

LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

ELEVENTH MODULE

Language and Social Class

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Previously



- The difference between accent and dialect
- Main American dialects
- Main sources of American dialects
- Models of dialect diffusion – the wave model & the gravity model
- Define the term **linguistic variable**

Learning Outcomes



By the end of these sessions, you will be able to the followings:

- Overt and covert prestige
- Stylistic variation
- Linguistic and social variation
- Define social class
- Variationist linguistics
- William Labov core ideas on language change



Overt vs Covert Prestige

- **Overt prestige** is the paradigm that sees a dialect more correct than the others. It sounds more prestigious or more educated.
- **Covert prestige** is more about group membership. A non-standard dialect is more valued.
- Overt prestige refers to power and status whereas covert prestige is about community and group identity.

Açık ve Örtük Prestige

- Açık prestij (Overt prestige): Bir lehçenin diğerlerinden daha “doğru” kabul edildiği paradigmadır. Daha prestijli ya da daha eğitilmiş gibi gelir.
- Örtük prestij (Covert prestige): Daha çok grup üyeliğiyle ilgilidir. Standart dışı bir lehçe grup içinde daha değerli görülür.
- Açık prestij güç ve statüyle ilişkilendirilirken, örtük prestij topluluk ve grup kimliğiyle ilgilidir.

Stylistic Variation

- As the context gets more formal, the features of overt prestige will increase.
- This is referred to as **stylistic variation**.

Linguistic and Social Variation

- Variations among speakers within the same location but with different social experiences
- Rural areas may be representing a greater uniformity
- The diversity in urban areas is a much more complex issue.

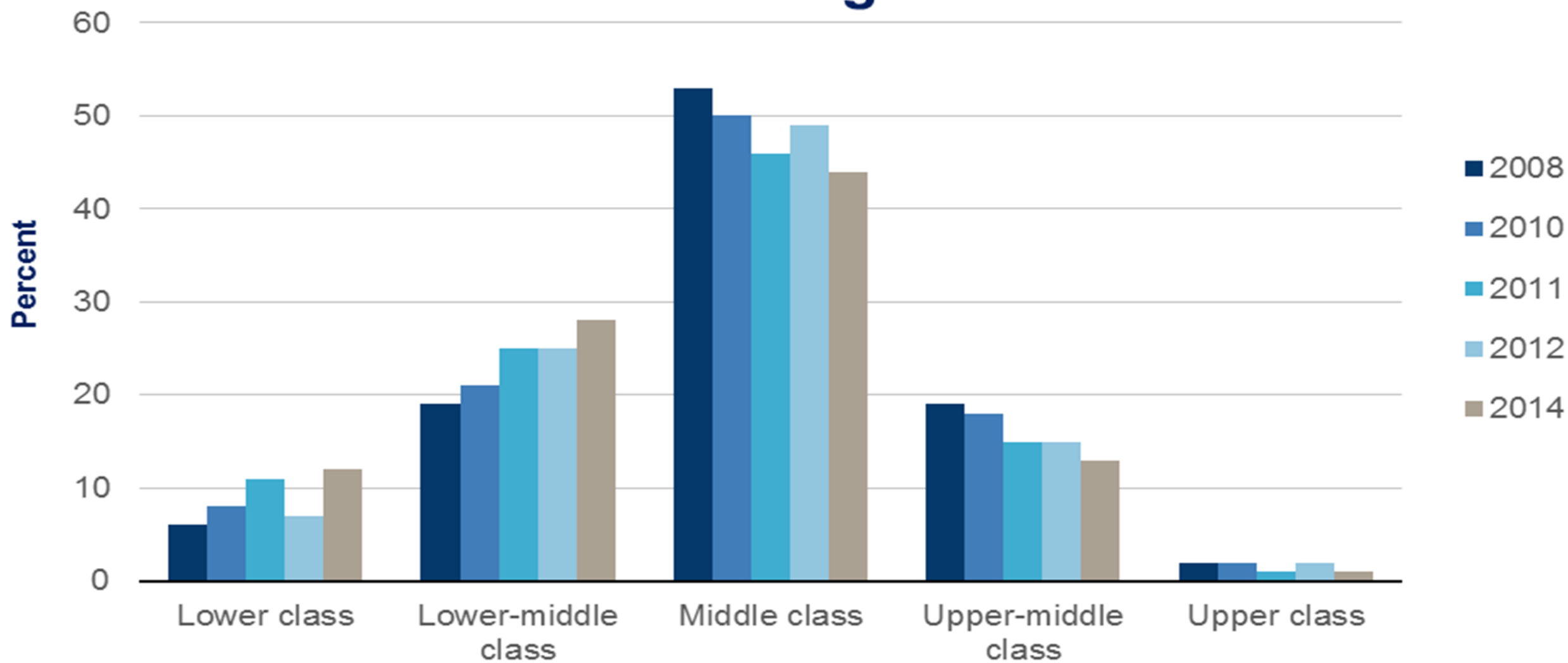
Linguistic and Social Variation

- The differences among speakers of a speech community is related to social rather than regional differences.
 - *You don't do nothing for it.*
 - *You did not do anything for it.*
 - *You ain't done nothing for it.*
 - *You didn't do anything for it.*
- The difference is a matter of class.

Social Class (Strata)

- A social class is a grouping of people into a set of hierarchical social categories
- The **upper**, **middle** and **lower** classes.
- Membership in a social class can be dependent on:
 - education
 - wealth
 - occupation
 - income
 - belonging to a particular subculture
 - social network

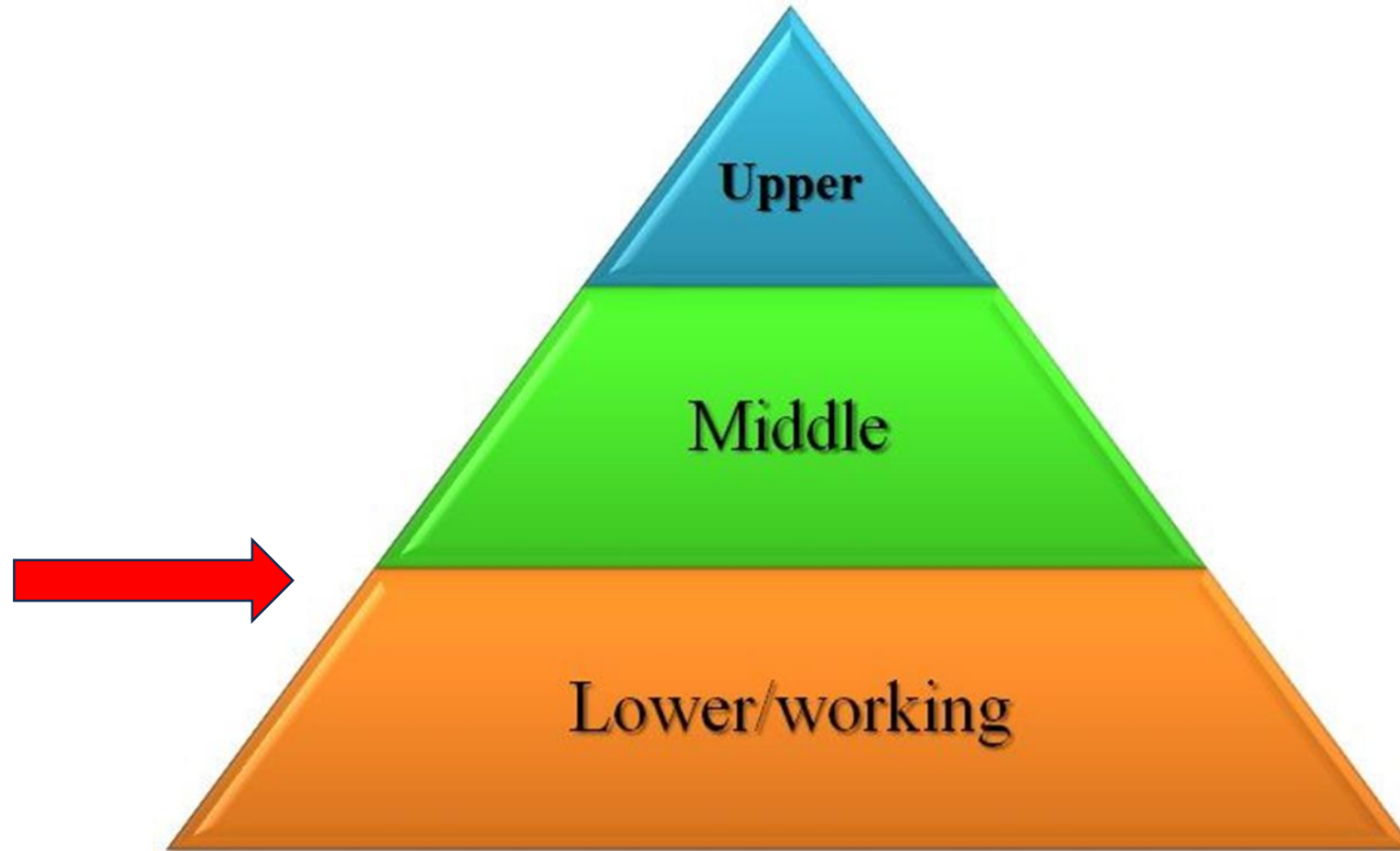
To which social class would you say you belong?



Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press/USA Today, 2014.

BROOKINGS

The Social Class Pyramid



The Social Class Pyramid



- Be cautious about such simplistic and unidimensional understanding of society.

Linguistic Clues

- We rely on these subtle linguistic clues in everyday high-stakes decisions:
 - deciding who to trust with personal information or responsibilities,
 - choosing who to hire or promote in a job,
 - judging who we feel attracted to or might want to date,
 - and even in smaller interactions like who to ask for help, who to believe, or who feels “like us.”

Variationist Linguistics

- In the past, it was believed that geography was the sole reason for language variation.
- Now we know that both geography and social status play important roles in language variation.
- This paradigm is called **Variationist Linguistics**.
- Instead of mapping regional differences, variationist research looks at the social factors that shape how people speak.

William Labov

- William Labov (1966) was the first scientist to claim that social factors play important roles in shaping language variation.
- The **non-rhotic** version of English was the accepted norm until World War I.
- The **rhotic** version was reemerging in New York, and this change was class-related.
- When the participants in his study paid more attention to their speech, the rhotic form was becoming dominant.
- Because the rhotic form was related to **overt prestige**.

Seems Chaotic, but Systematic

- On the surface, language variation seems to be disorganized and random.
- In fact, this variation is rule governed.
- Social differences among speakers are reflected systematically in language differences.
- The greater the social separation among speakers, the greater the linguistic differences...

Class and Linguistic Change

- Linguistic change does not happen at the high-class level
- It happens at the upper-working and lower-middle classes.
- Changes first start within a social class and then it moves onto the other classes.
- The lowest and the highest groups do not have anything to do with linguistic change.
- Upper-working and low-middle classes have less to lose and more to gain.

Resistance to Change

- Middle-classes show resistance to change to keep their place safe and to maintain status differentiation.
- Lower classes adopt easily to naturally occurring changes, the upper classes try to reject them.
- For a change to become the new norm, it needs to move among social classes.

Learning Outcomes



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Test Yourself

- We tend to modifying our language towards overt prestige depending on the context we are in; this phenomenon is referred to as:
 - a. speech act
 - b. stylistic variation
 - c. overt prestige
 - d. social class
 - e. linguistic change

Answer: b

Test Yourself

- Upper class welcomes linguistic changes easily.

True or False

Answer: false

Test Yourself

A is a grouping of people into a set of hierarchical social categories, the most common being the upper, middle and lower classes.

Answer: social class

Test Yourself

According to the Variationist Linguistics paradigm

- a. we modify our speech depending on the context that we are in
- b. the rhotic version of English in New York shifted to non-rhoticity in time
- c. not only geography but also social status plays a role in language variation
- d. rural areas represent a greater unity compared to urban areas
- e. membership in a social class can be dependent on many factors

Answer: c

Next lecture

Sex, Age and Language Change

