

*Handout*

**Field Experiments in the Language Change and Variation “Speech Community” studies**

**Below are listed the central elements in the classic Labovian sociolinguistic interview administered to each speaker in the face-to-face interviews comprising the “neighborhood studies.” These were typically administered after the unstructured casual conversation task. Not all were necessarily administered on the same day. For example, it was typical for interviewers to hold “continued interviews” across 2-3 sessions (Labov, 1984: 32ff). Samples of some tasks, marked with a (\*), are given or described in further detail in the pages that follow.**

1. (1-2 hours/speaker of Unscripted Casual Conversation)
  2. \*Minimal pair test
  3. \*Commutation test
  4. \*Embedded Contrast test
    5. Reading passage
    6. \*Word list
    7. \*Self-report test
  8. Subjective Reaction test
  9. Linguistic Insecurity test
  10. Family Background test
  11. Frequency test
12. (after 1984, Communication Modules -- Q-GEN-II)

from, Labov, W. (1984) Field Methods of the Project on Linguistic Change and Variation. In, J. Baugh and J. Sherzer, eds. *Language in Use: Readings in Sociolinguistics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. 28-53.

## 2. Minimal Pair test

Instructions: (1) Please read each word pair below, pausing between the two. (2) After you have read both items in the pair, please tell me whether you think they sound the same or different.

merry          marry

car             core

Mary          merry

God            guard

Coffee        caffeine

Murray        merry

Carry         Kerry

Tour            tore

Dawn          don

Cart            court

Curry        Kerrie

### 3. Commutation test (Version A)

Speaker 1 instructions: Read each item in the list below at a normal pace.

merry

car

Mary

God

Coffee in

Murray

Carry

Tour

Dawn

Cart

Curry

## 3. Commutation test (Version A, cont.)

Speaker 2 instructions: Please circle the word you hear being read.

merry	marry	Murray	Mary
car	core	con	court
merry	marry	Murray	Mary
God	guard	got	gone
Coffee in	caffeine	coughing	coding
merry	marry	Murray	Mary
Carry	Kerry	curry	Cory
Tour	tore	too her	to err
Dawn	don	down	doing
Cart	court	curt	cat
Carry	Kerry	curry	Cory

## 3. Commutation test (Version B)

*Interviewer note: Tape is not played from the beginning, but is cued (prior to the session) to begin from a random point within the recording.*

Instructions: You will hear a tape with a list you recorded. Please circle the word you think you intended to say. Then, in the right hand list, indicate how certain you are that this word is the one you intended to pronounce (1=I am very sure.....5=I have no clue what I meant to say).

merry	marry	Murray	Mary	1 2 3 4 5
car	core	con	court	1 2 3 4 5
merry	marry	Murray	Mary	1 2 3 4 5
God	guard	got	gone	1 2 3 4 5
Coffee in	caffeine	coughing	coding	1 2 3 4 5
merry	marry	Murray	Mary	1 2 3 4 5
Carry	Kerry	curry	Cory	1 2 3 4 5
Tour	tore	too her	to err	1 2 3 4 5
Dawn	don	down	doing	1 2 3 4 5
Cart	court	curt	cat	1 2 3 4 5
Carry	Kerry	curry	Cory	1 2 3 4 5

#### 4. Embedded contrast test

*Interviewer note: Prepare as many readings of this passage as necessary. In the blank space, splice in the appropriate test stimulus (merged/nearly merged/unmerged).*

### Coach Cunningham's Predicament

Marvin Cunningham is the coach of an undefeated Philadelphia boy's Little League baseball team, called "Cunning's Foxes." He's coached successfully, in his spare time, I might add, since 1970. In every season, he's come out 9 and 0. He's the best, and the boys love him. Last fall, Coach Cunningham got a letter from a disgruntled parent. This parent, Mrs. Moore, was from Lower Merion. She had a daughter named Katie who was really good at baseball, and wanted to play on Cunning's team. Mrs. Moore had a reputation for being a bit overbearing; she was a lawyer and she was a troublemaker. She threatened, in her letter, to turn Cunning in to the authorities if he didn't start playing girls on his team. Not wanting anything to mar his successful record, Cunning gave in and put Katie on the team. She was pretty good; really good, actually. The other boys on the team, Charlie, Murray, Ricky V., Ben, Junior, and Ricky P. didn't want to admit it, but she was. The one who really didn't want to admit it was Murray, because Murray couldn't catch a ball to save his life, and Katie was better than him. In fact, to make things tough for Katie, the boys decided to call her "Merion," after her high-falutin mom. Cunning, for his part, never played Merion. She stayed on the bench pretty much all season, because her mom never came to the games, and wouldn't catch on. She and Murray were both given the title First Utility Outfielder, and kept the bench warm all season. Coach usually played Murray in the final game of the season, because Murray's Mom, Mrs. Mitchell, always came to that game to see her boy play. Murray didn't mind. He was only on the team to make his parents happy. Secretly, he wanted to be a novelist, and so he liked sitting on the bench because it gave him an opportunity to read.

Now, they got to the end of the season, and guess what? Merion's mom showed up for the final game of the season. Cunning could see her up in the stands, right next to Murray's mom, Mrs. Mitchell. The Foxes were 7-8 against the Woodbine Wolves when Ricky V, the center fielder, slipped on a patch of wet grass and had to be taken out of the game! Coach Cunningham was in a real fix. He needed to put somebody in, but his only choices were the two kids sitting on the bench. Which first outfielder to play? Both Moms really wanted to see their kid in the game. Only one kid would be likely to give them a win. He considered the alternatives and decided, "No help for it. I've got to put (Merion/Murray in)."

What do you think? Did Coach make the right choice?

## 5. Reading passage

### From Aesop's Fables, The Cat and the Mice

Once upon a time, there was a house that was taken over by mice. A cat heard about this and said to herself, "I would be happy in that home." That night, she went and moved in with the family that lived in the house. Then, the fight between the cat and the mice began. The cat quickly made a habit of catching the Mice and biting off their heads. At last the mice could stand it no more, and they decided to go into their holes and stay there. "That's not very nice," said the cat to herself. "Now the only thing to do is to coax them out by a trick." So she thought for a while, and came up with a plan. Excited by her new scheme, she climbed up the wall and let herself hang down by her back legs from a peg and pretended to be dead. By and by, a mouse peeped out and saw the cat hanging there, like a spider on its web. "Aha!" the mouse cried. "You're very smart, no doubt, but you can turn yourself into a bag of potatoes hanging there if you like, but you won't catch us coming anywhere near you."

If you are wise, you won't be fooled by the innocent actions of those you have once found to be dangerous.

## 6. Word list

(Note: The carrier phrase has been removed to allow a focus on the phonological variables targeted.)

bus	egg	bowl	key
height	hut	toe	kid
night	bait	heat	Ett
how'd	boat	fast	miss
good	off	mad	dawn
move	bad	out	hurt
fill	face	home	hate
big	beat	do	bike
down	park	fell	other
toast	goal	eyes	sad
left	fish	hide	back
dead	set	right	sort
Boyd	say	moss	bath
head	spike	see	south
bag	pen	dad	dog
best	cook	aid	hood
Hoyt	beg	pin	pa
car	heed	paw	funny
side	sit	tore	tie
Kay	sat	fan	cough



mouse	duck	son	food
talk	fool	chew	ought
bone	had	sock	hall
pal	job	heard	ton
house	dew	who'd	heed
bug	Don	father	hid
mess	full	cot	past
now	shop	odd	vice
family	hot	go	voice
foot	nut	oat	tour
hit	toy	bee	tape
fight	sky	noise	awed
caught	cow	zoo	spice
fur	suit	door	time
pipe	life	choice	tongue
mouth	day	boy	type
on	rider	Hode	
cab	hoot	take	
tight	mice	put	
nice	goat	moist	
Hudd	dull	pest	
bite	school	up	

## 7. Self-report test

Instructions: Please click on a word on the screen to hear a set of possible pronunciations for the listed word. Indicate which one you think you use the most commonly. You can play each one as many times as you like.

Murray:      Version 1      Verision 2      Version 3      Version 4

god:          Version 1      Verision 2      Version 3      Version 4

tight:        Version 1      Verision 2      Version 3      Version 4

corner:      Version 1      Verision 2      Version 3      Version 4

tide:         Version 1      Verision 2      Version 3      Version 4

best:         Version 1      Verision 2      Version 3      Version 4