MANIPULATING LANGUAGE TO INDEX VARYING DEGREES OF ONE'S IDENTITY

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I dedicate this thesis to the many people who supported me along the way. I could not have completed this thesis without the encouragement and motivation from my mentors, family, and friends.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Manipulating Language to Index Varying Degrees of One's Identity

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This research project observes the construction of an identity in various social situations through the utilization of available tools such as music, attire, and specifically, linguistic resources. Identity can be constructed linguistically using phonological features, specific word choices, and discourse patterns. People’s language choices are used to associate or disassociate with different communities based on their position in society. Though these choices are often based on social class, ethnicity, or gender, the language behavior does not always match the socially imposed categories. Many people use language associated with African American English (AAE) to construct a specific identity via hip hop culture.

The subject I am studying is a 33-year old biracial male physical therapist who reflects this hip-hop identity. This research project observes the way the subject speaks in different social situations. Data were collected from the subject and analyzed for linguistic variation as he interacted with different participants from various social groups and indexed varying degrees of his identity using language associated with hip hop culture. In order to identify the style shifting behavior with members of differing discourse communities, I observed the subject’s language patterns in his professional environment at his physical therapy clinic as well as his comfortable environment at home with his family. This research exposes the role that non standard varieties of English play in the construction of identity characterized by their involvement with hip hop communities and not by their socially imposed categories.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

EARLY VARIATION STUDIES

One particular night, I witnessed what H. Samy Alim calls a cypher, a “highly competitive and creative style of discourse whose aim is the verbal domination and embarrassment of one’s opponent through a combination of lyrics and effective delivery” (Fitzpatrick, 2005). Three brothers stood on the side of the road in Las Vegas rap-battling a group of young adults they had just met. The lyrics mostly centered on what part of the west coast they represented and mocked the hometown of their opponents. One brother used his iPhone to create a beat that the rappers could use to ‘spit their rhymes’ or rap. This group represents an intriguing area of sociolinguistic research that involves a globally-connected community of hip hop and the language used to construct a hip hop identity. Though derived from African-American culture (Smitherman, 1997), hip hop communities are represented by people across nations, races, genders, and languages (Alim & Pennycook, 2007; Pennycook, 2009).

I chose to explore the language associated with hip hop communities with a biracial male named Dan.¹ Dan listens to a variety of music that he deems more “instrumental”. He appreciates the ability of artists to “break beats” and create interesting rhythm using their voice, turn tables, or drums. Some of his favorite artists are Beastie Boys, E40, Tech 9, and Brotha Lynch, an unconventional rap artist from Sacramento. He argues that the extreme violence found in Brotha Lynch’s lyrics have the same effect on an audience as a horror movie–“the purpose of the music is to make you uncomfortable”.

Dan is a first-generation high school graduate and is one of two of his five brothers to hold a college degree. He tells his brothers that a degree is one’s ticket into the “society of the elite and educated”. He continued his education earning a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree and is currently the clinic director of an outpatient orthopedic rehabilitation facility in

¹ Dan is a pseudonym.
the San Francisco Bay Area. Given the prestige of his position as a physical therapist and the training that medical professionals undergo to use appropriate language with patients (Ainsworth-Vaughn, 2001), it can be assumed that Dan has a language style representative of Standard English with his patients. However, Dan acknowledges that around his brothers, his “street voice comes out”. These discourse communities appear to contrast drastically though Dan’s identities are not entirely separate from one another. In fact, it is the bleeding of one into the other that is most interesting. Following Podesva’s (2007) study identifying linguistic variables associated with the indexing of identity, I observed and recorded Dan in two linguistically separate environments: at his physical therapy clinic with his coworkers and patients, and at his home with his family and brothers. This study will identify the salient linguistic variables associated with his ‘professional’ language and his ‘comfortable’ language.

**Indexing Identities**

Identity is a constant construction and reconstruction of the self in various social situations through the utilization of available tools including music, attire, and especially linguistic resources. Ochs (1996), for example, notes that specific contexts are situated within a socially constructed set of norms. Therefore, “every novice enters a fluid, sometimes volatile, social world that varies in certain conventional, non random ways. Membership is accrued as novices begin to move easily in and out of linguistically configured situations” (p. 406). Thus, linguistic variables are learned as one earns membership in a given context and can then be employed in different contexts to index certain aspects of one’s identity and form linguistically mutual relationships. Additionally, individuals use linguistic variables to distinguish themselves from groups and index diverging identities as well (Gumperz, 2001; Ochs 1996).

Much of linguistic variation is associated with a speaker’s position in society and can be used as a way to associate with or disassociate from various speech communities (Cameron, 1997; Eckert, 1996; Labov, 1990). Though these associations are often made in relation to social class, ethnic makeup or gender affiliation, the perceived linguistic behavior does not always correspond to these socially constructed categories. One such phenomenon relevant to the present study has been termed ‘wigga identity’ (Cutler, 1999) in which
members of a white middle class choose to represent their identity as similar to members of a black lower class population via language patterns associated with African American English (Bucholtz, 1999; Cutler, 1999). Rampton (1995) identifies this act as ‘code-crossing’ in that speakers that aren’t part of the speech community could ‘cross’ into the speech community of another by adopting linguistic features. This is separate from ‘code-switching’ where in-group members could move between codes used in their own speech communities. ‘Code-crossing’ could reflect the idea that many people desire to be marked as different or to separate themselves symbolically from the hegemonic standard (Kroch, 1978). It could also reflect the notion that other socially disempowered minorities and socially disempowered masculinities often construct their ethnic identities in ways to maintain salient differences from hegemonic identity constructions of the white majority (Wolfram & Dannenberg, 1999).

The manipulation of unique linguistic features is not representative of any given way of speaking. “According to the notion of indexicality, linguistic forms are endowed with interactional meanings which can be ideologically and indirectly associated with identity categories” (Podesva, 2007, p. 495). In his study of linguistic features used to construct identities in specific contexts, Podesva observed one man’s use of linguistic variables commonly associated with gay identity in three different contexts: an informal bar-b-que, a phone conversation with his father, and his work environment. Podesva showed that linguistic variables such as the falsetto phonation, which is both associated with gay identity and associated with other identities separate from gay identity, are more salient in the informal setting than the man’s work setting. The man’s language in his work setting conformed more to standard English in that he avoided the high frequency of the falsetto. This is important in terms of the idea that features can be manipulated to index a specific identity while operating in one context as opposed to another.

In addition to the manipulation of language for indexing purposes, speakers can also manipulate their language for audience purposes (cf. Duranti, 1986; Goodwin, 1986). In his earlier research, Bell (1984) argues within his Audience Design framework “that persons respond mainly to other persons, that speakers take most account of hearers in designing their talk” (p. 159). This framework, however, is one-dimensional in that it is only the audience that influences the speaker’s language style. Bell’s (2001) later research on style maintains
that one’s style reflects the different ways one speaks in different social situations based on the perceived or intended audience. Podesva, Roberts, and Campbell-Kibler (2001) furthers this notion by arguing that style and language is a coproduction influenced by both the audience and the speaker.

Our approach to style, in accordance with recent research on identity and the role played by language in forming identity, assumes that identity and style are co-constructed. Instead of treating stylistic variation as merely reflective of one’s social address or identity, we view style as the linguistic means through which identity is produced in discourse. A style may be viewed as a collage of co-occurring linguistic features which, while unfixed and variable, work together to constitute meaning in coherent and socially intelligible ways. Style simultaneously gives linguistic substance to a given identity and allows the identity to be socially meaningful. (Podesva et al., 2001, p. 179)

From this perspective, the linguistic behavior Dan employs in different social situations may reflect his attitude toward his audience or the relationships he has in various contexts. His language style is also a testament to the nature of the membership he has in a given speech community.

**Speech Community**

In order to describe the two groups of which Dan is a member, I am using the term *speech community*. However, the term *speech community* has proven to be problematic in the field of sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1971; Hymes, 1974; Milroy, 1987; Patrick, 2002; Wardhaugh, 2011). Do researchers impose a given community on a group of speakers based on perceived speech dynamics? Or are speech communities established by the speakers themselves? Imposed speech community membership forces speakers to fit into certain categories that may or may not be fully representative of their true identity. Early studies of speech communities focused on variables among speakers such as contextual style, social class and mobility, age, sex, and ethnicity (Labov, 1966). Social class plays an integral part in this definition. “People can be ordered with respect to the rest of society by quantifiable characteristics such as income, education, occupation, residence, or life-style” (Milroy, 1987, p. 13). There was also an emphasis on geographical connections and language contact that defined speech communities (Milroy, 1987). Speech communities were built around the notion that people who were socialized with shared norms would speak the same way (Rampton, 1998b). These definitions are problematic because they present boundaries that
limit groups of people based on researcher-imposed definitions of identity (Bucholtz, 2003).
An added problematic element of identity construction is that of ethnicity. Morgan (1994) contends, “The apparent confusion over what constitutes speech community membership is analogous to the difficulty sociologists have in describing the relationship between class and racial consciousness in the African American community” (p. 83). This concept is especially relevant to my research with Dan. Dan’s father is black, but Dan was raised by his white mother. Though Dan is biracial, he was raised in a predominantly white community therefore complicating the discussion about his perceived ethnic identity and his speech community membership.

More current research favors definitions of speech community based on the notion of a community of practice (Eckert, 1989; Rampton, 1998b). Community of Practice (CofP) analyzes identity based on the position one has within a shared environment and with shared experiences such as a work environment or a high school environment. Though Eckert identified a CofP on a national scale of shared values among high school groups, CofP is still considered to be a definition of local speech communities rather than global ones. There are, however, linguistic patterns on a global scale that cannot be defined by supposedly ‘objective’ characteristics such as social class, geographical connections, socialized shared norms, or locally shared environments. Therefore, researchers must also define such global communities in terms of the membership itself. Anderson (1991) addresses this issue by noting that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (p. 6). Therefore, identifying speech communities based on the authenticity of group membership is inappropriate and should be replaced with an approach that focuses on the speaker’s perceived membership and the values that are recognized on a global level.

**IMAGINED SPEECH COMMUNITY**

What is an ‘imagined’ speech community (Anderson, 1991)? What if identity was not something constructed by the individual or imposed by the researcher but rather a manifested idea to which the individual subscribes? This imagined identity could reflect values of some of the traditional definitions of community but does not group an apparently homogenous group together as a whole. Instead of classifying a speech community based on controversial
factors such as ethnicity, sex, and social class, those factors could be used as variables associated with, but not defined by, a speech community. Hymes (1986) describes this as a shift to a more descriptive theory of sociolinguistics. He defines speech community as “sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety” (Hymes, 1986, p. 585). These rules can be local rules or, more revolutionary, global rules. Speech communities can be groups of people from different (imposed) social classes, different geographical regions, different shared environments, and with different social norms, but who subscribe to the same identifying factors and indexing behavior. Given the problematic nature of Dan’s speech community and the global phenomenon of a hip hop community, it could be more appropriate to describe Dan’s language as representative of an imagined speech community. This approach provides a way to discuss the variables and features of Dan’s language more descriptively and avoids the problematic nature of traditionally prescriptive speech communities.

**AUTHENTICITY**

While my subject is of mixed race and is read as African-American in most contexts, it would be inappropriate to call his speech African-American English (AAE) based on his discourse community. Eckert (2003) notes that the concept of authenticity “is constructed in relation to particular locations” (p. 392). Because AAE is constructed in relation to African-American communities and Dan was not raised in an African-American community, he therefore cannot be ‘authentically’ using AAE. However, the argument of authenticity itself presents a problematic nature.

The idea of authenticity gains its force from essentialism, for the possibility of a ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ group member relies on the belief that what differentiates ‘real’ members from those who pretend to authentic membership is that the former, by virtue of biology or culture or both possess inherent and perhaps even inalienable characteristics of criteria of membership. (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 400)

It is clear that although Dan cannot and should not be categorized as a member of the AAE speech community because he was not raised in an African American community or household, his language behavior must be more closely examined to identify the characteristics and nature of the features of the nonstandard variety of English he uses in certain contexts.
There has been a good deal of research on individuals who appropriate AAE features for specific purposes, but are not ‘authentically’ members of the AAE discourse based on the communities in which they were raised (Bucholtz 1999; Cutler, 1999). As mentioned earlier, this behavior is known as ‘language crossing’ or ‘code-crossing’ which “refers to the use of a language which isn’t generally thought to belong to the speaker. Language crossing involves a sense of movement across quite sharply felt social or ethnic boundaries, and it raises issues of legitimacy...” (Rampton, 1998a, p. 287). This involves the awareness of crossing from an original identity into one that is not one’s own but is appropriated in order to assume a different identity. In her research study of a white high-school male, Cutler (1999) identifies her subject as a member of a Standard English speaking discourse community. However, upon entering high school, her subject begins appropriating specific features associated with but not always directly derived from AAE. She describes the influences that may have motivated his ‘crossing’ such as the popularity of hip hop, peer influence, or a rebellious personality.

The idea of crossing into another identity furthers the idea that there is an authentic form of the identity and the individual is consciously adopting the other traits. In this way, it still maintains notions of authenticity and essentialism. In addition, there is another issue related to this theory and that is the acceptance of a ‘crosser’. “The choice to accommodate toward the speech of another group is constrained by how speakers are perceived by the host society” (Cutler, 2010). Who is the ‘host society’ and what gives them authority to decide if a crossing person has authenticity? The notion of crossing has many facets of controversy in part because authenticity is controversial itself. The concept of authenticity, however, can be useful in understanding motives behind ‘crossing’ or language variation. Bucholtz (1999) coined the term ‘CRAAVE’ (CRossing African-American Vernacular English) for speakers who cross specifically into the AAVE or AAE speech communities and gives an example of one motive behind crossing:

As a consequence of racism, black masculinity in the U.S. (and elsewhere) has long been ideologically associated with a hyperphysicality that involves physical strength, hyper (hetero)sexuality and physical violence...Because of this complex of cultural ideologies, the use of AAE can, in certain marked contexts, indexically link blackness with hyperphysical masculinity. And because white masculinity can exist only in relation to other forms of masculinity (and to femininity), by
crossing into AAE middle class European American males may paradoxically be constructing themselves as (certain kinds of) white men. (p. 445)

Though it is still problematic to categorize language styles as either black or white, the concept behind using linguistic resources such as AAE to index a certain type of masculinity is a powerful method of identification. Though Dan’s racial background complicates the matter, his linguistic behavior may reflect an indexing of hypermasculinity through his use of specific linguistic forms, but the fundamental aspect of ‘crossing’ requires an initial, distinct identity with linguistic forms attached. However, Dan does not seem to be using features of AAE to ‘cross’ identity boundaries or index a different identity. Though similar to Cutler’s (1999) research on language crossing, Dan and his family appear to show the opposite behavior in that they have crossed from a more nonstandard variety of English to a more standard one.

**HIP HOP NATION LANGUAGE**

In order to avoid conflicting notions of authenticity, it is necessary to describe Dan’s language as one associated with and influenced by African-American English (AAE), but not necessarily AAE itself. Brathwaite (1984) uses the term *Nation Language* to refer to a way of speaking that is often associated with AAE but does not always share the same linguistic features.

Nation Language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English. (Brathwaite, 1984, p. 13)

We can argue that Dan’s variety of English is a form of Nation Language as AAE appears to have influenced his language patterns despite the fact that he was not raised in an African-American community. H. Sami Alim (2004a) defines one form of *Nation Language*, Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL), as a “strategic construction of a street conscious identity” (p. 400).

This street conscious identity is typically manifested through four activities of Hip Hop: MCing (rapping), DJing (making beats), graffiti, and breakdancing (Smitherman, 1997). Though its language would only be found in the MC aspect of hip hop, HHNL is representative of the culture and communication surrounding all four activities. According to Alim (2004a), some of the major features of HHNL are: rootedness in AAE language and
discursiveness, regional variability, synergistic combination of speech and music/literature, and links to sociopolitical circumstance. AAE is said to be exploited in HHNL to mark a distinctiveness. Some hyper-marked features are the invariant *be* and Signifyin’ discursive features (Alim, 2006). As Alim (2004b) explains (per Alim’s examples), the invariant *be* is often used by HHNL speakers in ways inconsistent with the research on its use in AAE. In AAE, the invariable ‘be’ is reserved for habitual actions, such as Lil’ Wayne’s lyrics “we be steady mobbin” meaning “we drive around”; however, there have been cases in hip hop communities where the invariant *be* has been used as an equative copula, such as “Dr. Dre be the name”. By using traditional AAE styles with more frequency and extending the use of AAE variables such as the invariant *be*, speakers can connect with the culture of the ‘streets’ by emphasizing an association with AAE and the ‘streets’.

Signifyin’ is a complex rhetorical device found in AAE that functions as “an act of resistance against an oppressive force” (Jacobs, 2002). There are many variations of the exact definition of signifyin’, but its overarching purpose is to critically refute a term or sign. In Hip Hop culture and discourse, this is known as the act of “flippin’ the script” (Smitherman, 1997). Speakers of HHNL are aware of social injustice and form a unified rebellion against the dominant culture. One popular rap artist describes his view of the signifyin’ tradition:

> The Black Language [HHNL] is constructed of–alright let me take it all the way back to the slave days and use something that’s physical. All the slavemasters gave our people straight chittlins and greens, you feel me, stuff that they wasn’t eating. But we made it into a delicacy. Same thing with the language. It’s the exact same formula. How our people can take the worst, or take our bad condition, and be able to turn it into something that we can benefit off of...So through the music, that’s kinda like going on now with the rap thang. It’s *ghetto* music. People talkin about they issues and crime and, you feel me? (Interview with rapper JT the Bigga Figga, cited partially in Alim, 2000)

Signifyin’, as described by JT the Bigga Figga, is a broad cultural tradition that is exemplified in the language used by members of the community. One aspect of Signifyin’ is the tradition of semantic inversion, which redefines a word for the purpose of subverting hegemony (Smalls, 2010). This is especially evident with the evolution of ‘nigger’ to ‘nigga’ (Jacobs, 2002; Smitherman, 1997). Smitherman argues that the “script flippin” of the word “nigger” occurs with a different pronunciation and is therefore often misunderstood. In the negative connotation associated with racist language, it is pronounced with the postvocalic -r. However, due to the common postvocalic -r deletion in varieties of English associated with
AAE, the pronunciation “nigga” has been redefined as a positive term for camaraderie among those who “identify with the trials as well as the triumphs of the Black experience” (Smitherman, 1997, p. 19). Jacobs (2002) furthers this idea, noting that “the African-American usage of ‘nigga’ is a strategy for asserting the humanity of black people in the face of continuing racism” (p. 1). What began as a conscious strategy to subvert hegemonic values has become an integral part of the linguistic makeup that distinguishes HHNL as a response to Standard English. Tupac Shakur exemplified ‘flippin’ the script’ when he remodeled the word with an acronym Never Ignorant Getting Goals Achieved. He, therefore, appropriated the negative connotations of the word to use as a positive message for his audience.

It is important to note that speakers are often aware of the injustice and participate in the rebellion regardless of their own position in society. In the present study, for example, while Dan’s ethnic, social, and linguistic background are problematic when categorizing language features. However, this definition of HHNL provides a way to discuss his imagined speech community membership that acknowledges social injustice and connects with a street-derived culture. This is not a local phenomenon as Cutler (1999) demonstrated in her studies of similar language patterns in New York and Pennycook (2009) shows in his studies of global hip hop cultures. This is the epitome of the imagined speech community. It has similar values and norms through an association that does not rely on geographic location, ethnic ties or similar socio-economic status. It is a community based on shared consciousness.

**Research Objective**

Instead of using the term ‘crossing’, it would be more appropriate to describe Dan’s behavior as the cultural practice of styleshifting which Alim (2003) describes as “co-constructed behavior that draws upon community based, historically-rooted language practices and ideologies at the same time as it organizes future practices, ideologies, and talk” (p. 41). Additionally, Podesva et al. (2001) notes that “style permeates language not as a separate component or dimension, but as a building block for creating and perpetuating social meaning” (p. 178).

Dan’s success in the professional world speaks to his membership in a SAE discourse community in the professional world, yet his continued use of nonstandard variables speaks
to his ability to manipulate his language, or styleshift, in order to accommodate his audience or index different aspects of his identity in a given context. In order to gain insight to the social meaning each of these English varieties have in the makeup of Dan’s identity, I will explore the specific variables that are used by Dan in his different speech communities. Drawing form Eckert’s (1996) findings, it can be assumed that these variables do not occur in entirely distinct situations, but are highlighted for different purposes in order to index his membership in a given speech community. This insight will also serve to shed light on a more appropriate way to discuss use and purpose of the nonstandard variety of English Dan employs in more “comfortable” environments.

**THESIS OVERVIEW**

Chapter One of this thesis details the relevant literature on identity construction via linguistic variables and provides specific background on stance and style. It will also examine the problematic nature of authenticity in determining the language varieties used by Dan. Chapter Two will provide a description of the subject and his speech communities. Additionally, data collection and analysis methods will be presented. In Chapter Three, the meaningful variables discovered will be described and discussed in terms of context and identity. These variables will be examined across the two distinct speech communities with which Dan identifies in his ‘comfortable’ language and his ‘professional’ language. Finally, Chapter Four will focus on the implications of such findings on both a micro and macro level.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Early Variation Studies

Early sociolinguistic research relied on the sociolinguistic interview (Labov, 1966) for data collection, given that the idea of language variation was relatively new. This sociolinguistic interview was used to determine the variation that existed between different contextual environments. Labov separated language variables based on more casual speech and more careful speech (or the speech given in the interview). Later, Hymes (1972) used a more anthropological approach to determine the sociocultural variables, such as cultural norms or gender, that affect the language in a given context. Baugh (1979, 1983) built on this method of approaching language variation as situationally dependent by taking account of both the context of the situation and the sociocultural variables attached, specifically factors such as familiarity of the speakers in a given discourse situation.

Podesva (2007) expanded on the idea of styleshifting in his research on Heath, an openly gay medical student, where he explored linguistic variables not as “markers of pre-defined social categories, [but rather] as resources for the construction of social meaning” (p. 481). Podesva recorded Heath in three distinct situations to identify the variables that were used and the ‘conversational moments’ that elicited the use of specific variables. Podesva (2007) argues that by analyzing the variables in such distinct situations and relative to interactional moves, social meanings or motivations for using variables may become evident.

Schilling-Estes (1998) argues that in order to analyze such interactional moves, it is necessary to explore the topic of styleshifting using a case study:

To arrive at the principles underlying style-shifting in real-life conversational interaction, individual and small-group studies are more appropriate than large-scale surveys, because small-group studies allow for detailed examination of the conversational contexts and personal identificational considerations that surround the style shifts in question. (p. 55)

In following Schilling-Estes’ suggestions here, I also intend to supplement such analysis with information about Dan’s metalinguistic awareness by using a sociolinguistic interview.
(Labov, 1966). In order to identify the variables manipulated in Dan’s differing speech communities, it was necessary to observe him in his most distinct contexts possible with the speech communities he interacts with most—his brothers and his patients. To this end, Dan was recorded on three separate occasions over the course of one year.

The first recording took place one evening at Dan’s home in San Francisco with his wife, Cristina, and his brother James, who was visiting from Southern California. The second set of recordings occurred over the course of two days at Dan’s physical therapy facility. Dan was recorded with his patients, medical assistants, fellow physical therapists, the clinic director, and a medical student named Maya completing her rotations at the facility. Dan was recorded with Maya while meeting with fourteen patients. The final set of recordings took place after Dan had moved to a new house in the suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area with his family. Dan and Cristina were joined by three of his four brothers: Michael and Sean, who were visiting from the Sacramento area, and James who was visiting again from Southern California. The group was recorded over the course of the two-day visit. It was during this time that Dan was also recorded in a sociolinguistic interview.

**THE STUDY**

It is important to note the role of the researcher in conducting such research and address the potential “observer’s paradox” (Labov, 1972). Labov (1972) notes that “the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation” (p. 209). Given Bell’s (2001) discussion of style-shifting based on one’s audience, it can be assumed that Dan’s language may have been influenced by the presence of the researcher. Although the observer’s paradox cannot be fully avoided, this situation presented a minimal effect on Dan’s language behavior at his facility due to the presence of his medical student and the nature of his profession. Dan was selected to be the subject of this study based on the close relationship I have with his family. Therefore, it is not uncommon for me to participate in the situations described below with Dan and his family and the influence of recording is therefore minimal.
There were four distinct contexts in which the subject was observed.

**The Small Group Family**

The first context in which I observed Dan took place in his apartment in San Francisco with his wife, Cristina, his brother, James, and myself. The group was recorded for 45 minutes while conversations revolved around recent news, Amazon gadget finds, and the television show *I Shouldn’t Be Alive*. Cristina and James are unique within the family in that they both share hip hop nation values with Dan, such as involvement with hip hop music and the occasional use of nonstandard English, and are also both are also college graduates.

**Outpatient Orthopedic Rehabilitation Facility**

Six months after the initial observation, Dan was again observed over a two-day period at his physical therapy facility where he works as a licensed physical therapist. This environment has many levels of sociolinguistic context for styleshifting. First, Dan was recorded while interacting with fourteen different patients with various injuries ranging from sport-related muscle tears to repetitive stress injuries. Additionally, for most of his patient visits, Maya, a medical student completing her rotations, accompanied him. At the time of observation, Maya was toward the end of her rotation, so she and Dan alternated the tasks associated with patient appointments. These tasks included eliciting patient histories, manipulation of injured areas, electronic stimulation treatment, and patient follow-up. Dan often gave directions or explanations of physical therapy procedures to Maya during the observation. A third level of sociolinguistic context occurred when Dan interacted with his coworkers. There were three other physical therapists as well as four medical assistants, two administrative assistants, and the clinic director who interacted with Dan periodically throughout the day. Finally, given the comfortable relationship I have with my subject, Dan spent a good deal of the day explaining medical processes and daily physical therapy tasks to me. The Table 1 shows the range of medical knowledge and formality that varies between these different levels of context.

**The Whole Family**

The second observation of Dan and his family took place at his new house in a suburban community of the San Francisco Bay Area. This family reunion included two more
Table 1. Range of Medical Knowledge and Formality among Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Formality</th>
<th>Little to No Medical Knowledge</th>
<th>Advanced Medical/Orthopedic Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prin. Investigator</td>
<td>Patients</td>
<td>Maya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimal formality</td>
<td>adjustment of formality after establishing rapport</td>
<td>minimal to moderate formality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frequent explanations at the basic level</td>
<td>assumed 4th grade reading level</td>
<td>frequent use of directions and very technical explanations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coworkers</td>
<td>moderate formality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>technical language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

brothers, Michael and Sean. Michael is in his late twenties and did not complete high school. He is skilled in rapping and often raps to beats that Dan makes. Sean was a senior in high school at the time and had recently received his own set of turn tables to make beats as well. The group of brothers, Dan, Michael, James, and Sean, as well as Cristina were recorded over a two day period for approximately 8 hours. The family interacted over dinner and television shows such as *The Office, I Shouldn’t Be Alive, Martin,* and *Parks and Recreation.* Additionally, the brothers would often mix beats and ‘spit rhymes’ in a section of Dan’s garage where he had set up an area for scratching, drumming, and recording. During those two days, there was a lot of interaction over card tricks, card games, video games, and one particular board game called *Things.*

**The Sociolinguistic Interview**

The final recording of Dan involved an interview modeled after interviews used in sociolinguistic variation studies (Bigham, 2008; Labov, 1990). Dan was first asked to read a series of words to establish a baseline for his phonological system, then he read two different stories. The first was a fictional story and the second was a nonfiction passage (see Appendix A). Finally, Dan answered a series of questions in a conversational style about his metalinguistic awareness, his identity, and his knowledge of hip hop culture in the Bay Area.
Members of Dan’s Speech Communities

Dan’s Family Environment

- Cristina: Dan’s wife of eight years. She holds a degree in Psychology and works as a Human Resource Analyst. At the time of the study, she and Dan were expecting their first child. She is Filipino and is known for her talent in breakdancing.

- Michael: Dan’s younger half-brother\(^2\). Though unemployed at the time of study, Michael has worked in construction for many years. He is a skilled rap artist and ‘spits rhymes’ to Dan’s beats often.

- Scott: The next brother in the family. Scott also works in construction and enjoys rapping with his brother to Dan’s beats.

- James: The fourth brother of the family. James is completing his graduate degree in Rehabilitation Science, following in the footsteps of Dan.

- Sean: Dan’s youngest brother. At the time of the study, Sean was a senior in high school with aspirations to pursue a career in medicine as well.

Dan’s Professional Environment

- Andy: Dan’s mentor and director of his physical therapy facility. Dan worked with Andy while he was earning his doctorate.

- Maya: A medical student completing her rotations, Maya worked alongside Dan for a few months to learn the specialty of physical therapy.

- Fellow Physical Therapists: Three other physical therapists work with Dan at his physical therapy facility

- Medical Assistants: Four medical assistants aid Dan and his colleagues.

- Administrative Assistants: Two administrative assistants also work at the physical therapy facility with Dan

- Patients: Dan was observed meeting with fourteen different patients at the physical therapy facility. There were six females and eight males.

Analysis of the Data

Once data were collected, the recordings were transcribed using a modified version of Jefferson (2004) transcription conventions (see Appendix B), analyzed, and coded for variables associated with Hip Hop Nation Language. Then, the context in which they were uttered was analyzed for possible identity motivation and situational cues that may have elicited styleshifting. These variables ranged from discourse topics (violence, music, etc.),

\(^2\) All of Dan’s brothers are half-brothers and are read as racially white. The five brothers were raised by the same mother.
lexical items (*fool, yo’ ass, ain’t*), morphosyntactic items (copula absence, third person substitution), and phonological items (final -g dropping, final -r deletion, and falsetto pitch). For phonological items, the recordings were analyzed using the PRAAT software (Boersma & Weenink, 2013) to identify pitch and vowel length. The rest of the items were transcribed and coded. Finally, the recordings were analyzed again to identify similar linguistic situations in the different contexts in order to find comparable variables in the different contexts. For example, in greeting a patient, Dan used a SAE style and said, “How’ s it going there, boss?” Later, in recounting an uncomfortable situation at work, Dan exclaimed, “Quit lookin’ at my jeans, fool!” Both utterances contained a vocative term, but differed based on context and therefore style.
CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the subject’s perspective and relevant literature on the hip hop community are introduced. One specific discourse feature, flippin the script, is discussed in detail as it is a significant part of Dan’s styleshifting. Then, each of the two linguistic environments identified by the subject, his professional environment and his comfortable environment, are explored in relation to his styleshifting behavior.

THE HIP HOP COMMUNITY

Dan classifies the hip hop community by what it’s not. As seen in Example 1, he argues that labeling this community is too exclusive as he believes the hip hop community represents those not marked by hegemony.

**Excerpt 1:** Dan (2013): It has an urban feel, not rock or country or electronic. It is the ‘other culture’ or everyone else. It is the rest of the people that don’t belong in those categories

Dan’s utterance here can be seen as representative of a nonstandard perspective of community membership. The standard groups are characterized by their exclusive membership and the nonstandard groups are perceived as more inclusive to those that don’t belong in the standard groups.

His perspective is reminiscent of Eckert’s (1989) ethnographic study of high school teenagers in which she categorizes the hegemonic groups as both “jocks” and “burnouts”. Jocks are those that intentionally participate in hegemony by actively abiding by traditional values and norms in society. Burnouts, on the other hand, also participate in hegemony by providing the antithesis to the jock category. They are the deviant group in reference to the traditional values and therefore perpetuate the hegemonic categorization. Eckert goes on to define the “progressive” groups, such as the punks, the beatniks, and the freaks, as the teens that challenge the hegemonic balance in high school as well as the adult generations.

The progressive groups consciously rebel against the Jock and Burnout categories, and particularly against the social separation that they represent. Thus the progressive groups pose a threat to the Jock-Burnout hegemony, not only
because of their “unpredictable” style but because of their opposition to the category system itself. (Eckert, 1989, p. 18)

Once the progressive groups become a threat to the Jock-Burnout category, it is common for the two groups to appropriate aspects of the progressive group in order to neutralize their rebellion and maintain dominance of the hegemonic spectrum (Eckert, 1989). Dan’s definition of the hip hop community is comparable to Eckert’s description of the outlying categories in social groups in that it describes not only a rebellion to established values, but a unique way to express a voice that can’t be expressed in the traditional hegemonic groups. When discussing the message of rock as that of rebellion and the message of country as that of tradition, Dan describes what he believes the message of hip hop to be.

Excerpt 2: Dan (2013): [The message] of hip hop...I would feel, what it is tryin’ to push is the freedom of expressing yourself however you feel you can, whether it’s like through like MCing or rapping or like spitting rhymes as they would say, rhyme-saying, I guess or making beats whether it’s on turn tables or drums or guitar, whatever you do it on, or dancing or drawing. Some sort of expression, usually musically.

Here Dan acknowledges that there are people operating outside of the opposing forces of hegemony that use hip hop music as a platform for their own voice. It is “something they could finally be good at and excel”. Dan identified the same outlets of expression as Alim (2004a): rapping, beats, graffiti, and dancing. Alim identifies beats as MCing and mixing music; however, Dan used ‘beats’ because he notes that this skill can be done with vocals, turn tables, or drums. He describes all forms of expression as being connected to music as that is a fundamental part of the hip hop community.

Excerpt 3: Dan (2013): There’s still a rebel to it, too. I think a lot of it is also like monetary-based. How much money you have and can show off and that kind of stuff. How cool you are, your status. It’s very status-based...You’re looked better upon if you’re more things, more cars, more jewels, more girls, the more whatever. The more things you have like that, then the better you are. Whether you have skill at spitting rhymes or whether you have skill at making whatever. [Status] is based on the topic that’s being expressed. How much you have and things like that when I don’t feel that was necessarily the case with a lot of things like rock and roll. It wasn’t always about what they had. It was more about emotional love, things like that, not as materialistic as current hip hop. That’s how I feel. That’s not how it was meant to start out. It think it was more of a freedom of a expression. A way for people who didn’t have a voice to be heard and things like that. A way to express themselves. If it was through graffiti, they could express themselves through that. If it was dancing. It was something they were finally good at and they could excel and show themselves and hear what was
going on on the streets and whatever, but now it’s become more of like what you have and how you can rub that in everyone else and things like that. It’s definitely taken a big shift in the last twenty ye–fifteen to twenty years with it becoming more popular I feel, too.

In this excerpt, Dan identifies the shift in hip hop culture. The foundation of hip hop was an identity connected with street culture with a focus on freedom of expression and a political motivation to subvert hegemony. Boyd (2002) argues that “as the age-old assumption goes, as one becomes more popular or mainstream, the less politically engaged and substantive the music would become” (p. 51). However, Boyd believes Hip Hop reflects two dominant parties: one that is focused on the entrepreneurial opportunity to “get money” and one that, despite its popularity, continues to maintain the political motivations to represent marginalized communities. “The argument goes on to say that with the advent of West Coast hip hop, and its emphasis on the gang bangin’ lifestyle so endemic to southern California, that the music began to move away from this political period into a phase of unadulterated consumerism and a celebration of nihilism” (Boyd, 2002, p. 52). This is reflected in Dan’s description of status-based values in the hip hop community: “the more things, more jewels, more cars, more girls you have” (Dan). While Hip Hop began as a voice for those previously not given a platform to speak, it appears to have evolved, as evidenced by the view of both Boyd and Dan, into a materialistic and monetary-based identity. Therefore, much of the language associated with Hip Hop culture may be reflective of the original manipulation of language to challenge or subvert hegemonic values, but may be used unintentionally by the hip hop community simply to index that aspect of their identity.

**SEMANTIC INVERSION: FOOL**

As previously described, one such linguistic manipulation is “flippin’ the script” or semantic inversion. Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) often uses what is traditionally perceived as an obscene term as something positive. Common semantically inverted words are ‘sick’ or ‘bad’. This linguistic manipulation becomes apparent in Dan’s language with his use of *fool*. On numerous occasions, Dan uses the word *fool* to refer to people in general. For example, “I could Joe Pesci a fool” or “cut a fool”. However, in the clinical setting, he uses similar sentence constructions replacing *fool* with terms such as *dude* or *boss*. For example, Dan asked a patient, “How’s the knee looking there, boss?” It would appear *fool* is a more informal way to reference people in conversation; however, using the research of HHNL, it is
clear that *fool* has been used to ‘flip the script’. On questioning Dan about his use of *fool*, he acknowledges the shift in his language. In his account, Dan used *fool* for males and *bitch* for females before his professional career, but noted that each was completely neutral without any negative connotations. Upon entering more professional settings, Dan was encouraged by his wife and boss to use a less contentious term. As Dan explains:

**Excerpt 4:** Dan (2013): It’s negative like ‘dis fool...it’s usually a negative association to it. I used to more be like ‘fool come here and fool this’ it was just like-dude. It was more of a ‘dude’ but now um more being with Cristina, things have changed because I used to use ‘bitch’ as just a reg- for girl all the time and she worked me out of that, too. And that was more from like just not being around classier situations where you need to watch your language better and talk to people more appropriately and stuff. And it was ‘fool’ all the time, and I used to say it all the time more at work. And then Andy caught on to that and so I’d have to, being around patients, I would have to stop doing that. So it was more purely being in a professional setting and not being able to say it and that kind of worked it out of me. And I used to say it more like dude. I used to say ‘fool’ all the time...I have to say, I’ve had to work to use it less. Cuz it used to be more like dude, like this fool would do this or this fool this or this fool that and all the time like fool fool fool and people would be like and I’m like oh sorry I mean, I don’t mean fool in a bad way and I’d have to explain myself and so then I’d stop. I had to stop saying it. And so I just didn’t, it didn’t work back in to my off time AS much. Now it’s just more like ‘dis fool. It’ll come out more negative.

Though Dan may not be aware of the history of semantic inversion or “flippin’ the script”, it has played a role in the speech community in which he participates. This language is often viewed as negative, unprofessional, or obscene to hegemonic speech communities; however, Spears (1998) argues that labeling such language as negative, obscene, or unprofessional is a form of prejudice if context and speaker values are not considered. Therefore, he labels such language as *uncensored speech* and indicates that many speaker communities have neutralized (Spears, 2007) certain words. Like Dan, Spears (2007) identifies *bitch* as a controversial term if it is taken out of context.

...some speakers use *bitch* as a perfectly unremarkable term for ‘female’...In such a case, the word has been neutralized: it no longer carries inherently any negative traits associated with obscenity. Once neutralized in some contexts, so-called obscene expressions may become neutralized in all or almost all the full range of speaking contexts in which members of certain social groups find themselves. In other words, they carry such expressions with them virtually everywhere they go, using them un-selfconsciously and attaching no special significance to them. (Spears, 2007, p. 7)
Similarly, Dan participated in a speech community where the terms *bitch* and *fool* had been semantically inverted and neutralized. Upon entering a more professional setting, Dan was shown the negative associations those words had in SAE and consciously took steps to adjust his speech for his new speech community. Dan notes that *fool* does not occur in his speech as much now that he is aware of its limitations in his professional community. Therefore, the instances where Dan does use *fool* are representative of that awareness in that they are used in more negative contexts.

**Excerpt 5:** Dan (2013): I’ll cut a fool

**Excerpt 6:** Dan (2013): You can Joe Pesci a fool

Excerpt 5 was uttered when Dan was discussing a frustrating patient with a coworker, while Excerpt 6 was uttered when Dan was admiring a self-defense gadget he had just purchased. Excerpt 5 may have been said in frustrating and therefore represents a more negative context, but Excerpt 6 was one where Dan was more excited about gadget. Both incorporate a more violent approach despite the context. This use of the word *fool* to reference violence is representative of Dan’s use of the traditionally, semantically-inverted term to index a ‘street’ or hip hop identity. It could also be representative of his awareness of the differing speech communities and, therefore, establish his identity as a continuum between the two dominant speech communities. This suggests that Dan’s use of HHNL features is indicative of indexing varying degrees of his identity in order to accommodate to his given discourse community.

In discussing his newer professional speech community, Dan described his metalinguistic awareness of shifting language styles around different people and in different contexts. He compared this style-shifting to the ‘hats’ that medical professionals must wear. According to Dan, medical professionals are trained to speak with patients in a way that creates a positive rapport while displaying medical expertise. During medical school, Dan’s professor told his class that medical professionals wear many hats, in one situation they need to wear their “PT” hat and assume authority with their knowledge of physical therapy. In that same situation, they need to wear their “human” hat and convey important medical information to their patients in an understanding and sympathetic way. Dan sees this as similar to the shifting that he does with his brothers. Mostly the ‘hats’ shift based on shared experiences or similar lifestyles, so the language shifting is mostly topical. But on a larger
scale, he describes his style shifting as language used in more “comfortable” environments as opposed to more “professional” environments. While this is a natural tendency for speakers to separate their styles between these two environments, the styles are generally categorized as formal and informal. Dan’s language patterns shift more dramatically to index the different aspects of his identity beyond the distinction of formal and informal registers. His language in his “comfortable” environments is more representative of HHNL while his language in his “professional” environments is more representative of SAE.

In the interview context, Dan demonstrated an acute metalinguistic awareness of the two discourse communities he interacts with. He noted that the HHNL variables were definitely aspects of his language he had consciously “worked out” of his interaction with his professional discourse community, but also described them as “working themselves back in occasionally”. This led him to define the language full of HHNL variables as his “default or comfortable” language and his SAE variety as the one he added on.

**COMFORTABLE LANGUAGE USE AND VARIATION**

It can be argued that while one mode of language is more comfortable for Dan, it is nonetheless a form of performance based on Dan’s metalinguistic awareness (Coupland, 2009; Goffman, 1981). Coupland (2009) argues that, even though language is an ingrained feature of our socialization, the option to use various linguistic resources is ubiquitous. A speaker’s choice to use one feature over the other, no matter how comfortable the feature, is an act of performing via language choice. Therefore, Dan’s comfortable use of HHNL is performative in indexing a more street-conscious identity.

Given the discussion of Dan’s use of ‘fool’ in his interview, any instance of ‘fool’ was marked and analyzed for variables that would reflect HHNL. Because HHNL is derived largely from AAE, there are many cases where the variables overlap; however, I will be referring to any such variables as representative of HHNL based on the previously discussed problematic nature of AAE.

**Excerpt 7**: Dan (2013): Nature don’t want you there, fool!

In Excerpt 7, Dan is using the morphosyntactic HHNL variable of third-person substitution (don’t for doesn’t). This response was to a television show *I Shouldn’t Be Alive* where the featured character had experienced numerous life or death situations in nature.
Given the intensity of the show, it is understandable that Dan would respond to the situation using language reflective of a hip hop identity that has neutralized violence.

The context of the next excerpt is important in understanding Dan’s shift to HHNL. At his clinic, Dan was making light conversation with a middle-aged, white, male businessman and asked him about the brand of his jeans. The patient, using an SAE style, uncomfortably avoided the question causing a noticeably awkward moment between Dan and the patient. After work, Dan was retelling the incident to his wife, Cristina, and laughed at himself for asking such a personal question about another man’s clothes. When describing the conversation, Dan did not use the exact language that the patient had used, but instead styleshifted with a response consistent with HHNL. The utterance in Excerpt 8 is therefore a kind of imaginary reported speech in retelling the incident.

**Excerpt 8**: Dan (2013): Why you lookin’ at my jeans, fool?

In this utterance, Dan exaggerated the patient’s response to the uncomfortable situation with a styleshifted report in HHNL. This report of the patient’s response included copula absence, final g-dropping, and the word *fool*, all of which are representative variables of HHNL. It is important to note that this example shows Dan’s own awareness of style-shifting based on his ability to re-voice other people using a different style to emphasize his own attitude toward the situation (Barrett, 1999).

**Excerpt 9**: Dan (2013): I think that fool’s lyin’.

In Excerpt 9, Dan is again mocking himself while playing a game with his family. His task for that particular round was to identify the player that contributed a certain response. He incorrectly identified one of his brothers who wasn’t playing the game at all. After laughing at himself for making a mistake, he exaggerated the situation using both ‘fool’ and final g dropping.

All three of these situations are representative of Dan’s language in its most comfortable context. In each, he was either making light of an embarrassing situation or he was referencing something violent or intense.

Other instances of HHNL were identified that were not marked by ‘fool’ but were marked by similar contextual situations. Examples can be seen here in Excerpts 10-12.

**Excerpt 10**: Dan (2013): He’ll spit a hot sixteen for yo’ ass

**Excerpt 11**: Dan (2013): I cut yo’ face off. I cut yo’ face!
Excerpt 12: Dan (2013): weak-ass Nissan Sylvia or a weak-ass Ford Focus

In Excerpts 10 and 11, for example, we see the standard post-vocalic r-dropping with your as well as reference to more violent imagery through lexical choices. Excerpt 10 is referencing a hip hop artist, which is further exemplified with Dan’s use of spit for the act of rapping and sixteen to reference the traditional sixteen bars in a rap verse. Collins, Moody, and Postal (2008) and Levine (2010) refer to the -ass in Excerpt 10 as the Ass Camouflage Construction (ACC) where -ass is used as a masked nominal in AAE varieties. For our purposes, we will use Spears’ (1998) description of -ass as it explains the -ass in both Excerpts 10 and 12. Spears (1998) argues that the -ass in Excerpt 10 is a metonymic pseudo-pronoun (MPP) because the anatomical definition of -ass has been extended to the whole person. While it is common to have MPPs in many varieties of English, the -ass is typically seen as more obscene, but has been neutralized in AAE and is therefore more common in both AAE and HHNL. Spears (1998) notes that -ass, such as in Excerpt 12, is similar in that it results in a more “obscene” reference, yet has a different grammatical function. Spears describes these as a special type of compounding he calls -ass Words (AW) or discourse -ass. As a morpheme, the anatomical meaning has been completely erased and is instead used as a discourse marker or a form of an intensifier. In this case, given the context of a racing application on his iPad, Dan’s use of -ass can be seen as an intensifier for the poor racing quality of the two cars mentioned.

Excerpt 13: Dan (2013): James pick it right up and get first place

Excerpt 14: Dan (2013): You ain’t said that! I said that twenty times before

This racing application is also what prompted Excerpt 13 where his brother beat him in the game and Dan shows mock frustration when he explains how long it took him to learn the game, but “James pick it right up...” Here Dan uses the third-person variability and omits the third-person ‘s’ which is also common in HHNL. Excerpt 14 is one of the most interesting contexts where Dan switches his style to HHNL. His brother, Michael, was arguing about creating a particular saying, which bothered Dan and elicited an immediate, frustrated response. This response included the negated auxiliary ‘ain’t’ common to many nonstandard varieties of English as well as an omission of any aspect marker. Dan was not referring to a specific number of times he had used the same phrase, but was instead implying that he had been saying that for awhile.
Another important aspect of Dan’s comfortable language is his range in intonation. In Green’s (2002) description of AAE, she notes the importance of studying prosodic features of AAE due to the ability of speakers to correctly identify a speaker’s race based on whether s/he ‘sounds black’ or ‘sounds white’. Many studies prove the accuracy of this linguistic profiling ability (Baugh, 2000; Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Rickford, 1972), yet researchers are not certain what role intonation or other prosodic features have in determining the judgement of ‘sounding black’. Wolfram and Fasold (1974) argue that intonation “appears to be one of the main reasons why some standard-speaking blacks may be identified ethnically” (p. 147). Tarone (1973) argues that AAE speakers have a wider range of intonation than SAE speakers, while Rickford (1999) specifically identifies the higher-pitch as representative of AAE. Alim (2003) calls this high pitch and wide intonational range the black American falsetto.

In the dialogue below, Dan is playing a game called Things with his family and close friends. The game has various prompts like “Things that are unpredictable”. All players respond to the prompt anonymously. Then, the players take turns guessing which response belongs to each player. This excerpt takes place during Dan’s turn as he attempts to correctly identify the respondents. The topic for this round is: Things not to do in a bathtub.

**Excerpt 15: Dan and Family (2013):**

2 There is (. ) trust a fart. Put hydrochloric acid (. ) Don’t cook toast
3 (. ) Burn bodies with acid (. ) and shit.
4 James: Alright
5 Michael: You guys are sick twisted people =I want you all to know this=
6 Dan: =So (. ) put hydrochloric acid is James
7 James: ((nods))
8 Cristina: =You’re all related!
9 Michael: You’re all related, so you’re all sick people.
10 Dan: And uh. Burn bodies with acid is =Nicole
11 Nicole: ((nods))
12 Cristina (to Dan): =Waitwaitwait What was the first
13 one?
14 Dan: James was- Put hydrochloric acid is James. Burn bodies with acid
15 is Nicole=
16 Cristina: =Wait you can’t guess them all.
17 Dan: Yeah ↑huh I go first
18 Cristina: You only ↑guessed the first one
19 Dan: And ↑I got it right!
20 Cristina: Oh you said yes? Oh.
21 Dan: God↑dammit I know how ta play!
22 Cristina (to James): I didn’t know you said yes ((laughing))
23 James: Yeah, sorry yayaya I was waiting, but I said yeah.
24 Michael (to Dan): God damn! Way to get on her ass about it!
25 James (to Cristina): I waited. Yeahyeahyeah he got it right =he got it right.
26 Dan: =I was ↑on a roll. I was
27 tryin’ ta get in ↑ma zone.
28 James (to Dan): She’s messin’ ↑you up.
29 Dan (to Nicole): So did I get it right?
30 Nicole: Yeah.
31 Dan (to Michael): We just watched Breaking Bad.

In this excerpt, we can see that as conflict arises about Dan’s turn, his use of the falsetto pitch increases as marked by the ↑ (Jefferson, 2004). Figures 1-3 show the pitch differences between Dan stating his answers and Dan defending his turn.

Figure 1. Line 6 - “Put hydrochloric acid is James”.

These figures show that when contested, Dan’s pitch shows much greater flexibility than when he was simply identifying the respondents. They also indicate a tendency to use rising intonation, which is commonly reserved for questions in SAE, but is a common feature in AAE for all sentence types (Green, 2002). Tarone (1973) argues that “the wider pitch range may be directly traceable to the competitive nature of the black speech events” and that “the element of aggressiveness and competitiveness was reflected in a wider range of
Figure 2. Line 19 - “And ↑I got it right!”.

Figure 3. Line 21 - “God↑dammit I know how ta play!”.
intonation‖ (p. 32). This shows that variables associated with HHNL may be exaggerated more when Dan is dealing with a competitive speech event such as defending himself in a game. Prosody, such as stress, intonation, or rhythm, are representative of features of AAE that are more intuitively recognized. Many studies have been conducted proving the ability of people to determine a speaker’s race based on ‘sounding black’ or ‘sounding white’ (Labov et al., 1968; Rickford, 1972). This raises questions about what features indicate a speaker’s race. Green (2002) argues that prosodic features of AAE, such as pitch and intonation, are important for the notion of ‘sounding black’, suggesting that Dan’s shift in pitch in different contexts during the game reflect styleshifting between HHNL and SAE.

**PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE USE AND VARIATION**

It is important to note that while Dan demonstrated clear styleshifting between HHNL and SAE at work and at home, each variety of English had a spectrum of formality and informality as well. In his interview, Dan described the training he went through in earning his doctorate on how to communicate to patients. He explained that given the fact that the average reading level for Americans is a fourth grade reading level, aspiring doctors are taught to initiate conversations at that level to avoid assuming knowledge the patient may not have. After interacting with the patient for some time, Dan then adjusts his language to meet the level of his patient. Therefore, there is a good deal of fluctuation in formality when he deals with his patients. Additionally, patients that meet with him often are also much more informal in discussing their treatment, so Dan reacts with informality as well as seen in the following examples:

**Excerpt 16:** Dan (2013): We’re just kinda focusin’ on getting back that range of motion. It was creakin’ right about here.

**Excerpt 17:** Dan (2013): There is lactic acid build up from just workin’, workin’, workin’. So we’re just gonna pump that out and send you on your way.

In Excerpts 16 and 17, Dan uses final g’ dropping and other informal markers in his speech as he works with a patient he has seen for quite awhile. This shows that in this speech community, Dan demonstrates informality with SAE, but does not styleshift into HHNL.

**Excerpt 18:** Dan (2013): We went from 75 degrees of external rotation at 90 degrees abduction to 95 degrees.

**Excerpt 19:** Dan (2013): If those are also stiff, that will result in the tightness here...we’ve been freeing it up here and here. Now we’re working on here.
In Excerpts 18 and 19, however, he is much more formal and technical, especially in choosing not to use final g’ dropping in Excerpt 19. Here Dan is manipulating this particular variable for formality purposes and not HHN identity purposes. The differing degrees of formality within Dan’s use of SAE in his professional speech community is significant because it demonstrates the distinction between SAE and HHNL between Dan’s two speech communities. That is not to say that he never indexes a more HHN identity at work, though. In explaining my research project to one patient with whom Dan felt more comfortable, he told his patient that at home, he “lets his inna’ street out”. This use of both the black falsetto and post syllabic r-dropping indicates the exaggeration of his HHN identity given the context of the utterance.

Similarly, being the oldest brother of five, Dan uses a lot of SAE in what I call his ‘teaching voice’ when interacting with his brothers. In certain contexts (playing a game, reacting to a television show, etc.), Dan uses a much more ‘comfortable’ HHNL variety of English. However, in discussing instructions, anatomy related topics, or getting a job, Dan is careful to use SAE almost hypercorrectly. At one point, Dan corrected his brother’s use of ‘octopusses’ with ‘octopi’. Here, he is focusing on the on the hegemonic norms of SAE to make a point about language. He even explicitly corrected one brother’s use of the double negative giving the prescriptive explanation that two negatives make a positive. When asked about his choice to correct his brother, he acknowledged that he wants to teach his brothers about the language necessary for an interview. Despite Dan’s obvious use of HHNL variables, he often validates the hegemonic norms of prioritizing SAE.
CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS

OVERVIEW

As discussed previously, linguistic variation occurs as speakers move between given speech communities (Cameron, 1997; Eckert, 1996; Labov, 1990) and index different aspects of their identity. This study serves to analyze the contexts in which one particular speaker styleshifts using specific linguistic forms to associate with two different identity categories: that of a successful physical therapist in the ‘society of the educated and elite’ and that of a ‘street-conscious’ individual connecting with his brothers and other members of the hip hop community. As we saw in the context of his physical therapy facility, Dan was able to employ Standard American English (SAE) variables in order to establish his credibility as a physical therapist. However, his language ranged from informal SAE to formal SAE with few cases of styleshifting into Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL). This is representative of Dan’s ability to maintain credibility and authority as a professional while also building rapport with his patients by accommodating his language to a given audience. Similarly, at home Dan’s language use exhibited considerable linguistic variation depending on the relationships he had with his different brothers and on their roles in the family. His self-described ‘comfortable’ style was observed with increased HHNL variables during interaction with his brothers, but Dan easily switched into his ‘professional’ style by employing SAE variables and knowledge in certain situations with his brothers. Both aspects of his identity could be associated with Anderson’s (1991) concept of the imagined speech community as they are both manifested ideas to which Dan subscribes instead of identity constructions.

Dan’s metalinguistic awareness is extremely important in analyzing his ability to manipulate his language in different contexts. Dan acknowledges his different styles in speaking and identifies his tendency to layer SAE together with HHNL. The fact that he notes that HHNL variables sometimes “work themselves back into [his] speech” shows that Dan may not be crossing into an African-American speech community as other studies have
shown speakers to do (Bucholtz, 1999; Cutler, 1999), but rather crossing into a SAE speech community. His flexibility with SAE and HHNL give him a unique position from which he can build rapport across racial, socioeconomic, and professional boundaries.

Dan’s discussion of the recent changes in the hip hop community is also important in discussing his own view of HHNL. His use of HHNL relates to others with a ‘street conscious’ identity, but is not political in that he is not actively subverting hegemony as previous hip hop communities intended to do. He argues that there is still a form of rebellion among hip hop artists and music, but that the overall message has become more concerned with material wealth may represent the context in which he styleshifts. Dan’s use and description of fool is clearly a pattern symbolic of semantic inversion (Smalls, 2010) or “flippin’ the script” (Smitherman, 1997) though he does not seem to share the original sentiment of subverting hegemonic values via such inversion. Therefore, his use of fool has been consciously reallocated to more negative or aggressive situations, thus re-inverting the meaning of fool in order to operate in both speech communities.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

Recently, the Seattle Seahawks corner Richard Sherman was called a thug more than 625 times in popular media for an emotionally charged outburst after a football game in January 2014 (Wilson, 2014), but responded in a way that challenged the notion of language and race:

> The reason it bothers me is because it seems like it's an accepted way of calling somebody the N-word now. It's like everybody else said the N-word and then they say 'thug' and that's fine. It kind of takes me aback and it's kind of disappointing because they know...Just because you hear Compton (Calif.), you hear Watts, you hear cities like that, you just think 'thug, he's a gangster, he's this, that, and the other,' and then you hear Stanford, and they're like, 'oh man, that doesn't even make sense, that's an oxymoron.'

Sherman’s rant and competitive style in football paired with his background of living in Compton is enough for the American audience to stereotype his identity as ‘thug’ despite his education and success. He calls his two conflicting identities an ‘oxymoron’ to the general public. Nonstandard varieties of English such as HHNL or AAE are indicative of a range of identities in the United States yet are consistently stereotyped to this hyper-stigmatized notion of ‘thug’. Given the perception of a ‘thug’ identity in the media and the
general population, Dan’s rejection of the Hip Hop label is understandable, despite his use of HHNL.

Alim and Smitherman (2012) recently unpacked a similar construct of linguistic misunderstanding in their book *Articulate while Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.* where they argue that using the word *articulate* to describe the communication skills of our current president is in fact perpetuating the notion that AAE or HHNL is inferior to SAE. In a nation where racism and classism are guised under linguistic intolerance, it is necessary that we take a closer look at the validity of nonstandard varieties of English and give value to their role in the U.S. The ability to styleshift between HHNL and SAE is still a privileged ability based on membership in hegemonic discourse communities based on education and prescribed grammar ‘rules’. As Dan described, he did not begin appropriating SAE variables in his speech until he began operating in more professional situations due to his education and career choice. Bourdieu (2003) argues that in the linguistic market, standard styles or dialects have more linguistic capital than nonstandard dialects. While it is recognized that SAE is more appropriate for professional situations, the public reaction to the use of SAE by those deemed ‘nonstandard’ is further perpetuating the subordination of other varieties of English. While there has been a good deal of research on the HHNL community as a whole, this study serves to examine the success in styleshifting between HHNL and SAE of one individual and opens the conversation for the positive role nonstandard varieties of English such as HHNL have in identity construction and speech community membership.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SOCIOLINGUISTIC INTERVIEW MATERIALS
Sociolinguistic Interview Materials

The subject will be asked to read the following. There are one fictional reading passage, one improvisational passage, one non-fiction reading passage, and five lists of words. Finally, the subject will participate in a sociolinguistic interview.

Fictional Reading Passage:

DANNY THE DOLPHIN, pt. 1

Once there was a young dolphin named Danny, who lived in a cove along the California coast with his aunt Helen and his uncle Aaron. Danny, Helen, and Aaron shared the cove with a family of eels and a commune of bats. One of the bats, Jaime, was Danny’s best friend. Most of the bats were either too young or too old to hang out with Danny and Jaime, except for one angry big-mouth rat named Dawn.

Nobody really liked Dawn because she could never make up her mind. Whenever Danny or Jaime asked her if she would like to go out for a swim with them, she would only answer that she “didn’t know”. She said neither "yes" nor "no". She would always shirk when it came to making a choice.

One day Danny got tired of Dawn’s indecision and told her that no one was going to like her if she carried on like this. Danny told her that she had no more mind than a blade of sea-grass.

One rainy day, the bats heard a great noise along the shore. The limestone walls lining the cove were getting old, so that the cove was rather unsafe. During a small quake, the walls started to crumble and Danny and Jaime knew the end was near. The cove walls shook and all the bats' hair stood on end with fear and horror. Jamie, the captain of the bats, decided this wouldn’t do and he sent out scouts to search for a new home.

Within five hours the ten scouts came back with good news. Jaime flew down to tell everybody that the scouts had found an abandoned stone boat house by a bay where there would be room and board for everyone. There was also a kindly shark named Nelly, and a horse nearby in a garden with a lime tree.

The bats flew down from the cove to direct the move; but Jaime put Danny in charge of directing the water animals. Everyone came out of their little houses and tide pools and pulled into a long line. Just when they were about finished lining up, Danny saw Dawn paddling around a puddle. He coarsely ordered her to stop and, of course, asked if she was coming.

Dawn told Danny that she wasn’t certain. She told him that she was undaunted because no one really knew if the cove walls might come down yet or not.
Danny couldn’t wait for Dawn to join them, so he made an about face and just swam everyone else off, leaving Dawn behind.

Dawn stood and watched them hurry away. She thought to herself that she might go tomorrow, or maybe not. She didn’t know; it was so nice and snug there in the cove.

That night there was a big crash. In the morning some fishermen—with some boys and girls—rowed up and looked at the cove. One of them moved a small boulder and he saw a young big-mouthed rat, quite dead, half in and half out of a hole in the rock. Thus the shirker got her due.

Improvisational Passage:

**DANNY THE DOLPHIN, pt. 2**

Hey, my name’s _____ and I’m gonna tell you a story about why Southern Californians don’t shirk on making a choice.

Once, there was a young dolphin named Danny, who lived in a cove along the Southern California coast with…

[tell about aunt Helen, Aaron, Jaime the Bat, and Dawn the big-mouth Rat]

Nobody really liked Dawn because…

[tell about why nobody liked Dawn; 
tell about Dawn shirking on making a choice]

One day Danny got tired of Dawn’s indecision and he said to her…

[tell what Danny said to Dawn]

One rainy day, the bats heard a great noise along the shore…

[tell about the storm and the unsafe cove; 
tell how Jaime sent scouts to look for a new home]

Within five hours the ten scouts came back with good news. Jaime flew down to tell everybody. Jaime said…

[tell what Jaime said about the place the scouts found; 
tell about the kindly shark, the horse, the lime tree, etc.]

The bats flew down and started to directed the move…

[tell how the move went; 
tell what happened when Danny saw Dawn]

"I'm not certain," said Dawn, undaunted. "The cove walls might not come down yet."

"Well," he said…

[tell what Danny said to Dawn;]
tell what happened next;
tell what Dawn said as she saw Danny and the others leaving]

Later they found out…
[tell what Danny and Jaime found out;
tell about who discovered the boulders;
tell what happened to Dawn]

Thus the shirker got her due. And that’s why Southern Californians don’t shirk when it comes time to make a choice.

Non-fictional Reading Passage:

THE RAINBOW PASSAGE
When the sunlight strikes raindrops in the air, they act as a prism and form a rainbow. The rainbow is a division of white light into many beautiful colors. These take the shape of a long round arch, with its path high above, and its two ends apparently beyond the horizon. There is, according to legend, a boiling pot of gold at one end. People look, but no one ever finds it. When a man looks for something beyond his reach, his friends say he is looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Throughout the centuries people have explained the rainbow in various ways. Some have accepted it as a miracle without physical explanation. To the Hebrews it was a token that there would be no more universal floods. The Greeks used to imagine that it was a sign from the gods to foretell war or heavy rain. The Norsemen considered the rainbow as a bridge over which the gods passed from earth to their home in the sky. Others have tried to explain the phenomenon physically. Aristotle thought that the rainbow was caused by reflection of the sun's rays by the rain. Since then physicists have found that it is not reflection, but refraction by the raindrops which causes the rainbows. Many complicated ideas about the rainbow have been formed. The difference in the rainbow depends considerably upon the size of the drops, and the width of the colored band increases as the size of the drops increases. The actual primary rainbow observed is said to be the effect of super-imposition of a number of bows. If the red of the second bow falls upon the green of the first, the result is to give a bow with an abnormally wide yellow band, since red and green light when mixed form yellow. This is a very common type of bow, one showing mainly red and yellow, with little or no green or blue.
Word Lists:

PRACTICE GROUP
heed, hid, hayed, head, had, hod, hawed, Hode, hood, who'd, hud, heard, hide, how’d, Hoyt, hewed

beat, bit, bait, bet, bat, bot, bought, boat, put, boot, butt, Bert, bite, bout, Boyd, butte

GROUP ONE

steal, rye, pull, bomb, district, ant, heed, bet, pin, diet, tan, caught, for, yesterday

Dawn, coarse, pill, wide, duel, psalms, hod, boot, pet, kin, fine, next, cigar, Jesus

humble, caller, hud, bought, den, tight, bid, hock, fell, wolf, street, rice, alphabet, bother

Ted, Kyle, stalk, cord, sighed, jail, hewed, bite, can, fold, stroller, lie, insurance, do, father

heed, hod, hud, hewed, hid, heard, hawed, hide, hayed, Hode, hood, how’d, Hoyt, had, who’d, head

bet, bought, boot, bite, bot, put, bait, butte, Boyd, Bert, bat, bit, beat, boat, butt, bout

GROUP TWO

still, ride, cold, almost, tid, aunt, white, hid, bot, pan, strict, cot, four, dew, maniac

wrought, sight, heel, hawed, bait, pat, old, high, just, huge, bad, Sean, pool, simple

horrible, my, fail, palm, heard, put, lied, hawk, did, straight, Ben, Detroit, mile, get, jungle
there, mice, hide, butte, ked, mull, guy, tin, cock, strings, card, hell, police, cow, moo

had, heed, hood, hide, hid, hod, who’d, how’d, hayed, hawed, hud, Hoyt, head, hewed, heard, Hode

beat, bat, put, bite, bit, bot, boot, bout, bait, bought, but, Boyd, bet, boat, butte, Bert

GROUP THREE

photography, right, pen, hayed, bit, almond, tad, bought, lice, hoarse, sell, due, mule, donkey

Dan, Boyd, Hode, stock, fore, while, they’re, hill, Ken, sight, told, restriction, gizmo, Monday, shell

Bert, tie, stale, immigrant, sign, sawed, torpedo, hail, d.v.d, hood, full, stroke, dead, monkey

kid, mine, how’d, bat, record, stranded, bed, calm, Don, feed, light, collar, feel, hide, fishing

head, hawed, who’d, hide, hayed, hod, hood, hewed, hid, had, heard, Hoyt, Hode, hud, how’d, heed

bait, bot, put, butte, bit, bat, Bert, Boyd, beat, boat, butt, bout, bet, bought, boot, bite

GROUP FOUR

Shawn, horse, peel, tied, stroking, pin, guitar, Wednesday, had, beat, nice, jinx, ten, Sunday

dull, who'd, why, folk, stress, mew, boat, fight, din, sod, horde, sale, height, ban, gun

cad, Hoyt, robot, sigh, butt, their, caulk, Tuesday, fill, t.v., gel, file, dance, balm, exciting
Interview Flowchart:

**Basic Questions:**

- How old are you?
- What is your gender?
- What is your sexuality?
- What is your race?
- What is your ethnicity?

**Growing Up:**

- Where are you from originally?
- How long did you live there?
- Where are your parents from originally?
- Where did you go to high school?
- What car did you drive in high school?
- Did you work while you were in high school?
- What did you do for fun in small town Loomis?

**College:**

- After high school, did you attend college right away?
- Where did you attend college? BA, MA, DPT
What was your area of study? Did you have any other academic interests or shifts in disciplines?

What did you do in your spare time in the Bay Area?

Did you work while you were in college?

Did you drive in college or take the BART mostly?

What kind of car did you drive?

Employment:

What do you drive now?

Where do you work now?

How long have you been working at your current job?

What is your ideal job?

What do you do in your spare time now?

California:

Do you think you could ever leave California?

Would you ever leave the Bay Area? Why or why not?

Would you ever venture into SoCal?

Where do you think the division is between NorCal and SoCal?

Is there a Central Cal?

Do you think the people are different in NorCal or SoCal?

Language (Identity, Class, and Race Issues):

So, as you know, I am studying language variation. The theory is that language is used almost on purpose - maybe subconsciously - in order to highlight certain aspects of your identity.
Do you agree?

When I first asked you about doing this project, you said you felt like you wore so many different hats? What do you mean? What hats?

What factors do you think influence these different ‘hats’? Personal Relationship? Educational level? Social class? Explain your definition of class?

Do you notice your language shifting when you talk to different people?

How would you describe those shifts?
APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
Transcription conventions were adapted from Jefferson (2004).

[ Overlapping utterances
= Contiguous utterances
: Extension of sound or syllable
(..) Untimed pause
(( )) Contextual information
dash- Cut-off word
... Deleted words
↑ Shift into especially high pitch