

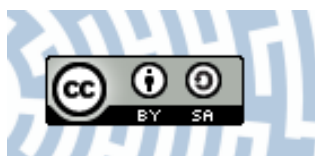


You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: Regional, social, and stylistic variation in American English pronunciation

Author: Adam Pluszczyk

Citation style: Pluszczyk Adam. (2018). Regional, social, and stylistic variation in American English pronunciation. W: I. Kida (red.), "Historical issues in Hamito-Semitic and Indo-European languages" (s. 57-72). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Uznanie autorstwa - Na tych samych warunkach - Licencja ta pozwala na kopiowanie, zmienianie, rozprowadzanie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu tak długo, jak tylko na utwory zależne będzie udzielana taka sama licencja.



UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Regional, social, and stylistic variation in American English pronunciation*

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present variation in American English pronunciation with respect to such factors as region, sex, age, social status, style, and context. We will select a few variables and analyze them in terms of their possible realizations – so called variants or candidates. With regard to the occurrence of variant realizations of a particular variable, it is crucial to stress that our analysis is not solely linguistically-conditioned since it also encompasses social and contextual factors which definitely contribute to the variation. The analysis from the purely linguistic point of view would be either erroneous or at least incomplete and thus unreliable. Therefore, the variation will be analyzed linguistically, socially, and contextually. We will observe the occurrence of at least two (or more) variants of particular variables (linguistically) and analyze their evaluation as prestigious or substandard (socially, contextually). In other words, we will indicate that with the emergence of the variants, one cannot avoid making judgments about the alleged betterness or worseness of either of them.

Keywords: regional and social dialects, variation, variety, pronunciation, American English

1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that there are a number of variations within a given dialect or variety. Whereas a *variety* is a broader linguistic term which pertains to any form of a language used by a group of speakers in a specific field, including variation in register and style, a *dialect* is a neutral label and refers to differences in lexicon, grammar, and pronunciation, and is associated with social groups. It is a variety of a language distinguished by its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation typical of a particular group of people living in a particular area at a particular time. It is also necessary to introduce the term *accent* which

* The Polish version of this article has been published as Pluszczyk (2013).

solely encompasses differences in pronunciation as opposed to a *dialect* which is different to another dialect with respect to not only phonology (pronunciation, the sound system of a language), but also grammar (morphology and syntax) and lexicon (vocabulary, the words of a language). There are distinctive features which are characteristic of a particular region or area of a country and which we are sometimes well aware of. The United States is such a vast country that due to its enormous size and a number of people, it seems that we should expect a number of dialects or varieties. Due to the enormous size of the area, pronunciation features are much more observable and identifiable in many parts of the United States. Surprisingly, the size of the country does not determine the multitude of the dialects whatsoever. As a result, the premise that the larger the area, the more dialects is not always justified since “people in various parts of the United States do not all speak alike, but there is greater uniformity here than in England or in the countries of Western Europe, and this makes the collection of a trustworthy body information upon the regional variations in American English a somewhat difficult and delicate matter” (Marckwardt 1958: 132).

2. Types of dialects

There are several types of dialects to be distinguished. The most classic, traditional, and most common type of dialect is a *regional dialect*. A regional dialect refers to the variation in language which can be encountered in a particular language area or region. There are also other synonymous terms which can be used interchangeably – such as *geographical*, *territorial* or *local dialects* (Crystal 1996). It should be stressed that the term “regional dialect” is solely geographically oriented since no other dimensions are taken into consideration.

Another type of dialect is a *social dialect*. It is worth mentioning that the emergence of social dialects does not have such a long tradition as regional dialects, which were being investigated earlier. “The concentrated study of ethnic and social dialects is more recent than that of regional ones, but is now being vigorously pursued” (Pyles and Algeo 1993: 230). This type of dialect emerges among various social groups (socially-demarcated societies) in association with a number of other essential factors, such as style, social status, ethnicity (Lyons 1995). A social dialect is also referred to as a *class dialect* or a *sociolect*, which is a recent term (Crystal 1997).

There are also other types of dialects. They are called *historical* or *temporal dialects* which pertain to a particular period in history, such as Shakespearian English, American English speech in the nineteenth century, Philadelphian speech or New York English at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Apart from that, we also distinguish *occupational dialects* which is typical of a particular professional group, such as physicians, teachers, journalists, etc.

(Crystal 1996). They are also referred to as a *jargon*. Occupational dialects are characterized by distinctive features typical of a particular occupational group, especially pertaining to lexical differences and peculiarities.

Finally, ethnicity also gives rise to the occurrence of *ethnic dialect*. “In addition, certain ethnic dialects can be distinguished, such as the form of English, sometimes referred to as Yiddish English historically associated with speakers of Eastern European Jewish ancestry” (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish 1997: 260).

It is crucial to stress that when analyzing speech variations, one should take regional, social, and contextual factors into consideration. Only then is it possible to give a complete, reliable, and exhaustive account of the linguistic data which occur at a particular period of time, in a particular area and among the speakers living in that area. “It is important to note that dialects are never purely regional, or purely social, or purely ethnic... regional, social, and ethnic factors combine and intersect in various ways in the identification of dialects” (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish 1997: 260). Thus, regional, social, and contextual factors contribute to the formation of particular dialects.

3. Speech variation, variability

When investigating variation in speech, there are usually at least two (or more) alternative articulations/variants of a given sound. Phonetic variation is observable in a number of contexts. For instance, the words *pot* /pɒt/ or /pɑ:t/, *pat* /pɑt/, *peat* /pi:t/, *pet* /pet/, etc. are distinguished by the distinctive phonemes in medial position, such as /ɑ:, æ, i:, e/ respectively. Similarly, the words *seat*, *feat*, *meat*, *heat*, *beat*, *cheat*, etc. are distinguished by the different phonemes in the initial position, which are the following: /s, f, m, h, b, tʃ/.

Another kind of variation can be analyzed at the allophonic level, that is, allophonically. In this case, we do not talk about distinctive phonemes – phonemes which are different from each other. In this respect, we concentrate on alternative realizations of one particular phoneme – so called *allophones*. When describing allophones, we usually take phonetic environment (phonetic context) into consideration since it usually determines the realization of a particular phoneme and thus gives rise to the formation of other variants – that is, other identifiable realizations – in other words, other allophones. Fromkin (2000: 523) stresses, “virtually all the phonemes in English show phonetic variation, depending on their context.”

Moreover, we also distinguish allophones due to the very variability of particular phonemes. The phenomenon is called *free variation*. Different speaking styles in various circumstances contribute to the occurrence of free variation where one distinguishes more identifiable variants of a phoneme.

Admittedly, there are a number of factors which affect our speech. As we can observe, free variation is not so free at times since it is correlated with regional, stylistic, contextual factors, which indicates that it is not totally independent. “The choice of the allophone is not random or haphazard; it is rule-governed. No one is explicitly taught these rules. They are learned subconsciously when the native language is acquired. Language acquisition, to a certain extent, is rule construction” (Fromkin and Rodman 1999: 260).

A *linguistic variable* is a linguistic term used to define a particular linguistic element or unit which comprises identifiable variants. We can distinguish the following types of linguistic variables; phonetic, phonological, grammatical (morphological and syntactic variables), lexical (or semantic). It should also be stressed that there are phonetic environments which favor or facilitate the amount of variability (*phonetic context* or *context sensitivity*).

Speech variables which are subject for variation are so ubiquitous that it gave rise to the formation of Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky, in Hammond 1999). It is based on the premise that there are usually at least two (or in some cases even more) identifiable variants of a particular variable. Moreover, to avoid confusion, it would be reasonable to introduce other equivalent terms referring to the *variable* and its *variants*. Hammond (1999: 13) introduces other terms which are useful in the distinction of the two confusing terms. According to Hammond (1999: 13), the term variable can be referred to as the “input” and its alternate realizations or variants are called its “candidates.” For instance, the /t/ sound which occurs in intervocalic position, as in *cutter* /'kʌtər/, *better* /'betər/, *litter* /'lɪtər/, *potter* /'pɔ:tər/, *water* /'wɔ:tər/ is an input which has its candidates: the first candidate constitutes the voiceless /t/, other candidates might be rendered as a voiced sound, half-voiced, flapped or tapped /t/, especially in casual, unmonitored speech. “In addition there is a very prevalent tendency to voice intervocalic voiceless consonants, especially -t-, when not protected by accent. The result is not a fully voiced consonant but what may be called a half-voiced...” (Schlauch 1959: 191). Similarly, there is another example of the input – the diphthong /aɪ/ which has got two identifiable variants – candidates. The first one is its standard pronunciation and the other one is a monophthongal variant /a/, which is typical of Black English dialects and dialects spoken in southern parts of the United States. Trudgill and Hannah (1994: 44), the monophthongal articulation of the variable /aɪ/ is restricted to some southern states and used only in word final positions or when preceding voiced consonants, as in *cry* /kra/, *try* /tra/ (word-finally), *contrive* /kə'ntrɪv/, *benign* /bɪ'nɪn/ – before voiced consonants.

It might contribute to labeling some variants as prestigious and others as non-prestigious or substandard. However, it is necessary to stress that the value which is given to a particular variable and its variants is associated with social factors since from a linguistic point of view, “...there is nothing inherently su-

perior in the linguistic structure of Standard English compared to non-standard varieties” (Benwell and Stokoe 2005). Hence, linguistically, all features as well as dialects are equal. However, socially, varieties undergo constant evaluation.

Apart from the purely linguistic variables (which have their own variants), there are also *extra-linguistic variables* which influence our speech. Whenever we analyze linguistic variability, we also encompass social factors. We take a number of factors into consideration, such as social position of a speaker, education, gender, age, the style of speech (formal and informal).

All the abovementioned *linguistic variables* are also referred to as *dependent variables*. However, we also distinguish *independent variables*, which are called *social variables*. Whereas the former constitutes purely *linguistic elements*, the latter pertains to *social or extra-linguistic factors*, such as social class, level of education, etc., but also geographical location, length of residence. Both of them interact with each other in the process of linguistic variation or differentiation. Thus, the purpose of sociolinguistics is to measure correlation or relationships between both linguistic and social variables – or in other words dependent and independent variables (Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 130).

In order to fully understand the variability of the speech patterns in American English speech, it is necessary to encompass all the factors which contribute to linguistic variation, such as *region, age, sex, social status, stylistic variation, ethnicity*, and also *individual characteristics*. We will give a short account of the abovementioned independent variables by giving a short description of each of them and at the same time exemplifying the differences in speech on the basis of selected variables and their possible variants with respect to those extra-linguistic factors.

a) Region

Region or the area of living is one of the most significant factors which contributes to variation. There are many linguistic features which vary regionally, spatially or geographically. Some features are easy to be distinguished, others require us to possess a deeper expertise in order to be noticed. Unavoidably, there are social factors which contribute to the differentiation in speech even within a small speech community. Nevertheless, from a purely regional point of view, the differences, especially in the phonological system are easily observable in American speech. Regardless of their own features and even peculiarities, they do not impede mutual comprehension. It appears that regional differences and peculiarities are of minor importance; what is considerably crucial in this respect is the social status, educational level etc. (Honey 1991: 71).

For instance, the preservation of a rounded vowel /ɒ/ as in *rod, pot, cod, lot, problem* etc. as opposed to the /ɑ:/ sound (Millward 1988) is typical of New England, as in /rɒd/ or /rɑ:d/, /pɒt/ or /pɑ:t/, /kɒd/ or /kɑ:d/ etc. Similarly, the broad /ɑ:/ as opposed to the flat /æ/, as in *laughter* /'lɑ:ftər/ or /'læftər/, *half*

/hɑ:f/ or /hæf/, *after* /'ɑ:ftər/ or /'æftər/, *dance* /dɑ:ns/ or /dæns/, *bath* /bɑ:θ/ or /bæθ/ is definitely preferable and still retained in New England varieties although in some areas the feature has been becoming recessive for quite a long time. According to Mencken (1990: 110), "One of the most strange facts unearthed has been noted already – that the broad *a* of the Boston area seems to be gradually succumbing to the flat *a* of General American..." Additionally, the monophthongization of /aɪ/ before voiced consonants and word-finally is a feature typical of southern varieties of American English. For instance, *stride*, *strive*, *ride*, *deride*, *pride* (consonant voicing) or *high*, *lie*, *buy*, *try*, *die* (word-finally). Finally, non-rhoticity, which is typical of southern dialects (most southern regions are enormously non-rhotic), is another example of how a certain pronunciation feature is associated with a particular region.

b) Age

Age is another variable affecting variation in speech. More precisely, people of different generations are expected to show some variation in speech. Hence, there is not much speech variation among people whose ages are similar – at least when we take this factor into consideration.

According to Wolfram and Fasold (1974: 89), there are two parameters in terms of which we should analyze the impact of the variable of age. The first one is referred to as *generation differences*; the other one pertains to *age grading*. As far as generation differences are concerned, they can also refer to *pronunciation*. Regarding generation differences, we usually expect to observe linguistic variation among the speakers representing different generations (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 89).

It will probably be much easier to identify variation or pronunciation differences when comparing the speech of the speakers whose ages are very different. Hence we should expect linguistic variation to occur in the speech of an adolescent and a middle-aged person rather than in the speech of a 10-year-old and an adolescent (solely taking this factor into account). For instance, the speech of very young children is unique since one of the most peculiar phonological features is reducing consonant clusters, twisting particular sounds, especially consonants which sometimes impede our comprehension.

Once the children grow old and become more mature, their sloppy speech slowly disappears. Even though middle-aged speakers can also be characterized by sloppy speech, it is usually attributed to the speech-style rather than the inadequacy to speak appropriately. Unavoidably, it is not difficult to find a middle-aged person who talks sloppily and does not pay much attention to how he/she talks but to what he/she says.

As far as age-grading is concerned, it usually refers to *vocabulary* and *grammar*. Especially teenagers and adolescents are very prolific in coming up with a number of slang phrases due to their imagination, innovation, and creativity.

Inarguably, people at this age show enormous suggestibility, impressionability to others; their openness to their peers' influences is really noticeable and, at the same time, unavoidable.

Grammatically and phonologically, there occurs systematic and regular affiliation among the adolescent speakers, in which case stigmatization of particular linguistic variables prevails, which is often the result of incredible peer pressure and the desire not to "stand out" but stick to others.

The speech of mainly grown-up people, especially middle aged people, is likely to undergo a number of modifications. More precisely, middle aged people are not only prone, but also feel obliged to speak more correctly or prestigiously, which is mainly ascribed to the pressures of society. There are a number of circumstances which require us to monitor our speech to avoid embarrassment and confusion. The situation changes again in due course since the older we are, the less prestigious our speech becomes again because we do not pay so much attention to the way we talk, even in circumstances which demand appropriate or monitored speech. "Vernacular usage gradually increases again in old age as social pressures reduce, with people moving out of the workforce and into a more relaxed phase of their lives" (Holmes 2001: 168).

It is inevitable that the higher the class is, the more prestigious or the less vernacular our speech patterns are. In other words, once we communicate with higher class people, our speech will not be characterized by many stigmatized forms. Similarly, the style of speech is also a crucial factor in determining whether we use stigmatized or non-stigmatized variants, regardless of the age. Although stylistic variation is crucial as well, it is not always ubiquitous or observable. A very young child is not expected to show awareness of the necessity of modifying speech just because a particular situation requires to do so. It is assumed that stylistic variation becomes fixed at a certain point, not at the onset of growing up. Admittedly, it would be ridiculous to expect children to modify their speech in order to sound appropriate.

c) Gender

Sex is another extra-linguistic variable which can also contribute to linguistic variation, primarily *lexicon*, *grammar*, and *phonology* as well. It is inevitably one of the most influential factors contributing to the speech patterns. According to Montgomery (1995: 152), "Gender is now generally recognized as the most widely salient dimension of social difference, and has become the focus for a great deal of recent discussion within sociolinguistics as a result of the burgeoning of feminists' scholarship." In most cultures, linguistic variation is attributed to sex or gender. However, its influence is dependent on the culture, which indicates that there are cultures in which the contribution of sex is barely identifiable in linguistic variation, but in others it is undoubtedly very potent and impossible to be ignored. It should be pointed out that in our culture

the differences in the speech between the women and men are subtle. In other words, phonologically, huge or noticeable differences in the realization of particular variables should not be expected. Nor are the grammatical discrepancies expected to be encountered. Nevertheless, sex is also one of the most important variables (social variables, independent variables) which in association with a number of other variables can be quite influential as well.

Holmes (2001: 153) admits that “[...] women and men do not use completely different forms [...] Both the social and the linguistic patterns in these communities are gender-preferential (rather than gender-exclusive). Though both women and men use particular forms, one gender shows a greater preference for them than the other.”

Nevertheless, there can be linguistic variation in *lexicon/vocabulary* and grammar, which is attributed to gender. Potential differences in vocabulary which can be encountered are mainly the result of areas of interest, occupations, activities (Shuy 1967: 15).

Grammatically, women have the tendency to use stigmatized variants less frequently, which was indicated in some linguistic experiments. Nevertheless, the differences in grammar are not so ubiquitous as the differences in pronunciation. It is more plausible to identify pronunciation differences between men’s and women’s speech than in their application of grammatical forms (Smith 1979: 110).

There are a number of variables the realization of which is rendered differently in the speech of both men and women. The variable /ɪŋ/ also varies with regard to sex (but also social class), which was shown in another experiment conducted in Norwich by Trudgill (Trudgill 1974), who was also trying to identify the differences in the language with respect to both social stratification and style of speech. According to Figure 1, we can clearly observe that the more standard /ɪŋ/ variant is typical of the women’s speech, whereas the less standard variant /ɪn/ is preferable among all of the speakers.

Similarly, the dental fricative variable /θ/ is much more preferable among the speech of females than males, who tend to realize the variable as labio-dental fricative /f/ or alveolar plosive /t/. Similarly, there are a number of areas where the differences in speech between both men and women are much more recognizable. In other words, it is much less cumbersome to identify the potential speech differences in the speech of males and females. Fortunately, the people living in these areas are cognizant of that fact, which does not impede mutual understanding. There are also a number of particular vocabulary items which are realized differently with regard to sex. According to Holmes (2001) in Montana in the Gros Ventre American Indian tribes, the pronunciation or realization of the word *bread* varies according to sex. Whereas the women realize this word as /kja’tsa/, the men’s realization of the word is rendered as /dza’tsa/. Oddly enough, once the articulation of the

word is confused by either men or women, there is a risk of considering such a person to be bisexual.

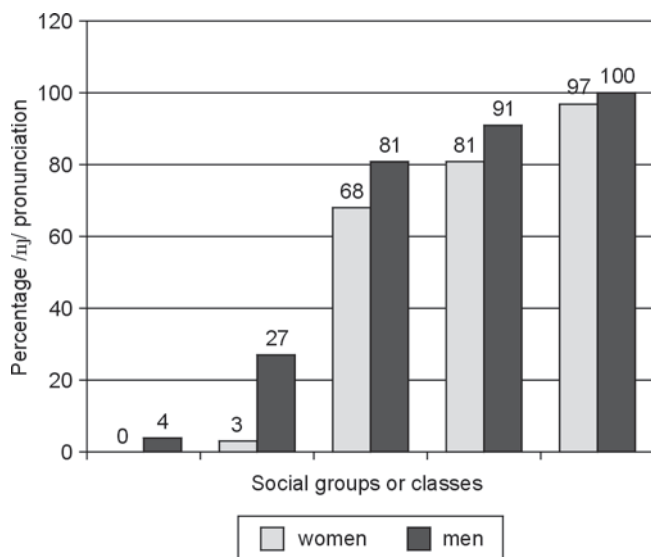


Figure 1. Variability of /ɪŋ/ (based on Trudgill, in Holmes 2001: 154)

However, it is common knowledge that men tend to use less standard or more stigmatized linguistic features. Even phonologically, women have the tendency to use vernacular speech less often; women’s speech is characterized by more standard or prestigious forms. It is also important to stress that although women from all social classes are more sensitive to speech, it is especially observable in the speech of lower middle-class and upper working-class women. “Females show more awareness of prestige norms in both their actual speech and their attitudes towards speech. Female sensitivity to speech is particularly characteristic of lower middle-class and upper-working class speech, although it is generally characteristic for all social classes” (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 93).

Thus we should expect phonological variation to occur due to the social status as well. In general, more prestige forms can be identified in the speech of females. “More recent studies show a consistent tendency for women to produce more standard, or rhetorically correct pronunciations, which generally correspond to the realization, as opposed to the omission, of certain speech sounds” (Smith 1979: 111). Moreover, the stigmatization in the speech of males is not regarded as shameful or negative. In fact, it is commonly known that the speech of even well-educated men is characterized by numerous stigmatized speech variables. The fact that men’s speech is less standard does not make them feel inferior or less educated and does not provide us with a reason to label their speech as less standard and wrong since (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 94).

d) Social status

Education and social status undeniably contribute to linguistic variation. Therefore, socially, whereas linguistic stigmatization is typical of lower class and less educated people, linguistic prestige belongs to middle or high class people.

Apart from *lexicon* and *grammar*, there is also variation in *pronunciation*. Speech variation is caused by the various social statuses the speakers are characterized by. Phonologically, these are a number of variables which undergo variation due to social class differences. The higher the social class is, the fewer non-standard features are used. Stigmatized features would be more observable in the speech of low-class people.

One should also emphasize that some people have the tendency to style-shift in a number of situations. They adapt the realization of particular phonemes in accordance with a particular situation, which can be done both consciously and unconsciously. For instance, if a particular situation requires doing so, an informant switches from using stigmatized items and uses standard variants instead.

In order to exemplify the occurrence of variability, one could concentrate on Wolfram's experiment who dealt with the following phonological variables: final cluster consonant simplification, the realization of the /θ/ and /ð/ variables in both medial and terminal position in a word, as in *filthy* /'fɪlθi/, *ruthless* /'ru:θləs/, *something* /'sʌmθɪŋ/, *nothing* /'nʌθɪŋ/, *pathetic* /pə'θetɪk/, *lethal* /'li:θəl/, *faithful* /'feɪθəl/ (medially) and *loath* /ləʊθ/, *path* /pæθ/, *with* /wɪθ/, *bath* /bæθ/, *bathe* /beɪð/, *death* /deθ/, *faith* /feɪθ/, etc. (terminally). There were also other variables: the occurrence of /d/ in terminal positions or its deletion (inaudibility), as in *appeared* /ə'pɪəd/, *elided* /ə'laɪdɪd/, *endeavored* /ɪn'devərd/ but also in words where the final /d/ does not constitute the -ed suffix, as in *good* /gʊd/, *world* /wɜ:rlɪd/, *bed* /bed/, etc.; the occurrence of /r/ after vowels (post-vocalic /r/), as in *bitter* /'bɪtər/, *paper* /'peɪpər/ *later* /'leɪdər/ *par* /pɑ:r/ (word-finally), and *tart* /tɑ:rt/, *card* /kɑ:rd/, *nerd* /nɜ:rd/, *cord* /kɔ:rd/ – following consonants (prevocalic /r/). Figure 2 depicts Wolfram's study which concerns the variability of /r/ based on the speech of various social classes (Wolfram 1969).

Another interesting example of variability can be observed in casual speech and is typical of the speech of low class people. These are final consonant clusters, as in /st/, /sk/, /kt/, /nd/, /ld/, etc. where the final element (a stop consonant) undergoes the process of deletion or reduction (so called final consonant cluster simplification), as in *cast* /kɑ:st/ or /kɑ:s/, *bask* /bɑ:sk/ or /bæs/, *wind* /wɪnd/ or /wɪn/, *world* /wɜ:rlɪd/ or /wɜ:rɪl/ respectively. It is necessary to stress that there are linguistic constraints under which the second element may be reduced. "The reason is that the reduction rule operates only when the second member is a stop consonant (eliminating *ps* and *ks*), and only when both members of the cluster are either voiced or voiceless (eliminating *mp*, *nk*, *lp*, and *lt*)" (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 130).

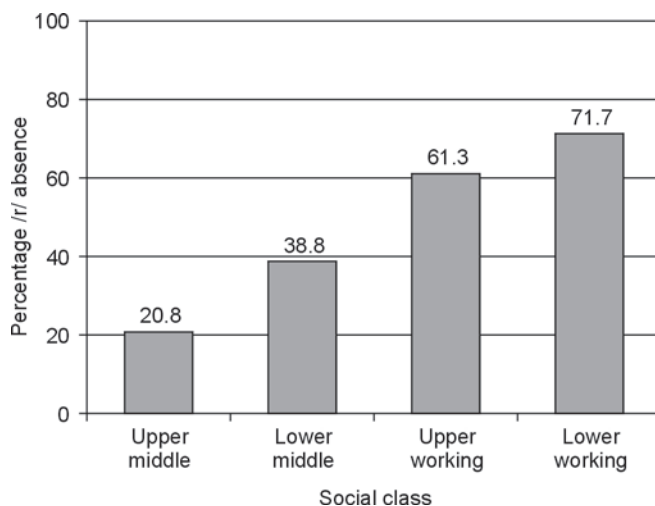


Figure 2. Variability of /r/, based on Wolfram 1969, in Wardhaugh (1998: 172)

e) Stylistic variation / contextual variation

The speech style also has a considerable contribution to the speech variation. In other words, how we talk is often governed by circumstances. There are a number of various factors which contribute to the level of formality and informality, such as the situation, the participants, their social status, age, gender, and the objective of the conversation. Whereas “formality” involves paying attention to the correct pronunciation (enunciation) due to the speakers’ awareness, informality implies natural, careless speech (Montgomery 1995: 105).

In formal settings, one attempts to sound correct and clear and monitor one’s speech. In less formal or informal situations, monitored realization is peripheral since one strives to concentrate on the content as soon as possible. Everyday situations and conversations facilitate casual speech style, where there is not enough time for monitoring the speech.

One should also mention that stylistic differentiation is more or less observable in different periods of our lives. As far as the age is concerned, “there is, however, less stylistic differentiation in the earliest stages of adolescence and the older stages of the life cycle. [...] stylistic variation appears to be at its maximum during those periods in the life cycle when adults are establishing their own status and role in American society” (Wolfram 1982: 59).

Similarly, Labov’s study pertaining to the variability of /r/ pronunciation based on social class and style of speech is also a good example (Labov 1966). Socially, there were various groups who participated in the study, from lower class, working class, lower middle and finally upper middle class. Stylistically or contextually, the study encompasses various speech styles, such as casual speech, careful speech, reading style, word lists and finally minimal pairs. According to the results obtained in the study, the continuum depicts different

styles; as the style becomes more formal, the /r/ increases. The percentage of the /r/ sound is much higher in word lists and minimal pairs. The /r/ pronunciation decreases when the informants are exposed to the reading style: in casual speech the /r/ is hardly audible. In this style they do not pay so much attention to the enunciation since they focus on the content of what they wish to convey. Admittedly, as the meaning is a primary concern, the speech itself is no longer monitored as well as it is in word lists and minimal pairs. It becomes unmonitored, casual, careless, and sloppy. However, there is another phenomenon which Labov did not predict and which is referred to as *hypercorrection*. According to the diagram, there are two speech styles (word lists and minimal pairs) where lower middle class speakers increase the usage of /r/. One might regard one of Labov's assumptions as a failure. Nevertheless, these results contributed to Labov's better understanding the process of hypercorrection. The fact that lower class people's /r/ is so abundant can be accounted for. The reason is that they display explicit endeavors to imitate the speech of upper-middle class people. In this case, they are well aware of the fact that the /r/ sound is typical of the speech of high class people. Hence they attempt to copy it in order to sound good, just like high class people.

Although there can be a number of instances of the hypercorrection process, it is worth mentioning that it is especially characteristic of women's speech. As a result, one can conclude that women are more likely to use more standard forms (forms which are typical of high class speech). Moreover, although women's speech is characterized by the higher frequency of hypercorrection, it is not always observable in the speech of all social classes – it occurs in the speech of a particular social class.

f) Ethnicity

Ethnicity also plays a crucial role in determining the linguistic variation (speech variation as well). There are a number of societies where phonological differences in the speech of selected ethnic groups have been researched.

However, it is significant to stress that the historical origin intersects with ethnic varieties in the realization of particular sounds. It is obvious that every ethnic variety possesses its representatives whose speech patterns stem from their ancestors' speech. Moreover, we should not ignore a number of social variables and patterns which also contribute to the realization of phonemes in contemporary American English. Thus, "for the professional student of language, the dispute concerning ethnic varieties of English centers around the historical origin of the variables used in the United States and the dynamics of social patterns that affect speech" (Wolfram 1982: 55).

It is common knowledge that there are a number of phonological features (phonological markers) which are typical of the speech of a particular ethnic group. For instance, the speech of American Black speakers is a good exam-

ple. According to (Giles 1979: 259), the phoneme /r/ is not used in numerous contexts, especially when it occurs in the final position in the word, as in *wear* /we(r)/, *far* /fɑ:(r)/, etc. Due to the considerable r-lessness in Black English varieties, the pronunciation in words like *part* – *pot* /pɑ:t/, *card* – *cod* /kɑ:d/, *dart* – *dot* /dɑ:t/, *tart* – *tot* /tɑ:t/ is identical. It is also claimed that the r-sound also disappears after a vowel and before another vowel in a word. Thus, it might not even be audible in words like *lorry*, *parry*, *marry*, etc. Nevertheless, the deletion of the r-sound in this position (so called intervocalic position) is not as common as the deletion of the /r/ in the terminal position (word-finally) or when it precedes a consonant (post-vocalic r), as in *failure* /'feɪljər/, *pleasure* /'pleʒər/, *leisure* /'leɪzər/ or /'li:zər/, *court* /kɔ:rt/, *nerd* /nɜ:rd/ accordingly.

Similarly, certain consonant clusters which also occur in the final position undergo deletion as well, such as /st/, /sk/, /ft/, /nd/, /ld/, /pt/, /nd/, /md/, /ft/, /ld/, /zd/, /bd/ (Rickford 1996). Thus, there might also be simplification in the following words: *waste*, *task*, *craft*, *mend*, *band*, *told*, *riled*, etc. Such reductions are usually observed in unmonitored speech. Furthermore, it is crucial to stress that whereas in African American English the last consonant always undergoes reduction, in other varieties it can be pronounced weakly or be unarticulated whatsoever (Rickford 1996).

Moreover, the final /t/ and /d/ which do not constitute a consonant cluster can also be unreleased or undergo complete reduction, as in *God* /gɑ:(d)/, *lot* /lɑ:(t)/, *wood* /wʊ(d)/, *pot* /pɑ:(t)/, *cod* /kɑ:(d)/, *not* /nɑ:(t)/, *paid* /peɪ(d)/, *raid* /rei(d)/, *bade* /beɪ(d)/, *fade* /feɪ(d)/, *made* /meɪ(d)/, etc.

Another example pertains to the realization of interdental /θ/ and /ð/. Since Dutch does not have any interdental sounds, Dutch Americans do not use /θ/ or /ð/ in words such as *thrive*, *theme*, *thrust*, *filthy*, *myth*, *weather*, *bathing*, etc. The /θ/ and /ð/ variables are rendered as /t/ and /d/ respectively. Nevertheless, many immigrants who arrived in the United States to start a new life did not manage to maintain their own dialectal features. Although their influence was noticeable, they themselves became influenced by the features characteristic of a particular area. It is also worth mentioning that Jewish immigrants who left their homeland in Eastern Europe had the heaviest contribution to New York phonology (including vocabulary).

g) Individual characteristics, emotional states

Differences in our personality and emotional states which accompany us at a particular time must not be ignored whatsoever. Undoubtedly, both personal characteristics and emotional states also contribute to the realization of variables and as a result the emergence of variants.

One of the experiments which accounts for the variability was conducted by Fischer (1958) – whose primary concern was analyzing variability in *ing*: /ɪŋ/ vs /ɪn/, as in *waiting* /'weɪdɪŋ/, *complaining* /kəm'pleɪnɪŋ/, *doing* /'du:wɪŋ/,

thinking /'θɪŋkɪŋ/, *sleeping* /'sli:pɪŋ/, etc. Fischer's experiment in New England perfectly exemplifies the variation of speech patterns not only due to differences pertaining to social and contextual factors, such as class, sex, social status, but also personality traits (aggressive/cooperative), and mood (tense/relaxed) of the speaker (Fischer 1958, in Wardhaugh 1998: 159). Tables 1, 2, and 3 reflect the variability of /ɪŋ/ with reference to social class, gender, and personality traits.

Table 1. Preferences for *-ing* and *in'* endings, by sex

	<i>-ing > in'</i>	<i>-ing < in'</i>
Boys	5	7
Girls	10	2

Source: Fischer (1958: 48), in Wardhaugh (1998: 159)

Table 2. Preferences of two boys for *-ing* and *in'* endings

	<i>-ing</i>	<i>in'</i>
'Model' boy	38	1
'Typical' boy	10	12

Source: Fischer (1958: 49), in Wardhaugh (1998: 159)

Table 3. Preferences for *-ing* and *in'* endings, by formality, of situation

	Most formal	Formal interview	Informal interview
<i>-ing</i>	38	33	
<i>-in'</i>	1	35	

Source: Fischer (1958: 50), in Wardhaugh (1998: 159)

According to the above tables, it is observable that non-standard forms (in this case /ɪn/) are typical of unmonitored, casual speech in which case the correct articulation of the sounds is not that significant. Apart from that being relaxed or tense also influences the way we talk. "Fischer's conclusion (p. 51) is that 'the choice between the *-ing* and the *-in'* variants appears to be related to sex, class, personality (aggressive/cooperative), and mood (tense/relaxed) of the speaker, to the formality of the conversation and to the specific verb spoken'" (Wardhaugh 1998: 159).

In conclusion, there are a number of factors which contribute to the prestige or non-prestige of a particular variety or dialect. However, we are aware of the fact that linguistically all dialects are equal. "Any variety – whether it be a dialect, social dialect, anti-language, or whatever – as long as it is sustained by a group of speakers must, by that very fact, adequately serve their communicative needs. In this sense, there is no inadequate, inferior or incorrect variety" (Montgomery 1995: 177).

4. Conclusions

The purpose of the article was to present American speech patterns and variability in American English pronunciation – variability with respect to region, age, sex, social status, style, context, ethnicity, and individual characteristics. A few variables were selected and analyzed in terms of their variant realizations – variants or candidates. The occurrence of particular candidates is usually strictly associated with the linguistic environment, and thus they are rule-governed as opposed to others the incidence of which seems to be free and is the result of free variation. However, our analysis is not only restricted to linguistic analysis. It also entails social factors which undeniably contribute to the realization of a particular variable. In other words, the analysis is not only conducted from the linguistic point of view. In fact, it would be erroneous to analyze variation in American speech (and any other as well) only regionally.

Apart from choosing particular variables and indicating their variants, one cannot avoid the assessment of the latter. Whereas some candidates are assessed as prestigious, standard, or neutral, others are evaluated negatively – that is, as substandard, incorrect or even erroneous. With the onset of the assessment of some linguistic forms (linguistic variables and their identifiable variants in this respect), one also tends to evaluate whole varieties or dialects and even speakers of the dialect. As a result, linguistically, all variants which have been identified and analyzed in the article are equal. Similarly, all the abovementioned varieties and dialects are equally valuable. However, the equality vanishes when we also encompass social dimensions.

References

- Akmajian, A., Demers, R., Farmer, A. & Harnish, R. 1997. *Linguistics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Benwell, B. & Stokoe, E. 2005. *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Chambers, J. K. & Trudgill, P. 1998. *Dialectology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. 1996. *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. 1997. *A Dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Fischer, J. L. 1958. Social influences in the choice of a linguistic variant. In D. Hymes. 1964. *Language in culture and society. A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Fromkin, V. A. (ed.). 2001. *Linguistics. An introduction to linguistic theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

- Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. 1998. *An introduction to Language* (6th ed.). Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Giles, H. (1979). Ethnicity markers in speech. In K. R. Scherer & H. Giles (eds.), *Social markers in speech*, 251–289. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hammond, M. 1999. *The phonology of English. A prosodic optimality – theoretic approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holmes, J. 2001. *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Essex, England: Longman.
- Honey, J. 1991. *Does accent matter?* London: Clays Ltd., St Ives plc.
- Hudson, R. A. 1996. *Sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Labov, W. 1966. *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Lyons, J. 1995. *Language and linguistics. An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marckwardt, A. H. 1958. *American English*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mencken, H. L. 1990. *The American language*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Millward, C. M. 1988. *A biography of the English language*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Montgomery, M. 1995. *An introduction to language and society*. London: Routledge.
- Pluszczyk, A. 2013. Zróżnicowanie dialektyczne a kształtowanie tożsamości językowej. In P. Nowakowski, K. Stroński & M. Szczyszek (red.), *Od wspólnot komunikatywnych do kontaktów międzywspólnotowych*, 91–106. Poznań: Wyd. Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, t. 26.
- Pyles, T. & Algeo, J. 1993. *The origins and development of the English language*. Fort Worth: Harcourt.
- Rickford, J. R. 1996. Regional and social variation in language. In S. McKay & N. Hornberger, *Sociolinguistics and language teaching*, 151–194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schlauch, M. 1959. *The English language in modern times*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Shuy, R. W. 1967. *Discovering American dialects*. Champaign, IL: Michigan State University.
- Smith, Philip M. 1979. Sex markers in speech. In K. R. Scherer & H. Giles (eds.), *Social markers in speech*, 109–146. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trudgill, P. 1974. *The social differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trudgill, P. & Hannah, J. 1994. *International English*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Wardhaugh, R. 1998. *Sociolinguistics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Wolfram, R. 1969. *A Sociolinguistic description of Detroit Negro Speech*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Wolfram, W. & Fasold, R. 1974. *The study of social dialects*. Englewood Cliff, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.