

Ethnolect, dialect, and linguistic repertoire in New York City

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Introduction

One way to conceptualize the ethnolect is to look beyond the fixed category when considering the role of ethnicity in speaker production. This paper adopts a linguistic repertoire approach (Gumperz 1964, Benor 2010) to investigate the identity construction of one speaker who utilizes a diverse set of linguistic resources on the Lower East Side of New York City. Highlighting features that are commonly bounded as ethnolectal (copula absence as a feature of African American English (AAE)), dialectal (BOUGHT-raising as a feature of New York City English (NYCE)), or potentially either (non-rhoticity in the syllable coda, a feature associate with both AAE and NYCE) demonstrates the limitations of bounded categories like ethnolect and dialect in capturing the complexities of speaker practice.

The traditional sociolinguistic approach to descriptions of African American speakers in New York City (c.f. Labov 1972a) and elsewhere in North America has been either to consider them primarily as speakers of an ethnolect (AAE), or to investigate the extent to which they assimilate to the local white norm (NYCE). A linguistic repertoire approach, in contrast, does not take a position on a speaker's underlying linguistic variety, but allows for more fluidity between bounded –lects. The present analysis draws heavily from Benor's (2010) notion of the ethnolinguistic repertoire, and expands on this approach by looking at how a speaker constructs not only ethnic identity but other aspects of a multivalent identity (Mendoza Denton 2002). Two aspects of speaker identity – ethnicity and locality – are highlighted here to demonstrate how a repertoire approach can reinforce efforts towards a more nuanced analysis of ethnolects and dialects in sociolinguistic research (Yeager-Dror and Thomas 2010).

Ethnolects and Dialects

The term ethnolect in North American sociolinguistics has traditionally been used to describe the English of ethnic immigrant groups from non-English speaking locales. Linguistically, the ethnolect is marked by substrate influence from the L1, a result of the transition from bilingualism to English monolingualism (Clyne 2008). Yet increasingly common is a broader application of the term ethnolect to describe linguistic differences that are believed to reflect ethnic group affiliation, or conversely to describe speakers from marked ethnic backgrounds and their linguistic difference. This

practice has led to *a priori* groupings of certain individuals as speakers of an ethnolect, with some scholars questioning why, for these speakers, ethnicity trumps other aspects of speaker identity and practice and comes to stand as the central explanation for linguistic difference (Jaspers 2008, Quist 2008, Benor 2010). This practice is evident, for example, in the labels we use for certain sociolinguistic varieties in the U.S., like African American English. Despite acknowledging that not all speakers who are African American use this variety, and that speakers who have other ethnic identities do use features from this variety, linguists rarely encounter a speaker who is African American without approaching that speaker as a speaker of AAE, so that analysis proceeds from a baseline of the ethnolect.

The conceptualization of the ethnolect as uniform, both linguistically and socioculturally, is further problematic in perpetuating an ideological contrast between marked ethnic speakers and their unmarked counterparts, or what Fishman (1997) describes as “rigid boundary distinctions between that which is ethnic and that which is not ethnic” (342). Many scholars note that a supra-ethnic category of whiteness is a socially valued identity category, one that is privileged and unmarked (Bucholtz 1999; Cutler 2008; Fought 2006). One impact of this hegemony of whiteness is a white/non-white binary where individuals or groups who do not fit into the supra-white category are analyzed in opposition to it. The reification of ethnolectal distinction can be seen as the linguistic manifestation of a white/non-white opposition, so that it is the linguistic productions of the non-white, marked groups that are described as ethnolects (Jaspers 2008). With respect to unmarked white speakers, ethnicity is erased (Gal and Irvine 2000) because it is normative. White varieties are then fixed into a different kind of –lect: a regional dialect.

From the perspective of ethnicity, then, both ethnolects and dialects are fixed ways that researchers group speakers according to ethnic group membership. Yet the unmarked and normative status of white speakers in North America means that we rarely talk of regional dialects as white ethnolects. And further, in marginalizing non-white speakers in large speech communities like urban cities as ethnolectal, we necessarily privilege the white, regional dialect speakers in our understanding of regional (and therefore sociolinguistic) diversity. As Eckert (2008a) notes:

“...the designation “ethnolect” can be part of a more insidious practice. In the dominant discourse of American dialectology, the white Anglo variety is considered a regional dialect, while African American and Latino varieties are considered ethnic dialects...the dichotomy between regional and ethnic varieties and the lack of attention to regional varieties of African American and Latino

speech underscores a deterritorializing discourse of subordinated racial groups” (27).

New York City is one locale where previous studies have utilized the ethnolect/dialect opposition. The city’s place in the popular imagination as an immigrant melting pot (Zangwill 1909) was represented in early dialectological work (Babbit 1896); despite considerable sociohistorical evidence that immigrant groups did in fact distinguish themselves along national and ethnic lines, the dominant view of NYCE that emerged in the first half of the 20th century was one of assimilation. As Becker and Coggshall (2009) argue, researchers reinforced two kinds of erasure. First was the erasure of distinct white ethnic groups and their language use (in line with the hegemony of whiteness). These groups, made up of speakers from the first (pre-1880 Irish and German) and second waves (post-1880, including Italians, Russians, and Eastern European Jews) of immigration to New York City, were believed to flatten linguistically within the classic three-generation model, with the result being a homogenous NYCE (a socially stratified speech community) made up of “white” speakers. The second concomitant erasure was that of any speakers from non-white ethnic groups, who were not considered in descriptions of NYCE (Becker and Coggshall 2009: 755-6).

Labov (1966) does consider the role of ethnicity in the production of NYCE variables. His Lower East Side sample is stratified to reflect the community’s ethnic sub-groupings, which he notes are primarily of European stock (Eastern European Jewish, Italian, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and Irish), but also African American, Puerto Rican, and Chinese (the latter two groups are primarily excluded from his sample due to a lack of LI English native speakers in these more recent immigrant groups). He initially grouped the sample into four “ethnic” groups – Negro, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant (110) – and later considers Italian speakers as a fifth category. In that study, Jewish Lower East Siders were found to produce significantly higher BOUGHT vowels than Italian residents, while Italians produced higher /æ/s for the tense set of the NYCE short-*a* split than their Jewish counterparts. Despite these important results for ethnic group membership and vowel production, the seminal analyses from the work – findings of social stratification in the community according to socioeconomic status and contextual style – collapse Jewish and Italians with other white Lower East Siders (Labov 1972b). This kind of collapse of speakers into a supra-ethnic white group has remained common in contemporary sociolinguistic dialectology, as is the exclusion of non-white speakers from dialectological sampling (see Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006).

In sum, regional dialects like NYCE in North American dialectology are often operationalized as if they are white ethnolects, such that much work in sociolinguistic dialectology investigates either the dominant regional dialect (and samples speakers of European descent) or some group of speakers

presumed to speak an ethnolect, but rarely both at the same time. Labov has motivated this distinction in saying: "the speech communities in most northern cities are in fact two distinct communities: one white, one nonwhite" (1994: 54).

In what follows, I analyze one speaker drawn from a longitudinal community study, ethnography, and oral history project conducted on the Lower East Side of Manhattan from 2006-2009 (Becker 2010). Lisa is a born and raised resident of the Lower East Side who was aged 29 at the time of our interview. She is African American and a member of the middle class – she has a college degree and works as a housing advocate at a local non-profit. Here I consider the ways that Lisa crosses the boundaries of ethnolect and dialect, non-white and white, in her use of a varied linguistic repertoire.

Lisa as multivalent speaker

Excerpt 1:

- 1 K: So what's your ancestry? Do you have Caribbean roots? African American?
2 L: I hate to use those boxes and squares if we have to.
3 K: I'm curious because I did another project in the Bronx, and it was really interesting because everybody
4 was really mixed. One grandmother was from Jamaica, and the other grandmother was from Atlanta,
5 so everybody had these really interesting histories.
6 L: No. Both of my parents were – I hate to say that word "African American." I'd like to call everybody
7 "brown." Different shades of brown...Everybody's brown. Everybody's got some different color, but
8 it's brown. It's tinted. I like that way better because it just blurs. So I'm just saying it for the purpose
9 of the interview. But, usually I say I'm brown. I'm a brown person.

Lisa's own words provide an entrypoint into the fluidity of her identity. While (begrudgingly) acknowledging that both of her parents are African American, she critiques the term as too limiting and notes that she prefers to think of herself and others as "different shades of brown," so that people around her form one, "tinted" group. This emic perspective on ethnicity as fluid suggests that an analysis which categorizes her first and foremost as an AAE speaker may be insufficient in capturing her own presentation of self. In what follows, a presentation of Lisa's use of resources from her linguistic repertoire also demonstrates that an ethnolectal analysis is insufficient to account for her patterns of linguistic production. Three linguistic variables – copula absence, raised BOUGHT, and non-rhoticity in the syllable coda – demonstrate the utility of a repertoire approach and the analytic limitations of the concepts 'ethnolect' and 'dialect.'

Lisa and the ethnolect

The ethnolect/dialect opposition does more than divide speakers into non-white and white for sociolinguistic analysis. It further assumes that speakers do not cross these lines – or if they do, this is something of note and to be named, like the phenomenon of *crossing* (Rampton 1995). Nowhere has this assumption held more sway than in research on AAE. An early focus on identifying the unique structural features common to communities of AAE speakers across mainly northern U.S. Cities (Labov 1966, Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Labov 1972a) led to a wide-scale assumption that African American speakers do not produce features of regional dialects. In some cases there was evidence that African Americans in U.S. cities were not, in fact, producing regional dialect features (see for example Labov 1966). More common has been to assume this and to exclude African Americans and other non-whites from dialectological samples (unless we are looking specifically at an ethnolect in a locale, or investigating the extent to which non-white speakers assimilate to local white norms in a locale). A concomitant effect of this assumption for AAE is the supra-regional myth (Wolfram 2007) that African American speech does not differ regionally. Both assumptions lead to the same perspective on African American speakers – that they are speakers of an ethnolect. Despite a recent move in the literature towards investigations of regionality in African American speech (Yeager-Dror and Thomas 2010, see also the citations in Wolfram 2007), I would argue that African Americans' ethnic identity still trumps other considerations, so that we continue to struggle with crossing the ethnolect/dialect divide, or at best end up talking about convergence between or divergence from these two fixed -lects.

An ethnolectal approach to Lisa would reveal many core features of AAE. Phonologically, she produces monophthongal /ai/ in voiced contexts, various vowel mergers before nasals and liquids, and high rates of consonant cluster reduction, among other features. This is in line with the findings of Coggshall and Becker (2010) who found that African Americans from the Bronx produced phonological features of AAE like /ai/ monophthongization. At the morphosyntactic level, Lisa utilizes paradigm leveling, habitual *be*, remote past *been*, and copula absence. This last feature I look at in some detail.

Copula absence is a hallmark feature in studies of AAE (Rickford et al. 1991; Blake 1997; Rickford 1999) and one that has not been documented in other varieties of North American English. As such, researchers interested in describing AAE as a distinct variety use copula deletion as a diagnostic of

ethnolectal behavior. Here, Lisa's rate of copula deletion across an 80-minute interview is 20%¹. The following passage illustrates Lisa's use of copula absence using the standard notation of "count" [C] forms along with "don't count" [DC] forms. Instances of copula absence are underlined.

Excerpt 2:

- 1 K: What about you? Do you see yourself staying?
2 L: Yeah. I'm [DC] proud of my neighborhood. I'm [DC] proud to be from here. I could go to the depths
3 of some crazy mountain in Africa, I could go to some random capricious mountain in fucking
4 Australia. If I say, "Manhattan," or "New York," People know where I live at. They've heard about
5 me. They've heard about my neighborhood.
6 K: So what's your identity? Is it Manhattan? Or is it Lower East Side?
7 L: It depends on where I'm [DC] at. It is [DC] so funny, so if I'm [DC] in, I know this because I do this
8 work nationally. So on the national level, sometimes some people from New York, upstate, and
9 they all bragging [C] about they from New York [C]. I'm [DC] like, "Eh, Yeah we all from
10 New York [C]. I'm [DC] from New York City." But then if we farther away [C], like if I'm [DC]
11 in Panama, South America, and somebody's [C] from New York, now we really together [C]. Like,
12 "Yeah, we from New York [C]. He's from Syracuse [C], I'm [DC] from New York City, but we're
13 from New York [C]."
K: You're together.
14 L: Yeah, we're together [C]. This is New York [C]. So, I'm [DC] a Lower East Sider. Always. I'm [DC] a
15 Lower East Sider til I die-er.

The instances of copula absence in this narrative (n = 6) account for a high percentage of Lisa's total copula absence (n = 41) across her 80-minute interview. Yet the presence of the feature in this narrative does not point to an ethnolectal description, nor even to an ethnolinguistic repertoire, where features from ethnic varieties are deployed in the construction of ethnic aspects of identity. Instead, a sense of the range of indexical meanings (Eckert 2008b) for a feature like copula absence may point to meanings or stances that are not linked to the construction of ethnicity, but to other social meanings. In Excerpt 2, Lisa clearly discusses her New York identity, a social grouping where ethnicity is not apparently salient. She recounts teasing upstate New Yorkers for claiming a New York City identity when traveling, saying "they all Ø bragging about they Ø from New York," then goes on to express a stance of solidarity with these individuals, saying "But then if we Ø farther away,

¹ This rate was calculated using the Straight Deletion formula from Rickford et al. (1991), which is (Deletions)/(Full Forms + Contractions + Deletions). "Don't count" forms were excluded following Blake (1997).

like if I'm in Panama, South America, and somebody's from New York, now we Ø really together.” Presumably, some aspect of her identity tied to her socioeconomic background (Lisa was raised working class in a Lower East Side housing project, yet has a college education and works as a housing activist) is also at play in her affiliation with other New Yorkers who travel outside of the area and even the country.

Lisa uses an AAE feature from her repertoire to highlight her locality and to adopt a stance of solidarity with other New Yorkers. The usual mapping of ethnolect feature to ethnic identity does not hold in this example, nor should we assume it will hold in others. Copula absence, drawn from a broader linguistic repertoire that includes resources from AAE, can be deployed by Lisa in the construction of a place identity (Becker 2009).

Lisa and the dialect

Recent work in New York City has found that African Americans do in fact produce features of NYCE, contrary to the findings in Labov (1966) and to the broader supraregional myth (Wolfram 2007). Both Coggsall and Becker (2010) and Becker (2010) found that African Americans produce a raised and ingliding BOUGHT vowel, a feature long studied in NYCE (Babbitt 1896; Hubbell 1950; Labov 1966; Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006). Raised BOUGHT is part of a larger set of long and ingliding vowels in NYCE, shown in Figure 1. Continued non-rhoticity in NYCE accounts for the maintenance of this large system, so that mid and high vowels in non-rhotic contexts are also long and ingliding. A wide-scale merger of the ingliding vowels in NYCE was reported in Labov (1966), in which tense /æ:/ and BOUGHT raise in parallel along the periphery of the vowel track to merge with non-rhotic BARE and BEER (for /æ:/) and BORE and BOOR (for BOUGHT). Labov reported that these mergers were complete for his young working- and lower middle-class speakers in casual speech; he further categorized raised BOUGHT as a change in progress, predicting raising to continue in NYCE.

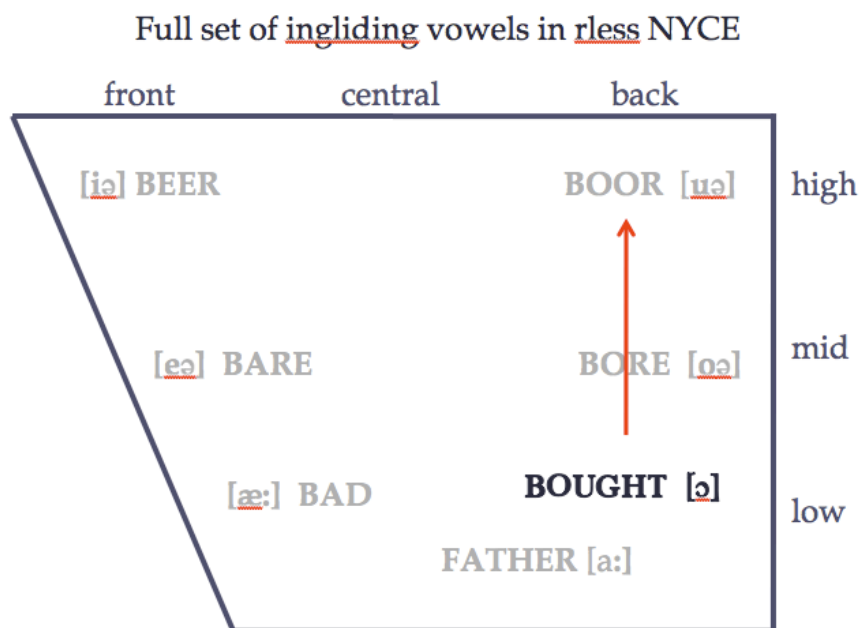


Figure 1. The long and ingliding vowels in NYCE

Becker (2010) considered an ethnically diverse sample of Lower East Siders and their productions of BOUGHT. Results showed that, in fact, not only do African American Lower East Siders produce raised BOUGHT, they are the only ethnic group to maintain its usage in apparent time. Although Labov (1966) reported a change in progress for raised BOUGHT in the direction of increased usage of this feature in NYCE, a reversal of that change is evident for the 64 speakers in Becker (2010). Further, gross ethnic group categorizations (utilized for statistical analysis and based on speaker self-identification and dominant census groups for the area: African American, Chinese, Puerto Rican, and white) impact BOUGHT height. A mixed-effects model fit to the F1 of the nucleus of BOUGHT selects the interaction of year of birth and ethnicity as the only social predictor of F1. The overall picture for BOUGHT is one of a reversal of the change in progress from Labov (1966), so that BOUGHT is now lowering in apparent time, as seen in Figure 2.

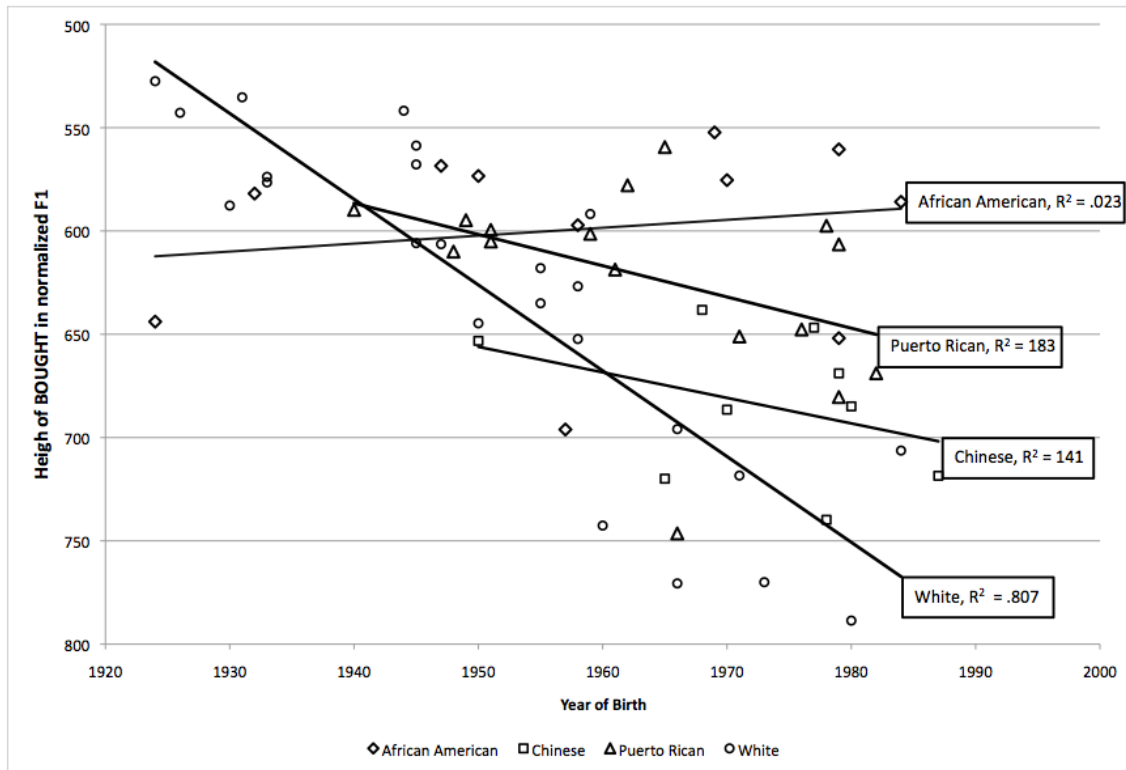


Figure 2. BOUGHT-lowering in apparent time, from Becker (2010)

The findings in Figure 2 overall help to disrupt the ethnolect/dialect binary, as they show white and non-white speakers who behave similarly with respect to raised BOUGHT, an NYCE feature. Speakers from all ethnic groups in the sample produce raised BOUGHT, particularly older speakers of all ethnic backgrounds. In addition, Asian and Latino speakers show similar trends to white speakers in apparent time, reversing the change in progress for raised BOUGHT (see also Hall-Lew and Wong, this volume). In contrast, African American Lower East Siders are distinct from other groups in showing a trend of BOUGHT-raising over time, so that young African American Lower East Siders produce some of the highest means for BOUGHT in the sample.

Lisa is one of these BOUGHT-raisers. An ethnolect approach might take the difference in apparent time for her and other African Americans as some type of divergence from local white speech. Yet divergence normally finds non-white speakers moving away from dialectal features; here, it is African Americans who adopt the NYCE feature, while white New Yorkers move away from it. Would we need to argue that raised BOUGHT is now a marker of New York AAE? A repertoire approach allows for a different perspective, one that views features not as the property of any ethnic group, but

as potential resources for the conveyance of indexical meanings. A look at Lisa’s productions of BOUGHT can provide a window into these meanings.

Figure 3 presents Lisa’s variable production of BOUGHT (displayed as the mean height in normalized F1). Lisa’s mean for BOUGHT is 683 Hz, and she ranges in the production of 26 tokens from 515 to 860 Hz. She notably shows variation in individual production that crosses back and forth over the cut-off line for a raised BOUGHT as given by Labov, Ash, & Boberg (2006), which is 700 Hz.

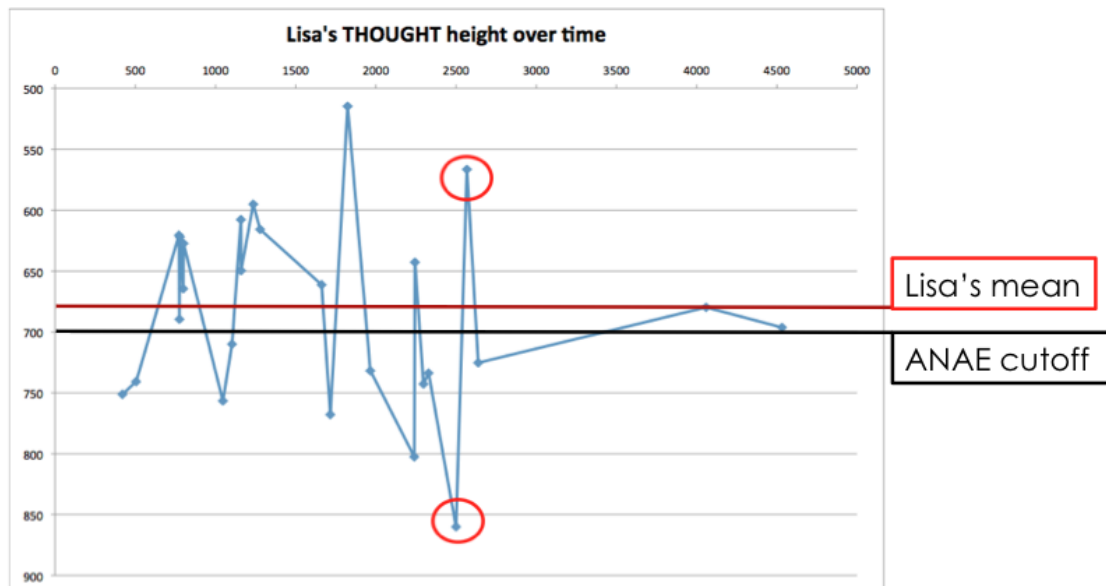


Figure 3. Lisa’s BOUGHT height over time

The following narrative is considered here as it has two instances of BOUGHT (circled on the graph above) that differ by almost 200 Hz and are produced only 60 seconds apart. The two tokens (*talkin*g in line 7 and *fought* in line 20) are in bold. In addition, I add to our picture of Lisa’s repertoire with the notation of copula absence as in Excerpt 2, underlined>.

Excerpt 3:

- 1 L: One day this lady—we was celebrating winning a victory for affordable housing. And this
- 2 white woman, she comes, she sits there, she comes in and she’s [C] like, “Oh can I sit with
- 3 y’all because it’s [DC] so noisy in there.” So I was like “ah,” I’m thinking she’s [C] a old
- 4 school white person, you know like the white people that’s [DC] been here for years, one of

5 the white people that's [DC] been here for years and they - they tight in the bar too [C]. So, I
6 thought² she was one of us, so I was like, "Hell yeah! Come and sit down man yeah!"
7 We talking [F1 860 Hz] [C] we drinking [C]. And then she had a whole different idea of her
8 existence in our community. She was – when I told her about the affordable housing opportunities,
9 she was like completely against that. She was like, "I don't get it. I mean, you just should work for
10 what you get. Like I worked. See where I am today? I worked for that. I earned this. And, if you ask
11 me, we're [C] making the neighborhood better." This is what she [C] telling me. The neighborhood
12 was shit when people lived here before and all this other stuff. This lady's [C] like going on about how
13 she's [C] this benefit to my neighborhood. And I couldn't believe it. I was like, I said miss, you [C]
14 looking at what we're doing [C], we moving from things that were public to now private [C]. You're
15 [C] looking at a town where nobody had control over what repairs happened in their building, let
16 alone in their apartment. You had slum landlords who care less about the residents. Then, you – now
17 we're [C] moving to a more private, uh sector with everything, and now people want to give a fuck
18 about shit. And now landlords want to make sure things are correct because they [C] going to make
19 more money off of that. And I said but, "My mother **fought [F1 566 Hz]** for the change, and the
20 reason why we lived here was, not because of choice, we was forced to. There was nowhere else to
21 live but this piece of shit.

The topic of the narrative is, in part, ethnicity, as Lisa describes an encounter with a Lower East Side resident, a "white woman" (line 2), but one she at first glance identifies as "a old school white person, you know like the white people that's been here for years, one of the white people that's been here for years and they don't – they Ø tight in the bar too." (lines 4-7). Quickly, however, she realizes that this white woman is a more recent transplant, and a confrontation ensues over issues of gentrification. What emerges from this narrative is that on the Lower East Side, ethnic identities interact directly with socioeconomic class, age, and lifestyle practices. Older white residents ("old school" white people) are most likely working- or middle-class and native to the neighborhood, and many align themselves with an anti-gentrification position similar to Lisa's. Young white residents are likely to be upper middle-class, gentrifying transplants who express views similar to the character in Lisa's narrative. Here, the two productions of BOUGHT occur in two very different instances of stance-taking (Jaffe 2009). In the first, Lisa has yet to realize that the "old school white person" she has invited to sit down is in fact a gentrifier, and her stance is one of solidarity. She produces a non-raised, non-NYCE BOUGHT (one with a high FI). In the next instance, she is now in opposition to the white gentrifier, and reports part of her argument against this person view's, saying, "My mother

² This token was produced too quickly for acoustic measurement and is excluded from BOUGHT analysis.

fought for the change.” Her locality here is important, but now as an aspect of identity made relevant in opposition to another, an other, someone who is not a legitimate Lower East Sider.

One perspective on these two tokens, which shift dramatically in height,³ is that Lisa utilizes raised BOUGHT to make her ethnicity relevant. The non-raised token is produced when Lisa sees her interlocutor’s ethnicity as non-threatening, or as less relevant, so that other aspects of identity construction can emerge. Once this person is revealed as a different kind of white person, a raised BOUGHT is produced. Perhaps this NYCE feature is used to construct ethnicity, just as the AAE feature of copula absence as used to construct locality.

More in line with a repertoire analysis and with a perspective of Lisa as multivalent, however, would be to see these BOUGHT productions as meaningful in Lisa’s construction of identity more broadly. It’s not just her blackness in response to another’s whiteness, or her localness in response to another’s outsider status. Of particular interest is the co-occurrence of copula absence with the non-raised token – “We Ø talking, we Ø drinking,” so that both features – a non-raised BOUGHT and copula absence – may draw on meanings that incorporates relationship building and solidarity. A raised BOUGHT, in contrast, takes an oppositional stance, but one that all the same incorporates aspects of identity that are relevant in the Lower East Side context, and that cannot be separated from each other – ethnicity, socioeconomic class, political stance, and more. This is a true indexical field for raised BOUGHT and speaks to the difficulty in categorizing use of this feature, for Lisa, as either accommodating or not accommodating to a local white norm.

Ethnolect or Dialect? Coda /r/

Investigating a variable like the variable production of coda /r/ highlights the need for analysis that sees identity as multivalent. The feature is a resource of both AAE and NYCE, so to observe variable rhoticity in Lisa’s speech from a –lect perspective would force a choice – is Lisa’s non-rhoticity an AAE thing or an NYCE thing?

³ Preceding voiceless stops promote raising (as do voiceless fricatives, but to a lesser extent), as do following voiceless stops, so the difference in phonetic environment cannot account for the difference in production here (Becker 2010).

It has been suggested that a “shared” feature like coda /r/ can have an additive effect for ethnolectal speakers in a locale that also is variably non-rhotic – consider that Labov et al. (1968) found near-categorical non-rhoticity for African American New Yorkers while Wolfram (1969) found much lower rates of non-rhoticity in Detroit (as noted in Wolfram (2007: 9). As such we might expect non-rhoticity to be higher for African American New Yorkers than for non-African American New Yorkers.

From both ethnolect and dialect perspectives, rhoticity is increasing for New Yorkers. Labov (1966, 1972b) document a change in progress towards /r/ production in NYCE, one that has continued today but has not yet reached completion (Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006; Becker 2009). Becker (2009) found an overall rate of 36% [r-1] for seven white Lower East Siders, although this was an older sample, with the youngest speaker aged 45 at the time of interview. The two youngest speakers (aged 45 and 55) showed a rate of 57% [r-1], suggesting a fair amount of progress for this change since Babbitt (1896) reported rates of [r-1] as low as zero around the turn of the 20th century.

African Americans in New York City were also found to be almost completely non-rhotic in the late 1960s (Labov 1972a). More recently, Blake and Shousterman (2010) found an overall rate of 40% [r-1] for 4 African American New Yorkers, suggesting an advancement in the change in progress towards /r/ production that is similar to that found for dialect speakers, if not advancing more quickly⁴.

Lisa’s rate of [r-1] across 300 tokens of coda /r/ is 64%, higher than the rates found for either African Americans or white New Yorkers in prior work (although it is most similar to the middle-aged and middle-class white speakers in Becker (2009). Rather than answer the question above – is Lisa’s non-rhoticity AAE, or NYCE? – I argue that a linguistic repertoire approach both allows for room to identify what non-rhoticity might allow Lisa to accomplish, and demonstrates the need to move beyond the ethnolect/dialect binary.

In terms of indexicality, Becker (2009) argued that non-rhoticity was used by white Lower East Side speakers to construct a place identity, so that rates of production were statistically impacted by shifts between neighborhood-oriented and non-neighborhood-oriented topics, as seen in Figure 4.

⁴ Yet note the small sample sizes in Becker (2009) and Blake and Shousterman (2010), in addition to differences in the social characteristics of these speaker samples relative to their earlier counterparts. More work is needed here on change in progress for coda /r/ in New York City.

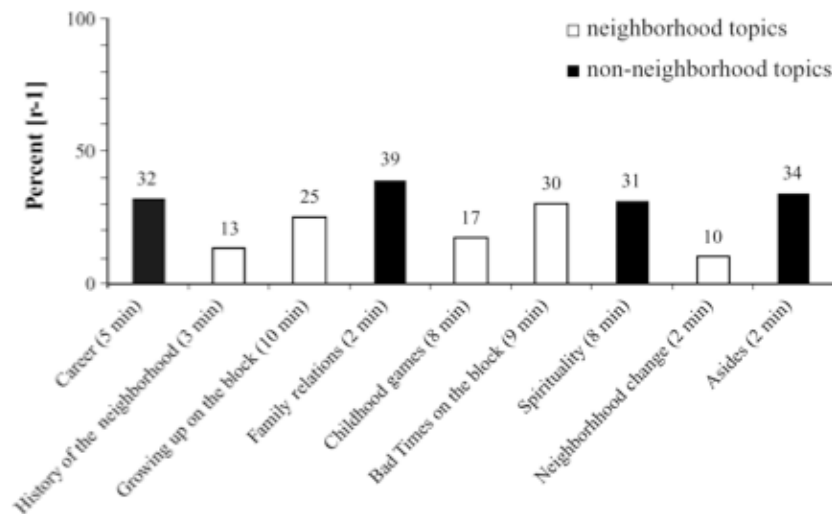


Figure 4. One NYCE speaker’s rates of [r-1] across topics, reproduced with permission from Becker (2009)

For Lisa, we can incorporate rhoticity as a resource in social practice in the above narrative in Excerpt 3. First, we can look at the micro-use of rhoticity in the speech around the non-raised BOUGHT, where Lisa takes up a stance of solidarity (and utilizes copula absence as well).

5

1 So I was like “ah,” I’m thinking she’s [C] a old school white person [r-1], you know like the white
 2 people that’s [DC] been here[r-1] for years[r-0], one of the white people that’s [DC] been here[r-1]
 3 for years[r-1] and they - they tight in the bar too [C]. So, I thought she was one of us, so I was like,
 4 “Hell yeah! Come and sit down man yeah!” We talking [F1 860 Hz] [C] we drinking [C]. And then
 5 she had a whole different idea of her[r-1] existence in our community.

In this stretch of speech she utilizes much [r-1], suggesting that rhoticity, similar to non-raised BOUGHT and copula absence, can be deployed to construct a stance of solidarity or to downplay distinct aspects of identity. Conversely, in the stretch of speech surrounding the raised BOUGHT Lisa uses many instances of [r-0]:

1 And now landlords[r-0] want to make sure[r-1] things are correct because they [C] going to make
 2 more[r-0] money off of that. And I said but, “My mother[r-0] fought [F1 566 Hz] for[r-0] the

⁵ Rhoticity in contexts of stressed schwa (*person, bird, her*) are noted here, although these tokens are not used in the calculation of Lisa’s overall rate of [r-1], as there is a lack of agreement as to whether these are countable contexts for /r/ vocalization.

- 3 change, and the reason why we lived here[r-0] was, not because of choice, we was forced[r-0] to.
4 There was nowhere[r-1] else to live but this piece of shit.

In this way, /r/ pronunciation works in co-occurrence with the other features analyzed here, copula absence and raised BOUGHT, to allow Lisa to make complex identifications relevant in talk. These identifications move well beyond ethnicity and locality – AAE or NYCE – so that Lisa’s use of a diverse repertoire, in unique ways that don’t map directly onto ethnolect or dialect, speaks to the limitations of these categories.

Conclusion

This paper has contributed to the body of work that problematizes the notion of the ethnolect in sociolinguistic analysis (Eckert 2008a; Jaspers 2008; Benor 2010) as one of many bounded –lects that sociolinguistic researchers adopt as an analytic convention. I argue that this approach can obscure the ways that speakers make use of linguistic resources to construct multivalent identities. An investigation of the linguistic resources deployed by a single speaker demonstrates the potential for multiple and intersectional aspects of identity to emerge in interaction, and speaks to the limitations of –lects.

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