sex; the debate is still very much 'work in progress'. What all the contributors share, however, is a critical perspective on the quantitative paradigm in which they work, and a commitment to fuller and richer accounts of the behaviour of women in their speech communities.

Notes

1. I do not wish to imply, however, that my political perspective is necessarily shared by individual contributors, who will doubtless indicate their own outlook in what they have written.

2. Some linguists, notably Trudgill (1978), would equate all sociolinguistics with the quantitative paradigm. In this volume we take the view Trudgill argues against, i.e. that the quantitative paradigm is only one approach within sociolinguistics (others include ethnography of speaking, discourse and conversation analysis). Thus, all the papers in this book are 'sociolinguistic' in orientation.

3. The source for these and many other examples is Ehrenreich & English (1979).

Theoretical Perspectives

Chapter 2

Some problems in the sociolinguistic explanation of sex differences

Deborah Cameron & Jennifer Coates

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we shall be concerned with what we are calling 'sociolinguistic explanation'. Let us emphasise that we are not denying the existence of sex differences in language use. Awareness of such differences goes back a long way; it is part of our folklinguistic heritage. Modern sociolinguistic studies have improved on folklinguistics, however, giving us a clearer picture of linguistic variation in general. Variation associated with the sex of the speaker is now well documented in communities as different as New York, Mombasa, Belfast and Norwich. But the main goal of these quantitative studies has been the collection and analysis of data on linguistic variation: sociolinguists are not primarily concerned with the reasons for such variation, and their methodology is not usually designed to probe such issues. Sociolinguistics has dealt, therefore, with the what of sex differences, but has it dealt so well with the why? Do the conventional explanations given in sociolinguistic analysis stand up to scrutiny?

That is the question we want to address.

Before turning to the problem of explanation, it is as well to outline what is being explained. In the case of sex difference, the major finding is well known: women on average deviate less from the prestige standard than men. This is true for a fair number of cultures, though not all; exceptions include Malagasy (Keenan 1974) and certain Muslim communities (Labov, personal communication). In modern urban societies it is typically true for every social class.

Three main explanations have been proposed for this persistent difference: one in terms of conservatism (women stick to older
forms because they are more conservative); one in terms of status (women speak more ‘correctly’ because they are sensitive to the social connotations of speech); and one in terms of solidarity (women do not experience the same pressure as men to adhere to vernacular norms). We will take these explanations one at a time.

2. Conservatism

The idea that women are more conservative than men, in language as in other spheres, is a recurrent piece of folklore. It is used as an explanation when it fits, and conveniently forgotten when it does not. So on one hand, Otto Jespersen asserts that women’s conservatism and modesty prevent them from innovating in language, whereas he praises men for coining ‘new, fresh expressions’ (1922: 247); on the other hand, in the eighteenth century at the height of the struggle to ‘fix’ the language, women were blamed for introducing new and ephemeral items into the English lexicon. Men, by implication more conservative, zealously guarded the purity of the standard language. It appears women are said to be conservative only when this attribute is out of favour.2

Trudgill (1974b: 90) quotes the examples of Koasati and Chukchi as cases where women’s language preserves older forms, i.e. is more conservative than men’s, implying that this is a widespread pattern. But to rely on women’s conservatism as an explanation of sex differences is dangerous, as a cursory examination of Pop’s comprehensive account of dialect surveys around the world (Pop 1950) will reveal: the evidence is contradictory. Many dialectologists, including Jaberg and Jud, and Pop himself, claim that women’s speech is more conservative and therefore choose women as informants. Others, in particular Gilliéron in France and Orton in England, describe women as poor informants because they are not conservative. Such discrepancies require explanation themselves. Perhaps conservatism is chiefly in the mind of the researcher (and note that dialectologists were men, as were most of their fieldworkers).

There is a particular problem with the ‘conservatism’ explanation being applied to the findings of urban sociolinguistics. Women’s speech has repeatedly been found to be closer to the prestige standard than men’s; but while this could indicate conservatism on the part of middle-class women, among working-class women it would indicate the opposite. For such women, the standard variety represents innovation: a conservative pattern would involve preserving vernacular variants. The notion of conservatism is therefore unable to do what researchers have usually wanted it to do, namely explain the behaviour of women as a group.

There is, furthermore, a considerable body of evidence from sociolinguistic surveys that women are often in the vanguard of linguistic change. Labov (1972a: 301ff) discusses their innovative role, and his remarks receive support from subsequent studies like the Milroys in Belfast and Romaine’s in Edinburgh. Women are implicated in change particularly when it is in the direction of the prestige standard: this leads to a new explanation, replacing conservatism (which is clearly inadequate) with status consciousness on the part of women.

3. Status

The status explanation of linguistic sex differences is very much tied up with an approach to variation based on social stratification (Labov 1972a; Trudgill 1974a). This approach seeks to demonstrate that the distribution of variants in a speech community is socially stratified, and that some variants also have a patterned distribution that correlates with the formality of the situation in which they are uttered.

Surveys using this approach have produced the result that women have higher scores than men for prestige variants and correspondingly lower scores for vernacular variants. But women also show more marked patterns of styleshift. This gives the lie to any notion of conservatism, and leads to a belief that women may be trying to gain status through their speech patterns. This is sometimes expressed in the idea that women’s speech is hypercorrect – an idea that fits in well with prevalent stereotypes of women as a group.

Trudgill, for instance, speculates that women may be generally more status conscious than men, both because society sets higher standards for female behaviour (all women are expected to act like ‘ladies’) and because women’s lifestyle (by which Trudgill means domestic labour and a focus on family rather than waged work) confers little status in itself (Trudgill 1974b: 94).3 Women are thus under pressure to acquire status by other means, such as their speech patterns. Their sensitivity to linguistic norms is associated with the insecurity of their social position.

This insecurity on the part of women offers a parallel with the insecurity of the lower middle class, who provide the classic example of hypercorrect linguistic behaviour (whereby in formal
styles their scores on certain variables are nearer to the prestige standard than the scores of the highest status group, indicating conscious overcompensation). But what exactly is the relationship between the hypercorrect behaviour of lower-middle-class speakers and the behaviour of women?

An example may help to clarify this issue. Let us therefore consider the case of the glottal stop in Glasgow speech using data from Macaulay’s study (1977). The glottal stop is an overtly stigmatised variant in Glasgow, and Macaulay found its use showed very clear social stratification. The biggest contrast in group scores was that between lower-middle-class men and lower-middle-class women: the female informants used 40 per cent fewer instances of glottal stop. One lower-middle-class woman used fewer glottal stops than any upper-middle-class informant – a finding which conforms to the classic definition of hypercorrect behaviour.

What this shows is that hypercorrection for this variable and this speech community is a pattern associated primarily with lower-middle-class women, rather than the lower middle class in general. There is some evidence to suggest that this is not an unusual finding: where a hypercorrect pattern is found for the second highest status group in a sample there may also be a sex difference, with women exemplifying the pattern more clearly than men. But even if this regularity turned out to be invariable, it would hardly license us to generalise and call the behaviour of all women hypercorrect, or to use the notion of hypercorrection to explain women’s relatively more standardised speech. Stable linguistic variables do not produce the classic ‘cross-over’ pattern found in cases of hypercorrection; they lead to regular stratification, as in Fig. 2.1. Women use fewer stigmatised forms and more prestige forms in every class; it is no more justified to class this pattern of female usage hypercorrect than it would be to call the usage of the middle class hypercorrect in relation to that of the working class. The notion of women’s sensitivity to prestige norms is an explanation that arises from the intrinsic maleness of the norms. Men’s behaviour is seen as normal; when women’s differs, it has to be explained.

This leads us to another matter needing explanation. If women’s speech is closer to the standard, while men use more stigmatised forms, why are men not perceived as inferior speakers? The answer, according to a number of linguists, is that stigmatised variants and nonstandard varieties possess covert prestige. To explain the survival of stigmatised nonstandard varieties we must hypothesise a set of vernacular norms in opposition to the prescriptive and pedagogical norms with which we are all familiar. It is these vernacular norms which have prestige for working-class speakers, and which therefore exert a powerful influence on their linguistic behaviour.

In a well-known paper, Trudgill (1972) linked the notion of covert prestige to the sex differences he observed in his Norwich survey. He argued that nonstandard language is associated with working-class culture and has connotations of masculinity. Thus men of all classes are more influenced by vernacular norms than women, and produce more vernacular variants.

This explanation raises problems of its own. Why should the vernacular be associated with masculinity? There is a strong implication here that working-class women are outside working-class culture: whereas men have in-group (vernacular) norms, women are perpetual ‘lames’ deferring to the norms of the superior-ordinate class. Once again, men are the standard from which women can only deviate: the possibility of norms which are sex- and class-specific is not entertained. Working-class ‘vernacular’ culture and male culture are assumed to be one and the same thing. We will return to this point below.

There is one further problem with status-based approaches, however, that is essentially methodological, and poses the ques-
the finding we are concerned with — women's greater closeness to the prestige standard - is not an artefact of the methods used to assign informantsto social classes.

Both Labov and Trudgill use a standard sociological model which places heavy emphasis on occupation as an indicator of social class. But this model — on which sex-difference findings depend — itself uses sex differentiated criteria. Men are rated on their own occupations, but women are classed with the men on whom they are assumed to be dependent.

For a detailed and representative example we may take Trudgill's survey of Norwich English (Trudgill 1974a). Six criteria are used to determine social class: occupation, father's occupation, income, education, housing and locality of residence. Women informants are, however, rated on their father's occupation if single, and their husband's if married or widowed. The underlying assumption, as Trudgill himself points out, is that the whole family takes its position from the status of the father, who is assumed to be the main breadwinner. This latter assumption is by no means obvious in a society where male unemployment is widespread, and where divorce often results in single-parent families headed by women. Furthermore, Trudgill is prepared to ignore it in certain cases: he classifies married women by their own occupations if these outrank the husband's job on the Registrar-General's scale.

The inconsistencies and absurdities of stratification studies in relation to women are well documented (for an incisive critique see Delph 1981). For our present purposes it is sufficient to point out that two factors especially relevant to people's speech patterns are their level of education and their social aspirations. In these attributes daughters need not resemble their fathers, nor wives their husbands.5 By giving so much weight to men's occupation when classifying women, researchers give men and women within a family a parity of status that may be spurious in precisely the terms that are most important linguistically; but if this parity has to be qualified, so does the finding of clear-cut sex differences in every social class.

Are there more revealing and less sexist social indices linguists could use? There is at least one study (Douglas-Cowie 1978) which finds social ambition a better predictor than occupation, or even education, of linguistic behaviour. After getting informants in a rural Northern Irish community to rate one another for ambition, and comparing the results with scores obtained on several linguistic variables, Douglas-Cowie concluded that, except when an individual has received an unusually high level of education (e.g. has been to university), linguistic behaviour is 'clearly related to social ambition rather than . . . social status in traditional terms' (Douglas-Cowie 1978: 49).

It would be interesting to see whether a social ambition measure applied to all individuals would produce significant sex differences (indeed this might serve as a test of the hypothesis that women are more status-conscious than men). It would also be important to determine the effects of age for it Trudgill is correct in supposing that women use speech to gain status because of double standards and limited opportunities, recent social changes (altered attitudes to women and widespread unemployment among young people of both sexes) should be narrowing the gap between young women and men.

Whatever the solution, it can hardly be denied that there is a problem for sociolinguistics in using the traditional model which takes the family as the primary unit of social stratification at a time when our traditional concept of the family (man in waged work, dependent unwaged wife and their children, all living in a single household) is breaking down.

4. Solidarity

Lesley Milroy (1980: 194ff) questions whether status-based models are adequate to deal with the language patterns of urban populations such as Belfast. She asserts that the importance of solidarity as a factor influencing language use. The concept of social network, by enabling us to see the individual in relation to the group, refines our understanding of linguistic variation. The evidence is that a tight-knit network is an important mechanism of language maintenance. The close-knit networks to which working-class men have traditionally belonged serve to maintain vernacular norms.

Does this mean women's speech is closer to the standard than men's because women belong to weaker networks which are less efficient at enforcing linguistic norms? In Belfast, speakers from the Hammer with looser-knit networks resulting from unemployment and rehousing are not more standardised: their speech shows a drift away from the focussed vernacular norms of tighter-knit groups, but not a drift towards the prestige norms of standard English. Milroy argues that sex differences can be explained by the controlling influence of the network: men's tighter-knit networks maintain vernacular norms, whereas women's relatively looser-knit networks have less capacity to enforce focussed linguistic norms. Note the contrast between this and the status
explanation, which claims women are sensitive to prestige norms. Here it is men who manifest sensitivity to vernacular norms. Women’s speech is less vernacular rather than more standard.

Solidarity models seem to us to have great explanatory potential, but we want to draw attention to some problems with the social network concept as presently defined in relation to women. Two key notions which need to be examined are those of density and multiplexity. The finding that Belfast men generally have closer-knit networks than women is underpinned by the calculation of a network strength score for each informant; the scores (which tend to be higher for male informants) are based on five criteria, one related to density and the rest to multiplexity.

Density
The first condition an informant must satisfy to score a network strength point is (1) membership of ‘a high-density, territorially based cluster’ (Milroy 1980: 141). A cluster is defined as ‘a portion of a personal network where relationships are denser internally than externally’. Milroy gives as examples the adolescent gangs studied by Labov, the groups formed by many young Belfast men, and middle-aged Belfast women who ‘belong to clusters of six or seven individuals who meet frequently to drink tea, play cards and chat’ (1980: 142). All the groups in this list are single-sex, as are the three peer groups studied by Jenny Cheshire (1982). It it always the case that dense clusters are single-sex? And if not, what are the linguistic correlates of mixed-sex clusters?

Multiplexity
Where density refers to the reciprocal links among a group of people, multiplexity refers to the different kinds of link between members of a network (for instance, they may know each other as relatives, friends, workmates, neighbours and so on). If two individuals are linked in more than one way, the link is multiplex.

Milroy’s four multiplexity-related criteria for network strength are: (2) having substantial ties of kinship in the neighbourhood (more than one household in addition to his (sic) own nuclear family); (3) working in the same place as at least two others from the same area; (4) having the same place of work as at least two others of the same sex from the same area; (5) voluntary association with workmates in leisure hours. The third, fourth and fifth of these conditions are male-oriented (number five in two different ways, since women’s relation to ‘leisure time’ is different from men’s; women have less of it, and are less free as to how they spend it). They are male-oriented because they relate specifically to the domain of waged work. Of course women do participate in waged work, especially in working-class communities like those Milroy studied. But they also have domestic responsibilities which these network-strength criteria do not recognise.

Does this matter? Milroy herself anticipates any criticism to the effect that men will tend to score higher on the network strength scale, saying (1980: 142):

Readers may assume that multiplex ties of the kind reflected in conditions three, four and five are usually contracted by men, and that men would, therefore, automatically score higher on the network strength scale. In fact, since both the Hammer and the Clonard are areas of high male unemployment, individual women frequently score as high as, or higher than men.

This observation, while perfectly true, fails to acknowledge the bias inherent in the conditions. The fact that some Hammer and Clonard women get high scores only tells us that in these areas women have taken on a ‘male’ role. Our criticism is that there are no parallel criteria which recognise the conditions of women’s lives, and which permit points to be scored for multiplex links of a female kind (what kind is that? we beg the question deliberately). Women and men differ in their speech patterns; that is agreed; but a scoring system that throws the differences into relief by giving women low scores unless they take on male roles may be skewing our understanding of sex-linked speech patterns. We need a model of difference and not deficit.

This brings us back to a point we have already touched on: the assumption that women are outside working-class culture, or at best peripheral to it. Within the status-based approach, it will be recalled, working-class women’s marginality to what is defined as the subculture (e.g. male ‘street’ culture in Labov’s work on Black English Vernacular) is matched linguistically by a failure to use the vernacular consistently. This is explained in terms of women’s allegiance to prestige rather than vernacular norms. But if we take a solidarity-based view instead, the picture is rather different. It we define vernacular norms as features which mark a speaker’s loyalty to a particular network, it appears women do have some loyalty to vernacular norms. It also appears, however, that women’s identification with vernacular culture is not always marked by the same linguistic features that mark men’s identification with vernacular culture.

This is clearly shown in Jenny Cheshire’s study of adolescents in Reading (Cheshire 1982). Cheshire found various which funct-
ioned differently for male and female peer groups. When the use of these variants was correlated with the individual's degree of adherence to peer group values, boys' adherence correlated with one set of variants (nonstandard was, never and present tense -s) while girls' adherence correlated with a different set (past tense come and aint as a copula).  

As Margaret Deuchar points out in a review (1983) 'This challenges the Labovian assumption that the social factors affecting language operate independently of one another.' The social network approach has produced a methodology which can take account of sex and class differences simultaneously, instead of abstracting them away from each other and ultimately explaining them as if 'women' and 'working class' were completely separate categories.

But findings such as Cheshire's which have emerged from this methodology give little support to the solidity explanation of why women's speech is more standard than men's (i.e. that female networks lack the ability of male ones to enforce focussed vernacular norms). Clearly the Reading girls' group did produce shared, and distinctively female, norms for expressing values in opposition to the dominant values of the larger society.

5. Market forces

It is clear from the studies we have cited above that women do not always and everywhere produce speech nearer to the prestige standard than men's. Milroy's young Clonard women, for instance, maintained vernacular norms on some variables to a greater extent than their male contemporaries, and this pattern has also been found elsewhere (see Russell 1982; Thomas, Ch. 5). While social network structure is an important factor in explaining these apparent exceptions to the rule – or more neutrally, the fact that some groups of women maintain vernacular norms while others do not – it seems there is one further factor that needs to be taken into account: the differing economic opportunities open to women and men in specific speech communities. In her work on the changing speech of South Carolina, Patricia Nichols (1983) draws attention to the importance of these 'market forces'.

Nichols carried out fieldwork in two Black communities in South Carolina, paying particular attention to the effects of socioeconomic changes in precipitating a shift from the use of a low-prestige variety (Gullah) towards standard English. She found that the women in her sample did not behave uniformly.

Older mainland women were the heaviest users of Gullah variants, scoring higher on these than their male contemporaries, but younger mainland women, in complete contrast, were the most advanced in the shift to standard English.

Nichols explains this finding in terms of the local labour market. She suggests that certain jobs encourage or even require workers to use standard English whereas in other jobs no emphasis is placed on 'good speech'. Like most labour markets, that of the area Nichols studied is sex-segregated: men of all ages work in the construction industry, while older women work in the domestic and agricultural jobs to which Black women have until recently been confined. None of these groups has much incentive to use standard English, and the older women in particular have little opportunity even to encounter standard English speakers: they are firmly located in their own local communities. Hence the high scores of older women on Gullah variants; they, and to a slightly lesser extent the men of the community, have no reason not to maintain their vernacular.

What about the younger women who are shifting towards the standard variety? Nichols observes that new employment opportunities have opened up for these women in white collar and service jobs. Such jobs do require standard English and bring workers into contact with people who speak it, giving the young Black women both incentive and opportunity to acquire the new variety.

Nichols claims that in the South Carolina Black community, labour market forces are the single most important factor influencing linguistic choices. Because the labour market is divided along gender lines, striking sex differences in language use are produced. But Nichols stresses that these particular conditions and differences cannot be generalised to every speech community. All women have in common their subordinate status relative to men, but the conditions of their lives, especially their economic position, can take many different forms depending on class, race, locality and so on. There is a crucial point here for all those who seek to explain the linguistic behaviour of women: women are not a homogeneous group, they do not always and everywhere behave in similar ways and their behaviour cannot be explained in global, undifferentiated terms.

6. Conclusion

The problems we have raised in relation to linguistic sex difference—findings are of two kinds. First, we have criticised the
sociological component of sociolinguistic methodology, arguing that sociolinguists have often been insufficiently aware of the specific conditions of women's lives. Too little attention has been paid to the place of women in economic and social organisation; too little is known about the nature and value of women's subcultures and often this has led to an assumption that 'vernacular culture' is a uniform and exclusively masculine phenomenon. Another serious methodological problem for correlational approaches lies in the traditional model of social class membership which has been widely criticised for its unsatisfactory treatment of women.

Secondly, we have tried to show that the three explanations most commonly put forward to account for sex-difference findings are inadequate, as well as being implicitly sexist (for instance, in their tendency to attribute particular psychological dispositions, like 'conservatism', to women as a group). The inadequacies we have discussed have serious implications for theoretical concepts such as 'vernacular' (how far can we maintain a notion of the vernacular as a relatively homogeneous class/regional variety?) and 'speech community' (given differing vernacular norms for the two sexes, what happens to the definition of the speech community as a group with shared linguistic norms?).

As always, there is a need for more empirical research. But this must not be done in a framework which assumes that male behaviour and male norms are prototypical. Explaining sex differences does not just mean explaining the usage of men, after all. It means devising methods applicable to all informants, so we can gauge the importance of sex in the complex system of intersecting social relations that supports linguistic variation.

Notes

1. The original version of this chapter was delivered to the Fifth Sociolinguistic Symposium held in Liverpool in 1984, and a revised version was published in Language and Communication, vol. 5, no. 3 (1985). The present version incorporates minor amendments and several additions. We are grateful to all those who have made comments on the paper at various stages in its evolution, and particularly to Lesley Milroy, to whose criticisms we have tried to respond. All remaining errors and shortcomings are, of course, our responsibility.

2. The contradiction between Jespersen's views and those of the eighteenth-century purists exemplifies a tendency to identify whatever is thought healthy and vital with the linguistic behaviour of men, and whatever is disapproved with that of women. A striking example from sociolinguistics itself is Labov's work on Black English Vernacular, where he writes approvingly of the vernacular as 'the mainstream in the history of the language' (1972b: 258f) while linking it to a street culture in which women not only do not, but cannot and should not participate (1972b: 254).

3. The reason we chose to consider Trudgill's speculations in detail reflects the fact that they have been extremely influential; many people take it as read that the status explanation is true. We believe, in contrast, that it must remain speculative until more compelling evidence is adduced for women's greater status consciousness.

4. Cf. Newbrook's study of the Wirral (1983), which found a variant considered 'hypercorrect' to be favoured by women to a greater extent than men. Newbrook, however, did not subdivide his sample for social class, so it is hard to say if the pattern he uncovered was the same as the Glasgow pattern or not.

5. According to Marie Haug (1973), working-class women in the USA are likely to have a higher level of education than their husbands. In Haug's study of working couples using census data collected in 1970, this was the case for more than 50 per cent of young and middle-aged working-class women.

6. Douglas-Cowie's methods appear to work less well in studies where the investigator is an outsider to the community, and this suggests they would raise severe problems in large-scale surveys (Milroy, personal communication). Even so, it should not be beyond our wit to find some way of incorporating social ambition as a nonlinguistic variable.

7. We are aware of one study that suggests this is happening: Ulseth's 'Stress and toneme as used by Trondheim speakers: a sociolinguistic study', cited by Chambers and Trudgill (1980: 100).

8. Since (4) specifies same-sex links, two out of the five network-strategy conditions value same-sex rather than mixed-sex links. It is in fact built into network theory that high levels of social segregation of the sexes occur where networks are strongest.

9. Features that act as markers of group identity are those which have a high correlation with the nonlinguistic variable measuring degree of integration into a group (e.g. 'network strength score' or 'adherence to vernacular culture'). But this does not necessarily imply that the linguistic variant concerned has a high frequency of overall use, as would be the case with vernacular variants in the Labovian paradigm. Indeed, it would be possible for a group that attached no significance to feature X to use it more than a group for which it was a marker of identity. Our thanks to Lesley Milroy for clarifying this important point.

10. Cheshire defines vernacular culture using male-oriented criteria like fighting and stealing which fit the girls less well. No attempt is made to discover forms of taboed behaviour that are meaningful for girls (e.g. degrees of sexual activity).
Nichols (1983) acknowledges the utility of social network structure in explaining these choices. But this is not incompatible with emphasising economic relations, since ‘market forces’ and employment patterns are important determinants of a person’s social network structure.

Chapter 3

A pragmatic account of women’s use of standard speech

Margaret Deuchar

1. Introduction

Several sociolinguistic studies (e.g. Labov 1966; Trudgill 1974a; Milroy 1980) have found that in western, industrial societies, women tend to produce speech closer to the standard in pronunciation than that of men. The main explanations advanced for this phenomenon are in terms of sociological factors external to language such as status consciousness or solidarity. I shall show that neither of these explanations is entirely satisfactory, but that the phenomenon can be explained in terms of pragmatic, interactional notions internal to language use. The notions I shall make use of are those of face and power as used by Brown and Levinson (1978) in their model of politeness.

2. Findings to be explained

To begin with we must be clear about what is meant by the finding that women produce speech closer to the standard than that of men. This finding is based mainly on work done in the USA and Britain, but also in other western, industrialised countries. What the studies have in common is that they are conducted in places where there is a recognised standard pronunciation, such as Received Pronunciation in Britain, and they are based on data collected in a variety of situations, ranging from interviews to informal conversations. The speech data are coded for particular variables, and scored in terms of a scale which reflects how close their variants are to standard pronunciation. So for example, in Trudgill’s (1974) study of the variable (ng), i.e. the pronunciation of the suffix in verbs like walking,
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