Social network and social class:
Toward an integrated sociolinguistic model

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The purpose of the work

• Understanding the role of social network and social class in patterns of linguistic variation

• Suggesting a kind of an integrated model
Two theoretical platforms

SOCIAL CLASS

A CONCEPT DESIGNED TO ELUCIDATE LARGE-SCALE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

SOCIAL NETWORK

RELATES TO THE COMMUNITY AND INTERPERSONAL LEVEL OF SOCIAL ORGANISATION
## Advantages of these models

### Social class
- Based on conflict, division, and inequality best accounts for many of the patterns of language variation

> “Language represents a form of social and cultural capital that is convertible into economic capital”

### Social network
- Less abstract mode of analysis
- Studying small ethnic groups
## Characteristics of networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Interactional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Shape and pattern of network</td>
<td>• Content of ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Properties: density</td>
<td>• Properties: multiplexity, durability, intensity of ties etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Close-knit network

• Relatively dense
  = everyone would know everyone else
• Multiplex
  = the actors would know one another in a range of capacities
Close-knit networks – does it exist in urban communities?

Due to cultural and economical diversity that cities permit, we can consider urban close-knit networks

• Newer emigrants’ communities
• High-educated individuals
Strong and weak network ties

• “…Innovations between groups are generally transmitted by means of weak rather than strong network ties”

• Spread of uvular [r] across national boundaries in northern European cities, appearance of similar developments in unrelated languages cannot be explained by strong ties
Belfast study (Mirroy&Mirroy)

- Object of study: spread of backing variants of /a/ and raised variants of /e/ from protestant East Belfast into the Clonard – a West Belfast Catholic community
- Sociolinguistic approach: variables – sex, social class, social network
Belfast study (Mirroy & Mirroy)

[before changes]

West Belfast
- /a/ - front, short realization
- /e/ - low, short realization

East Belfast
- /a/ - backed, long realization
- /e/ - raised, long realization
FIGURE 1: Map showing the Ulster Scots area (shaded) in relation to East and West Belfast.
Belfast study: results

- Backed variants of /a/ are associated with male, vernacular inner-city speech and are more closely correlated with network structure for women.

- Raised variants of /e/ are associated with women (middle class), correlation between network structure for male.

### Table 1

Contrasting patterns of distribution of two vowels involved in change, according to social class and sex of speaker, relative frequency of innovatory variants, and level of correlation with network strength.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change led by</th>
<th>High correlation with network strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Males (working-class variant)</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Females (middle-class variant)</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Belfast study: conclusion

• Vernacular speakers associated more strongly with the innovation are in each case those for whom the vowel functions least prominently as a network marker.
• Close-knit network is a conservative force, weak ties network promotes changes.
• Use of morphosyntactic variants by four groups:
  1. blacks (B)
  2. blacks who have considerable contact with whites (WBs)
  3. Whites
  4. whites who have considerable contact with blacks (BWs)
FIGURE 2: Average percentage use of black English vernacular-marked morphosyntactic variants by four groups of Philadelphia speakers (adapted from Ash & Myhill 1986:39).
Black and white research (Ash&Myhill 1986)

- Explanation of these effects
  Ash&Myhill: in terms of prestige of white norms
  Mirroy&Mirroy: weak ties theory
A link between social network and class

- Observation: speakers, whose ties to a localized network are weakest, are frequently found in the middle-class or upper-working class areas of cities.
- Class-specific network structures emerge from large-scale social and economic processes that also influence on social mobility.
A link between social network and class

- Fischer; Cochrad at al. considered the relationships between the variables class and network (German, Sweden, Wales, USA)
  - effects of education and affluence in affording access to a socially and geographically wider range of contacts
A link between social network and class

Kroch (1987) and Labov (1980)’s findings:

In British and American societies close-knit, territorially based networks are associated with lowest classes and with upper-classes.

Network and class analyses compliment each other.
Basis of an integrated model

• Thomas Højrup’s life-models
• Hypothesis: economic positions of people, their education and professional activities split them into subgroups – the members of such groups share lifestyles.
Life-model 1

• Private enterpreuners, producers
• Family-centered network
• Members put themselves to work to gain independence, that’s why they don’t have leisure time
• Business bind them into a cohesive production unit
Life-model 2

- Wage earners
- Their families are separate from the wage earner’s work => more weak ties
- Solidarity between workers
- Proletarian traditionalism vs. privatized workers (Lookwood 1989)
Life-model 3

- High professional and managerial employees
- Career is one of their purposes => competitiveness => few weak ties
- Family is supportive force
An integrated model

- Due to the knowledge of life-model, it is possible to predict a network type and then to suppose the probability of linguistic changes
An integrated model

• Starting point: information about socio-economic position
• Second level: life-model
• Strength ties prediction
• Hypothesis about probability of linguistic changes
**An integrated model**

![Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 3:** Macro- and microlevels of sociolinguistic structure.
Conclusion

• Configuration of network structure depends on socioeconomic factors => importance of considering social network and social class together

• Strong ties network functions as a conservative force, weak ties communities favour linguistic changes
Advantages of the new model: using socioeconomic factors it predicts not only social differences, but also different kinds of network. Thus, the probability of linguistic changes can be supposed.
• The model looks very logic, but too general for linguistic studies

• In my opinion, it is important to remember that the adoption of dialect norms is the way of integration and sometimes there are no correlation between economic position and linguistic changes

Ex.: pronunciation of unstressed Russian "о“: [a] in Moscow vs. [o] in the Urals