

Chapter 1 Linguistic change across the lifespan

And I was kind of wishing that I didn't actually get in [to college]. That way I could just stay here, and be with my family and my friends and that kind of thing. But I'm going, so I'll just have to make the best of it!

Joanna, 2005

1.0 Talking posh

In their well-known study of koiné formation, Kerswill and Williams (2000) collected speech data in Milton Keynes, a British “New Town” designated in 1967 to accommodate a growing post-war population. Britain also planned “town expansion schemes” which in the 1960s and 1970s brought council estates¹ to the edges of small market towns in south-eastern England, including the town in which I grew up. These towns were already home to both long-settled residents and more recent middle-class migrants from the London suburbs, all of whom were suddenly brought into contact with thousands of re-housed working class Londoners, mostly from the East End.

The child of middle-class suburbanites, I sounded very different from the majority of my peers, whose home dialect was working class London English. There were very few of us at school who had more standard accents, and we were relentlessly teased for being “posh”². Most gradually accommodated to the Londoners, leaving myself and another girl, who I shall call Victoria, the only posh holdouts. After high school, Victoria started a job in Canary Wharf, the new banking district of London, to which she commuted every day from home; and when I ran into her a few years later, she was transformed: more confident, more fashionably dressed and more sociable. Yet the most

striking change had been made to her accent, which had moved dramatically towards the London working-class norm. I remember feeling surprised, a little betrayed, and then worried: why was I now the only odd one out?

Looking back, it seems highly likely that my own post-secondary school transition (to Cambridge University) was responsible, since that turned out to be the first place I had ever been where the majority of my peers sounded like me. The different paths Victoria and I took, and our attitudes to the speech communities we had grown up in and to those we encountered later on, were reflected in our different adult ways of speaking. Yet we were alike insofar as we had resisted the peer pressure to participate in community linguistic change throughout our teenage years. How did we do it? In this dissertation I examine how different individual life experiences, both during and after the completion of secondary schooling, may affect an individual's involvement in the linguistic changes going on in the community, and what this means for the sociolinguistic study of real time change.

1.1 Introduction

Labov's (1966) pioneering study of New York's Lower East Side demonstrated that community change in progress could be observed through synchronic age stratification, a method known as apparent time interpretation. In the decades since its publication, sociolinguists have used age distributions in apparent time to trace the course of linguistic change in many communities across the world (e.g. Haeri, 1994; Hibiya, 1988; Macaulay, 1977; Modaresi, 1978; Rickford, 1979; Shuy, Wolfram, & Riley, 1967; Trudgill, 1974 inter alia). The positive correlation between decreasing age and frequency

of use of an incoming linguistic variant was a diagnostic of community change in progress.

However, Cedergren's (1987) re-study of the lenition of (ch) in Panama City, undertaken more than 10 years after her first apparent time study (Cedergren, 1973), revealed a peak in use of the incoming variant among adult speakers in their early 20s. That is, young adults realized lenited variants of (ch) with a higher frequency than both older community members *and* teenagers. Ash (1982) found a similar peak among young adults for the vocalization of (l) in Philadelphia. In more recent work, Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2007) show that for six morphosyntactic and discourse-pragmatic variables in English (including eg. forms of the future tense, quotative LIKE and intensifier SO) there is an adolescent peak in apparent time. Linguistic change in progress, then, is not a monotonic function of age, but presents a more complicated picture, in which community change is accompanied by individual change across the lifespan. What we see in these peaks is a reflection of the individual's sociolinguistic lability, and of his or her changing relationship with parents, peer group and the wider world. The observation is not new: recurring patterns with age (known as 'age-grading') had previously been noted in the case of stigmatized variants of stable variables, such as (ing) in New York, Norwich and Detroit, where younger speakers consistently used high rates of the non-standard alveolar variant. The consistent appearance of a peak in adolescence for non-standard sociolinguistic variants is consonant with a theory of normative pressure, which is assumed to be weakest during the teenage years, when peer influence is greatest. Engagement with more mainstream society in the adult years produces more appropriately conservative sociolinguistic behavior, and a retreat from non-standard

variants. Thus individuals change, while the community remains stable. Trend studies such as Cedergren's, however, have demonstrated that individuals can also change, in similar ways, alongside a backdrop of community change.

It is vital that sociolinguists gain a better understanding of the individual peak, and the conservatism and perhaps stability which must follow it. Clearly, for community language change to occur, children must learn to advance beyond their parents' vernacular, overtake their older peers and also stabilize or retreat later on, so that they may in turn be overtaken by their own children. This stability must set in before adulthood – although the question of whether 'adulthood' here should be linguistically or socially defined is one to be addressed in this dissertation. Regardless, without individual stability, community changes could not increment over time.³ The stability hypothesis, then, is not only crucial to the reliable interpretation of apparent time, but to a workable theory of community language change. Without a detailed understanding of how the dynamics of lifespan change intersect with community change, the rate of apparent time change may sometimes be underestimated (Labov, 2001:446).

In particular, we know little about the extent to which teenagers, who are responsible for many peaks, slow down or retreat from participation in linguistic change in later life:

If adolescence is the life stage in which speakers push the envelope of variation, conservatism is said to set in during adulthood. Adults have regularly been shown...to be more conservative in their use of variables than younger age groups. This conservatism has been attributed to the pressure for use of standard language in the workplace.

(Eckert, 1997:164)

Yet young adulthood is in general a surprisingly understudied life stage in sociolinguistics, with more attention directed to adolescents, pre-adolescents and children (e.g. Cheshire, 1982; Eckert, 2000; Goodwin, 1982; Kerswill, 1996; Kerswill, Torgersen, & Fox, 2005; Mendoza-Denton, 1997). Large-scale sociolinguistic surveys generally include young people in their 20s, but this age group is rarely accorded any special sociolinguistic interest. Adulthood in any case tends to represent a default category against which other life stages are compared. Real time panel studies of linguistic change have not looked at young adults in detail either. De Decker's (2002; 2006) study, which followed high school graduates into their first year of college, is a notable exception and will be discussed in a later section.

The present work is designed as a longitudinal study of the speech of teenage girls undergoing the transition to young adulthood in South Philadelphia. The main source of data is a collection of sociolinguistic interviews that I conducted with a panel of girls in their senior year of high school and first year of college, in addition to ethnographic observations and survey information. Specifically, it is an investigation of the extent to which speakers in this life stage do or do not continue to participate in ongoing community linguistic change, with particular reference to changes that are *below* the level of social awareness.

To achieve this, three phonological variables undergoing change in Philadelphia will be considered:

- a) the raising and backing of the nucleus of /ay/ before voiceless consonants,
- b) the lowering of /e/ and
- c) the fronting and raising of the nucleus of /aw/.

The girls' production of these phonemes in real time will be compared with their use of two stable linguistic variables over the same one year time period. Stable variables, by definition, involve linguistic alternates suspended in a stable, long-term relationship, often for many centuries. The two chosen for the present study are a) the alternation between velar and alveolar variants of (ing), and b) the alternation between interdental and stop variants of word-initial (dh), both of which have been the subjects of extensive prior research.

An ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of these variables in a real time investigation of individual linguistic change is justified on the following grounds.

- There have been few *panel* studies of linguistic changes from below, and almost none of these have included speakers in late adolescence to young adulthood: the period in which apparent time peaks occur;
- Little is known about individuals' use of stable variables over the lifespan, although much has been hypothesized from apparent time data;
- Thanks to many decades of research by William Labov and colleagues, phonological variables in Philadelphia are among the best understood in the field,

- and provide an ideal opportunity to carry out detailed intra-individual comparisons against a background of community change;
- The addition of *ethnographic* observations should help to explain any intra- and inter-speaker variability in individuals' use of both stable and changing linguistic variables over the time period being investigated.

In the rest of this chapter, I will expand upon the four points made above. I will review the existing literature on linguistic change in real time in section 1.2. In section 1.3, I will situate the phonological variables in the context of the Philadelphia speech community. Specific details about the variables will be presented in later chapters. In section 1.4 I consider work in sociology and linguistics on the lifecourse, particularly the adolescent to young adult transition. Section 1.5 will describe the contribution of ethnographic methods to the understanding of linguistic change. In section 1.6 I outline the objectives of the dissertation.

1.2 Tracking linguistic change in real time

The apparent time construct has been supported as a reliable tool in inferring the progress of linguistic change over time (Bailey, Wikle, Tillery, & Sand, 1991). Yet as many linguists have noted (Bailey, 2001; Guy, 2004; Labov, 1994), the clearest picture of linguistic change must come from a combination of real time and apparent time evidence. Real-time studies are of two types: *trend* and *panel* studies (G. Sankoff, 2005). Trend studies replicate the methods and sampling criteria of an earlier study in the same speech

community. A panel study relocates the original speakers from the first study, allowing linguists to test for changes that occur within the life-span, such as age-graded changes.

In an ideal world, linguists would study linguistic change in progress as it occurs, in real time, by following people over the course of their entire lives, or a community over decades. There are obvious methodological difficulties associated with real-time work, such as maintaining contact with individual panel speakers, or constructing and matching cohorts in trend studies. Yet these types of studies have been successfully carried out, particularly in recent years, now that enough time has elapsed since the earliest apparent time studies to allow the testing of original hypotheses against newer, real-time evidence.⁴

As already mentioned in section 1.1, one of the first trend studies was carried out by Cedergren (1973; 1987) in her return to Panama City. Other notable trend studies of phonological change include Trudgill's (1988) re-study of Norwich and Sankoff and Blondeau's work on uvular /R/ in Montreal French (G. Sankoff & Blondeau, 2007; G. Sankoff, Blondeau, & Charity, 2001). Morphological change in Brazilian Portuguese (Naro & Scherre, 2003), Finnish (Nahkola & Saanilahti, 2004), and in Montreal French (G. Sankoff & Wagner, 2006) has also been tracked in real time via trend study methodology⁵. Studies of this kind have been instrumental not only in supporting the apparent time construct, but in understanding how different types of change diffuse through the social structure of a speech community over time.

The discovery of interruptions to the assumed smooth progress of generational change has prompted a wave of interest in panel studies. Panel studies have provided mounting evidence to confirm that speakers can modify their use of changing

sociolinguistic variables beyond the developmental stages of childhood and pre-adolescence. While structural categories such as phonemes appear to remain unchanged (Labov, 1994:102-107), other linguistic elements subject to sociolinguistic variation, notably lexicon (D. Sankoff, 1993), morphology (Paunonen, 1996) and phonetics (G. Sankoff et al., 2001) appear to be malleable. Support for these findings have come from highly detailed phonetic studies of individual public figures, such as Harrington, Palethorpe and Watson's (2000) study of the Queen of England's public broadcasts, or Pharao's (2007) study of chat show interviews with a Danish celebrity. In both cases, the speaker shifted some of their phonetic realizations in the direction of community change.

An intriguing study of individual lifespan change is that of the Yiddish singer Sarah Gorby, by Ellen Prince (Prince, 1987). Gorby, was tracked over the course of her decades-long recording career. Prince found that Gorby successfully maintained the vowels of a prestige dialect her native Bessarabian dialect (not the standard), in open-class, but not closed-class lexical items. Out of contact with other speakers of her native dialect for virtually her entire life, Gorby had apparently shifted to a more standard vowel pattern, but could reproduce the dialect variants in the more salient, open-class words. Prince's findings suggest that not only are some linguistic categories more accessible to modification in adulthood than others, but that speakers may be especially aware of (whether in accepting or rejecting) more socially prestigious variants. Sankoff, Blondeau and Charity (2001) examined the use of apical versus uvular /r/ in Montreal French in the speech of 25 panel members, 7 of whom increased their use of uvular /r/ over the course of their lifespans. The most dramatic increases in use of the more prestigious incoming uvular variant occurred in the speech of a speaker named Lysiane B. As Lysiane steadily

climbed the socioeconomic ladder from 1971 to 1995, the frequency of her use of uvular /r/ climbed too.

While an understanding of individuals' post-adolescent participation in prestigious change from above is crucial to the interpretation of apparent time, its sociopsychological motivations are relatively transparent. As in cases of stable variation, non-prestige variants are associated with the youth, while prestige variants increase in adulthood. More interesting is the question of why an individual such as the Queen of England, who arguably holds the most prestigious place possible in English society, would participate in non-prestigious change, long after she has left behind the young adult peak identified by Cedergren and others.

To explore this, it is helpful to make use of a major theoretical typology of change proposed by Labov (1966), in which he differentiated stable variation from 'change from above' and 'change from below'. "Change from above" refers to linguistic change that is above the level of social awareness; it is also a reference to the frequency with which such changes originate in the higher social classes. "Change from below" refers to linguistic change below the level of social awareness, and originating in the middle or lower social classes.

Sociolinguistic panel studies have tended, as noted above, to examine linguistic variables above the level of social awareness, whether stable or changing. Panel studies of teenagers and young adults have had a similar focus. They have also tended to explain individual lifespan change as the result of dialect contact, rather than looking at individuals' relationship to community-internal change.

Three such panel studies focus on contact between standard English and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Baugh (1996) followed the fortunes of four young African-American men and found that three reduced their use of non-standard negation between adolescence and adulthood as a result of increasing contact with standard English. The fourth speaker was in jail by adulthood; his engagement with the wider linguistic marketplace had effectively been terminated.

Cukor-Avila (2000, cited in Bailey 2001) also reports on a ten-year study of four African American speakers in the town of ‘Springville’, TX. While the two adults remained stable for a variety of morphological and syntactic AAVE variables, the two younger subjects (aged 9 and 6 at time 1) changed in the direction of standard English.

Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994) report on changes in the use of African-American syntactic variables in the speech of ‘Foxy Boston’, an eighteen year-old who was interviewed over the course of the preceding five years. Although the focus of the study was interviewer-effects on style-shifting, the study also found that Foxy’s changing orientation towards her African-American identity as she progressed through high school and college had an effect on her overall rate of certain African-American variants over time.

In another study of ethnic identity construction, Carter (2006) examined changes in the speech of a Latina girl, Maria. At age 10 she was attending a majority-white elementary school in North Carolina, and by age 14, she had moved to a more ethnically diverse junior high school. The data from the later interviews demonstrated that Maria sounded “more Latina”, with lowering and backing of /æ/, backing of /uw/, lenition of intervocalic stops, and a more stress-timed prosodic rhythm. Carter attributes some of

these changes to Maria's active attempt to adapt to the new social order of her junior high.

Sankoff (2004) used interviews with two of the panel members of the television documentary *Seven Up* as data for a longitudinal study of British English broad-a and the CUP vowel, both of which involve stereotyped phonemic variation. She shows that the two selected Northern men variably shifted to Southern variants as a result of their migrations in young adulthood: one to London, and the other to the USA.

The only study to look at a clear example of a system-internal linguistic change below the level of social awareness is De Decker's (2006) investigation of /æ/-backing among young Canadians. The backing of /æ/ is the first step in the Canadian Shift (Clark, Elms, & Youssef, 1995) triggered by the *cot-caught* merger. De Decker followed a group of four girls who left their small town to go to college in nearby Toronto, where the Canadian Shift is more advanced. Over the three year period, two of the four girls expanded their favoring linguistic environments for /æ/-backing; one increased her retraction of /æ/ only in her original promoting environment; and the fourth girl, described as not enjoying the Toronto college night life, did not change. De Decker argues that young individuals who move to a city that is more advanced than their hometown with respect to a given linguistic change will accommodate to the new community norm. However, individuals who do not form social network ties in the new community will show no change.

These few studies of linguistic changes in the speech of young adults have drawn on small samples. It has been difficult to disambiguate the social factors determining the linguistic changes speakers made during young adulthood – in all these studies, contact

with an external speech community obscured the community-internal effects of normal entry to adulthood. Foxy Boston and the Baugh speakers ranged along a continuum of contact with the white community; the two young speakers in Cukor-Avila's study appeared to lose their rural features as a result of contact with a local black urban community. Sankoff's Northerners were exposed to the Southern British speech community, and one later migrated to the US. Even De Decker's speakers, who remained within the standard Canadian English dialect zone, migrated to the urban Toronto speech community in order to attend college. While these studies are extremely valuable to an understanding of linguistic change across the lifespan, they do not illuminate the changes that can be effected among individuals within a single speech community. Until we have examined, in real time, the speech of young adults who are not geographically mobile, we cannot assume that lifespan change is *only* due to external dialect contact.

South Philadelphia, the neighborhood of Philadelphia chosen as the fieldwork locus for the present study, is a tightly-knit community in which several generations of one family may be found living on the same block, or within a few blocks of each other. While the community is reasonably prosperous and upwardly socially mobile, there are strong pressures on community members to remain geographically non-mobile. It therefore provided an ideal opportunity to examine young people's participation in dialect-internal change from below, without the confounding factor of dialect contact. In the next section, I will outline some facts about the Philadelphia speech community and its vowel system. South Philadelphia is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.3 Linguistic variation in the Philadelphia speech community

The most comprehensive published description of the Philadelphia speech community is Labov's (2001) *Principles of Linguistic Change: Social Factors*. In this book, as indicated by the title, broad theoretical principles emerge from or are tested against data from a large-scale survey of Philadelphia speech that was conducted by Labov and a research team in the early 1970s. In this section, I draw primarily on this survey, known as the project on Language Change and Variation (LCV), for my description of the Philadelphia speech community and on Conn's (2005) trend study of Philadelphia which I refer to by Conn's abbreviated dissertation title *Of Moice and Men* (OMM).

The LCV incorporated both telephone surveys and a social network study (Milroy & Milroy, 1985) of five city neighborhoods representing a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Over 100 individuals were interviewed by the research team in the neighborhood study, which incorporated formal tests (such as the reading of word lists and subjective judgement tests) and ethnographic observations of life on each of the city blocks chosen to represent the neighborhood.

The fourth largest city in America in 1980 (US census, in Labov 2001:42) and a formerly mighty industrial port, Philadelphia's recent history at the time of the LCV was one of economic decline and white flight to the suburbs, although at the present time of writing its downtown is undergoing a renaissance, with boutique hotels, condos and restaurants spreading to formerly blighted areas such as the Northern Liberties neighborhood adjacent to the central business district, Center City. The 1970s saw a large in-migration of African-Americans from the South (Hershberg, 1981:468) increasing

their population from 11% in 1930 to 33.6% in 1970. The LCV chose not to include African-Americans in the study, selecting majority-white neighborhoods for investigation. Labov (ibid:48) refers to the segregation of black and white vernaculars discovered in preliminary LCV work as the basis for this decision, with “the great majority of black speakers” using a form of African American Vernacular English that was not specific to Philadelphia⁶.

Within the white speech community, the focus was primarily on vowel variables, almost all of which were undergoing change in the Philadelphia vowel system. This is represented in Figure 1.1 (Labov ibid:143), in which circles represent mean values for realization of the vowel, and the arrows the direction and speed of change. Longer arrows reflect more rapid changes, as reflected in apparent time distributions.

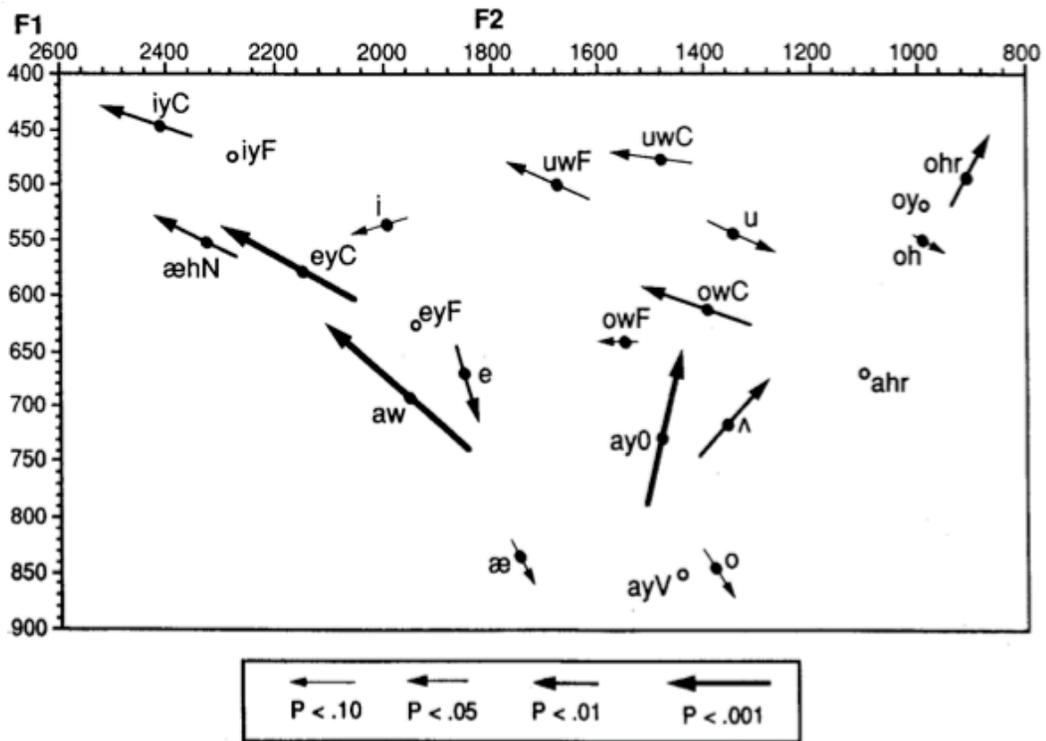


Figure 1.1 Movement of Philadelphia vowels in apparent time.

O = mean values for 116 speakers in the neighborhood study. Vectors connect values for groups 25 years older and younger than the mean. __F = free vowel; __C = checked vowel; __0 = before voiceless finals. In Labov (1994:59, Figure 3.6)

Another way of representing the ongoing sound changes is to place them on an S-curve of linguistic diffusion through the community:

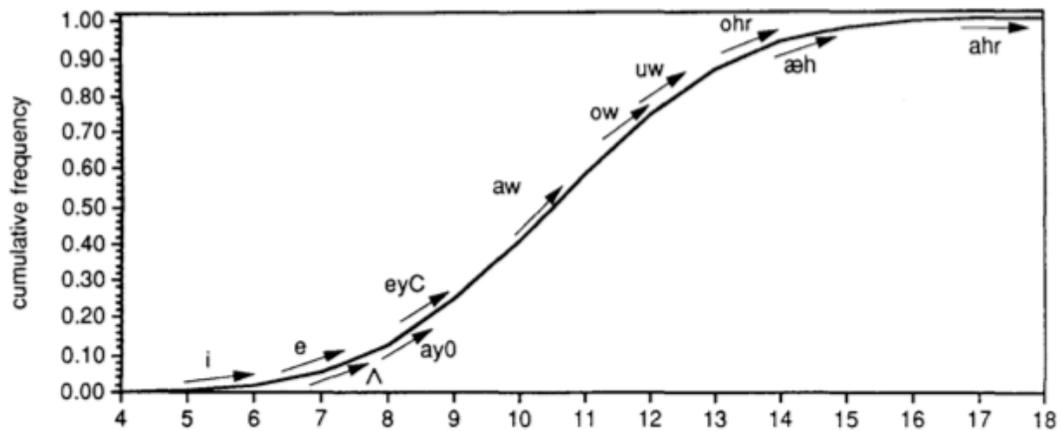


Figure 1.2 Placement of Philadelphia sound changes on S-shaped curve.
 Slope of arrow (y/x) = age coefficient/100. In Labov (1994:67, Figure 3.11)

The tensing and raising of the nucleus of /ae/ in a number of phonologically and lexically defined contexts is an old change that has almost reached completion, and hence appears near the top of the S-curve (although see eg. Roberts & Labov, 1995 for an account of new environments for /ae/-tensing.). Originally a change from below, it has risen above the level of social awareness to become a local shibboleth that is occasionally commented on by Philadelphians. A self-report test administered in the LCV study found that tensed and raised variants of (æh) were under-reported by subjects (more than advanced variants of (ay0), (aw), (uw) and (ow) were under-reported), and had “a high degree of social recognition and considerable social stigma” (Labov, 2001:204). One participant called a tense realization of *man* [mɛ:n] “South Philly slang, not the best pronunciation”, while another said, “I don’t like it. It doesn’t sound too good.” (Labov, *ibid*:203). That tense short-a functions as a symbol of covert prestige in Philadelphia is also clear, however. In the present study, I gathered one of the most explicitly meta-linguistic comments on (æh) yet recorded: a mother who noticed her daughter producing lax

variants in *laughing*, and said, “Did you just say [læfɪn]? Never fucking say that again.” (See Chapter 6 for the full context of this story).

Further down the S-curve, beyond the mid-range changes such as the fronting of /ow/ and /uw/, are the changes described as “new and vigorous” (Labov, 2001:132): the tensing and raising of the nucleus of /aw/, and the centralization of the nucleus of /ay/ before voiceless consonants, which Labov designates as (ay0). The new and vigorous variables were below the level of social awareness at the time of the LCV study (Labov, *ibid*: 203-204), with speakers showing little recognition of them in evaluation tests, and very little social differentiation appearing in the apparent time analyses. Conn (Conn, 2005:156) found similar results in evaluation tests for (aw) in the OMM study, but some significant differences for the evaluation of (ay0), in which advanced variants produced by a female speaker were downgraded, and those produced by a male speaker were upgraded. In general, however, these variables are not the topic of overt comment in Philadelphia, as is the tensing of /ae/, and as such remain changes from below in both the linguistic sense (of originating system-internally) and in the social sense (of being below social awareness). This makes (aw) and (ay0) ideal for a study of lifespan change, since speakers have no *overt* social motivations for adopting or rejecting them. If the non-mobile teenagers and young adults in the current study reduce their tensing of (aw) or their centralization of (ay0), then we cannot say that they are consciously adapting to non-local norms, but must look to other explanations.

The final vowel variable under consideration in this dissertation is the lowering of /ɛ/, which Labov designates as the sociolinguistic variable (e). In the LCV this was described as “incipient”, meaning that it registered change across age distributions, but no

social or stylistic differentiation. Any change in the realization of (e) among speakers in the present panel study is likely to have occurred entirely without the speaker's awareness. This makes (e) a potentially better contributor to a theory of lifespan change, although it is possible that we will find that (e) has not, in fact, emerged as a vowel change in progress, and that it will contradict the predictions that were made by the LCV on the basis of its tiny apparent time trajectory.

Controls are provided by the stable variables (ing) and (dh), which were well-studied by the LCV. As in other English-speaking communities (see Chapter 5 for more details), non-standard variants of these variables were associated in the LCV study with lower social class, men, and, importantly, youth. A dramatic peak in apparent time was recorded for both (ing) and (dh) among 16 year olds (Labov, *ibid*: 110, 112). We should expect the South Philadelphia informants in the present study to exhibit similar behavior in real time, with a decrease in the frequency of non-standard variants between their senior high school year and college. If they indeed behave as expected, then the vowel variable data can be understood to represent the linguistic changes of normal, non-anomalous individuals. The extent to which they avoid non-standard variants in the follow-up interview can also be seen as an indicator of their level of engagement with the standard language marketplace: an indicator that can in turn be used to interpret their real time use of (aw), (ay0) and (e). However, while the information provided by analyses of (ing) and (dh) will be helpful, they must go hand-in-hand with a detailed understanding of each speaker's social transitions.

1.4 The transition from adolescence to young adulthood

In the social sciences and in sociolinguistics, gender has been theorized as the socially constructed counterpart of biological sex (Cheshire, 2002:427). Age as a sociolinguistic variable has come to be similarly deconstructed. Linear age, or maturity, is a biological category, but age is also conceptualized by communities in terms of the social experiences—such as marriage and childbearing—that are typically associated with certain life stages. These experiences may be generation-specific (Cheshire, 1987 and forthcoming), such as participation in the Second World War, or recurring and age-specific, such as childhood and old age. Divisions between generations and across the lifespan in pre-industrial societies may be very simple, perhaps recognizing only two major age-specific divisions: child and adult (Hunt, 2005:18). In industrial societies, many more age-specific societal functions have emerged, so that in the 21st century, Americans for example, have recourse to a wide array of labels such as 'toddler', 'tween', 'teen', 'thirtysomething' and so on. Alongside these highly differentiated recurring categories, the concept of age cohort has emerged, giving rise to generation-specific labels such as 'baby boomer' and 'Generation X'.

In sociolinguistics, the use of age as a sociolinguistic variable has moved away from general use of an early model in which speakers were grouped by calendar age, often decade by decade (e.g. Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1974). Instead, researchers have taken into account the generation-specific experiences of speakers, such as relationship to the 'punctuating event' (Labov, 2001:315) of a world war. In their study of Cajun English in Louisiana, Dubois and Horvath (1999) rely on survey and interview information to

divide their speakers into three locally-meaningful age categories. Speakers in the oldest category grew up speaking French-influenced English, but the middle generation experienced stigmatization of their dialect as the community underwent urbanization and contact with an external standard norm. The young generation grew up during another community change, in which Cajun culture was celebrated, and Cajun dialect had become a means to signal ethnic pride. Dividing the community into arbitrary age-cohorts would not have captured the significant linguistic differences between the generations, each of which were affected by a different set of historical events.

While sociolinguists must be sensitive, then, to the specific historical experiences of a speech community, we should also bring this kind of awareness to our definitions of recurring age-specific categories within the human lifespan. Ideally, these categories will further our understanding of the mechanisms of linguistic change and will allow for comparisons with similarly constructed studies in other communities. Labov (2001:101) divides speakers in the Philadelphia LCV study⁷ into age groups that reflect their "acquisition and use of linguistic norms and their ability to put them into practice", at least in American society. These are:

1. alignment to the pre-adolescent peer group (8-9)
2. membership in the pre-adolescent peer group (10-12)
3. involvement in heterosexual relations and the adolescent group (13-16)
4. completion of secondary schooling and orientation to the wider world of work and/or college (17-19)
5. the beginning of regular employment and family life (20-29)

6. full engagement in the work force and family responsibilities (30-59)
7. retirement (60s)

Labov's categories rely to some degree on prior knowledge of how sociolinguistic variation is acquired at certain life stages (Payne, 1980; Roberts, 1994). They also rely on the existence of a mandatory educational system from which people graduate by age 19, and the assumption that the adult years may include employment or children in the 20s, and retirement in the 60s. Naturally, they are general categories designed to create discrete age categories for quantitative analysis: they are not intended to capture the extensive individual variation that might exist. Yet even these general categories may have to be re-thought as American society adapts to demographic changes. The average American lifespan is lengthening, and college education is becoming the norm, so that, for example, childbearing may now occur late into the 30s, and retirement in the 70s. Sociologists now argue that the concept of a "life cycle", in which individuals move smoothly from stage to stage at normatively acceptable ages, is no longer relevant in a post-modern society that is constantly changing (Hunt, 2005:21). Rather than a predetermined series of steps, individuals see the life course⁸ as a series of "passages" to be negotiated, a series of opportunities and risks that must be faced alone, rather than through formal, institutionalized rituals (Giddens, 1991:78-79). Furthermore, individuals have considerably different experiences of the lifecourse because of structured inequalities such as gender, ethnicity and social class -- none of which are accounted for in Labov's model.

Yet a one-dimensional segmentation of the life course should not be criticized too extensively, for it cannot take into account the multitude of individual lifecourse experiences, and does not attempt to do so. It provides a general outline, which sociolinguists are only beginning to refine and fill in, with work on the speech of the elderly⁹ (e.g. Coupland, Coupland, & Giles, 1991; Hamilton, 1994; Labov & Auger, 1998), the speech of children (Roberts, *ibid*; Smith, Durham, & Fortune, 2007) and the speech of pre-adolescents (Eckert, 2004).

This dissertation will examine in detail one of Labov's categories: the completion of schooling and orientation to the wider world and/or college, at ages 17 to 19. Recent work in sociology suggests that many American young adults are entering the workplace later in life, getting married and having children later. This period has been referred to as 'extended adolescence' and 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 1997) - a time in which young adults admit to not yet feeling like full 'adults'. It is possible that differing notions of adulthood and adult responsibility contribute to linguistic variation in the 'emerging adulthood' period and beyond.

Sociologists and psychologists have recently become interested in the question of what contributes to young people's subjective notions of adulthood. The traditional milestones on the path to adulthood – leaving home, finishing education, entering the workforce, getting married, and having children – are being reached at different times by different people. Benson and Furstenburg (2003) report:

Since the 1950s, the variability in the timing and sequence of entry into adult-like roles, such as living on one's own, getting married and becoming a parent, has increased. Demographic transitions are not as tightly bound to strict timetables and expectations. Young people today tend to achieve transitions at varying rates, and many times attained adult-like statuses are not permanent, in that young people tend to enter and exit transitions over time.

Furstenburg & Benson (2003:3)

The transition from adolescence to adulthood, however and whenever it is made, is a time of upheaval not only in the lives of each individual, but importantly, in those of their peers. The strict age cohorts and highly comparable daily experiences of the high school are left behind; groups of friends who formerly did everything together must reconcile themselves to the fact that they are now all in different jobs, or different colleges, or perhaps one of them is still living at home, or raising a child. Regardless of whether an individual remains in their local environment and maintains a local social life, there is a good chance that their social networks have been perturbed.

With any change in daily social network interactions comes the potential for changing one's status in the linguistic marketplace, or *marché linguistique*. The concept of *marché linguistique* (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1975) recognizes that some people's daily lives and occupations require more linguistic involvement with the wider world than others. More importantly, the market pressure to use the standard language varies among individuals. When adolescents leave the high school, they are immediately ranged along a continuum of engagement with the linguistic marketplace.

In the South Philadelphia high school where I carried out sociolinguistic fieldwork, 95% of students graduate and of these, 90% go on to further education. Among the panel of girls to be described in the present work, only one girl was in a full-

time job at the time of second interview, because she had left, after one semester, the vocational college where she had intended to train as an accountant. I did also interview a teenaged mother, Jessica. At the time, she was still in high school and applying to local colleges. She intended to go to college full-time, leaving her baby in the care of her mother and grandmother. However, because she was brought along to a panel member's second interview, I only met her once.

A comparison of the panel's engagement with the linguistic marketplaces of work, college and full-time motherhood can therefore not be undertaken. Instead, I take into consideration the type of college each girl attended, the expected career outcome of the course, and the extent to which panel members maintained network ties to their family and friends in South Philadelphia after graduation.

One surprising fact (to me, at least) about this group of young women was their fear of living away from home and their worries about losing contact with their South Philadelphia friends. My own experience of this life period was of whole-hearted relief at finally gaining independence from my family (despite a very happy childhood and good relations with my parents). I deliberately applied to universities that were as far away from my home in south-east England as possible. Unlike many of my informants, however, I was not a first-generation college-goer: both of my parents had lived away from home while completing some form of vocational education. They accepted my decision to move away (not very far, as it turned out in the end) and allowed me to get on with my life at college without interference. It seemed to me that in South Philadelphia it was frequently the parents, not my informants, who were feeding their daughters' worries by calling their cellphones and sending them instant messages. It is important not to

forget that the transition from adolescence to young adulthood involves not only orientation to the world of work and college, but orientation away from one's parents.

In the current study, I will compare the transitions of speakers who move away from home with those who continue to live with their parents. The girls who live at home and attend college in Philadelphia are more than just controls. They are at the heart of this investigation.

1.5 Ethnographic methods in the study of linguistic variation

In her report on Chicano English in a participant-observation study of Los Angeles, Fought (2003) refers to Eckert's observation on the importance of ethnographic methods:

The use of ethnography in the study of variation allows the researcher to discover the social groups, categories and divisions particular to the community in question, and to explore their relation to linguistic form.

Eckert (1991:213)

Eckert's own (1989) ethnographic study of a Detroit high school uncovered two saliently opposed local categories, *Jocks* and *Burnouts*, whose differing orientation to corporate school activities was reflected linguistically in their adoption of a vowel rotation known as the Northern Cities Shift (Callary, 1975; Fasold, 1969). Traditional social class categories did not correlate so well with the distribution of linguistic variants as did these locally-defined "communities of practice"¹⁰ (Eckert, 2000).

Two other ethnography-based sociolinguistic studies of teenagers in high schools are relevant to a discussion of this approach. Fought (1999; 2003) discovered that in a

Los Angeles ‘continuation’ school¹¹, Mexican-American participation in a majority California sound change, /u/-fronting, was conditioned not only by gender and social class, but by the speaker’s strength of affiliation with local gangs. Long-term participant-observation allowed Fought to differentiate a number of gang-related categories, including gang member, people who are associated with gangs but will never become members, ‘*Wannabes*’ who will eventually become members, and people unaffiliated with gangs, such as *Moms*.

Mendoza-Denton’s (1997) ethnography of a mainstream California high school attended by 65% non-white students (Mendoza-Denton, *ibid*:19) also looks at the speech of Mexican-Americans. The linguistic variable, /ɪ/-tensing, is characteristic not of the majority community, as in Fought’s study, but of Chicano English. Mendoza-Denton found that use of tense variants was associated with individual speakers’ construction of social identity. Speakers aligned with gangs favored tensing, while membership of other locally-defined groups, such as the *Discos* and *Latina Jocks*, disfavored tensing (Mendoza-Denton, *ibid*:84-86).

Ethnographic fieldwork, then, provides a powerful means of uncovering the local meanings of linguistic variants and thus a way of accounting for patterns of use in the data. While /ɪ/-tensing is ethnically marked in the wider California speech community as a feature of Chicano English, in the local context of Sor Juana high school it does not index (Silverstein, 2003) traditional conservative Mexican values of home and family. Rather, it “is somehow indexical...of a Latina-based identity” (Mendoza-Denton, *ibid*:86), and it is this identity that is displayed and promoted among the highly non-

traditional Latina girl gangs, and further reinforced through their extreme rates of /I/-tensing. Particularly in a study of speakers who are similar in terms of age, social class and ethnic background, it is important to have a sense of the social boundaries imposed by the speakers themselves. For the present study, social factors such as age, gender, race and social class were controlled in order to focus on the differences in post-high school transition. I could have gone about this by asking a school guidance counselor to give me a list of students divided by application to various colleges, but for reasons I enlarge on in Chapter 2, I preferred to avoid any association with official school bureaucracy. Instead, I chose to locate a sample of students via social network contacts, after becoming a familiar presence in the cafeteria and hallways, in a non-institutional role.

The work described in this dissertation was not designed as an ethnographic study, but it incorporates the observations I made during both of the two-month-long periods I spent in the South Philadelphia high school. Ethnographic work is necessarily time-consuming and intensive, and since this is also the case for a longitudinal panel study in which each informant is interviewed twice, a compromise had to be reached. I was a participant-observer in the high school, but only for short periods, and only for as long as I needed to obtain my original (necessarily large) sample or reinterview speakers who consented to a second interview. No ethnographer is ever fully satisfied that they have come to understand the community they are observing, and I was left with many frustrating holes in my knowledge. However, as I describe in Chapter 4, the incorporation of ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to not only locate a cross-section of teenagers with different post-high school aspirations, but to give the appropriate level of attention to locally salient categories that I would otherwise have ignored.

1.6 Objectives and outline

The dissertation is organized as follows. The present chapter is an introduction to the goals of the study and the existing literature on real time change, the Philadelphia speech community, and ethnographic methods. Chapter 2 describes the social context of the study and the selection of speaker samples for analysis: 22 speakers for analysis of (ing) and (dh) in real time, 18 speakers for synchronic phonetic analysis of (aw), (ay0) and (e), and 9 speakers for real time vowel analysis. Chapter 3 is a detailed discussion of the social landscape of the high school. Chapter 4 contains the stable variable analysis and Chapter 5 contains the phonetic analysis.

NOTES

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- ¹ Government-owned housing for low-income families, similar to US housing projects.
- ² “Posh” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2007) as “[C]hiefly Brit.): typical of or belonging to the upper class; (affecting to be) superior or genteel; ‘snooty’, pretentious.”
- ³ Another theoretical possibility is one in which no-one stabilizes and all community members advance at the same rate. This would however produce a flat graph in apparent time, and the phenomenon explicated here is one in which there is a slope with age. The scenario is in any case rare, if not unknown.
- ⁴ However, the first re-study of this kind is recognized as Gauchat (1905)/Hermann (1929).
- ⁵ I restrict the definition of real-time study in this section to the sociolinguistic study of spoken language. Historical linguistics and sociohistorical linguistics (Romaine, 1982) have also successfully tracked linguistic variation in real time via written texts, but they fall out of the scope of this discussion.
- ⁶ Relations between black and white vernaculars in Philadelphia was studied in a subsequent research project by Labov and reported on in, inter alia, Labov & Harris (1986); Graff et al (1986) and Ash & Myhill (1986).
- ⁷ The Project on Language Change and Variation (LCV) ran from 1973 to 1977, and was a study of language change in progress across the city. It is described in more detail in the previous section, 1.3.

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- ⁸ “Life course” is the term currently preferred in sociology, since it avoids the connotations of recurring, fixed stages that are attached to “life cycle”. For a detailed account, see Hunt (2005).
- ⁹ Very little linguistic work with this age group has been within a quantitative variationist paradigm, however. Eckert (1997:165) comments that “[t]he retiring and retired age group has been the least studied of all [age groups].”
- ¹⁰ Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:464) define a community of practice (CofP) as “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor” and comment that “practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor”. Jocks, for example, are mutually engaged in furthering their college careers and the school’s reputation, and thus their behavioral and linguistic practices reflect standard norms.
- ¹¹ For students who had left or been expelled from mainstream schooling. Fought (2003:23) describes it as “the landing place for students who have had serious academic or personal trouble at the main high school, including repeated trancies, violence, failing grades, pregnancy and so on.”