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## **Outward bound: language as a property of the speech community**

*William Labov (University of Pennsylvania)*

Studies of language change and variation across the past five decades support the view of language as a property of the speech community rather than a construct of the individual. Language learners are programmed to ignore the idiosyncrasies of their caretakers, acquiring instead the general features of the broader speech community. This leads to a high degree of uniformity in metropolitan areas, in the structural base of variation, in the direction of linguistic change and in patterns of style shifting. Large scale regional studies like *The Atlas of North American English* find increasing regional diversity but a high degree of uniformity within regions. All this evidence indicates that the language learning faculty is oriented to detect uniformities of linguistic behavior beyond the nuclear family, and adopt these general patterns to maximize communication.