

[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.

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