia pattern. Words are assigned to vowel allophones according to the Philadelphia pattern.

On sociological grounds, we might have expected all upper class speakers to show the same overlap as this man. In Philadelphia, as in other eastern American cities, tense short *a* is a linguistic shibboleth and quite stigmatized; and it would seem that the simplest way of avoiding the stigmatized pronunciation in speech should be to replace the tense vowel by the lax one. Since the two vowels are in complementary distribution, this replacement would not even cause increased homonymy.⁴ The stigmatized status of the tense vowel is evident in the class stratification of the degree of fronting, the acoustic dimension most

responsible for perception of peripheral vowels as tense,⁵ as displayed in table 1:

	Lower Working Class	Upper Working Class	Lower Middle Class	Upper Middle Class	Upper Class
tense short <i>a</i> before nasal	2363	2387	2269	2085	2020
tense short <i>a</i> before fricative	2202	2236	2116	1976	1898
tense short <i>a</i> before stop	2154	2190	1973	1953	1928
lax short <i>a</i> as in <i>cat</i>	1803	1786	1681	1839	1737

Table 1: Degree of fronting (measured by F2) for short *a* by class.

It is clear from this table that the upper class has responded to the stigmatization of the tense vowel more sharply than any other class group. Nevertheless, its speakers have not merged tense and lax short *a*. Apparently, even extreme sensitivity to social stigmatization has not altered phonemic categorization.

In other ways as well, the Philadelphia upper class follows the basic pattern of the local dialect. Most important sociologically, there are two markers of east coast upper class speech which are absent in the Philadelphia upper class: the vocalization and deletion of post-vocalic *r* and the use of the New England or British broad *a* pattern. Like the city generally, the upper class exhibits no *r* vocalization, either when the *r* is preconsonantal or when it is word final. When asked whether anyone had ever remarked on their dialect, several of my upper class informants mentioned that upper class friends from other east coast cities had noticed their failure to delete post-vocalic *r*. As for the broad *a* pattern, the upper class follows the local dialect pronunciation almost entirely. The word *unt*, for example, is homophonous with *ant*. Of the words that are traditionally said to vary between broad *a* and short *a* in eastern American speech, only *tomato* is occasionally pronounced with broad *a*. This form, however, is such a shibboleth that its sporadic use is unsurprising. One interesting, if minor, peculiarity of Philadelphia upper class vowel pronunciation is the presence of certain southern features that may at one time have characterized the city as a whole but that are now found only among the upper class. Clearest of these is a tendency to reduce or eliminate the glide of the /ay/ vowel of monosyllabic words, both word finally and before nasals, as in *die* or *time*. There is also a tendency to back the broad *a* in the word *father* and a tendency to lower the nucleus of /ey/ in open monosyllables. These speech features are more pronounced in men than in women and in older than in younger speakers.

Aside from the detailed phonetic realizations of the vowels, perhaps the most important difference between working class and upper class vowel pronunciation is the relationship between male and female speech in the two groups. In the working class, ongoing vowel shifts involving fronting are further advanced in the speech of women than in the speech of men. Thus, in the subgroup of the LCV Philadelphia sample containing working class and lower middle class speakers over 50 years of age (9 men and 11 women), of the five non-back vowel allophones⁶ undergoing fronting and raising in the Philadelphia dialect, the women had higher median F2 values than the men in all cases. In the upper class sample of people over 50 (6 men and 4 women), by contrast, the men had higher F2 values than the women in my sample in all but one case. These results are summarized in table 2 by class and sex.

	Working class male	Working class female	Upper class male	Upper class female
tense short <i>a</i> before nasal	2250	2436	2045	1983
tense short <i>a</i> before fricative	2117	2262	1934	1843
tense short <i>a</i> before stop	1828	2215	2316	1925
/aw/ as in <i>house</i>	1741	1915	1965	1708
/ey/ before consonant	2054	2163	1867	1999

Table 2: Degree of fronting (as measured by F2) for five vowel allophones by class and sex.

The reason for this difference appears to be that upper class women show an even stronger tendency than upper class men to correct their speech away from the vernacular norm. Such increased correction is like that found among middle class women for pronunciations that have become extreme enough to provoke social evaluation. Labov (1990) reports that, among middle class (as opposed to working class) speakers, women use a more standard pronunciation than men for vowels that have become subject to overt correction while they show a more innovative pronunciation than men for changing vowels that have not yet triggered correction. Indeed, table 2 shows that the only vowel for which upper class

women show more fronting than men is /ey/, the vowel that has most recently begun to front. This change is too new and phonetically unsalient to have become stigmatized and so to have provoked correction. In consequence, upper class women lead men of their group in fronting, just as women lead men in fronting this vowel in other social groups.

It is noteworthy that, for the only two stable long vowel allophones in Philadelphia, /iy/ in closed syllables and /iy/ in open syllables,⁷ men of all classes have less fronted pronunciations (lower F2 values) than do the women of their respective groups. Thus, for a vowel without a marked vernacular pronunciation the relationship between men and women is the same across classes. This fact reinforces the interpretation that women exhibit more fronting of long vowels than men unless correction intervenes. This result is shown in Table 3:

	Working class male	Working class female	Upper class male	Upper class female
/iy/ in closed syllables	2375	2414	2283	2403
/iy/ in open syllables	2272	2349	2215	2285

Table 3: Degree of fronting (as measured by F2) of /iy/ by class and sex.

Of further interest is the fact that women's more extreme correction does not occur in Philadelphia with certain changes involving the raising of back vowels without fronting, those listed under 4) at the beginning of this section. These changes are not sex linked in working class speech in any clear way; and in the upper class sample there is also no stable difference between men's and women's pronunciations. Where there are differences between the sexes, they are in the same direction for upper class as for working class speakers. Only /ohr/ is an exception, and since the number of speakers in these samples is small and the differences between men and women are also small, the exception is probably not significant.⁸ These changes are older than the fronting changes examined above and Labov (1990) argues that sex differentiation declines as changes go toward completion. Table 4 gives the average F1 values for these vowels (a lower F1 corresponds to a higher vowel):

	Working class male	Working class female	Upper class male	Upper class female
/ahr/ as in <i>car</i>	664	676	635	659
/ohr/ as in <i>shore</i>	496	531	533	505
/oh/ as in <i>coffee</i>	538	519	618	517
/oy/ as in <i>boy</i>	558	496	569	526

Table 4: Degree of raising for four back vowels by class and sex.

4.2. The speech style of the upper class.

It is clear that vowel pronunciation, the most salient phonological feature of the local vernacular in Philadelphia, does not differentiate the upper class from the rest of the city in any categorical way. While the phonetic realizations of Philadelphia variants used by the upper class are minimal and easily distinguishable from working class pronunciation, they are hardly distinguishable at all from the pronunciations of the middle class. Hence, vowel pronunciation cannot be the source of the recognizability of upper class speech. Similarly, there are no important differences between upper and middle class speech in the pronunciation of consonants. Both groups show only small frequencies of so-called "g dropping" (/in/ for *-ing*), which is common in the working class vernacular; and both lack entirely the replacement of interdental fricatives by dental stops (/diyz/ for *these*, /tæNk/ for *thank*) and the palatalization of initial /s/ in the cluster /str/ (/ftriyt/ for *street*), which occurs with some frequency in the working class vernacular.

The properties that distinguish upper class speech are not phonemic but prosodic and lexical. They constitute what Hymes (1974) called a "style" rather than a dialect. In particular, upper class speech is characterized by a drawling and laryngealized voice quality and, contrastingly, by a frequent use of emphatic accent patterns and of intensifying modifiers. These features are iconic and have, perhaps for that reason, an intense interactional effect, at least on outsiders; and this effect has led to the public recognition of the upper class speech style as distinctive. Thus, the sobriquets "Chestnut Hill" and "Main Line Lockjaw" associate the laryngealized voice quality of upper class speech with the two primary areas of upper class residence in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Upper class speech is sometimes heard by others as British sounding; but, in Philadelphia, this cannot be due to any similarity to British dialects in the pronunciation of vowels or consonants.

Rather it seems that the American east coast upper class has traditionally shared features of speech style with the British urban upper class. Not surprisingly, these features are as striking to the British ear as to the American. Joan Washington, dialect coach to the Royal National Theatre of Britain and a trained observer of accents and styles of speech, has described the upper class style in the context of a recent production of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, a play about British class differences in language:

In general, the upper class characters tend to have longer speeches, to demonstrate their confidence by taking time to speak, assuming that others will want to listen. They sit on vowels, expressing the authority of their opinions by doing so. This contrasts with quick Cockney phrases, their speakers ducking in while the going's good (Neill, 1992).

The impressions I formed while interviewing upper class informants can perhaps be taken as a typical middle class reaction to the upper class style. The drawling quality of the speech ("sitting on the vowels"), including among my informants a marked tendency to allow word final syllables to trail off into a laryngealized buzz, projected to me an image of relaxation and ease. At the same time, the use of emphatic stress patterns and intensifying modifiers, in contrast to the mitigating forms used by others, projected self-assurance and an expectation of agreement from the listener. In interactions with me, upper class speakers seemed to presuppose their high social status; and it was this presupposition of status that the style as well as the content of their speech conveyed. My subjective impressions of upper class style accord well with the descriptions of others. Coles (1977), for example, speaks of the sense of "entitlement" that members of the upper class learn in childhood and maintain throughout life. As he defines it, this attitude is the psychological correlate of power and wealth. It includes a sense of one's own importance and the expectation that one's views and desires will be treated with respect. Members of the upper class project their sense of entitlement in all social and interpersonal interactions. It is hardly surprising that relaxed articulation combined with frequent use of strong emphasis in conversation should convey a strong sense of entitlement, for in the relaxed use of emphasis is implied a lack of fear of disagreement and a diminished concern for accommodating one's views to those of an interlocutor.

The tendency of upper class speakers to use emphatic stress patterns and intensifying modifiers can be demonstrated quantitatively by comparing the rate of use of these forms across class and gender; and these statistics provide objective confirmation of observers' impressionistic reports. Tables 5, 6 and 7 give the results of comparisons that I carried out:

	Intensifying adverbs	Augmentative adjectives	Hyperbolic adjectives	# words in sample
4 upper class men	9.2	11.1	6.8	3680
4 upper class women	9	7	4	6810
4 upper middle class men	8.7	5	1.4	3570

Table 5: Number of intensifying modifiers per 1000 words of speech.

	NP = Adj+Noun		NP = Quant+Noun	
	% stress shifted	N	% stress shifted	N
4 upper class men	72	212	60	136
4 upper class women	62	188	42	129
4 upper middle class men	49	184	37	108

Table 6: Frequency of accent shift from head noun to prenominal adjective or quantifier.

	Augmentative Adjectives		Intensifying Adverbs	
	% stress shifted	N	% stress shifted	N
4 upper class men	85	41	76	34
4 upper class women	65	48	54	61
4 upper middle class men	46	18	35	31

Table 7: Frequency of accent shifted onto pre-head intensifying modifiers.⁹

Table 5 shows that upper class men are the most likely of the three groups I studied to use intensifying modifiers, including intensifying adverbs like "very," "extremely," and so forth; augmentative adjectives like "large," "serious," etc.; and hyperbolic adjectives like "outstanding," "enormous," etc. The difference in the three groups' use of intensifying adverbs is very small because of the widespread use by all speakers of the simple intensifier "very;" but the differences in the use of intensifying adjectives, of both moderate

and hyperbolic force, are larger and are statistically significant.¹⁰ Upper class women use these forms somewhat less often and upper middle class men still less often. Upper class men are also more likely than the other groups to shift the nuclear accent from the head noun in a noun phrase to a preceding modifying adjective or determiner.¹¹ Again, as is shown in table 6, upper class women are less likely than men of their class but more likely than upper middle class men to shift the accent. Here the difference among the groups are quite large. As table 7 shows, even where the modifier is an intensifier, the upper middle class accents it less than half the time.

Such accent shifting is, of course, the major way of indicating emphasis prosodically in English. Compare the effect of uttering "a big PROBLEM" to "a BIG problem."¹² The combination of patterns in the two tables indicates that the upper class is speaking more emphatically in the interview sections from which this data came than is the upper middle class. The pattern is striking and reinforces my informal impression that the upper class informants expressed their opinions with greater self-confidence and authority than the middle class informants. Of course, it is important to remember that I, the interviewer, was a middle class man a generation younger than the speakers. My status may easily have had a differential effect on the speech style of the different groups of informants, and we do not know whether the pattern I found would recur in all interactional contexts.

In confirmation of the results reported above, note that upper class male informants were even more likely to use an emphatic stress pattern when the noun phrase receiving the nuclear accent contained an augmentative adjective than they did overall (compare column 1 of tables 6 and 7), while this result does not hold for upper middle class men. The difference suggests that the upper middle class group avoids the highly marked emphasis that results when emphatic lexical choice and accent placement are combined while the upper class group, especially the men, favors just this effect. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the upper middle class speakers also avoid almost entirely the use of the most highly marked lexical intensifiers, the hyperbolic adjectives (see column 3 of table 5). Thus, utterances like the following are characteristically upper class:

- (1) That's an ENORMOUS problem.
- (2) He was the WORST mayor this city has EVER had.
- (3) I used to think the unions were so TERRIBLY needed.

Upper class women fall consistently between upper class men and upper middle class men on all of my measures of emphatic speech, showing that direct, emphatic speech is more characteristically male than female, at least in these interviews. However, the figures also show class status having a more powerful effect than gender.

5. Conclusion

The Philadelphia upper class is socially exclusive and has an acute sense of its separate identity. Yet linguistically it remains part of the local geographic speech community. Even its distinctive style of speech is fashioned from the common linguistic system and marks the group's high social status with symbolic resources whose meaning and interactional

effect are defined by that system. The firm integration into the local dialect of a group so strongly set apart socially and ideologically is perhaps surprising. It tells us that speech communities are fashioned out of a reality deeper than the consciously recognized divisions of society. Dialects have always been primarily thought of as geographic in character, and with good reason. The linguistic subsystems they define seem to be the product of sheer density of communication among speakers and are not determined by speakers' desires to distinguish themselves from one another. Only lack of contact leads to dialect differentiation and preserves it.¹³ Within dialects so demarcated, subgroups distinguish themselves by the way they express shared linguistic resources. These differences of expression cause the now well-known heterogeneity of the speech community; and it is in these terms that the upper class distinguishes itself. By using local pronunciations in a phonetically minimal way, it shows, to the maximal extent possible given its underlying dialect, that it is allied to the standard regional and national language as against the local one. The speech style of the upper class achieves its powerful interactional and orienting effect, if our analysis has been correct, by signaling social status through the use of a discourse strategy interpretable by any speaker but usable only by one whose social position licenses it.

6. Notes

1. The study reported here was supported by the National Institute of Mental Health under post-doctoral research fellowship MH-05536. My sponsor on the fellowship was William Labov, and I am pleased to be able to express here publicly my thanks to him for his encouragement, advice and material assistance. I carried out the research in his laboratory in parallel with his NSF-funded project on the Philadelphia speech community. In addition to his help, I also wish to acknowledge the extensive help I received from other members of the project, especially Donald Hindle and Elizabeth Dayton. Finally, I am grateful for the comments that the late Erving Goffman gave me on an earlier draft of this paper.
2. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview a comparable sample of upper middle class women due to the time constraints on my project .
3. Words like *school* do not front even when other /uw/ words do because of the phonetic effect of following /l/.
4. Of course, even if homonymy were an issue, it is well known not to impede vowel mergers.
5. The vowels of a speaker form an inverted triangle in F1xF2 acoustic space. Along the front and back diagonals, there are two parallel tracks, one more peripheral and one more central. The so-called "tense" vowels are ones that occupy the peripheral track. The best measure of peripherality is F2. The higher it is in the front or the lower in the back, the more peripheral the vowel. However, peripheral vowels tend to rise (Labov *et al.* 1972), so that tense vowels also sound higher than their lax counterparts.
6. The fronting of back vowels shows much less regularity. The F2 measurement of the

nucleus of these vowels is extremely variable, making comparisons across small samples unreliable.

7. Labov (1990) reports that /iy/ in closed syllables is raising and fronting and that this is the most recent of Philadelphia sound changes. For our speakers, this change is not relevant since they are of the pre-World War II generation, for whom the vowel was presumably stable.

8. Upper class women seem to be behind upper class men in the recent change by which /ay/ before voiceless consonants raises without fronting. The significance of this fact is obscured by the difficulty of determining the interaction between sex and pronunciation for this vowel in other social classes (Labov 1990).

9. Upper middle class men used too few hyperbolic adjectives to allow a comparative analysis of their accent patterns.

10. For the intensifying adverbs, chi-square = .062, a non-significant result. For the augmentative adjectives, chi-square = 9.41, $p < .01$; and for the hyperbolic adjectives chi-square = 13.03, $p < .005$.

11. In English the default position for the placement of nuclear accent or stress is the last stressable word of a phrase; for example "barn" in "John painted the old barn."

12. Upper case type indicates accent placement.

13. Given this fact, the continued existence of a relatively uniform vernacular among urban, working class African-Americans in the United States and their failure to adopt or to influence the local white dialects of the northern and western cities in which they live is strong evidence for the extreme social segregation of this group, as Labov has pointed out.

7. References

Baltzell, Digby. (1958). *Philadelphia gentlemen: The making of a national upper class*. New York: The Free Press.

Coles, Robert. (1977). *Privileged ones: The well-off and rich in America*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Domhoff, G. William. (1967). *Who rules America?* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

_____. (1970). *The higher circles: The governing class in America*. New York: Random House.

Hymes, Dell. (1974). Ways of speaking. In R. Bauman & J. Sherzer (eds.), *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 433-452.

Labov, William. (1980). The social origins of sound change. In W. Labov (ed.), *Locating language in time and space*. New York: Academic Press. 251-266.

_____. (1981). What can be learned about change in progress from synchronic descriptions? In D. Sankoff & H. Cedergren (eds.), *Variation Omnibus*. Edmonton, Alberta: Linguistic Research.

_____. (1984). Field methods of the Project on Linguistic Change and Variation. In J. Baugh & J. Sherzer (eds.), *Language in use*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. 28-53.

_____. (1989). The exact description of the speech community: Short *a* in Philadelphia. In R. Fasold & D. Schiffrin (eds.), *Language change and variation*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. 1-57.

_____. (1990). The intersection of sex and social class in the course of language change. *Language Variation and Change*. 2: 205-254.

Labov, William, Yeager, Malcah & Steiner, Richard. (1972). *A quantitative study of sound change in progress*. Philadelphia: U.S. Regional Survey.

Lennig, Matthew. (1978). *Acoustic measurements of linguistic change: The modern Paris vowel system*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

Nearey, Terence. (1977). *Phonetic feature system for vowels*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut.

Neill, Heather. (1992). Joan Washington - the National Theatre's Henry Higgins. In *Programme for Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw*. London: Royal National Theatre.

Wolfe, Tom. (1976). Honks and wonks. In *Mauve gloves and madmen, clutter and vine*. New York: Bantam. 191-206.