

SUMMARY OF “SOCIOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS A COMPONENT OF LINGUISTIC VARIATION”

Dodsworth (2008)

1. VARIABLE

This article presents an investigation of vowel pronunciation in Worthington Ohio. In particular we are looking at the fronting of the vowel /o/, as in the words *home* or *coat*.

2. SUMMARY

The author begins by describing the tension that exists between Worthington and the city of Columbus. In the land between the two municipalities there has been development of apartment buildings for people who want to send their children to Worthington schools but still pay Columbus taxes which are lower, thus creating a division between true locals and carpetbaggers.

Regarding the variable, fronting is part of the South Midland region and is also perceived to be common among working-class males. based on the work of ? the author concludes that fronting has been available in the region for at least a century, and so has been available to all classes and has acquired indexical values that link it to locality.

Study Set Up The author analyzes 545 tokens from 21 speakers (there seems to be a problem with Tables 2, 3, and 4: 9 plus 11 does not equal 21). D measures the F2 values and normalizes them and then tests correlations with independent variables which are age (over 30 or under 30), sex, and affiliation with Worthington.

Results:

- age is the only statistically significant factor
- in terms of sex there is a slight lead by females
- in terms of Worthington affiliation, people with a weaker affiliation towards Worthington front /o/ more

Because two of the independent factors did not prove to be significant, and because very little of the variation was being explained, the author does an analysis of the variation by individual speaker.

As expected there is a wide spread between the different speakers and using traditional arguments about attitude towards the place of residence, or attitude towards certain social institutions, the author believes that we can explain the extremes in terms of speaker behavior (for example Sally vs. Emily). However, she then finds certain other speakers (Lydia, Rita) that match the extremes of behavior, but in terms of pronunciation are in

the middle of the range of /o/ fronting. In other words a category such as attitude would only explain part of the speaker's behavior.

In order to resolve this issue, the author employs the concept of sociological imagination. D wonders whether different speakers have different mental representations of their community and in this case the Columbus-Worthington distinction and whether this difference in representations affects their pronunciation. D observes that linguistic practices are related to speakers' "awareness of the various levels and domains of society and their interconnections." What is not clear is why the concept of sociological imagination is introduced only in trying to understand the low-level significance of community affiliation and is not also applied to the low-level significance of sex as well.

The author isolates two types of social consciousness: human centred and integrated.

- human centred: this means that the speaker views the situation from the perspective of personal experiences and ideologies.
- integrated: the speaker views the situation with an emphasis on links between the individual and the social and by situating the process in its historical perspective. For example urban sprawl is not seen just in the context of Worthington but as a global phenomenon.

In an attempt to explain the different behaviors of Sally and Lydia on the one hand (who both have a clear affiliation to Worthington) and Emily and Rita on the other (weak affiliations), D refers to the ways that the young women in these two pairs construct their social consciousness differently. For Sally and Emily "personal practices, characteristics and beliefs are central," while for Lydia and Rita "Lydia and Rita show evidence of mental representations in which human characteristics are less independent of social structures and historical processes, of a broader perspective that takes into account social processes operating above the level of the individual."

3. ASSESSMENT

The conundrum of speakers with similar local affiliations but divergent linguistic behavior, is indeed intriguing. D lays out the problem very clearly and justifies its importance within sociolinguistics. The exposition of the theoretical concepts feels a bit rushed, but the discussion of the evidence for assigning different types of social consciousness to the speakers is detailed and convincing. The overall exegesis is appealing but as the author herself notes the conclusions are tentative and need to be supportive with other, perhaps non-linguistic evidence of diverging social consciousness.

REFERENCES

- Dodsworth, R., 2008. Sociological consciousness as a component of linguistic variation. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12, 34–57.
- Thomas, E. R., 2001. *An Acoustic Analysis of Vowel Variation in New World English*. Publication of the American Dialect Society. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.