Language change according to William Labov

Stable Distribution of English Low Vowels

Unstable Distribution of English Low Vowels

Social Networks

Change
1. For a given phoneme with mean $P$ and asymmetrical neighbours, outliers in the direction of the farther neighbour $N_1$ are heard as valid tokens more often than outliers in the direction of the nearer neighbour $N_2$.
2. New language learners acquire a mean value $P'$ shifted in the direction of $N_1$.
3. Steps (1) and (2) continue for succeeding generations irrespective of social evaluation...

Change
4. Outliers in the $N_1$ direction are heard as characteristic of younger speakers and emphatic, less monitored speech, deviant from norm of older speakers.
5. Younger nonconformist speakers consequently use a higher frequency still.
6. Female speakers increase their use of $N_1$-outliers still further so that these are now heard as characteristic of female speech.
7. Male conformist speakers retreat from the use of $N_1$-outliers.
Change

8. Upwardly mobile female, nonconforming speakers spread the use of N1-outliers and shifted P’ to the limits of the speech community.

9. A pattern of social stratification develops with the highest values of the variable in communities with the highest concentration of upwardly mobile nonconforming speakers.

10. The use of N1-outliers rises to public awareness and irregular social correction begins.