Try It Yourself: Consider these pronunciations of Hispanic names: “deh-lah-CROOS” for de la Cruz; “FWEHN-tehs” for Fuentes; “GAHR-sah” for Garza, and “ehr-NAHN-dehs” for Hernandez. Say these names aloud as you think they would be said without an ethnic pronunciation. Compare those pronunciations with the ones in quotation marks, and identify two features in the Hispanic pronunciations that are characteristic of Chicano English. Identify two other features we did not discuss but that you think may reflect characteristics of Hispanic English.

Socioeconomic Status Varieties: English, French, and Spanish

Less striking than regional and ethnic varieties, but equally significant, are the remarkable patterns of speech that characterize different socioeconomic status groups. Here we describe some speech patterns of the English spoken in New York City and in Norwich, England, as well as of the French of Montreal and the Spanish of Argentina.

New York City

New Yorkers sometimes pronounce /r/ and sometimes drop it in words like car and beer, cart and fourth (where /r/ follows a vowel in the same syllable and appears either word finally or preceding another consonant). The presence or absence of this /r/ does not change a word’s referential meaning. A “cah pahked” in a red zone is ticketed as surely as a similarly parked car. And whether you live in New York or “New Yoahk,” you have the same mayor (or “maya”).

Still, the occurrence of /r/ in these words is anything but random and anything but meaningless. Linguist William Labov hypothesized that /r/ pronunciations in New York depended on social-class affiliation and that any two socially ranked groups of New Yorkers would differ in their pronunciation of /r/. On the basis of some preliminary observations, he predicted that members of higher socioeconomic status groups would pronounce /r/ more frequently than would speakers in lower socioeconomic class groups.

To test his hypothesis, Labov investigated the speech of employees in three Manhattan department stores of different social rank: Saks Fifth Avenue, an expensive, upper-middle-class store; Macy’s, a medium-priced, middle-class store; and S. Klein, a discount store patronized principally by working-class New Yorkers. He asked supervisors, sales clerks, and stock boys the whereabouts of merchandise he knew to be displayed on the fourth floor of their store. In answer to a question such as “Where can I find the lamps?” he elicited a response of fourth floor. Then, pretending not to have caught the answer, he said, “Excuse me?” and elicited a repeated—and more careful—utterance of fourth floor. Each employee thus had an opportunity to pronounce postvocalic /r/ four times (twice each in fourth and floor) in a natural and realistic setting in which language itself was not the focus of attention.

Employees at Saks, the highest-ranked store, pronounced /r/ more often than those at S. Klein, the lowest-ranked store. At Macy’s, the middle-ranked store, employees pronounced an intermediate number. Figure 11-13 on page 372 presents the results of
Labov's survey. The darker sections represent the percentage of employees who pronounced /r/ four times; the lighter sections above the darker areas represent the percentage who pronounced it one, two, or three times (but not four). Employees who did not pronounce /r/ at all are not directly represented in the bar graph. As can be seen, 30% of the Saks employees pronounced all /r/, and an additional 32% pronounced some /r/. At Macy’s, 20% pronounced /r/ four times, and an additional 31% pronounced some /r/. At S. Klein, only 4% of the employees pronounced all /r/, with an additional 17% pronouncing one, two, or three /r/s. Labov’s hypothesis about the social stratification of postvocalic /r/ seemed strikingly confirmed.

You may be able to suggest other possible explanations for these findings because factors other than socioeconomic status might have influenced the results, as Labov recognized. For example, if he spoke to more men than women in one store or more stock boys than sales clerks, or more African Americans than whites, the difference in pronunciation of /r/ could have been the result of gender, job, or ethnic differences. As it happened, there were more white female sales clerks than any other single group, and looking at their pronunciations separately from those of everyone else would eliminate the possibility of findings skewed by gender, job, or ethnicity. Figure 11-14 reveals an overall pattern of distribution similar to that for the whole sample of respondents. The white female sales clerks at Saks pronounced more /r/ than those at Macy’s, who in turn pronounced more than those at S. Klein. Thus Labov could rule out the possibility that his findings reflected ethnic, gender, or in-store job differences.

Following the department store study, Labov undertook a different kind of investigation. Equipped with detailed sociological descriptions of individual residents of Manhattan’s Lower East Side, he spent several hours with each of about a hundred respondents there and tape-recorded the conversations. His interviewing techniques prompted the respondents to use speech samples characteristic of different speech situations, or registers, as we discussed in Chapter 10. Here are six variables he examined:
• postvocalic /t/
• th in words such as thirty, through, and with (New Yorkers say thirty sometimes with /θ/ and sometimes with /t/)
• th in words such as this, them, and breathe (the infamous “dis,” “dat,” “dem,” and “dose” words, with variants /d/ and /θ/)
• alternate pronunciation of -ING words like running and talking, with /nθ/ and /m/ variants (Often referred to as “dropping the g,” you know from Chapter 3 that the alternation is between velar /ŋ/ and alveolar /n/; only in spelling is there a “g” to drop.)
• pronunciation of the vowel in the word class coffee, soft, caught
• pronunciation of the vowel in the word class bad, care, sag

In the interviews, Labov spoke with women and men, parents and children, African Americans and whites, Jews and Italians—a representative sample of Lower East Side residents. On the basis of extensive information about their background, he assigned each respondent to a socioeconomic status group based on a combination of these three factors:

• the education of the respondent
• the income of the respondent’s household
• the occupation of the principal breadwinner in the household

Using these criteria, he placed individuals into one of four socioeconomic status categories, which he called lower class, working class, lower middle class, and upper middle class. As expected, and as Figure 11-15 on page 374 shows, upper-middle-class (UMC) respondents exhibited more /nθ/ than lower-middle-class (LMC) respondents, who in turn exhibited more than working-class (WC) respondents, who used more than lower-class (LC) respondents. Each group also pronounced more /nθ/ as attention paid to speech was increased in various styles. Through several graded speech registers—casual
style, interview style, and reading style—respondents in all socioeconomic groups increased the percentage of /θ/ pronounced. Interview style is not shown here.

Labov found that all six variables were socially stratified. Each socioeconomic status group had characteristic patterns of pronunciation, and the percentage of pronunciation of the variants was ranked in the same way as the groups themselves. The upper middle class pronounced most /θ/ for *th* (as in *thing*), most /ð/ for *th* (as in *then*), most /θ/ for *th* (as in *running*), and most /t/ for *th* (as in *car*). The lower-class respondents pronounced fewest of these variants, while the lower middle class and working class fell in between, with the lower middle class pronouncing more than the working class. Such regular patterns of variation suggest that even subtle differences in social stratification may be reflected in language use.

The vowels were stratified in a similar way. New Yorkers have several pronunciations of the first vowel in *coffee*: it ranges from the high back tense vowel [u] through the mid back vowel [a] down to the low back vowel [a]. The vowel of words in the *bad* class also varies—from low front lax [æ] to high front tense [i] with an offglide, as we saw in our discussion of the Northern Cities Shift. In New York City, higher socioeconomic status groups favored lower vowels in both cases.

**Norwich, England**

To see whether the kind of linguistic differentiation found in New York City existed elsewhere, British linguist Peter Trudgill investigated the speech patterns of residents of Nor-
wich, England, and found strikingly similar results in syntactic as well as phonological variation. Trudgill divided respondents into five groups: middle middle class (MMC), lower middle class (LMC), upper working class (UWC), middle working class (MWC), and lower working class (LWC). Figure 11-16 illustrates the distribution of final /ŋ/ in the suffix -ing among these groups in casual and reading styles.

![Figure 11-16](image)

Comparing data from New York City (Figure 11-15 on page 374) and Norwich (Figure 11-16) shows that the patterns of distribution for socioeconomic status are similar in the two cities. Each successively higher socioeconomic status group pronounces more /ŋ/ than the group immediately below it.

### Montreal, Canada

In Montreal, French speakers vary the pronunciation of pronouns and definite articles. Except in the word *le*, /l/ is sometimes pronounced and sometimes omitted in personal pronouns such as *il* 'he' and *elle* 'she' and articles (and pronouns) such as *les* 'the (plural)' and *la* 'the (feminine).’ (See Table 2-11, page 59.) In the usage of two occupational groups, professionals and laborers, the laborers consistently omitted /l/ more frequently than the professionals did, as shown for four such words in Figure 11-17 on page 376.

### Argentina

Spanish speakers show similar patterns of phonological variation. To cite one example in Argentina, speakers sometimes delete /s/ before pauses (as in English, /s/ is a common word-final sound in Spanish, occurring on plural nouns and on several verb forms). In a study of six Argentinian occupational groups, the percentage of /s/-deletion was greatest in the lowest-status occupations and least in the higher-status occupations, as shown in Figure 11-18 on page 376.
General Comments

On the basis of evidence from these and other studies, parallel patterns of distribution may be expected for phonological variables wherever comparable social structures are
found. Morphological and syntactic variation also exists, though evidence about variation at these levels of the grammar is scanty. What holds true of variation in English, French, and Spanish presumably holds true of similarly structured communities speaking other languages, although here, too, evidence is scanty.

The Language Varieties of Women and Men

You know that in many speech communities women and men don’t speak identically. In the United States, certain words are associated more with women than men and may “sound” feminine as a result. Adjectives such as lovely, darling, and cute may carry feminine associations, as do words that describe precise shades of color, such as mauve and chartreuse.

In some languages, the differences between women’s and men’s speech are more dramatic than in English. In informal situations among speakers of Japanese, even the first-person pronoun ‘I’ differs for women (atasi) and men (boku). In French, je is the first-person pronoun for men and women, but because adjectives are marked for gender agreement, Je suis heureux ‘I am happy’ identifies a male speaker, while Je suis heureuse identifies a female speaker.

Reports of striking differences between gender varieties have been reported for Chukchee (spoken in Siberia) and for Thai. In polite Thai conversation between men and women of equal rank, women say dîc³dan while men say p³ôm for the first-person singular pronoun ‘I.’ Thai also has a set of particles used differently by men and women, especially in formulaic questions and responses such as ‘thank you’ and ‘excuse me.’ The polite particle used by men is k³ráp, while women use k³á or k³â. Because these politeness particles occur frequently in daily interaction, speech differences between men and women can seem highly marked in Thai, despite the fact that few words are so differentiated.

There are also more subtle differences between men’s and women’s speech, the kinds of quantitative differences we saw between other social groups. For example, in Montreal, where professionals delete /l/ from articles and pronouns less frequently than laborers do, men and women also differ in pronouncing these same words. Figure 11-19 on page 378 shows that men delete /l/ more frequently than women for il (personal, as in il chante ‘he sings’), for elle, and for the pronouns les and la.

Patterns in which women delete sounds less frequently than men also appear in New York City and Norwich. In these cities, when higher socioeconomic classes behave linguistically in one way to a greater extent than lower ones, women tend to behave like the higher socioeconomic groups to a greater extent than men do.

In English, besides vocabulary differences, more subtle linguistic differences between the sexes can go largely unnoticed. One study examined the pronunciation of the -ing suffix in words like running and talking. In a semirural New England village, the speech patterns of a dozen boys and a dozen girls between the ages of 3 and 10 showed that, even in such young children, all but three used both alveolar [n] and velar [ŋ] pronunciations for verbal -ing. Interestingly, twice as many girls as boys showed a preference for the /ŋ/ forms, as shown below.