Chapter 19
The Study of Language by George Yule

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VARIATION
Sociolinguistics: The study of the relationship between language and society.

- This can be done by using research from *anthropology* through the study of language and culture, *sociology* through the role of language in social groups, and *social psychology*. 
The study of **regional dialects** focuses on the speech of people in rural areas, while the study of **social dialects** focuses on speakers in towns and cities.

**Social Dialect**: Language of a certain group of people from a certain social class.

**Types of class involved:**

1. Middle Class
2. Working Class
Types of Class

1- **Middle class:** (Upper and lower [economically])
   They are people with more years of education performing non-manual work.

2- **Working class:** (upper & lower)
   They’ve spent few years of education, performing manual work.
   - In *studying* social dialects, features of language pronunciation, words and structures are studied.
   - Therefore, we can have “upper-middle class speech” which is a type of a social dialect or a sociolect.
   - **Note:** Each person has a *personal dialect* or *idiolect*, but we generally sound like those with similar educational backgrounds or occupations.
Labov studied occupation and socio-economic status by looking at the pronunciation of salespeople in 3 department stores in New York, USA: Saks, Macy’s and Klein’s.

He asked questions so that the salespeople answer: “fourth floor”.

This expression contains two opportunities for the pronunciation of postvocalic /r/.

- i.e. /r/ after a vowel.
Studies by Labov and Trudgill

Labov found out that: (A study on American English)

- There was a regular pattern:
  1. The higher the socio-economic status, the more \(/r/\) sounds were produced.
  2. The lower the socio-economic status, the fewer \(/r/\) was produced.

- There was a similar study in reading on BRITISH ENGLISH in (England) by Trudgill (1974). Results were Different.

Trudgill found out that: (A study on British English)

1. Middle-class speakers pronounced the postvocalic \(/r/\) fewer than working-class speakers.
2. Upper-middle class speakers didn’t pronounce the postvocalic \(/r/\) at all.
Social markers: Certain speech sounds that define the social group the speaker belongs to.

Examples of social markers:

1. Postvocalic /r/.
2. Pronunciation of –ing [n] (lower class) or [ng].
3. [h] dropping, associated with lower class and less education.

Example: Head as /ed/.
Speech style: A social feature of language use.

1. Formal: careful style
2. Informal use: casual style

We do not talk in one style all the time. We change our speech styles according to the social factors.

Style-shifting: A change from one style to another by an individual.

Labov also studied style-shifting: After getting an answer ‘fourth floor’, he would ask ‘excuse me?’ so that they would repeat the answer, which was pronounced with more attention to being clear.
When speakers repeated the phrase ‘fourth floor’, the frequency of postvocalic /r/ increased in all groups, especially in the Macy’s group (middle class).

In general, middle-class speakers are much more likely to shift in their style of speaking significantly in the direction of the upper middle class when they are using a careful style.
People change their styles when speaking according to the accommodation style:

**Speech Accommodation**: It is our ability to **modify** our speech style **toward** or **away from** the style of the person we are talking to.

1. **Convergence**: The use of forms that are **similar** to those of the person we are **talking to**. It attempts to **reduce** social distance.

2. **Divergence**: The use of forms that are **different** from those of the person we are **talking to**. It attempts to **increase** social distance.