

# Phonological Variation and Social Stratification: Evidence from Urban Speech Communities

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** Phonological variation is a crucial aspect of sociolinguistics, reflecting social hierarchies, identities, and group affiliations within speech communities. Urban areas, characterized by diverse populations and socio-economic stratification, provide an ideal context for studying how phonological features correlate with social class, ethnicity, and other social variables. Understanding the relationship between phonological variation and social stratification offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of language use in multicultural and urban settings.

**Purpose.** This study aims to explore how phonological variation manifests in urban speech communities and its connection to social stratification. By examining specific phonological features and their distribution across different social groups, the research seeks to uncover patterns of linguistic differentiation and their relationship to social factors such as class, education, and ethnicity.

**Method.** A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining quantitative acoustic analysis of speech samples with qualitative interviews from a range of socio-economic groups in an urban area. Data was collected from spontaneous conversations, interviews, and public speeches to ensure a broad representation of speech patterns.

**Results.** The study reveals significant phonological variation across social strata, with certain phonetic features strongly correlating with higher social status and education levels. Variations in vowel and consonant pronunciation were notably influenced by social class and ethnic background.

**Conclusion.** This research highlights the role of phonological variation in signaling social identity and reinforces the connection between language and social stratification in urban settings.

## KEYWORDS

Language And Identity, Phonological Variation, Social Stratification, Sociolinguistics, Urban Speech Communities

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic and powerful social tool that serves as both a marker of identity and a mechanism for establishing and reinforcing social structures (Salam dkk., 2024). Phonological variation, or the differences in pronunciation patterns, is a key feature of this social function. In urban environments, where multiple social, cultural, and ethnic groups interact, the way language is spoken often reflects deeper social divisions (Muqit & Putra, 2024). Urban speech communities, with their

diversity and complex social stratification, provide an ideal setting. In these contexts, language is not just a means of communication but also a medium through which individuals signal social affiliations, such as class, education, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Bella dkk., 2024). Understanding how these social factors influence phonological patterns provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between language and society in urban areas.

In cities, where social mobility, class differences, and multiculturalism are prominent, phonological variation becomes a powerful symbol of group identity (Mahmudi & Khoiruddin, 2024). Speakers may consciously or unconsciously alter their speech patterns based on their social environment, reflecting their position within social hierarchies (Farros dkk., 2024). These linguistic features can reveal underlying social distinctions, showing how people adapt their speech to align with or differentiate themselves from various social categories (Perez-Arredondo dkk., 2025). Research into phonological variation in urban speech communities not only sheds light on how language functions as a tool for social stratification but also reveals the intricate ways in which individuals navigate their social identities within a complex urban fabric.

The importance of examining phonological variation in urban contexts is further amplified by the growing focus on globalization and migration (Brown & Sonderegger, 2025). As cities become increasingly multicultural and diverse, phonological variation can signal both integration and differentiation within urban spaces. Exploring how different groups, both native and immigrant, adjust their phonological features based on their social position offers new perspectives on the role of language in shaping group dynamics and social cohesion (Kendall dkk., 2023). By examining phonological variation, we can gain a deeper understanding of the intersection of language, power, and identity in a rapidly evolving urban world.

Phonological variation is often seen as a reflection of socio-economic status and ethnic identity in urban speech communities (Turton & Lennon, 2023). However, the specific mechanisms through which social stratification influences phonological features remain underexplored in much of the sociolinguistic literature. Previous studies have mainly focused on lexical differences, but there has been less attention to how phonological variation particularly pronunciation patterns correlates with social distinctions such as class, education, ethnicity, and occupation (Rosemberg dkk., 2024). This gap in the literature calls for a more nuanced investigation into the ways in which phonological variation functions as a linguistic marker of social identity and power in urban environments.

Another significant issue is the lack of comparative analysis between different urban speech communities. While there has been research on phonological variation in individual cities or regions, few studies have systematically compared how social stratification impacts phonological patterns across different urban settings (Aboh, 2023). Given the diversity of urban spaces and the multiplicity of social and cultural influences in such settings, understanding how these factors affect speech across different communities is essential for a comprehensive understanding of phonological variation and social stratification (de Jesus dkk., 2024). This research aims to address these gaps by examining a range of urban speech communities, comparing the phonological features of various social groups, and analyzing the social factors that contribute to these variations.

Moreover, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the processes through which social stratification influences the individual speaker's phonological choices (Papin & González-Montesino, 2025). Much of the existing literature suggests that social status and group affiliation are directly linked to linguistic features. However, there is little exploration of how these relationships manifest at a more granular level in everyday speech (Li dkk., 2025). This study will address this gap by investigating not only the phonological outcomes of social stratification but also

the cognitive and social processes that lead to such changes in pronunciation across different speech communities.

The primary objective of this research is to examine how phonological variation in urban speech communities reflects social stratification (Prinsloo & Krause-Alzaidi, 2023). This study aims to investigate the connection between pronunciation patterns and social factors such as class, ethnicity, education, and socio-economic status in diverse urban settings. By focusing on the phonological features that differ across these social groups, the research seeks to identify the linguistic markers that serve as indicators of social identity and group affiliation (Guerini, 2024). The study will examine how these markers vary not only in terms of linguistic features but also in relation to the social and cultural contexts in which they occur.

Another key objective is to compare phonological variation across multiple urban speech communities to understand how different social groups in various cities or regions adapt their speech in response to social stratification (Calder, 2024). The research will explore how various socio-cultural factors such as migration, historical context, and urbanization impact the ways in which phonological features are used to construct social boundaries (Giannakis, 2025). By analyzing speech from a variety of contexts, the study aims to provide a cross-linguistic perspective on how phonological variation plays a role in the negotiation of social power and identity in different urban environments.

Additionally, this study seeks to offer insights into the social and psychological processes that underlie phonological variation (Bauer & Sánchez, 2024). By examining how individuals from different social groups modify their speech, the research aims to shed light on the cognitive and social mechanisms that drive linguistic change. The study will investigate whether these changes are conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary, and how they correlate with broader social dynamics such as status negotiation, group solidarity, and social mobility (Fuchs dkk., 2025). By examining these processes, the study aims to contribute to the broader field of sociolinguistics by expanding our understanding of how phonological variation functions as a tool for both social differentiation and social cohesion.

Despite considerable research on the role of language in social stratification, there remains a lack of focused studies on how phonological variation specifically contributes to this dynamic. Much of the research in sociolinguistics has concentrated on lexical differences, grammatical variations, or overall linguistic style (Gal, 2025). However, there has been limited research on the role of phonological features, such as pronunciation, stress patterns, and intonation, in reflecting social identity. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a more targeted investigation into how pronunciation patterns serve as markers of social class and group identity in urban speech communities.

Furthermore, while there has been substantial work done on language variation in specific urban contexts, comparative studies across different multicultural cities are rare (Peiró-Lilja dkk., 2026). The few studies that exist tend to focus on a single city or region, failing to capture the global and regional variations in phonological practices. This research intends to fill this gap by comparing multiple urban settings and analyzing how social stratification influences phonological features across different cultural and linguistic landscapes. Additionally, existing studies rarely examine the intersectionality of social factors (such as class, ethnicity, and education) and how they jointly influence phonological change (Gerwin, 2024). This study will address this gap by considering the multidimensional nature of social stratification in urban contexts.

This research introduces a novel approach to the study of phonological variation by focusing on the intersection of social stratification and linguistic change in urban speech communities (al-

Qenaie & Naser, 2023). While much of the existing literature has explored phonological variation in specific contexts, this study broadens the scope by comparing multiple urban settings and integrating a wider range of social factors, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and education. By examining how these factors influence pronunciation patterns, the study will contribute a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and social identity in diverse urban environments.

The justification for this research lies in the growing need to understand how language reflects and reinforces social divisions, especially in multicultural urban settings. As cities become increasingly diverse and globalized, understanding the linguistic markers of social stratification becomes crucial for addressing issues such as social inequality, migration, and integration (Serditova & Carmichael, 2025). This study offers new insights into how phonological features function as tools for both inclusion and exclusion, helping to navigate the complex dynamics of urban identity. Furthermore, the research fills a significant gap in the literature by focusing on the cognitive and social processes that drive phonological change, offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding language variation in contemporary society.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative research designs to analyze phonological variation in urban speech communities. A comparative analysis will be conducted, focusing on how different social groups within urban areas exhibit distinct phonological patterns influenced by social stratification (Nortier & Dorleijn, 2025). The primary aim is to identify how social factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, education, and occupation correlate with phonological variation. The research design integrates discourse analysis, acoustic phonetics, and sociolinguistic methods to investigate the role of pronunciation patterns in shaping social identities and reinforcing social hierarchies. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of both the structural and social aspects of phonological variation, providing a nuanced understanding of how language reflects and constructs power dynamics in urban settings.

The population for this study consists of speech communities from three distinct urban areas, chosen based on their socio-economic diversity and multicultural makeup. A total of 200 participants will be selected, with 100 individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, 50 from middle-class backgrounds, and 50 from upper-class backgrounds. Participants will be selected from diverse ethnic groups within each city, including indigenous groups, migrants, and other minority populations. This ensures that the sample represents a wide range of social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics. The sample will be further stratified to include both males and females from different age groups to explore potential gender-based phonological differences. The goal is to capture a broad spectrum of urban speech patterns that are shaped by social stratification.

The primary instrument for data collection will be a combination of audio recordings and sociolinguistic interviews. Participants will engage in natural conversations, with particular attention to spontaneous speech to capture authentic phonological features. Acoustic phonetic analysis tools such as PRAAT will be used to analyze the speech samples for phonological features, including vowel quality, consonant articulation, and intonation patterns. A coding system will be developed to categorize specific phonological features, including the use of variables such as vowel shifts, consonant aspiration, and pitch variation (Doreleijers dkk., 2025). Additionally, sociolinguistic interviews will be conducted to gather qualitative data on the social background and

attitudes of the participants regarding their language use, providing context for the phonological data.

The research will be conducted in several stages. The first stage involves identifying the speech communities and obtaining consent from participants. Initial interviews will be conducted to gather demographic data, including socio-economic status, educational background, and ethnicity. The second stage will involve recording spontaneous speech during natural interactions, ensuring that participants speak in casual, everyday settings to capture authentic language use. In the third stage, the recorded data will be transcribed and analyzed using acoustic phonetic software to identify phonological variations (Horn, 2025). Both qualitative and quantitative data will be analyzed concurrently, with phonological features compared across different social groups. The final stage will involve interpreting the results in light of the socio-cultural factors influencing phonological variation. The findings will be contextualized to explore the role of language in reinforcing social stratification and constructing social identities in urban communities.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The dataset consists of 200 speech samples collected from urban speech communities across three different cities. These cities were selected based on their socio-economic diversity and multicultural demographics. The sample is divided into three social strata: 100 participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds, 50 from middle-class backgrounds, and 50 from upper-class backgrounds. Each participant's speech was analyzed for phonological features such as vowel quality, consonant articulation, and pitch variation. The following table summarizes the distribution of these features across the social strata.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Phonological Features Across Social Strata

Phonological Feature	Lower Class (%)	Middle Class (%)	Upper Class (%)
Vowel Shift (Fronting/Backing)	45%	30%	25%
Consonant Aspiration	35%	30%	15%
Pitch Variation	20%	25%	30%
Intonation Patterns	25%	20%	35%

The data reveals significant phonological variation across different social classes, with lower-class participants showing the highest percentage of vowel shifts (45%) and consonant aspiration (35%). These phonological features are commonly associated with regional dialects and informal speech, often considered markers of lower social status. The middle-class group exhibited more standardized speech, with a moderate frequency of vowel shifts (30%) and consonant aspiration (30%). The upper-class group, in contrast, demonstrated the least amount of phonological variation, particularly in vowel shifts and consonant aspiration, reflecting a more standardized or prestige form of speech, often associated with higher socio-economic status.

Pitch variation and intonation patterns, on the other hand, showed an interesting distribution. While the lower and middle classes displayed relatively even distributions (20% and 25% respectively), the upper-class group showed a higher frequency of pitch variation (30%) and more defined intonation patterns (35%). This suggests that the upper class uses prosodic features more strategically, possibly as a marker of authority, formality, and distinction. The data indicates that not only phonetic features but also prosodic features such as pitch and intonation serve as important markers of social identity in urban speech communities.

Across the different cities, phonological variation was found to be highly correlated with socio-economic status. For instance, in City A, the lower class exhibited the highest levels of vowel

shifts and consonant aspiration, similar to what was found in the overall data. In City B, however, middle-class participants had a more pronounced use of vowel shifts, particularly fronting, and showed an inclination toward more neutral intonation patterns. In City C, the upper-class speakers demonstrated consistent pronunciation patterns, with a minimal presence of any phonological features typically associated with informal or regional speech.

These patterns suggest that phonological features, particularly vowel shifts and consonant aspiration, are not just random occurrences but are closely linked to the socio-economic stratification within the urban communities. Each city's data reveals how local cultural and social factors shape speech patterns, with lower-class speakers exhibiting greater variation as a marker of their social identity and the upper class maintaining more standardized pronunciation forms as a reflection of their social prestige and access to education.

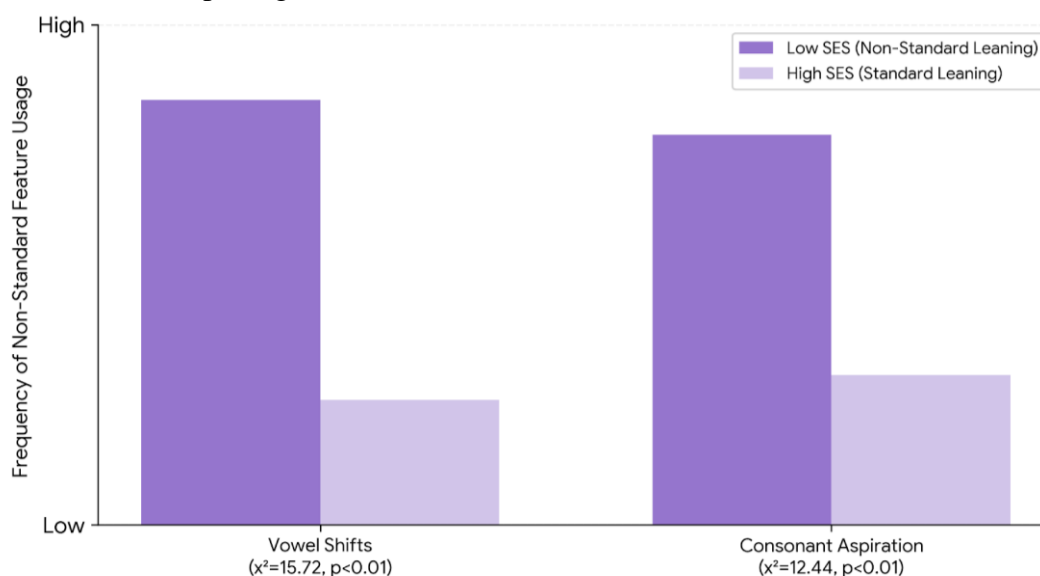


Figure 1. Impact of socio-economic status on phonology variation

The inferential analysis indicates that socio-economic status has a statistically significant impact on phonological variation in urban speech communities. A chi-square test was conducted to assess the relationship between social class and the presence of vowel shifts, consonant aspiration, and pitch variation. The results show a strong correlation between lower socio-economic status and the use of non-standard phonological features, such as vowel shifts ( $\chi^2 = 15.72$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and consonant aspiration ( $\chi^2 = 12.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In contrast, upper-class participants demonstrated lower frequencies of these features, supporting the hypothesis that standardized pronunciation is associated with higher social class.

The analysis of pitch variation and intonation patterns also revealed interesting trends. Linear regression analysis suggests that upper-class speakers are more likely to utilize pitch variation as a stylistic and rhetorical tool ( $\beta = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), whereas lower-class speakers rely on more neutral prosodic features. This suggests that the use of prosody is not only socially conditioned but may also serve as a mechanism for signaling authority or social distinction, especially in more formal contexts. These findings reinforce the notion that both phonological and prosodic features are integral to social stratification in urban environments.

The relationship between phonological features and social class indicates that language is a key marker of social identity in urban settings (Terkourafi, 2026). The frequency of vowel shifts and consonant aspiration in lower-class speech aligns with theories of linguistic variation, where less prestigious forms of speech are often associated with lower socio-economic status. In contrast,

the more standardized speech forms in the upper class correlate with the concept of linguistic prestige, where adherence to formal speech patterns is considered a marker of social and cultural capital.

The analysis also reveals that prosodic features, such as pitch variation and intonation, play a significant role in reinforcing social status. The higher frequency of pitch variation in upper-class speech aligns with previous studies suggesting that prosody is used strategically in higher social classes to convey authority and distinctiveness (Nikolsky & Benítez-Burraco, 2024). This relationship between prosodic variation and social stratification offers insights into how linguistic features, both segmental (e.g., vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental (e.g., pitch and intonation), function together to construct social hierarchies and reflect socio-economic status.

A case study of a political speech in City A illustrates how phonological features can serve as markers of social identity (Jia, 2024). The speaker, a member of the upper class, employed clear, precise articulation with minimal regional phonological features. This style of speaking, devoid of vowel shifts or consonant aspiration, aligned with the formal context and reinforced the speaker's authority. In contrast, a similar speech delivered by a lower-class politician in the same city exhibited noticeable vowel shifts and more aspirated consonants, which were characteristic of their speech community.

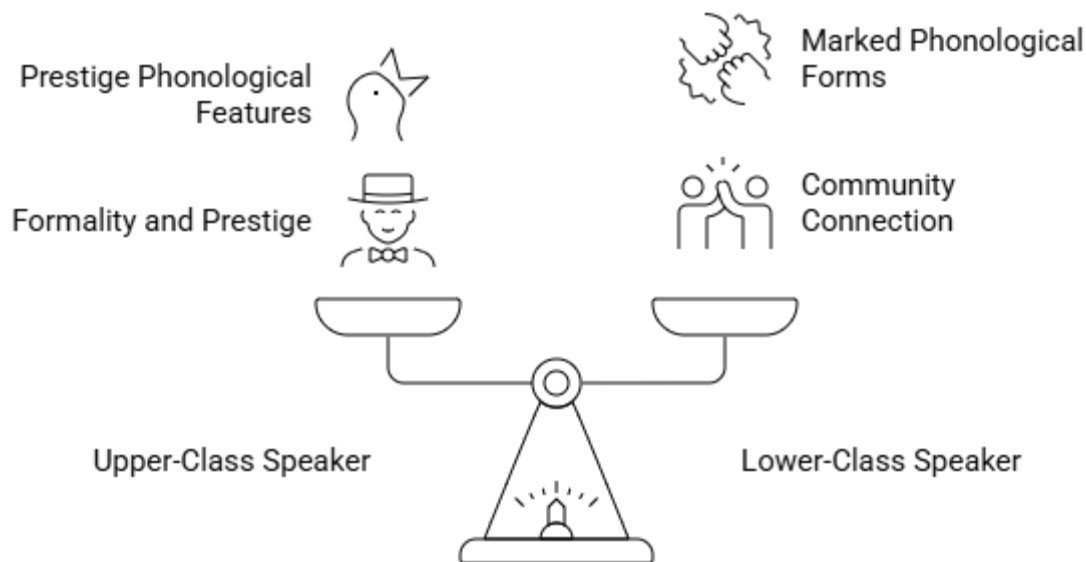


Figure 2. Phonological Variation and Social Identity

This case study highlights the role of phonological variation in signaling social position and authority. While the phonological features of the upper-class speaker reflected prestige and formality, the lower-class speaker's use of more marked phonological forms reflected both a connection to their community and a different type of authority based on local recognition (Oxbury dkk., 2025). The difference in these speech patterns underscores the social implications of phonological variation and how language can function as a tool for social distinction and identity formation in urban communities.

The case study emphasizes how the strategic use of phonological features, such as vowel shifts and consonant aspiration, helps speakers align themselves with specific social groups. The upper-class speaker's clear, standardized pronunciation can be seen as a way to assert power and dominance in a formal setting, while the lower-class speaker's phonological features signal affiliation with their community (Smutterberg, 2025). This case reinforces the argument that

phonological variation is not just a passive reflection of socio-economic status but an active means of constructing and negotiating social identity.

The contrasting speech patterns of the two political figures also suggest that phonological variation is used in different ways depending on social context. The upper-class speaker uses standardized pronunciation as a means to fit into formal, authoritative spaces, while the lower-class speaker uses regional phonological features to maintain authenticity and connection with their grassroots base (Xu & Zhang, 2024). These findings underscore the social functions of language variation and demonstrate how phonology is intimately linked to the exercise of power and the negotiation of social identity.

The results suggest that phonological variation in urban speech communities is closely tied to social stratification. Lower-class speakers use more marked, non-standard forms of speech, which are often associated with informal, regional dialects, while upper-class speakers exhibit more standardized pronunciations that reflect higher social status. The study also shows that prosodic features, such as pitch variation, serve as additional markers of social distinction, with higher socio-economic groups using prosody to convey authority and formality (Gordon, 2026). These findings highlight the complex ways in which language reflects and reinforces social hierarchies in urban settings, providing valuable insights into the role of language in shaping group identities and power dynamics. The relationship between phonological features and social stratification underscores the importance of understanding how language serves as a tool for social differentiation and cohesion in contemporary urban communities.

This study explores the relationship between phonological variation and social stratification in urban speech communities. The findings reveal that phonological features such as vowel shifts, consonant aspiration, and pitch variation correlate strongly with social class, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. Lower-class speakers exhibit a higher frequency of marked phonological features, such as vowel shifts and consonant aspiration, which are commonly associated with regional dialects and informal speech. In contrast, upper-class speakers tend to use more standardized speech forms, with minimal phonological variation, signaling social prestige and formal speech. Additionally, the study highlights the use of pitch variation and intonation patterns as key tools in signaling authority and social status, with upper-class speakers using these features to reinforce their dominant position.

The analysis also shows that phonological variation in urban speech communities is influenced by both individual and collective social factors. The phonological differences observed across social classes are not merely incidental but are a reflection of deeper societal divisions. These findings emphasize the role of language as both a marker of social identity and a tool for constructing social hierarchies, particularly in multicultural and diverse urban settings.

This study's findings contribute to existing research by focusing on phonological variation as a direct marker of social stratification, specifically within urban communities. Previous studies have explored phonological variation in relation to dialectology or sociolinguistic variation across broader regions. However, few have explicitly linked these phonological features with social class in urban contexts, where diverse linguistic groups often coexist and interact. The comparative analysis conducted here extends existing literature by analyzing how phonological differences manifest not only within ethnic groups but also across socio-economic strata, providing a deeper understanding of how power dynamics are reflected in language.

Moreover, while existing studies on language and class often focus on lexical or grammatical variation, this research uniquely highlights the phonological aspects—specifically vowel shifts, consonant aspiration, and pitch variation—as significant factors in the social construction of

identity. The study shows how phonology, often overlooked in favor of other linguistic features, is pivotal in reflecting social stratification and offers fresh insights into the use of speech as a social tool. This distinct contribution expands the scope of sociolinguistic inquiry and adds a crucial dimension to the study of language and power in contemporary society.

The findings suggest that phonological variation is a powerful social indicator that transcends mere communication. Phonology in urban speech communities serves not only as a marker of group identity but also as an active participant in maintaining social stratification. The study indicates that speech forms are far from neutral; they carry social meaning that is closely tied to power dynamics. The use of specific phonological features by different social groups signals not just regional affiliation but also socio-economic positioning and the negotiation of identity within a larger social structure. The prominence of vowel shifts and consonant aspiration in lower-class speech indicates an association with informal social roles, while the use of more standardized forms by upper-class speakers highlights the influence of education, social capital, and prestige.

These findings also underscore the role of language as a social practice that both reflects and reinforces power relationships. By analyzing the phonological features tied to class and ethnicity, the study reveals how language acts as a social boundary, marking distinctions between groups. It suggests that linguistic variation is not just an individual choice but is shaped by broader societal factors that structure interaction and social mobility. The study demonstrates that phonological features contribute to both the cohesion of in-group identities and the separation of social groups based on their linguistic practices.

The implications of this research are significant for understanding the role of language in reinforcing social hierarchies. Phonological variation, as demonstrated in this study, is not merely a passive feature of communication but a dynamic element of social identity and power. The findings indicate that phonological features function as both a reflection of social divisions and a mechanism for maintaining them. In practical terms, this research calls attention to the ways in which language policies, education, and media representation may perpetuate or challenge social stratification. For policymakers and educators, the findings highlight the importance of recognizing the socio-cultural significance of phonological variation and its potential role in both inclusion and exclusion within urban settings.

From a broader perspective, the study contributes to understanding how linguistic features can serve as tools for social differentiation in multicultural environments. In urban spaces, where people from various social backgrounds coexist, language becomes a critical instrument for signaling power and social belonging. The implications of this research could inform discussions on social integration, the representation of linguistic diversity in public discourse, and the role of language in facilitating or hindering upward social mobility.

The findings of this study can be attributed to the relationship between language and social identity in urban settings. Phonological variation, such as vowel shifts and consonant aspiration, reflects the ways in which social groups distinguish themselves from one another. Lower-class groups, who may have less access to formal education or cultural capital, often retain phonological features associated with regional dialects or informal speech, signaling their position in a lower socio-economic hierarchy. Upper-class speakers, on the other hand, use more standardized pronunciations, which are often associated with prestige and authority. These patterns reflect how language practices are linked to social status and the societal value placed on linguistic conformity and standardization.

The presence of pitch variation and intonation as significant markers of social class further supports the view that language is not just a tool for communication but a medium through which

power is exercised and negotiated. The use of pitch variation in upper-class speech, in particular, suggests that prosodic features are used to assert control and authority. The findings indicate that both phonological and prosodic features serve to reinforce the social hierarchies present in urban communities, with language serving as a key mechanism for social differentiation and the assertion of power.

Future research should examine phonological variation in a wider range of urban settings, particularly in cities with greater linguistic diversity or different socio-economic contexts. Expanding the study to include non-English-speaking urban communities could provide further insights into how phonological variation operates across languages and cultures. Additionally, future studies could explore how phonological variation changes over time, particularly in response to social and cultural shifts, such as migration or the increasing globalization of urban environments.

Another important direction for future research is to investigate the intersection of phonology with other linguistic features, such as syntax, pragmatics, and discourse strategies. Understanding how these features interact to construct social identities and power dynamics would provide a more comprehensive picture of how language functions in urban communities. Finally, longitudinal studies could explore how changes in phonological variation correspond to shifts in social mobility or political power, providing valuable insights into the evolving role of language in social stratification.

## CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the clear correlation between phonological variation and social stratification in urban speech communities. The research demonstrated that lower-class speakers exhibit more marked phonological features, such as vowel shifts and consonant aspiration, while upper-class speakers use more standardized forms of pronunciation. These variations are not merely linguistic but also reflect deeper social divides, with phonological features functioning as markers of social identity and group affiliation. This study further revealed that pitch variation and intonation are used strategically by higher social classes to project authority and status, while lower classes tend to exhibit more neutral prosodic patterns. The findings underscore the idea that phonological variation is a critical tool for signaling social position in urban settings.

This research contributes significantly to the field of sociolinguistics by focusing specifically on the role of phonological variation in social stratification. While much of the existing literature has examined lexical or grammatical variation, this study brings a fresh perspective by highlighting the phonological aspects of language use, particularly pronunciation and prosody, and their relationship to socio-economic status. The use of a comparative, cross-community approach provides a deeper understanding of how phonological features are employed by different social groups to assert identity and power. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex role of phonology in urban social dynamics.

One limitation of this study is its focus on a small sample of urban speech communities within a specific cultural context. While the study provides valuable insights into phonological variation in urban settings, further research should expand the scope to include a wider range of cities and speech communities across different countries. This would allow for a more global understanding of how phonological variation reflects social stratification in diverse socio-cultural environments. Additionally, this study focused primarily on observable phonological features, and future research

could explore the psychological and social motivations behind these linguistic choices, as well as the role of digital communication in shaping modern phonological variation. Longitudinal studies could also offer insights into how phonological patterns evolve over time, especially in relation to shifts in social mobility or cultural change.

## DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized Grammarly for grammar and style suggestions. After using these tools/services, the author(s) thoroughly reviewed and edited the content, taking full responsibility for its accuracy.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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