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ABSTRACT

This study is a sociolinguistic analysis of the variant pronunciation of /aI/, a selected phonological variable, by white informants in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Through a purposive sampling procedure, 56 informants were interviewed to determine their pronunciation of /aI/. Informants were ranked according to education, income, and occupation to determine social class. Specific environments of /aI/ were chosen for study. Conclusions show that the highest social class and the youngest age group produce the closest pronunciation to broadcast standard. (Author)

The Social Stratification of /aI/ in Tuscaloosa, Alabama

by L. Ben Crane

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship of the pronunciation of /aI/ to social class and age in the speech of whites in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The speech of blacks is not included because a separate study is required to do justice to black English. Also, much work already has been done with black speech while few (if any) attempts have been made to show social stratification of speech sounds other than /r/ among white speakers in the South.

The social rank of an individual is defined for this study as the sum of his ratings on scales for education, income and occupation. Therefore, a social class is a group of individuals sharing similar social ranks. Clearly then, social class (or social stratum) in the present study is a category with Bernard Barber's "measurable referents" being education, income, and occupation. The strata have a built-in ordering in that each stratum represents a range of values on a linear scale. This ordering of strata, from the lowest valued stratum to the highest, is basic to the present study, and stratification will be said to occur only if the linguistic values of /aI/ exhibit the same direction of ordering as the social classes or age groups within social classes.

Particular pronunciations of /aI/ are associated with particular social classes and age groups in social classes; however, the appearance of a particular pronunciation alone in the speech of an individual is not sufficient evidence

to determine his social class. Conversely, the fact that an individual is a member of a given social class does not necessarily mean that he will have a particular pronunciation of /aI/ in his speech; yet, there is the likelihood of the appearance of a particular pronunciation in the speech of a member of a given social class.

Another distinction of terms that needs to be made is the difference between apparent time and real time. A consideration of age stratification in apparent time deals with distinct age groups at a fixed point in time, while studying age stratification in real time consists of dealing with a fixed group of informants at several distinct points in time. All of the figures and tables regarding age stratification in the present study deal with apparent time.

A total of fifty-six informants were originally interviewed for this study, and these interviews were recorded on a standard reel-to-reel tape recorder. Since Tuscaloosa's population is relatively stable and largely native born, the decision was made to interview only natives of Tuscaloosa and its surrounding metropolitan area. In most cases the informants were at least third generation Tuscaloosa residents. In certain areas of the country, no doubt, this would ignore a large segment of the current population, but this "natives only" requirement for Tuscaloosa seems to insure a more accurate picture of the speech than any attempt to include non-native speakers.

Since the size of the sample necessarily had to be restricted, a purposive sampling procedure was employed to insure a complete cross-section of age and social status

of white informants from Tuscaloosa. Informants were selected to represent various religious backgrounds, neighborhoods within the city, and occupations.

At the outset, it was decided to study /aI/ in Tuscaloosa only in informal speech. Therefore, the linguistic interviews were devised to elicit as natural responses as possible. At no point in the interview was any material offered for the interviewee to read. Since it was believed that such an intrusion into the natural, conversation-like quality of the interview would have caused certain restraints and would have reminded the person being interviewed of the artificiality of the situation, it was decided to sacrifice the opportunity of studying the comparison of language in a formal versus informal basis for the sake of natural, conversational language.

In those instances in which I did not know the informant at least casually, a mutual friend was present to insure a relaxed atmosphere and as natural speech as possible from the informants. In most cases, however, I was acquainted with the informants before the interview was requested..

In the interviews for this study, no particular responses were being sought, and no formal questionnaire was used. Questions concerning family history, family life, discipline, games, school, religion, dating, superstitions, fear, hobbies, and travel were asked to insure topics of conversation. These subjects have proven to work well in past interviewing experiences. However, informants were encouraged to talk freely on any subjects of their choice.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the summer of 1971, with a few conducted in the summer of 1972. Where possible, interviews were conducted with representatives of three generations within a family.

Originally, informants were classified in this study into three categories, upper class, middle class, and lower class. Since the middle class includes informants from a wide range of income, occupation and educational backgrounds, the middle class is later redivided into upper middle class and working class. This subdivision makes possible finer distinctions in the analysis of /aI/. Some sociologists feel that an even larger number of classes exist in the South. Warner, Meeker and Ellis in an article "What Social Class Is in America" state:

> Studies in the Deep South demonstrate that, in the older regions where social changes until recently have been less rapid and less disturbing to the status order, most of the towns above a few thousand populations have a six-class system in which an old-family elite is socially dominant.

Yet, since it is impossible to assign points other than subjectively for "social dominance," a scale which objectively assigns points in three categories was devised. The three areas considered for social ranking are education, occupation, and income. In each of these areas, the highest number of points to be achieved is five.

The informants were ranked according to education as shown in Figure 1. Since it would be unfair, if not impossible to rank e members of the youngest age groups on an equal

scale with the members of the other two groups if their own education were used to assign points, the children usually were assigned the same number of points as their parents. However, in a case when a young informant already had surpassed the educational level of his parents, he received points for his own education. In cases where the two parents had different educational backgrounds, the young informant was assigned the number of points accorded to the parent with the most education.

Means for assigning points for occupation were somewhat more complex. A list of all the informants' occupations was compiled and ordered according to the North-Hatt Scale of Occupational Prestige, commonly referred to as a NORC Scale, which is perhaps the best-known and most frequently used of such occupational scales. This list of represented occupations was then divided into five groups as shown in Figure 2. This scale is in no way meant to be inclusive of all occupations and covers only those occupations represented in this sample. Wives were assigned their husbands' occupational ratings unless their own ratings were higher, and children were assigned their parents' ratings.

Points were assigned to the informants for income according to the scale shown in Figure 3. These figures are higher than the national average, but the median income per while family in Tuscaloosa was computed from the 1970 Census Bureau figures as approximately $11,067. Therefore, since this ranking system was devised to be adequate and representative only for Tuscaloosa, cut-off points were somewhat higher

than they might be for a national scale. Since these are family income figures, the totals include the incomes of both husband and wife where appropriate. Again, children were assigned their parents' ratings.

The points for each informant were totaled and the totals for all informants ranked in descending order. From these totals social classes were delimited as shown in Figure 4. Since the bulk of the white population in the United States typically falls into the middle social group, the large middle class shown in this sample is probably representative of the total white population of Tuscaloosa. This large group covering informants receiving 7-12 points includes such diverse informants as those described in Figure 5. The diversity of informants in the middle group suggests a further breakdown of this middle class into the divisions shown in Figure 6.

A division of the informants according to age is an important means of studying sound change in progress, as well as, perhaps, providing a means of studying trends of sound change within a social group or among social groups. Rather than superimposing figures for age divisions given in previous sociolinguistic studies, the age division were made in what seemed a most natural pattern for this study. Since 22 is the age by which most people finish undergraduate school, it provides a good upper boundary for the youngest age group. No age limit was set on how young an informant could be, but all informants except one (an extremely verbal eight-year-old) were eleven years old or older.

The second age group is the largest and includes people from 23 to 61 years of age. These limits were chosen because they generally represent the work years of an individual.

The lower limit for the third age group was set at 62, which is the age when a person normally either retires or begins to consider retirement. In this age group, the oldest informant was 86. However, all informants were screened carefully to insure that they could still hear properly.

Again, to help eliminate bias in transcription of the pronunciations of /aI/ from the tapes, the services of another transcriber were acquired to listen to the tapes independently and record the sounds as he heard them. The pronunciations of /aI/ were noted phonetically. All words for which there was a disagreement in notation between the transcribers were excluded from this study. The total of such words was sever per cent.

Excluded from this study at the outset were proper names, words for which the level of audibility was too low, words accompanied by laughter, or words consisting of false starts or including obvious performance errors. These cases are not part of the seven per cent exclusions.

The variable /aI/, heard in the pronunciation of fine, light, rise, and wide has a number of variants in Tuscaloosa. The frequent use of several of these variants and at least three measurably different sounds seems to demand a ternary system for studying /aI/. What is being measured with this variable is the amount of differentiation between the first and second elements of the diphthong referred to by Labov

as "nucleus-glide differentiation." Since in Tuscaloosa, the first element of the diphthong /aI/ is nearly always [a] or [a→] , one really need account within the ternary system only for the variation of the second element. In this study of /aI/, an X indicates a pronunciation of /aI/ whose second element approximates /I/. A Q indicates a sound whose second element may extend only as high and as fronted as [ɛ↑] . A [illegible] indicates a sound consisting of a single element; again, usually [a] or [a→] . The use of a ternary system resulted in a fairly large number of exclusions.

In dealing with the variable /aI/ in New York City, Labov states that "the effect of nucleus-glide differentiation is more extreme and more easy to observe in final position and before voiced consonants and voiceless fricatives," indicating that certain environments affect the pronunciation of /aI/.

The variable /aI/, therefore, is divided into three environments:

a. word-finally and preceding voiced sounds

b. preceding voiceless fricatives

c. preceding voiceless stops

The sample of words containing /aI/ before voiceless fricatives was too small to be studied independently and as a result had to be excluded from this study; however, the limited number of cases that were observed seem to pattern more like "word-finally and preceding voiced sounds" than like those cases preceding stops.

The percentages of the variant pronunciations of /aI/ by class in all environments are shown in Figure 7. Sharp stratification is observed in the X column for all age groups, with the 62+UC and 23+UC producing broadcast standard /aI/ most frequently. The lower class produces virtually no broadcast standard /aI/, with its norm between little off-glide and no off-glide. The middle class has a norm somewhat like that of the lower class while the upper class, in particular the 62+ and 23+ groups, displays no norm.

Figure 8 gives the percentages for the variant pronunciations by age for /aI/ in all environments. While no apparent overall pattern appears, gradient stratification is observed within the middle class. Again, this stratification by age within the middle class must be regarded cautiously in light of the percentages recorded for the upper and lower classes.

In order to obtain a clearer picture of the stratification of /aI/ by class, Figure 7 now is divided into Figure 9 (/aI/ word-finally and preceding voiced consonants) and Figure 10 (/aI/ preceding voiceless stops). One notes in Figure 9 that word-finally and preceding voiced consonants, stratification of /aI/ by class is maintained in the X column. Again, the greatest amount of nucleus-glide differentiation occurs most frequently among the 62+UC and 23+UC groups. The latter group's broadcast standard pronunciation in 42 per cent of the occurrences represents the greatest amount of broadcast standard pronunciation of /aI/ for all groups in all environments.

The lower class shows not one occurrence of broadcast standard pronunciation of /aI/ word-finally or preceding voiced consonants.

The percentages of broadcast standard /aI/ production before voiceless stops, as shown in Figure 10, are larger than the corresponding percentages in Figure 9, except for the 23+UC group. Whereas class stratification appears in the X column for the 62+ and 22- age groups, the same is not true for the middle age group, where stratification is blocked by the unusually low X percentage for the 23+UC. The "check" column is of considerable importance in Figure 10, revealing no monophthongs present before voiceless stops in the UC speech and exhibiting gradient stratification by class within all age groups.

Through a comparison of Figures 9 and 10, it can be seen that in Tuscaloosa the percentages of broadcast standard production of /aI/ are greater before voiceless stops than word-finally and preceding voiced consonants. The environmental effect on /aI/ in Tuscaloosa, then, seems to be the opposite of that shown by Labov for New York City. In Tuscaloosa, the nucleus-glide differentiation is greater before voiceless stops while in New York City, nucleus-glide differentiation is greater word-finally and preceding voiced sounds. However, it must be kept in mind that in New York City the environmental effect is primarily on the first element of the diphthong, while in Tuscaloosa, it is on the second.

Figures 11 and 12 give the environmental breakdown of /aI/ by age. The percentages of variant pronunciations of /aI/ word-finally and before voiced consonants appear to be almost totally random as seen in Figure 11. However, Figure 12, which gives the percentages of variant pronunciations of /aI/ before voiceless stops, presents some significant findings. A tremendous difference between the X column percentages in Figures 11 and 12 is revealed for the 22-UC and the 22-MC groups. These two groups have broadcast standard /aI/ before voiceless stops in approximately one-third of the occurrences. The figures for the 22- group are essentially like those for the 62+ group. The Q representation (partial-glide) is seen to be the norm for all groups except the 62+MC, and even there, the largest figure (44 percent) is in the Q column. Therefore, the ternary system is shown to be of value in the analysis of /aI/

A re-analysis of the pronunciation of the variable /aI/ was made, and the large middle class was subdivided into upper middle class and working class. In this re-analysis, the working class informants are the key to all changes in the class stratification and age stratification. The upper middle class exhibits an age stratification away from broadcast standard pronunciation, and, surprisingly, the working class exhibits an age stratification toward it. Of course, this blocks class stratification for all age groups. Without this breakdown of the original middle class into these two groups, this vitally interesting, and, as yet, unexplainable turn of events was obscured. Of course, these interesti

figures have spurred my interest in further persuing this study.

Social Stratification of /aI/ Among White Speakers in Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Abstract

This study is a sociolinguistic analysis of the variant pronunciations of /aI/, a selected phonological variable, by white informants in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Through a purposive sampling procedure, fifty-six (56) informants were interviewed to obtain their pronunciations of /aI/. Informants were ranked according to education, income, and occupation to determine social class. Specific environments of /aI/ were chosen for study. Conclusions show that the highest social class and the youngest age group produce the closest pronunciation to standard English.

FIGURE 1

Educational Ranking

5 - college graduate

4 - some college

3 - high school graduate

2 - some high school

1 - grade school or less

FIGURE 2

Occupational Scale

5 - doctor, dean

4 - land developer, large businessman, college professor engineer

3 - public school teacher, small businessman, social worker saw mill owner, insurance salesman, motel manager, train engineer

2 - shift worker, clerical worker, hair dresser, government hospital employee

1 - small farmer, laborer

FIGURE 3

5 - $24,000 or more

4 - $18,000 - $24,999

3 - $10,000 - $17,999

2 - $4,000 - $9,999

1 - under $4,000

FIGURE 4

Social Classes in Tuscaloosa

13 - 15 points -- upper class

7 - 12 points -- middle class

under 7 points -- lower class

FIGURE 5

Selected Middle Class Informants

Informant A (female)

Occupation-school teacher (husband-engineer)	4
Education-college graduate	5
Income (husband) ($16,000)	3
Total	12

Informant B (male)

Occupation-train engineer	3
Education-9th grade	2
Income-($7,500)	2
Total	7

FIGURE 6

Sub-division of Middle Class

10-12 points -- upper middle class

7- 9 points -- working class

FIGURE 7

% of /ɑɪ/ by class in all environments

S.E.C.*	X	Q	✓
62+UC	32	49	19
62+MC	7	44	49
62+LC	10	56	44
23+UC	33	37	30
23+MC	10	48	42
23+LC	2	39	59
22-UC	18	64	18
22-MC	13	51	36
22-LC	0	47	53

*Socio-Economic Class

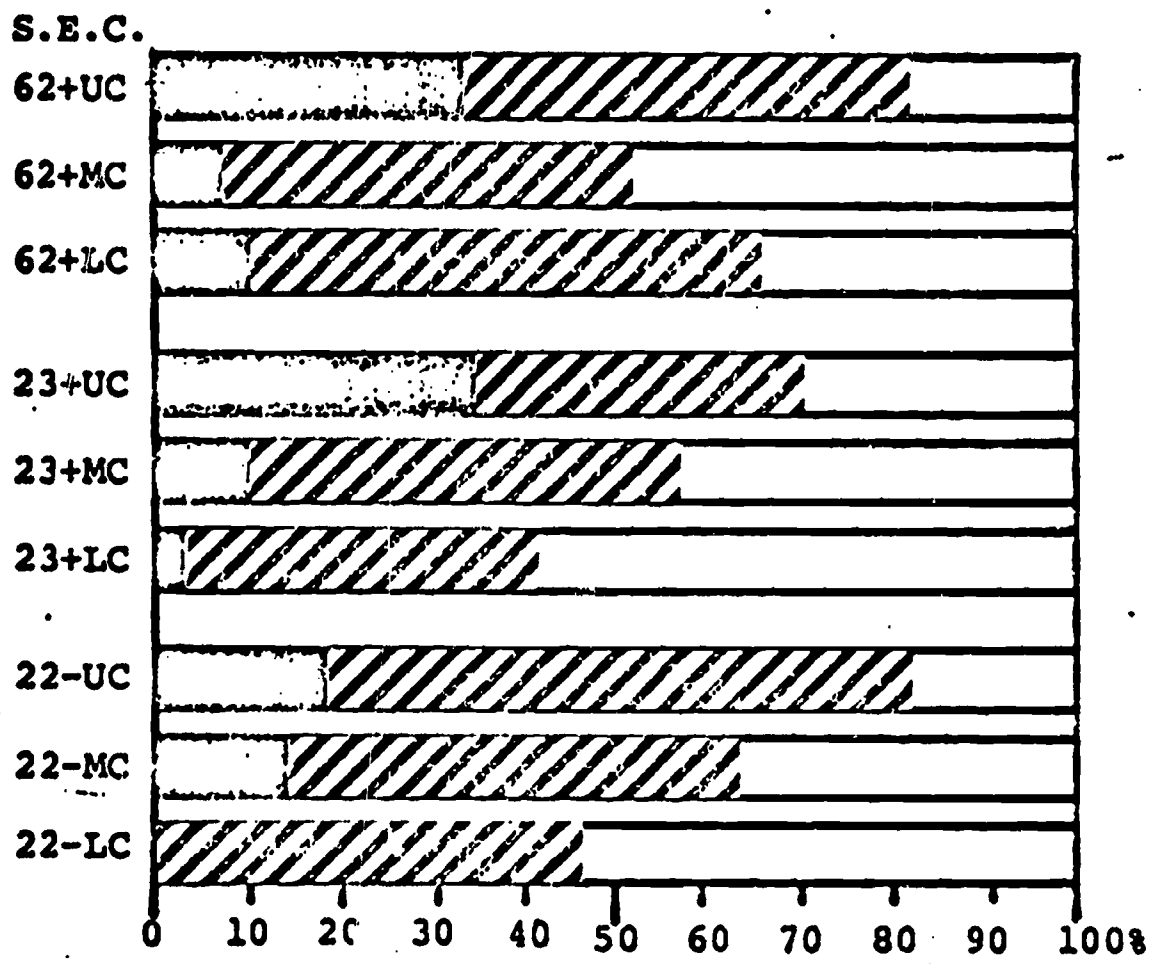
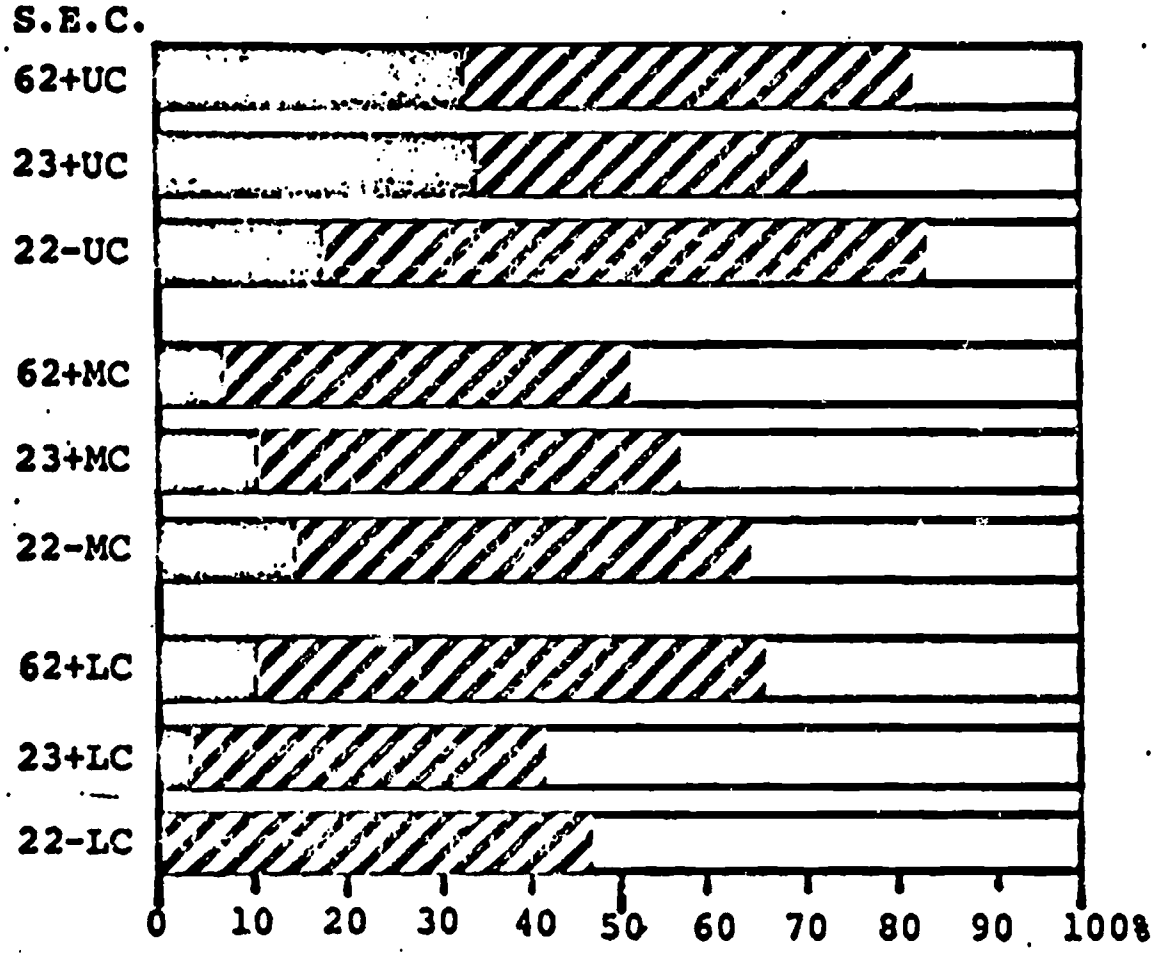


FIGURE 8

% of /ax/ by age in all environments

S.E.C.*	X	Q	✓
62+UC	32	49	19
23+UC	33	37	30
22-UC	18	64	18
62+MC	7	44	49
23+MC	10	48	42
22-MC	13	51	36
62+LC	10	56	44
23+LC	2	39	59
22-LC	0	47	53

*Socio-Economic Class



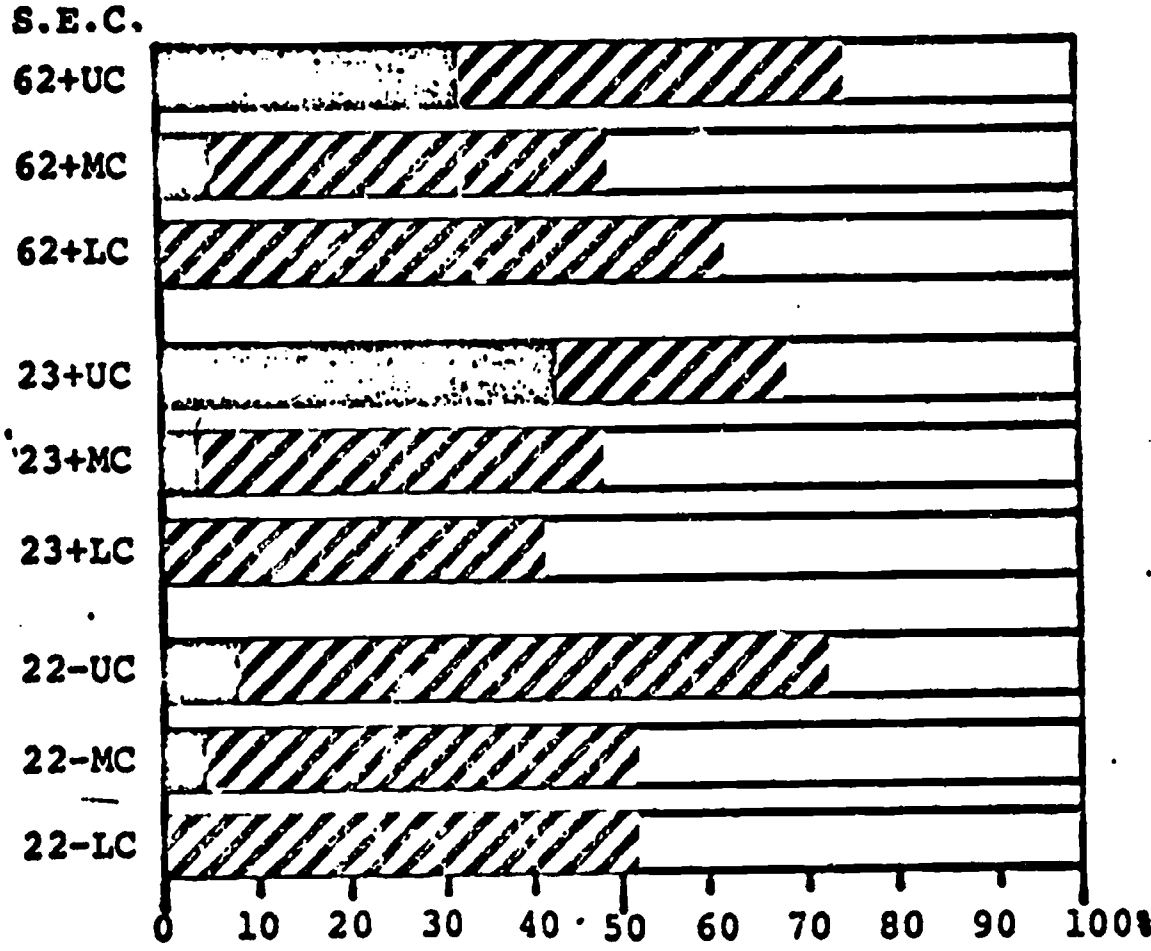
KEY
X
Q
✓

FIGURE 9

% of /aɪ/ by class preceding voiced consonants and word finally

S.E.C.*	X	Q	✓
62+UC	32	43	25
62+MC	5	44	51
62+LC	0	62	38
23+UC	42	26	32
23+MC	3	46	51
23+LC	0	41	59
22-UC	8	64	28
22-MC	4	48	48
22-LC	0	52	48

*Socio-Economic Class



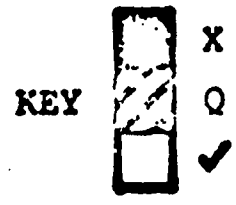
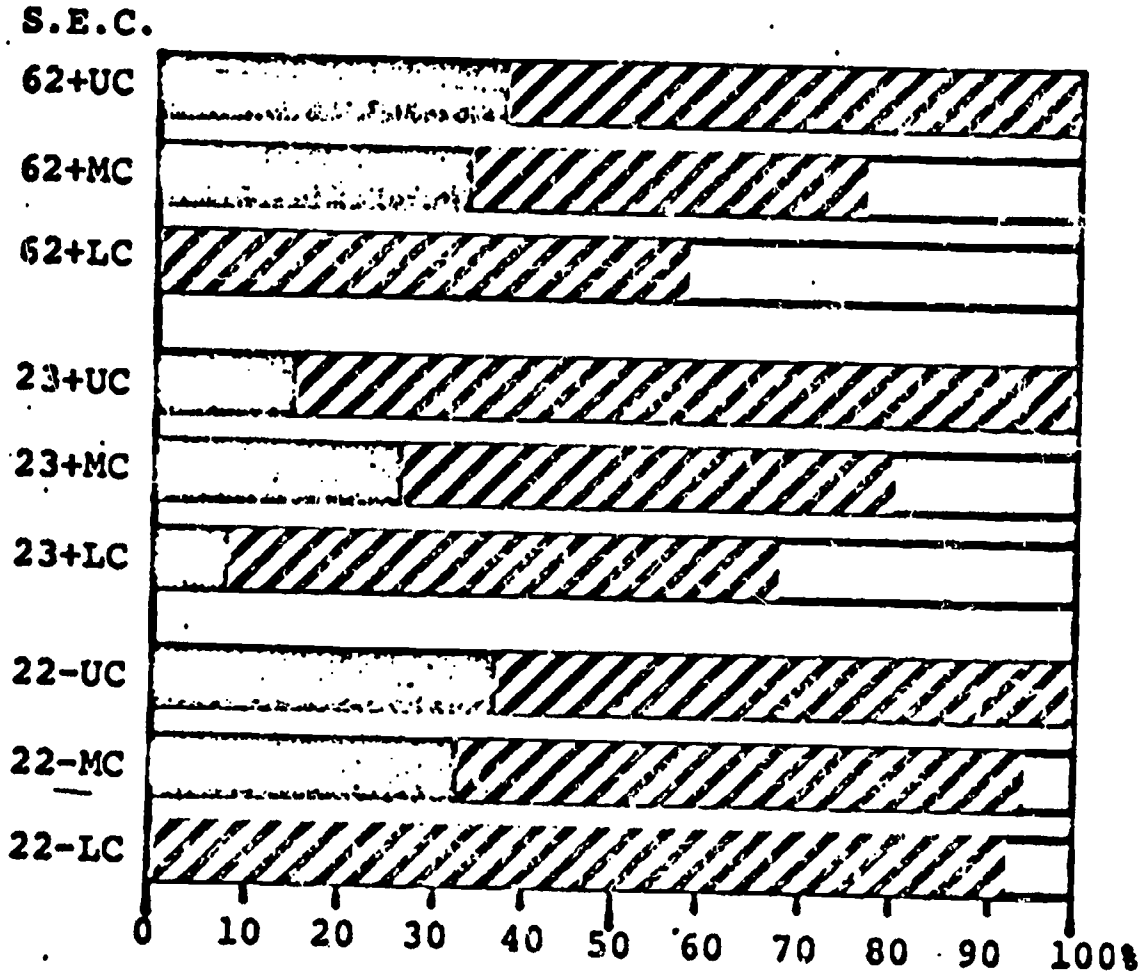


FIGURE 10

% of /ax/ by class preceding voiceless stops

S.E.C.*	X	Q	✓
62+UC	37	63	0
62+MC	33	44	23
62+LC	0	59	41
23+UC	14	86	0
23+MC	27	53	20
23+LC	8	60	32
22-UC	37	63	0
22-MC	32	62	6
22-LC	0	92	8

*Socio-Economic Class



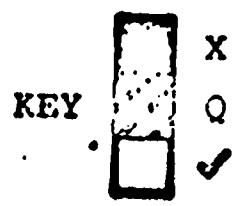


FIGURE 11

% of /ax/ by age preceding voiced consonants and word finally

S.E.C.*	X	Q	✓
62+UC	32	43	25
23+UC	42	26	32
22-UC	8	64	28
62+MC	5	44	51
23+MC	3	46	51
22-MC	4	48	48
62+LC	0	62	38
23+LC	0	41	59
22-LC	0	52	48

*Socio-Economic Class

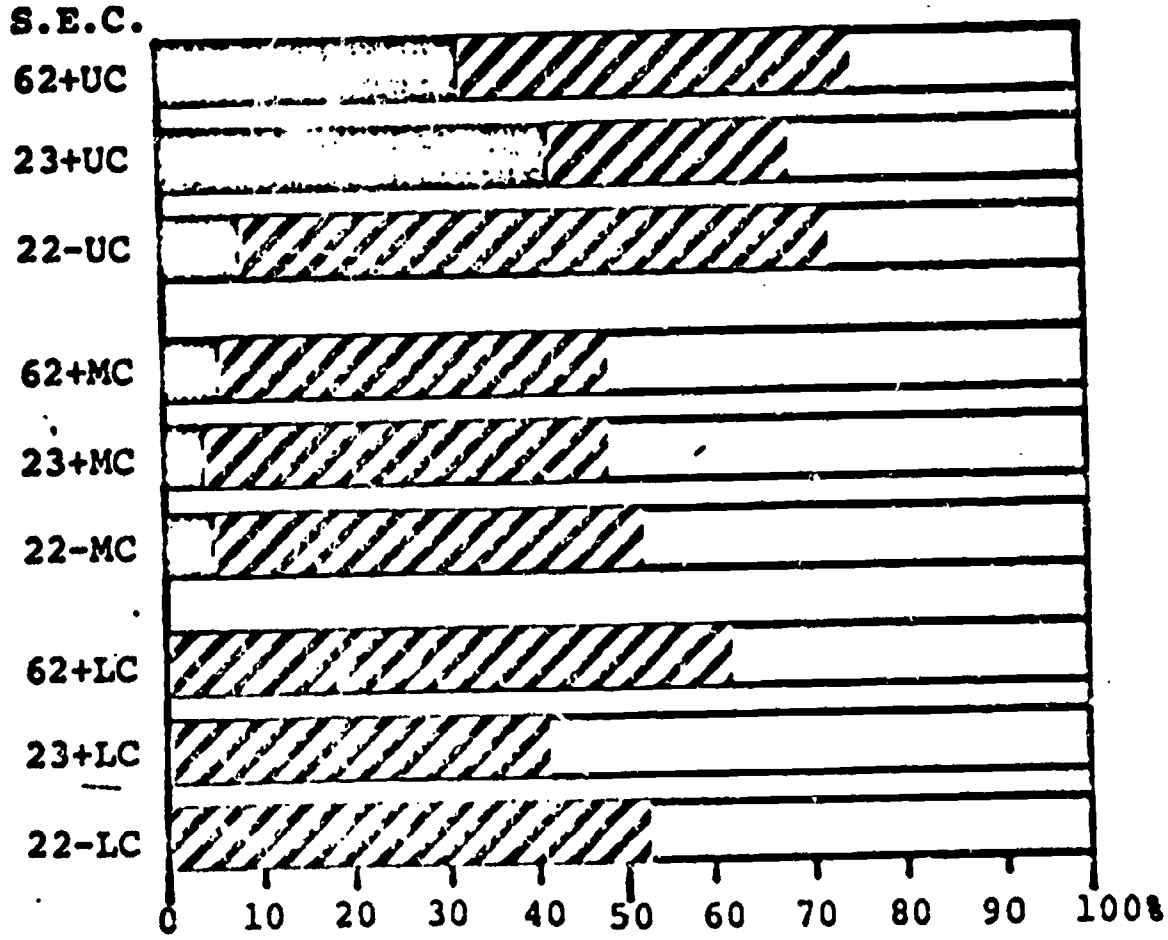


FIGURE 12

% of /ax/ by age preceding voiceless stops

S.E.C.*	X	Q	✓
62+UC	37	63	0
23+UC	14	86	0
22-UC	37	63	0
62+MC	33	44	23
23+MC	27	53	20
22-MC	32	62	6
62+LC	0	59	41
23+LC	8	60	32
22-LC	0	92	8

*Socio-Economic Class