

## Language Style as Identity Construction: A Footing and Framing Approach

Poster presented at NWAVE 27, October 1998

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### Introduction

Despite the prevalence of conceptualizations of style shifting as a reactive phenomenon, conditioned by contextual factors such as formality and audience, style shifting increasingly has come to be viewed as a proactive phenomenon which speakers freely use to shape and re-shape context, as well as their personal and interpersonal identities (e.g. California Style Collective 1993, Coupland forthcoming). In this presentation, we suggest that an explanation for style shifting based on the interactional sociolinguistic notions of footing and frame indexing (e.g. Goffman 1981, Tannen and Wallat 1993) provides a neat encapsulation of some of the central tenets of these more proactive approaches, while at the same time addressing their limitations.

### The Footing and Framing Model

Speakers engage in style shifting in order to cast themselves and others into various roles, or 'footings'. Footings may change many times during the course of a single interaction, and speakers often balance a number of roles simultaneously, since footings exist on a number of different levels, from the personal interactional (e.g. the role of 'friend') to the institutional (e.g. 'CEO of a corporation') to the sociocultural (e.g. 'Native American male'). Through taking up various footings, speakers adopt alignments with or stances toward social actors and social groups. In addition, speakers position themselves with respect to the talk itself, whether its subject matter or its entire 'frame'—that is, the interactants' sense of what sort of speech activity (e.g. formal interview, conversation with a friend) is taking place at any given moment.

Style shifting enables speakers to assume different footings because language features may serve as indexes of various prototypical kinds of people. Crucially, these prototypes are not just general 'census categories' such as male and female (though they may be) but are also more specific prototypes such as 'physically powerful man' or 'quaint island fisherman'. Speech events are similarly indexed to prototypical types of speech events (e.g. an election speech, a dialect performance). Speakers do not always adopt prototypes wholesale but rather draw on bits and pieces of various prototypes at different levels. This model draws on the insights of research in cognitive anthropology (e.g. Holland and Quinn 1987) and interaction (e.g. Tannen 1979) that shows that humans understand their social world through a number of culturally and ideologically organized mental scripts, schemata, and prototypes.

The Footing and Framing approach has at its foundation locally constructed footings within particular speech events. Speakers understand themselves to be **being** someone **doing** something **related** to other social actors. Language variation is a resource that serves speakers as they construct and re-construct their personal and interpersonal identities in unfolding talk, through what has traditionally been called style shifting.

## Attention to Speech Model

(Labov 1972a)

Speakers shift styles based on how much attention they are paying to their own speech as they converse. Self-conscious speech is characterized as ‘careful’, ‘formal’ or more ‘standard’, while unselfconscious speech is ‘casual’ or ‘vernacular’. This is a primarily reactive approach because degree of attention to speech is contingent on the level of formality of the speech situation in which speakers find themselves.

In a Labovian framework, each speaker has a single most ‘natural’ style:

### *The Vernacular Principle*

“the style which is most regular in its structure and in its relation to the evolution of the language is the vernacular, in which the minimal attention is paid to speech” (Labov 1972b:112).

The vernacular surfaces in casual speech contexts but seems to exist independent of situational factors.

The AS model has been criticized for a number of reasons, among them the following:

- It is extremely difficult to quantify amount of attention paid to speech. Some studies suggest that speakers produce more standard variants when able to monitor their own speech than when this ability is blocked (e.g. Mahl 1972); others show that speakers use less standard forms when they can hear themselves clearly than when they are forced to speak under noisy conditions (e.g. Moon 1991).
- The model is too unidimensional: Each speaker exhibits a number of different types of casual, careful and formal speech (e.g. Hindle 1979).
- Speech varieties are necessarily situated; the notion of a vernacular that exists independent of situation is untenable:

**“there is no single, absolute entity answering to the notion of natural/casual speech.** If speech is felt to be appropriate to a situation and the goal, then it is natural in that context” (Wolfson 1976:124).

“we shall not fall into the trap of attempting to record the vernacular of a given speaker, defining this as his [sic] most natural and unconstrained linguistic code. For it is clear that any speech varies considerably in response to situational context, not merely in response to self-monitoring on a single dimension of casual to formal” (Milroy 1987:59).

- It is just as easy to explain the style shifting that takes place between relatively formal and relatively informal contexts as attention to accommodating to one’s interlocutor(s) as attention to one’s own speech (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991:5).

## Acts of Identity

(LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985)

“the individual creates for himself [sic] the patterns of his linguistic behavior so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished” (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985:181).

“speech acts are acts of projection: the speaker is projecting his inner universe, implicitly with the invitation to others to share it.... By verbalizing as he does, he is seeking to reinforce his models of the world, and hopes for acts of solidarity from those with whom he wishes to identify” (L and T-K 1985:181).

“It is frequently supposed that we all have ... a ‘mother tongue’ or ‘native language’ which represents some really fundamental properties of us as individuals who have grown up in a particular society.... For some people in the world it is true that one particular variety of linguistic behaviour has a particular force and intimacy from being powerfully associated with early childhood; for others it is not true.... **Nor is it ever possible to isolate such a ‘native language’** by recourse to the strategies Labov and most other sociolinguists have developed for recording relaxed peer-group usage... [since] **relaxed peer-group usage is still oriented toward some social target** (L and T-K 1985:188-189).

## Communication Accommodation Theory

(e.g. Giles 1973; Giles and Powesland 1975; Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991)

Speakers wishing to gain the social approval of interlocutors will shift their speech toward that of their interlocutors. Those wishing to distance themselves will shift their speech away from that of their interlocutors toward that of an external reference group.

CAT has undergone extensive revision since its inception, and many of its limitations have been acknowledged/addressed (in, e.g. Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991). For example:

- Linguistic convergence does not always yield interpersonal or psychological convergence, nor does linguistic divergence always lead to interpersonal divergence. For example:

People may hurl verbal abuses at one another, interrupt one another, or mock one another’s speech patterns (e.g. Mosher, Mortimer, and Grebel 1968; Argyle and Kendon 1967).

People in complementary or asymmetric relationships (e.g. teacher-student, employer-employee) must utilize non-convergent speech in order to preserve the social distance inherent in the relationship (e.g. Montepare and Vega 1988).

- People’s beliefs about speech styles may play a larger role in linguistic convergence/divergence than the actual speech styles of their interlocutors. For example:

Speakers may converge with what they believe others’ speech styles to be rather than what they actually are (e.g. Thackerar and Giles 1981).

Speakers may converge with what they believe others expect them to sound like—in other words, they may converge in an attempt to **conform to a certain role**. For example, in certain situations in which sex-role

asymmetry is paramount, women may converge with their perceived notion of what men expect them to sound like (e.g. Snyder 1981).

In both types of situations, **stereotypes**, or **prototypes**, are invoked:

“accommodation is often cognitively mediated by our **stereotypes** of how socially categorized others will speak” (GCC 1991:16).

“The notion of **prototypicality**...is relevant here and in some role-relevant situations, people may gain kudos for ‘acting their age’, using a professional line, and so forth” (GCC 1991:15).

- What is perceived to be accommodation to an interlocutor may in reality represent the speaker’s **assertion of a particular persona**:

“For instance, an interviewee who sounded more like his or her prestigious interviewer may not have so shifted strategically in the latter’s direction sociolinguistically. Rather, the interviewee may simply have been attempting a so-called assertive self-presentation...via language, thereby portraying a competent persona” (GCC 1991:23).

Thus, “what can be parsimoniously interpreted as accommodation may in actuality be an artifact on occasion” (GCC 22-23).

## **Audience Design Model**

(Bell 1984, forthcoming; Bell and Johnson 1997)

Speakers shift styles based on the composition of their audience, including addressees, non-addressed participants in the conversation, and non-participants of various sorts (e.g. eavesdroppers, overhearers). The usual direction of shift is convergence toward the speech of audience members. However, speakers may initiate shifts in which they diverge from their audience in order to dissociate from this audience and converge with a non-present reference group. The primary direction of shift, however, is responsive or accommodative.

Bell has altered several key points of his model since its 1984 formulation:

- Referee design is no longer seen as secondary to audience design:

“I now tend to think that we have to acknowledge referee design as an ever-present part of individuals’ use of language. **We are always positioning ourselves in relation to our own ingroup and other groups, and our interlocutors**” (Bell forthcoming 22).

“What I now suggest is that these [audience design and referee design] may be two complementary and co-existent dimensions of style, which operate simultaneously in all speech events. Yes, we are designing out talk for our audience. But we are also concurrently designing it in relation to other referee groups, including our own ingroup” (Bell forthcoming 23).

- Bell and Johnson (1997) maintain that **accommodation involves far more than adopting language features associated with the ‘demographic characteristics’ of audience members** (e.g. gender, ethnicity). Rather, accommodation “includes speakers making active use of the resources of their speech community in order to accomplish their conversational purposes” (Bell and Johnson 1997:15). For example:

Interviewers show high usage levels for the Maori particle *eh* when addressing both Pakeha and Maori informants. This is because *eh* is also a marker of solidarity and so helps accomplish the purpose of getting informants to feel comfortable enough to talk freely.

- Style shift is seen to be contingent not only on audience shift and topic shift but also on **how speakers frame the topics about which they converse**. Thus, Bell designs an interview in which speakers will discuss education-related matters both from the vantage point of the students they once were and from an adult viewpoint.

## Markedness Model

(Carol Myers-Scotton 1998)

Speakers choose from among speech styles in order to either maintain or change the existing set of “Rights and Obligations” (norms for social interaction, codes for behavior) that hold between them and their conversational interactants. There is an ‘unmarked’ variety for every occasion. If speakers choose this variety, the RO will remain constant; if they chose a marked variety, the RO will be altered. Speakers have knowledge of what constitutes markedness based on exposure to marked and unmarked choices in community discourse. Underlying speakers’ choices is ‘rationality’: Speakers make choices because of the benefits they expect to receive from their choices, relative to the costs.

### Identifying Unmarked Choices:

- “The unmarked choice can be identified in terms of frequency; it is the choice most often made in a specific interaction-type by a specific type of speaker” (Myers-Scotton 1996:7).

But...

- **Markedness readings are interaction-specific and dynamic:** That is, what is unmarked in a given interaction may be quite marked in another; what is unmarked at the beginning of a conversation may later become marked or vice versa (Myers-Scotton 1998:23).

### Unmarked RO Sets:

- “The unmarked RO set for a given interaction type... is derived from whatever situational features are salient for the community for that interaction type” (M-S 1998:24).

But...

- **RO sets are interaction-specific and dynamic as well:** “the same situational features are not relevant in all interaction types,” “the content of a situational feature may change,” and “the hierarchical relation of one feature to another feature in an interaction type may change.” For example, gender or ethnicity may be more salient in one interaction than another; the salience of either of these features may change “when the topic changes” (M-S 1998:24).

### Making Marked Choices:

- “The possibility that **speakers make marked choices which are negotiations against the existing status quo** is a major point in the MM” (M-S 1998:29).

- “To make marked choices which actually achieve their goals, **one must recognize the ‘strategic’ nature of the environment** and assess successfully the intricacies of the interrelation of salient factors in a specific interaction and the possibility of changing their relative saliency. That is, the environment itself can change because it includes other actors who are similar to the speaker and therefore will be trying to maximize their gains, too” (M-S 1998:31).

The primacy of speaker agency:

- Speakers do not make choices primarily because they are concerned with accommodating to audience members or with presenting themselves as a member of one group vs. another: “While speakers as rational actors include an evaluation of the effects of choices on others, **the actor is central**. Speakers seek to optimize their own outcomes, not those of their addressees” (M-S 1998:30).
- **Speakers do not make choices which “simply reflect their social group memberships or the type of speech event in which they are participating or the structure of the event”** (M-S 1998:19) but rather those which serve their goals in a given interaction.
- Social context factors (e.g. social identity features such as age, sex, and ethnicity; situational features such as setting, topic, etc.) “determine, not *choices*, but only the *speaker’s opportunity set*, that is, what varieties he/she is able to use” (M-S 1998:34).

## Problems for Style: Fraternity Men

Kiesling (1998) presents an analysis of the use of the ING variable in a fraternity at a Virginia college. In addition to interviews, I also collected speech from other speech events, particularly fraternity meetings and social events. Meeting speech was that speech produced by a ratified speaker in a weekly meeting. This speech was thus very public and highly performative. Socializing speech occurred during extremely casual social events, such as hanging out at a bar, or at a party. I could thus compare the use of ING for each speaker in three different types of speech event. My results, displayed in figure K-1, showed that the men did not have common patterns of style shifting between the event types. In particular, several men actually show higher usage levels for the alveolar, vernacular variant (N) in meetings than in informal social activities (although there were more men who shifted to using more of the velar (G) variant in the interviews and meetings).

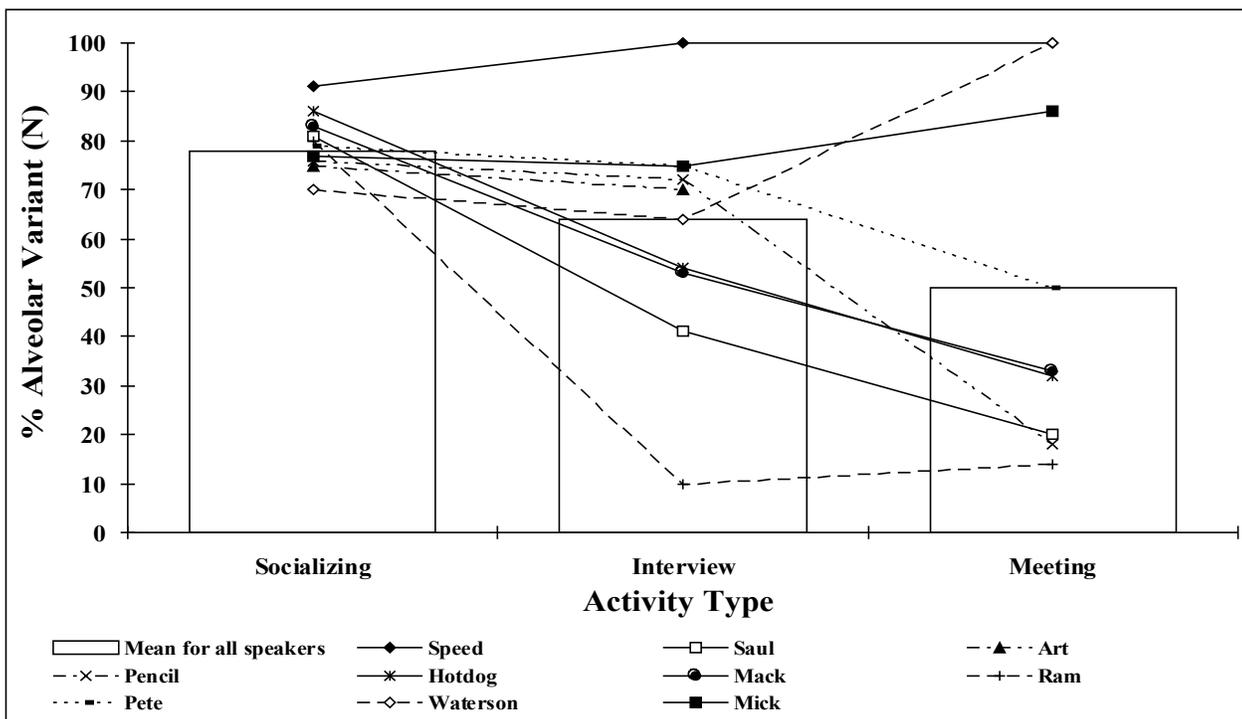


Figure K-1: N variant use for (ING) for progressive verb forms among fraternity speakers

No dialectal or social group patterns correlated with these stylistic patterns. Through discourse analysis of the men's speech, I showed that the men who were using more of the N variants in the meeting were highlighting features of identity that connected them to ideologies of hard work, an important fraternity ideology. Such ideologies, in turn, are connected to ideologies of physical power that are central to certain kinds of masculine identity. The men who used more G in meetings, however, did so to highlight a different kind of masculine power — the structurally-based power associated with established societal and fraternity hierarchies. In so doing they also align themselves with another important fraternity ideology. Thus the men employ *both* the N and G variants strategically to align themselves with particular fraternity and cultural ideologies.

### Attention to Speech

We would have to argue that different men are paying differing amounts of attention to their speech. This is unlikely, since the man with the highest levels for N uses his tokens in an important election speech in which he is being overtly evaluated on his suitability for office.

### **Acts of Identity**

We could try to claim that these men want to be identified with different class groups through their use of N (working class) and G (middle-class). But it is not the membership in the group that the men are adding to their identities through their ING use, but values associated with prototypical members of that group. Thus, while AI is similar to FF in its focus on the indexing of social identities to linguistic form, it implies an all-or-nothing claim of group membership, whereas FF argues that only certain features of the indexed prototype are claimed by the speaker through their shift.

### **Communication Accommodation Theory**

The more recent version of CAT would explain the fraternity behavior fairly well, as an “assertion of the speaker’s persona,” by indexing certain stereotypes or prototypes. In the FF model, this becomes footings indexed to various character roles and cultural prototypes.

### **Audience Design**

Clearly the audience is the same for each man who speaks in the meeting, where most of the divergent style shifting occurs. Thus, we need to appeal to referee design in order to explain at least one of the two usage patterns for ING. One could maintain that the men who use more N are accommodating to a non-present group of physically-powerful men in order to convey their association with this group; conversely, those who use G are accommodating to a present group of fairly standard speakers. But such an approach fails to capture the role of N in the creation and projection of *individual* identity. Further, it denies the men who use G any active voice at all, since their stylistic choice is now viewed as mere “accommodation” to their surroundings. As with CAT, the newer versions of this model move in the direction we are advocating, but not far enough.

### **Markedness Model**

We agree that the men see a rational advantage in their use of variants, and would incorporate speaker rationality into any model of style shifting, but how to identify the unmarked variety is not clear cut. In the meeting event, is it G because of the ‘formality’ of the speech activity? But I show that their use of G carries social meanings also. The main problem for this model is that *both* variants are meaningful to the same degree; they both help index a speaker’s stance and shape identity in the situation, without needing to be marked.

### **The Footing and Framing Approach**

The fraternity speakers are primarily taking footings in the local speech activity. In the fraternity, men will take either a ‘tough’ confrontational footing or a solidary footing through the use of the vernacular variant (depending on content and other variables). Through a greater use of the standard variant, they adopt roles of authority and reason.

The speakers rely on the fact that the variants index social prototypes to help create their footings. The vernacular variant indexes prototypically casual speech activities and thus reframes the formal event so that a speaker can create a solidary footing. However, the vernacular is also indexed to prototypes of physically powerful, hard-working, working-class men, and as such can create a footing associated with those men (see Ochs 1992 on this kind of indexing). The standard variant indexes prototypically formal speech activities as well as prototypes of men who hold power because of their place within established societal structures or because of personal knowledge — professors and CEOs, for example.

### **Problems for Style: Ocracoke, NC, and Robeson County, NC**

Data from Schilling-Estes 1998a suggests that the models below cannot fully explain all cases of style shifting. This is a case study of one speaker's shifts into an exaggerated performance of his vernacular dialect, a well-recognized variety that has long characterized the residents of Ocracoke, NC. The best-known feature of this variety is the pronunciation of the /ay/ vowel with a raised and backed nucleus, as in [h<sup>ɪ</sup> t<sup>ɪ</sup> Id] for 'high tide'. When this speaker, Rex O'Neal, shifts into performance style, he highlights this pronunciation by using nuclei that are higher and farther back than in other contexts, including conversation with the fieldworker and with his brothers. Figure S-1 illustrates.

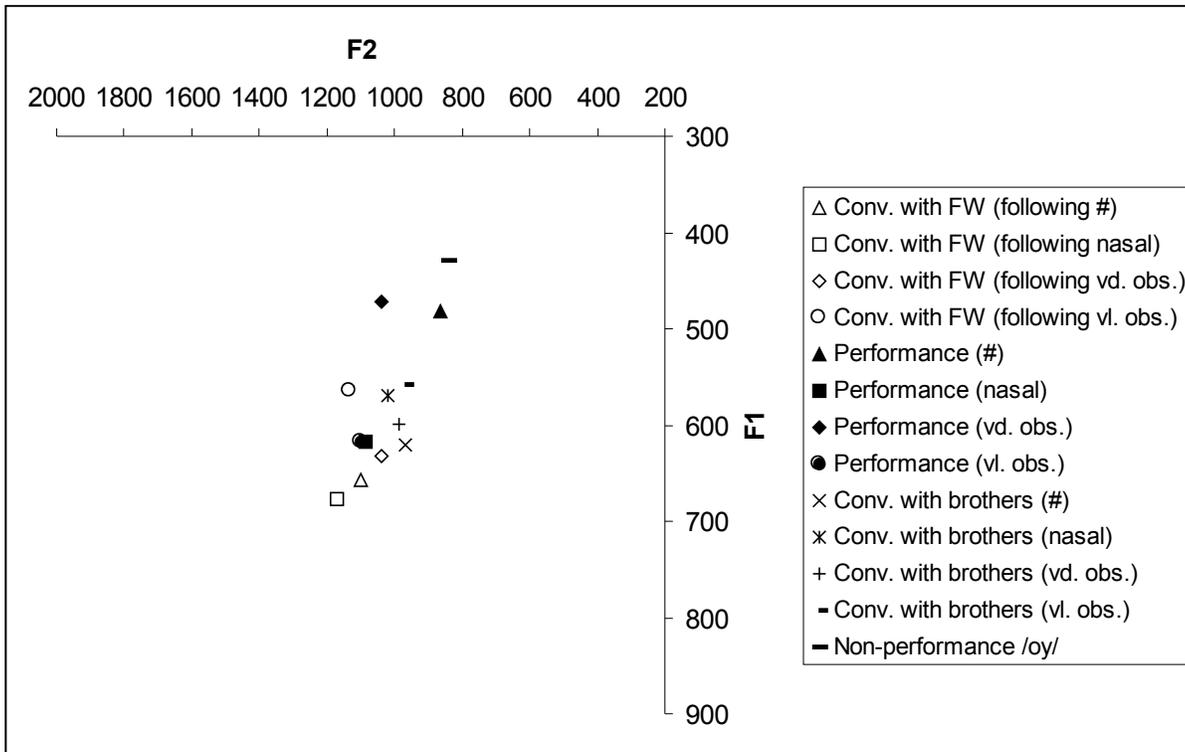


Figure S-1: Mean values for Rex O'Neal's /ay/ nuclei in three stylistic contexts (from Schilling-Estes, Natalie. 1998. Investigating 'self-conscious' speech: The performance register in Ocracoke English. *Language in Society* 27. 53-83)

### **Attention to Speech**

- Although Rex O'Neal's attention is focused sharply on his speech when he gives a dialect performance, his speech becomes more rather than less vernacular.
- Rex O'Neal's performed speech displays more regular patterning than predicted by Labov's Vernacular Principle. Not only are his /ay/ nuclei generally higher and farther back in performance than non-performance speech, but they are highest in exactly the same context in which they are most frequently raised in his non-performance speech and in the Ocracoke community in general: before voiced obstruents, as in *tide* or *rise*.

### **Acts of Identity, Communication Accommodation Theory**

- It is difficult to conceive of who Rex is converging with and which group he is seeking to identify with when he gives his performances, since the exaggerated dialect he produces is clearly intended for humorous effect rather than as an accurate rendition of the language variety of a particular group of speakers.

- Rex O’Neal’s divergence from the relatively standard speech of his addressee, the fieldworker, leads to psychological convergence rather than divergence, since he amuses the performer and provides the non-present audience of linguists who will listen to the interview with the ‘heavy accent’ they want to hear.

**Markedness Model**

- Under this approach, Rex O’Neal’s exaggeratedly vernacular speech most likely would be seen as relatively ‘marked’, since according to Labov (1972a), we typically expect speakers to increase the standardness rather than the vernacularity of their speech in the sociolinguistic interview. Thus, the shift into performance speech would bring about a change in the RO set that exists between the speaker and the fieldworker. However, the model does not explain why Rex O’Neal opts for the particular marked variety that he chooses: What does he stand to gain from giving a speech performance vs. utilizing any of the other varieties in his repertoire? It may be that the mere display of linguistic ability alone yields some sort of benefit. Although MM recognizes that such display occurs, it is vague on what the benefit of demonstrating one’s linguistic virtuosity might be.
- The markedness of Rex O’Neal’s speech performance is actually more difficult to assess than we might think: Sociolinguists have long maintained that speakers are so likely to produce ‘affected’ (i.e. ‘performed’) speech in this speech event that the researcher must devise ingenious methods for overcoming this propensity.

Schilling-Estes 1998b further demonstrates the difficulty of determining the ‘unmarked’ variety for a given speech situation as well as for particular individuals. This investigation is a case study of the numerous style shifts that take place in a single sociolinguistic interview between two good friends, a Lumbee Native American (“Dan”) from the tri-ethnic community of Robeson County, NC, and an African American (“Ronald”) from Wilmington, a small city on the North Carolina Coast. As part of this study, I examined each speaker’s usage levels for a number of ethnic and regional dialect features in different sections of the interview, as defined by topic. The patterning of *r*-lessness in each section is shown in Figure S-2:

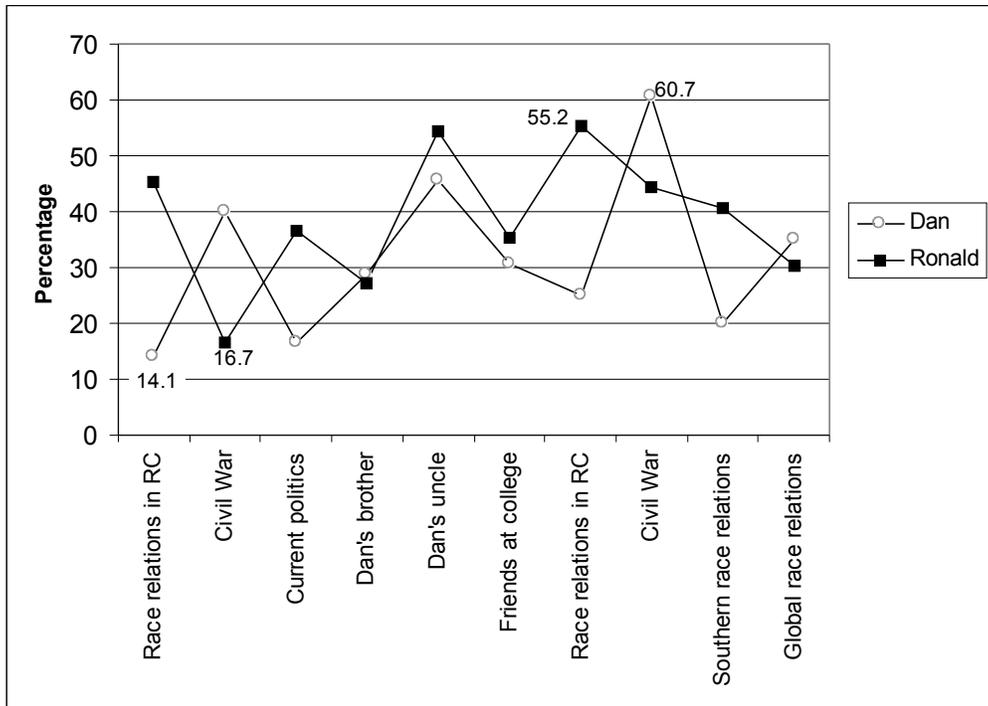


Figure S-2: Style Shifting for *r*-lessness in a Single Interview

The fact that each speaker shows quite a large range of usage levels for *r*-lessness suggests that there does not exist a single unmarked level for this speech event or even for each speaker, whether situated within this event or within an idealized ‘maximally casual’ event. Nor are there unmarked levels for use with each topic, since the speakers show shifting patterns during their discussions of race relations, as well as different patterns in each of the two sections on this topic. And even if markedness does pertain to topical subsections of speech events rather than entire events, we are still left with the question of how the unmarked variety for each topic would arise to begin with: How many times must Ronald and Dan converse about race relations during a sociolinguistic interview before an unmarked style solidifies and they are able to identify it? (cf. Myers-Scotton 1996:7, above).

### ***The Footing and Framing Approach***

- In performing his dialect, Rex is not indicating identity with a nonpresent ingroup but is footing himself as a ‘quaint old fisherman’. The role he takes up enables him to adopt a friendly stance toward the fieldworker as well as a cooperative (though also good-naturedly challenging) stance toward the nonpresent linguists who he believes have typecast him into the very role he adopts with such relish.
- In shifting levels of *r*-lessness (and other speech features), Dan and Ronald take on different footings with respect to one another as the interview unfolds and as shifts in topic bring different frames to the forefront. When the frame ‘conversation between friends’ is uppermost in their minds, they align themselves with one another on a friendly footing through indexing similar prototypes (e.g. ‘university student’, ‘one of the guys’), the linguistic result of which is similar levels of *r*-lessness (and other features). But when the frame is ‘discussion of race relations’, the linguistic result is typically divergence, since each indexes quite different prototypes (e.g. ‘young African American man’, ‘Lumbee man’, ‘Native American’) in order to foot himself as an ethnically distinct individual. Crucially, the two also align themselves with respect to topic as well as each other. Thus, they adopt quite different positions regarding race relations throughout most of the two discussions of this subject matter (with linguistic divergence as a by-product), but take up similar footings by the end of the interview, at which point they show linguistic convergence.

Both Rex O’Neal and Dan and Ronald accomplish their various footings through indexing character prototypes through their use of dialect features associated with these stereotypes. Thus, Rex invokes the ‘quaint old-timey fisherman’ while Dan, for example, evokes the ‘old-time Southern gentleman’ in his exaggerated *r*-lessness during his discussions of the Civil War.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The footing and framing model embraces some of the central tenets of all the models outlined yet departs from each in some crucial ways.

### ***Speaker Agency in Style Shifting***

Like AI, MM, and later versions of CAT and AD, we believe that style shifting centers on speaker agency rather than environmental or situational factors. In this, we depart from AS, early CAT and early AD, which hold that speakers shift styles primarily in response to situational factors such as formality of the speech situation and audience composition. We also depart from AS in maintaining that stylistic choices are not a mere reflection of speakers’ demographic characteristics but are a matter of more active choice. Of course, we admit that agents *do* respond to situations, albeit creatively, and some situations allow for more creativity than others. In addition, we agree with MM in that speakers’ choices may be constrained by their ‘census characteristics’ or ‘social address’.

### ***Shaping and Re-Shaping Individual and Interpersonal Identity***

We depart from AI and the ‘official’ tenets of AD in our belief that speakers do not shift styles primarily to project membership in certain social groups. Rather, they engage in style shifting in order to index the attributes, values, or stances associated with different prototypical character types and speech events and hence to incorporate these attributes into their personal and relational selves.

We agree with MM that speakers engage in style shifting in order to shift relations among participants (and non-present others). However, we do not believe that they can do so through assessing the markedness of their speech, because we do not believe that interactional situations (however fleeting) are attended by unmarked RO sets or unmarked language varieties. Indeed, situations and role relationships (and seemingly unchanging ‘demographic’ characteristics) are in large part linguistically constituted, and so it becomes impossible to speak of baseline varieties for use in pre-defined interactional situations.

### ***Convergent Approaches to Style Shifting***

Our views that style shifting is based primarily on identity maintenance and creation (and not group reference) and that this is accomplished through indexing attributes of various prototypes (and not through assessing the markedness of various speech styles in certain situations and manipulating this markedness) conform to later versions of CAT and to recent views on style shifting offered by the California Style Collective (1993) and Coupland (forthcoming).

“The construction of style is a process of bricolage. Resources from a broad social landscape can be appropriated and recombined to make a distinctive style that will be identifiable not only by which resources it uses, but how it uses each resource and how it combines all its resources.... [W]hat all these resources have in common is that they have some kind of social meaning for the speaker who takes them up” (CSC 1993:5).

“the displayer’s intention is not to negotiate a definition of self as a member of another speech community but to be seen as an individual with attributes associated with that community of speakers” (Eastman and Stein 1993: 188, qtd. in Coupland forthcoming 14; cf. also Bell and Johnson 1997:15, above).

### ***The Role of Linguistic Convergence and Divergence***

Under such a view, convergence with audience members is an artifact of identity creation and projection; it is not primary:

“When we converge stylistically to an interlocutor, we may gloss this as the reduction of (socio)linguistic dissimilarities, which it IS under linguists’ analytic microscopes. But from the perspective of the social actor, what is being reduced is the cultural and social divide between identities, the social personas they can project through their stylistic selections” (Coupland forthcoming:11; cf. Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991:22-23, above).

Similarly, speakers diverge from audience members not necessarily to indicate disassociation from the present audience and association with a non-present group but to create and project particular identities, or roles. Quite often, the fulfillment of roles through divergence leads to psychological convergence, as for example in the case of Rex O’Neal’s divergent performance speech, which forges a bond of friendly camaraderie with the fieldworker.

### ***A Final Question***

If the meaning behind the linguistic features used in style shifting derives from the association of these features with certain character types and speech events, then where does this association come from? Forging a link between a character type and a speech style is not a simple matter of assigning an appropriate speech style

based on ‘social address’ (i.e. demographic characteristics such as age, social class, ethnicity). Rather, it seems to be a two-way process, in which the meanings attached to language features help to constitute the prototypes while the prototypes imbue the language features with social meaning in a continuous feedback loop, well recognized in the fields of evolutionary biology and cognition as ‘structural coupling’ (e.g. Maturana and Varela 1987).

Again, our views accord with those of the California Style Collective (1993:4-5):

Style shifting involves far more than “simply performing a style and in the process presenting... [oneself] as a member of a group characterized by that style. This view would require that we accept three things as static: the group’s existence, the style, and the relation between the group and the style.... This view, which is the common one taken in studies of variation, is a useful abstraction from practice for the study of the place of the community and of the style in the social world. But we have chosen to focus on the practice from which this abstraction is made. Groups and their styles do not exist independently of their members’ construction of them, and while that process of construction can be ignored for many purposes, it is still a key fact.”

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