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STIGMATIZATION AND PRESTIGE IN SELECTED PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES. PHONOLOGICAL VARIABILITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN STRATIFIED SOCIETIES

The article starts from describing phonological variables and their identifiable variants. It concentrates on finding a convincing explanation and justification for the selection of particular phonological realizations. Due to the influence of such factors as the region, social settings, speech style and linguistic context, one can spot the variability in speech which contributes to speech alternations and the development of a number of variants.

1. The notion of the variability

It is undeniable that variability is observable in all the language areas – grammar (syntax), vocabulary (lexicon) and pronunciation (phonology). It is necessary to distinguish the terms ***variable*** and ***variant*** in order to avoid confusion. A *variable* is an item which embraces two or more variants (Hudson, 1996). A phonological variable is an item which has at least two realizations, the selection of which depends on a number of reasons, such as region, situational or linguistic context, social factors, speech style etc. For instance, *which*, *where* etc. reflect a phonological variable /w/, which in turn has got two identifiable *variant* pronunciations – /w/ or /hw/.

The purpose of this paper is to present randomly selected phonological variables which lead us to further analysis aimed at finding possible reasons for the selection of one of the two (or more) variants.

It should be stressed that the reasons for the selection of the variables were very vague or not even dealt with in the past. Apparently, it was sufficient to know that people differed in their own speech. There was an assumption that the variable to be chosen by a person depended on his or her preference and his own style. Therefore the term *free variation* was employed when analyzing these idiosyncrasies. Only

later was it revealed that there were certain 'rules' and arguments which accounted for the application of these variables and their idiosyncratic, irregular and unpredictable variants.

> Where linguistic variation had been observed in the past, it had generally been referred to as *free variation*. One of the achievements of urban dialectology has been to show that this type of variation is usually not "free" at all, but is constrained by social or linguistic factors. The insight was achieved in the first instance as a result of the development of the notion of the *linguistic variable*, ... (Chambers and Trudgill, 1998: 50).

Analyzing particular speech variables and their frequency can lead us to the conclusion that certain regularity can be observed in this respect. Generally, what gives rise to the consistency and even predictability of the variables are the ***context***, ***situational*** *and* ***social setting*** and ***linguistic environment***. Only then should the pronunciation or realization of particular variants be predicted at least to some extent. In this analysis I have the intention of highlighting the variables and finding a convincing explanation for their selection.

It should be pointed out that the pronunciation can also be predicted on purely phonological grounds at times, which has no correlation with optimal realizations; i.e. the expected aspiration of the /p/ sound, as in *pat*, *pin*, *pen* etc. Therefore we might expect an American person to articulate *tata* as /thata/. This example perfectly reflects the fact that we should not expect any optimality here since aspiration seems to be an obligatory factor (Gimson, 1997). In contrast, Polish students learning English might be variable in their pronunciation of "*Polish*" since not all of them are made aware of such phonological phenomena (in fact hardly any high school student would be cognizant of the aspiration process). Even though they are formally taught, they tend to apply it randomly. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that in such cases we do not deal with any variability. For that reason, I intend to focus on the variability which indicates that at least two variants can be applied (which is not the case with the 'p' aspiration).

Exposure to the variables does not prevent people from communicating, interacting and understanding each other; the mutual intelligibility is not impeded. "In practice these fairly fined differences which affect only a small part of speech and do not interfere with intelligibility, ..." (Spolsky, 1998: 40).

The term *variability* should definitely be familiar to those dealing with dialectology. It is observable in all areas of language, especially *grammar* and *phonology*. According to Labov (http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/lingwww/lin102–99/Notes/labov.html), the existence of a linguistic variable is particularly associated with social factors. Spolsky (1998: 11) stresses its value claiming that it can be socially significant. Admittedly, the choice of particular variants is correlated with social classes in stratified societies and communities which can be traced all over the world. Therefore, we can draw a simple conclusion that wherever we encounter stratification in societies, we should also expect differences in languages. The point is that some areas of language can reflect these differences more convincingly than the others.

However, this is not the subject of my investigation in this paper. What I intend to highlight is only speech and its potential realizations in everyday situations.

2. Phonological variability: prestige and stigmatization

Prestige and ***stigmatization*** are the two terms pertaining to variability. In the sociolinguistic context, whereas the former refers to the prestigious variants, the latter implies that the variants are stigmatized – regarded as corrupt and substandard (Wolfram and Fasold, 1974: 81).

Through interaction with others, the speakers can be *active* or *passive* participants involved in various conversations taking place in a number of social settings – formal, informal, casual etc. Undeniably, people using prestigious forms are exposed to their counterparts which are less prestigious and regarded as undesirable. They passively participate in the discourse when talking to other interlocutors. Those using stigmatized variants are faced up with more correct and more standard variants when talking to others. However, according to Holmes (2001: 231), we observe imitation at times the purpose of which is accommodating to the speech of other interlocutors as is the case with low class people trying to make their speech more prestigious.

Although it should be relatively easy to identify which forms are prestigious and which are stigmatized, still the distinction can lead us to unexpected confusion. What contributes to this confusion is the region, the area in which these variables are identified. The form which is prestigious in one region is regarded as less prestigious or even stigmatized elsewhere and vice versa. As a result we can go so far as to assert that its value is not solely measured socially, but also spatially. "Post-vocalic [r] illustrates very clearly the arbitrariness of the particular forms which are considered standard and prestigious. There is nothing inherently bad or good about the pronunciation of any sound, as the different status of [r]-pronunciation in different cities illustrates. In New York City, pronouncing [r] is considered prestigious. In Reading in England it is not" (Holmes, 2001: 140).

Historically, the New York City dialect was r-less in the nineteenth century. This r-lessness was prestigious then. However, after the Second World War it became rhotic again (Wardhaugh, 1998). Paradoxically, the speech of older generation in the city is apparently conservative and stigmatized (at least from the point of view of the youngsters). Nevertheless, if social factors had been dealt with in the past, the /r/ pronunciation would probably have been considered socially prestigious and non-stigmatized.

Similarly, add Wolfram and Fasold (1974), stability is not characteristic of stigmatized features. The feature which is stigmatized now was not solely restricted to high class people in the past, which means that it was employed by all the people, regardless of their social status. This premise has a temporal dimension. We also encounter an assimilation process in which lower class speakers acquire prestige vari-

ants by imitating the speech of high class people. However, it would be a gross exaggeration to state that prestige forms become stigmatized immediately. In the process of speech imitation, they might solely lose their prestigious value.

Are speakers aware of the forms they apply in their speech? Are they aware of their value – which is either prestigious or stigmatized? Are their variants consistent and regular or are they likely to switch? If there is little consistency, what is the frequency? What makes speakers change the way they talk? Why should they do this? How significant is the need to modify your speech?

Before concentrating on the variables, it is crucial to know the notion of ***an indicator*** (***social indicator***), ***a marker*** and ***a stereotype***. These terms will help us answer some of the above questions.

An indicator is the only term which brings forth very little or even no social importance. It is socially significant but they are not shown any awareness. The only people who are aware of social indicators are linguistically trained researchers (Wardhaugh, 1998: 140).

A social marker, on the other hand, has a close connection with the social status and is socially significant. They can be both *socially* and *stylistically* conditioned (i.e. the rhoticity in New York City etc). The r-less speech in the New York City dialect determines the social class inferiority since your non-rhoticity marks you as being someone from a lower class despite the fact that inconsistencies appear, which is mirrored in the hypercorrection process (Bailey and Robinson, 1973). Stylistically, lower class people are more frequent and regular in their rhoticity since only then do they focus on the correctness remembering that this sound is prestigious. What makes it different as opposed to social indicators is the awareness shown by ordinary people – interlocutors in this respect. Indicators are less abundant in American English, as opposed to social markers the number of which is ubiquitous, "Social markers are much more prevalent in American English than social indicators" (http://users.ntplx. net/~pfarris/essays/science/english.txt).

Social stereotypes are referred to the forms which are consciously characterized by the speech of the people. For that reason, Wardhaugh (1998: 140) provides us with the examples, "New York *boid* for bird or *Toitytoid Street* for *33rd Street*; Texas 'drawling' or *Howdy Pardner*; a Northumbrian *Wot-cher* (What cheer?) greeting; the British use of *chap*; or a Bostonian's *Pahk the cah in Hahvahd Yahd*." Other examples – grammatical examples might be the forms which "violate" the structures; i.e. deletion of the copula, as in *She very smart*, sound simplification or deletion etc (http://users.ntplx.net/~pfarris/essays/science/english.txt). It is noticeable that all these examples, regarded as stigmatized, are a far cry from their standard counterparts.

Eventually the term ***social diagnosticism*** should not be ignored, especially when analyzing sociolinguistic variability. A linguistic variable in which we identify its variants by means of social class is termed *socially diagnostic* (Wardhaugh, 1998). Thus phonologically, the r-pronunciation or non-pronunciation, the /ɪŋ/ variable, the /θ/ or the /ð/ variables, the /aɪ/ variable, are all the instances of socially diagnostic variables since the selection of their variants is primarily ascribed to social stratification.

It should be added that social diagnosticism is easier to observe when analyzing grammatical variables. Phonological variables employed by speakers of different social classes usually exemplify a certain gradual process the progression of which depends on the social prestige. Thus, there is a need to distinguish ***gradient*** and ***sharp stratifications*** (Wolfram and Fasold, 1974: 80).

The speech variables are so abundant and pervasive in various languages that this gave rise to the so called ***Optimality Theory*** (Prince and Smolensky 1993; McCarthy and Prince 1993a; Archangeli and Langendoen 1997, quoted in Hammond, 1993: 13). Each variable constitutes at least two identifiable variants the selection and articulation of which depend on various factors. Hammond (1999) introduces the terms "*input*" – which refers to the *variable* and "*candidates*" – which are associated with its different pronunciations or realizations (*variants*). Therefore, to avoid confusion, I am going to use these terms when focusing on particular examples.

3. Social variability: regional implications

When we distinguish phonological variables influenced by social factors, we should not disregard the area in which these social variables are employed. Unavoidably, it is often important to know the region which might play a crucial role here. Some regions are associated with prestige; apparently regions which serve as centers where social mobility is likely to be noticed.

> ...separation of areas by rivers, mountains, and other natural barriers has inhibited the spread of language in the past because it has inhibited physical mobility. Mountain ranges, islands, and other isolated areas as a result often become *relic areas* – areas in which the older forms of a language are preserved. ... In opposition to relic areas, we have what are commonly called *focal areas* – dialect areas that serve as centers for linguistic spread. ... Prestigious urban centers often serve as focal areas, so that a city like Boston may show the spread of dialect features outward from that area (Wolfram and Fasold, 1974: 75).

We can assume that the speech in some regions is very influential since speakers from other regions, at least neighboring areas imitate the speech from the central area. Predictably, low class people are expected to imitate the speech faster as they struggle to have their speech "standardized" and similar to the prestigious speech of high class people.

Nevertheless, the popularity of particular regions pertaining to speech is also evident "temporarily", which means that it is also likely to change. Some areas used to be popular in the past but they lost their center of attention and prestige for a number of reasons. As a result, since the popularity of a particular region vanishes, the interest in its speech also diminishes.

Conversely, some areas have been deprived of the chance to become places in which the linguistic forms could be "differentiated", "altered", "standardized" in order to become more prestigious and "highly sought-after." Historically, in the southern

areas of the United States the events were not very favorable for the development of variations in which we might distinguish prestigious and stigmatized features. In the area which was mostly populated by Black people, the geographical and social mobility was definitely limited.

4. *Selected phonological variables*

An example of a phonological variable which has two optimal pronunciations is the diphthongal variable /aɪ/, whose variants (candidates) are the diphthongal variant /aɪ/ and its monophthongal counterpart /ɑ:/. Since the former is expected in all the areas except for the South, we can consider region to contribute to the variability and its distribution. However, there are some constraints which restrict the usage of the monophthongal variation. Since this realization is applied before voiced consonants or word-finally, the /aɪ/ should be expected in words such as *thrive*, *file* (consonant voicing); *cry*, *pry*, *my* etc (word finally). However, if the /aɪ/ diphthong precedes voiceless consonants, a diphthongal realization prevails, which is typical of educated Southern speech (Mencken, 1974: 463), as in: *plight*, *nice person* etc. Therefore, the application of the /ɑ:/ sound is also strictly correlated to the linguistic environment. Since education is one of the social factors, we can argue that the process of monophthongisation is a reflection of both regional and social variation. Since the /aɪ/ variant is educated, we give it a prestigious, non-stigmatized status, as opposed to /ɑ:/, the stigmatization of which appears to be undeniable.

We should stress that the monophthongisation of /aɪ/ is not stigmatized in most Black English varieties being used by all people regardless of their social status.

Another interesting variable which constituted the subject of a social investigation was /θ/ and /ð/, as in *thorny*, *theme*, *thus*, *thrive though* (initially), *healthy*, *lethal*, *pathetic*, *something, southern*, *wither*, *brother* (medially), *wrath*, *loathe*, *worth*, *north*, *loath*, *with* (terminally). As we can observe, the /θ/ and /ð/, whose positions in words are ubiquitous, are either voiced or devoiced. In order to articulate this dental fricative appropriately, the blade of the tongue should touch the inside of the lower upper teeth with the air passing through the gaps between the tongue and the teeth (Roach, 1994: 49).

Nevertheless, we encounter a differentiation of the /θ/ and /ð/ pronunciation, in the which case we hear /t/ or /d/ instead of their respective standard counterparts /θ/ and /ð/ (http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/1906/dialects.html).

Hannah and Trudgill (1994) state that this phenomenon is likely to occur in the New York City speech. It is also crucial to point out that these variants are not expected to be heard in the speech of educated and high class people (http://www~nw.uniregensburg.de/~.kuf14327.7.stud.uni-regensburg.de.NYC.html).

William Labov (quoted in Wardhaugh, 1998), concentrated on the /θ/ and /ð/ variables in the New York City speech by having investigated their realization in initial position, as in *thing*, *this*, *thorn* etc. His observations reflect the idea of

applying the standard or non-standard variants of /θ/ and /ð/ according to both stylistic and social stratification. The former refers to the different styles which the speakers are exposed to, i.e. casual speech, careful speech, reading style, word lists etc. The latter pertains to various levels of socioeconomic classes, as a lower class and an upper class.

Socially, speakers of all classes tend to modify the /θ/ and /ð/ variables in each style, the application of a non-standard form is correlated to the social class, which indicates that the higher the class is, the fewer non-stigmatized variants are employed. Stylistically, the more monitored the speech is, the fewer nonstandard variants should be expected. The results led Labov to further interesting observations,

> ... in every context members of the speech community are differentiated by the use of the variable, but nevertheless every group behaves in the same way, as indicated by the parallel slope of style shifting. However, individuals are not consciously aware of this general pattern for all groups because each individual is limited in his or her social contacts. The same linguistic variable signals both social and stylistic stratification (Wardhaugh, 1984: 164).

We should also remember that the /θ/ and /ð/ variables with their two variants – /t/ and /d/ (each respectively), which are regarded as stigmatized in the New York City area, do not only appear in American dialects. Admittedly, its nonstandard variants are apparently considered to be standard in other dialectal variations, i.e. Black English Vernacular. It is widespread in initial position. However, rarely should we expect the /d/ variant medially, in which case /v/ is heard instead. "These words are pronounced *duh*, *dat*, *dose*, *dere* and *dey* ... This happens only in the beginning of the word; otherwise the realization of the voiced *th* is v, like in *ovvah* for *other* and *bruvver* for *brother*" (Whatley 1981: 100–101, quoted in http:/uta.fi/FAST/US1/LP/teru-be.html).

Wolfram and Fasold (1974: 136) provide us with a much more exhaustive account of the /θ/ and /ð/ variables and their realizations in various situations from both a social and linguistic point of view. They claim that the /v/ for voiced /ð/ is noticeable in both medial and terminal position. The unvoiced /θ/ is rendered as /f/ in all positions, i.e. *think*, *throat*, *nothing*. If, however, voiced nasal sounds precede the devoiced /θ/, /t/ is audible, as in *month*, *tenth* etc. Therefore, we can observe a typical regularity in this respect (http://www.une.edu.au/langnet/aave.htm).

Conclusively, whereas in New York City the /θ/ and /ð/ variables and their variants – both standard and stigmatized imply a social and stylistic significance, it is not so socially and stylistically conditioned in the speech of black people in which case there is not any clear-cut boundary separating stigmatized and prestigious realizations.

Another extraordinary observation concerns the variable /ɪŋ/ which, as it turned out, has two identifiable variants (candidates), /ɪŋ/ and /in/, as in *waiting*, *looking*, *doing*, *shopping* etc. Trudgill (1996) put forward a hypothesis in which he assumed that the higher the social class is, the more likely it is to hear the /ɪŋ/ realization of the variable. The results which he obtained in Norwich utterly confirmed his

assumptions (Wardhaugh, 1998: 166). Similarly, there are two factors which are of significance in this respect – both stylistic and social. The frequency of the /ɪŋ/ variant is correlated to the style of speech. As we can observe, the more formal the speech is, the closer attention is paid to articulating the /ɪŋ/ as /ɪŋ/ and not as /ɪn/. The standard pronunciation of sounds means choosing variants which are standard or prestigious, in this case the /ɪŋ/ variant, as opposed to /ɪn/, which is stigmatized and found in the speech of people from a lower class, "There are two variants, (ng): [n] and (ng): [ŋ], of which (ng): [ŋ] is the one generally considered to represent standard English and RP, so we might predict in advance that (ng): [ŋ] will be used more often by high-status speakers than by low-status-speakers, and more often under circumstances which draw attention to speech" (Hudson, 1996: 161).

Surprisingly enough, the observed phenomenon is not solely observable in Norwich, where Trudgill (1996) carried out his investigation. According to Holmes (2001: 139), the variability of /ɪŋ/ appears in speech communities in Britain, America and Australia as well.

There are also a number of sound simplifications which contribute to the development of variables. However, there is enough evidence to state that deleting sounds is applied due to phonological rules.

It is undeniable that whenever we observe a rule, there need to be some restrictions or constraints which enable it to be applied.

The first reduction to be identified is the consonant cluster simplification, as in *best*, *friend*, *last*, *risk*, *band*, *past*, *mist*, *field* etc. Noticeably, the last sound is a stop consonant which follows other consonants, both voiceless and voiced. It is claimed that consonant clusters such as *-st*, *-sk*, and *-nd* in a terminal position of the words undergo the process of reduction or simplification by articulating the final consonant weakly or not at all. In Black English, however, there is no weakening of the sound at the end of the word since it undergoes a complete deletion (Whatley 1981: 100–101, quoted in http:/uta.fi/FAST/US1/LP/teru-be.html).

Wolfram and Fasold, (1974: 129) elaborate on that stressing that this reduction is observable either in case of clusters which constitute part of the word, as has been shown above or when they constitute the suffix *-ed*, as in *looked*, *mocked*, *scanned, pissed* etc. (the latter pertains to nonstandard dialects of English).

In case of two adjacent words, there are also some constraints which differ according to dialects. In *best friend*, *bland tomato soup*, *guest house*, *best solution*, *difficult question* etc. the consonant reduction should be expected in spoken Standard English. However, in *best English teacher*, *bland onion soup*, *best answer*, *correct answer* etc. the consonant simplification (in which the last sound undergoes deletion) must not take place since the next sound is a vowel. "Crucially the frequency of reduction depends on the environment in which the sound occurs ... If the next word starts with a consonant, it is more likely to reduce than if the next word starts with a vowel" (http://www.une.edu.au/langnet/aave.htm).

This rule needs to be applied in Standard English, as opposed to nonstandard English, i.e. Black English Vernacular, in which such restrictions are not distinguished. Thus, such reductions might occur even though the next sound is a vowel,

i.e. *best friend*, but also *best answer*. One should not ignore the /t/ sound which is followed by another plosive and there is no audible release, as in *football*, *night train*, *that desk* etc. (Gimson, 1997).

The same rule concerns the *-ed* suffix, which might be deleted or undeleted, depending primarily on the linguistic environment and the dialectal variation. Thus, in standard dialects, whereas in i.e. *she backed Peter up*, it is acceptable to delete the *-ed* suffix, it would not be possible for *-ed* to undergo the process of deletion in *she backed out of her promise for no reason at all.* Admittedly, in most Black English dialects, the *-ed* suffix would probably be deleted.

Nevertheless, Wolfram and Fasold (1974) argue,

> Even in nonstandard dialects, the presence of a following vowel has a partial inhibiting effect. Clusters are less frequently simplified if the next word begins with a vowel than if it does not. Another major contextual constraint on deletion frequency is whether or not the final member of the cluster represents *-ed*. If it does, there will be a lower frequency of simplification than if the final member is an inherent part of the word.

Inarguably, there is a strong connection with morphological variability which is an indispensable factor in this respect as well.

Since there appears to be such a gradual frequency of the non-deletion of *-ed* suffix, we may risk a statement that regardless of the situational setting and linguistic environment, speakers are well aware of the optimal realization of the above-mentioned consonant clusters, both of which are acceptable. This might indicate that we can also label the deletion of *-ed* suffix as stigmatized and its survival as standard and prestigious.

There is another reduction rule concerning the post-nasal /t/ sound. Similarly, there are constraints which operate here and which contribute to the acceptability of the /t/ reduction. The post nasal /t/ is observable in such words, as *lent*, *rent*, *bent*, *sent*, *pant*, *want* etc. Inarguably, this rule does not function in such separate word items, in which case the standard /nt/ cluster is heard. Neither is it applied in words as *country*, *elementary*, *wintry* etc. since the /t/ sound precedes consonants. It does operate when the /nt/ cluster, being an inherent part of the word, precedes a stressless vowel (Fromkin, 2000: 564). Thus, the /t/ sound undergoes deletion in such words as *car rental*, *mental disease*, *parental care*, *dental care*, *center*, *fantasy*, *printer*, *vintage*, *century*, *interlocutor*, *intercity*, *sentence* etc., which is typical of American English pronunciation. However, the deletion is impossible in *fantastic*, *integrity*, *contagious* etc. We can also find homophonous words, as *banter – banner*, *winter – winner* etc.

It is significant to point out that the variable is solely ascribed to differences in speech styles. Predictably, the process of the post-nasal /t/ sound deletion should appear in a casual, rapid conversational style, in which people communicate freely and do not monitor their speech just because they do not feel obliged to. Conversely, in monitored speech, the /t/ sound is undeniably audible regardless of the fact that this phenomenon has the status of a rule. Apparently, differences in social position are not influential in this respect.

Conclusively, the /nt/ cluster is an example of a variable in which we distinguish its two variants – /nt/ and /n/. This variable works only under certain circumstances. Since it is regarded as a phonological rule, labeling the variants as stigmatized and less stigmatized appears to be somewhat peripheral, if not unnecessary and undesirable.

Finally, the last variable I intend to focus on and which evidently deserves attention is the /r/ sound. The /r/ sound comprises two identifiable variants. The first candidate is characteristic of a clear audibility of /r/; the other one indicates that the /r/ sound is either barely audible or is not audible whatsoever.

There have been a number of investigations concerning the /r/ sound and its articulation. William Labov (1996) contributed to one of the most significant observations regarding the variability of the /r/ sound. By having carried out his famous experiment in New York City department stores, he observed that its pronunciation is strictly correlated with *social class*, *speech style* and *linguistic environment*. Socially, the more rhotic you sound, the higher class you must represent. The amount of /r/ also pertains to stylistic variation – whereas monitored speech contributes to rhoticity (i.e. reading style, word lists), the loss of /r/ or its weakening is characteristic of casual conversation in which correct pronunciation for speakers is peripheral. Linguistically, the words with the /r/ sound at the end (in syllable final position) exhibit a greater rhoticity than the words where the /r/ sound is in a consonant cluster position. Therefore, regardless of the department, the /r/ sound was more likely to be heard in *floor* but it was barely audible (at least it was less frequent) in *fourth* (Hudson, 1996). Thus, we can regard the /r/ sound as prestigious and its loss as a stigmatized variant.

Labov also observed the phenomenon which utterly contradicted his assumptions. Lower middle-class speakers tended to sound more rhotic when having been exposed to reading word lists and pairs. This, however, made Labov aware of the process of hypercorrection.

> Someone from a higher social class is more likely to use the more prestigious accent because he / she has had contact with many more speakers of the more prestigious accents and by this feels secure in using this accent. Someone from a lower class will lack this security because of less contact with speakers of the more prestigious forms. If these lower class speakers use the more prestigious forms, they will do it, due to their lack of security, more consciously and therefore more correctly than the natural speakers of the upper class accent. This might be considered as hypercorrection then (Trippel, http://coral.liliouni-bielefekd.de/~ttrippel/labov/node17.html).

Why is the sound audible in terminal positions (as post vocalic) as in *floor*? Why isn't it so rhotic in pre-consonantal positions, as in *first*, *fourth* etc? One reason might be the effort which must be put in order to articulate the sound audibly and clearly. In this respect it seems to be much easier to pronounce the /r/ sound when it follows the vowel. However, undeniably, this effort concerns all people regardless of their social status, which still leaves the question unanswered. This might lead us to further analysis of why high class people sound more rhotic. We might

also assume that high class people struggle to show their distinctiveness – the language distinctiveness in order to show their "superiority." Apparently they would need to be quick innovators since low class people also struggle to use such speech in order to make their language – in this case their speech – similar to the most prestigious and favored.

5. Concluding remarks

Admittedly, variability is abundant in pronunciation. Whenever we talk about phonological variables (as well as morphological and syntactic), we encounter the alternative due to which we select one of the two (or more) realizations. The selection of the particular variant primarily depends on the social factors which constitute social status and education. It also pertains to the situational setting which gives rise to differences in a speech style. Thus our speech undergoes modification in casual conversation, more formal setting, when reading word lists etc. Socially and stylistically, the variables which have been observed, comprise their variants which are either prestigious or stigmatized. Which of them is used depends on the situation and speakers themselves. The pronunciation can also be predicted due to linguistic environment. Therefore, one of the two (or even more variants) is applied less frequently.

Sometimes we do not talk about any optimality whatsoever, which is due to phonological rules. Therefore, if there is no optimality, there is no prestige or stigmatization. Contradictorily, if we do observe some optimal pronunciation, we can argue that it is variable. The variables contribute to the distinction between realizations which are either stigmatized (less standard) or non-stigmatized due to social, situational and contextual differences. What is certainly common is the fact that both of them are acceptable. However, some of them might be acceptable only for particular members in particular situational settings.

Possibly, some people tend to adjust their speech to the speech of high class people in order to make it more standard and less stigmatized. In such cases, people do it consciously by interacting with people of a high social class. High class people are not so preoccupied since they do not need to change their speech unnaturally. If, however, their speech is continuously imitated, its prestige might either disappear or lose its value. Nevertheless, other variants appear and it takes some time for them to become so widespread among all social classes. Naturally, it does not always need to be the case. It often turns out that regardless of the period of time, there is a clear distinction between prestigious and stigmatized pronunciation mainly because low class people either fail to standardize their speech or they do not feel the need to. Undeniably, it is extraordinary that by talking to people in various circumstances, we can "see" more than just their appearance, behavior and gestures.

Finally, the region is very significant as well. Apparently, in some regions a particular sound is variable and usually has two variants, both prestigious and stigmatized. In one speech area a particular variant is prestigious whereas in another one

it becomes more stigmatized. In other regions, the sound does not display any variation. Therefore, when analyzing stigmatization in pronunciation, we should take regional, social, contextual and stylistic differences into consideration.

Depending on the variables, some of these factors are more important than the others. Although these factors are independent, still they often overlap when contributing to the articulation of the phonological variables. Undeniably, the differences in pronunciation of particular sounds can often be justified and even predicted.

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