



Social Dialects and Social Stratification: the Observer's Paradox

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Received: 01 December 2021 **Accepted:** 13 February 2022 **Published:** 29 March 2022

Abstract: This work provides a concise overview of the complex interplay between social dialects and social stratification, highlighting the enigmatic concept known as the "Observer's Paradox. Social dialects, the linguistic variations influenced by an individual's social identity and background, have been a significant area of study in sociolinguistics. These dialects are not only reflections of cultural diversity but are also intimately linked to social stratification, the division of society into hierarchical layers. While the influence of social stratification on language variation is well-documented, the "Observer's Paradox" poses an intriguing challenge in this context. The "Observer's Paradox" encapsulates the dilemma where the linguistic behavior of individuals may be altered when they are aware of being observed, especially when interacting with someone from a different social stratum. This paradox complicates sociolinguistic research because it introduces an element of artificiality into data collection and analysis. When individuals modify their speech patterns in the presence of researchers, it becomes challenging to draw accurate conclusions about the genuine linguistic behavior of different social groups. This work delves into the critical relationship between social dialects and social stratification while emphasizing the impact of the "Observer's Paradox." It explores the methods and challenges faced by researchers striving to unravel the complex dynamics of language variation in stratified societies. Understanding the nuances of the "Observer's Paradox" is essential for obtaining reliable insights into the intricate web of sociolinguistic phenomena and their intersection with social hierarchy. Furthermore, this exploration underscores the importance of employing innovative and ethical research techniques to mitigate the paradox's effects and gain a deeper understanding of the social dynamics at play.

Keywords: Social Dialects, Observer's Paradox. Social Stratification, Language.



1. INTRODUCTION

Sociolects, or social dialects, are linguistic variations in speech that are affiliated with particular social groups or classes within a society. These differences are influenced by variables such as education, occupation, and speech pattern. There is ample evidence in both the United States and the United Kingdom to support the existence of social dialects based on these criteria.

Education:

Education plays a significant influence in shaping the language use of individuals. In both the United States and the United Kingdom, those with a higher level of education tend to use a more standard or prestigious dialect, according to research. In New York City, Labov (1966) found that people with more education were more likely to use standard American English, while those with less education were more likely to use non-standard varieties.

Occupation:

Additionally, occupational groups may have distinct communication patterns. Studies in the United States, such as the research conducted by Trudgill (1974) in Norwich, England, have demonstrated that certain professions and occupational groups have their own linguistic norms. For example, lawyers, physicians, and professors typically use more formal language than blue-collar employees.

Speech Style:

Different social contexts can affect the manner of speech. Individuals may modify their language usage based on the person they are conversing with, their environment, or the formality of the situation. This phenomenon has been extensively studied in both nations. For example, Milroy's (1980) study in Belfast, Northern Ireland, revealed that speakers modified their speech based on the social network they were in. Class-Based Dialect Variation: In the United States, social stratification has also resulted in class-based dialect variations (Eckert, 2000). Penelope Eckert's research, for example, examines how various social groups and identities influence the speech patterns of California high school students.

Received Pronunciation (RP): In the United Kingdom, RP is a prestige accent associated with upper-class speakers and formal education (Upton & Widdison, 2006). It has distinct phonological characteristics and is frequently used in the media and education. Studies, such as the Survey of English Dialects, have documented regional and class-based dialect differences, including come from RP.

The Cockney dialect: East London is home to a well-known social dialect known as Cockney. It has distinct phonological and lexical characteristics. Linguists such as Peter Trudgill have investigated Cockney and its variants.



Estuary English: Estuary English is a social dialect that arose more recently in the southeast of England. It combines RP with characteristics of Cockney and other regional accents. This variation has been studied by linguists such as David Rose and Paul Kerswill.

Theoretical Framework

Interactional Sociolinguistics: This theory focuses on the study of language in context and emphasizes the importance of understanding how language is used in real social interactions. Researchers employing this approach often conduct detailed analyses of conversations and examine how language is influenced by social factors.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative and descriptive work. And the methodology involves the detailed examination of naturally occurring conversations to understand the organization and structure of talk. It can be useful in addressing the Observer's Paradox as it often relies on recorded interactions that can be analyzed later.

Discussion and Findings

The Observer's Paradox refers to the idea that people may change their language behavior when they know they are being observed, thus potentially skewing research results. To mitigate this issue, researchers use various strategies:

Long-term Participant Observation: Researchers can embed themselves within the community they are investigating, establishing trust and rapport with participants over time. As participants become more secure with the researcher's presence, the Observer's Paradox can be mitigated.

Long-term participant observation is a popular research technique in anthropology, sociology, and other social sciences for overcoming the observer's paradox. The observer's paradox refers to the phenomenon in which individuals alter their behavior when aware they are being observed, thereby potentially skewing the results of an experiment. Long-term participant observation aims to mitigate this issue by immersing the researcher in the social context being studied over an extended period. Here are some of the most important aspects of this method and how it helps to surmount the observer's paradox:

Extended Engagement: Long-term participant observation involves the researcher spending an extended amount of time within the community or group they are studying. This extended engagement allows the researcher to become familiar to the participants, eventually blending into the social fabric of the community. Over time, participants become less conscious of the researcher's presence, reducing the likelihood of altered behavior.

Naturalistic Setting: Typically, this technique requires researchers to immerse themselves in the natural environment of the group or community they are studying. By residing or spending significant time in the environment, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of



the participants' routine behaviors, interactions, and rituals without causing significant disruption or suspicion.

Building Trust: Long-term participant observation is dependent on establishing rapport and trust with the subjects. Participants are more likely to conduct naturally and candidly in the researcher's presence as trust develops over time. This trust can also grant access to more intimate or private group activities.

Gradual Data Collection: Long-term participant observation relies on the incremental accumulation of data through ongoing interaction and observation, as opposed to structured interviews or surveys. To discreetly and unobtrusively document their observations, researchers may take field notes, maintain journals, or use audiovisual recording.

Reflexivity: This method encourages researchers to engage in reflexivity, which entails recognizing their own biases and subjectivity. Periodically, they may consider their function as an observer and their potential impact on the group being studied. This self-awareness can assist researchers in minimizing their impact on observed behavior.

Thick Description: Participant observation over an extended period of time frequently yields rich and detailed descriptions of social phenomena. Researchers intend to provide a "thick description" of the observed culture, context, and behaviors. By capturing the complexity of social life, this profundity of knowledge helps to mitigate the observer's paradox.

Triangulation: Multiple data sources and methods may be used by researchers to increase the credibility and validity of their findings. Triangulation involves cross-referencing information obtained through participant observation with other sources, such as interviews, surveys, or existing records, to validate their findings and reduce the impact of bias.

Long-term participant observation can be an effective method for overcoming the observer's paradox, but it also presents challenges, such as the time and resources required for protracted fieldwork, the possibility of ethical concerns, and the need for researchers to effectively manage their own biases. Nonetheless, this method can provide valuable insights into the inner workings of social groups and communities while minimizing the impact of the observer's presence on the observed behaviors if it is conducted with rigor.

Unobtrusive Data Collection: Researchers can gather linguistic data without interacting directly with participants. For instance, they can examine written materials, recordings of natural conversations, and social media postings in which individuals may be less aware of being observed.

Record Natural Conversations: Without the participants' knowledge, researchers can record conversations to capture spontaneous speech in natural contexts. This reduces the self-consciousness that individuals may experience when they are aware they are being studied.

In research and data collection, "record natural conversations" is a strategy used to surmount the observer's paradox. The observer's paradox refers to the phenomenon in which people's



behavior or responses change when they are aware they are being observed or studied. In research settings, this can contribute to inaccurate or biased results. To mitigate this issue, researchers often use various methods to record natural conversations without the subjects being aware, which can provide more genuine and reliable data.

Here are some key points to consider when using this strategy:

Hidden Observation: To record conversations in their most natural state, researchers may use covert recording devices or techniques such as audio or video recording. Subjects are less likely to alter their behavior or responses if they are oblivious that they are being observed.

Ethical Considerations: It is essential to ensure that any form of covert recording adheres to ethical and legal privacy standards. In many instances, informed consent may still be necessary, and subjects should be informed that they were recorded after the fact.

Naturalistic Settings: Researchers frequently select naturalistic contexts for their studies, where subjects are more likely to engage in naturalistic conversations and behavior. This includes public spaces, workplaces, online forums, and social media.

Longitudinal Data: Recording conversations over an extended period can provide valuable longitudinal data, allowing researchers to track changes in behavior, language, and relationships over time.

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis: Conversations that have been recorded can be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis can include word frequency counting, speech pattern measurement, and sentiment analysis. Exploring themes, emotions, and motivations, qualitative analysis can delve deeper into the conversation's content and context, revealing their underlying meanings.

Triangulation: Researchers often combine recorded conversations with other data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, or participant observations. This triangulation of data sources helps to validate findings and reduce the impact of the observer's paradox.

Comparative Studies: Comparing recorded conversations in natural settings with those in controlled, observed settings can help researchers identify the extent of the observer's paradox and its impact on data quality.

Transparency and Debriefing: After data collection, it is essential to inform subjects that they were recorded in a transparent manner. During the debriefing procedure, researchers should allow subjects to provide additional context or clarify their statements.

Overall, researchers can overcome the observer's paradox and capture more authentic and valuable data by recording natural conversations. However, it must be conducted ethically, transparently, and with a thorough comprehension of the potential impact on privacy and consent. Researchers should also be aware of potential biases introduced by the recording procedure, such as selection bias and interpretation bias.



Mixed-Methods Approach: Combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques can result in a deeper comprehension of social dialects. To triangulate findings, quantitative surveys can be supplemented with in-depth interviews or participant observations.

Ethical Considerations: Researchers should prioritize ethical guidelines and informed consent to ensure that the privacy and rights of participants are respected while conducting research.

In social sciences and research methodology, the Observer's Paradox is a frequently discussed concept. It refers to the notion that the act of observing and studying a phenomenon may influence or alter that phenomenon, making it difficult to obtain genuinely objective and impartial data. Ethical considerations play a significant role in overcoming the Observer's Paradox, as they guide researchers in conducting their studies in a responsible and considerate manner. Here is how ethical considerations can assist in resolving the Observer's Paradox:

Informed Consent: Ethical research necessitates obtaining participants' informed consent. Before participants consent to participate, researchers must explain the purpose of the study, potential risks, and participant rights. This transparency helps mitigate the paradox by ensuring that participants are aware of their role and are not unintentionally influenced by the act of observation.

Minimizing Intrusiveness: Researchers should strive to minimize their presence and intrusiveness during data collection. Ethical guidelines encourage using unobtrusive methods or maintaining a respectful distance to avoid altering the natural behavior of participants.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: It is essential to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. When participants believe that their responses and behaviors will be kept confidential, they are more likely to act spontaneously, thereby reducing the influence of observation on their behavior.

Non-Discrimination: Ethical considerations necessitate that all participants be treated with respect and without discrimination. When researchers avoid bias and discrimination, the observed behavior is more natural.

Beneficence and Non-Maleficence: Ethical principles also emphasize the significance of participants' benefits and the minimization of harm. Through their research, researchers should seek to benefit society while avoiding injury or distress to participants. This can assist in mitigating any adverse effects of observation.

Reflexivity and Self-Awareness: Researchers must be self-aware and reflexive about their own biases, assumptions, and potential influence on the research process. Ethical researchers take steps to minimize their own impact on the observations.

Triangulation: Researchers frequently use triangulation to surmount the Observer's Paradox. Using multiple methods, sources, or observers to cross-verify results. By comparing data



from various perspectives, researchers can obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, thereby diminishing the significance of any one observation.

Ethical Review and Oversight: Numerous research institutions have ethics review boards that evaluate and authorize proposed research. These committees ensure that researchers adhere to ethical guidelines and consider potential Observer's Paradox-related issues. Oversight can aid in upholding ethical standards and minimizing observer-induced biases.

Ethical considerations are essential for addressing the Observer's Paradox in research. By following ethical guidelines and principles, researchers can minimize their influence on the phenomena they study, obtain more accurate data, and maintain the trust and respect of their participants. Ethical research practices ultimately contribute to the credibility and validity of social science research.

Anonymity: Protecting the identity of speakers can encourage them to speak naturally, without feeling self-conscious about their speech.

Anonymity can be a potent tool for overcoming the observer's paradox, which is a concept often encountered in social sciences and data analysis. The observer's paradox refers to the notion that individuals may alter their behavior when they are aware they are being observed, thereby potentially distorting the collected data. This phenomenon can make it difficult to collect accurate and impartial data on individuals or groups. In multiple ways, anonymity can mitigate the effects of the observer's paradox.

Reduced Self-Censorship: Individuals who are aware that their actions or responses are being recorded may experience self-consciousness or worry about social desirability bias. This can result in them censoring their behavior or providing responses that conform to their perceptions of what is expected. People are able to act or express themselves more freely when they feel less pressure to conform to social norms or expectations when they are anonymous.

Honest and Unbiased Feedback: In research, surveys, or feedback collection processes, anonymity can encourage participants to provide honest and candid responses. Participants are more likely to share their true thoughts, feelings, and experiences when they know their identities will not be disclosed. This can result in more accurate and valuable data.

Natural Behavior: Observing people in their natural environment, without their knowledge, can provide a more accurate depiction of their typical behavior. Anonymity ensures that people act as they typically would, leading to data that better reflects reality.

Enhanced Privacy: Anonymity safeguards individuals' privacy, which is an essential ethical consideration in many research and data collection contexts. It ensures that sensitive or personal information remains protected, reducing the risk of harm or unintended consequences for the participants.



Minimized Observer Effect: The paradox of the observer can also affect researchers and data collectors. Researchers may become more cautious or inadvertently alter their conduct upon realizing that their presence may influence the subjects. This effect is mitigated by anonymity, allowing researchers to collect more objective and impartial data.

It is essential to note that while anonymity can be a useful tool for overcoming the observer's paradox, it also presents its own unique difficulties. For example, ensuring the security and confidentiality of anonymized data is essential to preventing data intrusions or abuse. Additionally, some individuals may use anonymity to engage in unethical or detrimental behavior, necessitating the implementation of ethical considerations and safeguards.

Anonymity is a powerful strategy for mitigating the observer's paradox by enabling more natural and unbiased behavior and responses from individuals. It fosters an environment where people feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment or consequences, ultimately leading to more accurate and reliable data in various research and data collection settings.

3. CONCLUSION

Researchers can produce more accurate insights into the existence of social dialects in the United States and the United Kingdom, as shaped by education, occupation, and speech style, by carefully considering these strategies and ethical considerations and working to minimize the influence of the Observer's Paradox. This can be accomplished by producing more accurate insights into the characteristics of social dialects in both countries.

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