

# BANGOR LINGUISTICS CIRCLE

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Duncan Tanner Room and online  
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## Sound perspectives for inferring social meaning? Speech and speaker dynamics over a century of Scottish English

As in many disciplines, in sociolinguistics too, perspective matters. Structured variability in language occurs at all linguistic levels and is governed by a large range of diverse factors. Viewed through a synchronic lens, such variation informs our understanding of linguistic and social-cognitive constraints on language at particular points in time; a diachronic lens expands the focus across time. And, as Weinreich et al (1968) pointed out, structured variability is integral to linguistic description and explanation as a whole, by being at once both the stuff of the present, the reflexes of the past, and the potential for changes in the future. There is a further dimension which is often not explicit, the role of analytical perspective on sociolinguistic phenomena.

This paper considers a particular kind of structured variability, phonetic and phonological variation, within the sociolinguistic context of the recorded history of Glasgow vernacular English across the 20th century. Two aspects of perspective frame my key research questions: (1) what are the 'things' we observe, and from which we infer social meaning may be at work in speech? (2) How are these 'things' embedded in time and social space? I consider these questions by reviewing a series of studies on two sounds in Glaswegian English, the first thought to be stable and not undergoing sound change (/s/, as in e.g. seat), the second thought to be changing (postvocalic /r/, as in e.g. car).



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