

## DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM LABOV'S SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDIES

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**Abstract:** *The sociolinguistic research done by William Labov in two different years (1963 and 1972) in this article. The primary idea of this paper is to analyze Labov's scientific views, methods, and changes of approaches in language learning process, and to find out similarities and differences. The social context of the papers, the group of the respondents, linguistic factors and results are analyzed. The result of the analysis shows that Labov's research plays an indispensable role in sociolinguistics, they focus on language variations and social factors.*

**Key words:** *Method, methodology, sociolinguistics, the stratification, social status, identity*

### INTRODUCTION

Language is a changeable process. Accordingly, language acquisition can be different based on sociolinguistic factors. These factors include gender, background, origin, sexuality, age, and etc. Although language learners are taught with the same method or resources, their result can differ because of those factors given above. The factors and their influence on the language learning process have been reviewed and analyzed by various researchers. William Labov is one of the most important scholars in the field of sociolinguistics, which studies language change in relation to society. His studies from 1963 and 1972 show a strong connection between language and society, but their aims, methods, and the linguistic phenomena studied differ slightly.

In his 1963 study, Labov studied sound change on the island of Martha's Vineyard. He paid particular attention to changes in the pronunciation of the diphthongs /ai/ and /au/. In this study, Labov analyses the speech of representatives of different age, professions, and ethnic groups to determine through which social groups language change spreads. For example, some local populations have retained a unique pronunciation to distinguish themselves. As a result of his research, he showed that language change is not only an internal linguistic process, but also related to social factors. He said: "social pressures are continually operating upon language, not from some remote point in the past, but as an immanent social force acting in the living present" (Labov, 1963, p. 275). This idea means that language is constantly changing under the influence of society.





A 1972 study in New York City focused on the pronunciation of the /r/ sound in the phrase “fourth floor”. Here, Labov examined the relationship between language and social stratification. During the study, he secretly observed the speech of salespeople working in three different levels of stores. As a result, it was found that employees in higher-level stores pronounced the /r/ sound more fully.

This study is later concluded that, although it used a very simple method, the results were very clear and consistent (Labov, 1972). That is, it was possible to identify complex sociolinguistic patterns even through simple observational methods.

Labov’s research has also been analysed by other scholars. For example, “he investigated the pronunciation of postvocalic /r/ in New York City speech, in the words “fourth” and “floor” (Mather, 2012, p. 339). This method is very accurate and practical, and helps to study real-life speech.

#### DISCUSSION

For Labov, the most important speech style is natural, everyday speech. According to other scholars, people speak in this style when they have less control over their speech and are most natural (Mesthrie et al., 2009). Therefore, Labov tried to observe real-life speech in addition to interviews.

The main similarity between the two studies is that they study language in a social context. In both cases, Labov linked language change to groups in society, social status, and identity.

He also used real-world data in both studies, which means he used a practical rather than a theoretical approach.

Another similarity is that he showed that linguistic change is orderly and systematic. Both studies prove that language change is not random, but is based on certain laws.

However, the main difference is in the subject and method of the study. The 1963 study was conducted in a more natural setting, in a small community, and aimed to explain the causes of language change.

The 1972 study was conducted in a large city, among specific social classes, and aimed to show the social stratification of language. In addition, in 1963, Labov mainly studied the development of sound change, that is, why and how it changes. In 1972, he analysed how language variants are distributed among social groups.

#### CONCLUSION

These two studies by Labov formed the basic principles of sociolinguistics. The 1963 work revealed the social causes of language change, while the 1972 work clearly showed the stratification of language in society.

Both studies prove that taking into account social factors is very important in understanding language.





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