Paper today is titled “tinking about Takoma”, Race Place and Style at the Border of Washington, D.C.

[Click]

It is part of a broader initiative in the Georgetown University Department of Linguistics, the Language and Communication in the District of Columbia, or LCDC, project. Natalie Schilling is the primary investigator, and to date, it has produced over 130 interviews, several articles, and dozens of conference presentations.

This project is a style study focusing on two informants in D.C.’s borderland neighborhood of Takoma/Takoma Park and the ways they use an ethnoracially marked variant, [dh]-stopping, to emphasize the race neutrality of their neighborhood.
For the sake of environmental sustainability, I have not printed handouts.

You can find this full presentation as well as the abstract, references, and notes on my website, jessgrieser.com. That’s G-R-I-E; I know I don’t look German, but it’s ein gut deutsche name.
DEFINING “COMMUNITY”

Language practice is instantiated in community as a means for community members to show affiliation or distance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEOGRAPHIC</th>
<th>SHARED SOCIAL PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labov 1963 (Martha’s Vineyard)</td>
<td>Bucholtz 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labov 1966 (NYC)</td>
<td>Eckert and McConell-Ginet 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labov 1972 (NYC Lower East)</td>
<td>Bucholtz 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnstone and Kiesling 2008 (Pittsburgh)</td>
<td>And many others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becker 2009 (NYC Lower East)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And many, many others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most prototypical understanding of community is based on physical space: for instance, a neighborhood community, a city community, a school community. Those who reside, do business, or otherwise inhabit that physical space become members of the community which that physical space defines. Tapping into the language practices of those who inhabit a physical space can shed light on discourses that are meaningful to the members of that community, as well as on the ways in which the community defines and understands itself.
Many studies of language and place have looked extensively at groups of speakers, and the ways in which they collectively use linguistic variables to index ideologies of place and community membership. The most well-cited of these, of course, is Labov’s 1966 study of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and the linguistic features, particularly post-vocalic /r/ deletion, which index a lower east-side identity for the speakers there. This identity was found to be tied to other facets of group identity relevant to the lower east side residents, such as race, class, and orientation toward other New York communities. Thus the indexical field (Eckert 2008) for post-vocalic /r/ deletion at the time of Labov’s study might encompass things such as working class and blackness as well as indexing residency in a particular locale.
These indexical links may shift, however, with the way the landscape itself changes over time. In her revisit to the Lower East Side, Becker (2009) explores the meaning of post-vocalic /r/ deletion forty years after Labov’s initial study. In the intervening years, the lower east has become a heavily gentrified and trendy area, home to Greenwich Village and other highly-desirable communities in Manhattan. Becker posits that in the face of so much migration to the area and loss of its original residents, /r/ deletion has become a marker of an “authentic lower east side” identity that allows longtime resident speakers to make a linguistic differentiation between themselves and the gentrifying newcomers to the neighborhood.
Same Physical Community
Same Linguistic Variable
Different social meaning
Large-scale studies such as these provide a great deal of information about what kinds of variables are available to be drawn upon by individual speakers in their construction of identities. However, studies of many speakers within a community which explore macro-level connections between language practice and identities of place may mask the subtleties in the complex negotiation of situation oneself as a member of a particular community through one’s language practice. So while inTERspeaker variation is a great tool to explain the ways in which ideologies and identities of place are negotiated at the level of the community, closer examinations of the linguistic practices of individuals, known as inTRAspeaker variation or style shifting sheds light on exactly how these variables operate in connecting that speaker to an identity which encompasses both race and place.
Speakers may vary their speech based in order to indicate a stance (Du Bois 2007) taken toward an individual or concept, which has been argued to motivate variation at both the segmental (Podesva 2008) and suprasegmental (Nielsen 2009) level, to express distance from or solidarity with a real or imagined audience (Bell 1984; Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994; Hay, Jannedy, and Mendoza-Denton 1999), to create or reject indexical links between language and racial identity (Anderson 2008; Podesva 2008).

There are, of course, many other reasons to style shift. However, stance, community membership, and racial identity are the focus of this study.
Phonological studies of place
Dubois and Horvath – TH fortition as a marker of Cajun Louisiana identity
Podesva (-t/-d deletion) as a marker of black identity and also anti-gentrification stance
Labov 1966 and Becker 2009 – r deletion
TAKOMA DC

On the border between DC, PG and Montgomery Counties
Median household income of 48K (+8K from the national median)
Ethnically balanced (TCCI)
  48% white, 34% African American
Highly Educated
  85% high school diplomas, 49% bachelor’s or higher
Recent census data shows DC to be an increasingly segregated city. Racial identity and racial plurality becomes codified in the space
I use “Takoma” to mean both Takoma D.C. and Takoma Park, MD
SUBJECTS

- Mona
  - 44
  - Lifelong Takoma resident
  - UMC professional (Lawyer)
  - Educated at Howard University
  - African American

- Peter
  - 57
  - Lifelong DC resident
  - LMC/MC service industry worker (barber)
  - HS equivalency
  - African American
DuBois and Horvath (1998) find it to be salient marker of Cajun identity (perhaps at a second- or even third-order indexical level)
Linguistic factors were all statistically significant, but what is most interesting is the ways in which fortition is a significant resource for the speakers in their creation of race-based identities and in characterizing Takoma Park.
Checked a sample (10%) of perceived stopped tokens in PRAAT

Originally run with all phonological environments
  Phonological environments collapsed based on descriptive statistics:
    - Vowels, pause, alveolar, consonant
    - Nasal found to be a significant predictor of 0-realization
  Following environment not significant and excluded after first run
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>% stopped</th>
<th>Factor weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Lexical category</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functional</td>
<td>1014</td>
<td>0.246</td>
<td>0.666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lexical</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Preceding segment</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vowels</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>0.964</td>
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<tr>
<td>coronals</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>0.239</td>
<td>0.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pause</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consonants</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Following segment</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consonants</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vowels</td>
<td>1227</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Position</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initial</td>
<td>1171</td>
<td>0.219</td>
<td>0.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0.273</td>
<td>0.616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medial</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Totals by speaker:

MONA 506 (444 Fricated/62)
Peter 852 (640 Fricated/212)

For the present study, all 1358 tokens of th/dh were coded exhaustively for topic. Topics were grouped into four categories: talk about language and language practice (language), talk about Takoma as a community (Takoma), talk about other communities in D.C. and Maryland (dcother) and race talk (race). When all four topics were included in the statistical model, topic was found to be a statistically suggestive, but not significant, predictor of stopped realization [p < 0.08].

So this was confusing.

However, it seems evident from the way the speakers use the stopped realization to talk about race and to construct characters who are to be perceived as racial beings.
although Mona on the whole uses the stopped variant just over 12% of the time, in 
one stretch of race talk encompassing 18 tokens, she uses a stopped variant six 
times and a null variant once, accounting for more than 33% of her total tokens in 
this stretch of speech, almost three times her overall rate for the interview. In her 
talk about gentrification and whites moving into Takoma for instance, the stopped
variant is used quite frequently:
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Peter, although a user of the stopped variant at almost twice Mona's rate, makes very sharp distinctions in his use of the variant in constructed dialogue (Tannen 2007) for himself and for characters he portrays as being either hapless or very successful. He draws heavily upon this variant in creating the voice of another character, a panhandler described by Peter as someone who spends his time “sitting(Ø) in the woods on a milk crate, smoking(Ø) crack and drinking(Ø) wine” in contrast to Peter's own ethical hard work in the barbershop below.
In part of the interview, Peter tells a very animated story about the panhandler approaching him and providing a very close estimate of his day’s earnings, and expresses his own puzzlement as to how the panhandler managed to come up with the figure he quotes. His realizations of the interdental fricative variable play a significant role in his construction of the differences between himself and the panhandler. Consider the following (realizations of the variable are marked in parentheses):
In Peter’s constructed dialogue of himself, in blue 10 possible sites of the interdental fricative are realized. Of these 10, only 4 are realized as nonstandard (40%). By contrast, in his constructed dialogue for the panhandler, in red, 11 of 11 possible sites for the interdental fricative are realized with a nonstandard variant. Because more standard realizations of a variable are commonly conflated with higher levels of education and higher status, Peter uses standard realizations of the interdental fricative in his own constructed speech as a way of reinforcing the distance between himself and the panhandler, and to paint himself as the educated hard-worker of higher standing, which is congruent with his description of the panhandler’s laziness in contrast to his own industrial work in the shop.
These sorts of close discourse analyses reveal the stopped variant to be doing a great deal of work for both speakers in constructing their ideologies of place and in constructing racialized and classed characters, and this usage justified the running of a second regression model, this time collapsing all community talk into one category, and all race talk into another. On this run, topic emerged as a statistically significant predictor of the stopped variant \( p = 0.024 \).
A second explanation for the statistical modeling issues may come from the way race is codified in DC space. The two most recent censuses show increased migration of upper-class whites into the western quadrants of DC, with increasing poverty and minority racial populations in the other two quadrants. Thus DC neighborhoods are often imbued with a sense of racialness—to talk about the heavily-black Southeast neighborhood of Anacostia is to talk about blackness, to talk about the predominately white neighborhoods in the upper Northwest is to talk about whiteness. Thus in the same way talk of language often cannot be separated from larger Discourses about race (Podesva 2008), to talk about DC as physical space is similarly to implicitly talk about race.
The lack of statistically significant difference between Takoma talk and non-Takoma talk, particularly in light of Mona’s interview as quoted above, may also indicate the speakers’ different understanding of Takoma vs. D.C. Takoma, to its residents, is consistently referred to as race-neutral or aracial—the idea is that the community is first and racial divides are not salient for its members. The lack of distinction between Takoma-oriented talk and non-Takoma-oriented talk may simply be a reflection of this general valuing of race neutrality and multiracial acceptance that is dominant throughout the Takoma community.
It is evident from this data that an ethnoracially marked variant is used to:

a) create racialized characters in narrative
b) take stances about race and race neutrality in place
c) indicate unity of place and race in what is considered (a)racial space

Further work is needed with additional speakers in Takoma to examine whether or not the lack of distinction between District of Columbia talk and Takoma talk exists for more speakers. In addition, while the rates of use of the variable support the hypothesis of a continuum in black speech styles which is related to social class, more speakers are needed to examine this hypothesis as well. (Please stay tuned—this is the topic of my dissertation.)
In his interview, Peter comments, “Doesn’t make a difference whether I’m black or white or what nationality you are. We’ve gotten past that you know....Doesn’t make a difference whether it’s D.C. or Maryland, bang! We are a part of a community.”

This attitude which characterizes Takoma as a haven of race-neutral unity. Because to talk about D.C. is to talk about race, to balance Takoma talk with talk about other parts of D.C. is to implicitly reject race as a salient discourse of Takoma—it positions Takoma as exactly the race-neutral space that Takoma speakers describe.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?

- Dissertation research:
  - Anacostia, D.C. (the location of Peter’s story)
  - Black-to-black gentrification

- Examining
  - Style
  - Construction of racial identity
  - Construction of community identity
  - Stances about gentrification and ideologies of place (Podesva 2008, Modan 2007)
**MANY THANKS TO:**

- Dr. Robert Podseva and my fellow students in GU’s Language and Social Meaning Seminar
- Dr. Natalie Schilling and the other investigators of the Language and Communication in the District of Columbia project
- The organizers of the LSA 2013 Annual Meeting
THANK YOU!

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