10

Dialects and Style

Most of us have noticed that people speak very differently on different occasions. We observe that a friend speaks a certain way when talking with a supervisor in the workplace or with a professor at school but sounds quite different when chatting with friends over lunch or speaking with children at home. We may even notice that we change our own speech when we're in different settings or talking with different people. People who no longer live in their hometown may find themselves switching back into their home dialect when visiting home or even when talking on the phone with a family member back home.

In this chapter, we shift our focus from language variation across different groups of speakers to variation in the speech of individual speakers, or language STYLE. Research has shown that variation in speech style is just as pervasive as regional, social-class, ethnic, and gender-based language variation. There are no single-style speakers. Even speakers who live in relative isolation display a range of speech styles – that is, they engage in STYLE SHIFTING. This is because language variation is intricately tied to social meaning. On one level, social meanings and their associated linguistic usages may seem to be relatively fixed. As we have explored in previous chapters, a speaker may use language based on their region of origin, their social class, ethnicity, and/or gender. On another level, however, speakers very often use language to *change* social meanings, including social and interpersonal relations and personal identities. A young white female from Northern California, for example, may variously show, through linguistic style shifting, closeness to or detachment from her regional ties, affiliation with or distance from her conversational partners or the topics they're talking about, and a range of different facets of, or even types of, personal identity—that that of a serious university student, a flirtatious date, or a caring daughter. Thus, if we hope to gain a full understanding of the interrelation between linguistic and social variation, we need to investigate not only associations between linguistic variants and regional, ethnic and other social groups, but also how people capitalize on these associations as they speak (sign, write, text, chat, etc.) to convey, shape, and re-shape social, interpersonal, personal, and sociolinguistic meanings.

[Video: Stephen Fry on descriptivism & style (5:09-5:37)](#)

10.1   Types of Style Shifting

Several different types of style shifting may occur. For one, speakers may show shifting usage levels for features associated with different dialects or with different registers. Whereas dialects are language varieties associated with particular groups of speakers, REGISTERS can be defined as varieties associated with particular situations of use. For example, a speaker may show higher usage levels of *-in'* for *-ing* in an informal register than in a more formal one. In addition, speakers may also shift in and out of entire registers and dialects. Thus, a person

speaking on the phone to a business colleague may switch quite suddenly from an "adult" register to a "babytalk" register if they are interrupted by pleas from their young child or, perhaps, attentions from a pet. The "babytalk" register encompasses a range of features on different levels of language patterning, including high pitch, exaggerated intonational contours, and the use of words with diminutive FLEECE vowel [i] endings (as in *tummy* for "stomach") and double or REDUPLICATED syllables, as in *boo-boo* for "injury" or *din-din* for "dinner". Another readily recognizable register is "legalese," the dense, often incomprehensible prose that typifies legal documents, particularly when you get to the "fine print" section.

As an example of shifting from one dialect to another, a European American teenager may switch from a European American variety into an approximation of African American English to indicate affiliation with "cool" youth culture. Shifting into a dialect (or language) other than one's "own" is often called CROSSING (Rampton 1995, 1999). However, exactly what it means to "own" a particular dialect (i.e. to have "native" competence in a dialect) and whether it is possible to have more than one dialect as one's "own" are open questions. Another type of style shifting involves shifting in and out of different genres. GENRES are also associated with particular situations of use; however, they tend to be more highly ritualized and formulaic and are often associated with performance or artistic display of some type. For example, preachers may use a specialized "sermon" genre, while a creative writer may write in the genre of the mystery novel or of science fiction.

[INSERT ENHANCEMENT 10.2]

Since both "genre" and "register" are associated with situations of use, there is no sharp dividing line between them, and what might be classified as a "register" by some scholars may just as easily be termed a "genre" by others. In addition, it is not always easy to determine whether a particular shift counts as a shift in register/genre vs. a shift in dialect variety. For example, in shifting from a casual to a more formal register, speakers whose native dialect is a vernacular variety of African American English may feel that they are shifting both register and dialect in producing a more formal tone. Similarly, it is not easy to determine whether someone is "crossing" into another dialect or merely using *some* of the features associated with another dialect, or even whether a speaker is switching between dialects of one language or from one language to another, a phenomenon typically referred to as CODE SWITCHING. Hence, shifts from a vernacular variety of African American English into standard Mainstream American English (MAE) are sometimes classified as code switching and sometimes as style shifting. In reality, there is no clear dividing line between style shifting and code switching, since, as discussed elsewhere in this book, it is very difficult to determine what counts as a "dialect" of a language vs. a "language" in its own right. We will not explicitly discuss code switching in this chapter. However, many of the issues that pertain to shifting between styles in a single language also apply to switching between different languages. For example, code switching is shaped by many of the same situational factors and speaker motivations that affect stylistic variation.

Because there is no clear dividing line between register/genre shifting and dialect shifting, or between dialect shifting and code switching, and because people rarely simply "turn off" one dialect or register and "turn on" another (though they may do so with code), it is perhaps more fruitful to think about stylistic variation—as with social and ethnic group based variation (see Chapter 7)—in terms of stylistic repertoires rather than register or dialect per se. Again REPERTOIRE can be taken to refer to the collection of linguistic features that each individual has at his or her disposal at any given moment, to be employed as needed for different social, interactional and personal reasons, rather than conceiving of people shifting into and out of abstract entities like "Latino English" or a "legalese" register, which they either do or do not 'own'.

Style shifts may involve features on all levels of language use, from the phonological and morphosyntactic features typically studied by researchers interested in the quantitative patterning of social and regional dialect differences, to intonational contours, lexical items, and pragmatic features (e.g. greetings, and politeness formulas), to the way entire conversations are shaped. For example, Deborah Tannen (1984) discusses the different "conversational styles" associated with different cultural and regional groups in the United States, some of which are characterized by a high degree of overlapping talk among speakers and others of which are characterized by very little overlap, and even pauses between speaker turns.

Further, style shifts can involve different degrees of speaker self-consciousness. For example, a student in a college far from her hometown may unconsciously shift into her native dialect when holding a phone conversation with friends and family back home, while another speaker may quite self-consciously "cross" into a non-native dialect in order to "perform" the variety (perhaps to display a degree of "ownership," perhaps to make fun of the dialect), or even use an exaggerated version of their *own* native dialect in a performance situation. In our studies of Ocracoke Island, NC, we found that some island residents put on overblown dialect performances for tourists and other outsiders (including sociolinguistics) who come to the island in hopes of hearing "authentic" Ocracoke speech (Schilling-Estes 1998).

Finally, styles may be short-lived, as, for example, in the case of the parent talking with a colleague on the phone who shifts briefly into "babytalk" register to address a child who comes into the room. They may also be fairly extensive, even becoming part of one's daily routine. Barbara Johnstone (1999) discusses the case of a Texas salesperson who frequently shifts into a "Southern drawl" when talking with potential customers to help her make sales. Style shifts can even be so enduring that they come to characterize particular individuals or groups, so that we can talk about a person's own "unique style," or peer group styles such as those associated with the "jocks" and "burnouts" in some US high schools (Eckert 2000). Further, style shifts can even shape registers and dialects. For example, the fact that people in New York City and other traditionally *r*-less areas of the US shift into more *r*-ful speech in more formal situations helps cement the association of *r*-pronunciation with "proper" speech and thus hasten the speed with which [r] is making inroads into historically *r*-less regional dialects.

Exercise 1

Based upon an audio recording of speeches to diverse audiences, examine stylistic variation in the speech of a person well known for the ability to bridge different cultures (for example, Jesse Jackson or Martin Luther King, Jr.). Compare speeches made to members of minority cultures with those presented to members of cultural majorities. Are there any qualitative differences in linguistic form (for example, phonology, grammar)? What kinds of differences are there in language-use conventions when different audiences are addressed (for example, speaker–audience interplay, salutations)? Are there particular features with social or situational associations that the speaker might be manipulating (for example, multiple negation)? What kinds of dialect or register features do *not* appear to be manipulated? (For example, are irregular verbs shifted?)

Scholarly interest in language style is probably as old as research on language itself, and research on style may be undertaken from any one of a wide range of perspectives, ranging from the literary study to the rhetorical analysis of the effectiveness of different styles for various purposes to the very practically grounded analysis of spoken and written styles for the

purposes of identifying the authors of anonymous communications in connection with criminal investigations (e.g. Fitzgerald 2001, Jessen 2008, Rico-Sulayes 2012). Within sociolinguistics, many approaches to the study of stylistic variation have been considered, from early approaches that sought to catalog the wide array of "ways of speaking" of particular cultural groups (e.g. Hymes 1962, 1974) to later work that focuses on how individual linguistic features contribute to personal, interpersonal and social meanings in small stretches of conversation (Eckert 2012).

For our purposes, we will focus mostly on the tradition of study associated with the quantitative analysis of social and regional variation. However, as we saw with language and gender studies, researchers increasingly are combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This makes sense in the study of stylistic variation, since there is an intimate connection between individual styles and the broader styles associated with particular groups of speakers and speech situations. In order to engage in style shifting, speakers must be aware of the various registers and styles around them, as well as the social meanings associated with these styles, and then be able to use features from the various styles to accomplish their own conversational purposes and present themselves as they wish to appear in particular interactions. In the process of combining features from various sources, speakers shape styles, and these new styles in turn might become stylistic norms around which other groups orient. Hence, the up-close investigation of stylistic variation in interaction lends insight into how particular sets of features come to be associated with certain social groups, as well as how varieties may change.

Three major approaches to the quantitative study of stylistic variation have been influential during the past several decades: ATTENTION TO SPEECH, AUDIENCE DESIGN, and SPEAKER DESIGN. We examine each of these, as well as some of the major research findings from each approach. These three approaches can be roughly correlated with Penelope Eckert's (2012) "three waves of variation study," a highly influential conceptualization of the development of quantitative sociolinguistic study that will be explained more fully below. Following our examination of previous and current approaches to stylistic variation, we will take a brief look at some further considerations in the continuing study of stylistic variation.

Exercise 2

One of the language registers that has been examined by sociolinguists is the "math register" – the particular use of language associated with mathematics. In the following items, typical of language use in math problems, identify some of the specialized uses of language that might be a part of the math register. What parts of speech seem to be especially affected in this register?

1   Does each real number x have a subtractive inverse?
2   The sum of two integers is 20 and one integer is 8 greater than the other. Find the integers.
3   Find consecutive *even* integers such that the sum of the first and third is 134.
4   Find three consecutive *odd* integers such that the sum of the last two is 7 less than three times the first.
5   Under one particular phone plan, each minute of phone conversation from Europe to the U.S. costs 50 cents more than each international text message. One month Professor Thorn's record of phone usage showed 30 text messages to the U.S. and 42 minutes' worth of phone calls to the U.S. The total bill was $57.00. What is the cost per minute of one international phone call?

In a book on dialect differences and math failure, *Twice as Less: Black English and the Performance of Black Students in Mathematics and Science*, Eleanor Wilson Orr (1987)

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suggests that the roots of the math difficulties experienced by many working-class African American students are found in the grammatical differences that distinguish vernacular varieties of African American English from standard English. Having examined the typical kinds of language uses in math in the above examples, react to this conclusion. Are there special features of the math register that are common to *all* students studying math? How does the use of language in math differ from "ordinary" language use? Are these differences unique to the field of mathematics? Do you think dialect differences pose special obstacles to learning math? Why or why not?

10.2   Attention to Speech

One factor shaping our speech style is how self-conscious we are about how we're talking. As we noted earlier, people may talk very differently when chatting with good friends over lunch than when they are on their "best behavior," including linguistic behavior, for a job interview. Early quantitative studies of language variation and change focused on just this factor, attention to speech, in their considerations of stylistic variation. The ATTENTION TO SPEECH approach holds that speakers shift styles based primarily on the amount of attention they are paying to speech itself as they converse. The more attention they pay to speech, the more formal or standard their speech will become; as they pay less attention to their speech, they become more casual. This approach comes from William Labov's studies of language variation and change in the Lower East Side of New York City in the 1960s (Labov 1966, 1972b). Since he was interested in how language changes spread across social groups and different stylistic contexts, Labov devised interviews that were designed to yield speech affected by differing degrees of attention to speech, in the belief that speakers would move from an informal, casual style to a more formal, standard style as they focused more and more attention on their speech. The bulk of the typical SOCIOLINGUISTIC INTERVIEW was designed to yield conversational speech through open-ended questions about topic areas of general interest and of particular interest to the community under study. Questions were grouped into topic-based modules, and modules could be easily rearranged during ongoing conversation to allow interviewees to guide the flow of topics. In addition, interviewees were free to go off on tangents of their own and to tell lengthy stories. The speech in the conversational portion of the interview could be classified as either CASUAL or CAREFUL in style. Casual speech was held to occur in such contexts as extended discussions which were not in direct response to interview questions, remarks by the interviewee to a third party rather than to the interviewer, and narratives about highly emotional topics, such as near-death experiences. Speech was held to be more careful when less emotionally charged topics were discussed or when the interviewee provided direct responses to interview questions.

The classic sociolinguistic interview also includes several other stylistic contexts: READING PASSAGES, designed to elicit somewhat more self-conscious speech than careful conversational speech; WORD LISTS devoid of narrative context, intended to further focus people's attention on language itself rather than on content; and lists of MINIMAL PAIRS – that is, words that are phonetically identical except for one sound (e.g. *dear* vs. *near* or *peat* vs *pit*. In Labov's New York City study, the words in each pair would be pronounced differently in MAE but might be pronounced the same in New York City speech. For example, one word pair he included was *sauce* and *source*, since these words might be homophonous for *r*-less speakers in New York City; another pair was *god* and *guard*. Such minimal pairs were intended to focus speakers' attention not only on speech in general but on specific linguistic features of interest, in this case, whether or not speakers used stigmatized *r*-less productions.

After obtaining data from the various stylistic contexts in his sociolinguistic interviews , Labov then investigated the incidence of certain features of New York City speech in each stylistic context by examining, in each context, the occurrence of a given dialect feature in

relation to the number of potential occurrences of the feature. For example, if a speaker uttered 50 words which normally contain *r* after a vowel and before a consonant, as in *weird* or *farm*, and pronounced 20 of these words without the *r*, as in *fahm* for "farm", the degree of *r*-lessness is 40 percent.

10.2.1 The patterning of stylistic variation across social groups

Labov's studies revealed that, when sociolinguistic interview data is aggregated by speakers' social class group and the various styles listed above (i.e. careful, casual, reading passage, word list, minimal word pair), we see quite regular patterns of stylistic variation. Namely, speakers used stigmatized dialect features, such as *r*-lessness, as in "fahm" for *farm*, or *t* for *th*, as in "tru" for *through*, at progressively lower frequency levels as they moved from casual style to minimal pair style. This patterning mirrors the patterning of stigmatized features as one moves from the lowest to highest socioeconomic class. The intersection of stylistic and social class variation in the use of [t] for *th*, as in "wit" for *with*, in New York City English is depicted in figure 10.1.
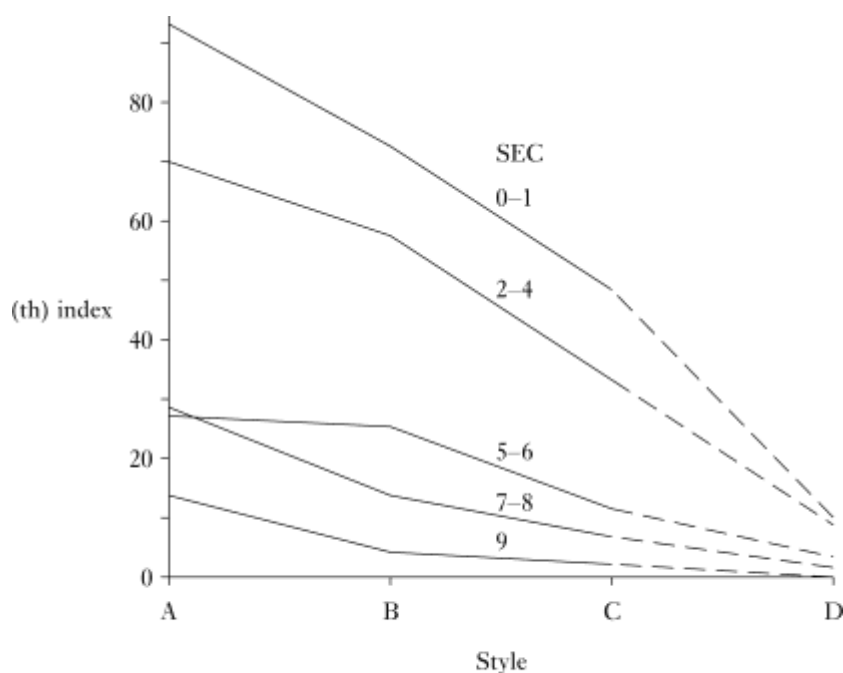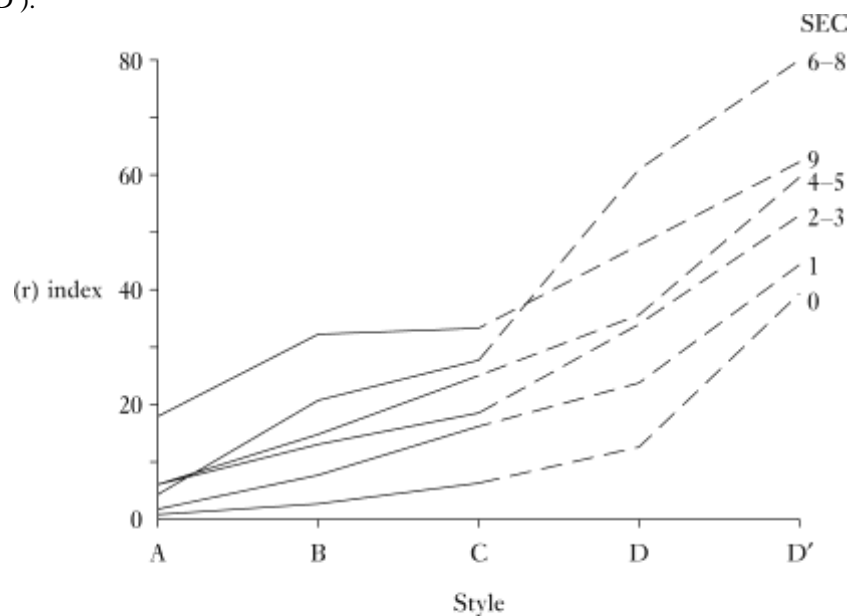

Socioeconomic class (SEC) scale: 0–1, lower class; 2–4, working class; 5–6, 7–8, lower middle class; 9, upper middle class. A, casual speech; B, careful speech; C, reading style; D, word lists.

Figure 10.1   Stylistic and social class differences in [t]/[θ] usage in New York City English (adapted from Labov 1972b: 113)

Figure 10.1 reveals that social class distinctions in frequency levels for stigmatized features tend to be preserved in each speech style. In other words, although all speakers decrease their use of stigmatized features as they move from casual to formal speech, speakers in lower socioeconomic classes show higher levels of stigmatized features in each speech style than speakers of higher classes.

Sometimes, as speakers become more formal in style, members of some lower social-class groups will actually use stigmatized features at a lower rate (and prestige features at a higher rate) than members of higher social classes. This pattern applies particularly to upper working-class or lower middle-class groups (as defined according to a particular socioeconomic status scale discussed in chapter 6. Labov terms this "cross-over" pattern HYPERCORRECTION, since speakers who exhibit this patterning are speaking in a hyper-"correct" or hyper-standard style. Labov maintained that lower middle-class and upper working-class speakers are more prone to hypercorrection than members of other socioeconomic classes because, in his view, they are more concerned with raising their socioeconomic status than members of other status groups. Perhaps this is because members of classes lower than the lower middle and upper working classes cannot envision rising to a higher socioeconomic level, while those in higher classes simply do not have as far to rise. Because of their concern with achieving the next higher level of status, speakers in lower middle-class groups attempt to talk like members of upper middle-class groups. In their attempts, they sometimes go too far and end up utilizing prestige features at a greater rate, or stigmatized features at a lower rate, than those they are trying to emulate. This is particularly likely to occur in formal styles, where the focus on language is greater than in casual styles. Research also suggests that the "cross-over" pattern is most likely to occur with features currently undergoing language change (Labov 1972b: 70–109; Trudgill 1974), such as the increasing use of *r*-ful pronunciations (as in *farm* rather than *fahm* for "farm") in New York City in the 1960s. Figure 10.2 depicts hypercorrection in the use of *r*-ful pronunciations in New York City by members of the lower middle class (social classes 4–8). Speakers in this group display a higher rate of usage for this prestigious feature than speakers of the upper middle class (class 9) in the formal "word list" and "minimal pair" styles (styles D and D′).

SEC scale: 0–1, lower class; 2–3, working class; 4–5, 6–8, lower middle class; 9, upper middle class. A, casual speech; B, careful speech; C, reading style; D, word lists; D′, minimal pairs.

Figure 10.2   Class and style stratification for postvocalic *r* (adapted from Labov 1972b: 114)

Another form of hypercorrection involves consciously adding features to one's speech rather than increasing or decreasing percentage rates. SPELLING PRONUNCIATIONS, for example pronouncing the silent *l* in *salmon* or the *t* in *often* are one such type of hypercorrection. Hypercorrection can also involve using a feature in linguistic contexts where we do not

usually expect it, as for example when a speaker says **Whom** *is it?* or *This is between you and I*. Cases of hypercorrection which involve adding features or extending the boundaries of linguistic patterns are sometimes referred to as STRUCTURAL HYPERCORRECTION, whereas the type of hypercorrection which involves using features at a different rate than expected is known as STATISTICAL HYPERCORRECTION.

Exercise 3

One of the grammatical forms which is most commonly affected by hypercorrection is the reflexive pronoun (e.g. *myself*, *yourself*). Based on the following examples, identify the reflexive pronoun form most affected by hypercorrection and the types of constructions in which hypercorrect reflexive forms are typically used.

1   David and myself often work together.
2   Please give the ticket to myself.
3   Between Marge and myself, we should be able to raise the kids.
4   This book was really written by the students and ourselves.
5   I arranged for myself to leave early.
6   He brought the project to myself for review.
7   The students often give a party for the other faculty and myself.

In addition to the fact that social status distinctions are usually preserved across speech styles (except in cases of hypercorrection), Labov's studies of speech style also point to a couple of other intriguing patterns. Contrary to what we might expect, Labov observed that casual, unselfconscious speech is more regular in its patterning than speech produced in more careful, more self-conscious stylistic contexts. For example, in his studies of the vowel system of New York City English, Labov found that speakers' vowel systems in casual speech were more symmetrical and more closely aligned with what he had determined the general New York City system to be than were their vowel systems in more formal speech styles. In other words, speech uttered in casual contexts was found to more closely approximate the "natural," "native" language variety of a given community than speech in other contexts. In addition, Labov observed that the New York City vowel system was changing over time and that speakers' vowel systems in casual speech were more similar to the newer New York City vowel system than were their vowels in more formal speech. In other words, in Labov's view, casual speech seems to give a truer picture of language change in progress than more careful speech styles.

Labov's view regarding the value of unselfconscious speech as reflective of "genuine" patterns of variation and change are captured in his VERNACULAR PRINCIPLE, which holds that "the style which is most regular in its structure and in its relation to the evolution of the language is the vernacular, in which the minimum attention is paid to speech" (1972c: 112). Note here that *vernacular* is used to refer to one's least self-conscious style, which may or may not be a very nonstandard style (e.g. for a native speaker of MAE). However, as we noted in Chapter 1, the two senses of vernacular often do go hand-in-hand; contrary to popular belief, not only are vernacular dialects not "sloppy" or "lazy" versions of standard varieties, but they actually are *more* regularly patterned than the more self-conscious styles that typify formal, standard speech.

10.2.2   Limitations of the attention to speech approach

Labov's findings have had an enormous impact on sociolinguistic study over the past half-century. However, the theoretical and methodological assumptions underlying Labov's approach to stylistic variation have been called into question for a number of reasons. His view has been criticized for its focus on only one factor affecting stylistic variation – attention to speech – and on only one continuum of stylistic variation – standard to nonstandard. In addition, even if we agree that attention to speech indeed plays a key role in shaping speech styles, it is very difficult to actually quantify, and it has been argued that the different stylistic contexts in the sociolinguistic interview differ in other ways besides attention to speech, and along dimensions other than casual-formal/nonstandard-standard. For example, the "casual" speech that surfaces when people go off on tangents may be a matter of topic as well as attention, since people may associate certain topics (e.g. leisure activities) with casual speech and others (e.g. education or occupation) with more formality. Similarly, other "casual" contexts involve shifts in addressee, not just attention—for example speech directed at a family member or friend rather than the interviewer. Further, it has been noted that reading styles most likely do not lie on the same plane as spoken styles, since speakers may have special "reading registers" or "listing registers" that they use for the reading passage and word list sections of the interview that are very different from any of their formal spoken registers (e.g. Milroy 1987: 100–7).

We may also question whether formality and standardness always go hand-in-hand with heightened attention to speech and whether informality and nonstandardness always correlate with lessened attention. As we just noted, a native speaker of a fairly standard variety of English may be quite standard in unselfconscious styles. In addition, native speakers of nonstandard varieties sometimes use self-consciously vernacular speech for various purposes. For example, when people tell narratives replete with vernacular variants, far from being inattentive to speech, they may be paying quite a bit of attention to producing an engaging performance. In addition, the exaggerated dialect performances of Ocracoke Islanders mentioned above are also self-consciously non-MAE. These performances feature several rote phrases which highlight a number of the features of the traditional Ocracoke dialect. For example, one classic phrase, "It's hoi toid on the sound soid" ("It's high tide on the sound side"), showcases the well-known island pronunciation of the PRICE diphthong in a word like *tide* as more of an *oy* sound of the CHOICE vowel, so that a word like *tide* sounds more like "toid." Ocracokers' self-consciously dialectal performances are far from standard or formal sounding. In fact, they sound much more vernacular than sociolinguistic interview speech, or even extremely casual conversation with friends and relatives.

Exercise 4

Listen to the following clips of Ocracoke fisherman Rex O'Neal. In the first clip, Rex is performing "the Ocracoke brogue"; in the second clip, Re chats with a sociolinguistic researcher; in the third clip, Rex talks to his brother.

Audio: Rex - performance
Audio: Rex - interview
Audio: Rex - brothers

If you were to place these three recordings on the following continuum, where would you place each one?

  More Standard ←---→ More Vernacular

Which linguistic features (phonological and/or grammatical) stood out to you and helped in you place the recordings on the continuum?

People sometimes produce quite self-conscious speech despite our best efforts to engage them in unselfconscious conversation. And whereas sometimes they are self-consciously standard and formal, as Labov's attention to speech model predicts, sometimes they are also self-consciously vernacular, as in dialect performance and performative narratives. At first, one might be tempted to think that self-consciousness about speech is an artifact of the interview situation, in which one is confronted with recording equipment and with an interviewer they probably don't know very well, if at all. In reality, though, self-conscious styles are actually common in everyday life. After all, we all tell stories, "put on" others' voices when quoting, and maybe even exaggerate aspects of our own ways of speaking, whether for amusement, illustration, or more practical reasons, as for example, in the case of the Texas saleswoman mentioned above who exaggerated her Southern accent to make more sales.

Video: Young Austinites

Because self-conscious speech is in fact so common, researchers interested in stylistic variation have come to question the focus on unselfconscious, vernacular speech that has characterized sociolinguistic study since Labov's early work, since such a focus gives us only a partial picture of people's full array of linguistic usages. Further, even when it seems that people are feeling relatively unselfconscious about their speech, we can question whether there really is any such thing as each individual's single most vernacular, casual, or "natural" style. In reality, speakers may use different types of casual, unguarded speech in different settings, depending on such matters as who they're talking with and what they're talking about. A woman at home with her family might not be paying much attention to her speech itself as she talks, but the way she talks in this setting might be very different from how she talks when she's out with a group of friends for the evening (e.g. Hindle 1979). And people might even use different types of casual speech in a single conversation. The second author of this book conducted an in-depth study of style shifting in one very conversational sociolinguistic interview as part of our studies of Robeson County, North Carolina (Schilling-Estes 2004; see Chapter 7 for full discussion of Lumbee English). Both participants were young adult males; the interviewee was a Lumbee Indian, and the interviewer was an African American. Both participants sounded quite different, yet equally relaxed, when telling humorous stories about the Lumbee's family and when telling stories about common friends at the university they both attended. Thus, rather than (perhaps vainly) seeking each person's single most "real" style, we can perhaps gain a fuller understanding of everyday language use if we bear in mind that natural speech comprises a range of speech styles, all of which are shaped by situational, personal and interpersonal factors, and all of which are "genuine" in their own way.

Despite the concerns that have been raised regarding the attention to speech approach to stylistic variation, Labov and others have demonstrated that when speakers participate in sociolinguistic interviews composed of tasks believed to elicit increasingly more self-conscious speech, the speech styles that surface often can be arranged on a continuum from casual to formal using Labov's original criteria, and that the speech styles thus arranged do show regular, direct correlations between casualness and nonstandardness, on the one hand, and formality and standardness on the other. Labov's research showed such correlations in a very large body of data from Philadelphia gathered over the course of a number of years (Labov 2001a). In addition, Labov never intended his model to be extended beyond the sociolinguistic interview to capture the full range of factors that shape stylistic variation in everyday life. His model remains valuable, though researchers interested in in learning more about the full range of factors that might condition stylistic variation, both within and outside the sociolinguistic interview, have now moved beyond a singular focus on attention to speech.

10.3   Audience Design

When we think about what factors affect stylistic variation in our own speech, chances are that one of the first things that comes to mind is who we're talking to – that is, our audience. The correlation between speaker style and composition of the listening audience has been seen as so important that it has led researchers, notably Allan Bell (1984, 2001, 2014: 293-322), to propose that audience, not attention, is central in stylistic variation. In its original formulation, Bell's AUDIENCE DESIGN approach holds that speakers shift styles primarily in response to their audience. Under this view, speakers adjust their speech toward their audiences if they wish to express or achieve solidarity with audience members; they adjust away from their audience if they wish to express or create distance. This approach is rooted in a social psychological approach to stylistic variation originally known as SPEECH ACCOMMODATION THEORY (SAT) (Giles 1973; Giles and Powesland 1975; Giles 1984) and later called COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY (CAT) (e.g. Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991). According to SAT, style is explained primarily on the basis of a speaker's social and psychological adjustment to the ADDRESSEE – that is, the person(s) being addressed by the speaker. The most common pattern of adjustment is CONVERGENCE, in which the speaker's language becomes more like that of the addressee. The tendency to shift speech toward the addressee is summarized as follows:

> People will attempt to converge linguistically toward the speech patterns believed to be characteristic of their recipients when they (a) desire their social approval and the perceived costs of so acting are proportionally lower than the rewards anticipated; and/or (b) desire a high level of communication efficiency, and (c) social norms are not perceived to dictate alternative speech strategies. (Beebe and Giles 1984: 8)

Put simply, the model is rooted in the social psychological need of the speaker for social approval by the addressee, but the speaker must weigh the costs and rewards of such behavior in shifting speech to converge with that of the addressee.

The other side of the accommodation model is DIVERGENCE, in which speakers choose to distance themselves from addressees for one reason or another. Speakers will diverge linguistically from addressees under the following kinds of conditions:

> [when speakers] (a) define the encounter in intergroup terms and desire positive ingroup identity, or (b) wish to dissociate personally from another in an interindividual encounter, or (c) wish to bring another's speech behavior to a personally acceptable level. (Beebe and Giles 1984: 8)

As we would expect from a model grounded in theories of social psychology, both the motivations of the individual speaker and the social relations among speakers and addressees are essential to this explanation for stylistic shifting. A number of different experiments by Giles and others (e.g. Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991) have shown how speakers converge, and, in some cases, diverge with respect to speech-related phenomena such as rate of speech, content, pausing, and what is loosely referred to as "accent."

The audience design approach extends the speech accommodation model in two very important ways: (1) by articulating in detail the different kinds of audiences that affect speaker convergence/divergence, and (2) by applying Speech Accommodation Theory to the quantitative investigation of specific linguistic variables rather than relying on general discussions of differences in "accent" across speech style. The audience, as defined by Bell, includes not only those directly addressed, or addressees, but also participants of various sorts who are not directly addressed. Speakers make the greatest adjustments in their speech in relation to their direct addressees, but they may also alter their speech based on non-addressed participants, with the degree of adjustment determined by such factors as whether the speaker

is aware of the participants' presence and whether participants are ratified (i.e. sanctioned to participate in the conversation). Ratified but non-addressed participants are called AUDITORS, non-ratified parties of whom the speaker is aware are called OVERHEARERS, and other parties – that is, those whose presence is unknown and unratified – are called EAVESDROPPERS. Non-personal factors such as topic and setting may also affect style shifting, but such shifts can be thought of as deriving from audience-based considerations. For example, when speakers discuss a topic such as education, they may shift into more standard speech because they associate this topic with a certain type of audience – namely, a high-status, standard-speaking audience – rather than because of the nature of the topic *per se*.

In addition to RESPONSIVE STYLE SHIFTS, undertaken in reaction to shifts in the make-up of a speaker's audience, the audience design approach also recognizes that speakers often engage in INITIATIVE STYLE SHIFTS - that is, shifts initiated from within speakers themselves in an attempt to alter the existing situation. Such shifts are held to occur when speakers shift their focus from the immediately present audience to an absent person or persons with whom they wish to identify. For example, a grade-school student talking with a teacher might take up a rebellious stance against school authority by shifting from his most "proper" speech into the vernacular speech he associates with his classmates. In the context of sociolinguistic interview, a cooperative interviewee might display a general shift in the direction of the fairly standard speech used by the academic who is interviewing her; however, at certain points, she might choose to foreground her ties to her local community by shifting into the speech style associated with her fellow community members. The non-present group that is called to mind when people engage in initiative style shift is known as the REFEREE GROUP. REFEREE DESIGN is the term applied to the component of the audience design approach that focuses on these referee groups and initiative style shifting. The basic components of the audience design approach to style shifting are diagrammed in figure 10.3.
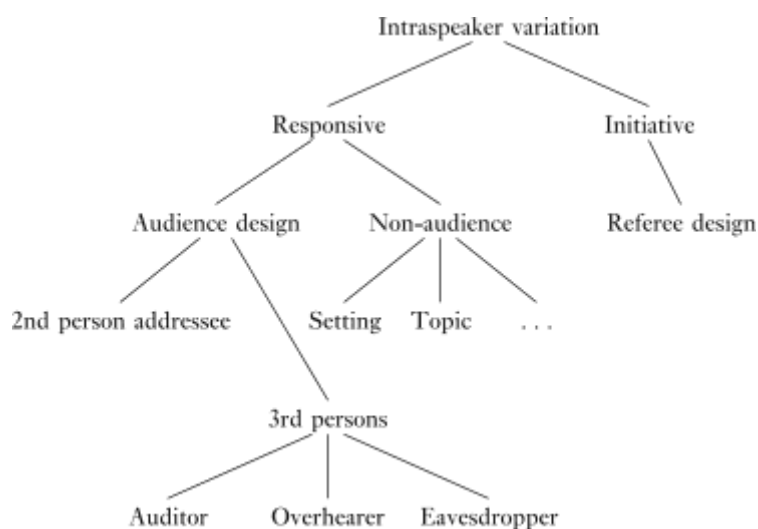

Figure 10.3   Style as audience design (from Bell 1984: 162, figure 6; reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press)

Video: Bill Clinton style-shift to Southern (3:40-4:05)

10.3.1   *The effects of audience on speech style*

Bell's audience design model grew out of his detailed studies of style shifting in radio announcers addressing a range of audiences as well as evidence he compiled from a wide

array of language variation studies. In his studies of radio announcers in New Zealand, Bell found that the same announcers used more standard (i.e. British) English when reading the news for a national station but used more features of New Zealand English when reading the news (often from the same script) for a local community station. In other foundational work, Nikolas Coupland (1980) showed that audience effects can be pervasive in daily interaction. He studied the speech of an assistant in a travel agency during the course of her work day and found that she too got more or less standard depending on who she was speaking with, including clients, co-workers, and fellow agents at other travel agencies.

In an important study designed to test Bell's model, John Rickford and Faye McNair-Knox (1994) studied stylistic variation in the speech of an African American teenager, whom they called "Foxy Boston," in talking with different interviewers, two African Americans (interviewing as a team) and one European American, at several different time periods, between 1986 and 1992. They examined Foxy's and the interviewers' usage levels in each interview for several features of vernacular African American Vernacular English, including invariant *be* (as in *He be talking all the time*), copula absence (e.g. *She nice*), and several types of inflectional -*s* absence (e.g. plural -*s* absence, as in *three cat* "three cats"). In general, as predicted by Bell's model, Foxy did indeed show higher usage levels for the vernacular features studied when talking with the African Americans than when talking with the European American. However, there was one interview with the African Americans where Foxy showed relatively low usage levels for invariant *be* and copula absence. In this case, we may need to appeal to the initiative or referee design component of Bell's model, since Foxy's different styles with the same interviewers on two different occasions cannot be the direct effect of audience design. Rickford and McNair-Knox note that the interview in which Foxy uses unexpectedly low levels of vernacular African American features was not as relaxed as the other interviews. In addition, Foxy was going to a predominantly European American high school at the time and had recently attended several motivational programs exposing her to standard American English and its value in "getting ahead." Hence, she may have designed her speech in this interview in terms of a non-present referee group of MAE speakers rather than the present audience of African Americans. This study thus demonstrates the importance of both the responsive and initiative components of the audience design model. In addition, it indicates that individual patterns of stylistic variation may change over time and that both synchronic and diachronic stylistic variation must be taken into account in investigating language change, an issue which is further illustrated in a re-study of Foxy's speech patterns more than 20 years after her initial interview (Rickford and Price 2013), as well as in longitudinal studies of dialect and style changes in a population of African American children as they grow up, conducted by the first author of this book and his colleagues (Wolfram, Van Hofwegen, Renn, and Kohn forthcoming).

The audience design approach to style shifting extends the attention to speech approach in a number of ways. First, it applies to a wider range of situations and can used to explore style shifting in both research and non-research settings, including media performances and everyday conversations. In addition, although it is in some ways unidimensional in its focus on audience effects, it is more expansive in several ways. For one, the notion of "audience" is multifaceted rather than unitary, and it has been demonstrated that direct addressees have more effect on speaker style than do auditors and other types of audience members. In thinking about this, consider, for example, how your speech style might be different when in a one-on-one meeting with a professor who is a direct addressee versus when engaged in group discussion with peers with the same professor present in the classroom as an auditor. In addition, the audience design model does acknowledge the role of factors such as topic and setting. For example, Coupland's (1980) study of style shifting by the Cardiff travel assistant going about her normal workday shows that she adjusted her style based not only on who she was talking to but also, when talking with friends, whether she was talking about work or non-work-related matters. Similarly, while Foxy Boston's speech became far less vernacular when

she was talking with a white rather than African American interviewer, she actually did get quite vernacular with the white researcher when they were talking about "exciting" topics like dating and boys.

Further, though both Labov's and Bell's approaches were initially focused on stylistic variation as a responsive phenomenon, Bell later reformulated his model to give equal weight to initiative style shifts (e.g. 2001, 2014: 293-322), in recognition of the fact that speaker-initiated style shifts are quite pervasive, as demonstrated even in early, foundational studies of style shifting and code switching. One such study is Blom and Gumperz's classic study (1972) of the small town of Hemnesberget, in Northern Norway. These researchers found that while villagers often shifted between the local dialect and a more standard variety based on shifts in who they were talking to, they also shifted in the absence of shifts in audience design. For example, in talking with friends in an informal setting, speakers sometimes shifted into more standard speech to sound more authoritative, as when attempting to win arguments. In a very early study of stylistic variation that predates even Labov's foundational studies, Fischer (1958) found that his study participants, schoolchildren in a rural New England village, showed variation between the standard *–ing* pronunciation in words like *walking* and *talking* and nonstandard/informal *–in'* (e.g. *walkin'*, *talkin'*) based not only on the formality of the speech situation (tests, formal interviews, informal interviews) but also on their personalities and moods. For example, "model" boys who did well in school and were cooperative during research tasks produced more *-ing* than "typical" boys who were more resistant to school-related tasks like participating in research interviewers.

Bell's model thus stresses the importance of audience in conditioning stylistic variation without discounting the array of other factors that can come into play as well, including formality, topic, and setting, as well as speak-internal factors such as the desire to accomplish certain interactional goals (e.g. winning an argument) or to project character types or personality traits (e.g. a "model boy," cooperativeness). At the same time, the model remains predictive and testable, both within and beyond the sociolinguistic interview setting. It thus offers an invaluable perspective from which to study patterns of and explanations for intra-speaker variation.

Exercise 5

Conduct an audience design-based study of stylistic variation along the lines of Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994) by conducting two interviews with the same interviewee but two different interviewers, for example, you and a classmate. Ideally, each interviewer will use the same interview questionnaire, will share a number of demographic characteristics with the interviewee but differ from one another in terms of one demographic characteristic. For example, if you are a young female of color, find a classmate who is a young white female and an interviewee who is a young white or person of color. You should keep all other factors as controlled as possible, for example, setting, degree of familiarity, dress, etc., and should choose a native speaker of an American English dialect. You should also obtain informed consent to record the interviewee; discuss with your teacher the procedures for doing so at your university. In many cases, recordings made solely for classroom purposes need only informal consent, but you should verify this prior to making any recordings.

Using the Inventory of Distinguishing Dialect Features in the Appendix, as well as what you have learned so far about the features of various regional, social, ethnic, and gender-based varieties in the US, social class, select a feature and conduct a quantitative analysis of its patterning (i.e. number of occurrences of the feature out of all possible occurrences; see Chapter 6, Sections 6.4-6.5 for details) in the speech of interviewee in each of the two interviews. For example, you might choose to examine the use of [d] for [dh], as in "dis" for *this*. If you are interviewing a Southerner, you might examine ungilding of the PRICE vowel, as in "tahm" for *time*.

What was the usage level for the feature in each interview (percentage usage)? Did the inteviewer show diff usage levels for the feature in the two interviews? Why or why not? Did you notice different usage levels in different sections of the interview, perhaps based on topic? Referring back again to how to conduct a quantitative analysis in Chapter 6, do you think linguistic considerations in addition to stylistic ones may have affected your results (e.g. following linguistic environment)? What about factors other than the demographic characteristics of the two parties in each interview?

10.3.2   Questions concerning audience design

Despite the strengths of the audience design approach, several questions arise. For example, if indeed audience is the main conditioning factor for stylistic variation, we must ask ourselves what specifically about their audiences speakers are accommodating toward or diverging from when they engage in style shifting. As Bell notes, there are three increasingly specific possibilities:

1   Speakers assess the personal characteristics of their addressees and design their style to suit.
2   Speakers assess the general level of their addressees' speech and shift relative to it.
3   Speakers assess their addressees' levels for specific linguistic variables and shift relative to these levels.
    (Bell 1984: 167)

Bell does not attempt to determine definitively which of these three possibilities holds true for most cases of style shifting and in fact maintains that speakers most likely respond to audiences on all three levels when they engage in style shifting. It is quite clear that speakers do indeed respond on level (1). For example, in an early foundational study, Fasold (1972) noted that African American speakers in Washington, DC, used vernacular variants more frequently with African American than European American interviewers, even though most of the African American interviewers used MAE or varieties of African American English that were quite close to MAE. However, to say that speakers respond to the personal characteristics of their audience members does not really tell us *what* characteristics they are responding to: When someone speaks in a more vernacular manner with one interviewer than with another, is it primarily because of ethnicity, or perhaps because of some other factor, such as relative age, familiarity (perhaps the interviewee has known one interviewer longer than another), gender, or even how friendly the interviewer is?

It is even more difficult to tease apart levels (2) and (3), since, as Bell puts it, "the general speech impression of level (2) largely derives from the combined assessment of many individual variables" (1984: 168). In the study of Foxy Boston discussed above, the researchers found that Foxy seemed to be able to adjust her speech based on her interviewers' general usage levels for the features studied (level 2). However, she did not seem to be able to make more fine-grained adjustments (level 3). Further, Rickford and McNair-Knox note that not all variables seem to stand an equal chance of being selected in style shifting: Features that are used frequently (for example, invariant *be* in vernacular African American English in the 1990s, as in *He always **be** late for school*) and may be more noticeable seem to be more likely to be manipulated in stylistic variation than features with a low frequency of occurrence that often escape people's conscious attention (for example, possessive *-s* absence, as in *Janet book is on the table*).

In our own studies, we have found that how important features are to people's senses of individual and community identity may influence the extent to which they are used in style shifting. For example, when Ocracoke Islanders perform their unique dialect for outsiders, they produce exaggerated versions of the "hoi toid" vowel which is a well-known icon of Outer Banks speech. However, they do not produce exaggerated pronunciations of other, less noticed vowel sounds that nonetheless are characteristic of traditional regional speech, for example the pronunciation of the MOUTH vowel more like the FACE vowel, as in "dane" for *down*. Conversely, residents of Smith Island, in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, are readily able to manipulate different pronunciations of the MOUTH vowel in demonstrating and performing their own dialect and other language varieties. However, they do not seem equally able to use the PRICE vowel for stylistic effect, as Ocracokers do. Most likely, this is because "dane" for "down" is more symbolic of community identity for Smith Islanders; in fact, both islanders and outsiders often point to this feature as the most distinctive pronunciation trait of Smith Island speech (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999).

It is also important to bear in mind that linguistic features may carry other social associations besides those related to demographic groups (e.g. ethnic or gender groups) or local, geographically based identity. For example, the schoolboys in Fischer's study used *-in'* and *-ing* to project character traits or types like the "model boy." Similarly, the teenager in Rickford and McNair-Knox's study used low levels of vernacular African American English features in one particular interview with an African American interviewer not only, or even primarily, to indicate affiliation with the White students with whom she was attending school at the time, but also to take up a relatively uncooperative stance compared with the more relaxed interviews with the same interviewer at different time periods. Thus, designing one's speech for one's audience involves more than matching or trying to match the speech of the demographic groups to which one's audience members belong but also using features for a range of purposes related to personal and group identity and interpersonal interaction. Further, it seems that sometimes the personal and interactional meanings of linguistic features may derive from their association with particular demographic groups, and sometimes vice versa. Indeed, group associations and interactional meanings can become quite interrelated, and it becomes difficult or impossible to tell "primary" meanings from "secondary" ones. For example, it's hard to tell whether a feature like *-in'* for *-ing* carries meanings like "uninterested in school" (as with the kids in Fisher's study) because it is associated with working class speakers, who are often considered to be less educated than those in higher status groups, or whether *-in* for *-ing* can be used to indicate affiliation with working class speakers because it carries meanings related to casualness, relaxedness, and a lack of pretentiousness, including lack of concern for "putting on" "proper" English (Campbell-Kibler 2007, 2010). We will have more to say on this issue in Section 9.4 below.

Finally, although current formulations of the audience design model give equal weight to responsive and initiative shifting, we are still left with questions about the exact nature of the relationship between the two dimensions. For Bell, although both dimensions are indeed essential, initiative style shift necessarily is derivative of responsive, since individuals cannot create social meanings for linguistic features in a vacuum but rather must craft their styles out of features whose meanings have already been established through their regular association with particular social groups and social meanings. For example, we cannot suddenly decide to use a feature such as fronted GOOSE vowel (as in something like "tew" for *to*) to convey authority if it doesn't already have some sort of association with people who hold authority; similarly, we can't use it to connote formality if there is no particular association between the fronted GOOSE vowel and formal situations (which there isn't, as far as we know).

At the same time, though, linguistic usages are not simply reflective of situations and social identities but rather can be said to shape and indeed constitute them. Particular ethnic or gender groups cannot exist apart from language, since their linguistic usages play a key role in

defining these groups and their members. And these definitions are not unitary or unchanging but rather multifaceted and malleable. For example, as discussed in previous chapters, Penelope Eckert (2000) shows how teenagers in a Detroit-area high school variously use features of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift (NCVS; see Chapter 5) to shape various types of male and female identity. For example, the "jock" girls who project the image of "good girls" who do well in school, date popular athletes, etc., show lower usage levels for newer features of the shifting vowel system than the "burnout" girls who orient less toward school and more toward urban Detroit, and its linguistic features, including newer features of the NCVS. Similarly, studies conducted in connection with the Language and Communication in Washington, DC project at Georgetown University show how some groups of African American women and men in DC show different degrees of adaptation to local (white) language norms as they shape their gender and ethnic identities over time (Jamsu, Callier and J. Lee 2009; S. Lee 2014). In particular, the African American women in the DC study in general are moving toward white, MAE norms over time, while the African American men in the study are retaining traditional features of African American Vernacular English such as the ungilding of the PRICE vowel (as in [ra:d] for *ride*) and non-fronting of the BOAT vowel, as the women broaden their educational, occupational and social networks and the men maintain localized neighborhood ties.

When we acknowledge that language and interactional and identity factors are intricately intertwined, it becomes very difficult to think about stylistic variation in terms of either conforming to or flouting speech norms associated with particular situations or social groups (i.e. as either responsive or initiative design), since, again, situations and groups (and individuals) are comprised in large part by linguistic usages, and so we cannot really say what "normal" linguistic-social associations might be. Nonetheless, there does seem to be a sense in which speakers' stylistic initiative is constrained to an extent by pre-existing styles and their social meanings, even when speakers use styles and elements of styles to create new types of social and personal identities. In the two cases above, for example, while the Detroit-area teenagers and DC African Americans are actively shaping and projecting unique types of gender and ethnic identity, they do rely on pre-existing associations between linguistic features (e.g. features of the NCVS and of vernacular AAE) and social meanings (urban orientation, local orientation) to craft new meanings. We will have more to say on the interplay between speaker creativity vs. constraint in the next section.

10.4   Speaker Design Approaches

As sociolinguists' views on stylistic variation have developed, we have seen a movement away from viewing style shifts as responsive to changes in situational formality or audience composition. Instead, style shifting is viewed as a proactive means of shaping situations, interpersonal relations, and how we portray and even internalize our own sense of personal identity. Views that focus on what speakers accomplish via stylistic variation can usefully be termed SPEAKER DESIGN approaches, to distinguish them from approaches that focus on correlating intra-speaker variation with external factors such as variation in interactional task (e.g. conversing with an interviewer vs. reading lists of words) or variation in audience make-up (e.g. being interviewed by a member of one's own vs. another ethnic group).

10.4.1   *Three approaches to style, 'three waves' of quantitative sociolinguistic study*

As mentioned in section 9.1 above, the movement from attention to speech to audience design to speaker design approaches to stylistic variation has gone hand in hand with a movement Eckert (2012) has termed "three waves" of quantitative (i.e. variationist) sociolinguistic study more broadly (Soukup 2011). According to Eckert, first-wave studies are those focusing on

quantitative correlations between linguistic variation and pre-determined social groups, usually based on large-scale demographic categories (e.g. region, social class, sex, race, age). Speakers are seen as rather passive users of the linguistic features associated with their particular "demographic address," that is, the intersection of social factors that make up their identity (e.g. middle-class white male). The social meanings of linguistic features are seen primarily as group associational in nature. A feature like *r*-lessness, for example, indicates association with a group who frequently uses the feature, for example Bostonians or African Americans. The attention to speech approach is a natural correlate of such a view of language variation, since it too holds speakers to be reactive as they shift styles in response to shifting interactional tasks and since it focuses on aggregate patterns of intra-speaker variation across stylistic contexts and social groups (especially social class groups) rather than on individual patterns or intra-situational variation. A classic example of a first-wave study of both social group and stylistic variation is Labov's foundational study of the Lower East Side of New York City (1966), highlighted in section 9.2 above.

Second-wave variation studies, under Eckert's view, are quantitative sociolinguistic studies that incorporate ethnographic perspectives and seek out locally important social groups and social meanings rather than pre-imposing researchers' existing categorizations or presuming that the social meanings of linguistic features are always primarily group associational. The classic example here is Eckert's (2000) study of the teenage social groups in the Detroit-area high school cited above, in which she found that linguistic variation correlated more closely with locally important social groups (jocks and burnouts) than with broader-scale categories such as parents' socioeconomic class. In addition, the features she focused on (chiefly features of the NCVS) were not being used simply or even chiefly to express meanings related to demographic address (e.g. residence or non-residence in a large city in the US Inland Northern dialect area) or to vernacular vs. MAE speech but rather were used by students to indicate, and forge more localized meanings such as orientation toward or away from the high school and the mainstream social norms and aspirations it embodied. Audience-focused approaches to stylistic variation can be said to be "second wave" in the sense that they too represent a movement away from the quantitative patterning of pre-imposed stylistic meanings (MAE vs. vernacular) in pre-set speech contexts (conversational interview speech, reading passages, word lists) to the patterning of variation in local interactions with specific types of audience members. In addition, whereas classic audience design-based style shifts are rooted in group-associational meanings (e.g. Foxy's shifts toward AAVE when talking with African American interviewers), referee design takes us beyond this and allows for interactional and identity-related meanings as well, as we see for example in Foxy's shifts away from vernacular variants with African American interviewers to indicate discomfort with the interview situation and her shifts toward these features with the white interviewer to indicate increased involvement with topics of mutual interest.

Finally, third-wave studies are those that focus on how people use linguistic features to craft various types of social meanings rather than on how variants pattern across either locally salient or "objectively" categorized social groups. Because the focus is on what speakers do with language rather than how social meanings may be reflected in linguistic uses, third-wave studies are fundamentally speaker-design studies, and speakers' stylistic usages take center stage in sociolinguistic study rather than being relegated to the background, behind the "real," most "vernacular" style that was originally held to give us the best picture of the patterning of variation across geographic and social space as well as the course of language change over time.

10.4.2   *Studying stylistic variation from a speaker-design perspective*

In order to get at the personal, interpersonal and social-group related meanings of linguistic features, third wave/speaker-design studies investigate how features are used in

unfolding interaction, as well as how features co-occur and cohere into individual and group styles. Again, such styles may be fleeting, as for example, with a quick shift into "babytalk" when talking with a young child or into dialect performance when illustrating how US Southerners talk; styles may be more enduring but relatively localized, for example jock girl talk in suburban Detroit; or styles may become reified as widely recognized dialects and registers, for example New York City English or "legalese." And just as styles need not be static and rigid, neither are the personal identities and interpersonal relationships that language styles help comprise. In the study of style shifting in a conversational interview between a Lumbee Indian, "Lou," and African American, "Alex," cited above, both interlocutors vary the way they speak based not only on what they're talking about (e.g. the Lumbee's family, mutual friends at the university) but also how closely they identify with one another and/or with Black and Indian ethnicity as the conversation unfolds. For example, when they talk about (contentious) race relations on a local level, Alex shows higher usage levels for vernacular African American features, as well as linguistic divergence from Lou, than when the two talk about other topics, or even when they discuss race on a more abstract, global level.

Views that hold that identities are fluid rather than fixed, are created in social (and linguistic) interaction rather than in isolation, fall under SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST approaches to sociolinguistics and social science more generally and are often held in opposition to STRUCTURALIST views in which people are seen more as products of relatively fixed structures in which they are embedded (e.g. sex, race, socioeconomic class, geographic location). We can see that reactive approaches to social and stylistic variation like Labov's attention to speech model and even early formulations of Bell's audience design approach are more structuralist in nature than "third-wave," speaker design-based views, which are clearly more constructionist.

Video: TED talk - "Three ways to speak English"

Because speaker-design studies focus on how features are used in discursive interaction, they necessarily focus on features' interactional as well as group associational meanings and in addition may combine analysis of the segmental pronunciation features that have traditionally been the focus of quantitative sociolinguistic study with analysis of features more commonly associated with discourse analytic approaches to sociolinguistics, for example pragmatic/discourse features such as discourse markers and referring terms. For example, in the study of Lou and Alex just mentioned, a range of types of features were examined, including phonological features (e.g. *r*-lessness, the pronunciation of the PRICE vowel as unglided ("tahm" for *time*), discourse markers indicative of high inter-speaker involvement such as *you know* and *I mean* (Schiffrin 1987), and referring terms indicating group affiliation vs. distance (e.g. the use of *us* vs. *them* when referring to various ethnic groups). This analysis revealed not only the multifaceted nature of each interlocutor's speech styles and senses of identity, but also of the pronunciation features under study. When discourse patterns indicated that Alex was seeking solidarity with Lou, Alex's concurrent high usage levels of *r*-lessness and "tahm" for *time* were mostly likely being used to evoke the features' "rural Southern" associations, since both he and Lou share these facets of identity. At other times, however, when discourse patterns indicated more distance between speaker and hearer, Alex seemed to be using these same features to evoke associations with African American ethnicity, thus highlighting his ethnic distinctiveness from Lou. Further, the pronunciation features carried interactional as well as group associational meanings, since they were part of the stylistic "packages" used at different moments in discourse to help create conversational closeness or distance.

In addition to considering both segmental phonological and pragmatic/discourse features, researchers taking a third-wave/speaker design perspective also consider a full range of other

types of features, in the belief that the social meanings of linguistic features are very much shaped by how they co-occur with other features. Thus, speaker design studies move beyond segmental phonological features and morphosyntactic features to consider suprasegmental phonological features such as prosody (intonation and rhythm) and voice quality. As we saw in the last chapter, a young gay male medical student, Heath, used falsetto (basically, very high pitched) voice quality differently in different interactional situations, for different types of identity-related and interactional ends. He used more falsetto utterances in a casual gathering with his friends than in a conversation with his father and an interview with a patient. On a more fine-grained level, his falsetto utterances in the casual gathering are also of longer duration, have a higher maximum pitch, and a greater pitch range than those in the other two interactional contexts.

Speaker-design studies also include looking at both features undergoing change in particular communities and widespread stable features, since both types of features form part of speakers' stylistic repertoires and help contribute to stylistic meanings. And whereas stable features like *-in'* vs. *–ing* might seem to have unitary, stable meanings across time and space, in reality, these types of features too take on a range of meanings depending on what other features they occur with. In a study of listener perceptions Campbell-Kibler (2009) shows that when *-in* and *-ing* are used in combination with other features often associated with a US southern accent (e.g. ungilding the PRICE vowel), listeners rate speakers who use more *–in'* not only as more Southern but also as less educated and intelligent. In contrast, using *–in'* or *-ing* has no effect on ratings of educatedness or intelligence for people without Southern accents, who get rated more highly on these measures than Southern speakers regardless of whether or not they "drop their g's". In other words, though we might thing of "g-dropping" as always connoting informality, nonstandardness, and uneducatedness it turns out that our feelings about it are mediated by how we feel about the other accent features with which it occurs, and by how we feel about the speaker groups who typically use Southern vs. non-Southern speech styles.

In addition to illustrating the importance of how features are situated within styles, Campbell-Kibler's study also highlights another important concern in speaker design-based approaches to stylistic variation: the role of listener perception as well as speaker intention in shaping social meaning. As we have all experienced, no matter how much we may try to convey particular meanings when we talk, meanings may misfire, and listeners may misinterpret our intended thoughts, or may attribute to us characteristics or motivations we never meant to convey. Similarly, a speaker of a socially disfavored dialect may have every intention of conveying competence and intelligence through the content of their talk in a "high stakes" situation like a job interview; however, interviewers may still judge them negatively based on their pronunciations and grammatical usages, even very small details like using *-in'* for *-ing*, no matter what they are actually saying.

Finally, because third-wave/speaker design studies are centrally concerned with speaker agentivity and creativity, they embrace rather than shy away from overtly self-conscious or stylized linguistic usages such as Heath's flamoboyant diva style or Rex O'Neal's exaggerated performances of the Ocracoke dialect. Indeed, researchers increasingly are investigating what Coupland (2007) terms "high performance," that is, highly stylized events like media and stage performances, since high performances draw attention to performativity and so remind us that all linguistic usages, and the social and personal identities they in large part comprise, are "performed," in the sense that they are fluid, enacted in moment-to-moment interaction, rather than static products of demographic address. One very interesting example of such a study is Barrett's (1995) investigation of how African American drag queens in Texas use highly stylized language in their flamboyant drag performances to create and display a unique identity that is at once drag, gay, African American, and male. To craft this identity, the performers combine elements of hyper-feminine speech (e.g. hyperstandard grammar,

"empty" adjectives like *divine*, super-polite forms), gay male speech (e.g. the use of adjectives like *fabulous* and *fierce*), and African American English. Other studies of "high performance" include Sclafani's (2009) investigation of parodies of the well-known media figure Martha Stewart, and Podeva, Jamsu, and Callier's (forthcoming) examination of production and perception of US politicians' speech. Both of these studies investigate how a widespread stable feature, fully released /t/ in *button* (as opposed to the unreleased version many of us produce in everyday conversation) can be manipulated in performance to convey attributes ranging from (admirable) clarity to "inauthentic" hyper-precision to laughably "over-precise" articulations and other mannerisms (in the case of the Martha Stewart parodies).

As various forms of media become increasingly prevalent in people's everyday lives, and as people gain increasing exposure to a wider range of language features, language varieties, and types of personal and group identities, self-conscious linguistic and identity performances are likely to become increasingly common, even as they gain the growing attention of researchers on stylistic variation. For example, recent decades have seen the rise of performative "crossing" by white youth into African American speech in the US (Bucholtz 1999, Cutler 1999), as well as the development of purposely hyperbolic Stylized Asian English by multiracial teens in London (Rampton 1995). At the same time, though, the notion that language, and indeed life, is a performance is nothing new to scholars and students of literature, as is exemplified in Shakespeare's famous quote: "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players: / They have their exits and their entrances; / And one man in his time plays many parts, / His acts being seven ages" (*As You Like It* II.vii.139–43).

10.5   Further Considerations

Focusing on stylistic variation as speaker design has certainly increased our understanding of intra-speaker language variation; however, this approach, like the others we have considered, leaves us with a number of questions. Chief among them is that we still have to grapple with the relative weight of structure vs. agency in individual linguistic usages. Do we want to maintain, along with researchers such as Bell, that no matter how creative they may be, speakers cannot craft meaningful linguistic styles (or social identities) out of nothing but must necessarily rely on known linguistic-social associations in order for audiences to be able to interpret their performances? Or do we want to push things a bit further and maintain that all linguistic usages, no matter how seemingly responsive or predictable are at heart agentive, since, as Coupland puts it, "From a self-identity perspective, shifts that are 'appropriate' are nevertheless creative, in the sense that speakers opt to operate communicatively within normative bounds' (2001: 200)?

Relatedly, there are questions concerning which types of social meanings are primary – those associated with interactional moves by individuals in unfolding interaction or those associated with group belonging. For example, does *–in'* mean "casual" because it is often used with groups considered to be less formal such as Southerners or members of the working class, or does *–in'* mean "working class" or "Southern" because it is first and foremost a feature of "casual" speech? Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson (2006) provide an insightful analysis of how the social meanings of the features of the well-known "Pittsburghese" dialect introduced in chapter 5) have changed over time. At first, the features were used by working class men in the Pittsburgh area with no particular social meaning; later, their social group associations began to be noticed, and they began to be used in style shifting, with meanings related to social class and (in)correctness. Nowadays, the features have come to mean "local," and people use them to indicate "authentic" affiliation with Pittsburgh identity. In addition, however, the features can also be used non-seriously or ironically, as people self-consciously perform "local." Johnstone, et al.'s study suggests that different types of social meanings do not have to be hierarchically or temporally ordered after all, since meanings can cycle from

group associational (i.e. Pittsburgh working class men) to interactional (incorrect) and back again (authentic local Pittbsburgher). Hence, following Bell (1984, 2014: 268-272), it may be best to conceive of the various types of social meanings linguistic features can take on as operating in an "indexical cycle" rather than a series of "indexical orders" (see chapter 5) with their (not necessarily intended) connotations of temporality or of primacy vs. derivativeness.

As Bell notes, questions regarding the interplay between individual creativity and social structures, between personal interactional and group-based meanings, are not confined to sociolinguistics or the study of stylistic variation but have long been pervasive in social theory (2014: 305). And sometimes theories focus on structure/stricture, as for example, with Labov's attention to speech approach to stylistic variation, in which speakers are seen as essentially responsive in their stylistic usages; and sometimes they focus on agency, as with third wave/speaker design approaches. However, to achieve a full picture of intraspeaker variation, we really must consider both. Even seemingly quite reactive linguistic usages are active in the sense that they too shape conversations, situations, and interlocutors, as well as future conversations and wider social groups and forces (cf. Agha 2003: 269-270). For example, when Foxy Boston responds to her African American interviewers with high usage levels vernacular features, she shapes the interaction as relatively relaxed and herself and her interlocutor as members of a shared social group. At the same time, knowingly or not, she helps cement the association of the vernacular variety with African American speakers and as an in-group code. She maintains this association into adulthood, when she becomes a business owner who needs to succeed in the "mainstream" linguistic marketplace and so reduces her use of vernacular African American speech, which she still views it as too "local" for widespread use (Rickford and Price 2013). Conversely, even the most wildly creative styles, for example, those of the African American drag queens in Barrett's study, are grounded in longstanding associations between certain ways of speaking and particular social groups/character types (indeed, stereotypes), for example, "proper" white women, "flamboyant" gay men, and "street smart" African Americans.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, because stylistic variation both reflects and creates social meaning, it seems best studied through a variety of approaches, including quantitative studies of broad correlations between social groups, stylistic contexts, and usage levels for particular language features along with more qualitatively oriented investigations of the range of factors that contribute to stylistic variation in unfolding interaction. Indeed, the best studies of stylistic variation will combine both – for example, by investigating how an individual uses variation in a given interaction against a backdrop of broad-scale correlations between linguistic features and social groups, or by augmenting quantitative studies of correlations between linguistic features, social groups and stylistic contexts (e.g. conversational speech vs. reading passages, interviews between people of like vs. unlike ethnicity) with the investigation of how features pattern in unfolding discourse and in relation to one another. The study of intraspeaker variation always involves interspeaker variation, just as personal identity is always, inevitably, shaped in relation to others. Stylistic variation is at once the province of the individual and a shared resource for shaping and reshaping social groups and social forces.

10.6   Further Reading

Bell, Allan (1984) Language style as audience design. *Language in Society* 13: 145–204. This article presents one of the most comprehensive foundational attempts to explain the dynamics of style shifting. As indicated in the title, Bell's approach gives primacy to the speaker's audience in its account of stylistic variation.

Coupland, Nikolas (2007) *Style: Language Variation and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This book provides an overview of approaches to stylistic variation from Coupland's well-studied and clearly social constructionist perspective. Included in the book are reinterpretations of traditional views of group-based language variation (e.g. variation by social class, ethnicity, and

gender) as fundamentally rooted in the stylistic performances of individuals, as well as demonstration of the value of investigating highly stylized "high performance."

Eckert, Penelope (2012) Three waves of variation study: The emergence of meaning in the study of variation. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41: 87-100. In this article Eckert sets forth her view on the development of quantitative sociolinguistic study as a series of three "waves," each taking a different approach to the interrelation between language and society, and linguistic and social meaning. This work, in circulation as an unpublished manuscript since 2005 has been influential as researchers increasingly move from reactive approaches in which stylistic variation is subordinate to social group variation to approaches focusing on the primacy of creative stylistic usages in shaping individual and group language styles and identities.

Eckert, Penelope (2000) *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell. This book encapsulates Eckert's paradigm-shifting approach to quantitative sociolinguistics in which speaker creativity is seen as central in shaping patterns of language variation and change. The book is exceptional in its in-depth exploration of the interrelation between language variation, social groups, and social practice, as well as the relation between intra- and inter-speaker variation and between stylistic variation and language change. Eckert presents her analyses of these broad topics against the backdrop of her sociolinguistic/ethnographic study of a suburban Detroit-area high school.

Labov, William (1972b) *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Chapter 2 in this collection describes a classic department store experiment carried out in New York City in which "casual" stylistic responses are contrasted with "emphatic" ones. It is worth reading for the ingenuity of the field technique. Chapter 3 outlines Labov's foundational "attention to speech" based approach to stylistic variation.

Rickford, John R., and Faye McNair-Knox (1994) Addressee- and topic-influenced style shift: a quantitative sociolinguistic study. In Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan (eds.), *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register*. New York: Oxford University Press, 235–76. The authors of this article conduct a thorough and thoughtful investigation of variation in the speech of an individual speaker of African American English according to addressee, topic, and other factors, in order to test the predictions of Bell's audience design approach to stylistic variation. The authors are also careful to investigate linguistic as well as possible social constraints on variation, in order to determine when the speaker's patterns of variation are indeed due to social factors and when they are simply a by-product of the linguistic factors that affect variation (see chapter 2). A fascinating follow-up study demonstrating how language styles change over time is presented in Rickford and Price (2013).

Schilling-Estes, Natalie (1998) Investigating "self-conscious" speech: The performance register in Ocracoke English. *Language in Society* 27: 53–83. Reprinted in Bayley, Robert and Richard Cameron, eds. (forthcoming) *Language Variation and Change: Critical Concepts in Linguistics*. Routledge Publishers. This article is a foundational study demonstrating the value of investigating of overtly performative speech. The focus is on dialect performances in the Outer Banks island community of Ocracoke, North Carolina. In particular, it provides an in-depth look at the speech performances of one islander from both quantitative and qualitative sociolinguistic perspectives.