Accommodation at work: some phonological data and their implications

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Introduction

Accommodation theory has been and is being developed by Giles and others (for overview, see introductory paper to this issue by Beebe and Giles) in order to account for some aspects of speech variation in interpersonal encounters. Originally, it was intended to explain 'those speech changes which appear to be instigated by the speaker's motivation to gain the approval of, or dissociate himself from, the listener' (Giles and Powesland 1975:167). As more evidence has been accumulated, the theoretical statement has become increasingly complex and, correspondingly, more able to encompass specific instances, particularly in relation to speakers' different motives in varying their speech, listeners' different reactions to such variation, and limitations on the extent of variation. One of the most recent statements of accommodation theory is to be found in six basic propositions (Thakerar et al. 1982). Three propositions relate to linguistic convergence, three to divergence; although all six may be relevant in any one speech event, the first proposition is most directly relevant here:

People will attempt to converge linguistically towards the speech patterns *believed* to be characteristic of their recipients when they (i) desire their social approval and the perceived costs of so acting are proportionally lower (identity maintenance function) than the rewards anticipated; and/or (ii) desire a high level of communication efficiency (cognitive organization function).

In 1975, Giles and Powesland argued (1975:158) that 'it would not seem unreasonable to suppose that there may be a general set to accommodate to others in most social situations.'
  The investigation of style-shifting in interpersonal encounters is a centrally sociolinguistic topic, but Giles and Smith (1979:65) see their social psychological approach as compensating for an inadequate sociolinguistic methodology in this area:

The perspective adopted in accommodation theory is aimed at correcting the lop-sided reliance in sociolinguistics upon descriptive sociological methods in understanding spoken behavior. . . . To understand why individuals speak the way they do, we must know something not only about their descriptive characteristics, but also about the manner in which they interpret 'the situation', and the procedures they use to act on these interpretations.

The same point led Giles and Powesland to question '. . . whether the parameters used by professional linguists and phonologists are necessarily the most appropriate indices of speech change in these sociolinguistic experiments' (1975:180). Giles's current position is the very reasonable one that 'social psychology and sociolinguistics could profit from a symbiotic relationship' (Giles 1979:3; see also Giles 1977; and Smith et al. 1980). Indeed, the two approaches have already been merged — Thakerar et al. (1982) have included a small amount of objective phonological analysis to support their more usual evaluative approach in their investigation of status effects on the speech of female nurses. Also, Beebe and Zuengler (i.p.) report some linguistic characteristics of the accommodation strategies of Puerto Rican and Chinese-Thai children.

   Generally in support of this trend, I want, first, to show that problems of validity confront traditional social psychological approaches to the analysis of linguistic shifting and established sociolinguistic methods with equal severity; but second, to argue that a theory of linguistic accommodation cannot be fully explicit without a detailed analysis of those linguistic features which are manipulated; and finally, to report an empirical investigation of accommodation at one linguistic level (phonological) in a natural setting. The investigation uses established sociolinguistic methods, and its findings suggest that aspects of accommodation theory need further clarification.

Problems of validity in two approaches to the investigation of speech accommodation

How do we determine when a speaker's speech style has shifted? We have a choice between objective measurement/quantification of linguistic features and the use of lay judges' evaluations of style shifts (see Putnam and Street, this issue). Giles and Powesland (1975:180) argue that the accommodation model accounts specifically for *responses* to another's speech style, so that we could argue in favor of basing our analyses 'directly' on these responses in the form of expressed judgements; quantifiable linguistic features have to be selected by the researcher and such features may or may not be responded to in reality; they may or may not be significant. Within socio-

linguistics, a pragmatic solution to this problem of validity has been adopted, and linguistic variables have been considered significant *by virtue of* their frequency of occurrence correlating significantly with social or contextual dimensions.

Still, there are some justifications for this seemingly *ad hoc* procedure; some sociolinguists (e.g. Labov 1972a; Macaulay, 1977) have examined individuals' reactions to the phonological and morphological features that they have used in their variable-counts and have provided evidence of the significance, sometimes overtly recognized, of these features to members of the speech community. Also, in my own work, I have found a strong correlation between judgements of shifts with a speaker's accent repertoire and the results of objective frequency-counts of sociolinguistic variables (Coupland 1980).

There is a growing feeling within sociolinguistics, however, that straight-forward correlational research allows only limited conclusions to be drawn. This is particularly true in the case of traditional 'static' correlational socio-linguistic studies, where the covariation of linguistic and social features is plotted independently of any consideration of the dynamics of the inter-action. This is the approach criticized by Giles and Smith (1979:64): 'socio-linguistics . . . should reconsider its view of speech behavior as if it were a blob of clay moulded by situational constraints.' Hymes has made the same point in his discussion of the goals of sociolinguistics (1977:76): 'Adding a speechless sociology to a sociology-free linguistics can yield little better than *post hoc* attempts at correlation between accounts from which the heart of the relevant data will be missing.' For accommodation theory, the 'heart' of the matter is presumably an adequate account of the social and psycholog-ical conditions which favor speech convergence, maintenance, or divergence, together with an adequate account of the linguistic facts of particular cases. Linguistic description alone cannot provide the answers. Indeed, in the absence of an adequate social psychological theory we risk not asking the relevant questions. To take a particular case, we might never consider the distinctions between psychological and linguistic convergence/divergence or between subjective and objective convergence/divergence (see Thakerar et al. 1982, and below).

Turning to the usual evaluative methods of Giles and others, we find problems of validity of a different kind. In social psychological investigations of speech accommodation, it is established practice to collect evaluations of tape-recorded spoken texts from groups of 'linguistically naive' subjects who are asked to rate these texts on a number of scales, linguistic as well as non-linguistic. The setting, as in many sociolinguistic experiments, is unavoidably unnatural. The act of rating tape-recorded speech and the laboratory itself are arguably steps away from 'reality', but necessary if we are to have control

over participants' (speakers' and raters') attitudes and knowledge. To take a recent and particularly problematical case, Giles and Smith (1979) asked subjects to complete questionnaires by rating on five scales eight spoken texts purported to be recordings of a Canadian speaker trying out different styles of presentation for an English audience. First, it may be that accommodation is foregrounded here in a way it is not in real-life encounters. Also, subjects are rating a form of accommodation that we know very little about – cross-national accent accommodation – whereas individuals' accent repertoires are typically considered to be subsets of (nationally bounded) speech-community repertoires. Then, the eight texts are the result of the speakers' conscious manipulation of the variables 'pronunciation', 'speech rate' and 'content', so that, as in all instances of the widely used matched-guise technique (discussed by Lambert 1967), the validity of the results partly depends on the degree of realism the speaker can achieve. Producing all eight possible permutations of accommodated and nonaccommodated values of the three variables allows these variables to be distinguished in the analysis but demands remarkable virtuosity, and we must ask whether evaluations of manufactured accommodation are likely to be reproduced in natural settings.[2]

Many evaluative studies are far less open to criticisms of this sort, and the matched-guise technique is used only in studies which focus on the receptive aspect of speech accommodation. The three main investigations reported in Thakerar et al. (1982) involve subjects in rating texts which have been produced much more naturally and by authentic speakers – nurses in conversation over aspects of their work and students completing a block-design task. Moreover, the point is not that research conducted in unnatural settings is to be discounted; the 'layers of reality' surrounding 'the truth' are difficult to unravel in any research context (see Robinson 1979:217). But sociolinguistics is acutely aware of the *possible* gap between elicited and (unknowingly) observed speech, between controlled and uncontrolled data (see Labov 1972b; Wolfson 1976), and one goal of accommodation theory must be to account, ultimately, for what happens in everyday encounters. It follows from this that observational techniques have a significant contribution to make to accommodation theory (see Platt and Weber, this issue). They will give us confidence to claim that linguistic accommodation is a feature of speech in nonexperimental settings, and the findings ought to be suggestive of how speech is accommodated in reality. In this way, observational approaches may not only support accommodation theory but also help to develop it.

The need for an explicit linguistic component in accommodation theory

It seems obvious that a theory of linguistic accommodation needs, at some point, to make specific linguistic predictions, and that these need to be verified by analyzing linguistic features. An earlier statement of the theory (Giles and Powesland 1975:158) refers explicitly to a speaker sampling the speech of his/her interlocutor and subsequently choosing specific speech patterns from his/her (own) repertoire. The latest propositional statement is less clear about the linguistic mechanisms involved and emphasizes the distinction between psychological and linguistic convergence/divergence. Convergence is now said to be 'towards the speech patterns *believed* to be characteristic of . . . the recipients'. This shift in emphasis is understandable, but an 'attempt to converge linguistically' still has to have some discernible linguistic consequence. Furthermore, where we want to claim there is linguistic convergence/divergence rather than stylistic shifting in general, it must be possible to identify degrees of similarity/difference in participants' linguistic behavior. As was mentioned above, linguistic analysis has its attendant problems; we cannot be sure we have focused on the linguistic features that are significant in a particular encounter. Still, linguistic analysis can give us confidence that the phenomena we posit in our reading of an encounter do actually exist, and as accommodation theory moves toward a more psychological and less linguistic formulation, this question of whether linguistic accommodation exists in a given case becomes a relevant one.

Therefore, at some point, evidence in support of accommodation theory ought to include detailed quantification of linguistic styles, naturally produced in everyday settings. Without this, we will have no support for specific hypotheses as to what accommodation is and how it operates. Such an approach is not unproblematical, but can at least provide a firm empirical basis for our interpretation. There is also the advantage that a standard method – the quantitative sociolinguistic-variable technique developed by Labov (1966) – is available.

The investigation

Tape-recordings in a travel agency in central Cardiff provided phonological data for the investigation. Fifty-one clients, all natives of the city, were recorded in conversation with one assistant, Sue, who is also a Cardiff resident. Recordings were made with Sue's consent, but we can have confidence that they are free from observer effects for two reasons. First, the original aim of the study was to examine the speech behavior of the travel agency clients rather than the assistant herself, as Sue was aware; second,

recordings made during the first four days were not used, and by the fifth day all of the 'channel cues for casual speech' (Labov 1972a:94) were present. Clients were not aware that they were being recorded until the encounter was over; they were interviewed as they left the travel agency and asked for their permission to use the recorded material and for details of their occupation, age, educational background, and area of residence. No clients who were interviewed refused to give permission. Conversations varied in length between approximately two and ten minutes, and only one of the 51 clients had previously conversed with the assistant.

All of the 52 participants have some degree of regionally accented speech and can be ranked on a scale of accent mildness-broadness, as predicted by a large number of sociolinguistic investigations of urban populations (e.g. Labov 1966; Trudgill 1974; Macaulay 1977). As in these other studies, the population can be differentiated on the basis of their accent behavior into socioeconomic status, sex, and age groups. Because of this pattern of differentiation, accommodation theory predicts that Sue's phonological behavior will, within limits, vary in relation to that of her interlocutors if (i) she desires their approval (provided she perceives the rewards of so doing as greater than the costs); and/or (ii) she wishes to improve communication efficiency. It is already known that Sue's phonological repertoire allows her to vary her pronunciation in relation to gross changes in the speaking situation, in particular 'channel' (speaking on the telephone as opposed to face-to-face), 'topic' (speaking about her work or about other matters), and 'participants' (speaking to clients, colleagues, or tour operators), as reported in Coupland (1980). This earlier investigation, of course, took no account of the interlocutors' phonological behavior. Now, we could claim to have evidence of accent accommodation if Sue's patterns of phonological usage covaried with those of the clients she is conversing with.

There are some significant weaknesses with this methodology. First, although the propositional statements of accommodation theory are expressed in terms of unilateral speech convergence/divergence, Giles has pointed out (personal communication) that the clients' speech also has to be seen as accommodated, rather than as a static given (as the current methods imply). Of course, while we do not have a range of statistics for each client's use of particular linguistic features in a wide range of contexts (as we do for Sue, from the earlier study), it might be possible at a later date to look for variation *within* the speech of each client during a particular encounter. A second problem is that it is difficult to be clear about the particular attitudes and motives that underlie any shifting that Sue produces. It seems reasonable to assume that the 'general set to accommodate' (see above) will be relevant in the travel-agency context. More particularly, communication efficiency and social approval are presumably both relevant criteria for

success for a travel-agency assistant. Thakerar has suggested (in a personal communication) that the communication-efficiency function may be the more relevant here, if we see Sue holding high status (as, typically, the information giver) and the clients holding relatively low status. But at this stage of the analysis, it has to be admitted that participants' motives are far from adequately defined in the travel-agency investigation.

The accent behavior of all 52 participants was quantified for four phonological variables, according to the procedure developed by Labov (1966). The variables were selected as having been successfully diagnostic of social and stylistic variation in Cardiff English, both in Sue's speech and in general (see Coupland 1980). The variable (ng) had not been included in the earlier study since, in the more informal contexts analyzed there, its standard variant (/ŋ/) was very rare; that is, informal contexts were below the threshold level of regular variation for (ng) in Sue's speech.

In brief, Labov's procedure involves ranking realizations of a single linguistic feature on a scale of standardness–nonstandardness and assigning these realizations (variants) numerical values, so that, by counting the frequency of occurrence of individual variants, the degree of standardness in a speaker's use of a variable can be expressed as a single figure between 0 (completely standard) and 100 (maximally nonstandard). In this study, variants of the four variables were quantified in the following way:

(*h*) 'Aitch-dropping' is a stereotypical feature of many British regional accents, including Welsh-accented English. Since 0 is the less standard variant,

(h) realized as /h/ is awarded 0, and

(h) realized as 0 is awarded 1.

(*intervoc. t*) Between unstressed syllables or following a stressed syllable, intervocalic /t/ in Cardiff English is often realized as a short voiced variant [t̬] or as a tap [ɾ], either within a word or across a word boundary:

(intervoc. t) – /t/ – 0

(intervoc. t) – [t̬], [ɾ] – 1

(*ng*) 'G-dropping' is another stereotype of many British, including Welsh, regional accents in unstressed syllables:

(ng) – /ŋ/ – 0

(ng) – /n/ – 1

(*C cluster*) Simplification of final consonant clusters, particularly involving voiceless alveolar plosives, is a common feature of British English. It is noted even in descriptions of RP but is particularly common in Cardiff English, sufficiently so for it to be considered a regional feature. Different patterns of cluster simplification have to be recognized and these contexts have to be separately analyzed. The linguistic environments where alveolars are commonly lost are

(i) continuant consonant + /t/, followed by a word with an initial consonant other than /y/ or /h/ (e.g. *next day, left turn*, but excluding reduced negative forms *-nt* (as in *didn't, can't*).

(ii) the negative forms *-nt* followed by a word with an initial consonant.

(iii) word-final /t/ + /s/ clusters formed by the reduction of *is* or *has* (e.g. *that's, it's*), where loss of the alveolar is a clearly recognizable regional Cardiff feature.

In all cases,

(C cluster) — alveolar elided — 1

(C cluster) —   0 — if the full form remains, or
                is replaced, for example by [ʔ] or an assimilated form
                (e.g. [ðaʔθɪŋ], [ɪaːsppɔʊst]).

Frequencies of occurrence of the less-standard forms, expressed as percentages, were obtained for all variables for the speech of both participants in all 51 conversations.[3]

The population of clients is not a socially homogeneous group other than by place of residence. They were randomly selected from the individuals who entered the travel agency at the time of recording and belong to a range of socioeconomic groups; this is reflected in their accent behavior. One way of capturing this correlation is by grouping the 51 clients according to the *Registrar General's Classification of Occupations* (Registrar General 1970) and comparing the six groups' mean values for the four sociolinguistic variables, as in Table 1. As we might expect, values increase very regularly from occupation groups I to V.

Table 1.   *Percentages of less-standard variants of four phonological variables by the occupational class of 51 subjects*

	Occupational class					
	I	II	IIIN	IIIM	IV	V
(h)	16.7	12.3	16.3	68.9	88.7	66.7
(ng)	0.0	9.4	41.8	68.9	73.8	100
All (C cluster)	34.0	34.8	59.8	64.0	77.9	66.7
(intervoc. t)	0.0	12.8	42.1	58.7	76.7	80.0

The question is whether Sue's own speech, as indexed by the four phonological variables, reflects the variation apparent in the client's speech. Individual encounters suggest that there is quite close covariation. Extract 1 shows Sue in conversation with a female client, a staff-nurse (occupation class II) from a prestigious city suburb. This client is a relatively standard-

accented speaker (at least in this context), as shown by the high frequency
of more standard variants (0) of the variables marked:

Extract 1[4]
line

                    (Cii)
1. S.   I don't know of another one in March for three nights actually
                    0
   C.   oh or perhaps I // made a mistake last
                    (Cii)
   S.   wasn't Majorca was it?
                    1

                                        (Cii)
   C.   no no it was Benidorm but I couldn't book them // they were
                                                        1
5.   (Ciii)
        fully booked so it's//back on Tuesday
                    0
                            (Ciii)
   S.   /mm/ this is Tuesday it's three nights at fifteen thirty
                            1
   C.   that leaves
                    (r)
   S.   you ar//rive back   yes
                    1
        (r)   (r)
   C.   arrive back   oh I you //arrive back here
        0   0
                    (r)
10. S. you arrive back into Cardiff at fifteen thirty
                    0
                    (Ciii)
   C.   and it's fifty // seven
                    0
   S.   fifty   fifty nine
   C.   fifty nine plus
                    (r)
   S.   insurance and airport taxes
                    0
   •   (h)
15. C. and how much does it normally come in // to?
                    0
   S.   about six pound
   C.   and the airport // taxes
   S.   no approximately altogether

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       C.   oh altogether
20.  S.   yes
       C.   right   sixty five pound
       (S. speaks briefly aside)
                (Ciii)        (r)
       C.   and it's the Riviera
                    0        0
                (Ciii)
       S.   that's right yes
                    0
```

Sue's speech, too, is relatively standard in Extract 1, but we get an impression of her phonological range when speaking to clients by comparing her speech here with that in Extract 2:

Extract 2
line

```
                          (h)
 1.  C.   where do you have to get the plane then?
                           1
     S.   Cardiff Rhoose
                              (Ci)
     C.            twenty past three is it?
                           1
                (h)           (r)
     S.   so you'd have to be there at least   um
                    0               0
                (Cii)
     C.   I can't think
                    0
                    (Ci)
     S.   twenty past did I say?
     C.   I think // so yeah
                    (Ci)
     S.   twenty past three
                    1
     C.   yeah
                    (h)               (r)
10.  S.   so you'd have to be there about quarter to three
                    0               1
                    (r)               (Cii)
     C.   (to C1) get there on time couldn't we?
                    1                   1
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                          (h)        (t)
*C1. (to C) yeah but we'd have to get our wages first
                           1          1
        (t)
   C.   get em there // (( ))
        1
   S.   what time do you get paid?
        (Cii)                    (h)    (Ci)
15. C.  don't know usually about half past three
        1                        0      1
              (Cii)                        (h)   (t)
   S.   mm  can't you ask them if you can have it earlier?
            1                              1     1
                     (Ci) (ng)
              you're just going to go then //   are you?
                      1    1
   C.   yeah
                     (ng)
   S.   you're not going to tell them are you? (laughs)
                      1
20. C. and C1. no
              (Cii)               (r)       (ng)
   C.   we won't  lose our job   or anything you know
              1                   0         1
        (Ci) (ng)
   C1.  just going for the weekend like
        1     1
        (Cii)
   C.   isn't there one earlier than that?  // or later
        1
                     (Ciii)
   S.   /no/ no that's there's only one flight Monday Wednesday Friday
                      1
        and Sunday (pause)
                     (t)                        (Ci)
        well think about it anyway and then if you want to call back
                     0                          0
```

*C1's two speaking turns are transcribed and her variants are noted along with S and C's; C1's speech is not, of course, included in the variable-counts.

The client in the second extract is a factory girl from what is held to be a low-prestige city area. Both client and assistant show a high frequency of less-standard variants of the four phonological variables. The two extracts suggest a convergent accommodative pattern; Sue is accommodating her phonological behavior to that of her interlocutor.
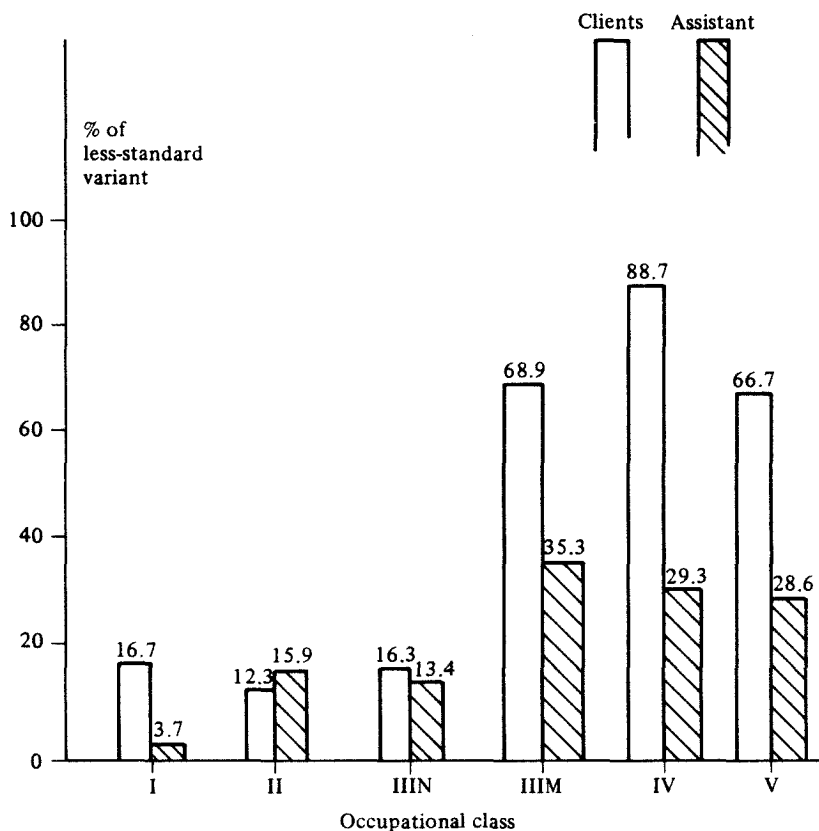
Figure 1. *Degrees of standardness in clients' use of phonological variables compared with the assistant's use of the same variables in conversation with them: variable (h)*

In order to examine the extent to which the pattern of phonological accommodation is repeated across the population of 51 clients, Figures 1 to 4 compare the mean values of the client occupation subgroups' phonological usage for the four variables with the values for Sue's speech in conversation with them. Overall, there is a clear suggestion in Figures 1 to 4 that Sue's accent behavior does match that of her interlocutors in a way that conforms to the predictions of accommodation theory. As percentages of the less-standard variants of each variable rise in the client's speech (as we move from occupation class I to V), so the percentages of these variants in Sue's speech in conversation with these groups generally rise. Indeed, a very similar pattern of covariation emerges with educational background as the criterion for establishing client subgroups.[5] The percentages of variants in Sue's speech
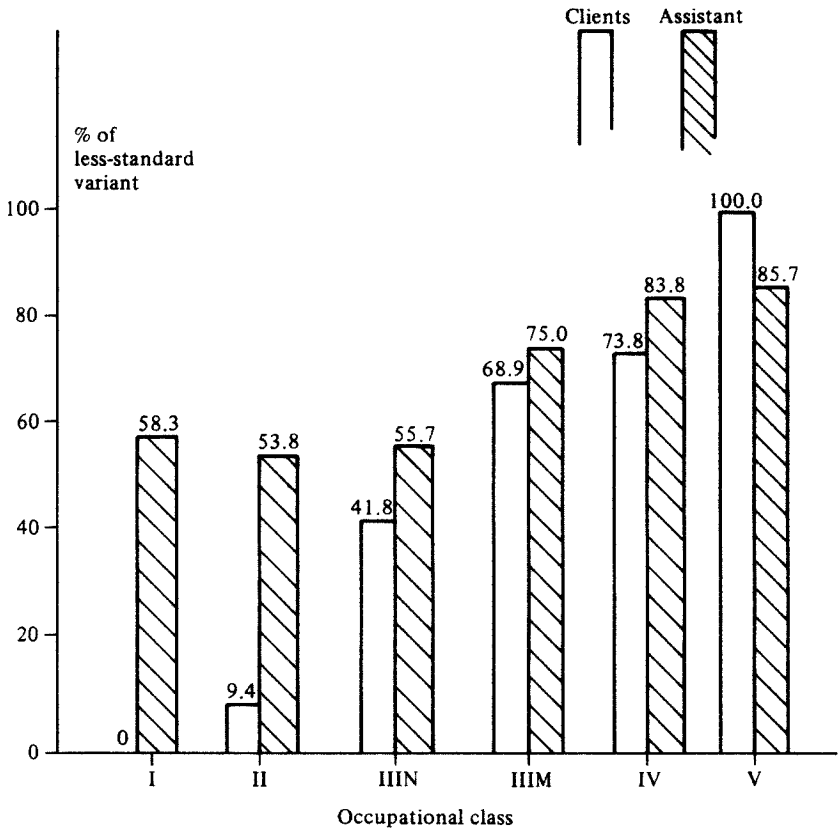
Figure 2. *Degrees of standardness in clients' compared with assistant's use of phonological variables: variable (ng)*

provide a reasonably reliable index of the socioeconomic status and educational background of her interlocutors, just as the percentages of those forms in the clients' own speech are able to do.

In fact, Figures 1 to 4 partly disguise the true extent of the intercorrelation between the clients' and the assistants' scores since the figures force us to compare absolute levels of standardness. There is no reason to expect the assistant to show the same phonological range as her clients, so it is more meaningful to compare participants' phonological behavior in terms of their own repertoires. Figure 5 allows us to do this by plotting deviations from the mean for each variable in Sue's speech against those in the speech of the client subgroups. The spread of points about the means in Figure 5 confirms the high degree of correlation between clients' and assistant's accent patterns
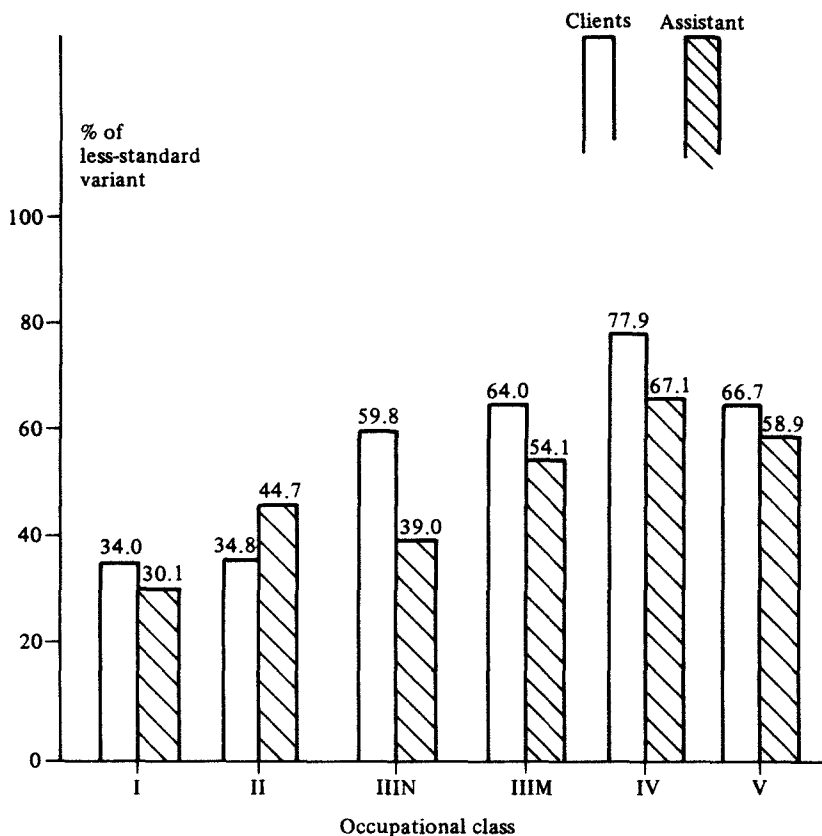
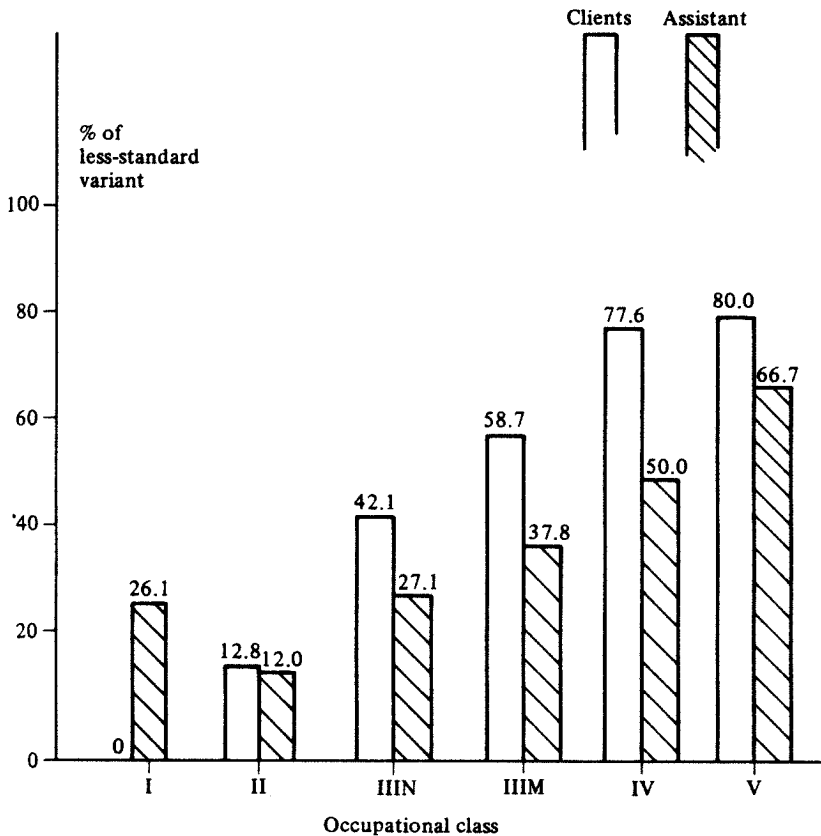Figure 3.   *Degrees of standardness in clients' compared with assistant's use of phonological variables: variable All (C cluster)*

suggested by Figures 1 to 4. Further statistical support for this interpretation may be obtained by calculating intercorrelation coefficients between the values shown in the first four figures.

The following intercorrelation coefficients were obtained between the client's and the occupation subgroups' values of the four variables:

(h)	—	.87
(ng)	—	.90
(C cluster)	—	.76
(intervoc. t)	—	.86

From these statistics and Figures 1 to 5 it is clear that, in an objective linguistic sense, phonological accommodation is a speech strategy that the assistant

Figure 4.   *Degrees of standardness in clients' compared with assistant's use of phonological variables: variable (intervoc. t)*

uses in her daily association with clients. The fact that it is produced spontaneously in a natural setting must constitute a small but powerful piece of evidence to support the basic predictions of accommodation theory.

Interpretation

It has been speculated that the rewards to Sue of this speech accommodation are that she gains her interlocutors' approval and/or makes her communication more efficient. Arguably, travel-agency assistants not only 'desire a gratifying interaction' (Giles and Powesland 1975:158) but are employed partly to ensure that this comes about. But what are we to say about the
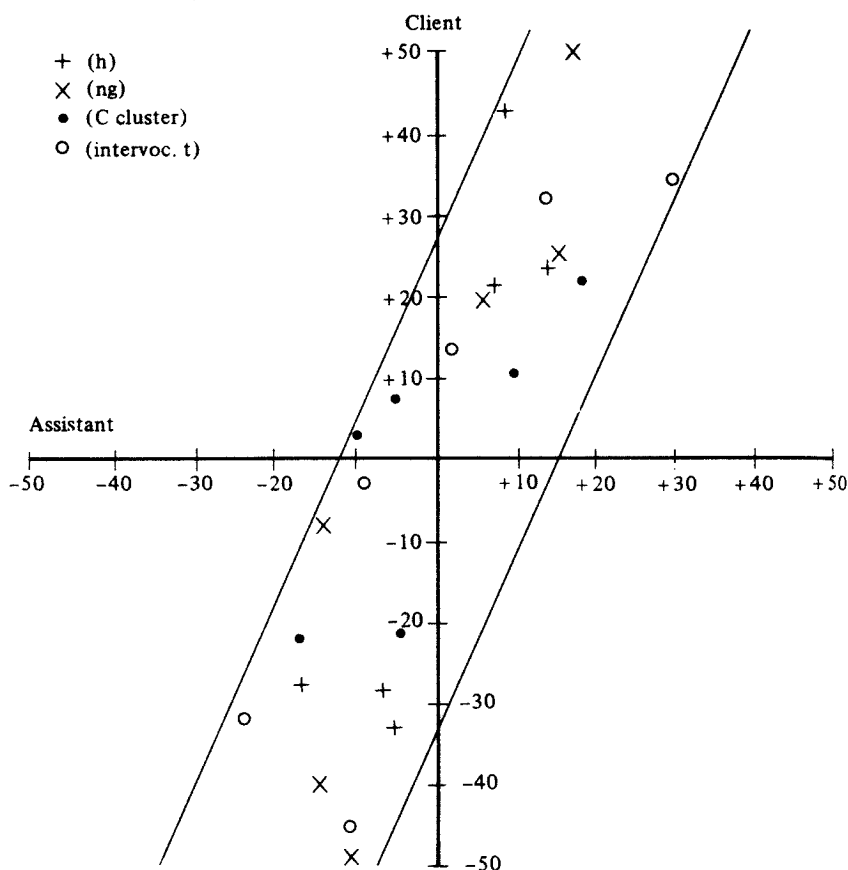
Figure 5. *A comparison of deviations from means of assistant's and occupational subgroup's values for all variables*

precise mechanism by which Sue's shifts of phonological style are produced? Certainly, attempts to answer this question *post hoc* are speculative, but the data presented at least encourage us to consider different alternatives.

Initially, Figures 1 to 5 may suggest that Sue is attempting to match, in her own speech, features in the speech of her interlocutors. That is, we could argue that Sue becomes aware of the degree of standardness–nonstandardness in her interlocutors' use of particular linguistic variables and, consciously, or unconsciously, shifts her own speech in an attempt to reproduce that degree of standardness. We would have to allow for discrepancies between perceived and actual degrees of standardness in both Sue's and the interlocutors' performance (subjective and objective accommodation) and for individual fluctuations resulting from differences in repertoire range and from

stylistic determinants other than the interlocutor's speech – such as topic, interactional function, and so on. If we assume that it is the assistant's intention to perform such a matching task, Figures 1 to 5 might lead us to claim that she is, overall, successful.

It is difficult to see to what extent the current statement of accommodation theory proposes this sort of feature-for-feature matching (intended, if not achieved by the speaker). Thakerar et al. (1982:208) say that '. . . specifically . . . interpersonal accommodation through speech involves the reduction of linguistic dissimilarities between two people in terms of their dialects, pause-lengths, etc.' Other quotations, too, suggest that a linguistic matching process is the heart of accommodation:

The term *'convergence'* has been coined to refer to the processes whereby individuals shift their speech styles to become more like that of those with whom they are interacting (Giles and Smith 1979:46).

. . . at least one member of an interactive dyad tends to adopt the speech patterns of the person to whom he is talking (Giles and Powesland 1975:156).

An alternative interpretation is that the well-attested linguistic matching that we find in interactive settings is, in a sense, only incidental. In the travel-agency investigation, for example, we could argue that Sue is *not* attempting to reproduce the actual levels of standardness for particular variables that she detects in the speech of her interlocutors; rather, she is attempting to convey via her pronunciation and presumably other behaviors, verbal and nonverbal, a *persona* which is similar to that conveyed by her interlocutors. If the participants' pronunciation characteristics converge, it is only as a result of attempts to reduce dissimilarities in social images. Since this explanation postulates a set of complex interpretive procedures between reception and production, it can be labeled an *interpretive* version of accommodation theory.

The literature on accommodation theory has sometimes discussed the interpretive procedures referred to above. Giles and Powesland (1975:158) say that '. . . accommodation through speech can be regarded as an attempt on the part of a speaker to modify or disguise his persona in order to make it more acceptable to the person addressed.' These authors' subsequent schematic representation of accommodation talks of speaker A drawing inferences as to the personality characteristics of B, although this component of the 1975 statement is not included in the later propositional summary. Why should there be this hesitation within accommodation theory over which interpretation – the direct matching or the interpretive version – is to be preferred? The explanation could lie in the range of linguistic features that

the theory tries to subsume. Shifts in pronunciation, speech rate, pause and utterance lengths, content, vocal intensity, intimacy of self-disclosures, pitch, dialect, and language use have all been treated as instances of linguistic convergence/divergence. While it is interesting to list the linguistic features that may be manipulated in interpersonal encounters in, at least superficially, the same ways, it is unreasonable to expect that such different aspects of language use can be treated in one, increasingly specific, theoretical state-ment. Ultimately, phonological shifting will have to be treated as a special case.

It is difficult to see how variation in pronunciation can be treated along-side shifts in, say, utterance length; phonological behavior is known to be socially meaningful within the speech community in a regular and specific way, unlike utterance length. In fact, Giles and Powesland (1975) have reviewed empirical studies of evaluative reactions to regionally accented speech (including South Wales speech) and have suggested that different rewards are available to speakers of RP (standard) *and* to speakers of region-ally accented English. A speaker of RP is likely to be favorably evaluated on traits of competence, while a less-standard speaker may be rated favorably on traits such as trustworthiness, friendliness, and sociability. Again, an implication of the neat correlation between socioeconomic status and phono-logical usage (found here and in the other studies referred to above) is that less-standard forms carry a form of prestige which derives from an attitude of ingroup solidarity – what Trudgill (1974) has called 'covert prestige'. Now, if accent behavior carries so much independent meaning, it seems a travesty to treat the variations in Sue's speech as 'merely' the matching of her speech patterns to those of her interlocutors. To model accent accommodation in interpersonal encounters, therefore, we have to include a mediating interpre-tive component where phonological features in a speaker's performance are processed for social meaning (including, perhaps, evaluations of socioeco-nomic and educational background) and the projected interpretation of the second speaker's own performance is assessed. In Sue's case this might mean that she steers a careful path between the poles of standardness and non-standardness with different interlocutors in order to be perceived both as efficient and as trustworthy, or at least as not *in*efficient and not *un*trust-worthy. The result would be the close matching of accent patterns that we find in Figures 1 to 5. In general, accommodation theory ought to be able to incorporate Giles's and others' data on the social evaluation of accents. At present it is unable to do this, since the general notion of 'desiring social approval' would presumably subsume desires to be perceived as *both* compe-tent *and* sociable – traits which are said to follow from standard and non-standard accent forms respectively (see Putnam and Street, this issue).

It is not possible to find conclusive support for either the linguistic

matching model or the interpretive model of accommodation in the travel-agency data. I have argued that the interpretive model is the more plausible to explain phonological variation. Still, a detailed analysis of the travel-agency transcriptions suggests that a limited form of direct linguistic matching does occur. For example, in Extracts 1 and 2 (above) Sue is occasionally influenced, it seems, by her interlocutor's pronunciation of particular phonological sequences. In conversation, it is inevitable that words or phrases will be repeated in close proximity; repetition is a central cohesive device. For example, there is the repetition of *arrive back* in lines 8 to 10 of Extract 1. Sue's first realization is with a (nonstandard) flapped intervocalic (ɾ) variant; the client – a relatively standard-accented speaker overall – follows with a standard continuant variant of (r); Sue's second realization (line 10) is the standard form, perhaps influenced by her interlocutor's pronunciation. Alternatively, we could see this as the product of random variation, but to take that line of argument ignores the dynamics of the situation. In Giles's terms, Sue's standard (r) variant in line 10 can be seen as the result of 'upward accent convergence', a matching exercise with identifiable attitudinal and communicative consequences. The repetition of the phrase *arrive back* gives it added salience in the discourse and, in Labov's terms, Sue's amount of attention to her own speech is increased and she style-shifts accordingly. This might be a form of feature-for-feature matching, then, although it is still interpretable in terms of motives and effects.

Another example of close matching is the pronunciation of *twenty past three* in lines 3 to 8 of Extract 2. The client, a relatively nonstandard speaker, produces a simplified consonant cluster in *past three*; Sue is producing a number of standard variants (in lines 2 and 4) but produces two nonstandard (C cluster) variants of the same sequence *past three* under the influence, perhaps, of the client's own earlier pronunciation. Sue's motives for this 'downward convergence' may be to avoid distinguishing herself as a more standard and so a higher-status speaker in respect of this particular phonological sequence.

Still, these instances of matching pronunciations of particular items are quite rare, and detailed analysis also throws up equally clear cases where the interpretive model is required to explain accommodative behavior. Over Extract 2, Sue's speech shows a normal (for her) mixture of standard and non-standard variants. At one point, however, she produces a sequence of seven nonstandard forms (lines 16 to 25) before reverting to a more standard style in line 26. A simple matching model cannot explain the motives and effects of this downward shift over the assistant's three speaking turns. There is no comparable shift in the interlocutors' pronunciation. There is no sudden need, it would appear, to gain social approval or increase communicative efficiency; these are unchanging objectives for a travel-agency assistant.

Rather, the downward shift is the result of a change in projected social image or persona. Over lines 16 to 25, Sue adopts the role of sympathetic co-conspirator: the clients are planning to leave work early and Sue is an accessory before the fact. Later, she reverts to her more formal persona of business-transacting travel-agency assistant, and her pronunciation reverts to its more standard style. This shift in social image has enabled Sue to emphasize successively the traits 'efficiency', 'social attractiveness' and 'efficiency' again (see Purcell; and Putnam and Street, this issue).

The distinction between a direct linguistic matching theory and an interpretive theory of accent accommodation could be tested empirically. One test case might be a cooperative encounter between members of different speech communities. Here what has been called 'downward' accent shifting – say, as an indication of reduced formality – might conceivably take the form of *di*vergence (when measured objectively) despite a mutual desire to gain approval. In such a case, speakers would indeed be shifting down their scales of standardness, but in the direction of different nonstandard norms. Theoretical support for this aspect of accommodation could come from Tajfel's theory of intergroup relations which argues that people do not always react to each other as individuals but, on occasions, as representative members of social groups. To date, accommodation theory has incorporated Tajfel's theory into analyses of divergence only (see Beebe and Giles, this issue). But within any speech community, phonological behavior inevitably marks a speaker as a representative of a particular social group; so, accommodation theory should also allow for the intergroup significance of phonological shifting in respect of convergence.

The travel-agency data, then, are broadly supportive of accommodaion theory in that we find regular accent convergence in cooperative encounters. The data confirm that we need an interpersonal perspective to account for levels of phonological standardness in participants' speech. But accommodation theory invites us to focus on the degree of proximity between interlocutors' speech patterns – for example, in the convergence/divergence analogies – and this focus can be too narrow. Phonological selections, as Labov and others have shown, are highly charged with social and stylistic meaning, and members of a speaking community must negotiate statuses and personalities through their phonology. If accommodation theory recognizes these complexities, it needs to shift its emphasis onto the interpretive procedures that mediate between reception and production of phonological forms, and away from linguistic convergence/maintenance/divergence phenomena which are arguably only the *product* of individuals' communicative competences.

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Notes

1. I am grateful to Howard Giles and Jitendra Thakerar for comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. Giles and Smith (1979:62), in fact, comment that the version which contained accommodated variants of all three variables 'could have been perceived as patronizing or ingratiating' or even as 'threatening', and they consider various explanations for these reactions.
3. Ideally, this quantifying procedure should have been replicated by a second researcher blind to the hypothesis. However, care was taken to ensure that the social characteristics of individual speakers were not known while the phonetic analysis was being done. Also, those who have undertaken such lengthy analyses will appreciate how remote the analyst is from the significance of the data at this stage; patterning of phonological frequencies is recognizable only with a broad perspective, when the quantification is complete.
4. Key to symbols: bracketed symbols identify particular variables:

   (C) – consonant cluster; i/ii/iii – contexts i, ii, and iii, as defined above.

   (h) – variable (h)

   (ng) – variable (ng)

   (t) – variable (intervoc.t)

   (r) – intervocalic /r/, which is realized in non-standard Cardiff speech as a single tapped form as opposed to the standard post-alveolar continuant and its variants. This variable is not included in the counts made and reported below.

   0/1 below the lines of text identify more and less standard variants respectively.

   Slashes indicate points of overlapping. Single slashes enclose totally overlapped speech.

   Single brackets enclose 'stage directions'.

   Double brackets denote inaudible sections.

   C. denotes a client.

   S. denotes the assistant, Sue.
5. To save space, no statistics relating to educational background are reported. These can be obtained directly from the author.

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