

拉波夫 语言学自选集

**STUDIES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS:
SELECTED PAPERS BY WILLIAM LABOV**

北京语言文化大学出版社

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The Social Motivation of a Sound Change

THE work which is reported in this chapter concerns the direct observation of a sound change in the context of the community life from which it stems.¹ The change is a shift in the phonetic position of the first elements of the diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/, and the community is the island of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. By studying the frequency and distribution of phonetic variants of /ay/ and /aw/ in the several regions, age levels, occupational and ethnic groups within the island, it will be possible to reconstruct the recent history of this sound change; by correlating the complex linguistic pattern with parallel differences in social structure, it will be possible to isolate the social factors which bear directly upon the linguistic process. It is hoped that the results of this procedure will contribute to our general understanding of the mechanism of linguistic change.

The problem of explaining language change seems to resolve itself into three separate problems: the origin of linguistic variations; the spread and propagation of linguistic changes; and the regularity of linguistic change. The model which underlies this three-way division requires as a starting point a variation in one or several words in the speech of one or two individuals.² These variations may be induced by the processes of assimilation or differentiation, by analogy, borrowing, fusion, contamination, random variation, or any number of processes in which the language system interacts with the physiological or psychological characteristics of the individual. Most such variations occur only once, and are extinguished as quickly as they arise. However, a few recur, and, in a second stage, they may be imitated more or less widely, and

may spread to the point where the new forms are in contrast with the older forms along a wide front. Finally, at some later stage, one or the other of the two forms usually triumphs, and regularity is achieved.

Whereas for the first stage we are often overwhelmed with an excess of possible explanations, we have quite the reverse situation in attempting to account for the propagation and regularity of linguistic changes. A number of earlier theories which proposed general psychological, physiological or even climatic determinants have been discarded for some time.³ The contribution of internal, structural forces to the effective spread of linguistic changes, as outlined by Martinet (1955),⁴ must naturally be of primary concern to any linguist who is investigating these processes of propagation and regularization. However, an account of structural pressures can hardly tell the whole story. Not all changes are highly structured, and no change takes place in a social vacuum. Even the most systematic chain shift occurs with a specificity of time and place that demands an explanation.

Widely divergent ideas appear to exist as to what comprises an explanation of the mechanism of change. The usual diachronic procedure, as followed in palaeontology or geology, is to explore the mechanism of change between states by searching for data on intermediate states. It follows that we come closer and closer to an accurate depiction of the mechanism of change as the interval between the two states we are studying becomes smaller and smaller. This is certainly the method followed by such historical linguists as Jespersen, Kökeritz, and Wyld, and it is the motivation behind their extensive searches for historical detail. On the other hand, a viewpoint which favors the abstract manipulation of data from widely separated states has been propounded by M. Halle (1962); explicit defense of a similar attitude may be found in H. Pilch's (1955) study of the vowel systems of Shakespeare, Noah Webster,

and present-day America. Neither Halle nor Pilch distinguish the three aspects of change outlined above.

It would seem that the historical approach is more appropriate to an empirical science concerned with change, even over a narrow time span, as this approach leads to statements which are increasingly subject to confirmation or disconfirmation. At the same time, such a close view of historical change makes us increasingly sceptical of the value of limitations on the kinds of data which may be considered: as, for instance, that the linguist explain linguistic events only by other linguistic events. One would expect that the application of structural linguistics to diachronic problems would lead to the enrichment of the data, rather than the impoverishment of it.⁵

The point of view of the present study is that one cannot understand the development of a language change apart from the social life of the community in which it occurs. Or to put it another way, social pressures are continually operating upon language, not from some remote point in the past, but as an immanent social force acting in the living present.

Sturtevant (1947: 74 - 84) has outlined a concise theory of the spread and consolidation of language changes which consistently views this process in its social dimension. One sentence in particular will serve as an excellent theme for this investigation:

Before a phoneme can spread from word to word . . . it is necessary that one of the two rivals shall acquire some sort of prestige.⁶

It is hoped that the study of the particular case under discussion will lend support to this general view of the role of social interaction in linguistic change.

The Island of Martha's Vineyard

The island of Martha's Vineyard, Dukes County, Massachusetts,

was chosen as a laboratory for an initial investigation of social patterns in linguistic change.⁷ Martha's Vineyard has the advantage of being a self-contained unit, separated from the mainland by a good three miles of the Atlantic Ocean. At the same time, the Vineyard has enough social and geographic complexity to provide ample room for differentiation of linguistic behavior. We are also fortunate in having the records of the *Linguistic Atlas of New England* (henceforth abbreviated LANE) as a background for the investigation.⁸ It is over thirty years since Guy Lowman visited Martha's Vineyard; his interviews with four members of the old families of the island give us a firm base from which to proceed, and a time depth of one full generation which adds considerably to the solidity of the conclusions which can be drawn.

Fig. 1.1 shows the general outlines of Martha's Vineyard, and Table 1.1 gives the population figures from the 1960 Census. The island is divided into two parts by an informal, but universally used distinction between *up-island* and *down-island*. *Down-island* is the region of the three small towns where almost three-fourths of the permanent population live. *Up-island* is strictly rural, with a few villages, farms, isolated summer homes, salt ponds and marshes, and a large central area of uninhabited pine barrens.

As we travel up-island from Vineyard Haven, we come first to the town of West Tisbury, which contains some of the most beautiful farms and fields of the island, now largely untilled and ungrazed. At Chilmark, the ground rises to a series of rolling hills which look out to the Atlantic on one side, and to Vineyard Sound on the other. Chilmark's salt pond is permanently open to the Sound through a narrow channel, and so serves as a permanent harbor for the dozen fishermen who still operate from the docks of the village of Menemsha in Chilmark. Finally, at the southwest

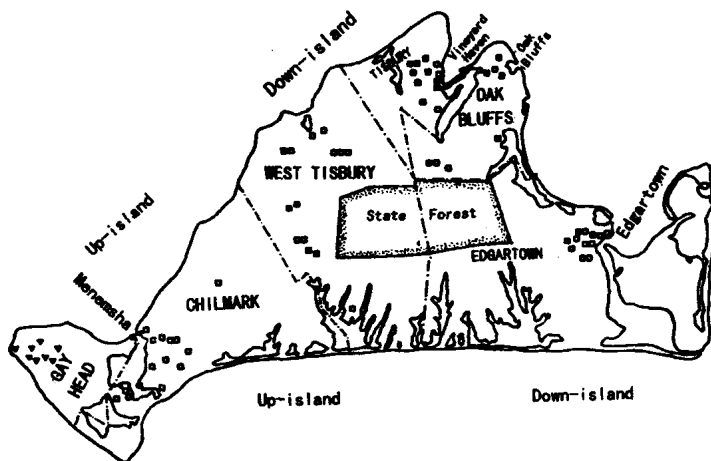


Fig.1.1. Location of the 69 informants on Martha's Vineyard. Ethnic origin is indicated as follows: □English, ■Portuguese, ▼Indian. Symbols placed side by side indicate members of the same family.

TABLE 1.1
POPULATION OF MARTHA'S VINEYARD

<i>Down-island [towns]</i>	3,846
Edgartown	1,118
Oak Bluffs	1,027
Vineyard Haven	1,701
<i>Up-island [rural]</i>	1,717
Edgartown	256
Oak Bluffs	292
Tisbury	468
West Tisbury	360
Chilmark	238
Gay Head	103
Total	<u>5,563</u>

Source: From U. S. Bureau of the Census, *U. S. Census of Population: 1960. Number of Inhabitants. Massachusetts. Final Report PC(1) - 23A* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1962), Table 7, P.23 - 11.

corner of the island, there is the promontory of Gay Head, and the houses of the 103 Indians who represent the original inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard.

The 6,000 native Vineyarders fall into four ethnic groups which are essentially endogamous. First, there are the descendants of the old families of English stock, who first settled the island in the 17th and 18th centuries: the Mayhews, Nortons, Hancocks, Allens, Tiltons, Vincents, Wests, Pooles—all closely related after ten generations of intermarriage. Secondly, there is a large group of Portuguese descent, immigrants from the Azores, Madeira, and the Cape Verde Islands. There are Portuguese all along the southeastern New England coast, but the Vineyard has the largest percentage of any Massachusetts county. In 1960, 11 percent of the population was of first-or second-generation Portuguese origin; with the third-and fourth-generation Portuguese, the total would probably come close to 20 percent.⁹

The third ethnic group is the Indian remnant at Gay Head. The fourth is the miscellaneous group of various origins: English, French Canadian, Irish, German, Polish. Though the sum total of this residual group is almost 15 percent, it is not a coherent social force, and we will not consider it further in this paper.¹⁰

Another group which will not be considered directly is the very large number of summer residents, some 42,000, who flood the island in June and July of every year. This tide of *summer people* has had relatively little direct influence on the speech of the Vineyard, although the constant pressure from this direction, and the growing dependence of the island upon a vacation economy, has had powerful indirect effects upon the language changes which we will consider.

The Vineyard is best known to linguists as an important relic area of American English: an island of r-pronouncers in a sea of r-lessness. With a 320-year history of continuous settlement, and a

long record of resistance to Boston ways and manners, the island has preserved many archaic traits which were probably typical of southeastern New England before 1800. The most striking feature, still strongly entrenched, is the retention of final and preconsonantal /r/.¹¹ New England short /o/ is still well represented among the older speakers. Exploratory studies of the Vineyard in 1961 showed that most of the special traits of the island speech shown on the LANE maps may still be found among traditional speakers from 50 to 95 years old.

Lexical survivals of 17th-century English are even clearer indications of the archaic nature of the Vineyard tradition. We find *bannock*, for a fried cake of corn meal, *studdled* for 'dirty, roiled' water, in addition to such items as *tempest* and *buttry* listed in the LANE. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the fact that the Vineyard represents an underlying stratum is the presence of *belly-gut*, for a face-down sled ride. In LANE records, this form is shown on the Vineyard and in western New England; in the intervening area, it has been overlaid by three successive layers—*belly-bump*, *belly-flop*, and currently, no word at all.¹²

As interesting as the structure of Martha's Vineyard English may be, it is not the purpose here to contrast one static system with another. We would like to understand the internal structure of Vineyard English, including the systematic differences which now exist and the changes now taking place within the island. For this purpose, we will select for study a linguistic feature with the widest possible range of variation and the most complex pattern of distribution characteristic of Martha's Vineyard.

Selection of the Linguistic Variable

It would be appropriate to ask at this point what are the most useful properties of a linguistic variable to serve as the focus for the study of a speech community. First, we want an item that is frequent,

which occurs so often in the course of undirected natural conversation that its behavior can be charted from unstructured contexts and brief interviews. Secondly, it should be structural: the more the item is integrated into a larger system of functioning units, the greater will be the intrinsic linguistic interest of our study. Third, the distribution of the feature should be highly stratified: that is, our preliminary explorations should suggest an asymmetric distribution over a wide range of age levels or other ordered strata of society.

There are a few contradictory criteria, which pull us in different directions. On the one hand, we would like the feature to be salient, for us as well as for the speaker, in order to study the direct relations of social attitudes and language behavior. But on the other hand, we value immunity from conscious distortion, which greatly simplifies the problem of reliability of the data.¹³

In the exploratory interviews conducted on the Vineyard in 1961, many structural changes were noted that were plainly parallel to changes taking place on the mainland under the influence of the standard Southeast New England pattern. Changes in phonemic inventory were found: New England short /o/ is rapidly disappearing; the two low back vowels, /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ are merging. Important changes in phonemic distribution are occurring: the /or ~ ɔr/ distinction is disappearing; initial /hw/ is giving way to /h/.¹⁴ Shifts in structured lexical systems, all in the direction of regional standards, can be traced. Archaic syntactic features are disappearing. Yet as interesting as these changes may be, there is no reason to think that their distribution will follow a pattern peculiar to the Vineyard.

In the case of postvocalic /r/, however, we do have a linguistic variable defined by the geographical limits of the island, which follows a social pattern idiosyncratic to Martha's Vineyard. In some island areas, retroflexion is increasing, and in others,

decreasing; as we will note later, the social implications of this fact can not be missed. The variations in /r/ are frequent, salient, and involve far-reaching structural consequences for the entire vowel system.

However, the preliminary exploration of the Vineyard indicated that another variable might be even more interesting: differences in the height of the first element of the diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/. Instead of the common southeast New England standard [aɪ] and [aʊ], one frequently hears on Martha's Vineyard [ɐɪ] and [ɐʊ], or even [əɪ] and [əʊ]. This feature of centralized diphthongs¹⁵ is salient for the linguist, but not for most speakers; it is apparently quite immune to conscious distortion, as the native Vineyarders are not aware of it, nor are they able to control it consciously. As far as structure is concerned, we cannot neglect the structural parallelism of /ay/ and /aw/; on the other hand these diphthongs are marked by great structural freedom in the range of allophones permitted by the system. These are strictly subphonemic differences. Since there are no other up-gliding diphthongs with either low or central first elements in this system, it is not likely that continued raising, or even fronting or backing, would result in confusion with any other phoneme.

The property of this feature of centralization which makes it appear exceptionally attractive, even on first glance, is the indication of a complex and subtle pattern of stratification. This very complexity proves to be rewarding; for when the centralizing tendency is charted in the habits of many speakers, and the influence of the phonetic, prosodic, and stylistic environment is accounted for, there remains a large area of variation. Instead of calling this "free" or "sporadic" variation, and abandoning the field, we will pursue the matter further, using every available clue to discover the pattern which governs the distribution of centralized diphthongs.

The problem becomes all the more significant when it becomes apparent that the present trend on Martha's Vineyard runs counter to the long-range movement of these diphthongs over the past two hundred years. And while this sound change is not likely to become a phonemic change in the foreseeable future, it operates in an area where far-reaching phonemic shifts have taken place in the past. It is, in effect, the unstable residue of the Great Vowel Shift.

The History of Centralized Diphthongs

It seems generally agreed that the first element of the diphthong /ay/ was a mid-central vowel in 16th- and 17th-century English (Jespersen 1927:234; Kökeritz 1953:216).¹⁶ This axiom (really an hypothesis) receives strong support from the fact that speakers show the same level for many important linguistic variables in casual speech, when they are least involved, and excited speech, when they are deeply involved emotionally. The common factor for both styles is that the minimum attention is available for monitoring one's own speech. We may assume that when Thomas Mayhew first took possession of his newly purchased property of Martha's Vineyard in 1664, he brought with him the pronunciation [əɪ] in *right*, *pride*, *wine* and *wife*. The later history of this vowel in America indicates that [əɪ] continued to be the favored form well into the 19th century.¹⁷

When we examine the records of the LANE, we find that centralized /ay/ was a healthy survivor in the speech of the Atlas informants.¹⁸ We find it scattered throughout the rural areas of New England, and strongly entrenched in the Genesee Valley of western New York. It had disappeared completely from the Midland, but was quite regular—before voiceless consonants—in both the Upper and Lower South. This differential effect of voiceless and voiced following consonants was only a directing influence in

the North, but stood as a regular phonetic rule in the South. On Martha's Vineyard, as on neighboring Nantucket and Cape Cod, centralized /ay/ was frequently recorded.

The history of /aw/ differs from that of /ay/ more than our general expectations of symmetry would lead us to predict. There is reason to believe that in England the lowering of /aw/ was considerably in advance of /ay/, and it is not likely that the same Thomas Mayhew used [əʊ] in *house* and *out* (Jespersen 1927: 235 – 36; Kökeritz 1953: 144 – 49; Wyld 1920: 230 – 31). The American evidence of the late 18th and 19th centuries, as summed up by Krapp (1925 2: 192 – 96), points to [ou] as the conservative, cultured form, giving way to [au] or [ɑʊ], with the rural New England form as [æʊ] or [ɛʊ]. The Linguistic Atlas records show only a hint of parallelism of /ay/ and /aw/. (Kurath and McDavid 1951: Maps 28 – 29). We find [əʊ] mainly in eastern Virginia, before voiceless consonants, with some small representation in upstate New York, but the principal New England form of [au] stood out against a background of rural and recessive [æʊ]. Martha's Vineyard shows very little centralization of /aw/ in the LANE maps.

This brief review indicates that the isolated position of /aw/ has facilitated phonetic variation on a truly impressive scale. The first element has ranged from [ɪ] to [ɑ], from [ɛ] to [o] all within the same general structural system. Perhaps one reason why /ay/ has not shown a similar range of variation is the existence of another upgliding diphthong, /ɔy/.¹⁹ In any case, as the stage is set for our present view of Martha's Vineyard diphthongs, /ay/ is well centralized, but /aw/ is not. It may be too strong a statement to say that this represents the phonetic heritage of the seventeenth-century Yankee settlers of the island, but we may venture to say that we have no evidence of any intervening events which disturbed the original pattern.

As we begin the systematic study of this centralization pattern, we will refer to the linguistic variables (ay) and (aw) instead of the phonemes /ay/ and /aw/. Where the subphonemic differences in the position of the nucleus of /ay/ and /aw/ are considered to be in *free variation*, and linguistically insignificant, the variants of (ay) and (aw) show significant differences in their distribution and carry sociolinguistic information. In this case (but not always), the variables (ay) and (aw) represent the same phonetic substance as the invariant categories /ay/ and /aw/; the parentheses indicate a different approach to the analysis of variation. Whereas // means that internal variation is to be disregarded as insignificant, () indicates that this variation is the prime focus of study.

The Investigation of (ay) and (aw)

The summer visitor to Martha's Vineyard gets only a fleeting impression of the native speech pattern. Seven out of every eight human beings on the island are visitors like himself. But for the Vineyarder, there is no effect of dilution. For him, summer visitors have very little status on the island and their ephemeral nature is convincingly demonstrated in the first week in September of every year, when they disappear even more quickly than the insect population of the summer months. The normal native speech of Martha's Vineyard can then be heard as the dominant sound in public places. A knock on any up-island door will no longer produce a Back Bay stockbroker, but the rightful owner in possession once again. As a rural up-islander he is very likely to use a high degree of centralization of (ay) and (aw); but in the small town areas of down-island one may also hear this feature, particularly in words such as *right*, *white*, *twice*, *life*, *wife*, *like*, but not so much in *while*, *time*, *line*, *I*, *my*, *try*. Similarly, one may hear in the streets of Vineyard Haven centralized forms in *out*,

house, *doubt*, but not so much in *now*, *how*, or *around*.

In order to study this feature systematically, it was necessary to devise an interview schedule which would provide many examples of (ay) and (aw) in casual speech, emotionally colored speech, careful speech, and reading style. The first of these diphthongs is more than twice as frequent as the second, but even so, several devices were required to increase the concentration of occurrences of both.

1. A lexical questionnaire, using the regional markers shown as most significant in the maps of the LANE, supplemented with recent observations, and concentrating on the following words containing (ay) and (aw):

spider	rareripe	iodine	dying out
sliding	swipe	quinine	flattening out
		scrimy	dowdy
white bread	nigh		outhouse
white of egg	pie	frying pan	backhouse
nightcrawler	sty	fry pan	crouch
lightning bug	firefly		mow
Italian	shiretown		rowen

2. Questions concerning value judgments, exploring the social orientation of the respondent, were so phrased as to elicit answers containing (ay) and (aw) forms.²⁰ Answers to such questions often gave a rich harvest of diphthongal forms, with contrasting uses of emotionally stressed and unstressed variants.
3. A special reading, used mainly in the high school, was offered ostensibly as a test of the ability to read a story naturally.²¹ Since these readings gave the most exact comparisons between speakers, they were utilized for the spectrographic measurements discussed below.

In addition to the formal interview, observations were made in a great many casual situations: on the streets of Vineyard Haven and Edgartown, in diners, restaurants, bars, stores, docks, and