

/k/ as a Sociolinguistic Variable

Methodology and Results

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The purpose of this paper will be to evaluate the use of /k/ as a sociolinguistic variable – (k) in the Labovian notation – and to present a possible methodology for studying it, with some preliminary results.

A frequent observation in the author's work on all varieties of the Regional French of Normandy (RFN) is variable aspiration of /k/, not only in the environments where such palatalisation would be expected – before high front vowels – but also before other front vowels, and notably before /a/. This extended environment for /k/ palatalisation seems to be particularly prevalent in the working class, and possibly also in males. This paper presents a preliminary study of the variable in the interview speech of four working-class informants (3M, 1F). It falls into two parts:

- Methodology: what is the best way to study this variable instrumentally?
- Results: how far does the 'standard' environment for palatalisation seem to be extended?

The results from this study indicate that the palatalisation of /k/ before /a/ is not significantly different from its palatalisation before front mid-open /ɛ/ and front mid-close /e/ for these four speakers. Aspiration was measured *via* Voice-Onset Time, and the advantages and drawbacks of this method will also be discussed; the method was chosen as the one most likely to be reliable for the data used. I will also talk about the phonological and sociolinguistic implications of the findings.