Discursive Sources of Linguistic Diversity: Stancetaking and Vernacular Norm-Formation

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1 Introduction

Variationist sociolinguistics arose in the attempt to understand how linguistic diversity can lead to language change (Labov, 1994, 2001). For the most part, however, the focus has been on what speakers do with diversity that already exists in their environments. For example, we ask how the usage of features of AAVE or Southern American English patterns in a speech community more often than we ask how a set of features gets associated with African-Americans or with Southerners and comes to be available for use in the community in question in the first place. This paper explores some of the discursive practices through which particular choices along particular dimensions of variation can come together as a relatively focused (LePage & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) regional dialect which is then available as a resource for constructing and displaying differentiation associated with place, class, and other aspects of personal identity. I describe three activities in which people may take stances vis-à-vis localness: talking unselconsciou­sly, performing local identity, and talking about local speech. In each of these activities, stancetaking is accomplished in part by means of small linguistic choices. However, different sets of linguistic forms function as stancetaking resources depending on the stancetaking activity called for in the interaction. As a result, there are three different, though overlapping,
sets of norms for speaking the dialect on which all three activities are thought to draw.

I illustrate this with excerpts from sociolinguistic interviews with natives of Pittsburgh, PA, a city that linguists and locals alike identify as having a distinctive regional dialect. In one, a Pittsburgher speaks in a fairly unselfconscious 'interview style.' His strongly local orientation is potentially mirrored and modeled in his accent, which may, for some hearers, become semiotically linked with his localness. In another excerpt, a Pittsburgher tells a story in the course of which he mimics the speech of a character he represents as a more 'authentic' Pittsburgher than himself, modeling his own stance vis-à-vis local life through his speech in his own voice and using a performance of a stereotypical local character, in a stereotypically local voice, to accomplish a shift in footing and claim an authoritative epistemic stance. In the third excerpt, two Pittsburghers talk about and cite examples of 'Pittsburghese,' explicitly modeling local speech and using it to accomplish personal identity and epistemic authority in yet another way.

The three excerpts illustrate how a co-occurring set of nonstandard forms (some regional in distribution, some not) that is drawn on in routine interaction, in performances, and in metalinguistic talk may become codified as a regional dialect with different, though overlapping, sets of emergent norms, one arising from the speech of local people, one from performances of such people's speech, and one from discourse about local speakers and their speech. The first of these is a set of statistical norms (things that can frequently be heard), some of which may, under certain circumstances, become semiotically linked with localness. This is what sociolinguists typically think of as a variety or a dialect. The second set of norms provides a model for talking like a stereotypical speaker of the variety, and the third is a set of forms for which there may be a vernacular name like 'Pittsburghese.' These three sets of norms can coexist in the experience of particular speakers and speech communities, and they influence each other, and the sociolinguistic research process, in ways that are not yet well understood.

2 Stancetaking and Sociolinguistic Variation

Labovian variationist sociolinguistics is primarily focused on uncovering the mechanisms of language change. Variability is an inevitable concomitant of change, so in order to understand how language change is likely to proceed we need to understand how to predict the outcome of variability. The classic Labovian account (Labov, 1972, 1994, 2001) uses the correlational methods of quantitative sociology to model how 'social facts' about speakers, such as socio-economic status and sex, account for patterns of variation in groups.

From the beginning, however, in Labov's own work as well as in others', more particular questions were being asked about these correlations. Why, for example, might males use less prestigious forms than females? What might make a working-class speaker adopt more local-sounding forms? Although not framed in terms of stancetaking, the answers that were proposed suggested that phonological variability could be a resource for indexing attitude and affiliation. In his groundbreaking study of Martha's Vineyard (Labov, 1963), Labov showed that the speakers who identified most closely with traditional local ways of living were most likely to use the more conservative, older, less standard-sounding variants of certain phonological variables. This suggested that the more local-sounding forms might in fact be part of the process through which local identity was signaled. James and Lesley Milroy's work in Belfast (Milroy, 1992, 1987) explored the utility of social network theory for uncovering and explaining patterns of variation. People with relatively many and overlapping ties to their neighbors (such that they knew the same people in multiple roles, and the people they knew also knew each other) were relatively likely to talk in a more local-sounding, less standard-sounding way, because dense, multiplex social networks are effective enforcers of local norms. 'Social class' was thus reconceptualized in terms of social activity and from the perspective of speakers' everyday experience of language. Peter Trudgill's equally influential study of sex-correlated differences in Norwich (Trudgill, 1972) suggested that men may use more non-standard, local-sounding forms because such forms carry 'covert prestige' as signals of working-class solidarity. At the same time, students of social interaction such as John Gumperz (1982) and creolists R. B. LePage and André Tabouret-Keller (1985) were suggesting that choices among variants in a speaker's repertoire could be thought of as 'acts of identity,' and that speech communities and linguistic varieties are best seen as ways of labeling the fact that ways of identifying and, accordingly, ways of talking, sometimes become relatively consistent from individual to individual.

Over the past decade or so, sociolinguists have begun to focus on the stancetaking potential of linguistic variability. In the more anthropological tradition of Gumperz and LePage and Tabouret-Keller, interactional sociolinguists such as Ben Rampton (1995, Rampton, 1999) study 'language crossing' or 'styling the "other,"' exploring how shifts between a speaker's 'native' language or variety and one clearly associated with another group can accomplish shifts in stance. For example, Rampton (1995) describes how brief excursions into Punjabi by London adolescents of Anglo and Afro-Caribbean as well as Indian and Pakistani descent can signal oppositional footing in interactions with adults or key a joking stance in playground interaction. Stancetaking work can also be accomplished through
shifts into and from ways of speaking that are not so clearly ‘other,’ but rather part of a speaker’s native repertoire. In Texas, for example, where sounding Southern is a resource more or less ‘natively’ available to many people, moves towards more Southern-accented speech range, depending on the speaker and the situation, from almost completely automatic style shifts correlated with register to quite self-conscious rhetorical moves, as when ‘Southern Belle’-sounding speech is used in footing-shifts meant to manipulate men (Johnstone, 1999). Schilling-Estes (1998) shows that in Ocracoke (an Atlantic-coast U.S. island), a speaker self-consciously demonstrating the local pronunciation of an expression he thinks of as particularly local performs his own local identity, calling attention to his local-sounding pronunciation of the diphthong /ay/ by exaggerating it.\(^1\)

At the same time, variationists doing quantitative, correlational work about speech communities have started to add ‘identity,’ variously defined, to the lists of socio-demographic variables they use to account for patterns of linguistic variability, finding that identity sometimes correlates more closely with variation than do variables such as age, occupation, or place of residence. For example, Guy Bailey and his colleagues (Bailey, Wickle, Tillery, & Sand, 1993) show that, in Texas, linguistic changes that diffuse from rural to urban settings typically involve the reassertion of traditional speech norms as badges of local identity. Hazen (2000) finds that North Carolina speakers with ties to institutions and cultural characteristics from outside their county are more likely to shift towards standard-sounding pronunciation in formal speech, while people with more local identities are linguistically more consistent.

Penelope Eckert’s (1996, 2000) work in a Detroit high school comes closest to linking the interactionist and variationist approaches to stance, identity, and phonology, suggesting what gives rise to correlations like the ones described by Bailey, Hazen, and others. For Eckert, the choice between one variant and another is part of the semiotic activity in which social differentiation is created, not simply a reflection of already-existing differentiation. For example, for the students known as ‘burnouts,’ adopting certain variants of vowels is one way of orienting to and participating in local activity, just as is cruising in cars, dressing in a particular style, doing some things rather than others in school. Such choices can be relatively automatic or relatively performed, calling attention to themselves as carriers of symbolic meaning.

\(^1\) See also Rampton (2003) on uses of Cockney- and ‘posh’-sounding speech in London schools and Coupland (2001) on how and why a Welsh radio announcer shifts into and out of more iconically Welsh-sounding talk.

For interactional sociolinguists, stancetaking provides a convincing way to think about how the ‘broader social issues’ they are interested in mutually constrain and enable (and are constrained and enabled by) particular discursive moves; for variationists, variables having to do with stancetaking are turning out sometimes to do a better job than other variables at accounting for the patterns of variation they are interested in. But the situations that have been the focus in these two lines of inquiry are different in some important ways. Interactional sociolinguists’ accounts of ‘language crossing’ or ‘stylistization’ are about relatively ‘performed’ talk – talk, that is, that calls attention to and takes responsibility for its multi-voiced quality (Bakhtin, 1982[1953]; Bauman, 1977; Bauman & Briggs, 1990). The way the talk is performed may be an element of its pragmatic force, as when a shift into another language or variety signals a shift in footing or a change in point of view. The kinds of shifting that go on are often talked about (by participants as well as by linguists) as if they were conscious, reflexive actions by creative, agentic social actors, and they may be off by paralinguistic cues such as changes in intonation or voice quality. Johnstone’s Texas ‘Southern Belles,’ for example, talk about ‘turning on the Southern charm’ and describe what this move can accomplish, in what kinds of situations. Furthermore, speakers adopting the phonological rules of someone else’s ‘native’ variety may apply them differently than do native speakers (Guy & Cutler, 2003), and since speakers cannot be aware of some features of their own variety (Silverstein, 2001), some variables are more likely to be drawn on in performances than others.

Variationists, on the other hand, tend to focus on relatively non-performed, ‘vernacular’ talk, and the kinds of shifting they are interested in are more like unconscious habits. The style shifting Hazen describes in the speech of ‘expanded identity’ speakers, for example, does not call reflexive attention to itself, even though it presumably can signal a set of social alignments and predispositions; Texans do not talk about the feature Bailey correlates with local identity, although they can hear it, as its social stratification shows. The ‘choices’ these speakers make are not usually seen as creative actions, and they may involve variables of which speakers are unaware. As I will show, the fact that different variables and dimensions of variability are available for use in performed than in relatively non-performed talk means that different norms for ‘the same’ variety may arise in the course of different uses for the variety.

3 Vernacular Norm-Formation

Linguistic normativity is a facet of all discourse, since individuals’ linguistic free agency is always constrained by the need to make sense to others.
As Talbot J. Taylor puts it, ‘[The] constant moral focus which is placed on our verbal behavior is what brings us into the semblance of linguistic conformity that every speech community exhibits’ (Taylor, 1997). How this ‘moral focus’ is instantiated is contingent on the situation, so linguistic-normative processes take multiple forms. To determine how a particular set of linguistic forms becomes differentiated from others and oriented to as a variety, we need to examine the discursive practices that ‘reflexively typify speech and accent in various ways’ (Agha, 2003), altering and focusing how speakers perceive and use these forms and what it means to do so.

As Wolfram (2003) points out, the processes leading to the development of norms for vernacular varieties are not well understood. Explicit, public-sphere normative talk such as that involved in the standardization of prestige varieties (Agha, 2003; Milroy & Milroy, 1985) has received far more attention than have the processes that result in norms for low-prestige varieties. Wolfram suggests that vernacular norming processes are unlike the relatively well-described processes by which mainstream varieties are standardized, in part because vernacular norms arise in different, often more covert and informal discursive practices, with fewer designated ‘language guardians’ like dictionary usage panelists and teachers, and fewer designated occasions and sites for normative discourse like English classes, grammar hotlines or the ‘complaint tradition’ described by Milroy and Milroy (1985). ‘At this point,’ says Wolfram, ‘we know little about the regulatory procedures and mechanisms used to instantiate vernacular dialect norms’ (2003: 253).

4 Three Modes of Dialect Stancetaking

Sounding like a Pittsburgher is at least an implicit model of, and can illustrate a more explicit claim about, what Pittsburghers sound like. But there are several different ways in which Pittsburghers construct normative models of local speech as they talk, depending on how local speech functions as a resource for stancetaking, each giving rise to a somewhat different set of vernacular norms. Here I discuss and exemplify three kinds of discursive activity that involve the modeling of Pittsburgh speech. In one of these, dialect is linked with local identity: local affiliation is potentially indexed by local-sounding speech, in a relatively routine, unselfconscious way. In another, performances of dialect are used more self-consciously to claim local knowledge and signal affiliation or disaffiliation with local identity and attitude about it. In the third, dialect is the topic and people self-consciously cite and perform local forms as a way of establishing epistemic authority to talk about local speech.

There is a loosely bounded set of phonological, lexical, grammatical, and intonational features that linguists have associated with southwestern Pennsylvania (Brown, 1982; Hankey, 1965, 1972; Johnstone, Andrus, Baumgardt, Schardt, & Kiesling, 2004; Johnstone, Bhasin, & Wittkołski, 2002; Kiesling & Wisonosky, 2003; Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2005; McElhinny, 1999). Like most linguists, Pittsburghers whose attention is drawn to some subset of these features describe it as a dialect, and they talk about this dialect often, in many contexts and media, frequently in connection with talk about local identity (Johnstone & Baumgardt, 2004; Johnstone & Danielson, 2001). By design, all of the 75 sociolinguistic interviews I and my co-workers have conducted in four Pittsburgh-area neighborhoods include explicit talk about ‘Pittsburghese,’ as it is locally known, and, throughout the interviews and other research tasks, people often break into spontaneous talk about and performances of the dialect. Each of the three extended interview extracts I will use to scaffold my discussion involves at least one mode of stance-taking via the use of local-sounding speech, and each represents at least one of the discursive practices that give rise to emergent sets of normative regularities for local-sounding speech.

4.1 Speaking as a Local: Dialect Stancetaking and Affiliation

In the linguistic practice I will call routine identity work, uses of particular nonstandard forms are either the only choice a speaker has, invariable because they are dictated by linguistic and/or cognitive facts or because the speaker has no other variant available, or self-expressive ‘acts of identity’ that lay claim to a social persona. From the perspective of hearers, any nonstandard form can potentially be oriented to as a signal of localness, whether or not speakers can control their use and whether or not they are in fact local in distribution, although linguistic acts of identity are particularly visible when speakers shift from one pattern of variation to another. In routine dialect-use practices, dialect stancetaking activity is not oriented to in the interaction; if somebody calls attention to another person’s dialect usage the interaction may be derailed. In this activity, talking as a local does not mean adopting a stereotypical set of local-sounding features but rather shifting toward one’s own vernacular repertoire. While hearers may orient to people who sound local as instantiations of a stereotypical local identity,

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2 Many of the nonstandard features that can be heard in southwestern Pennsylvania are also found elsewhere in Appalachia and/or the Ohio Valley. What is of interest for the current research is not the actual geographical distribution of these features but the fact that, in the Pittsburgh area, they are ideologically associated with Pittsburgh and the (for the most part imagined) Pittsburgh dialect.
from speakers’ perspectives, it is personal identity rather than a stereotypical regional character or way of speaking that is potentially on display.

Routine identity work is exemplified by Dennis C. (a pseudonym), a 53-year-old teacher and accountant. In each interview we try to get the interviewee to talk at length in a relatively unselfconscious way; in Dennis C.’s case I discovered that local politics made him voluble, very much in keeping with his strongly local orientation. Dennis has lived in the same Pittsburgh neighborhood all his life and is active in its historical society and the most conservative, tradition-orientated of its civic groups, and his feelings about the artists and designers who are gentrifying (and revitalizing) the neighborhood are mixed.

Dennis C.’s speech is characterized by a number of the phonological features linguists have associated with the local dialect. His pronunciation of the diphthong /aw/ is variable: in all but word-final contexts, but especially before nasals, it is sometimes monophthongized, so that ‘downtown’ can, for example, sound like [da:n’ta:m]. For another thing, /o/ is often fronted, so that ‘over’ may sound like [o’ver]. The low back vowels /a/ and /o/ are merged, and the resulting vowel often has a rounded realization, such that ‘not’ sounds like [not] rather than [nat]. Further, /l/ is often vocalized, so that ‘smaller’ is pronounced [smɔlər]. The vowels in really, stuff, and want are all somewhat nonstandard, and Dennis employs a grammatical construction involving existential it (‘It was more people in this city when I was a kid’). These features are highlighted and described in the transcription that follows, in which equals signs signal talk that immediately follows or precedes another’s talk, and square brackets signal overlapping talk. Pauses and paralinguistic features are noted inside double parentheses.

(1) LV07 (‘Dennis C’) dahntahn2

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shocked

which I don’t think they they want to.

monophth./aw/ in about; /l/ in people not vocalized; monophth./aw/ in outside; vocalized /l/ in people; monophth. /aw/ in downtown; less rounded LBV in not than in previous turn

=That part of it works, uh- the businesses, and then you’re right. And that’s why, when I, I kind of laugh when they ((swallows)) talk about taxing the people living outside the city. They oughta be on their hands and knees thanking these people, ‘cause they are keeping the downtown the stores and restaurants, they’re, they’re what keeping, they’re- they are the ones keeping that open, that="

monophth. /aw/ in council

=That’s basically [it. And then there’s]

monophth. /aw/ in downtown; rounded LBV in not; rounded LBV in clock

=That’s what it

the Cultural District, which, [is a whole different]

[right, that’s a]

=It’s a totally different thing, and that’s really nice, that’s

=I think that] works really well=. The reality is, people are going to the- It’s easier to- you can park easier

Mmm hmm.

The reality is, people are going to this. It’s easier to- you can park easier

Mmm hmm

and I, I, I, I think they have to accept that fact,

Mmm hmmm

Mmm hmmm

Mmm hmmm

Mmm hmmm

Mmm hmmm

I know policemen that I know that tell their wives, they don’t want their wives going downtown shopping downtown.

I [was, I] went downtown on a weekday one time. Usually I’m not downtown on a weekday. And this was about ten o’clock in the morning. I saw nothing but panhandlers and people standing on corners drinking liquor out of bags.

[I mean], I don’t know if it’s quite that bad, but, it doesn’t ((sighs)).

Yeah.=

=And it’s just, it’s it’s. I- I think the downtown, I think they need to accept the fact that it’s not going to come back the way it once was.

Yeah. Well, I, no, they obviously don’t want to yet, but

I just don’t think [they we-]

[I mean.] I think it’s the people who work down- I mean whatever s- stays open down there, is just because

Yeah, [oh yes, yes]

[the people who work] there go shopping during their lunch break,

[Yes]

[That’s] basically [it. And then there’s]

[that’s what it]

which I don’t think they they want to.

=That’s basically [it. And then there’s]

[that’s what it]

the Cultural District, which, [is a whole different]

[right, that’s a]

=It’s a totally different thing, and that’s really nice, that’s

=I think that] works really well=

=That part of it works, uh- the businesses, and then you’re right. And that’s why, when I, I kind of laugh when they ((swallows)) talk about taxing the people living outside the city. They oughta be on their hands and knees thanking these people, ‘cause they are keeping the downtown the stores and restaurants, they’re, they’re what keeping, they’re- they are the ones keeping that open, that=

=That’s basically [it. And then there’s]

[that’s what it]

the Cultural District, which, [is a whole different]

[right, that’s a]
Dennis C. is speaking as a Pittsburgher here, talking about and demonstrating his local experience (‘when I was a kid’) and local knowledge in part to establish his right to be heard on the topic of local politics. Research linking topic and dialect style suggests that a topic less evocative of his local identity might call forth a less local-sounding accent (Johnstone, 1998). But he is not performing a Pittsburgh accent. He does nothing to make himself accountable for the quality of his ‘Pittsburghese,’ and the conversation is not about local speech or local identity. Dialect functions as a stancetaking device in that it is correlated with and thus, for some interlocutors, in some circumstances, may signal Dennis’s local expertise and his attitude about localness. There are people like Dennis in his generation, working-class in origin but college educated, whose accents are not potentially as local-sounding, to some extent because they have made different identity choices. On the other hand, though, a great deal of what might make Dennis’s phonology sound local is not under his control or in his awareness, and could thus not be performed or talked about.

Dennis’s speech provides a potentially normative model of the kinds of variability that are often found in spontaneous, vernacular talk by Pittsburghers with working-class roots and mostly local life experience. Monophthongal /aw/ occurs in several different words (downtown, outside, about, council) and is variable from instance to instance of particular words (such as downtown, although if one syllable is monophthongized the other almost invariably is, too). Vocalization of /l/ is also variable, in one case conditioned by the following phoneme (people living, where the initial /l/ in living precludes vocalization of the final /l/ in people). The low back vowel tends not to be rounded in the word not, and it does tend to be rounded elsewhere, but, as with each other feature, this is variable, as is the fronting of /i/. Dennis G.’s pronunciation of really is often mentioned when laypeople talk about what Pittsburghers sound like. His pronunciation of staff with a lowered /a/ is quite common in Pittsburgh, but it is never mentioned when people talk about ‘Pittsburghese.’ His pronunciation of want and his use of existential it are more idiosyncratic.

The norms reflected in Dennis’s speech are statistical norms (he talks the way many Pittsburghers do), but they are also the kinds of norms that actually shape people’s behavior, the community norms Milroy describes (1992). The social network in which Dennis grew up was the dense, multi-plex kind that tends to enforce local norms. The variationist account of the actual interactional processes that cause this to be the case has to do with prestige, stigmatization, and the social demarcations that variation often helps accomplish. But the statistical fact that Dennis C. sounds like other people also has to do with more strictly linguistic and cognitive factors such as the chain shifts whereby the realization of one phoneme is partly dictated by the realization of another, and the difficulty of learning to unmerge a phonological merger.

4.2 Performing Dialect: Dialect Stancetaking and Attitude

An extract from an interview with a 28-year-old journalist and musician exemplifies a second mode of dialect stancetaking. Here, dialect forms are used to make more explicit claims to epistemic authority or to alter the interpretive frame, accomplishing shifts in perspective, voice, point of view, or footing. This stancetaking activity is meant to be audible: it is metapragmatically signaled via laughter, changes in voice quality, and/or other ‘keys to performance’ (Bauman, 1977). Although it is meant to be noticed, it is not necessarily meant to be commented on, however. Performances like these represent both the speaker’s personal identity and that of a stereotypical other and signal the speaker’s stance vis-à-vis that other.

Josh’s personal orientation and life experience are less local than Dennis’s, and he speaks here less as a native Pittsburgher than as a representative of a younger, more mobile, more globally-oriented cohort. Part of this part of the conversation had to do with resistance, on the part of some residents of older working-class neighborhoods, to gentrification, and the condescending attitudes that sometimes give rise to such resistance. Josh’s accent is more supra-local sounding, although, like Dennis C., he fronts /o/, vocalizes /l/, and merges and rounds the low back vowel. In the course of a brief narrative, he contrasts people like himself (‘a friend of mine’ and ‘an artist’) with a representative old-timer, the mayor of a rundown mill town to which young artists and professionals are beginning to be attracted by virtue of the inexpensive real estate there. The mayor of McKees Rocks is presumably someone like Dennis C.: a politically active longtime resident, who, in the context of a city council meeting, probably adopts a relatively careful style. But the character Josh creates sounds like Dennis C. only in that he monophthongizes /aw/ in town.
LY19 (‘Josh G’) Mayor of McKees Rocks.

1. jg
   Yeah you’ll get that attitude, a friend of mine moved to, bought a house in McKees Rocks because it was only fifteen thousand dollars.

2. bj
   =Mmm hmm=

3. bj
   =yeah

4. jg
   Uhh, but he, he goes to the community meetings every week now, he’s really active and that makes him one of very few people in McKees Rocks that’s, active. But he said, uh, when when uh, the artist from the Community Mural Project was there, uhm, this was, months ago now it’s done but before that, ((swallows)) she had uh come eh to the, with the, to the mayor and the council there and said ‘What, needs to be done to heal this town?’ You know which was [you know, that’s how, right]

5. bj
   ['heal this town' (sarcastically)]

6. jg
   right right you and I laugh. Uhh but eh, but at the same time, the mayor immediately responds ‘There ain’t nothin’ wrong wid dis town!’ ((lower, creakier, gruffer-speaking voice))

7. bj
   ((laughs))

8. jg
   And ((laughing)) you know and so there’s, you know I guess there’s that there tension there

With the exception of the pronunciation of the word town as [tən], Josh’s imitation of the mayor (turn 6) employs not more Pittsburgh features but more nonstandard features of the kind that index working-class speech throughout the U.S.: ain’t, multiple negation, the stopping and voicing of /æ/ in with, and the stopping of /θ/ in this. Josh also adopts a lower-pitched, creakier voice. The performance is also ‘keyed’ (Bauman, 1977) externally, by means of a long, suspense-building introduction with a fairly formulaic punch-line introducer: ‘Uhh but eh, but at the same time, the mayor immediately responds…’ The performance accomplishes stancetaking in several ways, involving epistemic stance, footing, and performativity. First, demonstrating that he knows what a local person sounds like lends credibility to Josh’s self-presentation in a way his own much less salient Pittsburgh accent may not. It helps establish his authority to describe and evaluate local life, in the context of an interaction (the interview) in which he was invited to participate by virtue of being local. Second, Josh’s switch from his own dialect to the mayor’s helps shift his footing from third-person narrator to first-person character. Third, the switch in dialect helps key the shift into performance.

‘Sounding like a Pittsburgher’ is modeled in two ways here: in Josh’s speech in his own voice (and in that of the artist), and in his performance of the mayor’s speech. The first of these -- Josh’s own place identity as created and potentially signaled by his accent -- represents one of the normative processes by which a particular set of linguistic features becomes differentiated and linked with local identity. This is the process also exemplified by Dennis C.’s dialect use in example 1. The mayor character represents another such process. The sets of features drawn on in each of these activities -- those that are heard in Pittsburghers’ speech, and those that are heard in representations of Pittsburgh speech -- overlap, but they are not the same. In other words, the two normative processes give rise to somewhat different norms.

4.3 Talking about the Dialect: Stancetaking and Epistemic Authority

Example (3) illustrates both of the previous two ways in which sounding like a Pittsburgher is often modeled in Pittsburghers’ speech, and introduces a third. In activities like this (Johnstone & Baumgardt, 2004; Johnstone, Andrus & Danielson, 2006), uses of nonstandard forms are offered as examples of local speech. The ability to cite dialect forms accomplishes epistemic authority by demonstrating local knowledge and experience. Epistemic stance may become the topic of talk when speakers disagree; stan-

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3 Josh’s quotes can be seen as “demonstrations” in Clark and Gerrig’s (1990) sense, but the claim I am making about their function goes beyond the claims Clark and Gerrig make and does not rely on speaker intentions as a way of identifying function. Josh is, perhaps intentionally, (selectively) depicting what the mayor sounds like, but, I claim, he also, probably unintentionally, provides a normative model for the speech of people like the mayor.

4 I discuss this conversation in considerably more detail in Johnstone (forthcoming), where I focus on the relationship between stancetaking and personal identity.
standards of evidence may vary, and different ways of knowing the forms in question may be adduced. In this activity, social stereotypes and collective knowledge are embraced and embroidered: what is being constructed is a representation of a community's sociolinguistic identity. In this extract, a mother in her 40s and her 13-year-old daughter talk about 'Pittsburghese' in an explicitly normative way. They offer examples of what 'Pittsburghese' sounds like, argue about which forms are authentically local and how local forms should sound, and, in the case of the daughter, try to decide whether or not they sound local. As they do this, they use claims about their own speech and local experience as way of establishing the authority to describe the dialect, linking epistemic stance with place identity.

Jen R., the mother, shares a number of local-sounding phonological tendencies with Dennis C. and Josh G.; like Josh G., Jen's daughter Donna sounds somewhat less local. Jen's pronunciation of /aw/ is variable, like Dennis C.'s, sometimes monophthongized and sometimes not. She merges and rounds the low back vowels, like both Dennis and Josh. She fronts /u/ in words like move and sometimes vocalizes /l/. She pronounces while in turn 110 as [wa:l], reducing the diphthong /ay/ to a more monophthongal form when it is followed by /l/ (which is vocalized). This is another fairly common local-sounding variant. Her daughter Donna does not monophthongize /aw/ but fronts /u/ and /o/, vocalizes /l/, and merges and rounds the low back vowel.

(3) FH01 ('Jen R.') and FH02 ('Donna R.') Pittsburghese

1  bj  Um. So, have you ever heard of Pittsburghese?
2  jr  Oh yes. I mean, [there's]
3  bj  What-
4  jr  that store over on the Southside in um,
    [Station Square that has the] Pittsburghese shirts
5  dr  [(Breath intake)] Yeah
6  bj  Uh huh=
7  jr  =In fact, I remember when my friend Karen
     moved out of state, with her husband's job took
     them out of state and to many other states. I
     remember sending her a couple Pittsburghese
     shirts for them.
8  dr  Hm
9  jr  Umm. Yeah, I've heard of [Pittsburghese,] defi-
10  bj  nently. Yeah=
11  jr  What do you think it is? I mean is it-
12  dr  [(laughs)]
13  bj  [Yeah?]
14  jr  I think it's how we say downtown and um-
15  dr  =down[town]
16  jr  [South]side and,
17  dr  Y'all
18  jr  wash and iron and different words and the way
    Pittsburgh is. There're
19  jr  Yinz
20  jr  [Just the uh- like]
21  bj  [Yinz is another one.] What, what other ones can
     you think of? (to dr)
22  dr  Just y'all and yinz. That's, that's the most my
     friends always are saying y'all to me.
23  bj  [Y'all?]
24  dr  [Drives] me crazy.
25  jr  Y'all?
26  dr  Yeah, they say y'all to me. They say [it's a
     Pittsburghese]
27  bj  [And]
28  dr  that's a Pittsburgh thing?
29  bj  Huh!
30  jr  Younzd is more a Pittsburgh thing than [y'all.]
31  dr  [yeah]
32 jr Y'all's more like a Georgia, [Southern.]
33 dr [I was thinking]
34 jr Southern, [but ]
35 dr [Yeah]
36 bj You do? In-
37 dr Yeah well like our neighbors like two doors down, I'm really good friends with their son. He's a year older than me. And like, he says yinz constantly, 'cause like both his parents say yinz, like 'Yinz wanna do somethin'?' or [like] ((laughing)) you know so [I hear that.]
38 bj [Mm hmmm]
39 jr [We don't use that.]
40 dr Yeah I never said you [used it] but
41 jr [Yeah,]
42 bj You don't use that. [Uh huh.]
43 jr [But] I'm just thinking, I know, um, like, your dad and I don’t use that [too often.]
44 dr [No.] But I hear it a lot from [them when] I'm over there
45 jr [Mm hmmm]
46 bj
47 jr Yeah. It's funny.
48 dr And you pick up on it. You start to say then, [once]
49 jr [Sure.]
50 dr you're around people so often, you start- I started to say yinz to people. ((laughing)) And they're looking at me like, okay
51 dr Mm hmmm
52 bj So, would- you don't- you wouldn’t say you use any of the, Pittsburghese things?
53 dr Not really. No, I don't think so.
54 bj Uh huh ((probably you-))
55 jr [You s-] you do, but you don't reali--
56 dr [I do?]
57 jr for iron.
58 bj Uh huh.
59 dr [iron]
60 jr [I] say wash w- wash for wash. I [mean]
61  dr  [wash]  target  monophth. /əʊ/  self-citation:  monophth. /əʊ/ in 'Pittsburghese' pronunciation, but targets the second token rather than the first.

62  jr  I don’t, I don’t pronounce my words as clearly as-

63  dr  [wash]  [əʊ]: still trying to imitate, still targeting the nonlocal variant.

64  jr  or the accent’s [on]

65  bj  [uh huh]

66  jr  a different [part]

67  dr  [wash]  [əʊ]: still trying to imitate, still targeting the nonlocal variant.

68  bj  Uh-huh

69  jr  Yeah

70  dr  [wash]  [əʊ]: still trying to imitate, still targeting the nonlocal variant. Is her own pronunciation 'Pittsburghese'?

71  jr  Southside instead of Southside.

72  dr  Southside  monophth. /əʊ/ and assimilated /æ/ in 'performance' of Southside, exaggerated diphth. /əʊ/ and /æ/ in 'citation'

73  jr  I say Southside. Downtown instead of downtown

74  dr  downtown

75  jr  I know I, I know I kn- use a lot of Pittsburghese.

76  bj  Mm hmmm.

77  dr  I [probably do] and I don’t realize it

78  jr  [I know I do.] Well when I’ve been in [different] states, in different cities,

79  bj  [Mm]  fronted /ə/ in do; revised claim about whether she uses 'Pittsburghese.'

80  dr  They’ll- they’ll say ‘You’re from Pittsburgh.’

81  jr  Yeah, they’ll immediately [say,]

82  dr  [When we were in]  South Carolina, right?

83  jr  you’re from Pennsylvania=,

84  dr  =Yeah. you’re- you’re [definite-]

85  jr  ['Are you-], are you from the Pittsburgh area?

86  dr  Yeah. (laughing))

87  bj  Does that happen to you, too, or=?

88  dr  =Yeah. I mean, I remember one time, we were in South Carolina visiting my, my uncle and my two cousins and my aunt. And we went to (some) store, and we were talking about how like the South kind of moves slow, [you know?]  diphth. /əʊ/ in South; vocalized /ə/ in uncle; fronted /ə/ in two, moves;
[Yeah,]

[God, it drives you crazy.]

[And then she’s like] she’s like, ‘You guys from Pennsylvania?’ We’re like ‘Yeah.’ And she’s like ‘You guys wouldn’t happen to be from Pittsburgh, right?’ And we’re like, ‘We’re from Pittsburgh.’ And she’s like, ‘Oh, okay. I can [tell by your accent.]’

[Yeah.]

[That’s] how she knew. ‘Cause she even said that Pittsburgh accent, when you’re not a-round it, when you do hear it, you really pick up on it fast.

Stance and normativity come into play here in a number of ways. Jen first establishes her authority to speak on the topic of ‘Pittsburghese’ by means of a narrative about sending ‘Pittsburghese shirts’ to a friend who had moved away. (These t-shirts typically have the city skyline on the front, on which are words spelled in ways that suggest their ‘Pittsburgh’ pronunciation; on the back, there may be a dictionary-like list of ‘Pittsburghese’ forms.) But rather than continuing to use artifacts such as this as her source of evidence, she switches to a different mode of evidence, her own competence in local speech: ‘It’s the way we say words.’ She then begins to list some of these: downtown, Southside. The citation forms she uses are not the local pronunciations – she pronounces /aw/ as a diphthong in both, using the less local-sounding variant. Nor do her citation forms reflect what Pittsburghers usually imagine is local about ‘the way we say [these] words,’ which is different in each of the two. Downtown is typically spelled ‘dahn-tahn’ on artifacts like t-shirts, the spelling suggesting that the monophthongization of /aw/ is to be attended to – whereas Southside is typically spelled ‘Souside,’ with a diphthongal /aw/ but a deleted or assimilated /ə/.

In turns 72 and 73 Jen returns to these two words, contrasting what she represents as their standard pronunciation with the way she claims to say them. In citing the ‘standard’ forms, she exaggerates the diphthongs in both words and the /ə/ in Southside. In her performance of her own pronunciation, she overdoes what popular local spellings suggests are the local pronunciations, monophthongizing the /aw/ in both words rather than just in downtown. Three different process of normativity are at play here, one in-
volving Jen’s own, characteristically variable vernacular, one involving performed dialect – dialect that shifts footing and keys performance and local epistemic authority – and a third involving explicit, didactic normative discourse much like that involved in standardization (Johnstone & Baumgardt, 2004).

Donna, the 13-year-old, tries to participate in all these activities. In turn 17 she suggests an addition to the list Jen is building, “y'all,” then, after there is no uptake from her mother or me, another in turn 19, “yinz” (a variant of the second-person plural pronoun “you’uns”). I acknowledge this contribution in turn 21 and encourage her to offer more. She repeats “y'all” and “yinz” in turn 22, then explicitly adds the source of her epistemic authority on the topic of local speech: “my friends always are saying y’all to me; ‘They say it’s a Pittsburghese [thing]’” (turn 26). These authority-evoking moves are different from her mother’s: Donna claims to know what is local because she hears other people use local forms, whereas Jen claims to know what is local because she does it herself, and she demonstrates this by performing how it is done. She makes this move again in turn 30, in arguing that “y'all” is not really “a Pittsburgh thing,” pronouncing “yinz” not in the stereotypical version represented on t-shirt lists, which would be “yinz,” but in an older way, “yinz.” In both cases, though, knowledge about how to sound like a Pittsburgher and orientation to place (Jen’s more local, Donna’s more global) are linked in stance-taking moves involving dialect forms.

In turn 60, Jen, still listing local forms, makes and tries to illustrate a claim about how she says “wash.” In a performance error, she almost confuses the “correct” form with the “Pittsburghese” form, so that the second time she says the word it sounds like the standard [wash] but is apparently meant to be an improved performance of a pronunciation she thinks of as local, [wash]. Donna, who has just claimed that she does not use “Pittsburghese things” (turn 53), repeats the word in a low voice in turns 61, 63, 67, and 70, apparently trying to imitate the “Pittsburghese” pronunciation so as to contrast it with her own. But since Donna picks as her “Pittsburghese” target Jen’s second performance, which was actually the more standard-sounding variant, Donna seems to conclude that her own pronunciation is in fact the Pittsburghese one. So after “trying out” “Southside” and “downtown” in a similar manner, she changes her story in line 77: “I probably do [use Pittsburghese] and I don’t realize it.” Shifting stance in this way means that she can now adopt the kind of insider authority that her mother has been drawing on, and she does this in co-narrating the story about the family’s having been identified as Pittsburghers by their accents.

5 Dialect Stancetaking and Vernacular Normativity

Linguistically, the three activities I have exemplified differ in how they draw on phonology, syntax, prosody, and lexicon. In routine identity work, phonology becomes more nonstandard and more local-sounding as self-consciousness decreases and the speaker ‘relaxes’ into a more local way of being and sounding. This is the classic Labovian finding about ‘style,’ as he defines the term (Labov, 1972: 70-109). The variants adopted may be sociolinguistic ‘indicators,’ or forms that covary with localness, ‘markers,’ or forms that can index localness but that speakers are not aware of, or ‘stereotypes,’ forms speakers are aware of and talk about as symbols of localness (Labov, 2001: 196-197). Likewise, grammatical nonstandardness, including supra-local features of colloquial syntax that are used throughout the English-speaking world, increases as speakers become less self-conscious. Local-sounding words are probably more frequent in relatively planned performances of identity than in routine identity work. This is because the likelihood that a particular word (particularly if it is a substantive) will come up in connection with the topic at hand is far smaller than the likelihood that a particular phoneme will, and because people can and do unlearn local-sounding vocabulary much more easily than they can change their accent.

In dialect performance, by contrast, phonology becomes more nonstandard and more local-sounding as the speaker’s self-consciousness increases. The targeted phonological forms are likely to be ‘markers’ or ‘stereotypes.’ The phonology that is used in performances is the speaker’s ‘native’ phonology as it interacts with memories of prior imitations and other performances of the ‘target’ dialect. For example, phonological rules of the target dialect may be applied in ways constrained by the native dialect, which may result in quantitative differences in the frequency of particular variants (Guy & Cutler, 2003). As is particularly clear in the Josh G. example, supra-local kinds of phonological nonstandardness (such as dropping the “g” in “-ing”) are often part of the performance. Likewise, syntax may be nonstandard in supra-local ways, and syntactic nonstandardness increases with the level of performance. A speaker whose native dialect has different phonology and or grammar may shift ‘downward’ in his own repertoire of variants. As the dialect becomes more performed, prosody and voice quality are likely to depart from the speaker’s personal norm; prosody is a major element of the activity. Local-sounding words are effective keys to performance, too, as long as they are relevant to the topic at hand. Ones that are more likely to be relevant, such as pronouns, are thus most likely to be used.

In the case of talk about dialect, the whole activity is highly self-conscious. All the forms adduced are ‘stereotypes,’ by definition, since they
are being talked about. Both standard and local-sounding phonology may be exaggerated in the activities of citing and exemplifying local forms. Since this activity is linked with literacy in a way the other two are not — it is like lexicography, and often draws on and results in written lists of local forms — its phonology may be constrained in some ways by orthography: sounds that are easier to spell are cited more often, and ‘eye-dialect’ (Preston, 1985) may be included, as for example when [n] is represented as a local pronunciation of and. Supra-local kinds of phonological nonstandardness are often offered as examples of local features. Syntax is typically represented in lexicalized or phrasalized form. For example, the Midland construction in which verbal complements of need and want are past participles rather than present participles or passive infinitives is cited as the needs washed thing or in some similar way, and the words used in such citations are almost invariably needs and washed. Supra-local kinds of grammatical nonstandardness tend not to be cited in this kind of activity. Nor is prosody frequently represented, in part because the activity is tied so closely to literate activities that involve the citation of words and phrases. Words, on the other hand, are the key stance-affording features in this kind of activity. Dialect is typically described as ‘the words we use’ or ‘the way we say words,’ and phonological and syntactic features are lexicalized through being cited repeatedly in a single lexical or phrasal context — as when Jen uses the words wash, iron, downtown, and Southside to point to four phonological features of local speech. Local-sounding words cited most often are those that people remember from childhood.

By virtue of these differences, each mode of dialect stancetaking gives rise to a somewhat different set of emergent vernacular norms. Variation has traditionally been most interested in the norms that emerge from everyday, routine activities in which dialect accomplishes local identity. In this set of emergent regularities, phonology is consistent across words in a given word class but variable across instances of a given word, since speakers may pronounce the same word differently depending how conscious of their speech they are, and because phonetic realizations are fundamentally stochastic, aimed at a target but not always hitting it in the same place. Local peculiarities of syntax and supra-local kinds of nonstandardness can both index acts of local identity. For reasons of frequency, local lexicon is less likely to be relevant in this way of ‘sounding like a Pittsburgher,’ which is a matter primarily of phonology and syntax.

In dialect performances, ‘sounding like a Pittsburgher’ almost invariably requires prosody, sometimes to the exclusion of almost anything else. Phonology is highly variable from performer to performer. As with routine identity work, local-sounding and supra-locally nonstandard syntax are not distinguished; both serve as resources for performance in the same way.

The local words most likely to be needed in the situations that might involve dialect performance are the ones that are the most frequent and the most strongly associated with the dialect. These are the ones most likely to emerge as normative, the ones which a ‘correct’ performance of the dialect would be most constrained to include. These would include pronouns such as yinz. (In fact, the characters such performances almost invariably construct are the kind of working-class, locally oriented people known in Pittsburgh as ‘yinzers.’)

Dialect norms that emerge from talk about dialect involve a phonological system that is consistent across tokens (such that, for example, downtown is represented as being invariably monophthongal) but variable across words in a word class (such that downtown is represented as monophthongal but Southside can be represented as diphthongal). Variability among speakers is possible (some people say [da:dta:n], some don’t), but not variability with a speaker’s speech. Prosody does not figure in this emergent set of norms. Syntax is lexicalized, so collapses with the lexicon, and ‘sounding like a Pittsburgher’ is almost entirely a matter of using certain words and, in some cases, pronouncing them in particular ways.

6 Discussion

In the traditional approach to the study of sociolinguistic variation and change, the focus of study is the first of these discursive activities. The second and third simply muddy the waters, since authentic examples of variation and correct conclusions about patterns of variation can be uncovered only in the sort of unselfconscious vernacular represented in Dennis C.’s speech. We are quickly coming to realize, however, that all three of the vernacular normative activities I have described are of interest, and suspecting that they may be related to each other in ways we do not yet fully understand. We are wondering, for example, whether artifacts like folk dictionaries and interactive dialect websites actually affect patterns of variation in everyday speech and how performances of dialect may reshape dialect norms. For example, talk about dialect is the kind of metapragmatic activity that makes linguistic awareness possible (Silverstein, 2001), giving rise to sociolinguistic stereotypes, which, according to Labov, are then likely to recede. Alternatively, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes’ work suggests that this sort of normativity contribute to the process by which dialects ‘contract’ around certain highly salient variables.

All three kinds of normativity are present in the experience of many speakers and speech communities. A teenager like Donna, for example, has parents and friends with local accents; she hears imitations and performances of local speech on the radio and in school; she sees ‘Pittsburghese’ t-
shirts and can talk about what is on them and why. People Josh’s age often play around with, joke about, and satirize local speech. A woman like Jen, in her 40s, sounds local and sends ‘Pittsburghese’ shirts to friends who have moved away. Many speakers move from one to another of these activities, sounding local in routine talk, performing localness, and talking about local speech, moving from sets of linguistic habits called forth in the service of self-expression, to rhetorical actions that draw selectively on material from this habitual repertoire, to explicitly normative descriptions of what they see as the same repertoire. Although some can differentiate them clearly, from the perspective of many individual speakers there is little difference among these activities. Thus in order to get a complete picture of variation in a speech community we need to study them all.

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References

7

Apparent-Time Change in the Smith Island Auxiliary Verb System

JENNIFER MITTELSTAEDT

1 Introduction

Smith Island English, a moribund variety of American English spoken on Smith Island, Maryland, has attracted the attention of sociolinguists for some time now as an example of language change in progress. The island’s population appears to be in permanent decline, due to environmental and socioeconomic factors. Schilling-Estes (1997) shows that the resultant recession of Smith Island English (SIE) is proceeding differently from other similar instances of language death, making its documentation particularly important. Specifically, SIE is an example of the “concentration” model of dialect recession. Characteristic features of the variety become more frequent and more pronounced in younger generations, as opposed to the more typical “accommodation” model in which younger speakers generally produce relevant features less frequently or less distinctively than older speakers as the variety dies. Both phonological and morphosyntactic features exhibit concentration in SIE (Schilling-Estes 1997, Schilling-Estes 2002, Parrott 2001), including the relatively unusual morphosyntactic phenomenon referred to as weren’t leveling: the process in which a particular form (in this case, weren’t) replaces all other forms in the negative past tense BE paradigm (with the contracted -n’t form of negation only).

I present here an extended pattern of leveling in Smith Island English, which includes weren’t leveling. The data show that the entire auxiliary verb system is currently leveling to weren’t, ain’t, and don’t, with no con-

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