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ANOTHER LOOK AT THE ROLE OF FEMALE SPEAKERS
IN SOUND CHANGE
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0. Introduction. I want to consider results from a sample of language change in progress studies from the last two and a half decades in addressing the question of the role of women in situations of phonological change. It is necessary to attend closely to the work of Labov, especially early work in which he and his colleagues laid the theoretical foundation for change in progress investigations. Within the early Labovian framework, certain generalizations were made about the role of women in sound change that are hard to clarify or challenge without reexamining a number of other early ideas and early data along with later material. There is a need to review and reevaluate certain sociolinguistic concepts: style shifting, hypercorrection, prestige, and others. Most of these concepts seem to fit well within a stratificational model, a sociological model that assumes the sharing of societal norms across classes. Some sociolinguists have suggested that a conflict model is a better one for describing and explaining variation (e.g. Rickford 1986). A conflict model assumes the inherence of class conflict and norm differences in societal structure. It seems to me that a conflict model is the better one for describing and explaining the different roles in sound change of different groups of female speakers in different situations.

1. Consideration of theoretical particulars. Since the beginning of modern sociolinguistic work two claims about the role of women in the process of sound change have been common. One is that women are more standard speakers than men, and therefore are found to correct more frequently and extremely toward the standard-prestige variant of a variable (Labov 1966a; Levine and Crockett 1967; Wolfram 1969; Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1967; Trudgill 1972). The other claim is that the women of a subgroup in a community are innovative in sound change (Labov 1966a, 1972; Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner 1972; Trudgill 1974).

On first consideration it seems that both claims can be true only if sound change begins in the highest ranking status group in a speech community since it is the speech of that group that defines the standard. On first consideration it seems that the two claims that women are more standard speakers than men and that women innovate or lead in sound change cannot both be true if a new form originates within any stratum except the highest. Nonconservative behavior would then be in violation of the standard norm. Nonstandard, vernacular speech, however, is just where linguistic innovation is often found (Eckert 1987; Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner 1972; Milroy and Milroy 1978). Because of style shifting, theoretically both claims could be true if a new form originates in or enters a speech community through a lower status group. It is possible for women to use innovative, nonstandard forms in one speech style, and conservative, standard forms in another. Some studies show this to be the case with regard to some variables—studies going back as far as Labov's (1972a) Lower East Side investigation of (eh) and (oh). (Also see Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner 1972; Milroy and Milroy 1978.)

Early modern work on sound change in progress, in which theory was developed concerning a mechanism of change relying on hypercorrection, overemphasizes the influence of either standard or conservative speech in the process. Of the 13 orderly stages in the process of sound change outlined by Labov (1965), the final five involve 'change from above', that is, socially

conscious correction of a stigmatized form, which makes for stylistic stratification. Speakers, and especially speakers of middle status groups, hypercorrect in careful speech (pp.524-525).

Pressures from below the level of social awareness operate on entire linguistic systems, Labov says, 'in response to social motivations which are relatively obscure and yet have the greatest significance for the general evolution of language'(1966b:123). Indeed, Labov's 'mechanism' model (1965:535) implies that the 'default' case of sound change is one in which change begins in a subgroup that is not the highest-ranking status group. Studies of the last two and a half decades confirm this. Yet, in early work Labov concerns himself primarily with social pressures from above, pressures motivating the overt process of social correction, perhaps because the social motivations involved in change from below are 'relatively obscure'.

Hypercorrection from above is graphic when a crossover pattern is observed. In the familiar sociolinguistics charts showing the distribution of values for a phonological variable across speech styles, one sees that the standard dialect variant is used more in formal speech by speakers in all classes—almost all of the time. Regularly, one line disturbs the pattern by crossing over another in formal style speech. The line which crosses over is the line representing, roughly, lower middle class (LMC) speech; the crossed line represents upper middle class (UMC) speech. LMC women show the most extreme values; female speech, in fact, largely accounts for the crossover. These same charts also usually show crossovers in casual speech. The same group of speakers corrects 'down' as well as 'up'. This is a phenomenon I will call 'the doublecross'. It has been observed for decades (e.g. Labov 1972a:301, in specific reference to women's speech behavior) but not named or attended to. In casual speech, means for the LMC are more extreme in the direction of nonstandard speech than is true for the working class (WC). Both the LMC and women can be observed correcting toward the standard variant, whether such behavior is conservative or innovative. The claim is that, across class, women behave like LMC speakers; or LMC speakers behave like women. Hypercorrection from above is strongest among LMC females (Labov 1970:69).

The motivation proposed—and the one widely accepted within sociolinguistics—for style shifting and hypercorrection from above is prestige (Joos 1952; Fischer 1958; Labov 1963, 1966a). This answer to 'Why copy standard speech?' seems to beg the question in so far as 'prestige' is used to mean prestige associated with the standard. Often that is what is meant. The word 'prestige' in this sense is sometimes, but not usually, qualified with the adjective 'overt', to distinguish it from a prestige not associated with the standard dialect, 'covert prestige' (e.g. Labov 1972a:66-67). In sociolinguistic literature an overt prestige and an overt norm have reference to the standard language controlled by the UMC. A covert prestige and a covert norm have reference to nonstandard language; they are evidenced by the regular selection of nonstandard forms for use. Why call one set overt and the other covert?

A stratification model seems to have been influential in Labovian theory. A stratification model assumes the desire for and expectation of upward mobility across, at least, the UMC and LMC. Especially within the last decade, investigators of sound change in progress have begun to point out that there are prestiges and norms at work that do not refer to the standard language; and it is part of the job to account for them. Labov admits that one 'can't avoid the implication that in New York City we must have an equal and opposing prestige for informal, working-

class speech—a covert prestige enforcing this speech pattern' (1972a:108). Commenting on the statement by Labov above in the course of interpreting his own findings in Norwich, Trudgill says, 'We suspect . . . that there are hidden values associated with non-standard speech, . . . but so far we have been unable to uncover them or prove that they exist'(1972:183). Groups that are not the highest status group behave as if they adhere to the standard language norm less than the highest status group—with the exception of the second ranking group, which hypercorrects. In casual speech especially, speakers of lower ranking groups use variants of variables that are different from the ones used by members of the highest ranking group. This suggests that the norm is not uniform for the speech community, even within speech styles. Milroy and Milroy claim that WC speakers in Belfast adhere to local, class-associated norms, and not to norms of middle class (MC) speech (1978:35-36).

Trudgill notes that WC speech (and other aspects of WC culture) appears to have connotations of masculinity, because it is associated with roughness and toughness. In contrast, femininity is associated with MC speech (1972:183). Trudgill is articulating a dichotomy that is probably a part of common cultural knowledge (whether true or not). The contrast makes a pair of symbols in the set of symbols that partly creates gender: boy and girl, toughness and delicacy, roughness and refinement, WC behavior and MC behavior, bad speech and good speech. And male speech is associated with urbanness as well as with the WC. Labov locates the cultural knowledge with subjective reaction tests: 'The sexes are opposed in their personal attitudes towards the speech of the city, with men favoring it slightly, and women heavily against'(1966a:495). This does not mean, of course, that members of one class can be counted on to do one thing, and members of another class to do another thing; or that men can be counted on to do one thing, and women another thing. Behavior may conform to class of gender norms or not. Norms, Labov points out, can be used 'to measure the degree of oscillation for individuals and class groups, measures which in turn can be correlated with social mobility and social insecurity' (1965:175).

The least formal level of speech, the one in which minimum attention is given to self audio-monitoring, is 'the vernacular'. This speech is 'more systematic speech' than other speech, Labov states (1966a:523). At this least formal level, linguistic relationships determining the course of language evolution can be seen most clearly. The spread of sound change is usually outward from urban areas and upward through the socioeconomic hierarchy (Chambers and Trudgill 1980; Eckert 1988), in spite of unusual cases such as the introduction of postvocalic *r* in New York City.

Peer groups in urban settings are the milieu of vernacular speech through which change spreads; these groups represent social networks. A number of sociolinguists have used sociology's social network theory to tackle the embedding problem in sound change (Labov 1972b; Milroy and Milroy 1978, 1985). Social network theory emphasizes that through social links an individual influences the behavior of others involved in a network and that the effects of these links also ramify through the society (Mitchell 1974:280). Multistranded relationships are more likely to be intense than singlestranded ones. If people are tied to one another by a variety of links they find it difficult to sever social relations and are therefore obliged to fulfil the expectations of those to whom they are linked (p.283).

The consideration of concepts and arguments I have just made in change in progress theory reveals certain problems, allows for certain expectations. The two claims about the role of women in the process of sound change—that women are

more standard speakers than men, and that women are innovative in sound change—can theoretically both be true if women style shift extremely; female speakers must hypercorrect both up, in formal speech, and down, in casual speech, making doublecross patterns. It is an empirical question whether women of different classes and in different ways of life do this. Early in modern sociolinguistic theory the role of LMC women was seen as key, because of hypercorrection from above. However, this view encourages a focus on correction toward the standard prestige forms, whether these are innovative or conservative speech. This is a problem because the vernacular is where structure and regularity are most to be found. It is in this speech, also, that change typically originates, among members of young peer groups, and, in urban societies, spreads out from city centers, from the speech of WC individuals. The vernacular is identified, in theory, with young, male speech. Early theory has also been faced, over the years, with more and more evidence for conflicting social prestiges and corresponding conflicting linguistic norms. The conflicts must involve women as well as men. A stratificational model cannot deal with this. A conflict model can. One can expect female speakers to behave differently depending on factors of class, economic mobility, social network membership, and so on.

2. Studies. I review now, very briefly, the findings of eight change in progress studies, relevant to the question of female speakers' role, from the last two and a half decades. I include studies of three communities where morphological change was investigated.

2.1. Labov (1972a). NYC. (r). Three prestiges are at work in the change involving (r) in NYC. Older UMC speakers conform to a conservative standard prestige norm. Younger UMC speakers and middle-aged LMC speakers are influenced by the new standard prestige norm of r-fulness. Young and old LMC speakers, and WC and LC speakers of all ages, are influenced by this norm very little or not at all (pp.58-60). Older WC speakers actually use more *r* than older UMC speakers in both casual and careful speech. In younger WC age groups, *r* is used less and less in casual speech (p.62). It is possible that the norm for WC speakers is simply different from the one for MC speakers. The variable (r), as well as (eh) and (oh), in NYC show doublecross patterns. LMC female speakers are largely responsible.

2.2. Levine and Crockett (1966). Piedmont NC. (r). Levine and Crockett's study reveals two norms for the variable, r-fulness and r-lessness, both of which associate strongly with the speech of high status individuals. However, the use of *r* is increasing among young people and speakers who are 'near but not quite at the top of the "white collar" class' (p.98). This group could be seen as an aspiring LMC or UWC. Levine and Crockett report that women across classes take the national r-ful norm as theirs (p.98). It should be noted that these investigators excluded unmarried women from their study and assigned married women the class of their husbands (p.89). Levine and Crockett's results resemble Labov's for (r) in New York City. The conflicting prestiges correspond to different linguistic norms.

2.3. King (1986). Port-au-Port, Newfoundland. (l). King finds that in this bilingual area of Newfoundland the prestige of the Montreal variety of French as a Canadian standard influences phonological and grammatical change (p.8). Speakers' sex is a significant factor for the deletion of *l*. The speech of young men is changing more quickly than women's in the direction of the standard Canadian French. Young males hypercorrect, refraining from deleting *l* even in environments where standard speakers delete (p.12).

2.4. Hartford (1976). Gary, IN. (r, ai). Hartford studies the speech of adolescent Chicanas and Chicanos in a community where the prestige variety of English is a middle class Black English (p.74). Girls more than boys use Black English variants rather than Spanish variants of most of the phonological variables considered: for instance, girls use flapped *r* rather than trilled *r* (p.74). High occupational aspiration corresponds with high scores for girls, but not for boys. Hartford claims that the Chicanas' peer groups, isolated both from school activities and most Latino community activities, encourage the use of the MC prestige forms (pp.77-79).

2.5. Cheshire (1982). Reading, Berkshire, England. *do, come*. Cheshire is able to identify core groups of individuals and to isolate the morphological features that best reflect adherence to the vernacular culture for boys frequenting adventure playgrounds (pp.153-154). She finds it was not possible to construct a vernacular culture index for the girls, who do not form structured peer groups the way the boys do (p.162). The core group boys use the nonstandard variables, except auxiliary *do*, more than any of the girls. *Do* is undergoing change away from an earlier dialect form toward the standard form *does*; the nonstandard variant is conservative. Past tense *come* marks vernacular loyalty for girls; the girls who are not 'good' girls use it. For boys it is simply an invariant feature; all the boys use it (pp.163-164).

2.6. Nichols (1983). Georgetown County, SC. *fu*, *at*, *ee*, *um*. Nichols investigates the speech of subpopulations of a Black speech community in rural South Carolina, including both educated and uneducated mainland groups and residents of an all Black river island. The language continuum encompasses Gullah, and varieties of English. Nichols examines variation in the use of the complementizer *fu*, the locative *at*, and the third person markers *ee* and *um*. River island women use standard forms much more frequently than poor mainland women or island men; and poor mainland women use standard forms less than poor mainland men (pp.60-61). Poor mainland women are mostly illiterate and are confined to their immediate communities. Nichols suggests that where educational and occupational opportunities are extremely limited, women will show more conservative linguistic behavior than men in their group. As economic opportunities begin to expand, they do so along sex-segregated lines, and female jobs require the use of English. The much higher paying men's jobs do not require control of English. The literate, more mobile river island women have an incentive to decreolize. For different reasons, neither the island men nor the poor mainland women have this incentive (pp.62-62).

2.7. Eckert (1987; 1988). Detroit, MI. (eh, e, uh). In her study of the speech of White adolescents in Livonia, a suburb of Detroit, Eckert finds that speech patterns conform most closely not to parents' class but to social category, Jock or Burnout (1988:5). The college-bound Jocks, isolated from the metropolitan area of Detroit, orient themselves to the high school. Burnouts actively extend their mobility and networks into suburbs closer to Detroit and into Detroit itself (1987:102-103). Relevant variables are (eh, e, uh). The backing and lowering of (e) and (uh), recent processes, are more advanced in the speech of Burnouts than of Jocks. An extremely raised variant of (eh), a variable that is no longer a strong urban marker, is used much more frequently by high school girls of all categories than boys (p.106). Gender expectations are more binding for Jock girls and Burnout boys than for Burnout girls and Jock boys. Most Burnout girls have higher scores than Burnout boys for the backing of (uh); females are leading in this vowel position change. The leaders are a group of Burned out Burnouts (p.108).

Eckert mentions that in many cities the older Northern Cities Chain Shift changes have been led by young, female speakers; she associates the Burnout girls' scores for the backing of (uh) with this larger pattern (1988:31).

2.8. Milroy and Milroy (1978; 1985). Belfast. (Λ, ai, a, ε). Milroy and Milroy investigate sound change in three Belfast neighborhoods, Clonard, Hammer, and Ballymacarrett. Only Ballymacarrett has an industry, the shipyards, which provides local employment for the males. A group of young women from Clonard also work in the same shop together. The variables (Λ, ai, a, ε), show grading by age, sex, and neighborhood (1978:29). In general, males score higher for the use of nonstandard variants than females. For instance, the centralization and lowering of [U] to [Λ] is a male marker. In Clonard, however, middle-aged women use the centralized variant almost as much as young men (pp.25-26). Young Hammer women raise and front (ai) in casual speech more than men or middle-aged women in their neighborhood. The young women raise and front least of all in word list speech (pp.33-34). Some important conflict of norms is involved. A raised variant of (ε) is associated with outer city speech. Younger female speakers are advancing the raising of the vowel most in Ballymacarrett. The raised variant is not, however, a network marker for any female group. Its use is associated with a certain male network, although the lowering of (ε) is characteristic of young, male speech in general (1985:361-362). The backing of (a), a marker of male speech, especially young male speech, is not a network marker for any male group. But the backing of (a) is associated with high network strength for women. The young Clonard women who have a strong network are the female speakers who back the vowel (p.362). In fact, an innovation originating with a highly ranked community within the WC of the city, the males of Ballymacarrett, is spreading to another area through the speech of these young women (1978:29). The juggle of (ε) and (a) allows each to be a gender marker for one sex and a network strength marker for the other.

3. Discussion. Comparison of the findings of the studies reviewed here shows that there are differences between changes which originate with or enter a community among higher socio-economic status speakers and changes which originate with or enter a community among lower status speakers. In the first case, the changes are often phonologically isolated. Significant social factors are class and gender—that is, identifications of global importance. In the second situation—changes originating among lower status speakers—changes involve whole phonological subsystems. The changes are typified by vowel chain shifts. This observation is in keeping with Labov's claim that casual speech reveals the phonemic level (1966a; 1972a). Significant social factors are social network and neighborhood—that is, identifications of local importance—, along with gender and class. There are few exceptions to the two generalizations that women lead in sound change and are more standard speakers than men if a change originates among or is associated with high status speakers. Sound change beginning among low status speakers involves variables the extreme variants of which are often associated with young, urban, working class male speech. Here, however, both young men and young women actually lead in sound change. This is so because different vowel variables, or even different directions of movement for the same variant of a variable, have different values for subgroups of males and females.

Changes associated with higher socio-economic status speakers are typified by the three different variables designated (r). Neither an *l* sound nor any other consonant displays variation along with (r) in New York City, Piedmont, or the

Latino community in Gary. Increases in the use of a standard variant of (ai) among Chicanas and of a standard French variant of (l) among males in Newfoundland are also structurally isolated changes in distribution. In some cases, a desire for upward mobility is clearly indicated: in the case of r-fulness among LMC women in New York City; in the case of flapped *r* and Spanish/standard English *ai* among Chicanas in Gary. Note that it is just in a situation where men, more than women, can realistically expect to benefit from conformity to the standard that males lead in change: the Newfoundland case. Similarly, the river island women in Nichols' study, who hope for better jobs, decreolize while the poor mainland women do not.

The majority of the changes studied by Eckert and the Milroys in Detroit and Belfast are associated with urban, WC speech. A raised (eh), however, a female marker, is no longer strongly associated with inner city speech. Eckert has suggested that this detachment from WC urbanness allows the raised variant to be a marker of female speech. The raised variants of both (ε) and (a) in Belfast changes are associated with nonlocal prestige. These variants are, of course, involved in the complex vowel variation of the inner city, but oppose the lowered variants that are *heard* as urban.

Further observation complicates the picture. In Detroit the girls who are leading in the backing of (uh), the Burned-out Burnouts, constitute a somewhat isolated network, oriented toward metropolitan Detroit as much as the tougher Burnout boys are. The group of young Clonard women in a close social network have adopted the backing of (a). Older Clonard women use a backed (Λ). Young women from Hammer show extreme raising with (ai). In all three cases the women are behaving differently from WC women in a nearby neighborhood or from WC women of another age or social group in their own neighborhood. In the cases of backing (a) and raising (ai) the young women whose behavior is innovative display marked style shifting. This suggests a conflict of norms for these women.

It is necessary to see women, including young women, as persons whose behavior is interpretable within the social and economic possibilities of their own communities. (See Nichols 1980, 1983, for discussion.) Sociolinguists seem at a loss to explain the observation that in casual style speech in some situations of sound change women, and in particular young LMC and WC women and girls, use innovative, nonstandard variants more frequently than men of their socioeconomic group in the same speech community; and that in addition, these female speakers style shift extremely.

It may be simply that the doublecross represents a double loyalty, a conflict of norms that corresponds to a conflict of demands for display: gender display, class loyalty display, peer group membership display. In general, women's urban social lives are unlike men's in many ways. Young women do not have the same street lives as young men. Milroy and Margrain (1980), Cheshire (1982), and Milroy and Milroy (1985) note that often WC women's social networks are not as dense as men's. When they are dense, however, they appear to function like male networks in the process of sound change.

A model that makes it difficult to consider conflicts of prestiges and norms and that assumes a cross-class desire for and expectation of upward mobility has difficulty with evidence that women of the same class group behave differently and that the same individual female speakers behave differently in the extreme in different speech situations. Labovian theory has had a conflict of 'defaults' since its development. On the one hand, the 'default case' of prestige is the 'overt' prestige attaching to the standard variety of the language; and prestige is the social motivation of sound change. On the other hand, early observation of change in

progress allowed the specification of sound change stages in which the default origin of a change is a social class somewhere below the highest status one. Choices that individual speakers make within the social contexts of their daily lives spread and accelerate sound change, which is most structural, it appears, when it originates in the speech of low status groups.

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