

Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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William Labov Martha's Vineyard Island Study

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Welcome to class in the series of founding fathers of sociolinguistics. Today, we will talk about William Labov, who is a pioneer of the variationist tradition in sociolinguistics. His works inspired a wide range of scholars across Europe and America and his methods were adopted by many people like Trudgill, Peter Trudgill and others.

His two works, the first case study of Martha's Vineyard Island of the USA and the second case study of English in New York City: these two works opened a new technique, method and approach to look at language use in the real situation.

It also stands in opposition to the Chomskyan tradition of generative paradigm. And the methods, techniques he developed and used in his studies inspired the whole generation of linguists and he gave a new perspective for looking at the data on, understanding language as a phenomena in action.


So we will talk about William Labov today with a specific reference to the first case study that he carried out in 1963 at Martha's Vineyard Islands. But before that, we will have a brief bio of

this founding father of modern sociolinguistics and pioneer of variationist tradition in sociolinguistics.

So, his approach to look at language from a synchronic perspective and look at change and draw a parallel with the social strata is inspiring and he was the one who established a correlation between language structures and social structures. So, we will know more about Labov and in our series we will talk about two prominent case studies and most influential and inspiring works that he carried out, one in Martha's Vineyard Ireland as part of his MA dissertation in 1963 and the other in New York City as his PhD project in 1964, published later in 1966.

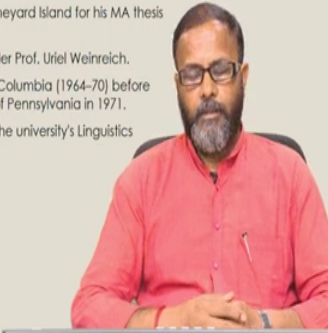

So, to begin with, let us understand and know who this person is. Who is William Labov, what are his major works, what is his influence on social linguistics, and the honors and awards he received.

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William Labov

- William Labov was Born on 04 December 1927 in Rutherford, New Jersey, US.
- Labov majored in English and philosophy and studied chemistry at Harvard in 1948.
- He worked as an industrial chemist in his family's business (1949-61) before working on linguistics.
- He worked on change in the dialect of Martha's Vineyard Island for his MA thesis in 1963.
- He got his PhD in 1964 from Columbia University under Prof. Uriel Weinreich.
- He worked as an assistant professor of linguistics at Columbia (1964-70) before becoming an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania in 1971.
- He became a full professor in 1976 and director of the university's Linguistics Laboratory.



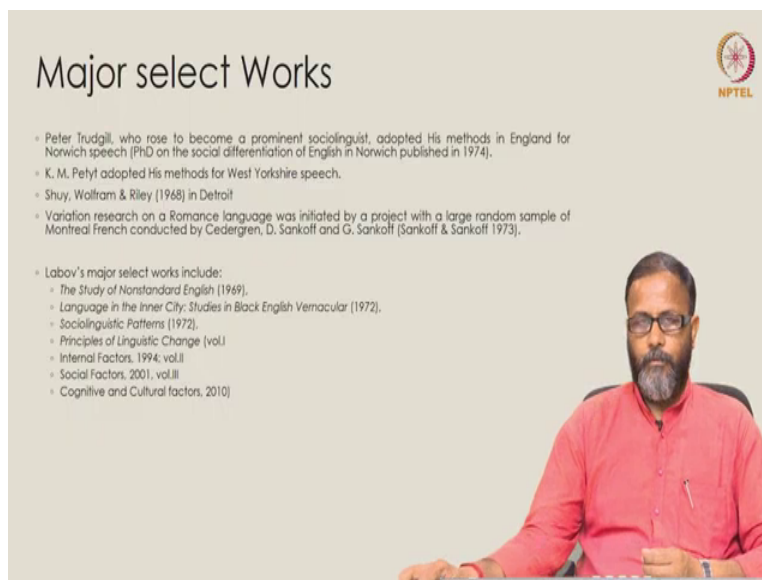
So, we will quickly go through the bio of Labov. So, William Labov was born on December 4, 1927 in Rutherford, New Jersey, USA. Labov majored in English and philosophy and studied Chemistry at Harvard University in 1948. He had a family business, and he worked as an industrial chemist in his family business from 1949 to 1961 before he moved to linguistics.

As I told you, he worked on the change in dialect of Martha's Vineyard Island. It is a wonderful case study that clearly establishes the linguistic attitude, strata and social identity, how social

identity is reflected in linguistic structures and how linguistic structures become influential and representative of the social class and group identity. So, in 1963, he worked on this Martha's Vineyard Island study as part of his MA dissertation. And he got his PhD from the University of Columbia, Columbia University in 1964 under a prominent social linguist, Professor Uriel Weinreich.

He worked as an Assistant Professor of linguistics at Columbia from 1964 to 1970, before he became an Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania in 1971 and later he became full professor. In 1976, he became the director of the university's linguistic laboratory. It is a very illustrious career.

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The slide features a title 'Major select Works' in the top left, an NPTEL logo in the top right, and a list of key sociolinguistic studies. Below the list is a photograph of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red shirt, sitting at a desk. The list includes:

- Peter Trudgill, who rose to become a prominent sociolinguist, adopted His methods in England for Norwich speech (PhD on the social differentiation of English in Norwich published in 1974).
- K. M. Petyt adopted His methods for West Yorkshire speech.
- Shuy, Wolfram & Riley (1968) in Detroit
- Variation research on a Romance language was initiated by a project with a large random sample of Montreal French conducted by Cedergren, D. Sankoff and G. Sankoff (Sankoff & Sankoff 1973).

Labov's major select works include:

- *The Study of Nonstandard English* (1969).
- *Language in the Inner City: Studies in Black English Vernacular* (1972).
- *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (1972).
- *Principles of Linguistic Change* (vol.I)
- *Internal Factors*, 1994; vol.II
- *Social Factors*, 2001; vol.III
- *Cognitive and Cultural factors*, 2010

And he had great influence on other scholars across America and England. And in 1974, we see Peter Trudgill's publication of his PhD thesis on Norwich speech as part of his PhD topic. Peter Trudgill rose to be a prominent sociolinguist later on.

K. M. Petyt adopted his methods for West Yorkshire speech. Wolfram & Riley, in 1968, they replicated the same method and technique for studying speech in Detroit. And variation research on Romance languages was initiated by a project with a large random sample of Montreal French, conducted by D. Sankoff and G. Sankoff and published in 1973.

So, he had a lot of influence on a variety of scholars across America and England, and Canada, of course. His contributions in correlating linguistic structures and social structures is immense and it became the major thrust of sociolinguistics during that period and it continues till date. If you look at the major works, major select works of Labov apart from these two case studies that he carried out in Martha's Vineyard Island and New York City for his MA and PhD thesis, other works include "The Study of Nonstandard English", published in 1969.

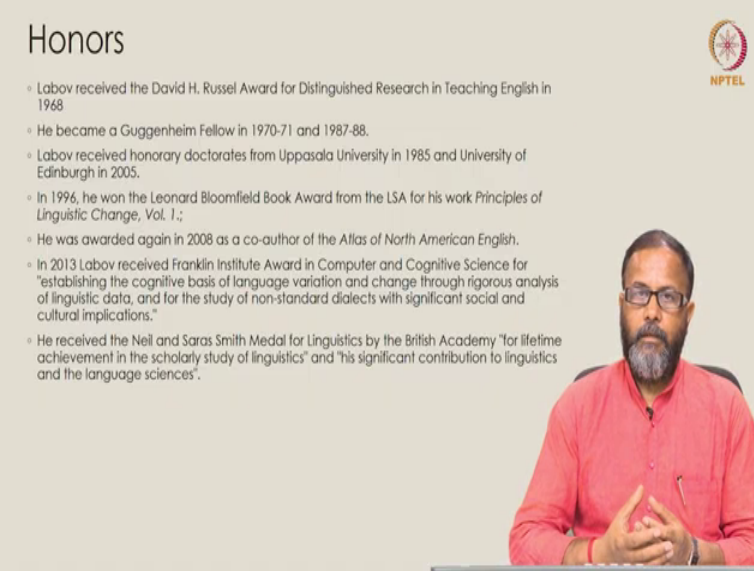
And then a very important and significant work he carried out was on Afro-American Vernacular English, where he argued that Afro-American Vernacular English (AAVE as we call in short form), he argued that this variety should not be looked upon as a perverted version of standard English. It should be treated as a variety of English independent in its own right and that no value judgment should be ascribed to this variety. That is a major work, titled "Language in Inner City, Studies in Black English Vernacular", and was published in 1972.

Then another major work came out again in 1972, "Sociolinguistic Patterns". A major work, a very influential work is "Principles of Linguistic Change: Volume I" for which he was awarded, and then again, the second volume talks about internal factors and the third volume talks about social factors. So, these volumes are very significant, important and influential.

Then another major publication that was done in 2010 was "Cognitive and Cultural Factors". And he has worked on narratives and people's accounts of their life and other things. He has carried out so much work. And he was the one who is known for a major contribution in sociolinguistics where he correlates linguistic structure with the social structure, and the social stratification of language. This is what William Labov can be summed up as, his works can be summed up as. So, he had a major influence on sociolinguistics.

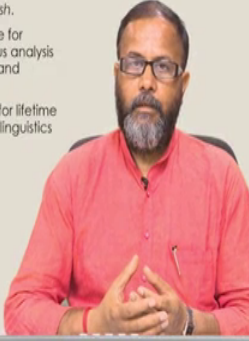
He is known as one of the founding fathers of modern sociolinguistics and he is the one who pioneered a different technique and approach in looking at language called the variationist tradition. So, language change and variation is what his major thrust was. With this bio note on Labov, let us move to his Martha's Vineyards Island study.

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Honors

- Labov received the David H. Russel Award for Distinguished Research in Teaching English in 1968
- He became a Guggenheim Fellow in 1970-71 and 1987-88.
- Labov received honorary doctorates from Uppsala University in 1985 and University of Edinburgh in 2005.
- In 1996, he won the Leonard Bloomfield Book Award from the LSA for his work *Principles of Linguistic Change, Vol. 1.*;
- He was awarded again in 2008 as a co-author of the *Atlas of North American English*.
- In 2013 Labov received Franklin Institute Award in Computer and Cognitive Science for "establishing the cognitive basis of language variation and change through rigorous analysis of linguistic data, and for the study of non-standard dialects with significant social and cultural implications."
- He received the Neil and Saras Smith Medal for Linguistics by the British Academy "for lifetime achievement in the scholarly study of linguistics" and "his significant contribution to linguistics and the language sciences".



The slide features a portrait of William Labov, a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a red shirt, sitting at a desk with his hands clasped. In the top right corner, there is a logo for NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning).

But before that, let us quickly have a brief survey on the honors and awards he received as an acknowledgement of his major contributions to sociolinguistics, that were bestowed upon him. So, the major honors and awards if we list there are a few here I have listed which are: he received the David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research in Teaching English in 1968. He became a Guggenheim fellow in 1970 to 1971 and again in 1987 to '88.


Labov received honorary doctorates from various universities. Among them two are very prominent, one from the Uppsala University in 1985 and another from the University of Edinburgh in 2005. In 1996, he won the Leonard Bloomfield Book Award from the Linguistic Society of America for his work on "Principles of Linguistic Change: Volume I". He was awarded again in 2008 as a co-author of the "Atlas of North American English".

In 2013, Labov received the Franklin Institute Award in Computer and Cognitive Science for establishing the cognitive basis of language variation and change through a rigorous analysis of linguistic data and for the study of non-standard dialects with significant social and cultural implications.

Last but not the least, he received the Neil and Saras Smith Medal for Linguistics by British Academy for lifetime achievement in the scholarly study of linguistics and his significant

contribution to linguistics and the language sciences. So, these are some honors which stand as an acknowledgement of his major contribution to the field.


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Martha's Vineyard Study

Background:

- Martha's Vineyard island is located about 3 miles off the East Coast of the USA
- It had a total population of about 6,000
- It hosted more than 40,000 visitors a year
- Most of the original inhabitants were very opposed to the summer visitors




Moving on, now, let us come to the first case study which rose to prominence and announced the arrival of a new scholar with a new technique, methods and approach that is the Martha's Vineyard Island study that he carried out. But let us look at Martha's Vineyard Island, the place where he carried out this research.


It is a small tiny island. It is located 3 miles off the East Coast of the USA and it then had a total population of 6,000, a very close knit group, very close knit society. It hosts more than 40,000 visitors every year in summer. And most of the original inhabitants were very opposed to the summer visitors. So, this was the background of the place where he carried out this work.

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About Martha's Vineyard Study




- The study took place from 1961 to 1963
- Labov studied the variations in diphthongs (sociolinguistic variable)
- the pronunciation of the diphthongs varies in the community and is called a linguistic variable
- He recorded 69 tape – recorded interviews with speakers from different ages and ethnic groups from the island
- He used a scoring system for his analysis
- The interviewees were divided into age groups



This study took place between 1961 and 1963, so two years of work. Labov studied the variations in diphthongs which he identified as a sociolinguistic variable. We will know more about it soon. The pronunciation of the diphthongs, combination of two vowels for you, diphthongs are combinations of two vowels. It varies in the community and is called a linguistic variable. He recorded 69 tape recorded interviews with speakers from different ages and ethnic groups from the island. He used a scoring system for his analysis and the interviews were divided into age groups.

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Linguistic theory Implied




Linguistic variable:

- feature that has two or more identifiable linguistic forms
- variants differ in form but that does not afflict their linguistic meaning

Criteria for a linguistic variable:

- frequent enough in ordinary conversation
- structurally linked to other linguistic elements
- exhibit a pattern of stratification due to social factors



Now, what was the theory implied, the implication of the theory here in this study, what theory he had in mind and what are the hypotheses. So, he tried to see a particular linguistic variable and its distribution in the speech of the islanders to see whether it corresponds to their linguistic attitude, their collective social identity and if it is not a random variable, but has a significant pattern.

So, a linguistic variable is a feature that has two or more identifiable linguistic forms. That was the question of choice. And he wanted to see what is the choice and what is the reason behind such a choice. So, centralized vowels, diphthongs, why some speakers deliberately chose it, and what is the position of occurrence, frequency of occurrence, and motive behind using this centralized vowel.

And variants have different forms, but that does not reflect their linguistic meaning, so little variation in sound without changing the meaning. And the criteria for a linguistic variable are that it should be: frequent enough in ordinary conversation, structurally linked to other linguistic elements, and, exhibit a pattern of stratification due to social factors. So, these are the parameters on which we identify a linguistic variable and one of the criteria that selects such variables is that they are frequent enough in ordinary speech, regular conversation.

Another is that they are structurally linked to other linguistic elements. So, their occurrence denotes some other linguistic elements. We will see how the centralized vowel diphthong

denoted the group identity and what the motive behind this was, which was the age group which was particular about it, whether it was volitional, deliberate or natural.



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Martha's Vineyard Study Results

Degree of centralization of (ay) and (aw) by age level on Martha's Vineyard

Age	(ay)	(aw)
75 -	25	22
61 - 75	35	37
46 - 60	62	44
31 - 45	81	88
14 - 30	37	46

Source: Wardhaugh 1995, page 197



So, if you look at the results of his work, he had 69 tape records of the elaborate speech recorded, he analyzed them, he transcribed and analyzed, he allotted a scoring system for this variable and the result showed the degree of centralization of /ay/ and /aw/ by age level, if you see, age 75 and above, 25 and 22, if you see 61 and 75, the frequency was 35 and 37, if you see 46 and 60, 62 and 44. But from the age group of 31 years to 45 years, we find a major significant shift 81 and 88. From 14 to 30, it was 37 and 46. For this age group 31 and 45 was that age group exhibited and demonstrated more affinity towards these re-centralized vowels.

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Possible explanations



- a high degree of centralization shows belonging to the island and resistance against the summer people
- young people are still somewhat ambiguous and therefore do not have such a strong centralization
- Older people follow an older way of speaking which does not involve that much centralization
- People of the age group 31 – 45 probably have recently made experiences which lead to the centralization of the diphthongs
- Centralization indicates 'Islander' status, loyalty, solidarity
- Portuguese and Native people use centralization to show equality with original inhabitants



So, what are the possible explanations for this? A high degree of centralization shows belongingness to the island and resistance against the summer people. So, this was a deliberate attempt by the original residents of that island to distinguish themselves from the outsiders, the visitors. It worked as a cohesive collective identity and it drew a line between the original residents and the outsiders. So, it was deliberate.

Young people were still somewhat ambiguous and therefore did not have such a strong centralization. So, this idea of 'we versus them' was more prominent in the age group from 31 to 45. People of the age group of 31 to 45 probably had recently made experiences which led to the centralization of the diphthongs. They have the eyes to distinguish themselves as different from the outsiders. So, this variation in pronunciation was a sociopolitical and ideological factor that forced them to sound different.

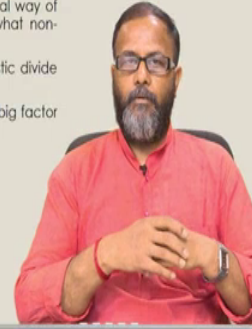
Centralization indicates islander status, loyalty and solidarity. That is exactly what I was talking about. It was all about identity. So, they wanted to identify with the island, the original residents. They wanted to claim that they are the one who are originally residents of this island, and inhabitants of this island. And they wanted to be segregated and separated, sound different and appear different from the 40,000 visitors they used to receive every summer. The sellers, Portuguese and native people, used centralization to show equality with original inhabitants.

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Outcome of the Study



- A big factor to consider when discussing the cause of these differences in pronunciations in Martha's Vineyard is largely down to the **attitude** of its inhabitants;
- The heaviest users of this type of centralised pronunciation of diphthongs were young men who sought to **identify themselves as native inhabitants**, rejecting the values and speech style of the mainland.
- The fishermen in particular also resented the influx of wealthy summer visitors and were antipathetic to their presence as they believed it infringed on their traditional way of island life. This, in turn, encouraged the Vineyarders to establish a somewhat non-standard dialect and retain their **social identity**.
- The tight knit community subconsciously ensured that they created a linguistic divide between them and us.
- This study shows that generations, occupations, or social groups might be a big factor in language use as a sociolinguistic consideration.



If you look at the outcome of this study, what we mentioned earlier, that was the fact that he demonstrated, but what is the outcome of this study? A big factor to consider when discussing the cause of these differences in pronunciation in Martha's Vineyard Island is largely down to the attitudes to its residents or inhabitants, because they wanted to claim the island, they wanted to claim that they are the one who are the original people of this island. So, it was a kind of constructing a group identity. And that was reflected in this linguistic structure.

The heaviest users of this type of centralized pronunciation of diphthongs were young men who sought to identify themselves as native inhabitants, age group 31 to 45, rejecting the values and speech style of the mainland, the visitors which they never liked on the island.

The fishermen in particular also resented the influx of wealthy summer visitors and were antithetical to their presence as they believed it infringed on their traditional way of island life. They perceive the threat to the tradition, culture and the lifestyle of the islanders. And that is why they wanted to sound different and be different and draw this line between the original inhabitants or residents of the island and the visitors of the island.

The tight-knit community subconsciously ensured that they created a linguistic divide between them and us. This study shows that generations, occupations or social groups might be a big factor in language use as a sociolinguistic consideration. So, young Labov worked on that island for two years as part of his MA thesis. The reason for choosing this particular variable, linguistic

variable, was that he sensed this after meeting many people, having informal meetings with different people and recalling their speech.

There are some anecdotes and lots of stories about the way he collected data, making them feel very emotionally charged, creating a context where they would express their views in their original way. So, conversation would be very casual, emotionally charged. And he also created a context where he recorded the accounts of people, their life, their emotions. So, after mixing and meeting with these people, closely working with these people, he was able to identify these two variables. And then he tried to look at the functions of these two variables. The choices people made in using these two variables.

And then he could understand the urge of this age group 31 to 45, who were, in fact, who believed to be custodian of the island's lifestyle, their value system and social systems and they wanted to create a linguistic divide. So, it was a deliberate attempt in order to exhibit loyalty to the island, express solidarity to the island people, they deliberately used this particular variety, the linguistic variable to demonstrate their loyalty and association and the claim of assertion of their original inhabitant status as opposed to the summer visitors.

This was a wonderful revolution in the world of linguistics where a linguistic variable, a small linguistic variable which is contextualized in a larger linguistic context had correlations with the social class, had correlations with the social purpose where identity became a major issue. So, the social determinants like identity, age and affinity to the island in a sense of infringement on the lifestyle, a kind of threat they perceived from outsiders.

So, these factors factored in distribution of these two diphthongs centralized vowels. And the youngest people would later, it was predicted that the youngest people who later replicate the same thing. But the vibrant age group from 31 to 45 who perceived themselves as custodians of the values and lifestyle of the island claimed the island. Older people did not care much, but the middle age group cared a lot about it and to be followed by the younger generation.

So, this revolution that linguistic structures are embedded and correlated with social structures was a great revolution. The techniques he used identifying sociolinguistic variables, linguistic variables that become sociolinguistic variables. Then the idea of observer's paradox where the interviewees are the people who were being recorded did not get influenced by the presence of

the tape recorder or the interviewer Labov himself. So, he tried to create a context where the speech becomes casual and relaxed and a real sample of the speech comes out and is recorded. He transcribed them, assigned values to each of the variables and counted.

So, this approach was different from what at that time the Chomskyan idea of linguistics: abstractness and computational aspects of linguistics that were being talked about. So, Labov's intervention, Labov's method, techniques and approach intervened this linguistic study of language and it made a major change in linguistics.

And this approach became more sharper and prominent in his second case study that was done in New York City in three shopping malls belonging to three socioeconomic, three different socioeconomic classes. And the tendency of, again, using a particular sociolinguistic variable which was systematically done, and this was published in 1966, "Social Stratification of English in New York City" and that created a wave.

And by the time that method was established very well, technique was established, approach was welcomed by a variety of scholars and his method, techniques and approaches were replicated all around like Sankoff and then Trudgill and Petite and other people in different locations. So, this is the contribution of Labov in social linguistics and this is the outcome and deductions from his first case study on Martha's Vineyard Island.

In our next video, we will talk about social stratification of English in New York City as the second case study, which he carried out as part of his PhD. He received it in 1964 and this work was published in 1966. So, we will talk more about that in the next video. This is it for now. Thank you very much.