

[t]inking about Takoma:  
Race, place, and style at the border of Washington, D.C.

In modern sociolinguistics, language has always been understood as an important resource for individuals to index their membership in a particular community, whether that be a linguistic community of practice (cf. Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992 and others) or a community delimited by physical space (Becker, 2009; Cogshall & Becker, 2009; Fasold, 1972; Johnstone & Kiesling, 2008; Labov, 1966). While a number of studies have examined intraspeaker variation and how it allows a speaker to negotiate identities related to class (Coupland 2001), persona (Podesva 2007), or race (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994), much of the existing work on speakers and their physically-delimited communities (neighborhoods, cities, etc.) has focused on interspeaker variation and with the exception of a few studies (Podesva, 2008) has largely ignored the ways in which intraspeaker variation, or style shifting, can be used to the same ends.

The present study examines (th) and (dh)-stopping in two sociolinguistic interviews conducted as part of the Language and Communication in the District of Columbia (LCDC) project (Schilling and Podesva 2008). The present study examines topic-related style-shifting in two African American speakers, matched for age, from one neighborhood in the District of Columbia known for its high integration and cross-racial acceptance. As Washington, D.C. is a city whose rate of racial segregation is increasing (US Census 2010), I argue that these speakers use this ethnoracially-marked phonological variant in topic-based style shifting as a means of aligning with the race-neutral identity of the community of Takoma.

Interviews were coded exhaustively for realization of the variable, linguistic factors (preceding and following segments, lexical category, and position of interdental fricative), and topic (Takoma, Other DC, Race, and Language). A total of 1358 tokens were analyzed, using multivariate regression in Rbrul (Johnson 2009). All linguistic factors were significant [ $p < 0.05$ ], as was topic [ $p < 0.05$ ] when talk about community (Takoma, Other DC) was contrasted with speech about race and language. The statistical results are supported by discourse analyses of the content of both speakers' talk: both speakers vary their rates of the stopped variant to contrast constructed dialogue of Takoma residents and non-Takoma residents and in talk about their relationships with their community in ways which reinforce the indexical links they make between themselves and the reification of Takoma as racially-neutral, integrated space.

Many studies have shown that processes understood to be indexical of racial and class identities on an interspeaker level also function on an intraspeaker level (for instance Rickford and McNair-Knox's 1994 study of AAE features in one speaker's talk). This study provides evidence that speakers' indexical relationships to their physical community can be studied at the level of the individual speaker as well.

## References

- Becker, K.. 2009. /r/and the construction of place identity on New York City's Lower East Side. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13, no. 5: 634–658.

- Coupland, N. 2001. Language, situation, and the relational self: theorizing dialect style in sociolinguistics. In *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Penelope Eckerd and John R. Rickford, Eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. pp. 185-211.
- Cogshall, E.L and K. Becker. 2009. The vowel phonologies of African American and white New York City residents. Publication of the American Dialect Society. p. 101.
- Bucholtz, M.. 1999. "Why be normal?": Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. *Language in society* 28, no. 02: 203–223.
- Eckert, P., and S. McConnell-Ginet. 1992. Communities of Practice: Where language, gender, and power all live. In *Locating Power: Proceedings of the 1992 Berkeley Women and Language Conference.*, 89-99. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group.
- Falsold, R. 1972. *Tense Marking in Black English*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Johnson, D. E.. 2009. Getting off the GoldVarb Standard: Introducing Rbrul for Mixed-Effects Variable Rule Analysis. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3, no. 1: 359-383. doi:10.1111/j.1749-818X.2008.00108.x.
- Johnstone, B., and S. F Kiesling. 2008. Indexicality and experience: Exploring the meanings of /aw/-monophthongization in Pittsburgh<sup>1</sup>. *Journal of sociolinguistics* 12, no. 1: 5–33.
- Podesva, R. 2007. Phonation type as a stylistic variable: The use of falsetto in constructing a persona. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*. 11, no 4. page 478.
- Podesva, R. 2008. Linking phonological Variation to Discourses of Race and Place in D.C. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. San Francisco, CA: 19 Nov. 2008.
- Labov, W. 1963. The social motivation of a sound change. *Word* 19. 273-309.. 1966. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*: 714–62.
- . 1966. *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*.
- . 1972. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rickford, J.R. and MacNair-Knox, F. 1994 Addresses and topic-induced style shift: A quantitative sociolinguistic study. *Sociolinguistic perspectives on register*. pp. 235-76.
- United States Census 2010. www.census.gov.