

RACE, SPEECH, IDENTIFICATION, AND IDEOLOGY: METHODOLOGICAL
INNOVATION AND INQUIRY

by

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(Under the direction of Sonja Lanehart)

ABSTRACT

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Sociolinguistic studies of race and perceptions of speech are productive avenues of research with implications across academic disciplines and public life. However, sociolinguistic considerations of the social processes linking evaluations of speech style and race, particularly in light of the reflexive role of discourse, remain understudied. Such disregard may relate, in part, to implicit and under examined epistemological assumptions among factions subsumed under “sociolinguistic” research and, by extension, the methodological implications related to these assumptions. With these attendant tensions in mind, this dissertation employs an alternative, sociocultural theoretical framework to consider the limitations and possibilities for expanding the scope and applicability of sociolinguistic studies on racial evaluations of speech. Through methodological discussion and empirical data, it employs different epistemological assumptions and complementary methods through distinct methodological approaches to analyze linguistic data on racial speech perception. Three articles examine (1) the nature of linguistic study on

racial perceptions of speech, including ways that listeners discursively construct race as a relevant topic in discussing perception in interviews, (2) epistemological and methodological practices and the prospects of their application to linguistic studies, and (3) examination of discourse as an ideological, reflexive resource linking speech style and racial construction. Findings across these studies advance theories of language and race, modes of linguistic research, evaluation of speech, and the ideologies that shape each. I suggest that approaching the status, origins, and relevance of speech styles widely associated with race through a sociocultural lens opens up new avenues for sociolinguistic investigation of linguistic profiling based on race.

INDEX WORDS: Sociolinguistics, race, speech perception, language ideology, methodology, discourse analysis, linguistic reflexivity, membership categorization analysis

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DEDICATION

To my zissou for all the hab def

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the study

Speech is inextricably tied to who we are and how others perceive us (Lanehart, 2002; Lippi-Green, 1997). Upon hearing just a few words, we begin to evaluate speakers' personalities, backgrounds, and races, among other social categories. The ways that speech style and social categories become meaningfully linked is often ideological, drawing upon deeply held normative beliefs about language. These language ideologies often function as resources for evaluating speech and its linguistic and social "reality". Throughout the studies presented in this dissertation, I argue for the sociolinguistic examination of social processes guiding racialized evaluation of speech style, especially in light of the ideological assumptions that often guide them. In order to promote epistemological transparency, I address the need to define race, language, and, more generally, the guiding assumptions of sociolinguistic research that considers racialized perceptions of speech.

Defining the role of race and language in one's research is not a neutral endeavor but rather an ideological one. Their roles are defined by researcher assumptions about ontology (what exists), epistemology (what counts as knowledge) and methodology (how to study what is considered knowable). Depending upon one's epistemological assumptions about language—basic knowledge claims and how they are grounded (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998)—different views of what "counts" as legitimate foci of linguistic inquiry take precedence. Also depending upon epistemological assumptions, race can take on different meanings. Hansen (2005) cites a number

of these perspectives, including race as (1) an objective, immutable, biological fact, (2) an identity-based, cognitive characteristic (e.g., Weber, 1968), (3) a social construct based on shared identification with a socially recognized group (e.g., van Dijk, Ting-Toomey; Smitherman & Spears, 1997), or (4) a practical, ongoing accomplishment of interaction (e.g., Heyman, 1990). In much the same way, language can be characterized in a number of ways depending upon one's assumptions and goals.

Two contrasting perspectives I consider throughout this dissertation are (1) language as a mental system dictated by internal rules (and social factors by some views), which are reflected in speech (e.g., Chambers, 2003; Chomsky, 1968), and (2) language as a socially situated and constructed act, which only exists in action or speech (e.g., Potter & Edwards, 2003; van den Berg, Wetherell & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). I adopt the latter, constructionist views of both race and language, conceptualizing them as constantly defined and redefined through individuals' talk and their orientation to each in reflexive, discursive interactions. I take a sociocultural stance within the perspective of constructionism, which I describe in more detail below. Briefly, this includes the assumption that race as well as language only exists through interactional constructions, and not as "realities" that exist prior to the interactions that constitute and reify them.

Pushing back against the generativist, Chomskian notion of language (Chomsky, 1957, 1968) as a fixed, discrete system that linguists can define and delimit, I adhere to the belief that language is a practice rooted in social action and does not lie in a fixed or objective position to any one person, group, or description of speech (Potter & Edwards, 2003). Rather, it is socially enacted and oriented to. By this, I align with "a wider framework than formalistic theories of language" (Makoni, Smitherman, Ball & Spears, 2003). Drawing on linguistic anthropologist

Duranti's (1997) description, language can be framed as a wider social practice that functions as a "linguistic habitus to be understood as recurrent and habitual systems of dispositions and expectations" (45). LePage & Tabouret-Keller (1985) describe language as an idea and practice that depends upon at least three social components—(1) perceptions of individuals that speak it, (2) conceptions disseminated by communities that speak it, and (3) scholars' descriptions of it. Therefore the notion of language, *per se*, is no more measurable or discrete than discourse about it from various sources. As noted in Makoni et al. (2003), simply because a language or variety has a name, does not mean its trappings have reached a wide consensus across the groups who perceive it. I would like to add the converse—simply because the trappings of a so-called language or dialect have reached wide consensus does not mean that the name for a variety should (always) be used.

This leads me to the notion of dialect, which is also contentious. Non-linguists often use the term to euphemistically denote a stigmatized way of speaking (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2005); as such, it takes on a negative connotation. Linguistically, a dialect is considered a recognizable collection of grammatical, lexical, and phonetic/phonological features associated with a group based upon geographical region, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic class, age, community of practice, etc. (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2005). I argue that dialect is also a loaded term for scholars of language study as well. In sociolinguistics, it often rides on assumptions of verbal patterns dictated from the top-down by fixed, socially-dictated systems in the mind. By using the term "speech style", I question these assumptions of "dialects" as mental systems. Following my belief that language only exists in individuals' orientations to it through talk and action, I define a dialect, too, as only "real" inasmuch as someone believes it to be (whether that be speakers, hearers, or linguists).

Linguistic anthropologists Silverstein (1998) and Agha (2003, 2005a) use the term *enregisterment* to denote the semiotic process by which styles of pronunciation, grammar, and lexical choice come to be socially recognized and indexically associated as a speech style, or register, spoken by certain categories of speaker (race, region, class, etc.). According to this view, ideological social forces (i.e., hegemony, economy, politics, etc.) create discursive practices that maintain and constrain these notions of a dialect's existence. The "reality" of a dialect, register, or speech style only occurs through its construction in action. A resulting example of this perspective is that African American English—a sociolinguistically regarded and socially relevant language variety (to some)—is a social construction accomplished through race talk. As such, "dialects do not pre-exist talk about dialects" and this concept of enregisterment is historical and discursive, so we should examine it historically and discursively (Johnstone, 2005).

Much work on racial identification and speech in variationist sociolinguistics in the U.S. discusses African Americans' speech and compares it to that of European Americans' speech. The terminology used to name these racial groups and their attendant speech is far from consistent across studies. African American English (AAE) is a race-based distinction across dialects that has predominated variationist sociolinguistic study in the U.S. for the past decade or so. Despite some contention, this term remains in use to denote presumed systemic speech patterns associated with many African Americans' speech, ranging from stigmatized and marked (vernacular) to approaching "mainstream English" (standard). While I do not adhere to the existence of dialects as entities, the notion of AAE holds meaning for many linguists and lay people alike (by different names in many cases, e.g., Ebonics). I use AAE (as opposed to using AAVE, Black English, Ebonics, Spoken Soul, speech of African Americans, or speech of

African slave descendants, to name a few) as a convenient indexical marker for the academic notion that there is some perceptual, linguistic entity that a sizable number of scholars and lay people alike identify as language norms and practices belonging to a culturally identified group (Morgan, 1998). I hope to illustrate throughout this dissertation that different cultural and theoretical formulations of identifying race, naming language, and conducting research are ideological.

The research I present explores the constructs of race and language as reflexive and interdiscursively constituted in social interactions over time. I argue that the interactional processes by which these constructs become socially meaningful are inherently ideological in that they imply hierarchical status and power through treatment of speech style as indexical of social categories and meaning, including racial ones. Language ideology refers to strongly held, underlying assumptions, beliefs, and expectations about the intersection of language style and social attributes that usually remain tacit (Irvine, 2001; Lippi-Green, 1997; Winford, 2003). LePage (1989) notes that ways of defining and discussing language are inherently ideological, as are all ways of doing research or living in the world. While this position is prevalent in much social science research, it is not attested to as often in variationist sociolinguistic research, which, in contrast, often assumes that language is objective.

We are enculturated into different language ideologies by our life experiences. This is common to most societies and remains unproblematic unless tensions make them visible. For example, unquestioned, dogmatic beliefs may violate the rights and dignity of non-dominant groups. These beliefs can lead to discursive social conventions evident on institutional and systemic scales that oppress certain individuals and groups based upon social prowess attached to ways of speaking. The ways ideologies become implicit justifications for linguistic profiling

or discrimination are not meaningful in isolation, but become significant in relation to how language is used (Blommaert, 2005).

The articles in this dissertation address ideological components to meaning making around speech style in different ways, and this research began in a much different place than my current theoretical stance on research implies. Over the course of completing these studies, my understandings and beliefs about the nature of language, knowledge, and research changed. My original questions have consequently taken a different shape, and the insights from the resulting studies consider how to conceive of language, race, and research on language and race, as well as how to engage a broader community in debate around these issues.

Chronological aspects of the dissertation: from realist to sociocultural

My interest in language ideologies surrounding race and speech started when I began graduate school, moved to the southern U.S. for the first time, and found myself working in a restaurant with individuals who were openly racist toward African American patrons of the establishment. I grew up in an almost entirely European American culture and, in college in New York City, my social network remained almost entirely White. Moving to a region of the country known for segregated and unequal racial settings and embarking upon academic study of sociolinguistics (particularly a course on African American English) was a “razor’s edge” experience for me. I realized the ways that implicit beliefs about race and ways of speaking did more work than to simply identify or classify people. More significantly, it gave the appearance of objective reasons for discrimination—their language is different, their actions are different, therefore they are different (different indexing inferior for many).

Wanting to build on these experiences and realizations, my dissertation began as a study into how African American speakers are sometimes identified racially by their speech alone.

Baugh (1996, 2003), Purnell, Idsardi & Baugh (1999), and Spears (1998) served as guiding posts for my interest in this subject. Linguistic profiling based on speech occurs, and yet, little evidence for how it is accomplished had been established through linguistic research—one of the few disciplines positioned to do so. I conducted interviews with undergraduates in which I played speech samples that my advisor and I believed represented speech styles ranging from more standard to more vernacular “African American English” (Spears, 1988). I believed that thematic analysis of salient, prosodic features (intonation, pitch, rhythm, voice quality, etc.) mentioned by interviewees could guide subsequent acoustic phonetic analysis of those features, resulting in a study that identified some of the key yet elusive features of speech that marked speech as African American.

Originally, my main research question for this study asked, “What are the salient, underlying features in speech identified as African American?” I believed that underlying aspects to a speech signal that hearers judged as sounding African American existed and that appropriate research methods and techniques could uncover objective features of this speech signal. In pursuit of this burning question, I completed initial pilot research under the assumption that acoustic phonetic analysis could identify these features and lend a burden of proof to linguistic profiling cases. This presumed an objective and systemic quality to language and dialect that exists outside of and actually underlies individuals’ reactions to and evaluations of race and speech. The epistemological assumptions that guided my earlier stance included positivist, realist assumptions that speech was a signal and reflection of mental processes and research should approach an objective and privileged stance to meaning.

Through further coursework, reading, and a deeper appreciation of the reflexive nature of research, I realized the implicit beliefs about language and research underlying much of the

sociolinguistic and sociophonetic work I had been studying (and in some ways emulating) took for granted. My research took on a different shape, led by three broadly constructionist assumptions: (1) that language is a social act (not a mental entity or system), (2) that speech styles, or dialects only exist in that people conceive of, name, and categorize them and their speakers, (3) and that an appropriate site for analyzing the ways that speech is identified racially is the actual talk that does the work of making identifications socially explicated in such discourse. Based upon these assumptions, I now ask, “how do race and speech style become meaningful in interaction?” This reflects a focus on the interactional and social nature of racial and linguistic meaning making. I look to the ways that discursive and metadiscursive resources operate along with ideological and reflexive resources to enable speech styles to become imbued with significance that has socially recognized indexical meaning.

A sociocultural approach

Sociocultural perspectives frame language as a social practice constituted by talk and action, not a passive medium reflecting underlying truths. It is a dynamic and constantly negotiated act (Austin, 1962; Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Potter & Edwards, 2003; Sacks, 1992; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). Consequently, meaning in talk is not directly mapped onto a linguistic form by objective, referential function, but rather is imbued with local meaning through resources that interlocutors control (Agha, 2003; Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Potter, 2005). This sociocultural view of talk as a contextual, social meaning-making practice (rather than a static mental system) is compatible with assumptions and methods associated with semiotic anthropology, ethnography of communication, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis more broadly.

The sociocultural approach I employ across these articles returns agency back into the mouths and ears of speakers and listeners. Much sociolinguistic research on racialized speech perceptions in the U.S. have been conducted in variationist and sociophonetic veins of linguistic research. These are largely dominated by positivist views of research, and mentalist, decontextualized views of language. A sociocultural approach offers a lens for examining concerns precluded by the epistemological restrictions of much sociolinguistic research. I now ask how speech style becomes imbued with shared, social, racial meaning through attention to metapragmatic resources evident in evaluative talk about race. The ways interlocutors orient to each other and the purpose of their talk is a subject for analysis. This view does not adhere to the notion that talk reflects pre-existing realities that lie behind actions, nor does it posit that underlying mental constructions provide resources for understanding how norms are socialized (Potter & Edwards, 2003). Situated practice replaces a concern for cognition as a focus of what lies beyond words.

According to the assumption that discourse is always a constructive act, no context for talk, nor any talker are inherently more reliable than any other. All discursive activity allows individuals to continuously renegotiate their position through talk (Wetherell, 2003). Theorizing the interview as a specific discourse act renders variability among interviews and interviewer effects as topics for analysis, not a problem to be overcome (van den Berg et al., 2003). This contrasts with realist views of the interview as a tool for elicitation, which assumes that there is a “truth” to uncover through careful elimination of bias (van den Berg et al., 2003). Under this view, certain “subjects” (or “samples”) are seen as legitimate or better sources of information. A sociocultural focus on discourse as a constructive and constructed act prioritizes local meaning making practice, so it matters little whose talk we look at or how much participants vary unless it

is part of our goal to analyze a subset of people. In other words, any participant is a “good” one (ten Have, 1999).

As the articles below will clearly delineate, I no longer assume that there are acoustic features inherent to a speech signal that results in the marking of a voice as “African American” sounding. Therefore, I no longer focus exclusively on what interviewees claim is salient. Instead, I believe that such identifications are constructed socially, and so the details of evaluative discourse reveal meaning making and ideological patterns grounded in enregisterment, whether or not interviewees are “truthful” or not. While certain speech habits may become associated more with individuals through their ascription to racial and linguistic categories of “African American” or “African American English”, I do not link this ability (i.e., to identify speaker race) to an objective feature of a speech signal that is inherently “African American” sounding. Instead, I focus on the social construction of what race and racialized speech are and, by extension, on the discursive processes that (1) allow interviewees to make race relevant as a topic, (2) construct the notion of racially marked speech, and (3) link these evaluations of speech to justifications they orient to in their discourse. I assert that individuals employ these discursive processes to construct race, speech, and racialized speech as “real” things. I also argue that the discursive processes for accomplishing meaning making in the interview context are the same accounting practices that enable individuals to identify, evaluate, and talk about racialized speech in other contexts.

Goals of the dissertation

This dissertation provides a theory-driven methodological approach to examining race talk, which I argue is the locus of instantiating and maintaining the perceived reality of racialized speech. Through the three articles I present here, I illustrate a theoretical model for analyzing

discourse about race and speech as a topic. Using different methodological approaches under the same theoretical framework, I explore different formulations of linguistic analysis of discourse around race and speech. From these analyses, I then focus on the value of considering how the social acts of speaking about race and language ground the social “reality” of each.

My data derives from two rounds of interviews conducted between 2003 and 2006, and analysis includes discourse analysis (Potter, 1998; Rymes, 1996) and membership categorization analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Wooffitt, 2005). The claims I make from findings include resources available in discourse and ideological processes that shape and guide the ways that meaning is made in interactions around evaluation of race from speech. I ask how race becomes meaningful in and through speech.

This dissertation grew organically through a process of exploring various methods, perspectives, and goals for understanding racial identification of speech. The foundations on which it began are crucial for grounding where it has come, and it is from this genesis that I write the literature review (Chapter 2), which covers broad sociolinguistic research on African American English, perception, ideology, and methods. I write for an interdisciplinary audience just as I draw from interdisciplinary perspectives and methods in this work. The following literature review provides a linguistic background of work that led to my interest in the subject of discourse and racial identification and has guided much of the work that went into the studies I present here. Without this background, my implications and claims lack depth and historical grounding. It is based on various normative forces in sociolinguistic research in the U.S. on race and perception that my research pushes back, and while I do not devalue sociolinguistic research on the subject of race and speech, I do advocate for a less autonomous and agnostic mode of inquiry in this field (cf., Coupland, 2001; Rickford, 2001).

Now that I have set out the major ideas within which this study is grounded, I introduce the research question that I address in my studies' design and analyses. This dissertation aims to illustrate theoretically and methodologically informed options to engage sociolinguistic research on racial identification in speech. The primary issue that I investigate is how interviewees orient to race and speaking style as topics in interviews during which they react to recorded speech. I ask: (1) how do interviewees construct their evaluations of racialized speech, and (2) what are the interactional effects and implications for such evaluations?

Outline of following sections

The ways I address this research question change shape across the three articles. Across them, I adopt an increasingly theoretical stance, and so the goals of each manuscript are slightly different. In the first article, I examine how 29 interviewees orient to one speaker, "Betty's", speech as racially problematic and consider the implications this has for how race becomes meaningful in talk. In the second article, I outline pedagogy, including epistemological and methodological suggestions for sociolinguistic analysis of identification of race. I specifically detail the interdisciplinary relevance of sociocultural assumptions and methods from membership categorization analysis. In the third article I apply a sociocultural approach to examine how ten interviewees account for their racial evaluation in race talk—discourse about race and speech. I specifically look at the ways that interviewees' metapragmatic framing of their race talk evaluations appeal to ideology through indexical and iconic assumptions about links between constructions of race and speech. Lastly, after all three articles, I synthesize implications across all three studies in a final conclusions section.

The next section, "Race, speech, and social meaning making," details major relevant strains of scholarly research pertaining to AAE, language ideologies, perceptual studies, and

methods—the grounds upon which the three articles I include take shape. The information in this section is structured so as to frame the gap in the literature that these three studies begin to fill.

CHAPTER 2

RACE, SPEECH, AND SOCIAL MEANING MAKING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I touch upon three broad strains of research—race and speech, methodology in linguistic studies of speech perception, and identity and speech style—in order to frame both the bases on which the three articles presented in this dissertation are built and the gap in literature that they collectively fill. I begin with a brief review of literature on descriptions and perceptual studies of AAE. My argument builds upon Spears' (1988) call for research discussing perceptual processes linking race to speech style and not just focusing on products of decontextualized racial speech identification. I highlight this contrast throughout this chapter between studies that focus on product versus process by examining the theoretical assumptions guiding both approaches. I make the case for sociolinguistic research that examines the discursive processes surrounding racial identification of speech and the ideological processes these implicate. Tying in literature on identity and speech style, I situate linguistic and social science research that draws upon social constructionist views of language and social meaning. This critically informs my belief that a sociocultural approach (within a social constructionist view) to studies of perception will benefit this vein of research through which I increasingly focus the articles in the dissertation. I then engage a comparative discussion of the epistemological and ideological assumptions driving sociolinguistic and sociophonetic research. I consider the types of questions that existing studies pose and then offer an argument for the usefulness of sociocultural methods in engaging interdisciplinary and applied research on racial speech perception. The goal of this review is to illustrate what has been done to address issues

surrounding racial speech perceptions in a methodologically informed fashion, making the case for a gap in the questions that have been posed using sociolinguistic and sociophonetic methods and questions that can be posed using additional methodological approaches, which I detail below.

Racial Identification from speech

An abundance of linguistic research on AAE has been conducted over the last four decades. In fact, five times as much research is said to exist on AAE as on any other variety of American English (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2005). Detailed linguistic studies have examined structural, physiological and historical descriptions of AAE (Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Cukor-Avila, 2001; Green, 1998; Mufwene, 2001; Rickford, 1999; Sapienza, 1997). However, only a limited number of studies examine non-linguists' perceptions of AAE or the social processes that frame them.

In a landmark study on the status of AAE as a speech variety, Spears (1988) acknowledges the presence of a continuum of Black English (BE), including both Black Vernacular English (BVE) as well as Standard Black English (SBE). He describes the latter as the absence of stigmatized features associated with BVE combined with the presence of non-stigmatized features that are still saliently distinctive to the variety. Providing important suggestions for needed future research, Spears notes that non-linguists can identify BVE and SBE speakers, but often cannot articulate how or why they can do so. He states that this is especially true for SBE speakers (arguably due to the lack of stigmatized features) and that individuals identify racialized speech along a continuum of styles associated with BE based on prosody as well as pronunciation and lexical choice. Because perceptions are difficult for listeners to articulate, Spears urges research to examine in more detail how listeners articulate or

make assessments of race. This occurred 18 years ago, yet there have been little to no sociolinguistic or sociophonetic studies that examine the discursive processes guiding listeners' descriptions of how they account for evaluations of race. From this, comes the remaining question that I begin to address in this dissertation: How is it that listeners identify an "African American" sounding voice?

Although there exists a paucity of sociolinguistic research that attempts to determine *how* listeners identify what sounds "African American", many studies over the last four decades have documented claims that listeners have the ability to correctly label speakers' race with little difficulty (Abrams, 1973; Baugh, 1996; Buck, 1968; Dickens & Sawyer, 1952; Graff, Labov & Harris, 1986; Grimes, 2005; Irwin, 1977; Koustaal & Jackson, 1971; Purnell et al., 1999; Shuy, Baratz & Wolfram, 1969; Tarone, 1973; Thomas & Reaser, 2004; Tucker & Lambert, 1969, Walton & Orlikoff, 1994). Many of these linguistic studies focus on the results, or research products, of identification rather than on the processes of identification itself. This body of research primarily addresses response accuracy and correlations between social variables and listeners' judgments of race (e.g., Tucker & Lambert, 1969), or what acoustic features of the stimuli correlate with individuals' ability to identify race from vocal cues (Purnell et al., 1999). Tucker and Lambert's (1969) empirical study is one of the first to document perceptual reactions to varieties of English spoken by African Americans and European Americans. They conclude that hearers are somewhat successful in determining race from a limited speech sample. These findings suggest that a person's race can affect his or her reception by and perception of others based on speech cues alone, but that this perception is also affected by hearers' experience and social context.

A somewhat recent example of research on listeners' ability to identify speaker race is Baugh's (1996) study in which he suggests that listeners can identify speakers as African American with claims of over 80% accuracy. A striking number of people in the study are able to correctly guess the guise he assumes in recordings of his enactment of "Chicano", "African American", and "European American" speaking styles. However, Baugh focuses on reports of accuracy and not the processes at work in listeners' evaluations. Listeners' identifications reflect their perceptions of Baugh's guises—or ideas of racially marked speech style—not their actual abilities to detect race (as he is only one person with one race). Baugh's study is a perfect example of speech style that *indexes* race, and it begins to address the power of accommodating or thwarting social and linguistic expectations based upon indexical assumptions. Yet this worthy topic for discussion is backgrounded by a discussion of accuracy and acoustic products of identification, rather than the processes guiding listeners' ability to detect an intended racial guise.

The distinction that Baugh's study illustrates and which I expound upon here is the difference between listeners' orientation to speech they hear, and listeners' demonstrated ability to correctly identify or label someone's racial affiliation based on what is heard. This latter consideration has predominated linguistic research on racial speech perception. Examining accuracy (product) relies upon consideration of speakers' actual race, whereas examination of the former—racial construction (process)—relies heavily upon the details of listeners' reactions, regardless of whether these match the actual race of the speaker or not. This is not to preclude the worthiness of studying how perceptions match up with speakers' actual race, but conducting research that focuses on social and discursive processes of racial speech identification will

complement studies focusing on accuracy through examination of the social context of speech production, perception, and enregisterment of speech styles as “real” (Agha, 2003).

Findings from sociolinguistic and sociophonetic studies along with purported evidence that isolated verbal cues are enough to spark racial perception raise questions not only about the often researched types of phonetic cues supposedly leading to identification of speaker race, but also the less often considered social processes involving bias, belief, and ideology, among many other factors that lead to identification. Despite the aforementioned claims that auditory cues contain salient markers for perceived race, the need exists to account for the ways that speech comes to index race for listeners. Rickford (1999) comments upon the fact that much of the research on African American speech “has been devoted to fine tuning the description of its phonological and grammatical features rather than to exploring the social and linguistic relations between neighboring Black and White speakers” (p. 90). In much the same way, perceptual studies on AAE have focused on products, or features, rather than on social and linguistic relations that are constantly (re)defined in interaction. Investigation into the ways that perceptions come to be shaped across interactions can have wide-ranging, much-needed effects, as noted in the literature (Baugh, 2003; Morgan, 2002; Spears, 1988). To further demark the differences in focus and priorities, I contrast the approach that many sociolinguistic and sociophonetic studies take—realist—with the added approach I argue for in this dissertation—sociocultural.

Realist versus sociocultural assumptions

In analyses of listeners’ talk about race, sociolinguistic studies often operate under an assumed relationship between speech content and directly mapped perceptual representations. In turn, this positivist perspective leads to findings that suggest that listener reactions to speech are

automatic and not agentic or social. As mentioned above, relatively little sociolinguistic or sociophonetic research on perception considers *how* listeners accomplish judgments of race based upon speech, or the discursive processes by which this is accomplished. Instead studies examine the potential influence of acoustic stimuli present in speech cues that may lead to accurate judgments of race. However, studies of this latter type do not account for the fact that many subtle components of speech, including social and individual factors (e.g., education level, exposure to different speech styles) such as those alluded to in Tucker and Lambert (1969) may hold greater saliency than the acoustic cues targeted by these studies (e.g., segment length, vowel formant qualities, intonational contour).

By nature of the types of knowledge realist studies of racial identification of speech prioritize, they do not address how these features may or may not be salient for listeners. Epistemological assumptions of objectivity and linguistic and perceptual “truth” mark research within the positivist, realist linguistic tradition described by Coupland (2001), Dodsworth (2005), and Johnstone (2005), which is common to many sociolinguistic, sociophonetic and acoustic phonetic studies. In these studies, findings suggest correlations between features and judgment, conflating the presence of phonetic features in speech with the impetus for listeners’ racial identification of speech. Researchers operating under realist epistemological assumptions maintain the semblance of an objective reality that they seek to uncover through linguistic “facts”.

In contrast, sociocultural studies adhere to the belief that all reality is constructed (Schilling-Estes, 2004), hinging upon concerns of how talk is used to ascribe the reality of racial styles of speech. Analyses prioritize the social effects this ascription has, not an implied significance, existence, or salience of structural features divorced from their context. The

concerns I raise with gaps in most sociolinguistic and sociophonetic research on linguistic perceptions of race stem from an epistemological and ideological difference in what these related bodies of research consider as relevant for study. Certain, arguably relevant, types of knowledge are “missed” due to allegiances to unquestioned assumptions common to many realist studies.

An example

The different considerations that realist and sociocultural studies prioritize are usefully highlighted by contrasting Spears’ (1998) aforementioned study with a recent sociophonetic study on the ethnolinguistic labeling of speech (Grimes (2005). Spears (1988) cites the need for research that investigates the characteristics of different styles of “African American” sounding speech such as prosody, voice quality, and suprasegmental features. This can be addressed by probing how listeners make sense of distinctions between speech styles in light of race, which is under the purvey of a sociocultural approach. This differs from the practice common to many existing sociophonetic studies, which analyze the acoustic content of speech signals of African American voices that listeners happen to identify as such. The difference between a focus on process (details of interaction) versus product (speech signal) continues to be conflated by recent sociophonetic studies. I offer as an example Grimes’ (2005) study in which listeners judge the race of different voices based upon recordings of single spoken words. He claims that listeners’ judgments about race are in response to “dialect features”—the two vowels in the words “bad” and “bed”—that are the target stimuli of the study. In effect, this characterization assumes that listeners’ unqualified responses are due to particular stimuli. However, this identification could be due to a number of stimuli—both linguistic (i.e., vowel quality, height, advancement; consonant production, volume, intonation), and non-linguistic (i.e., sounds like someone they know, ambivalence to the task, focus on content of speech, etc.). A focus on the products of

identification in effect extrapolates top-down assumptions about the process of identification without regard for the details of interaction in which such processes take shape.

Grimes characterizes the vowels in the recorded target words as constitutive of dialect features—an assumption about language and dialect that is left unquestioned in much sociophonetic research. Characterization of “dialect features” based upon two vowels is a prime example of a decontextualized approach to language and is illustrative of the need to define how conceptions of language and dialect operate in our research. It is easy to fall into this pattern, especially when it is the dominant mode of linguistic research on racial speech perception. Grimes states: “The logic and justification behind the experiments presented in this thesis is that if listeners *think that a given dialect feature is distinctive enough* to use to diagnose a speaker as a member of the social group to which the dialect belongs, then that particular feature bears a larger amount of dialectal weight” (emphasis mine, p. 24). Here, listeners’ unqualified reactions are described as agentic decisions, and features of vowel production are used to assume perceptual processes of racial identification of speech based upon supposed, isolated “dialect features”.

This kind of obfuscation between listener reactions to researcher-defined stimuli and claims to attested salience of a linguistic feature or variety illustrates the distinction between research prioritizing product and process. I argue that perceptual studies can benefit from epistemological and methodological consideration of listeners’ accounts of the social and discursive processes guiding perception. Revisiting my earlier assertion that studies are shaped by researchers’ epistemological assumptions, questions, methods, analyses, and findings are affected by the knowledge that one’s epistemology prioritizes in non-trivial ways. Therefore, the role that researcher epistemology, bias, and ideology play in the types of questions asked,

answers sought, and methods used in research should be made explicit so as to situate the assumptions of a given study according to these factors. Many linguistic studies of racial speech perception stem from a set of positivist assumptions about the nature of language. However, these assumptions driving methods and questions often remain implicit, and this becomes problematic when taken for granted. Questions that are no longer productive to the field are repeatedly asked in similar ways, while similar topical concerns in other related social science disciplines are operating under a different set of epistemological and methodological assumptions. When our assumptions are left implicit, this further compounds this lack of productive interdisciplinary inquiry.

Ramifications of keeping realist assumptions implicit

I feel that this lack of explicit mention of assumptions has played a part in the fact that, despite the acknowledged need to examine different aspects of racial perception in speech, examination of social processes informing racial evaluation of speech, such as individuals' discursive accounts of evaluation, has yet to be undertaken. In a way, variationist sociolinguistic concerns are built upon a research program rooted in positivist assumptions in which scholars have become invested. In this respect, they may not have the ears to hear this. Realist discussions of which linguistic features supposedly drive identification of race are mainly concerned with what listeners' identifications tell about the cues' salience. This presupposes two things: (1) that reactions reflect underlying saliencies, which (2) exist in the speech signal itself. These assumptions afford certain types of questions and preclude others from the realm of sociolinguistic study on racial speech perception.

The adoption of a sociocultural perspective for the study of speech perception and race entails reconsidering what "counts" as relevant for analysis, thus broadening the potential

questions and answers sociolinguistic research can, accommodate by prioritize concerns about process and social context grounding speech perception. Sociocultural studies on racialized perceptions of speech look to the details and implications of interaction for the locus of racial identification, not to a decontextualized speech signal. An expanded epistemological focus can take up the practical ways that listeners make use of their social and linguistic resources to participate in a contextual construction of race in interaction. Looking to participants as resourceful and knowledgeable social actors is a slant not often taken up in variationist sociolinguistic and sociophonetic research that, if adopted, could result in findings that relate to dialogues in sociology, educational research, linguistic anthropology, conversation analysis, and social psychology more fluidly. Seeking and promoting knowledge based in discursive processes that make racial speech identification possible will highlight listener-based aspects of linguistic profiling that transcend the laboratory or research setting by the discursive reflexivity they consider. I now turn to examples of studies that take this approach.

Discourse and social categories

Potter (2000) claims that variationist sociolinguistic studies do not take participants' "activities and orientations seriously" but instead impose their own ideologies onto the analysis without making this practice explicit (23). Additionally, some sociolinguists argue that non-linguists' reports of what is salient must be taken with caution or treated as a different type of data than the findings of sociophonetic and controlled survey research on perception (Wolfram & Baugh, 2005). I argue that this decision to omit or qualify listeners' reports of reasons behind their perceptions has to do largely with researcher ideology. Dating back to 1978, Tyler, a linguistic anthropologist, criticized realist linguistic theory for its lack of applicability to other theories or methods:

Common to both logical positivism and transformational linguistics is their view of language-as-mathematics. Both focus on language as a system of primitive or elementary units which can be combined according to fixed rules. However useful this analogy may be in certain limited ways, it creates problems in understanding how the purely formal system of elements and rules relates to something other than itself. Both create dualistic systems which oppose formal linguistic competence to empirical components (p. 13).

Despite Tyler's call for research that addresses more than the structural elements of speech, perceptual sociolinguistic research has not substantially developed this topic and so remains in the service of generativist treatments of language.

A trend that could have been taken up in variationist sociolinguistics has been generally confined to study in the U.K. Early evidence of this trend stems from Giles & Powesland (1975) in which they note the crucial role that non-verbal cues play in the perception of language, the way these cues are grounded in societal norms of behavior, and the ways they take shape through language use. The authors emphasize the need to take contextual information into account, such as the speaker's motivational state or the role of speech style as it intertwines with other aspects of social, racial, and national identity (Giles & Powesland, 1975). Deciding whether to consider speech as a social practice or as a signal to be decoded and agnostically reacted to is not an arbitrary one, nor is it a matter of good versus bad research. I stress again that one's choice of methods to collect data and perform analysis as well as what one counts as relevant depend upon research goals and questions (Eckert, 2001; Rickford, 2001). Epistemologically speaking, researchers and proponents of interdisciplinary linguistic research on race, perception and ideology (i.e., Coupland, 2001; Mendoza-Denton, 2002; Rickford, 2001; Schilling-Estes, 2004) have made a clear case for the need to include constructionist concerns in linguistic study for the ways of approaching knowledge it avails us.

Reconsidering process vs. product

An additional contrast between realist and constructionist accounts of racial identification of speech includes the sources of knowledge each camp seeks, and where they look for it. Considerations of listeners' discourse about speech and race are largely absent in sociolinguistic research on perception because the assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge for study do not prioritize this. Acoustic phonetic studies usually strive to elicit "perceptions" collected in a laboratory setting and involve guessing the race of a voice one hears. This decision to elicit listeners' reactions by survey-type identification tasks is affected by what kinds of knowledge are being sought. According to phonetic approaches, speech is viewed as a signal comprised primarily of phonetic features. Reactions to these signals are seen as reflective of underlying, objective components of that signal.

Assumptions about language and research of language included under the constructionist umbrella (which includes the sociocultural concerns I outline above) address concerns that realist methods do not address by nature of the assumptions they hold. Most existing sociophonetic studies analyze what reactions to speech tokens say about the acoustic features of those tokens. The difference I highlight here is between examining speech as part of social action (contextualized, process) and examining linguistic features as part of the speech signal (decontextualized, product).

Sociocultural approaches to sociolinguistics view speech as a social act which cannot be divorced from action. In turn, this type of inquiry incorporates interviews or other natural talk to be examined as a topic for analysis. Conversation analysts Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) criticize many theoretical (i.e., realist) analyses as "produced in isolation from the actual behavior of those individuals whose collective practices these theories are meant to illuminate"

(p. 28). Participants' conversational data make visible the ways speech style and speaker race, for instance, are made meaningful in interaction. Interviews can be used to occasion a context in which to examine personal constructions of reality including racial and linguistic realities (Cassell, 2005), highlighting meaningful ways that interviewees justify their evaluations. Conversational data can also explicate ideological resources that individuals use to justify racial evaluation of speech. Irvine (2001) points out:

...the investigation [of ideologies] will require moving beyond the mere recording of informants' explicit statements of sociolinguistic norms, for beliefs and ideational schemes are not contained only in a person's explicit assertions of them. Instead, some of the most important and interesting aspects of ideology lie behind the scenes, in assumptions that are taken for granted—that are never fully explicitly stated in any format that would permit them also to be denied (p. 25).

Therefore, talk includes many implicit ways to make sense of race and speech and also to place one's own identity in the "reality" being co-constructed around speech style and speaker category. Eliciting reactions with expectations of objectivity does not include a crucial aspect of how meaning is made—the talk that creates and conveys this meaning. Hence, considering speech as an act through which individuals orient towards social meaning making and ways of knowing can provide a useful forum through which to analyze practices inherent to speech identification as a social, ideological practice.

Identity and language style

When asking which categories and social meanings motivate individuals' perceptions of speech they identify as sounding "African American", it is also important to consider what larger societal forces and various communities construct and reinforce what it means to be or sound "African American". This consideration can further explicate how individual and group identity, as well as what scholars have labeled AAE and its speakers, shapes the interactional and social meaning making that links speech style and race through ideological resources. As commentary

of research ideology surrounding AAE, Mufwene (2001) suggests defining AAE by taking into account speakers' ideas about their language practices. He notes that it is the social meanings that listeners associate with various constructs of race, speaker, and culture that draw listeners' attention (consciously or unconsciously), rather than any real structural, linguistic distinctiveness. This problematizes what "counts" as socially salient in studying speech and its racial identification. I suggest that social practice and normative forces shape what is considered to be socially indexed by speech and as such are an important focus for understanding how such "realities" or perception originate.

By examining discursive processes evidencing evaluations of racialized speech, researchers can begin to identify how ideologies function as resources in such evaluation (for example, as justification). It is the nature of these discursive practices and the ideological resources in which they are couched that have remained underdeveloped in sociolinguistic research on perception. Irvine (2001) states that an analytic focus on ideology must separate speakers and speech from "empirical distributions" common to variationist sociolinguistics. She also contends that perceptions, ideologies, and attitudes are more than feeling or emotion but are displayed as working understandings of language as social systemic practice (p. 24). Irvine (2001) claims:

Styles in speaking involve the ways speakers, as agents in social (and sociolinguistic) space, negotiate their positions and goals within a system of distinctions and possibilities. Their acts of speaking are ideologically mediated, since those acts necessarily involve the speaker's understandings of salient social groups, activities, and practices, including forms of talk (p. 23).

When we interact verbally with others we do more than disseminate information. We position ourselves and create ideas of groups, languages, dialects, and ways of behaving through our construction of them in verbal interaction. Further, some linguists argue that the core issue

involved in racial and linguistic salience is alignment to racial identity and its presence or lack of “acceptability” rather than structural linguistic features (Agha, 2003; Lippi-Green, 1997; Morgan, 2002; Mufwene, 2001). In other words, sounding “African American” hinges upon people’s orientation to “African American-ness”. As such, the socially constructed activities and events that make up what people orient to as African American speech and identity are “mediated social act[s] that [are] part of African American experience including power and status negotiation in local and wider communities” (Morgan, 1998, p. 251). These mediated social acts (including words, conversations, media, and institutional discourses) are part of a larger African American cultural framework that means different things to different people depending on their experiences and positioning toward and/or within African American culture.

Morgan (1998) stresses that AAE is not just a variety or style but a social act that maintains identity, sense making, and reflection on life. Language is not just “a set of rules, but a way of behaving, a way of belonging, a way of creating social identifies and relationships” (Winford, 2003, p.24). This is further argument that language is more than structural form composed of phonetic, grammatical, and prosodic layers; it is more than structure and does not exist in a decontextual vacuum. Instead, the ways that we use language index certain social stances (Ochs, 1996). It is an epistemological and methodological choice whether one’s research considers this or not.

Rickford (2001) criticizes the trend in variationist sociolinguistics to maintain insular methods and concerns of applicability. He cites the need to account for the role of a speaker as a performer of identity, moving away from an autonomous sociolinguistics to include other, related theories and disciplines such as discourse analysis and communication theory. Reinforcing this sentiment, Coupland (2001) in the same volume criticizes Labovian (i.e.,

variationist/realist sociolinguistic) approaches to style and variation for their isolationist grounding within one disciplinary treatment that “renders analyses conceptually isolated from other important theoretical traditions in sociolinguistics, let alone the wider analysis of human communication and social interaction” (p. 186). Socially grounded analyses of language use and perception that stem from a social constructionist perspective can further inform variationist sociolinguistic as well as sociophonetic research leading to greater applicability and accessibility across disciplines inquiring about race and language.

Conclusions

Not only will inclusion of theories and methods recognizable to other disciplines augment the types of questions addressed in sociolinguistic research on race and language perception, it will also make our epistemology and methodology more explicit, affording us greater understanding with scholars addressing similar problems in other fields (i.e., sociology, social work, education, etc.). This can open up greater cross-disciplinary discussion about crucial issues, increasing the value of our work and the implications it can have outside of academia. Instead of wondering why findings from perceptual studies have little impact on actual practice (i.e., legal, educational, political), we can begin to make connections to other social and hard sciences.

Sociophonetic and sociolinguistic research on racial identification of speech has begun to demonstrate researchers’ understanding of how some phonetic cues operate in certain contexts (e.g., Grimes, 2005; Thomas & Reaser, 2004), but the nature of these studies’ epistemologies and methodological assumptions limits the claims they can make regarding social processes of speech identification. Asking not only *who* can identify an “African American” sounding voice or to *what* stimuli in the vocal signal listeners may be reacting for racial identification, but also

how these evaluations take shape in interaction, has relevance for studies of perception. By prioritizing different kinds of knowledge, research can address *how* it is that many listeners can identify a speaker as “African American,” expanding sociolinguistic research on this topic.

In the next three chapters, I explore some of the ways that these considerations are possible and how studies examining the interactional details of racial categorization of speech and speakers might look. In the first article, I examine interviewees’ constructions of a speaker, Betty’s, difference and “outlier” status in comparison to their talk that evaluates the other seven speakers they hear. Attention to the ways Betty’s speech style does not fit neatly into interviewees’ racial and linguistic expectations highlights the discursive construction of racialized styles of speech and the ideological implications this can have.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMINING THE HOW OF RACIAL SPEECH PERCEPTION: CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE “WHITENESS” OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN¹

¹ K. Anderson. Examining the how of racial speech perception: Constructions of the “Whiteness” of an African American Woman. Submitted to *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1/17/06.

Abstract

Over the last five decades, linguists have investigated accuracy of listeners' racial speech perception and phonetic features driving identification of a speaker's race based upon speech. This research generally correlates acoustic parameters and social variables with listeners' abilities to identify speaker race. However few linguistic studies examine social processes that influence speech perception. This article explores how listeners construct their perceptions of race through a qualitative approach to interviewing non-linguists about their reactions to recorded speech samples. I examine how language ideologies and perceptual processes intertwine in listeners' descriptions of speech with a goal of advancing the body of linguistic work on speech perception, language ideologies, and social issues surrounding perceptions of African American speech. Implications of this study include relevance to education, linguistic profiling, language ideologies, and language perception.

Keywords: Speech perception, language ideologies, African American English, race, linguistic profiling.

Introduction: Race, Speech, and Perception

Deriving perceptions of race from vocal cues is a longstanding line of sociolinguistic inquiry (e.g., Buck, 1968; Graff, Labov & Harris, 1986; Irwin, 1977; Koustaal & Jackson, 1971; Tarone, 1973; Walton & Orlikoff, 1994). Many of these studies primarily address response accuracy and correlations between social variables and listeners' judgments of race, while others focus specifically on whether individuals can identify race from vocal cues. Relatively little research however, considers how listeners accomplish such judgments. In the last decade, improved power and accessibility of acoustic phonetic analysis software has enabled phoneticians to isolate acoustic phonetic and prosodic cues and to correlate these cues' saliency with identification of speaker race (e.g., Purnell et al., 1999; Thomas & Reaser, 2004). Such studies examine the potential influence of acoustic stimuli present in speech cues that may lead to accurate judgments of race. However, these do not account for the fact that many subtle components of speech, including social and individual factors, may affect the saliency of the acoustic cues targeted by these studies.

A fusion of acoustic phonetic accounts of saliency and the importance of social factors attested to in folk linguistic and anthropological work has yet to gain prominence in sociolinguistic research. While some sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have broken ground in describing folk perceptions and language ideologies (e.g., Irvine, 2001; Lippi-Green, 1997; Niedzielski & Preston, 2003; Preston, 2004), these studies' findings have not been explicitly considered in acoustic phonetic research, nor have the findings of such research been applied to other studies examining how racialized perceptions of speech are described in talk. Examining ideological resources as they are expressed in interview talk around racial perceptions of speech generates information relevant to discrimination and linguistic prejudice based on

speech. This can have implications for how linguistic profiling and stereotyping of race by language occurs (Baugh, 2003). The present study extends this emerging line of folk linguistic and inquiry on language ideology through analysis of the ways 29 undergraduate listener interviewees construct and express social and racial evaluations of eight women's speech. I focus on listeners' constructions of one African American woman, Betty, as "White," which sets her apart from the other seven speakers in this study. Through this analysis, I hope to add to corpora accounting for perceptions of race through speech by closely examining the *how* of these listeners' perceptions of Betty's race based on a short sample of her speech.

A gap in the literature: Social processes of perception

Sociolinguistic studies of African American English (AAE²) have been prominent in the field over the last four decades. A subset of this line of research makes claims about individuals' supposed ability to identify speakers' race in the absence of visual cues (Abrams, 1973; Baugh, 1996; Dickens & Sawyer, 1952; Irwin, 1977; Purnell et al., 1999; Shuy, Baratz & Wolfram, 1969; Tucker & Lambert, 1969). For example, one study suggests that listeners can identify speakers as African American with claims of up to 80% accuracy (Baugh, 1996). However, reports of accuracy do not include details about the social processes and interactions containing evaluations of speakers' races. Examining the ways that listeners evaluate and describe race in their discourse about others' speech, and not just the features to which they might be reacting can augment the questions linguistic studies of speech perception can address. This can aid understanding of why listeners seem to react to certain salient features when discussing

² The terms "African American", "Black", and "AAE" are not used interchangeably in this manuscript. I use "African American" to indicate a social category of cultural affiliation (speakers are "African American"); "Black" to denote a listener's evaluation of linguistic and cultural affiliation (a listener thinks that a speaker sounds "Black" or White); and "AAE" to index a convention among linguists to refer to speech style associated with African American people and culture. While these terms are not unproblematic, I use them here to refer to a variety widely recognized in linguistic literature. I also recognize that skin color does not denote the cultural aspects of racial attribution, and neither skin nor cultural racial affiliation alone imply a type of speech.

perceived speaker race including the potential ideological resources influencing these supposed salencies. It is these interactions framing racial evaluations and the ideologies in which they are couched that have remained underdeveloped in linguistic research on perception (Irvine, 2001).

In attempting to answer how listeners identify a “Black” sounding voice, there is value in conversational data about what it means to be or sound “African American”, which may further develop the lines of inquiry primarily informed by considerations of accuracy of judgment or laboratory phonetic tests. Considering conversational data in order to analyze how perceptions are discussed around natural speech stimuli provides a perspective on how people react to speech through the analysis of what they say about it (Francis & Hester, 2004). Despite this, many theoretical analyses are “produced in isolation from the actual behavior of those individuals whose collective practices these theories are meant to illuminate” (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995, p. 28). In this study, I exemplify some ways that analytic attention to how listeners discursively construct race in their descriptions of speech can lead to a greater understanding of language ideologies’ role in the context of speech perception.

Many studies of racial perception in acoustic sociophonetics (e.g., Grimes, 2005; Thomas & Reaser, 2004) do not examine the ways listeners decide someone’s race or their level of awareness about such judgments. Sociophonetic and acoustic phonetic research usually analyze what quantitative reactions to speech tokens say about the acoustic features of those tokens, but do not consider listeners’ reactions in context. The difference I highlight here is between examining speech as part of society (contextualized) and examining speech features as part of the speech signal (decontextualized). Acoustic phonetic studies tend to control, vary, or manipulate cues in order to determine their decontextualized saliency, but do not consider which cues in speech are actually contextually salient to listeners. Therefore, although these acoustic

measurements may have meaning, they remain indeterminately meaningful to the listener as far as the scope of analysis is concerned.

While sociophonetic research has made great gains in developing an understanding of how some phonetic cues operate in certain restricted speech contexts, a complementary body of research on listeners' conversational responses to speech and consideration of these responses in terms of language ideologies will augment this canon. Attention to the details of listeners' description of their reactions to speech samples highlights their assumptions and meaning making, both explicit and implicit, giving linguists a better understanding of the social realization of perception. Irvine (2001) comments:

...the investigation [of ideologies] will require moving beyond the mere recording of informants' explicit statements of sociolinguistic norms, for beliefs and ideational schemes are not contained only in a person's explicit assertions of them. Instead, some of the most important and interesting aspects of ideology lie behind the scenes, in assumptions that are taken for granted—that are never fully explicitly stated in any format that would permit them also to be denied (p. 25).

Recognition of this gap in linguistic research on speech perception of race has led me to a social constructionist framework. My belief that language exists as social interaction (not as a system in the mind) forces me to reconsider the relevant features and constructs for analysis of listeners' perceptions of race. Existing studies of perception mainly examine listeners' ability to identify race or the nature of acoustic signals they judge to belong to African American speakers (or speakers of other races), focusing on structural features of language as a system. I suggest that a gap in research can be filled by examining acoustic phonetic considerations of saliency (i.e., structural features) in light of social, discursive meaning making (i.e., evaluations and ideologies) prioritized in linguistic anthropology and other social sciences. This entails examining the discursive process of language evaluation with a focus not on structures, but on

interaction. Interview data of conversations about speech provide a useful method of accomplishing this.

Mapping cues to the identification of race without regard for listeners' accounts restricts the value of sociolinguistic research. Opening up methods to consider processes of *how* augments the applicability of this longstanding line of inquiry. Traditional variationist sociolinguistic methods effectively identify whether, and by whom, something occurs—such as identifying speakers as African American (Baugh, 1996; Purnell et al., 1999; Tucker & Lambert, 1969), or where something happens—such as the occurrence of certain lexical or phonological items (Kretzschmar, 2003; Labov, Ash & Boberg, 2000; Pederson, 2000). While linguistic studies have inquired into the who, what, when, and where of many aspects of AAE, the how and why of listeners' perceptions—including what is deemed by them to be attributed to a “Black” sounding speaker—have only been addressed in detail by folk linguistics (e.g., Niedzielski, 1997; Niedzielski & Preston, 2003; Preston & Robinson, 2005). This tradition gives us rich descriptions and accounts of how non linguists categorize linguistic perceptions, but still does not examine in detail how ideologies and perceptions relate to these processes and their development.

Research that builds upon existing realist inquiry through either the use of multi-methods or entirely constructionist epistemologies will complement and expand possibilities for sociolinguistic research on racial speech perception that is well suited to answer questions previously unanswerable with past epistemologies and methods. Epistemology refers to researcher beliefs about knowledge—what kinds of knowledge are valuable, what ways of establishing knowledge are legitimate, and how such knowledge claims are produced. Additionally, a better understanding of social and linguistic processes behind perceptual activity

can lend standards of proof to legal battles regarding linguistic profiling (Baugh, 2003) and forensic linguistics (Gibbons, 2003), can inform educational policy by creating greater awareness of variety among speakers (Rickford & Rickford, 2000), and can complement and promote a non-autonomous sociolinguistic (Rickford, 2001).

Methods of Data Collection

The data for this study derive from loosely-structured interviews I conducted with 29 undergraduate students at a large southeastern university in the U.S. I began the forty-five minute interview sessions by playing eight anonymous speech samples (average=16 seconds) for each listener. These samples originate from 45-minute recorded conversations between socially acquainted pairs of African American women. I informed speakers that they could converse about any topic they chose and that data were being gathered on African American women. I did not disclose that the goals of the data collection were linguistic in nature. These meetings took place at various private rooms familiar to at least one member of each pair (a private office or conference room at the university).

I chose speakers from a convenience sample of acquaintances and colleagues from a variety of backgrounds all of whom self-identified as African American women. They represent a variety of speaking styles, and I was interested to see how listeners reported and discussed constructions of speakers' race(s) based upon this varied sample of speaking styles. All speakers were associated with the university in some capacity. The following table includes biographical information about each woman, labeled with the pseudonym³ by which she was presented to

³ I chose these pseudonyms because I saw them as race-neutral. This proved to be a naïve assumption, as names carry different social connotations for each individual. In subsequent incarnations of this study, numbers were assigned to the samples, although I avoided this originally to increase the personal quality names impart to the task.

listeners. Demographic information includes age, position at the university, and where each woman was raised.

Table 1.1

Speakers' demographic information

Pam	undergraduate student in her late teens from the northeastern U.S.
Betty	faculty member in her early forties from the Midwestern U.S.
Sandra	graduate student in her late twenties from the southeastern U.S.
Rhonda	graduate student in her early forties from the northeastern U.S.
Michelle	undergraduate student in her early twenties from the southeastern U.S.
Sophie	faculty member in her late thirties from the southern U.S.
Mary	staff member in her early sixties from the southeastern U.S.
Jill	graduate student in her late twenties from the southern U.S.

From these recorded conversations, I chose short speech samples based on a lack of overtly stigmatized grammatical, morphosyntactic and phonological features⁴ (e.g., Bailey, 2001; Bailey & Thomas, 1998; Cukor-Avila, 2001; Green, 2002; Rickford, 1999) as well as content that I thought listeners would not identify as racially marked or perpetuate racial stereotypes (e.g., soul food, religion). I selected samples of about 16 seconds in length to present what I feel is sufficient but not overwhelming speech context upon which listeners can evaluate speakers'

⁴ Examples of stigmatized features include consonant cluster reduction ("firs" for "first"), stressed "BIN" ("she been done that"), use of labiodental fricatives for interdental fricatives ("breav" for "breathe"), lack of copula ("she the ugly one").

race. I did not disclose speakers' race, nor did I present a choice of words for discussing race. Rather, I let listeners choose their own terminology, which included only "African American," "White", "Black", and "Caucasian".

Listeners were all undergraduates at the aforementioned university, and their ages ranged from 18-25 years at the time of the interviews. They represent a variety of majors (none of which are linguistics). Of the listeners, 20 come from the southeastern U.S. and nine from other areas of the U.S. I recruited these listeners through colleagues' classes at the university. Requirements for participation included current undergraduate status at the university and having resided in the U.S. from an early age. I did not control for any variables but did try to recruit as many African American participants as possible. While a convenience sample at this university would have yielded mostly European American interviewees, I strove to include around 50% African American listeners. While I am not seeking to target supposedly "informed" evaluations through this decision, I do hope to increase the variety of possible perspectives upon which evaluation of speech is constructed in the interview. This choice was informed by the assumption that the inclusion of individuals who claim cultural affiliation with a culture (i.e., African American) may offer a different perspective on experiences and opinions than individuals who claim affiliation with a dominant cultural majority (i.e., European American) (Baker, 1984).

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and took place in a private conference room at the university. Listeners completed a demographic information sheet and gave written consent to participate (see Appendix A for demographic information sheet). I then told each listener that I was interested in their identification and evaluation of speakers' race and asked them to pay attention to the *sound* of each woman's speech and not to focus primarily on word choice or grammatical features (see appendix B for pre-interview script). After playing the eight

speech samples, one at a time, two times each, I gave listeners the opportunity to hear each sample again or at any time throughout the interview. I provided a copy of the orthographic transcripts of the speech samples on which to take notes if listeners chose; these were labeled by speakers' pseudonyms and attended only to content and punctuation that aided readability (see appendix C for these transcripts). I used a variable ordering of samples across interviews, and after playing all eight, I announced the commencement of recording. (See appendix D for loose interview guide.) After listeners spoke briefly about each speech sample, I prompted them to describe the reasons for their evaluations. If they did not mention race, I prompted this next.

Listeners' Perceptions of Speakers' Race(s)

In order to examine listeners' discussions about speakers' races, I closely transcribed each interview verbatim with attention to intonation and pauses. Initial examination of the transcript data (and my experiences in the interviews themselves) revealed that most of the listeners describe Betty as sounding "White", far more than for any other speaker. This was interesting because all eight speakers claim affiliation with African American culture and identify themselves as African American. Of the 29 listeners who participated in this study, 19 identify Betty as sounding "White" (65%), eight identify her as sounding "Black" (28%), and two remain undecided (7%). The only other speakers that any listeners label as sounding "White" are Sophie (7%) and Rhonda (2%).

After cursory examination of the ways listeners' categorized Betty's speech, I chose to further examine the ways that Betty was constructed as different from the other speakers across these 29 interviews. Looking at how she stood out from the other seven speakers as someone whose race was problematic offers a useful juxtaposition of dialogue about race in these interviews. The analysis presented here moves farther away from attention to linguistic structures

(decontextualized) and toward examination of linguistic processes involved in describing perception (contextualized).

Table 1.2 below provides an illustrative snapshot of listeners' overall evaluations of Betty's race. Listeners mention various reasons for thinking Betty sounds "Black" or "White" throughout their interviews. Incidentally, no other racial categories emerge other than "Black", "African American", "White" or "Caucasian".

Table 1.2

Listeners' perceptions of Betty

<u>Listeners</u>	<u>Total #</u>	<u>Betty =White</u>	<u>Betty = Black</u>	<u>Betty =undecided</u>
AA females	5	4	1	0
AA males	4	4	0	0
EA females	13	9	2	2
EA males	7	2	5	0
Total	29	19	8	2

Analysis of Discourse around Betty's Race

Discourse analysis (DA) serves as the main analytic tool in this study for comparing interviews to each other and to better understand what each listener meant by lay terms within his or her own interview. Since social meaning does not lie in a fixed relationship to words, the indexicality—ways in which linguistic meaning is related to or by linguistic context of language (Ochs, 1992)—makes it crucial to consider listeners' comments in context. Examining the

discursive processes guiding evaluations of race based on speech in the interview can be applied to other social interactions. While the interview is an institutional setting in some respects (Sarangi, 2003), it also includes many of the same constraints and affordances as other social interactions (Baker, 1983). Inquiring about the ways listeners in this study react to, describe, and make sense of Betty's race lends relevance, therefore, to how they might react to and frame their reaction to someone on the phone, in the office, in the classroom, in the courtroom, or on the street.

Discourse analysis includes systematic attention to layers of interaction within the interview. Using DA to work through listeners' discussion about the speech samples, I analyze the reasons for those perceptions with a focus on how Betty's "Whiteness" or "Blackness" becomes relevant in the evaluative talk of these listeners. I examine hesitations, mitigations, use of social and linguistic categories, and the ways these are constructed (Edwards, 2003; Potter, 2005; Rymes, 1996; Stokoe & Wiggins, 2005). From these, I identified three major themes in the ways listeners construct Betty's race as well as one underlying ideological resource evidenced in many listeners' accounts. As I will touch upon in the implications, in order for linguistic studies to apply findings outside the field, they must provide recourse into socially contextual meaning making and interaction. I assert that examining the discursive construction of Betty's race provides a useful analogue for how individuals might make sense of voices they hear, and people they come into contact with in other social settings.

As detailed above, listeners categorized Betty's race differently than they did the other seven speakers (i.e., "White"). The following analysis further examines the ways this difference manifests itself in interviews through examination of the ways in which listeners construct and position Betty's race.

Why Betty's race is problematic

The striking difference between listeners' categorizations of Betty's race and the other seven speakers surfaces in almost all of the interviews and is characterized in three main ways: (1) Betty sounds "White" and the others do not (actively "White"); (2) the others sound "Black" and Betty does not (passively "non Black"), and (3) Betty sounds "Black" but ambiguously so, which sets her apart from the other speakers (ambiguously "Black"). These three distinct but overlapping ways that listeners construct Betty's difference illustrates the ways that listeners' construct—or make meaning of—her race. Within these three distinctions, listeners cite specific features of Betty's speech as salient for them and position her in reference to the other speakers, their ideas and expectations of race and speech style, and people and experiences in their lives.

What makes Betty sound "White" or "non Black"?

To exemplify how listeners used features of Betty's speech to occasion the topic of her race as "White", I offer three excerpts: KD (a European American female), TA (an African American female) and EH (a European American male) all identify Betty's speech as sounding "White" but in different ways. For KD and TA, Betty sounds passively "non Black", whereas EH describes Betty's speech as actively "White". (See appendix E for transcription conventions.)

(1)

KD: I think there were things that remind me of White speech um (3) just well I mean the lack of sounding Black. And maybe there's a sound to a White person as well {they} could pick up on.

After KD first formulates her evaluation of Betty's speech as reminiscent of "White" speech, she seems to rethink her statement and restates that it really has a lack of sounding "Black", not an

actual “White” sound. She adds speculatively that there might be an identifiable “White” sound, but this is not how she frames her interpretation. Instead, I argue that KD positions “Whiteness” as the default in this excerpt. After mentioning that features of Betty’s speech “remind” KD of “White” speech, she pauses for three seconds, then hedges, “just well I mean” before concluding that this is really “the lack of sounding Black” for her. She weakly suggests, “maybe” there is a “White” sound out there, but not necessarily in her conception.

TA’s reasons for attributing the category of “Whiteness” to Betty’s speech appear less general than KD’s, hinging instead on her specific perception of Betty’s “southern” accent and what this implicates for the construction of her race.

(2)

TA: Betty I thought was White. Because (5) like it’s very kind of hard to tell why somebody sounds White or Black and the same for all of them. But I just thought Betty was White.

KA: So was that something that you thought right away or was it something that she said that clued you into it?

TA: Um (5) I think it was also because of her accent. She had a southern accent that really didn’t sound Black so I just concluded that she was White from that.

TA does not describe Betty’s “Whiteness” in a way that marks it as a default. However, when combined with a southern accent, TA claims that the lack of sounding “Black” tips the scale, and Betty sounds more “White” in this case. In TA’s expression of how race and southernness connect, she positions Betty’s sound as something that does not fit, so she places her in another category, “White”. In both KD and TA’s excerpts, Betty’s “Blackness” is constructed as a

category ascription of necessity; she does not fit elsewhere, so she is placed in the category of “White”.

EH also attributes a feature of Betty’s speech to her sounding different—the flow of her speech. But he clearly states how this leads to her categorization of “White” for him. Not only is this discursive construction one of active “Whiteness”, but one of arguably archetypal “Whiteness”—newscaster. This cliché arises in many discussions about accent, or lack thereof, and is almost categorically used to denote European Americans or “White” sounding speech.

(3)

EH: Everything was (.) had it- it seemed like it had equal (2) there was a flow to her speech that some of the others didn’t have.

KA: Mm-hmm. (2.5) Um so how did that make her sound in comparison to others. (2)

EH: Her- (2.7) um (.) it sounded more (.) White I guess you would say or=

KA: =Mm-hmm,

EH: <I don’t know> like newscast.

KA: Mm-hmm.

EH: U:m, (3) she didn’t have as much (.) the tone in her voice was not- it wasn’t it wasn’t goin up and down as much as some of the others. It was just more flat.

EH compares Betty to the other speakers, and when I ask him to describe what this difference means to him, he states after a brief pause, “White, I guess you would say”. While Betty’s “Whiteness” seems to be actively marked by her speech style for EH (not as a default as in KD and TA’s constructions), the way he describes it is marked with hesitation. Despite EH’s construction of Betty as actively “White”, his descriptions are marked with difficulty,

maintaining Betty's general problematic racial identity for these speakers. This difficulty arises in listeners' discussion about Betty's speech as they accomplish the construction of a "White" Betty—as actively "White" or passively "non Black"—as well as the third category of construction I consider in this analysis—Betty as ambiguously "Black".

Why Betty sounds "Black ...but"

Of the eight listeners that thought Betty sounded "Black" all but one qualify that assessment with comments on how much harder it was to decide this compared to other speakers, or how her race is somehow ambiguous for them. These descriptions of Betty's voice as ambiguously "Black" do as much to construct her difference from the other seven speakers as those that categorize Betty as "White". The differences listeners attribute to the characteristics of Betty's sound resides in how her race is made different, not just as belonging to the category "Black" or "White". What is most interesting about these constructions of Betty as "Black" is what follows—the seemingly obligatory...*but*. This difficulty is described in the interviews as a disconnect between what listeners expect of a "Black" sound—the fit of the components of a voice that falls into the category "Black"—into which Betty falls with trouble.

The next excerpt comes from an interview with MT (an African American female) in which she provides her reasoning behind why Betty was ambiguously "Black" for her.

(4)

MT: Yeah they all sound Black to me except Betty. Betty was- I wasn't quite sure. Kind of just ambiguous she was. Somehow it really took me a while to fig- the rest were so easy to figure out, "Yeah they're Black," but Betty was just different 'cause I guess I mean she could be Black or White. Like the pitch in her voice and

the rhythm are somehow White but at the same time she just had this Black intonation as well.

KA: Hmm. So when you say the pitch and the rhythm are kind of White sounding but the intonation is Black sounding- so when you say pitch you mean the highness or lowness of her voice?

MT: Yeah the fluctuation of her voice.

KA: Sounded White?

MT: Yeah.

KA: Ok, but then when you said intonation um what did you mean by intonation?

MT: Just the way she speaks. I don't know just something back there sounds Black. All of them have that but just Betty was a little ambiguous 'cause her rhythm and her tone of voice were not consistent with each other.

(hears speech sample again)

MT: Yeah, she's Black. She just has a little- like she speaks a little bit like a White person. Probably grew- na:h- yeah probably grew around like middle class White people. And she probably picked up that rhythm but I guess she still kind of sounds Black.

MT's description of why Betty could be either "Black" or "White" includes features of Betty's speech that sound "Black" to MT mixed with features she identifies as sounding "White". A difference between this construction of Betty and the prior constructions is that MT hears things in Betty's speech she feels are "Black" *and* "White"; she describes this as inconsistent, suggesting that her expectations of what "Black" or "White" speech sounds like is

not sufficiently met for MT. Upon hearing Betty's speech sample for a third time, MT decides that Betty is indeed "Black" and that the ambiguousness arose from exposure Betty must have had to middle class "Whites", therefore coloring her speech with "non Black" flavor. This excerpt offers a unique view into the way this listener makes sense of Betty's race. MT hears aspects of Betty's speech that do not sound "Black" and finally places them within an attribution of sufficient exposure to "middle class White people" that changed Betty's speech patterns over time. In MT's construction, Betty does not fit into either category of "Black" or "White", so MT constructs a feasible way to account for this. Her sense making includes a Betty that "still sounds kind of Black", but "she speaks a little bit like a White person". However, Betty is "Black" *enough* for MT to ascribe "Blackness"...*but* to her and not the opposite ("Whiteness"...*but*).

Betty as proper: The ideology of "correct" speech

Another way that listeners constructed Betty's ambiguous "Black" sound hinges on a difference from the other seven speakers rooted in an ideology of "correctness". Betty stands out from the other speakers because many listeners identify her speech as "proper", "clearer", and "better enunciated". I argue that this ideological frame finds roots in a dominant language ideology perpetuated in schools, by parents, and people everywhere that speaking "correctly" affords one opportunities, maximizes social capital, and can erase aspects of your identity (i.e. southern, rural, African American, minimally educated, urban, etc.) (Lanehart, 1998). Like all ideologies, language ideologies are deep seated, often unconscious, and socially ubiquitous. I postulate that some listeners draw upon an ideology of correctness to back up their claims and perceptions about Betty. It stands as a kind of unquestionable authority. Their reasoning appeals to a higher authority rooted in ideology—the way it is. In this way, ideology becomes a crucial joist in many listeners' construction of Betty's race, be it "Black" or "White".

The following excerpt from my interview with MAS (a European American female) serves as a prime example of this ideology as a resource in her construction of Betty as ambiguously “Black”.

(5)

MAS: She was also a little bit hard to tell than some of the other people. She sounded- she **sounded** a little more educated um she soun- I mean not necessarily educated maybe she just came from a different place she um her I don’t know she sounded a lot more proper than some of the other people um and she was a little bit more hard to tell her race but I think that she’s Black.

KA: Ok, so what made you think that she was Black?

MAS: Um (6) I could just hear it in her voice just like kinda when you answer the telephone and you’re trying to figure out who somebody is you can just decipher.

KA: So was it um (3) was it like a pitch thing or a rhythmic thing or a pause duration thing or anything like that=

MAS: =Some of the others is definitely rhythmic (slowly) rhythmic rhythmic? I don’t know and (.) you can just tell especially with some of them you can just tell right away just (.) by the way that they (.) pronounce words. With her (.) she sounded a lot more standardized but I could just tell by the um (.) depth of her voice.

Immediately after commenting on how Betty’s race was “hard to tell”, MAS lists a number of reasons for this: “a little more educated”, “came from a different place”, “sounded a lot more proper than some of the other people”, and “sounded a lot more standardized”. Through this implicit comparison between Betty and the other speakers, MAS lists reasons for her

difficulty identifying Betty's race; she constructs possible ways to not be "Black" and I argue, to possibly be "White". Through her mention of "a different place" presumably inhabited by "some of the other people" (perhaps the other speakers, who sound "Black"), MAS constructs a type of "Blackness" that is rooted in sounding more "proper" and "harder to tell" than the other speakers. She does this with a visible degree of hesitation and mitigation ("I mean", "maybe", "I don't know"). She then makes a crucial distinction; Betty's pronunciation is "proper", and the others sound more "Black". What renders Betty's "Blackness" for MAS is not her pronunciation (which one can control in some cases) but her voice itself (which one has less control over). Coming from "a different place" can lead to sounding "proper" for MAS, hinting at issues of opportunity, education, and standardization. So Betty can still be "Black" in MAS's construction because of the "depth of her voice", but that which she may have control over (pronunciation) masks her race somewhat difficultly for MAS, because it does not fit her expectations of race and speech.

KW (a European American female), also cites Betty's clear pronunciation as a reason for her difficulty determining Betty's race. There was something "Black" sounding about Betty for KW, but, like MAS, what she perceived as clarity in Betty's pronunciation confused her perception of Betty as "Black" because something did not match up in her expectations of a "Black" voice.

(6)

KW: Now see I had a really hard time with her. I mean she pronounced her words fully I thought and (3) u:m (3) I mean she was **really** clear and uh and that's why I kind of like had a hard time with her I think.

In addition to listeners' constructions of Betty as ambiguously "Black", many specific attributions of Betty's "Whiteness" also hinged on an ideology of "correct" speech. For the listeners in the next two excerpts, Betty's "Whiteness" is saliently marked by the fact that there is something "more" about what they label her "enunciation", "pronunciation", or "grammar" than the other seven speakers.

CS (a European American female), comments about Betty do not just include a notion of complete enunciation but hinge upon it entirely. CS hits upon properness, clarity, and pronunciation in her description of Betty's race.

(7)

CS: I think Betty's White because of the way she spoke (.). I think it was more proper than the other (2) people.

KA: So is that also grammar or=

CS: =Clearer sentences. I think Betty was clearer with the pronunciation of words than Michelle was. And I (1) could tell that she was White. I think her-her sentences were more-more clea:r and

KA: Mm-hmm.

CS: more clear than Michelle's.

According to CS, Betty has clearer pronunciation of words and clearer sentences, which she directly compares to Michelle's speech (who she thought sounded "Black"). It was this difference in pronunciation, rooted in a sense of clarity for CS that frames her decision here to ascribe "Whiteness" to Betty. The category of "White" includes sounding "proper" and "clear" for CS.

LG, (a European American female), also depicts her perception of Betty's race as hinged on pronunciation.

(8)

LG: I couldn't decide if she was Black or White. Like at the beginning she would (.) was pronouncing her words very well and right there (pointing to transcript) it kind of ran together. These first few words sounded very, very White.

KA: Did any other parts sound White to you?

LG: (5) I don't know. I think mainly at the beginning of all the sentences she- it seemed like she starts out better and then do it. And the say she said "loo:k" she sounded Black. (small laugh) And I guess the duration and intonation are (.) not as bad as Pam. Still a little bit, yeah noticeable.

For LG, Betty's race is unclear because the ways she pronounces words vacillates between "White" and "Black" between the beginning and end of her sample. LG describes Betty's "first few words" as pronounced "very well" and "very, very White". In the middle of the sample, LG claims that Betty "ran together" which sounds "Black" to LG. This however, is not "as bad as Pam's". LG is more explicit than the previous excerpts about values she associates with Betty's speech. For her it is not just "proper" or "White" but "good" and "not as bad" as the other speakers.

Implications and Discussion

Although Betty, like the other seven speakers in this study, considers herself a culturally affiliated African American, she is consistently constructed by 28 out of 29 undergraduate listeners as racially "different" from the other seven speakers. Whether listeners label her as

sounding “White” or “Black”, her speech sample represents a departure from the other speakers. The ways listeners navigate the issue of Betty’s race include sounding actively “White”, passively “non Black”, and ambiguously “Black”. Ideologies of “correctness” surface in many listeners’ accounts of why they judged Betty’s race the way they do, hinting at the ways evaluation and justification intertwine. When asked to confront their perceptions of race, listeners compare speakers to each other, evoke personal experiences and expectations, and sometimes draw upon the explanatory resource of language ideology to legitimate their perceptions. These are constructed as widely available cultural resources or intuitions (i.e., “I could just tell”).

Features of speech, frequencies of the occurrence of these features, and correlations of these features to listeners’ social attributes are important to sociolinguistic inquiry; but the ways they emerge in descriptions of listeners’ racial evaluations of speech and the ways in which discourse highlights ideologies and judgments are also important to a contextualized account of speech perception. In this study, the ways listeners construct Betty as “White”, “non Black”, and “ambiguously Black” shed light on the social categories, implicit assumptions, and ideologies that serve as implicit resources in listeners’ sense making and justification of their evaluations of race. Betty is not just “Black” or “White”; listeners’ categorizations of her speech place her between and across categories, thwarting expectation—she is “White...*and*”, “Black...*but*”. This study shows that listeners’ reactions to race often surface through ascription of leaking boundaries; we make sense of others based upon very messy conceptions of the social world. By illustrating just a few of the ways that these 29 listeners constructed Betty; it is clear that there is far more to be said about the data in this study, let alone the constructions that occur on a daily basis as we hear others speak and react to and interact with them.

Implications from this study promote an awareness of language ideology and serve to illuminate the social grounding and effects of racial evaluations of speech in interaction. I draw specific connections to this study and educational research and practice. The interactions between teachers and students, as well as students with each other are rooted in language. The reflexive ways that language does not just disseminate information, but also speaks to social relations, assumptions, and judgments is often taken for granted by both researchers, and the researched. The power of this reflexive nature of language is amplified by its invisibility in many situations and institutions. Greater awareness of how we perceive and judge others based upon their speech can have far reaching effects—both positive and negative. In order to inform research on education, as well as language ideology, perceptual studies of language, and studies of race in general, I suggest a refocusing in sociolinguistic work on language and race. What we attend to in our analyses and the contexts we consider can shape our insights about linguistic perception of race and open up a dialogue with other social scientists working on problems of social equity and opportunity in the public sector. This study illustrates some of the meaning making that emerges in listeners' evaluations of one speaker's race based on her speech. The framing and content of these evaluations hint at underlying ideologies guiding evaluation and justification of racial identification of speech. The application of this and future, related studies can extend implications of findings from studies of linguistic perception across many related fields considering the meaning we make surrounding race and speech as we interact with others.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND APPLICATION OF SOCIOCULTURAL
RESEARCH ON RACIAL SPEECH PERCEPTION⁵

⁵ K. Anderson. Methodology, Epistemology and Application of Sociocultural Research on Racial Speech Perception. Submitted to *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3/31/06.

Abstract

Sociolinguistic studies of racial speech perception have the potential to influence other social science research considering speech, race, and social meaning. However, many linguistic studies remain confined to theoretical and methodological assumptions common to the hard sciences. This article initiates a dialogue on a set of alternative assumptions, specifically sociocultural epistemologies and methods, for conceptualizing language use and advancing sociolinguistic accounts of racial evaluations of speech. While most sociolinguistic studies of racial speech perception operate exclusively under realist assumptions associated with generativist studies of language, I propose complementary research (re)considering long-standing questions about the ideological components and discursive foundations of social processes involved in racial identification of speech. I offer examples from my own research incorporating constructionist assumptions common to a family of approaches in psychology, sociology, and education. Membership categorization analysis of interviewees' racial evaluations of speech samples grounds the epistemological and methodological suggestions I make for augmenting the applicability of sociolinguistic findings on this topic. I argue that greater interdisciplinary and applied engagement in sociolinguistic research on racial speech perception across education, sociology, psychology, and linguistic anthropology can occur by asking additional questions about linguistic meaning making from a sociocultural perspective.

Keywords: Race, Sociolinguistics, Sociocultural theory, Language ideology, speech perception, membership categorization analysis

Introduction

This paper aims to encourage an epistemological and methodological discussion about the applied potential for linguistic research on speech perception and race. Most linguistic studies on this subject stem from the subfields of variationist sociolinguistics⁶ and sociophonetics, which do not find substantial application in other social science disciplines. Relative to many other social science treatments of language and race, variationist sociolinguistic studies omit discussions of theoretical perspective, epistemology, and methodology. I argue that by considering these discussions, sociolinguistic studies of racial and linguistic meaning making can incorporate more transparent and expanded arguments that will be more readily recognized and taken up in related interdisciplinary dialogues.

Some of the terms I raise have varying implications in different disciplines, so to clarify my position I offer the following definitions. By theoretical perspective I refer specifically to assumptions about language and society (Crotty, 1998)—how the nature and role of language and its social grounding are conceptualized (i.e., does the researcher believe that underlying mental states are reflected by language?). Epistemology refers to the kinds of knowledge that are sought and the ways they are (re)produced (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) (i.e., does the researcher believe that unbiased reactions to speech are possible and valuable?). Methodology includes grounding principles behind research design that link theoretical perspective, research questions, and methods used (Mercer, 2004; Wolcott, 2001). If you believe that language reflects mental states and that unbiased reactions to speech can reveal these, this may lead to using survey or interview data as a tool to “uncover” individuals’ perceptual processes. Researchers in many

⁶ I use this term to refer to a branch that dominates North American sociolinguistics. Largely recognized as pioneered by William Labov and his colleagues in the late 1960s, it is an empirically based tradition that correlates linguistic variables with social variables. It seeks both to describe and predict language variation.

other social science disciplines considering speech and society openly air the theoretical perspective as well as epistemological and methodological considerations that inform their research questions, methods, and analyses. However scholars in variationist sociolinguistics and sociophonetics generally do not engage in such practices. I argue that findings from linguistic studies are not taken up in interdisciplinary dialogues with other social science researchers partly due to this fact.

The insights and suggestions I offer here stem from my research investigating the ways that listeners justify their evaluations of a speakers' race through descriptions of speech samples, how listeners construct race as a topic through these descriptions, and how listeners' language ideologies along with the social and linguistic categories they create frame their discussions of perceptions. With little linguistic research on perception addressing these questions, this investigation is necessarily interdisciplinary. Two main research questions ground the work I describe in the latter portion of this article: (1) By what devices do listeners ascribe racial categories to speakers they hear? and (2) how does interviewees' talk implicate social meaning making around speech? To address these questions, I employ membership categorization analysis (MCA) as an analytic tool to make sense of how listeners' talk is a practical accomplishment that constructs race and racialized ways of speaking through interaction.

I argue that questions posed by various North American linguists over the years as to how "African American English" is conceptualized by listeners (i.e., Green, 2002; Spears, 1998) and findings from past studies on perceptions of race in speech (Baugh, 1996; Thomas & Reaser, 2004; Tucker & Lambert, 1969) can benefit from a synthesis of methods drawn from the approaches of MCA, as well as the epistemologically related approaches of conversation analysis (CA), and discursive psychology (DP). Reconceptualizing epistemological and methodological

assumptions common to sociolinguistic accounts of racial speech perception offer additional avenues to address this topic, building upon past work and promoting interdisciplinary engagement through research that is accessible to other social science disciplines.

I begin by discussing the differences between what I refer to as realist and sociocultural modes of linguistic inquiry. I then contrast existing linguistic studies of racial speech perception and argue for the inclusion of epistemologies and methods aligned under a broad sociocultural approach to research on language. I conclude with examples from my research examining the ways that interviewees discursively orient to and construct race in interviews. These frame the implications I draw in my findings for epistemologically and methodologically informed sociolinguistic research on racial speech perception that has a more interdisciplinary and applied focus.

Epistemologies overt and implied

Methodology involves a reflective analysis of which kinds of knowledge “count”, which procedures will be used to investigate this knowledge, and what types of claims research can support (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). This is directly influenced by a researcher’s epistemology, which, although distinct from the notion of theoretical perspective in detailed accounts of research practice and design, can be subsumed under the same general notion for the purposes of this article. I do this also with consideration for ambiguity that may ensue between “linguistic theory” as advanced by empirical sociolinguists and generativists and theory in the philosophical and methodological sense.

I align with critical assumptions that research methods, designs, and analyses are not neutral, but are ideological (e.g., Eckert, 2001; Mercer, 2004; van den Berg et al., 2003). Goals for research influence what one seeks to find, which in turn influences the ways that one designs

research questions, methods, and analyses (Rickford, 2001). As mentioned above, variationist sociolinguistic and sociophonetic studies rarely make explicit considerations of the interconnectedness of research questions, methods, and theories about language in their studies. This autonomous mode of sociolinguistics (Rickford, 2001) renders it “conceptually isolated from other important theoretical traditions in linguistics, let alone the wider analysis of human communication and interaction” (Coupland, 2001, p. 186). The ways that research traditions conceptualize language and its social functions impact study design as well as how findings are disseminated and taken up. Therefore, grounding research in recognizable traditions of scholarship on language is crucial to acknowledgment of concerns related to autonomy and conceptual isolation

Realist and sociocultural perspectives on language

The role of epistemology can be usefully appreciated in terms of the distinctions between positivist and constructionist perspectives. I contrast two epistemological perspectives about language and social meaning—realist and sociocultural—along with the types of knowledge they prioritize and advance. Hammersley (1992) situates realist approaches as common to mainstream positivist research and concerned with findings that reproduce reality, which is assumed to exist outside of the research context (as cited in Speer, 2005). In other words, realist perspectives assume that objects contain meaning independent of social experience (Crotty, 1998), and language is conceived as an objective system studied apart from the context of interaction. It is from a realist approach that much of variationist sociolinguistic research is conducted. Recent linguistic accounts aligned with this perspective refer to it as “realist” (i.e., Dodsworth, 2005; Johnstone, 2005). So, I adopt the term “realist” as a parallel consideration to other sociolinguistic dialogues on theory.

In contrast, constructionist views regard talk as social practice that occasions mutual, local constructions of reality in which the researcher is a co-participant in meaning making and interpretation (Cassell, 2005). Relativism guides assumptions that knowledge and findings are colored by the nature of research questions, methods, and epistemology. Theoretical perspectives within constructionism also take on different names depending on the discipline and sometimes the stance within that given discipline. I use the term “sociocultural” to denote a focus within the constructionist perspective that emphasizes joint construction of meaning by individuals through historical and social contexts (Mercer, 2004). Applied to theories of language and its use, this sociocultural lens advances the perspective that language practices lie in a dialectic relationship to social meaning through socially contextualized interaction. As such, language production only takes on communicative and social meaning when and how interlocutors construct it.

The sociocultural perspective I advance in this article aligns with the aforementioned attention to discourse as practice in MCA, CA, and DP. Mercer (2004) describes sociocultural perspectives as rooted in Vygotsky’s (1978) work on communication. “From a sociocultural perspective, then, human[s’]... lives are normally led within groups, communities and societies based on shared ‘ways with words’, ways of thinking, social practices and tools for getting things done” (Mercer, 2004, p. 139). This perspective is widely taken up in educational research, and I adopt its notions of collective construction of meaning through discourse. I argue that this engenders avenues of sociolinguistic research on speech perception rooted in social science traditions focusing on the social genesis and maintenance of race and speech style through interaction. To aid the case I make for inclusion of methods informed by a sociocultural perspective, I review the role of theoretical perspective in sociolinguistic research of language and speech.

Theory of language in sociolinguistics

In variationist sociolinguistics, language is generally construed as a set of practices that constitute a system (e.g., Chambers, 2003). Edwards (2003) observes that the notion of language as a system assumes that representations of reality are mirrored in speech. Researchers operating within these assumptions investigate correlative patterns between linguistic features produced in everyday speech and social categories the speakers fit into (Wooffitt, 2005), the latter of which are viewed as fixed (Schilling-Estes, 2004). These linguistic systems, although rooted in speech production, are implicitly theorized in variationist sociolinguistic studies as decontextual systems of the mind, differing little from Chomsky's generative theories about language (Francis & Hester, 2004).

While variationist sociolinguistics has put the “socio” into the study of language, it often remains in the service of conceptualizing language as a mental entity—not an inherently social one. Coupland (2001) suggests a growing trend among sociolinguists to account for the context of discourse when analyzing its use. He claims that, “sociolinguistics must account for the social organization of meanings through interactive discourses” (p. 195). This trend has yet to find substantial representation in variationist sociolinguistics, which I argue remains largely in the shadow of the generativist concerns that ground its origins. However, interest has surfaced in the work of a few U.S. scholars, and more widely the U.K. and the Netherlands, in the form of critical sociolinguistics (Sarangi, 2003), critical discourse analysis (Blommaert, 2005), CA (ten Have, 1999), MCA (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002), DP (Potter, 2005), and critical DP (CDP) (Wetherell, 1998). While not all of these scholars claim to be sociocultural theorists, I extend their views, when applicable, under the position I advance as sociocultural. Broadly, I consider this a view of language, not as a system in the mind, but as a practice constituted and maintained

through interaction (Francis & Hester, 2004). Analyses aligned with this perspective examine what becomes relevant and evident in talk by drawing on participants' and researchers' shared understandings and resources and are arguably sociocultural by this focus.

An example of this perspective in sociolinguistics is extended by Eckert (2001), who asserts that language style is a set of linguistic practices that listeners associate with certain social meaning. She suggests that a "remaining question is how that meaning gets constructed" in language practice (pp. 123-124). Examining talk as practice rooted in social context addresses this concern. Ways of speaking, dialects, varieties, and styles do not exist outside of listeners' perceptions of them, according to a sociocultural perspective. Drawing from Bauman & Briggs (1990), awareness and analytic consideration of "speakers' meta-level discourse on language" can advance understandings of how linguistic performance and its evaluation produce and reproduce meaning in ideological ways (p. 61). This becomes relevant to other related contexts under the assumption that talk, in all settings, is the site for meaning construction (Sarangi, 2003). This trajectory of study has been quite significant in other fields addressing language and its social meaning, but has not yet gained prominence in sociolinguistic studies of racial speech perception. To advance understanding of how normative forces manifest themselves in everyday interaction, socioculturally informed research highlights the ways that social meanings around speech style and race are created and maintained, implicating ideological grounding for such reproduction of social practice (Wooffitt, 2005).

Realist sociolinguistics

Variationist sociolinguistics, sociophonetics, and perceptual dialectology are the main linguistic subfields that have conducted empirical studies of listeners' perceptions of race based upon speech. While these subfields are not synonymous, realist-informed methodologies and

epistemologies have generally guided research in each. Methods common to studies under this perspective include the following three: (1) Matched guise tasks asking listeners to react to and correlate different belief statements about a speaker's social attributes based upon his or her speech (e.g., Giles & Powesland, 1975). (2) Linguistic surveys and questionnaires in which respondents rank or in some other way quantify opinions about their own or others' speech (in the abstract or in reference to speech samples) (e.g., Preston, 1989). (3) Laboratory tests asking respondents to identify the race of speakers based on a range of recorded and sometimes systematically manipulated speech cues. These are designed to target the objective salience of certain phonetic and phonological features (e.g., Clopper & Pisoni, 2004). Relatively little of this empirical research on racial speech perception considers *how* listeners accomplish judgments of race based upon speech. Rather, it focuses on accuracy and correlations between linguistic features and pre-established social features. These existent methods align with realist assumptions that language is an objective system to be examined through carefully controlled studies eliciting speech viewed as objective data.

According to Edwards (1998), realist studies include experimenter-defined contexts for talk by “providing conditions and variables within which to record their responses” (p.31). He argues that in order to study how perceptions operate in interaction, theory and methodology must recognize such discursive interactions and descriptions of speech as constructs worthy of study (Edwards, 1998). The difference I would like to emphasize here between the realist informed methodologies described above and what Edwards advocates are epistemological, first and methodological, second. What “counts” as knowledge is not consistent between these two theoretical assumptions and so the principles underlying inquiry, or methodology, differ as well. While I am not advocating an end to realist studies on speech perception, I do argue that

sociocultural studies' addition to the corpus of research on racial speech perception will necessarily augment the types of questions and answers we can consider meaningful, resulting in an expanded understanding of how social and linguistic meaning making occur in interaction.

To further situate realist studies on speech perception, I offer a brief sketch of sociophonetic work in this vein. In the last decade or so, improved power and accessibility of acoustic phonetic analysis software has enabled phoneticians to isolate acoustic phonetic and prosodic cues and to correlate these cues' saliency with identification of speaker race (Baugh, 1996; Grimes, 2005; Purnell et al., 1999; Thomas & Reaser, 2004). These studies examine the potential influence of acoustic stimuli present in speech cues that may lead to accurate judgments of race. Sociophonetic studies consider speech as a signal—a component of a linguistic system to be further broken down, rather than as a social act. As such, findings from these studies do not consider the social processes driving perception or regard speech perceptions as necessarily social, as a sociocultural study would. Instead, their goal is to ameliorate the effect of context on speech and perception, following realist assumptions that unbiased research uncovers objective knowledge. The analogy of a doctor and physical therapist's work is helpful here; both are valuable and can promote the desired effect (healing); but they have different purposes and, thus, different foci. Sometimes healing requires one, both, or neither. In much the same way, I argue that the inclusion of an additional purpose and focus for racialized speech perception (sociocultural) addresses different, but equally important, aspects of racialized identification of speech.

An additional tension between realist and sociocultural methodologies lies in their treatment of “subjects”. Along with other realist informed research, variationist sociolinguistic and sociophonetic studies often do not value listeners' own accounts of what is meaningful and

often treat them skeptically (Wolfram & Baugh, 2005). Surveys and laboratory tasks often require respondents to decide a speakers' race, which is then correlated to either manipulations of the acoustic signal to isolate certain phonetic features or aspects of the respondents' demographic background. These methods effectively bypass participants' agency and nascent insights evident in their practical knowledge and use of speech, which sociocultural research values.

Investigation into the ways that racialized speech is socially constructed can have wide-ranging effects that deserve more attention, as attested to by various linguists (Baugh, 2003; Green, 2002; Morgan, 2002; Spears, 1988). van Dijk et al. (1997) stress that sociolinguistic accounts of racial perception should examine how individuals talk about groups and categories, keeping in mind how these implicate power structures and social contexts (p. 150). Based on this consensus among some linguists about the potential value of studying discourse, I draw a parallel argument for attention to not only the linguistic features that listeners target as potentially salient but how such discussion takes shape and the meaning that is constructed through such description of speech.

A relatively untapped audience for sociocultural research on racial speech perception exists within and outside of linguistics. Some scholars argue that sociolinguistic work on speech perception has not bridged disciplinary boundaries nor been applied outside of the field due to its methodological agnosticism (Coupland, 2001; Rickford, 2001; Schilling-Estes, 2004). The theories on language and its use, as well as the reasons certain methodologies are applied to various research questions, are rarely made explicit in the modes of variationist sociolinguistic research. Instead, the discipline remains autonomous with necessary acculturation into its implicit, arguably a-theoretical methods of research design and analysis. As Mendoza-Denton

(2002) states, discourse analysis and identity work rarely intersect with variationist sociolinguistic studies. I argue that these intersections can occur through awareness and questioning of the epistemological and ideological differences in what these related bodies of research consider as relevant for study. If alternative conceptions of language and perception are understood and valued in variationist sociolinguistic work, it can then accommodate a wider array of studies and findings.

Sociocultural sociolinguistics

“Anti-cognitivist” views of language are prioritized in approaches to language study that developed as critiques of traditional, cognitivist modes of inquiry in sociology (CA, MCA), social psychology (DP), and linguistics (CA) (Wooffitt, 2005). These tools for grounding and conducting studies of discourse lend themselves well to sociocultural analysis, especially in concert with theoretical and epistemological concerns of more critical forms of linguistic and discourse analytic traditions (i.e., CDP) through detailed examination of the ways that normative expectations about race, gender, or power, in general, manifest themselves in everyday interaction. As critical postcolonial linguists Makoni et al. (2003) claim, language is both communicative *and* social. Theoretical approaches to linguistic work amenable to a sociocultural paradigm include LePage & Tabouret-Keller (1985), Makoni et al. (2003) and Winford (2003), among others. According to these scholars’ claims, the existence of language varieties depends not only on linguistic features attributed by linguists to those varieties, but also on what speakers and hearers of said varieties occasion as socially relevant in evaluations of speech they hear. By this view, language use, perception, and analysis are socially embedded, and analysis of language cannot be disconnected from the recognition of space(s) in which it is spoken or created. Analyses that attempt to do so can only access part of the picture and often stop at the

structural aspects of language or only vaguely make reference to social underpinnings beyond correlation to social variables.

Listeners' own descriptions about race and language can be a useful site for socioculturally informed analysis of interactions around speech style. Hymes (1996) claims that not all users of language have the same resources (ranging from lexical, morphosyntactic, phonetic, prosodic, pragmatic elements and choices). These resources are not neutral, as Labov discussed in his early work in the 1960s (Blommaert, 2005). However, developments since the 1960s in the Labovian tradition of variationist linguistics do not generally consider the process of how such inequalities of linguistic features are rendered meaningful by listeners' perceptions of them. Rather, it is assumed that these asymmetries are pre-determined from the top down—social inequalities exist and are thus reflected in speech. A sociocultural perspective assumes that social inequalities are *created* through speech and are visible in the ways reactions to speech are imbued with social meaning, which happens whenever we open our ears or our mouths.

Research Design

The study design I highlight here includes interviews as a data collection method and MCA as a method of data analysis. While this is one of many feasible combinations to address a sociocultural study of racial speech perception, I find both useful in my research on this subject. This article serves as an introduction to alternative epistemologies and methodologies for addressing inquiry into racial speech perception. As such I concentrate on the explication of data collection and analysis methods illustrated by examples from a study on racial speech perception informed by sociocultural theory of language practice.

Conception of the interview in realist versus sociocultural perspectives

Realist and sociocultural perspectives on language, as with all epistemologies, assume certain relationships between linguistic practice, social reality, and researchers' analytic claims. Realist views do not consider speech itself as a topic for analysis; "language is thus seen as a mode of representing external and mental realities in an unproblematic way" (Sarangi, 2003, p. 65). The "truthfulness" of interaction is taken into account, as talk is seen only as important as it is reflective of, but not constitutive of, reality. Interviews are seen then, by researchers operating under this perspective, as tools or instruments for eliciting truth about interviewees' underlying perceptions or beliefs (Alasuutari, 1995; Edwards, 1998; van den Berg et al., 2003). On the other hand, interviews take on a different role in sociocultural studies. Seen more as sites for construction of social meaning and identity, they are theorized as both active and performative (Denzin, 2001). In other words, like everyday interactions, interviews offer another forum for the creation and maintenance of social meaning. Information is not just elicited by the interviewer and disseminated by the interviewee, but is co-constructed by participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). The one-to-one correspondence assumed between speech and meaning in realist-informed interviews is redefined in sociocultural interviews; Sarangi (2003) describes this as a contextual fuzziness, meaning that "interview talk" is everywhere. As such, interviews are topics for analysis that contain orientations to talk similar to other discursive contexts.

The practical construction of speech represents one analytical approach for examining meaning making about speech and speakers that remains underutilized in realist studies. A practical construction of speech addresses how we enact and ascribe identities to ourselves and others (Hansen, 2005). Analytic attention to linguistic devices such as lexical choice, pronoun use, affective stance, hedging, mitigation, self-repair, reported speech, laughter, and narrative

construction all implicate interviewees' construction of what different social categories index for them in language use (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002). These can be significant, as they are devices used in talk to accomplish goals, such as to subvert skepticism, establish rapport, avoid unwanted characterization and generally control impressions (Stokoe & Wiggins, 2005). "These kinds of actions can furnish us with the basis for analytic claims about the kinds of interactional or inferential concerns relevant to the speakers' ongoing production of their talk", i.e. implicate categories and the devices by which they ascribe them (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 189).

The interview context I highlight in my examples includes episodes during which I play short, recorded speech samples for interviewees followed by prompts for their evaluations of the speech. Thus, I occasion a context in which interviewees can orient both to the task of evaluating speech and discuss their social categorizations of it. Analysis of this evaluative talk using MCA evidences individuals' interactional procedures and understandings of how that interaction occurs (Baker, 1983).

Membership categorization analysis

The foundations of MCA stem from sociologist Sacks' moves away from a "decontextualized approach" to language (i.e. Chomskyan). Specifically, Sacks dissociated with views of language as a formalized system or apparatus housed in the mind (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 67) through his work in MCA, and CA with which it is often associated. Despite the fact that MCA and CA share a founder and many considerations, relevant distinctions do apply. While CA examines the ways individuals organize the sequences of talk-in-interaction, MCA focuses specifically on how categories function pragmatically in talk-in-interaction. Through the use of categories, participants co-construct and navigate meaning in ways that contain but are not limited to temporal sequences (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998).

British scholars continued the major work of developing MCA, maintaining its focus on practical language use in context. Hester and Eglin (1997) criticize decontextualized analyses because they “ignore the ways in which the use of knowledge is always situated” (p. 17). MCA stresses that every social act (linguistic or otherwise) is situated, as is every instance of every ascribed category. Rather than viewing language as an encoder of culture or meaning for analysts to uncover *post hoc*, MCA unpacks how language is used to accomplish understanding *in situ* (Hester & Eglin, 1997). In other words, categories are given relevance by their users, and social meaning only exists in action. The categories are assembled through interaction and do not operate by some cognitive machinery; they become meaningful through their use and members’ subsequent understanding.

The main analytic structures used in MCA are membership categories—characterizations of types of people (Psathas, 1999) (i.e., descriptions of how people talk), and membership categorization devices (MCDs)—collections of categories that can be applied to a population (Lepper, 2000) (i.e., “Black”, “White”). When an interviewee identifies one or more categories that they associate with a speech style, they ascribe a particular MCD (“Black”) to that speaker. In this way, MCA is a tool for examining how implicit and practical meaning making is evidenced by and produced through talk. Take the following excerpt from an interview in which the interviewee, FA, describes the speakers she ascribes to the MCD, “sounded African American”. (See appendix E for transcription conventions.)

Example 1: FA

FA: It's a tempo thing, it's some of the intonation and it's a little more animated and I don't know if it's just cause of what they're talking about,

KA: Mm-hmm.

FA: But it just sounds a bit more animated. Like some of those even just remind me of like a southern preacher how you know he would try to do all this really convey your point as well too.

An MCD from this excerpt is speakers who sounded “African American” to FA. The categories she uses to ascribe members of this MCD are: “tempo thing”, “some of the intonation”, “a little more animated”, and “remind me of a southern preacher”. Through attention to the organization of talk around categories and devices, MCA locates meaning making in social interaction, with ongoing maintenance and reconstruction across future interactions (c.f. Garfinkel, 2002). Since this is an ongoing, iterative process, studying how these meanings surface in interviews constitutes a site for this meaning making through interaction.

This meaning making can include rights or obligations which allow people to make sense of individuals and groups (ten Have, 1999), including appeals to language ideologies, notions of common sense, or extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), such as “*everyone* I know does x.” Together, categories and devices elucidate listeners’ recognizable ways for making sense of the social context of their lives (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002), and these contexts are always indexical and occasioned. I now offer a more critical consideration of the analytic use of categories and MCDs to highlight practical understandings of how speech is described and racially constructed.

Examples of racial construction of speech style through the lens of MCA

Along with others adopting a critical approach within MCA, CA, and DP (e.g., van Dijk, et al. 1997; Wetherell, 1998), I argue that the details of talk serve to create and maintain racial meaning that becomes associated with speech style. As the following examples illustrate, the

power of such talk to instantiate and sediment characterizations of speaker race is often implicit and unquestioned, especially when language is viewed as a neutral communicative entity (Speer, 2005).

Example 2: RJ

The following excerpt comes from my interview with RJ in which she describes a recorded voice she has just heard following a prompt from me to further elucidate the reasons for her evaluation.

RJ: I think she's Black. I can't (.) tell why- it's not (.) anything (.) like I think it's ev- It's like the ↑**to:ne** of the- of her ↑voice, like (1) it's ↑deeper or ↑something (0.5) that just (.) reminds me of um (2) some Black women I ↓know. And I would ↓say she sounds like (.) she sounds like she's talking about her son so she also sounds like she's ↑older↓.

(After hearing the recording again)

RJ: (0.5) Ok and the "I would like." (tapping pen on table) that to me (1.5) stood out. (0.5) I ↑think it's the (0.5) it's the tone because it's kind of sing-songy like

KA: Mm-hmm

RJ: It kind of is ↑lingering. (1) I don't know {---} (quieter and lower) in some of the things she ↓says that's kind of lingering.

KA: Ok. And when you say (.) "like" stood out, in what way?

RJ: The "**I ↓was ↓like.**" (.) For some - <I don't ↑know why that does.> It just sounds to me like (3.5) like I know **I** say ↑that a ↑lot. (2.5) So maybe ↓that's ↓why (laughs) Maybe that's why I'm putting it there. °But like it makes her sound like sort of ↓Black ↓vernacular°.

RJ's ascription of the MCD "Black" to a speaker whose recorded voice she just heard serves as the focus of this brief, illustrative analysis. The categories she applies through this ascription include "deeper", "tone of voice", "sing-songy", and "lingering" pronunciation. RJ occasions these categories in order to account for her evaluation of the speaker as sounding "Black". Additionally, RJ makes reference to her own experiences with the category descriptions: reminding RJ of "Black women" she knows, saying the phrase "I was like" the way she herself does, and subsequently sounding like "Black vernacular" to RJ.

Categories and devices are not always clearly demarked, but rather overlap in their instantiation in talk as well as in subsequent analyses in the way they serve to display common sense making, in this case around race. Individuals make connections between characterizations, traits, actions, and social implications in a way that is often taken for granted. In the example above, RJ discusses the reasons behind her evaluation of a voice as "Black" including descriptions of speech, social categories, and her own personal reasons for relating these. These categorizations illustrate the ways that RJ, in this context, draws upon categories and ascriptions to create meaning around race and speech in response to my prompt to do so. She does this in a way that I hear as aligning herself with this speaker and her ascribed "African American-ness". She does this by including categories that describe her own and the speaker's speech style in similar ways.

The following example includes an MCD that the interviewee, JN, ascribes in a way that does not work to align herself with the speaker she describes. Instead, the MCD, "Black", is ascribed by categorization that I argue involves implicit ideological grounding in assumed difference.

Example 3: JN

JN: Um, (1.5) I think (.) it's very rarely that I speak to somebody that's Black whether they're um (2) highly educated or southern or from Minnesota, not that- I don't think I've ever met a Black person from Minnesota

KA: (laughs)

JN: Um, there's always seems to be something in common. You know. Um, that is (.) just Black in itself and I don't think White people could imitate that.

KA: Mm-hmm.

JN: You know and the same (.) goes for- well maybe Black people can imitate you know (.) White voice or whatever but um I definitely think (.) there's just something different.

In this example, JN discusses how she categorizes the overall MCDs “Black” or “White” sounding speech after having discussed the ten short recordings of speech. Both MCDs (“Black” and “White”) have been constructed throughout the interview thus far, and I evoke them only after JN occasioned their relevance. In the example above, she elucidates possible versions of the MCD “Black” through ascription of the categories “highly educated”, “from the south” and “from Minnesota”.

JN also ascribes categories that explicate the MCD of “White” with “White voice” in reference to her descriptions of “Black” sounding speech. This includes not just categorized populations of speakers but a category of speech itself. She also explicates the MCD “Black people” by delimiting its categories in more specific ways: “Black people” not being from Minnesota, that there is “always something in common” in “Black” sounding speech that is “always there” and that “White people” cannot imitate. She then makes a caveat to the

converse—“Black people” could possibly imitate “White voice”. JN then concludes these ascriptions with the claim that there is “just something different” between the two categories she instantiates through her interview discourse.

In this third example, JN ascribes categories to the MCD of “Black” and “White”, therein illuminating her sense making strategies around race in this particular exchange. She opposes these MCDs in her construction, not just of distinctions, but difference that bars members of either category from easily becoming part of the other. This kind of implicit meaning making around difference, especially when related to categories that can involve social asymmetries, illustrates the power that mundane talk about race has for creating and perpetuating realities. Unlike RJ, who aligns herself to the MCD “Black” that she ascribes, JN ascribes categories to the two MCDs “Black” and “White” in a binary way. These are different groups with different ways of talking that do not overlap for JN, as is further evidenced throughout her interview. Careful attention to the details of talk, of which these examples only scratch the surface, comprise one way to engage in sociocultural analysis of discourse around the construction of racialized speech.

Conclusion and implications

I would like to return to my argument that a sociocultural view of language offers sociolinguistic studies of speech perception perspectives beyond realist informed studies. Linguistic analyses operating under a realist perspective generally consider individuals to be largely unaware of their ability to use language for certain purposes and in certain ways. I argue that sociocultural research on the social practice of speech evaluation expands interdisciplinary and applied possibilities for this line of research. As Bauman & Briggs (1990) claim, “reifying [linguistic] form as a collection of empty containers waiting to receive small dollops of

referential content or illocutionary force impoverishes our understanding of performance [talk-in-action] and of communication” (p. 65).

van Dijk et al. (1997) assert that speech reflects and maintains cultural norms and group membership (of a culture, society, etc.). Hence, racism and inequality are built into the ways we speak about others and ourselves. The ways “us” and “them” are used in speech affect our sense of who we are in reference to others by constructing a sense of constantly renegotiated membership. Topics that are made relevant in talk influence what people remember as important or real as events are defined, realities created, and beliefs valued and sedimented for individuals (van Dijk et. al., 1997; Speer, 2005; Wooffitt, 2005). So, the ways that various sources (individuals, groups, the media) characterize and ascribe social meaningfulness to language use and users create social realities that become linked directly to perceived linguistic practice (Agha, 2003).

It is not just through the use of different speech styles or registers that individuals drag along with them an identity; instead, speakers and hearers navigate many levels of common sense awareness about how to accomplish their communicative goals, including who and what they construe as “real”, “valuable” or “different” to name a few. In this vein, it is by examining talk-in-interaction that I argue we can reach broadened understandings of how listeners construct racial category ascriptions; thus elucidating the ways they link social meaning to linguistic practice.

Implications for the inclusion of sociocultural perspectives in future linguistic work on racial speech perception include broadened understanding of linguistic profiling, ability to better communicate the ways causal talk about language and its use wields power and perpetuates inequality, and development in concert with other social science theories about language

perception that draw upon linguistics and social processes. We, as speakers and hearers, are the meaning makers who perpetuate language ideologies in our ongoing identifications between sound and social meaning. These ideologies, which are resources in interaction that are often treated as ingrained and often unquestioned beliefs about language and social meaning (Wolfram, 1998), are actually created and maintained, in part, through characterizations that imbue speech with social meaning. Agha (2003) claims that interviews are sites to witness and analyze social behavior that accomplishes these ideological connections, and continues to form and transform them. I argue that through sociocultural analysis of interview talk and how it is occasioned you can “see” the ways that sound and social meaning become linked for those individuals.

I have alluded to some of the ways that sociocultural analysis of interview discourse around race offers a wider analytic lens. Through this sociolinguistic studies might examine language in order to analyze its social functions and to apply findings to a wide range of civic concerns, like legal battles regarding profiling and teacher training about dialect awareness. Moreover, this lens and the arguments set forth in this article might initiate scholarly dialogues in which longstanding questions of sociolinguistic inquiry can be appreciated with a degree of dimensionality that bolsters its significance across the social sciences and the broader citizenry they serve. Sociolinguists have been talking for decades about how to get the word out that linguistic practice itself is not inherently good or bad, yet the ways people link sound and social meaning have not been studied by linguists. Talk reflects this and continues to be driven by invisible and often unquestioned ideologies. As Irvine (2001) comments, sociolinguists have backgrounded or considered obvious the social significance of speech production and variation. I agree that sociolinguistic investigation into the metadiscourses by which ideology informs

meaning making around speech style and social categories requires that we consider attitudes about social categories and linguistic behaviors. These “cannot be assumed to have been established independently of anyone’s perception of them” (Irvine, 2001: 24). Ideologies shape perception, are manifest in talk about perception, and are perpetuated by the nature of talk and action surrounding perception. Therefore, it is of great importance that scholars of language focus research on processes that create, maintain, and distribute ideologies through talk about race.

CHAPTER 5

APPARENT AUTHORITY: METACOMMENTARY ON RACE TALK⁷

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Abstract

Reflexive talk about talk includes metadiscourses that characterize, categorize, and subsequently evaluate speech style. I consider interviewees' racial evaluations of speech samples to further develop a cultural understanding of linkages between speech styles and race, specifically the metapragmatic formulations of metacommentary rooted in "apparent authority". Through this lens, I focus on two types of metacommentary that accomplish varying degrees of assumed naturalization of linguistic convention—(1) culturally indexical, and (2) historically iconic (Parmentier, 1994). These address how interviewees' talk reflexively constructs and justifies linguistic and social "reality" through interview metacommentaries. Findings elucidate ideological resources for linking and justifying racial evaluations of speech.

Keywords: race talk, semiotic anthropology, reflexivity, metapragmatic resources, naturalization of convention, enregisterment

Talk about race talk: reflexivity in discourse

People use language to create socially recognizable realities in a number of ways. With regard to talk (i.e., spoken language), individuals categorize speakers based on nationality, socioeconomic status, and race, among other bases. They characterize speakers of a particular category in terms of linguistic features (i.e., “talks fast”) and, as I argue, social features (i.e., “she sounds like other White people I know”) of their talk as they evaluate the relative value of categories or characterizations in specific situations. Through categorizations, characterizations, and evaluations, speakers constitute named styles, or registers, of spoken language.

Labeled speakers and ways of speaking do not carry objective meaning that exists outside of their apprehension by others; instead these links become instantiated in speech through meaningful, contextual reference to them. Silverstein (2003) comments that language is a reflexive ethnolinguistic performance of cultural meaning and at the same time a denotational code for linguistic meaning. This reflexivity includes the process of labeling speech styles that index what they culturally denote to a listener (e.g., “AAE”). Additionally, named varieties of speech associated with race do not become meaningful just due to the differences in speech styles themselves (e.g., “habitual ‘be’”). It is the social significance that individuals name and attach to speech styles that constructs their distinctiveness. The inherently reflexive and ideological process highlights the ways that race and speech become reflexively linked through recognition and naming (Silverstein, 2003).

Whether speakers orient to a speech style as a named collection of spoken features, a group of people linked by some category, a list of behaviors, or some other means, the constructed relevance of a demarcated way of speaking constitutes an interactional achievement, which Silverstein (1998P) coined enregisterment. This as a practice “through which a linguistic

repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (Agha, 2003, p. 231). Wortham (2005) and Agha (2005a) take up related aspects of interdiscursivity and speech style related to enregisterment in a special issue of the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*. As a commentary in that issue, Irvine (2005) discusses how speech types that become interdiscursively linked by some social category (i.e., “Black”) take on a reflexive, indexical relationship between discourse A, discourse B, and person P (p. 78). She poses further questions about this practice that remain to be addressed; “How are these links picked out?” and “When and how is this assumption [of iconicity] justified?” (p. 78).

The nature of these questions hints at not just the content of listeners’ evaluations but the process and resources framing them. In this article, I consider these questions through discursive analysis of two types of interviewee metacommentary—indexical and iconic justifications—on race talk evaluations of speech style. I do so in order to problematize a trend largely absent in empirical sociolinguistic research on racial speech perception—the lack of consideration for the details of interaction in which speech styles are named and/or evaluated. The two types of interviewee metacommentary reflect ideological assumptions and sense-making strategies that perform identification, evaluation, and reflexive justification of racially identified speech. I consider ideological, social process guiding evaluation of speech style, such as enregisterment, in the hopes of drawing together concerns common to sociolinguistics, semiotic anthropology, sociology, and psychology, thus advancing interdisciplinary crosstalk on inequalities perpetuated by linguistic profiling and prejudice.

In this article, I consider semiotic anthropological treatments of language ideology (Silverstein, 2003), reflexivity (Taylor, 1997) and enregisterment of speech styles (Agha, 2003, 2005a, Silverstein, 1998) through examination of interviewees’ metacommentary on evaluative

race talk. My analysis rests on two key assumptions. First, I assume that discourse is the primary medium of social meaning-making and, second, that it is interdiscursive. The latter assumption suggests that discourse produces, reproduces, and anticipates social formulations located in practice (Agha, 2005b). As such, the necessarily ideological evaluations (Bauman, 2005) contained in race talk connect past, present, and anticipated ways of speaking, therein identifying speech and categorizing speakers (Agha, 2005b; Irvine, 2005). Interviewees' metacommentary on their evaluations of race talk highlights the ways that they index race through situated social and linguistic "reality" in a reflexively constructed discursive context.

The social grounding of evaluations of race through metacommentary

The social accomplishment of evaluative messages about speech style rests on talk's reflexivity that is interdiscursive in that it reaches across time and context to other discourses. According to Agha (2003), speakers "ground the epistemic force of the message in a prior authority" from which a "chain of authentication" extends (p. 260). These "prior authorities" can be instantiated in reports of one's own experience, of another's experience, or through assumptions of objective, shared cultural experience. Depending on how metacommentary organizes prior authorities in talk, interviewees can mitigate possible refutations of an evaluation, increase their evaluation's validity, or reposition ownership of an evaluation. Bakhtin's interdiscursivity has served as a common lens through which researchers have examined ideological and social processes by which talk creates social realities (Agha, 2005; Bauman, 2005). These relate to issues of enregisterment and metacommentary, which I raise here. Agha (2005b) sums this up: "the data of social life plucked from their isolatable moments invariably points to lived moments that lie beyond them" (p. 1). In order to consider moments "that lie beyond", I examine the ways that metacommentaries on race talk ground authority in past chains

of events (Wortham, 2005). This connects past and present discourse by interviewees' metacommentary that indexes features of other discourses (i.e., speaker types; Silverstein, 2005) and appeals recursively to "like" and "different" socially available indexed practice (Irvine, 2005). In the interviews I consider here, instances of metacommentary serve as a discursive strategy that works to legitimize evaluations by framing categorization and justification of race talk through both (1) indexical similarities to reported experience and (2) iconic assumptions of stable relationships between speech style and race.

Race talk

Language is at its most reflexive when it is the subject of talk (Taylor, 1997). By characterizing, naming, evaluating, and perpetuating presumptions, talk and language reflect one another. Race talk, as a subject of analysis, includes interviewees' metacommentary on evaluations and provides insight into how interviewees construct and then justify the imbuelement of speech styles with social meaning. "Our dialogues with our ethnographic interlocutors are related dialectically to their dialogues among themselves and our own dialogues back home" (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 80). As such, interviewees' reflexive race talk constitutes a useful context for examination of the resources guiding the discursive construction of their evaluations. When individuals evaluate others' speech as racially marked, at least three analytically interesting accomplishments emerge—(1) recognizing race and speech style in their talk (i.e., categorizations of talk as object) (2) employing interdiscursive resources to accomplish constructions (i.e., details of talk as practice), and (3) metacommentary on evaluations of race (i.e. ideological resources in talk). These constitute the reflexivity of race talk to fold back on itself (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). Interviewees' evaluative discourse about talk constitutes, "observable metapragmatic data" (Agha. 2003, p. 242). Therefore, reflexive race talk about

speech style instantiates not only a racial “reality” but also the situational relevance of named or categorized ways of speaking about race. This reflexive lens becomes available in analysis under the assumptions that speech is performative and constructive. With this said, I now return to Irvine’s questions in the context of my study.

My analysis addresses the following two questions: (1) how do listeners identify speech and social type? (2) how do they justify these evaluations? (Irvine, 2005) The transcripts that follow make visible some of the ways that interviewees construct the source of their belief statements about racialized ways of speaking. I consider metacommentary, including the metapragmatic formulations of epistemic stance (Ochs, 1996) underlying justifications of racial category ascription to speech through discourse. Specifically, the types of metacommentary I consider are (1) indexical justifications—explicitly assumed, culturally relevant experience (i.e., connections between “like” speech styles and social categories rooted and justified based upon experience; “she sounds like me”) and (2) iconic justification—implicitly assumed, historically stable “fact” (i.e., naturalized cultural, linguistic, or biological “truths”). The first type is indexical in that it refers to and connects with another speech style or category; discursive justification in metacommentary can elucidate these indexical relations. The latter is iconic in that it operates under an assumption of “natural” connection—one that appears to need no justification (i.e., “it’s a genetic thing”). Both types of metacommentary exhibit ways that speech style and social category become rooted in chains of authority and assumptions of how things are made to appear as though they simply “are” (Agha, 2003).

Analysis of interviewees’ reflexive discourse about race talk highlights the ways they occasion the meaningful connections between speech style, race, and the presentation of their

evaluation of both in the interview. van Dijk et al. (1997) provide examples of metacommentaries on race talk that legitimize speakers' claims by which race talk is navigated.

These include:

(1)

Apparent denial	"I'm not prejudiced but,	Metacommentary
	Black people just sound that way."	Race talk [iconic]

(2)

Apparent concession	"This might sound bad but,	Metacommentary
	it's really only the Asians at work."	Race talk [indexical]

(3)

Apparent empathy	"Bless her heart but,	Metacommentary
	she's doesn't speak well for being White."	Race talk
		[iconically indexical]

I add a fourth kind, apparent authority—the ways that listeners back their evaluation in metacommentary on race talk by invoking authorities in different ways and for different reasons to justify evaluations. 4a below illustrates the first type of apparent authority metacommentary I discuss, "indexical", and example 4b illustrates the second type, "iconic".

(4a)

Apparent authority	"The White people I hear	Metacommentary
	have that speech pattern."	Race talk

(4b)

	"It's a fact that	Metacommentary
	Black people sound like that."	Race talk

The first type of apparent authority—indexical—grounds explicit justification in the personal or vicarious experience that interviewees index as “like” the speech they evaluate. (i.e., “The Puerto Rican people I know sound like that, so I think she is Puerto Rican”). The second type, iconic includes varying degrees of implicit justification that the metacommentary grounds in external and stable naturalized convention, or chains of authority (i.e., “Black speech patterns are like this”). Both of these metapragmatic resources for formulating race talk rely upon certain assumed ways of speaking that instantiate and perpetuate cultural and linguistic assumptions. However, the culturally indexical type appeals to a more local accountability for justification, and the historically iconic type appeals to a broadly appreciable, normative sense of fact relative to the former (i.e., scientific or genetic explanations).

Research design

Interviewees’ metacommentary on race talk

van den Berg, Wetherell & Houtkoop-Steenstra (2003) contrast interviews as instruments of elicitation and as discursive topics for analysis. I espouse the latter view, which moves beyond considerations of “truthfulness” in interviewees’ accounts. I look instead to the ways that interviewees’ reflexive constructions of race and speech evidence ideological, metapragmatic resources for characterizing and evaluating race talk. This contrasts with assumptions in variationist sociolinguistics, where much of the empirical work to link speech and racial identification has been conducted. The view of language espoused by variationist sociolinguists generally maintains that perceptions of language are quantifiable and reflect preexisting components of a language variety’s systemic features. My analysis underscores the discursive resources that interviewees use to make racial evaluations appear legitimate by focusing on metapragmatic activity. I do not seek to uncover underlying beliefs or perceptual processes

outside of discourse. This view situates the reality of a speech style and the features linked to it in the reflexive interaction (i.e., race talk) that serves to instantiate and categorize it, not the speech signal itself.

Metacommentary on race talk highlights constructions of “reality” or naturalized conventions of racialized speech styles. As Silverman (1973) states, “talk serves to display its setting (this is its reflexive nature)” (p. 33). In this sense, while interview talk derives from particular institutional settings; all talk shares common resources across everyday settings, including classrooms, courtrooms, phone conversations, restaurant orders, and speeches. Additionally, the interdiscursive or reflexive aspects of the interview highlight the social formations in which participants operate. As such, interviewees do not simply evaluate and interviewers do not simply elicit; the two work together to negotiate a shared orientation towards evaluations. Part of this work is accomplished by means of metapragmatic resources, including ideological metacommentary that appeals to the naturalization of convention by which social (or linguistic) conventions are made to appear culturally or historically natural or necessary.

As Parmentier points out, “This tendency for naturalization is not without importance or consequences for the manipulation of power in society, for instituted conventions that enforce asymmetries of any sort...will continue to be reproduced (and thus to reproduce the asymmetry) if taken as natural” (1994, p. 176). Naturalization can occur through construction of present naturalness, or historic authority. This hints again at the interdiscursive nature of social and linguistic indexicality; evaluation of race talk can reproduce past experiences, produce new meanings, or blend the two, depending on the interviewee’s and interviewer’s moves.

The discourse I consider here derives from a corpus of ten interviews that I conducted in 2004-05 with women in a large southeastern university town. This data derives from a larger

sociolinguistic examination of how speech is racially marked as “African American”. As such, I was influenced in part by sociolinguistic assumptions and chose to include only women interviewees to augment the sparse corpus of perceptual linguistic work attending to women’s speech. These women form a heterogeneous group in terms of age, socioeconomic background, profession, and race. I recruited eight interviewees through friends and colleagues, and two through publicly posted flyers (see appendix F for flyer). I described the topic as a study of social perceptions of speech. No expertise was required for participation, and I turned no one away who was interested. I only required that participants grew up in the U.S.; this is motivated by concerns that individuals who had not spent their formative years in the states might have less sensitive reactions to racial distinctions in speech style. While these would be interesting, I chose to focus on those who had a greater history interacting with race relations in the U.S. Interviews lasted 45 to 75 minutes, resulting in over ten hours of recorded talk and 190 single-spaced pages of transcript.

Interviews included two sections: (1) a biographical portion in which interviewees talked about growing up, schooling, jobs, friends and families; and (2) a portion in which I played ten short recordings of women speaking and discussed interviewees’ reactions to these. I did not prompt interviewees for reaction to race outright, but offered a range of possibly relevant social features including age, region, race, socioeconomic class, etc. Speech samples come from recorded conversations between pairs of acquainted female friends and colleagues, eight of whom identified as African American and two as European American. By providing recorded speech I allow interviewees to engage in the practice of racial identification and then talk about how they came to their evaluation in the same discourse event. This reflexive site for analysis of race talk proved interesting for examining the ways evaluation and accountability surfaced in

race talk—probing evidential accounts for evaluative race talk that often remains implicit. I transcribed interviews verbatim with attention to pauses, intonation, and non-verbal action in a variation of Jeffersonian style (Jefferson, 1972). Analysis for this study began with a careful reading of the transcripts, noting patterns and themes

Analysis of Metacommentary: naturalization of convention in race talk

Below I analyze interviewees' metapragmatic activity surrounding race talk. This elucidates how listeners manage credibility, ownership of an evaluation, and bases for justification as resources for accomplishing interactional goals. In this way, it is distinct from asking what interviewees' talk says about their racial or linguistic constructions, or the perceptual realities behind such constructions. This analysis provides generalizable information about discursive contexts in which individuals hear a voice, make a racial judgment, and account for such a judgment, because it is precisely the reflexivity in the interview that is under analysis (Agha, 2003; Sarangi, 2003). Reflexive race talk as the topic of analysis of interviewees' sense making is not only as part of this specific interaction but serves as commentary on the interaction itself. By this reflexive turn, analysis of discourse moves beyond the context of one specific interaction. Drawing upon Agha's (2003) description of the aforementioned chains of authentication that reflexivity produce and reproduce the "epistemic force of the message in a prior authority" (p. 260), such metadiscourse presupposes the existence of normativity in some other authoritative grounding. The following analysis attends to two types of metacommentary: (1) indexical justification, and (2) iconic justification as evidence for interviewees' evaluations.

Example 1: Metacommentary on indexical justification through reporting experience

The first excerpt derives from my interview with BN, a self-identified Black graduate student in her early 30s. BN comments on the first of ten recorded voices that she evaluates. As

an example of indexical metacommentary that frames justification through reported speech and experience, BN begins her report with tentative evaluation of a voice as “Black”. (See appendix E for transcription conventions.)

(1)

BN:	U:m (1.5) well	}	metacommentary
	I would say-		
	aw man!		
	I don't know if she's-		
	I don't know what her race is. (3)	}	evaluation
	I think		
	she's ↑Black”	}	metacommentary
	but I'm not ↓sure.		
	I wanna say that	}	evaluation
	she's Black.		

KA: And what makes you wanna say that?

BN:	(1.5) ↑I don't ↓know	}	metacommentary
	I just (1.0) just		
	the ↑way she ↓sounds.		
	(laughs)		
	I can't explain it but	}	evaluation
	she has a certain sound		
	maybe-	}	metacommentary
	I don't know.		

In this initial reaction, BN's metacommentary dominates her evaluation and includes implicit and explicit signs of difficulty, including "u:m", "I don't know", "aw man!", pauses, mitigations—"well" and "I *would* say", and self-interruptions, all of which suggest indecision. BN then arrives at her initial evaluation of race, which is again expressed with implicit ("I *think*" and "I *wanna* say") and explicit ("but I'm not sure") difficulty. She frames her evaluation in terms of her own reported speech, ("I wanna say that she's Black"), distancing herself from the evaluation and mitigating an epistemic stance. After my prompt, "what makes you *wanna* say that?", BN's persistent hesitation is again marked through pauses, laughing after her initial justification, mitigation ("just", "maybe"), and explicit difficulty ("I don't know", "I can't explain it"). In addition to the framing around the initial justification, her voicing of the actual justification is generically vague, "it's just the way she sounds...she has a certain sound". I follow this statement with a probe for potential clarifications of BN's vague justification of a "certain sound". After a small bit of cross talk, BN launches immediately into a fluidly spoken passage about a conversation she had with her sister concerning this very topic, marking a difference in her uncertain epistemic stance in the above segment.

(2)

KA: Is it the way she says words or her voice?

BN: It's her=

KA: =(---)

BN: Yeah- my sister and I had this conversation
it's so funny that we're talking about this 'cause
(0.5) she was like (airy-er and emphatic)

} **metacommentary**

“you can TELL when a Black person is talking,	}	metacommentary
(normal voice) you can tell”		
I’m like, she was like (airy-er and emphatic)		
“I don’t know what it is but it’s this rhythmic sound in their voice.”		
I was like, “how can you say something like that?”		
Just you know, messin’ with her.		
She was like		
“Yeah you- you can hear it’s like the- it’s like a rhythmic	}	evaluation
it’s not- it’s not FLAT”.		
So: she has (0.5)	}	metacommentary
and I know what my sister’s talking about,		
she has that rhythmic sound that she’s talking ↓about.	}	evaluation
So I would say		
she’s Black.	}	evaluation

From the outset of this second passage, BN speaks with little hesitation and no longer expresses difficulty. When BN recruits her sister into the participation framework (see Goffman, 1981), her epistemic stance is marked as more certain by a more fluid metacommentary with less mitigation. By the end of this segment of talk, BN expresses not only a justification, but also reframes her initial evaluation in a more authoritative way. She aligns with her sister’s evaluation, “and I know what my sister’s talking about”, then provides the content of this reported speech as a renewed justification for her own evaluation of the voice she heard. She does this by echoing her sister’s phrase, “rhythmic sound”.

This second excerpt from BN's interview illustrates how metacommentary operates as an indexical resource for justifying race talk evaluations through the recruitment of others' evaluations or experiences. BN's sister's speech is relevant to BN in expounding on her own evaluation and, thus, useful in this situation. I argue that the reported conversation with her sister allows BN previously unexpressed reasons for her evaluation of "Black-ness" for the first speech sample, and a renewed epistemic stance of certainty rooted in empirical, culturally indexical and indexing experience.

Example 2: Metacommentary on justification as naturalized convention

This second excerpt comes from my interview with WM, a self-identified White librarian in her late 20s. This example includes WM's metacommentary, which serves to distance her from the racial evaluations she makes in two ways. First, WM reports her evaluations as hypothetical ("I would say"). Second, she frames her assumptions as iconic rather than indexical. More than the cultural indexing described in the previous example, WM's assumptions rest on historically and authoritatively formulated truths. This excerpt comes from an exchange about two thirds of the way through the interview during discussion of the eighth recorded voice.

(3)

KA: Ok

WM: I would guess

a younger

um, (2)

working class to middle class

um,

African American woman.

} **metacommentary**

} **evaluation**

} **evaluation**

KA: (1) Anything about regions?

WM: Mmm. (3.5)

Not particularly because

<I- I think that

I could place that accent in a number of different places.

It's harder because you know

the African American –

people who sound African American to me

they> >have that sort of speech

like what I at least feel like or think that speech is<

you can hear that in so many places

you know just because like migration

(laughs)

And things like that.

} **metacommentary**

} **evaluation**

} **metacommentary**

} **evaluation**

} **metacommentary**

} **evaluation**

} **metacommentary**

Following my prompt, WM begins framing her evaluation, showing signs of implicit difficulty. Similar to BN's initial justification, WM's formulation includes "mmm", pauses, and reported self-speech (e.g., "I would guess"). WM then identifies "the accent" as the object of her evaluation. She describes this speech not as a voice, person, or style, but as an accent—a real thing, more or less. Her justification for the regional difficulty she cites in her second evaluation begins with the phrase, "you know, the African American", after which she interrupts herself and obscures the rest of the phrase. The use of "the" gives it the quality of assuming a shared, knowable pattern. It is not just she who knows something about "the" African American "something" linked to this accent, but she and I, or she and the vague "you" somewhere out

there. This frames the epistemic stance behind her statement as shared, cultural knowledge that “you” and I know about a category in which the subject remains unspecified—“*the African American*” *something*.

At the same time, WM continues to phrase her evaluations in a hypothetical, reported stance, marked by metapragmatic verbs (“I *would* guess”, “I *could* place”). She then turns to justification of her evaluation in a more individually-grounded indexical justification—“people who sound African American *to me*”. This affects her overall stance, changing the subject from all people ascribed to the generalized category “*the African American*” something, to people who “sound African American” to *her*. This mitigates the generalizability of her initial claim but still includes an iterative present tense “who sound”. This includes all people who arguably have, do, and will sound African American to her—perhaps a certain type of African American people distinguished by speech style.

WM fluctuates from categories of stable groups and speech styles framed as widely available conventions (e.g., “The African American people”, “that accent”, “that sort of speech”, “you can hear”, “so many places” and “things like that”) to indexical groups rooted in her experience (e.g., “people who sound African American to me” and “what I feel like that speech is”) throughout this excerpt. As she does so her epistemic stance is marked by heightened signs of difficulty when framed as indexical justification based in her own experience. That WM spoke the self-interrupted phrase more quickly than the preceding speech, coupled with the subsequent slowing down, underscores this impression. The subject of this passage has gone from “accent” (an objective notion) to “that sort of speech” (indexically ambiguous) to what she “thinks or feels” that speech is (an object of her own construction).

WM then turns back to the generalizable notion of available fact, “you can hear that”. She is no longer reporting her own speech, but engaging a metapragmatic stance of iconic, historic availability, or naturalization. It is not just she, and not just in her experience, but a broadly general “you” and an ongoing iterative, “can hear that”. This happens not just in some places, but through an extreme case formulation, in “so many places”. WM’s further justification appeals again to an iconic, objectively available, shared knowledge, as expressed in her appeal to “you know” and “just because.” Rather than serving as actual justification, these gloss the lack of specific need for justification. They lead to a predication she occasions as logical “migration” punctuated by laughter.

In this excerpt, WM’s metacommentary works to distance herself from her evaluation in three ways: (1) reporting her own evaluation as hypothetical (“I would”), (2) hedging (“like”, self-interruptions, pausing), and (3) justifying evaluations through variably iconic metacommentary. Throughout these cultural formulations that reflexively evaluate and comment on WM’s evaluations in her race talk, she constructs objectively-oriented, “factual” evidence that she self-corrects with visible mitigation and implicit difficulty when framing an evaluation that is rooted in her own experience. Her iconic metacommentary avails a more comfortable (or less difficultly expressed) resource for justifying evaluation—albeit implicitly—widely available as iconic cultural knowledge. This serves to lessen the burden of proof on her, allowing her to formulate the assertion less as her own, and in an arguably more comfortable, “how things are”.

Further examples

After having described and given examples of the two types of metacommentary on race talk I consider, I offer examples from the other eight interviews I conducted to further explicate the typology of metacommentary I describe. The following eight examples serve as further

distinctions within these two types of metacommentary, indexical and iconic. Examples within the first type include, “culturally indexed ‘likeness’”. The second type of metacommentary includes, in order of increasing assumptions of naturalization, “indexically iconic patterns”, “iconic patterns”, “iconic ‘Whiteness’”, “iconic cultural behavior”, and “immutable biological fact”.

The following excerpt from an interview with KJ, a self-identified White undergraduate in her early 20s, is an example of the first type of metacommentary—reported experience of indexical “likeness” (in this case a Puerto Rican friend)—as indexical metacommentary justifying her evaluation. KJ was most resistant to categorizing race and engaging in race talk of all ten interviewees. This is one of three examples in which she made a racial evaluation; the rest of the time she avoided race talk altogether and focused on region talk (which a few other interviewees did as well but not to this degree).

Culturally indexed “likeness”

(4)

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---|-----------------------|
| KJ: | She actually (0.5) kind of | } | metacommentary |
| | sounds (.) Puerto Rican, | } | evaluation |
| | but I'm not positive, | } | |
| | but if I had to guess | } | metacommentary |
| | I'd say it's maybe Puerto Rican. | } | evaluation |
| KA: | Ok. And what- what little thing was it that- | | |
| | well maybe not little | | |
| | but what was it that made you think that? | | |

KJ:	She sounded like (0.5)	}	evaluation
	someone who could be bilingual.		
	Like, her inflection		
	and I'm pretty close to someone who's Puerto Rican.	}	metacommentary
	And like she grew up speaking both languages		
	and she kinda has the same like (2)		
	I can't really remember which ones specifically.		
	inflection on some of the words.		

KJ's reluctance to evaluate the speaker's race is marked by her hypothetical self-reporting ("I'd say") and mitigation ("I'm not positive", "maybe", "guess", "could be"). In the few instances where KJ ascribes race to speakers, she carefully grounds the justification of her tempered evaluations in experience she has had with people indexing the categories she creates. This is the most empirically grounded of all of the metapragmatic resources for justifying evaluations in race talk in this corpus of interviews but still serves to display resources in metapragmatic race talk.

The next example derives from an interview with RJ and also illustrates the first type of metacommentary, indexed justification of "likeness" rooted in others' speech or experience. RJ is a self-identified African American graduate student in her early 30s. In contrast to KJ's use of indexical "likeness", RJ constructs justification based on the category "Black", into which she cites herself as fitting. In this excerpt, she provides justification for her evaluation of a voice as "Black".

Culturally indexed “likeness”, continued

(5)

RJ: It's the way she says "I hate" and

"my friends and my family"

because (.)

<it ↑sounds to me like> (0.5)

Ok. So like on the one hand-

this is the thing I always pick up with Black ↓people (.)

I don't know where it comes from (.) but

there **always** is some sort of ↓southern (1.2) something in it.

metacommentary

RJ's justification includes the speaker's pronunciation of two phrases indexing a quality she consistently associates with the speech of people in her category, "Black" people. Her metacommentary includes three self-interruptions and grounding in her own experience ("to me", "I always pick up on"). These features of metacommentary mark some degree of hesitation and difficulty. Then, RJ seems to find a satisfactory explanation for her evaluation. According to RJ, "Black people" "**always**" have something that RJ identifies as southern.

The emergence of this experiential justification, much like BN's example, marks a fluid expression of justification once the metacommentary is grounded in ratified, indexical experience of or with others. RJ's initial metacommentary in this excerpt includes pauses and self-interruptions, and then is expressed with less difficulty after the instantiation of "the thing I always pick up on". While RJ grounds her metacommentary in indexical experience, which is marked with more ease, this still appeals to categorical trends rooted in iconic cultural

naturalization (e.g., “I **always** pick up on”, “there’s **always** something southern”). This illustrates the blurred boundaries between the ways metacommentary naturalizes convention. It is along a continuum from indexical to iconic, and two mutually inclusive types that I continue to explicate.

These two examples, along with BN’s above, feature metacommentary of the first type—indexical metacommentary rooted in an externally justified sense of “how things are”. Before offering the five excerpts that relate to the second type—iconic metacommentary rooted in appeals to implicit authority and a “necessary” or historically stable sense of how things “are”—I include one that lies somewhere between the two. This illustrates a middle ground of the continuum between the two types of metacommentary. In this example, GF, a self-identified African American professor in her early 50s frames her evaluation of a speaker as “African American” in what I call indexically iconic metacommentary. While she formulates her justification based upon her own speech, an experience of sorts, she does not explicate this justification. Rather, it just “is”. This presumes some degree of iconic, existent speech patterns. However, she identifies these as exhibited in her own speech.

Indexically iconic patterns

(6)

GF: Ok. I'd say she's African American.

} **evaluation**

KA: Ok. (2) And what features about her speech (.)
stood out for you?

} **metacommentary**

GF: She reminds me of me. (1)
(laughs)

}

That's all I can say,
she reminds me of me.

} **metacommentary**

The way- the- the -the way her voice patterns.
 So if she's not
 then I don't know.

} **metacommentary**

GF's metacommentary hints at the lack of need for justification. Her own speech patterns suffice to describe the evaluation of the speaker as African American. GF identifies herself throughout the interview as African American. In this evaluation she appears to index this by claiming similar, assumed speech patterns and thus deduces that the speaker is African American. In fact, if the speaker is not African American, “then I don’t know”. Her epistemic stance strongly asserts the existence of these alluded to speech patterns as well as their sufficiency for indexing the race of the speaker.

The following example illustrates a point further along the continuum toward iconic justification and comes from my interview with JN, a self-identified White woman and part-time college student. This includes metacommentary that presumes the existence of iconic speech patterns, which are available as justification of racial evaluation of a speaker as “Black”.

Iconic patterns

(7)

JN: (sniffs) I would say that she's Black.
 KA: Ok.

} **evaluation**

And tell me about what ways you de-decided
 she sounded Black
 given that stuff we just talked about
 with the other people.

JN: Certain wor:ds um,
 just struck me as familiar.
 Uh, the (.) the ups and the downs
 seemed more (.) um
 Black verbal patterns
 than (.) White
 um again
 with the (.) the stretching out
 of the end of the word (.)
 sounded like a Black quality.

metacommentary

JN does not mitigate or hedge her evaluation or justification, but she does tentatively frame her evaluation as hypothetically reported self-speech (“I would say”). Her metacommentary presumes the existence of “Black verbal patterns” and a “Black quality” which she juxtaposes with “White” patterns of speech. Due to the implicit dualism, this social formulation of objective and available “Black” and “White” “verbal patterns” marks an assumed, historically authenticated linguistic practice iconically associated with race.

The next two excerpts include interviewees’ metacommentary that frames evaluation of speech as “White” as a natural occurrence that has no available justification in race talk—it just is “White”. This too is an example of an iconic, historically established pattern, but one that is expressed with even less available justification than the prior examples of iconic metacommentary. The first of these excerpts comes from my interview with FA, a self-identified

Black graduate student in her early 30s. The second is with WP, a self-identified White southern⁸ real estate agent in her early 50s.

Iconic “Whiteness”

(8)

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| FA: | Um, | } | metacommentary |
| | I don't know what it is, | | |
| | but I just knew | } | evaluation |
| | she was definitely White. | | |
| KA: | Mm-hmm. | | |
| FA: | (laughs) | } | metacommentary |
| | I don't know how to say this, | | |
| | how so- but | | |
| | I could just tell. | | |

Iconic “Whiteness”, continued

(9)

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| WP: | She's just White. | } | evaluation |
| | (small laugh) | | |
| KA: | She's not different than= | | |
| WP: | =Huh-uh. Huh-uh. | } | metacommentary |
| | But she could even- | | |
| | she's even got that. | | |
| | I hate to say this because | | |

⁸ WP's southernness was very salient in her self-identification and in her interview talk overall, so I include it here.

it sounds racist but	} metacommentary
the Jewish tone- overtone.	} evaluation

In both of these examples, FA and WP frame sounding “White” as a given with no needed justification. This, I argue, belongs to a trope of talk, which instantiates the normative value of “Whiteness” that extends beyond these interview contexts into a chain of authority rooted in historically sedimented discourse. Both of these interviewees did not justify evaluations of “Whiteness”, which occurred multiple times in their interviews. This lack of justification in their metacommentary hints at an inability, reluctance, or perceived lack of need (either historically rooted in a chain, or simply instantiated in this particular interview context) to account for this evaluation. FA describes speech that she identifies as “Black” in more detail, and these descriptions hinge primarily on justification through narrative style (e.g., “story telling”, “sing-songy”, “like a southern preacher”, etc.). Moreover, WP’s lack of justification for the evaluation of “Whiteness” is followed by mention of a type of “Whiteness” that does require justification in her metacommentary—“Jewish overtones”. This is the only racial ascription in her interview that she expounds upon. For all others she focuses on region, age, or class. However, in this example she not only mentions “Jewish”, but she engages in what van Dijk et al (1997) call “apparent denial” as mentioned above (“I hate to say this but”). A “Jewish” type of “Whiteness” contradicts WP’s other formulations of *just* “White”, as well as her unjustified evaluations for other race types. Apparent denial is a resource that marks her only justification in race talk with difficulty and serves to distance her from this evaluation. WP avoids justification throughout the interview, even with my specific prompts to elaborate. Instead, she changes the subject. I argue that her metacommentary here serves as a resource to make room for seemingly

non-racist identification that avoids characterizations of race by avoiding justification of claims. WP's evaluations avoid ascription of racist to her and instead corroborate a seeming "color blind" identity in the interview through her metacommentary.

The next example from my interview with WC, a self-identified Black undergraduate student in her early 20s, includes metacommentary that draws upon the notion of iconic cultural behavior that she links to speech habits. WC describes a voice she hears as "Hispanic" and, after my prompt, provides justification for this evaluation based in metacommentary around historically grounded cultural norms for "Hispanic" women.

Iconic cultural behavior

(10)

WC: It sounds more (.) sing-songy
and more sort of (1.0)
I don't wanna say ↑whiney
for lack of a better word but
sort of- (1.5)
I don't know
to a large extent (.)
how like (.)
their (.) sort of culture **is** and
how like
women are in that **culture-**
or the kind **of** (.) women that like (.)
men of that culture

metacommentary

sort of want to marry or whatever.

(1) It's more sort of a (2)

even if you had a deep voice

you would somehow make it sound softer

or more sort of subservient

to- to like ... or whatever.

metacommentary

WC's metacommentary focuses on "Hispanic" speech. Earlier in the interview, she claims close contact and empathy with Hispanic people through experiences with friends and the broader community growing up. However, she affiliates culturally and linguistically with African American culture during the interview. She formulates "Hispanic" speech as iconic in her metacommentary, based upon culturally available "facts"—naturalized ways of being that are assumed to be reflected in speech style. This appeals to a widely available sense of iconic, stable, cultural normativity that she ascribes to "Hispanic" culture and speech. Like WP, she engages in "apparent denial" (e.g., "I don't wanna say") in characterizing this speech style as "whiney". She sets up a hypothetical situation in which a "Hispanic" woman would change or learn a speech style in order to appeal to what "men of that culture want to sort of marry". In this way, WC's metapragmatic framing constructs a style of speech she links iconically to being a Hispanic woman dictated by her expressed assumptions of naturalized cultural convention.

The next example takes naturalization one step further by placing it in biological naturalization. PE, a self-identified African American administrative assistant in her early 50s, justifies her evaluation of a speaker as "African American" sounding.

Immutable biological fact

(11)

PE: Um (1)

I guess just the sound.

Because

if- if you hear-

sometimes

you ↑can't tell but

most of the time

you ↓can

it's the different sound (1)

that comes through the vocal chords

Of Blacks and Whites.

And I don't know why but

I guess it's a (0.5) genetic ↑thing?

metacommentary

PE formulates in her metacommentary the immutable, biological difference between “Black” and “White” speech styles. Despite her assertion that “sometimes you can’t tell”, she concludes that “most of the time you can” based on the “different sound that comes through the vocal chords”. This places speech style in a physiological and genetic basis of contrast, which Parmentier (1994) argues represents a more naturalized and less artificial and arbitrary from the perspective of “social actors” (p. 186).

Discussion and Conclusions

Analyses that focus on interviewees' metacommentary highlight interviewees' linguistic resources for "produce[ing] knowledge about both the creation (language) and the creator [speaker]" (Makoni et. al., 2003). Through these interviews, I illuminate social processes underlying discussions of speech as a racially meaningful topic. In theorizing the reflexive nature of the interview, this study creates a reflexive interview environment in which not only talk is of analytic concern, but occasioned talk *about* talk. These degrees of reflexivity imbue talk with racial meaning, therein providing insights into the discursive processes that ground the enregisterment of racialized speech. Therefore, I reflect on these social processes, and not the construction of speech varieties.

Parmentier's (1994) discussion of shifts between arbitrary cultural practice (e.g., indexing cultural meaning through speech types, or enregisterment) and historical, and eventually invariant, practice highlight the dangers (not inherently good or bad) of arbitrary convention and the powerful ramifications that surround them. When arbitrary connections between speech and social meaning are imposed on a non-arbitrary continuum of motivated (individually, culturally, historically) and necessary or immutable constructs, then justification for ascription and evaluation take on different (and sometimes unspoken) forms and leverage hegemonic power differently. These differences surface in metacommentary, which can afford race talkers avoidance, face maintenance, and justification framed through appearance of experience or "fact". The topic of race talk, nevertheless, remains co-constructed, and therefore rests on all talkers.

Potter (2005) discusses ways that talk can lead to an "understand[ing of] conversation, ideology, and the way social relations are legitimized" (p. 194). Specific to the focus of this

article, the work of ideology lies in the belief statements that interviewees make about truth, common sense, and objectivity in their ascriptions of race to speech habits and people. This accountability takes the form, in many cases, of an objective relevance or “reality”, but, as I argue, even these forms are more instances of a situated, subjective reality *in situ* that individuals variably take to be real, or heard as real. Experiences, conversations, media messages, and ideological “known facts” all provide ways to link metadiscursive enregisterment across interactions. These enregistered varieties are “centered elsewhere in social space”, and labels attached to ways of speaking have histories that are transmitted and given authority beyond those that use them in the present (Agha, 2003, p. 236). Metadiscursive processes involved in accounting constitute “the co-existence of distinct, socially positioned ideologies of language within a language community” (Agha, 2003, p. 70), but they need not be consistent to be salient. Speakers create the ways that resources and events are constructed in each new interaction, but these threads are not invented in each interaction (Wetherell, 2003); they are distinct kinds of metacommentary passed through the speech chain that arrange their own rediscovery time and again.

Because ascribing categories, especially to minorities “is morally and interactionally risky” (van Dijk, 1987, p. 174), especially among strangers, attention to mitigation, hesitation, and appeal to authority all illuminate ways that listeners manage their talk about race, especially when race is not a comfortable topic. Ideology, too, is a resource by which practical events in talk achieve the appearance of “truth” and, as a practice, come to be powerful (Wetherell, 2003). Even if someone has good intentions, a lack of experience leading to evaluations grounded in mistakenly assumed “reality” or common sense can have an impact on the ways social meaning around ways of speaking are circulated.

Enlisting listeners to collaboratively make meaning of speech samples in an interview context grounds the analysis presented here. In this study, I employ metacommentary as one possible lens for illuminating the structure and implications of evaluations in race talk. Through attention to two types of metacommentary, I discuss various degrees by which enregisterment of racial speech style in race talk is naturalized from indexical to iconic bases for justification. The relevance I draw from this is to simply point out that race, as a construct, becomes variably meaningful through people's orientations to it in talk, and this occurs in many social contexts with various power to sediment, iconicize, or enforce unquestioned ascription of social attributes or cultural opportunity through a linguistically arbitrary factor—speech style. However arbitrary the linguistic assignment of style to utterance may be, the social indexing that takes place is not neutral but power laden (Agha, 2003; Irvine, 2005; Silverstein, 2003). Race talk is at once an object, a practice, and a metapragmatic resource; individuals' orienting to it can take up different levels of this reflexive, discursive context. Experiences are made up not only of lived action, but also through talk about others' action or reported realities that become meaningful if taken up and reproduced. If talk, and particularly metacommentary on talk, is theorized as action that creates and maintains realities, then the different ways individuals talk about race can have implications for the creation and maintenance of ways of reacting to and talking about race and speech.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

As I mentioned in the introduction, my dissertation study ended with different questions than with which it began. A range of disciplines overtly concerned with theory and methodology cast the field of sociolinguistics in new light for its lack of such concerns. As I have argued throughout, I believe that sociolinguistic studies on race and speech must consider epistemological and methodological issues before findings will be taken up outside its ever narrowing walls. For all my criticism of variationist sociolinguistics, it has merit and I plan to continue my scholarly participation on the fringes of the field, in part because this dissertation has implications for future sociolinguistic study and intersects with linguistic anthropology.

All three articles add to sociolinguistic discussions about social interactions that make racialized styles of speech meaningful to individuals. Complementing this, they also contribute to discussions of possible linguistic research processes (i.e., theories, methods, methodologies) for considering this topic. Each article teases apart different cultural formulations of theorizing. The first addresses race as a discursive construction, implicating ideological resources for doing so. The second argues for the inclusion of sociocultural and epistemological assumptions in sociolinguistic studies in order to advance the application and interdisciplinary possibilities for research. The third focuses on metapragmatic resources for justifying the enregisterment of speech style, taking a sociocultural stance on semiotic normativity perpetuated in and by talk. The thread running through these articles and from which I draw my major implication is the ideological and reflexive nature of talk as a power-laden resource for creating and recreating social “realities” around constructs of race and speech style. I now turn to the role that discourse

plays mediating power and its implications for future work building on the research reported here.

Reflexivity and power

A reflexive approach to discourse considers the narrated and narrating event—the product and process of race talk, or the evaluation and metacommentary on race talk. Examining these relations opens up consideration for how discourse norms are made evident in talk. This is useful for analyzing the role of discourse in many institutional settings, including interview settings. Since all individuals do not have the same social or linguistic resources (Hymes, 1996), people do not just use discourse; rather, it affects them. Therefore, the study of language must ask significant questions about the ways that social actors “broker” linguistic resources in systemic ways.

As van Dijk et al. (1997) assert, talk reflects and maintains cultural norms and group membership (of a culture, society, etc.). Hence, racism and inequality are built into the ways we speak about ourselves and others (Perry, 2002). The ways “us” and “them” are used in speech affect the topics we make relevant in talk, our sense of who we are in reference to others, and our sense of membership, which is constantly renegotiated. All of these influence what we remember as important or real as we define events, create realities, and justify beliefs (van Dijk et. al., 1997). Therefore, the ways that various sources (individuals, groups, the media) characterize and ascribe social meaningfulness to language use and users create social realities that become linked directly to perceived linguistic practice (Agha, 2003). Understanding ideologies about language (including racist ones), in turn, can be usefully grounded in examination of the ways we speak about our own and others’ speech.

The sociocultural approach I advance in this dissertation examines listeners' perspectives about race and speech style, as expressed in interviews. Through this lens, I attend to the ways that individuals make sense of social actions and speech, including how they present them as rooted in the discursive performance of description, reference, accounting, judging, explanation, and persuasion. It is not only what a listener says about speech, but also how she positions both her own and others' ascribed identities through talk (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998). Through the ways these *positionalities* are constructed, listeners create and perpetuate social meanings relating to power and prestige indexed by speech style—the social meaning attached to variation in language. Attention to how these social meanings are made can aid understanding of how language use comes to imply power, and also how ideology plays a role in this meaning making (Agha, 2003; Bauman & Briggs, 1990).

In any discursive context, speakers create the ways that resources and events are constructed through talk; but these threads are not invented anew in each interaction (Wetherell, 2003, p. 13). This relates to past experience, present context, and goals for interaction. As such, the way people act in interviews is not entirely different from the way they act in other situations; all contexts for talk are social and locally constrained, so certain “natural” contexts do not take precedence over others. Bauman & Briggs (1990) criticize positivist practice for “asking people for facts and assuming they will provide straight answers” (p.71). They argue instead for reflexively examining the features of talk to see what (situated) meaning is being constructed in context.

Some theoretical approaches in sociology and linguistics anticipate differences between lay and scholarly representations, excluding participant accounts as inaccurate, if not irrelevant or altogether false (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). As a result, many analyses isolate speakers' talk

from its social context, divorcing theory from the collective practices they purport to illuminate (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). Wetherell (2003) aptly describes the tension between searches for “truth” and searches for local meaning making: “don’t accept...that by asking people about their intentions and beliefs we can close things off with the conclusion, ‘Now we know what that was really all about.’ There is no ‘horse’s mouth,’ just more discourse” (p. 26).

Such consideration for how interviewees construct discourse around race informs local meaning making, illuminates commonsense and everyday connections between talk and race, and adds to existing accounts of race, speech, and social meaning. Through a focus on the alternative ways of “understanding conversation, ideology, and the way social relations are legitimized” (Hepburn & Potter, 2004, p. 194), I contribute to a body of knowledge about the ways linguistic and racial meaning are manifested as relevant (and thus meaningful) in talk by individuals. While a considerable amount of research on discursive constructions of race has been conducted in Europe (e.g., van den Berg et al., 2003; van Dijk, 1987; Verkuyten, de Jong & Masson, 1994; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), this study is situated in a North American cultural context. Additionally, unlike much of the other research on racial discourse, I do not focus on difference or prejudice, per se, but on evaluative and reflexive race talk as constructions of individuals’ speech, not individuals themselves. I would like to return now to the role that reflexivity plays in analysis of talk and discourse as a socially contextualized resource.

Reflexive implications

Across the three articles in this dissertation, I increasingly focus on the metapragmatic resources of race talk—the reflexive constitution of speech style through indexical and iconic metacommentary and enregisterment. A focus on metacommentary is essentially a focus on agency—people’s metalinguistic resources for doing things, which reflect their sense of available

agency and power for dictating how things are. In Chapter 5 I consider a range of metapragmatic resources situated along a continuum of indexical to iconic metacommentary on justification in race talk. Extreme ends of this continuum highlight that, on the one hand, our experiences allow us to justify and/or create what is real and meaningful and, on the other hand, society, history, or some other overarching force dictates what is real or meaningful (Parmentier, 1994). At either end of this process, the reflexivity of talk avails us at least three metalinguistic resources for accomplishing meaning through talk:

- (1) recognition of situations (i.e., identification of speech style—product of talk)
- (2) manipulation of marked, normative semiotic practices in relation to others (i.e., use of speech style as resource—fulfilling or thwarting expectation)
- (3) institutionalization of semiotic processes that mark speech styles (i.e., reflexivity of talk—talk's ability to comment on itself).

This last point encompasses all three: talk can convey information about the message, the messenger, and the relationship between these two. As such, reflexivity has no bounds. Reflexivity is not only a feature of talk that is underdeveloped in sociolinguistic theory surrounding race and speech style, but researcher reflexivity is also a notion that goes hand in hand with transparent epistemology also often neglected in the sociolinguistic studies of which I am critical. The approach I take here at once considers the role that discourse at many levels plays in instantiating and perpetuating links between speech style and social categories (theoretical), the role that linguistic research can play in problematizing and diffusing information about these linkages (interdisciplinary), and the impact that broadened approaches to these problems in linguistic research can have in non-academic forums (applied).

Implications that I draw from this discursive focus on reflexivity are threefold: reflexivity is theoretical, interdisciplinary, and applied. Going back to the cultural formations of theorizing I mentioned above, a reflexive approach to discourse is theoretical, epistemological, and methodological. How research approaches the role of race, language, and theory (as I discuss in detail in Chapter 4), dictates what it considers meaningful and applicable. I argue that in order for sociolinguistic or other language-based approaches to race, speech, and power to be meaningfully applied and taken up in interdisciplinary discussion, it must consider interdiscursive and reflexive contexts of racial construction, race talk, and speech style

Applied implications as a result of the sociocultural approach to race talk are also rooted in reflexivity. Race is often a silent topic, implicitly present and powerful in the social meaning we construct in interaction. However, its implicitness and silence are often used to justify social asymmetry. For example, teachers may avoid engaging students in race talk because parents may object to this discussion. To claim “our hands are tied” places agency and justification elsewhere in society and history. Not just theoretical approaches but also pragmatic approaches to reflexivity are useful offshoots of the work I describe in this dissertation. Our hands are not as tightly bound as we think because the reflexivity of talk affords greater resources than those which seem immediately available or dictated by some other power. The everyday uses of language—how we refer to others, how we characterize speech, people, and groups, how we justify our beliefs and actions—are far from trivial. They are taken for granted, implicit, and ideological, but they are not inconsequential. Research, inquiry, and theory that perpetuate reflexive agency from research to researchers, from researched to disseminated, from privileged theory to public “knowledge”, contribute to this. All of these formulations and formulated subjects are ideologically positioned and constructed through our discourse. If we realize and

promote race talk highlighting the implicit meaning making in our talk, we can begin to move beyond product and false objectivity and instead deal in living process and reflexivity.

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APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET (LISTENERS)

Age:

Sex: M/F

Year in School (1st, 2nd, Graduate, etc.):

Program of Study:

Place of birth:

Where you grew up:

Ethnicity/Race:

Socioeconomic class (working, middle/upper-middle, etc.):

Parents' Occupations:

APPENDIX B

PRE-INTERVIEW SCRIPT

You will hear 8 short samples of speech by different women. The interview will focus on how you **can** or **cannot** identify the race of these women based on the **style and sound** – the feel of their speech. You will hear the samples 3 times each. Feel free to draw, notate, underline, circle, or otherwise write on the transcripts. After you listen to the speech samples, I will conduct the interview, which will be tape-recorded. All of your responses will be anonymous and confidential, with the research team having sole access.

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPTS OF SPEECH SAMPLES (GIVEN TO LISTENERS)

Pam: I do take time out to relax but, I don't know if that would really help my nails grow. 'Cause I just- every-any time I have a free moment I will bite my nails. Um, usually when I'm studying, um, I'm coming up with something, like, I'm working on a project or something like that, um.

Betty: Now I liked it in there because the manager put mostly people who were working in there-I think you were where the students were. 'Cause I remember, when I moved in I said, "Look, I am not a student, and please, if you can, put me away from the students, 'cause I am no longer in that life; I need a good night's rest."

Sandra: I couldn't do it this weekend because I went home. But I e-mailed them right before I left, and I sent them everything as a word attachment, their consent form, because I don't want to have it like I did before where they walked in and immediately slid them the thing for them to sign; I want it already to be done.

Rhonda: What kind of study would that be if you would do-well you could do a convenience sample or a predetermined, um, sample of folks and just find out. I mean, or even pick up the phone and do your-some of your family members, you know in terms of their age range and ask them whether or not they've ever had a preference.

Michelle: This is perfect for me; I lose the big purses. I hate big purses. I used to be such a tom boy, I would not carry a purse to save my life. When I found this thing, I can strap it over my sh-chest, and just walk with it. And I never forget it 'cause it's so little I know I'm missing something if I don't have it. I got my key on there, so there's no way I would ever forget this purse because this is what I have to use to lock my door.

Sophie: 'Cause there were four other people who requested his-who requested him, but his team was already full. And I was like, well what about that deal? Because they put him on a team with no coach, and there weren't even enough players on the team to make a team.

Mary: He lives up there, so he told me Sunday, he says, "Guess what?" I said, "What." He said "I'm having me a house built." He said they're almost finished with it. And he says, "I will be so glad to get out of that place."

Jill: 'Cause he told me, um, he said, "I'm gonna start taking, um, gymnastics again." I said, "Oh really?" That's what he told me. So I don't know if that's the truth or not, but that's what he told me he's gonna be taking gymnastics again.

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How do you picture the first speaker? (referred to by pseudonym) Age, region, race, or SES are all appropriate ways to describe her. What about Speaker 2?
(This is repeated for each speaker.)
2. What about the speech makes you think that?
3. (Further questioning will depend on the listeners' unique responses. I will move from general impressions, to more specific information based on their answers.)
4. What was the racial makeup of your high school?
5. Did you have friend of other races?
6. Do you think everyone talks the same all the time, or do people change depending on certain factors?
7. Do you think the speakers you heard always sound the same?

APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

- (.) short pause
- (0.5) longer pauses (timed to tenths of a second)
- bold** stressed speech
- <text> quick speech
- >text< slow speech
- (text) non-verbal description
- text◦ quieter speech
- text= interruption
- text- self-interruption
- te:xt elongated vowel
- “text” quoted speech
- {text} unclear speech

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Seeking Women to participate in Graduate Research Project

Women of all backgrounds needed for help in dissertation research. Participation involves a 60-minute interview about social perceptions of speech and a short follow-up phone interview. Participation is strictly confidential and will be compensated with a small gift. If you or any woman you know is interested, your help would be greatly appreciated. Please Call Kate at (706) 372-1651 or e-mail at gourdo@uga.edu, to set up an appointment at a location of your choosing.

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