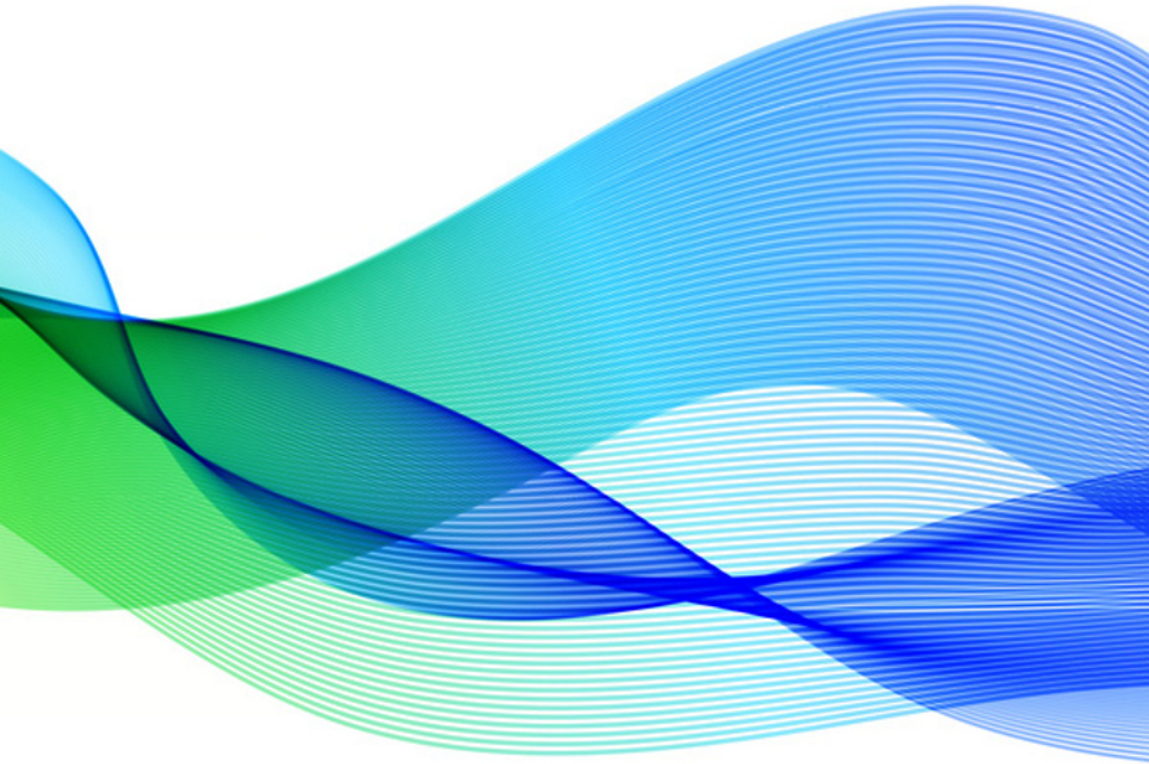
Making Waves

The Story of Variationist Sociolinguistics



Sali A. Tagliamonte

WILEY Blackwell

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Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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For
Shana Poplack
Thank you

Contents

Please visit the companion website at www.wiley.com/go/tagliamonte/makingwaves to hear sound clips of the interview quotes throughout the book.

Preface

This book recounts the history and development of a prominent area of Sociolinguistics, the area of the discipline that has come to be referred to as Variationist Sociolinguistics. How did it come to be?

In the preface of my synthesizing textbook *Variationist Sociolinguistics: Change, Observation, Interpretation* (Tagliamonte, 2012) Peter Trudgill, the General Editor of the series Language in Society, writes: "I don't know what Sali was doing in October 1972, but she was certainly not nearly old enough to be at the meeting." The meeting Peter is referring to is the first meeting of New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English, the conference that has come to be known as NWAV 1. Where was I in October 1972? I was probably visiting my grandparents in Swords, a small town in Muskoka, Ontario, Canada. It is an Alice Munro kind of place where migrants from all over the British Isles settled in the farmlands of Southern Ontario. As a child, it was my favorite place in the world and it is the place where I first realized I was a sociolinguist, although I did not know that then.

Canadian Thanksgiving takes place on the second weekend of October, around the time of the NWAV meeting, just as the leaves are in full color, yellow, orange, and red. It is a time of family gatherings and in my family there were innumerable cousins, second cousins, great aunts and uncles, and relatives aplenty. I used to eavesdrop at the Swords General Store, Post Office, and Gas Bar, listening to the peculiar ways the people coming in and out were speaking. I marveled at the way people spoke and puzzled over their expressions. I did not know that a field of intellectual inquiry was dawning that would enrich my adult life and take me down a long path of research into Language Variation and Change. The key concepts, methods, and explanations of this discipline would eventually answer many of my questions about the oddities of language I overhead at my grandparents' country store.

NWAV 1 in October 1972 was a pivotal event. It inaugurated an approach to language that focused on variation and change and set in motion waves of intense, groundbreaking research in the study of language and its relationship to society. Whose idea was it? Who was at that first meeting in October 1972? Why did it begin then?

Sociolinguistics more broadly is not much more than 50 years old itself, making it a relatively new discipline and one that has undergone a virtual revolution in the course of its short history from inception to full-blown development. Yet

most people in the world at large do not know what Sociolinguistics is and even if they do, they may have no idea how steeped in Sociolinguistics life in general happens to be. Those who notice the incredible changing kaleidoscope of language may be natural sociolinguists without even knowing it. Sociolinguistics pervades the human world. You might think, therefore, that the study of the language/society interface has a long history, but that is not the case. Sociolinguistics arose from a particular time and place and cultural climate in the United States in the post-World War II decades. Indeed, the dawn of Variationist Sociolinguistics can be pinpointed to a very specific time and place: 1969–1978. It comes down to a series of chance meetings, mutual interests and – according to many of the early researchers – serendipity. It must be said, however, that it could only have happened because a key set of individuals embraced the idea of the social life of language and its inherent variable structure and set out to study it.

I have been privileged to know many sociolinguists, professionally and often personally, over the course of my career. In the summer of 2012 as I was finishing the first draft of my book *Variationist Sociolinguistics: Change, Observation, Interpretation*, I began to fantasize about asking the most famous people in the field questions about how they had gotten into Sociolinguistics, why they had done the research they did, and how it had all happened. I thought I might ask people like Bill Labov, Peter Trudgill, Walt Wolfram, and Gillian Sankoff for their advice. Suddenly, it came to me in a flash, "I am a sociolinguist. Why don't I just interview them?" This is my usual approach to fieldwork in the communities I have studied. Why not simply apply the same method to my own intellectual community? The next question was how to begin? At the time, I had never been to Norwich, the site of the first sociolinguistic study in the United Kingdom. It was a kind of "Mecca" to me. So I wrote to Peter Trudgill, who did the original Norwich study and who lives in Norwich, and I said, "Can I come and visit you?" Peter said, "Sure." So, I booked a flight to England and went to Norwich. Peter met me on the platform at the train station. I remember the huge smile on his face as he stood there waiting for me to notice him. Peter, his wife Jean Hannah, and I spent a couple of days together wandering around the markets, pubs, and streets of Norwich. We also drank wine and did a lot of talking and reminiscing. Those few days kicked off the adventure of a lifetime.

Between September 2012 and January 2014, I sought out famous sociolinguists wherever I could find them, in the big cities of the United States (New York, Philadelphia, Portland), and Canada (Montreal, Toronto), often in places where the NWAV conferences were held. Over that period one person or another would receive an email from me entitled "A Sociolinguistic Favor" and a request for a get together. Whenever I traveled to locations around the world – England, Germany, Australia – I packed my trusty audio-recorder and lavalier microphone and employed my much beloved research tool, the "Sociolinguistic Interview." The twist from my usual research modus operandi, however, is that my teachers, mentors, colleagues, and in many cases friends – all major contributors to Variationist Sociolinguistics – were my research subjects. The series of interviews, which I will call the Corpus of Sociolinguists, comprises over 150 hours of in-depth, candid discussions (see list of interviewees in Appendix A). The story in this book touches

on the highlights that struck me as relevant, interesting, and that cohered across time. It also gives just about everyone a chance to speak.

All of the interviews bring to the fore each individual's personal narrative about their journey into Variationist Sociolinguistics, their fieldwork, research, and teaching experiences. A strong component of these conversations is also each person's philosophy of life in relationship to their discipline: facts but also experience and stories. So, this book is written as a novel interspersed with direct quotes from the interviews that are set apart from the main storyline in italics. When the quotes contain alternations between myself (i.e., *Sali*) and the sociolinguists (e.g., *Bill*), these are indicated by first names followed by a colon. The quotes in the book have been edited for readability (at everyone's express insistence) but not otherwise subjected to copy-editing; however, the audio clips found on the Wiley-Blackwell website for this book are, of course, verbatim.[1] The audio transcripts are numbered sequentially throughout the book by name of interviewee; these numbers correspond with the audio clips listed on the website.

The story of Sociolinguistics as language variation and change recounted in this book comes from the inside. I have crafted the story by weaving together the reminiscences as a rather meandering tale, but one that I hope does justice to the intellectual substance of the field. The stories and people are not fictitious. They are real. I have not used pseudonyms; I have not anonymized names or places. The people, events and places are events that happened. I feel tremendously privileged to have been given these glimpses into a field of intellectual inquiry and I have forever imprinted in my mind the cornucopia of insights from these "movers and shakers."

Scholars who teach Sociolinguistics have recently noticed that undergraduates, in particular, do not read the classic texts of the field, but instead rely on recent compilations, handbooks, and other digests of earlier material. The roots of the field and its unique inception are slipping away just when the foundations must be firm enough to support the recent, burgeoning, expansion – for some people, fragmentation – of the field. This is why I have highlighted certain discoveries and explanations straight from the proverbial "horse's mouth."

When my research for this book began, I used the word "founders" to describe my target group. I restricted myself to what I will refer to as first and second generation sociolinguists, hoping to catch the major players in the initial phase of the field. My definition of first generation comprises Labov and his contemporaries; the second generation is the first generation's students (more or less). Why did I do this? I simply had to stop somewhere.

The individuals that I deemed to be the forefathers and foremothers did not necessarily think of themselves in this way. After I contacted Walt Wolfram, he apparently said to Ralph Fasold, "You know, we were just doing our work. We weren't founding shit!" As will become apparent, people who originate ideas have no idea they are doing it when they're doing it.

Each interview was structured according to a set of four or five core questions, as in:

1 How did you get into Sociolinguistics?
2 Tell me a bit about your research on x, y, z.

3 What was it like doing fieldwork?
4 Why do you like variation?
5 What do you advise students for the future?

The comfortable social circumstances and open-ended nature of the discussions permitted considerable personal reflection. Many anecdotes and memories arose naturally from our conversations. According to best practice, I let the interviewee lead the topics of discussion wherever he or she wished, with minimal direction on my part, although I must admit to some cautious steering. This strategy has led to a singular body of materials about the dawn and development of the field.

Abraham Lincoln, well known as a magnificent speaker, refused to make public speeches unless he was given the opportunity to write them out first. He believed that people say the wrong thing when they simply extemporize. I disagree. The words and stories I recorded are so much more extraordinary than premeditated writing. They are infused with passion and the many human quirks of manner and expression that are the very fodder of the field itself.

What I am aiming to capture in this book is the essence of Variationist Sociolinguistics, to tap the socially embedded community of the field, to expose its linguistic insights but also its social motivations, perhaps even the private settings of its ideas and the meaning it holds for its practitioners.

William Labov 1
If you're dealing with the social indexical meaning of something, yes. Great quotations from people, portraits of their lives and the way in which their language distinguishes them, yes, that would be good.

Note

1. Discourse markers have been left in the quotes. Reformations, restarts, and other breaks in the phrase structure are indicated by hyphens.

1

Where It Begins

"What people thought was chaos turned out to be regular."

William Labov

William Labov stopped being an industrial chemist in 1960. He went back to school, to a graduate program in New York City at Columbia University. He was 33. Bill[1] had been working in the world of industry making dyes for a myriad of different clients. The work was laboratory based, but it also involved interacting with all kinds of people from factory workers to businessmen. Bill had a knack for listening. He discovered that you can learn a great deal about people when you notice how they talk. Indeed, he observed something quite intriguing – people sometimes speak one way and sometimes another. Even more curious is that the same person in the same conversation can pronounce a word differently from one time to the next. Often Bill is quizzically pondering why people are doing this rather than attending to what they are saying.

Language has many different parts and levels – sound, word, sentence, expression – and it all can vary. In the course of conversation one person might say, "*I came from town this morning*," whereas another might say "*I come from town this mornin*'." Now, notice the different ways of speaking. The verb *come* is pronounced as *came* one time and *come* the next. Words with final *ing* can be pronounced at the back of the mouth, *ing* or at the front of the mouth, *in*. These alternations are called *linguistic variables*. A linguistic variable in its most basic definition is two or more ways of saying the same thing (Labov, 1964: 166). Pronunciations can vary, *you say po-tay-to; I say pot-ta-to* (phonology). Words can vary, *potato*, *tatter*, *teeter*, *tatti* (lexis). Parts of words can vary, *I say; I says* (morphology). Word order can vary, *I do not know; I know not* (syntax). Even the funny little words that most people think don't mean anything vary, *you know*, *well*, *gosh*, *by golly*, and stuff like that. In Variationist Sociolinguistics (VSLX) all this difference is called "inherent variation" because it is an alternation of different forms (variation) and yet it is a core attribute of language (inherent).

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Bill sets out to explore this problem – why do people sometimes say one thing and sometimes say another? As it will soon become apparent, such people have odd antennae for language.

Martha's Vineyard – 1960

There is an island off the northeastern coast of the United States called Martha's Vineyard. It is a place of rugged shores, sandy beaches, and lighthouses. Fishermen have been going out to sea from the many marinas on the island for hundreds of years. People from the mainland go to enjoy the sun and sand. When visiting, Bill notices the same phenomena he was surrounded with at work. The islanders pronounced certain words a little different than other people. Words like *mice* and *mouse* rhyme with *price* and *house* but sometimes they can sound quite different. People hear these alternative pronunciations as a "twang" or an "accent." Some islanders use the strange pronunciations and others do not and sometimes even the same person varies from one pronunciation to another. Bill wonders, "Why?"

Bill also notices that people talk in very different ways from one situation to the next. When they talk about their life experiences, their childhood, and the stories from their experience, their voices change a lot. To Bill it seems that their words shine with the expression of their innermost selves. He calls this instinctual type of language the *vernacular*, the style in which minimum attention is paid to speech (Labov, 1972b: 108). Bill decides to go to Martha's Vineyard to tap into the everyday talk of the island. In so doing, he will find out about the place and its language. He talks with many people born and raised on the island, the locals. Bill has a flair for talking to people with straightforward interest and honest enthusiasm. "Hi, my name is Bill Labov. I'm from New Jersey, I'm interested in what life is like around here."

In the course of conversation, the people Bill talks to discover an opportunity for reflection. Opinions, ideas, and memories spill out cathartically and often poignantly. In the sounds of the vowels in words such as *right*, *about*, *now*, Bill discovers a striking array of alternations. Some of the people use a particular sound a lot and others use it only a little. Sometimes one of the sounds appears to go with age and sometimes it seems to go with the area of the island and sometimes it goes with occupation. Fishermen speak differently than shopkeepers and young people yearning for the mainland sound more like the mainlanders than the Vineyard fisherman. Bill wants to make sense of it all. With his science background, he is used to counting and figuring and tallying things up. So, he applies the same method. How many times did one sound occur; how many times the other, and under what circumstances? This is what has come to be referred to as the *Principle of Accountability* (Labov, 1966: 49; 1969a: 737–738, n. 20; 1972b: 72), the tenet that dictates that all the relevant forms, not simply the variant of interest, must be included in an analysis. Then, how many times for fishermen compared to how many times for storekeepers? Bill's ability to quantify who said what, in the precise circumstance in which it was said, leads him to an astounding discovery. The more people identify with the island, the more they want to stay on the island, to work and live and make their way in the world on the island, the more they use certain pronunciations – traditional, older pronunciations. It is a relative thing, not absolute. Everyone on the island uses the same sounds, but they use

them to different degrees. The mainlanders, however, do not make these sounds. The whole system is a dynamic with an intricate underlying orderliness.

Bill had tapped a pattern that has now been found in hundreds of other places since. People in small rural communities under pressure from metropolitan regions tend to use traditional pronunciations, expressions, words, and ways of speaking as a symbol of their local identity. The Vineyarders loyal to the island were subconsciously using the sounds that link them, linguistically, to the island.

The results of Bill's Martha's Vineyard study were published in *Word* (Labov, 1963), an academic journal, but one that reaches across a broad range of disciplines and professions. Libraries around the world carry this journal. Far away in the north of Wales in the small town of Bangor, Ron Macaulay is spending a year away at a British University. The Linguistics Department has a small library. Ron likes to go in and sit and read things that he comes across on the shelves. He reads everything that interests him. One day he finds the issue of *Word* with Bill's Martha's Vineyard paper.

Ronald Macaulay 1
This is the first time that anybody had ever made any sense about the relationship between the way people spoke and what they thought or believed and everything else. So, I mean this was a total revelation for me and I knew this is what I wanted to do from that moment on.

Little did Bill know that many people around the world would start having similar revelations. Meantime, Bill had set his sights on another community.

New York City – 1963

Bill grew up in a small town in New Jersey, far enough away from New York City so that he could always view it from a distance. At the time, people in New York were widely thought to speak in a chaotic and unpredictable way. New Yorkers themselves were so convinced of this they had developed an extreme dislike for their own speech. In fact, when trying to speak properly, they attempted to sound like they were *not* from New York. Bill wanted to study this situation and understand it.

One of the conspicuous features of New York City speech is the use of the sound *r* in words where it is in the middle or at the end. The traditional way of speaking in New York does not pronounce these *r*s. People say *pahk the cah* for *park the car*. However, this way of speaking is not highly regarded. When New Yorkers want to sound posh they pronounce more *r*. Bill devises a clever plan to find out how this happens. There are at least three types of department stores in New York City. Each one caters to a distinct social group. Saks is upper-class, Macy's is middle-class, and S. Klein is lower-class. Bill goes to each store and asks employees for the location of shoes, furniture, or appliances – whatever items are found on the fourth floor. "*Where can I find shoes?*" "*They're on the fourth floor*." In the words *fourth floor* are two possible instances of *r*. Each time Bill pretends not to hear what the employee says and asks the question again. The employee must repeat him- or herself. He records what is said both times. Is there an *r* in *fourth*; is there an *r* in *floor*? And what happens when the person repeats? Bill is careful to ask all types of employees

in each store, managers, salespeople, and shelf-stackers. Then he goes back to his office and counts all the *r*s and absence of *r*s. He discovers that the use of *r* correlates with the type of store. More *r*s in Saks, less in Macy's, even less in Klein's. Moreover, use of *r* correlates with the different responses. More *r* when the employee repeats the answer. But that's not all. Use of *r* also correlates with the rank of the employee. Managers used the most *r*, shelf-stackers the least. It is all highly ordered according to store, style, and job type.

The next step is to go out into the streets of New York City to find out what is happening in the city as a whole. Bill wonders how to circumvent the problem of people wanting to sound different to how they normally would sound. He remembers the vibrant stories he heard in Martha's Vineyard. What better way to get people to forget their linguistic inhibitions than to get them to tell stories? Deeply embroiled in the retelling of an emotional experience, a person no longer pays attention to how he or she is speaking. Authentic expression spills out just like water held back by a dam rushes forward when the gates are let loose.

In the summer of 1963 in New York City, Bill walked around the Lower East Side knocking on doors and talking to people and asking them questions that would invoke stories. One of the best questions for doing this was: "*Have you ever been in a situation where you thought you were going to die?*" The answers to this question lead to gripping stories of personal experience. You can read about some of them in Bill's latest book, *The Language of Life and Death* (Labov, 2013). Another favorite interview question was "*Did you ever get blamed for something you never did?*" How many people have not been blamed for something they never did?

Bill discovered that individuals shifted from less *r*s to more *r*s as they paid more attention to how they were speaking. People from all walks of life did this, men and women, working class and middle class. Indeed, this behavior of shifting the frequency of pronouncing *r* united the city as a whole. Everyone used far less *r* when they told stories.

It was natural to Bill to try to make sense of all these patterns by using quantitative techniques. As a scientist he knew the best way to figure out how something works is to measure what happens and record what makes a difference. When all those *r*s were tallied up and attributes such as social class, age, sex, and formality of the context were taken into account, he discovered a complex and systematic pattern. As the topic of conversation shifted from story-telling to discussions of opinion and politics, *r* became more frequent. Further, the more people used language in their jobs, the more they used *r* as well. The patterns of language use became comprehensible when the social and stylistic components of individuals and context were taken into account. This led to the discovery that the language of New York City was not chaos at all, but neatly organized. Bill called it *orderly heterogeneity* – order but variation, difference but regularity (Labov, 1982: 17). This is the beginning, Bill putting together his inherent scientific nature with the ability to talk to people and discovering that language has this hidden organization. He illustrated all these patterns using measurements and calculations plotted in graphs in his book *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Labov, 1972b). Through the pages in the book you see Figures with social attributes like style of speech, social class, age, and sex on the x or y axes, often with arching lines at regular intervals. The way language works in the speech community becomes visible as layers operating regularly across social dimensions. Figure 1 provides a stylized example of

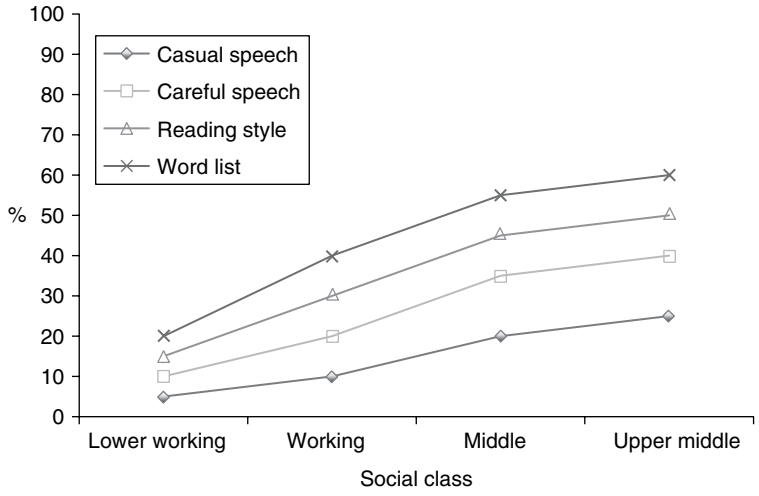

Figure 1 Regularity of sociolinguistic patterns at the community level – stylized.

a linguistic variable that is layered by social class and style. Images such as these captured the imagination of the next generation.

Suppose the graph displays the proportion of *r* pronunciations, *car* vs. *cah*. It shows how *r*-full variants become more frequent as the speech style becomes more formal. When reading a text or list of words people pronounce more *r* than in conversation. Further, every social class shifts the use of *r* in the same way, demonstrating how each one has its own strata in the community. The community is variable, but look at the regularity in it. This is what Bill means by social stratification.

J. K. Chambers 1
Bill Labov didn't realize what a revolutionary move he made when he did that Martha's Vineyard analysis and then the broader analysis in New York City that he was in fact making a move that completely revolutionized any kind of linguistic study that had ever been made before with a few individual exceptions. But he founded a school of linguistic thought that was totally different from anything that had ever gone before. I've written about that lots of times that the social uses of language were simply not considered until – like not considered by a large group – until he came along and did stuff in 1963.

York, England – 1963

At about the same time in England the University of York was being set up with a mandate to innovate, offer a creative perspective, and achieve high standards of excellence. The university administration recruited a man named Robert B. Le Page to head up the new Department of Language and Linguistic Science.

Bob had been trained at Oxford with a specialty in Anglo-Saxon poetry at a time when J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis were lecturing on *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and many other poems. Bob was influenced by Tolkien, in particular by his fascination with legendary tales, but also because Tolkien had

irresistible enthusiasm for his subject (Le Page, 2015: 14). When Bob graduated in 1950, he got a job at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. But Jamaica was not ideally suited to Anglo-Saxon poetry, so Bob needed another research topic. Bob says, "I became increasingly intrigued by the fact that I could understand hardly a word most of the working-class Jamaicans said to each other on the street or in the market" (Le Page, 2015: 97). He was soon attracted into the world of story-telling and language variation.

Fred Cassidy arrived in Jamaica in 1951 on a Fulbright Fellowship. Fred had lived in Jamaica until the age of 11 but had moved to the United States and gone on to become an English professor at the University of Wisconsin. At the time he was already a leading member of the American Dialect Society, an organization dedicated to the study of dialects.[2] Fred was in the process of setting up a project to collect Jamaican dialect words across the social spectrum and wanted a collegial collaborator. Bob didn't know anything about how to study language systematically, but Fred did and he taught Bob all he knew. Soon Fred and Bob were off on a trip to one of the most inaccessible parts of Jamaica.

> Fred suggested we make a trip together to visit the Maroons in Accompong. There was an old storyteller in the village. The next morning he and I sat under a tree with the tape-recorder and a bottle of rum between us and I recorded some of the Old Witch and Anansi stories he would have told at such celebrations. It was a revelation to me – my first encounter with a genuine oral tradition. I was hooked. (Le Page 2015: 96)

Bob discovered that people like to tell stories and he enjoys listening to them. Bob and his students get involved in the project and go on to collect stories and dialect words from all over Jamaica. He and Fred had many adventures together and together they compiled the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cassidy & Le Page, 1980). This work was considered to have great distinction and perhaps was one of the reasons that Bob was recruited back to England, to the new university in York. He offered York a balance between tradition and innovation.

At the University of York, Bob is charged with setting up a new department of Linguistics, which he designs on a model of multiple languages with two people in each. His idea is that researchers will talk to each other about the social aspects of language (Sociolinguistics) and the structural aspects of language (syntax) or the pronunciation aspects (phonology) across these languages. The underlying framework is oriented toward the sociology of language as outlined in Bob's book *Acts of Identity* (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). In it, Bob and his coauthor Andrée Tabouret-Keller attempt to put forth a general theory of language that is based on the relationship between what people actually say and what motivates their ways of speaking. Before too long York becomes one of the top universities for Sociolinguistics in the United Kingdom.

William Bright's Conference – 1964

Back in the United States, things were brewing in California. Due to the rising interest in the social aspects of language, William Bright organized a conference focused on this topic at Lake Arrowhead, near Los Angeles in 1964. At the time,

there are several prominent American scholars laying the foundations of the study of language in relation to society, including Charles Ferguson, Joshua Fishman, John Gumperz, and Dell Hymes. They are all invited. So is Bill Labov. Students already exposed to the Martha's Vineyard and New York City study anxiously seek Bill out. Among the students attracted to the conference is Ron Macaulay who has just returned to California from his sojourn in Wales.

Bill presented some new research arising from his New York City study. He describes how members of the lower middle class actually use prestige features more than the middle class. He argues that this is due to the desire of the lower middle class for upward mobility. It is a linguistic push for higher status. He calls this phenomenon *hypercorrection*. A more down to earth way of describing this is the axiom "when you're second best you try harder." In his conference presentation he speculates that this tendency will lead to language change. His paper is called "Hypercorrection by the lower middle class as a factor in linguistic change." The conference proceedings are published in an edited volume (Bright, 1966). The book is titled *Sociolinguistics*. It is one of the first times the word has been used in a publication.[3] Naming a thing has a certain power, almost like calling it into being.

This edited volume ends up in a bookstore in Cambridge, England where a student at Cambridge University named Peter Trudgill is studying with John Lyons. He is a left-wing young man wanting to make the world a better place. Peter happens to be in the bookstore one day and he looks down and sees the word *Sociolinguistics* and it intrigues him. He buys the book and finds a lot of things of interest, but he is especially intrigued by a paper written by a man named Bill Labov.

Peter Trudgill 1
But I was really excited by Bill's article. I thought, "Now that's what I want to do. I would like to do that."

In the traditional British university system, students write essays every couple of weeks on something of interest to them. Peter decides he will write on the topic of the new field of Sociolinguistics he has just discovered. Peter had grown up in Norwich in East Anglia surrounded by the abounding accents of his family and friends. He understood much of what Bill was talking about from personal experience. When Peter got his essay back from John Lyons, John had written, "This is very good. I think you should continue this."

The LSA Summer Institute – 1964

Henrietta Cedergren 1
What can I say, 1964 was an interesting year. Sali: Interesting year! Henrietta: Exactly.

The bus trip from Montreal, Canada to Bloomington, Indiana takes 25 hours. Gillian Sankoff was watching the miles pass away and thinking about the LSA Summer Institute. She is very excited. She has always been interested in languages. As an undergraduate she took Arabic, Greek, Latin, French and had ended up with a degree in Anthropology. She wants to combine her two prevailing interests and do Linguistic

Anthropology. Unfortunately, there is very little Linguistics going on in Montreal. Gillian has taken every Linguistics course she can, but it has all been descriptive and structural. The LSA Summer Institute that year is focused on a new discipline in Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, and there is going to be a special seminar, which will be attended by Bill Labov. Gillian is intent on participating in the seminar but when she arrives at the institute she discovers that it is a closed meeting. No students can attend; it is meant only for faculty. If that wasn't bad enough, the professor of the field methods course she had dreamed of taking only wants students who have had experience in the field. In retrospect this is kind of funny. Not much more than a year later, Gillian will write an enormous annotated bibliography on fieldwork methods and go on to innovate in fieldwork well beyond many researchers in the field. But at the time, she is devastated. What use will it be to be surrounded by sociolinguists and experts in fieldwork if she can't get at them? All her plans seemed scuppered. But during that summer institute Gillian meets a lot of people, some she will be friends with for the rest of her life, among them Henrietta Cedergren.

Detroit

Roger Shuy completed his PhD dissertation while working on the Illinois Atlas Project under the direction of Raven McDavid. He was also teaching at Wheaton, a Christian College in Wheaton, Illinois near Chicago. In his classes are two smart young students, Walt Wolfram and Ralph Fasold. When Roger finishes his PhD in 1961 he gets job offers from Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan State. He chooses Michigan State because it is a university on its way up.

In 1964, he decides to go to the LSA Summer Institute in Bloomington. As a faculty member, he is able to attend Bill's seminar and it exposes him to a whole new approach to language and society called Sociolinguistics. Having spent many years interviewing elderly farmers in Illinois about words, the new approach fires him up. It involves far more than simply finding out whether people said *skillet* vs. *frying pan*. It probes whole systems of language and their evolving mechanisms.

Roger Shuy 1
I was all full of the notion of Socio, so I taught a course in Socio. I had no idea what I was teaching but I picked up what I learned from the summer and called it a course.

Then, Roger decides, "I want to do the same kind of study as Labov did in New York City." Roger invites Bill to come to Michigan to help him design a project to study Detroit. When Bill arrives, Roger has to buy him clothes that are appropriate for the target neighborhood. Then they go off to Detroit and Bill does some interviews. Roger and his team observe. Then, Roger applies to the US Office of Education for a grant. The study will use Bill's methods and techniques. A former classmate of Roger's, Jim Alatis, is working at the Office of Education as a program officer and he helps Roger write the proposal. In due course, Roger is awarded the funding.

The Detroit project is huge. There are ten interviewers living in a hotel in Detroit. Roger's wife is doing the coordinating. It's a quagmire of people coming and going. Each day the fieldworkers go out and do three or four interviews. One of the main

fieldworkers is Walt Wolfram. At the end of each week all the fieldworkers must transcribe phonetically a list of words that they have had each person read aloud during the interview. The words tap various sounds that are undergoing change in the local community. All told, they conduct 700 interviews from people of all ethnicities, working-class and middle-class, Catholic and Protestant. It is perhaps the largest sociolinguistic study in the history of the field.

Walt Wolfram considers himself to be an accidental linguist. In high school he was a jock. When he went to university he had every intention of being a missionary. But in his Linguistics classes he discovers something else he is very good at. Then, there is a special professor, Roger Shuy. Roger isn't like other professors. He has energy; he has zeal. He invites students to his house and they all talk about Sociolinguistics. Walt and Roger become good friends. Walt even spends a lot of time baby-sitting Roger's kids. He keeps on working on a PhD at Hartford Seminary Foundation with Henry Gleason and Bill Samarin. When Roger starts the Detroit Project, he hires Walt as a fieldworker. The Detroit data are coming in with wonderful linguistic phenomena and there is a ton of it and Walt still has no dissertation topic. Roger says, "Walt, there's a great dissertation topic here. You want to work on this?" So, Walt starts to work on the Detroit data for his dissertation. It becomes *Detroit Negro Speech* (Wolfram, 1969). In it he demonstrates how social and linguistic variables combine to account for systematic variation in African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Meantime Ralph Fasold is finishing his undergraduate degree and figures he'll go back home and become a German teacher. Roger gets to him first. Roger says, "Where are you going to go to grad school?" Ralph says, "What? Go to grad school?" Roger says, "Ralph, you're excellent. You should go to grad school in Linguistics." Roger contacts Eric Hamp at the University of Chicago Linguistics Department. At that time, students can get scholarships that will pay their way through graduate school. Roger insists that Ralph submit an application and Ralph gets accepted to do a PhD in Chicago.

Meanwhile at Michigan State University the ideas of Bill Labov and John Gumperz are swirling around in Roger's mind. He beings to construct what he thinks a university program in Sociolinguistics should be like. Then he tries to set up a Sociolinguistics program, but the faculty are not interested. Not too long after, Roger gets another chance.

Roger Shuy 2
Sali: Now can I just stop you there, what made you think that Sociolinguistics was a good thing? Roger: Ah, because it was, I think related to my … altruism, concern for people who were downtrodden. These farmers in Illinois were not downtrodden, you know. But boy, when I heard Bill talk about inner city New York, I said, "That's what I need to do."

Washington

In the 1960s, the Ford Foundation was funding projects all over the world to study little-known languages. One of the projects is in Washington, DC and the object of study is AAVE. Joey Dillard was the original head of the project and Bill Stewart worked on it too.[4] The project is based in a yellow house in an African American