Introduction

No large-scale quantitative study on sociolinguistic variation in Washington, D.C. since Fasold’s (1972) work in African American community.

Present paper revisits (-t/d) deletion in four ethnoracial groups in D.C. metropolitan area.

Two patterns of variation identified and explained in terms of locally significant discourses of race and place (contra traditional variationist accounts that essentialize use of nonstandard linguistic variants along racial lines).

Overview of Interviews

- Principal Investigators: Natalie Schilling-Estes and Robert Podesva
- Investigates how residents use variation and discourse to showcase and shape identities in community
- Sociolinguistic Interviews
  - 45 minutes to 2 hours in length
  - Currently 74 interviews in corpus
  - Conducted by graduate students in Georgetown Linguistics Department
  - Interviewees encouraged to provide views on community, language use

Within racial groups, roughly half live in the suburbs, half in district.
Linguistic Analysis

- Coronal Stop (-t/d) Deletion
  - e.g. wes ‘side
- 2,400 tokens (100 per speaker) coded for the following:
  - Realization of variable
  - Linguistic factors (preceding and following phonological environment, morphological affiliation of coronal stop)
  - Social factors (interviewees’ self-identified race, gender, place of residence)
- Data submitted to logistic regression

Significant Factors

1. Preceding Phonological Environment
2. Ethnoracial Identity
3. Following Phonological Environment
4. Voicing of (-t/d)
5. Morphological Affiliation of (-t/d)
6. Gender
7. Place of Residence

Pattern 1: Ethnoracial Affiliation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Factor Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>0.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>0.553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>0.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>0.372</td>
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</tbody>
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- African American interviewees favor deletion.
- Latino/a interviewees slightly favor deletion.
- White and Asian American interviewees disfavor deletion.

The Deletion – Race Connection

- Deletion of (-t/d) has been widely cited as a feature of African American English (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Thomas 2007) and Chicano English (e.g., Santa Ana 1996, Fought 2006).

- Danger of Essentialization
  In fact, deletion is found in most other varieties of English, suggesting that we should draw the connection between the feature and ethnoracial identity with caution.

- To what extent is linguistic practice linked to ethnoracial identity in this community (D.C.)?
Fred (41, White)

“[P]eople from Washington...uh that are not, oh god, this is going to sound AWFUL, that aren’t BLACK, you know, don’t generally HAVE accents."

... 

“Yeah, Virginia’s got a Southern accent, and they have different ways of being southern accent as well. And then Maryland has kind of a, a very strange, “O”ey kind of, I do, I have picked up their “O”s a little bit, I have to say. The Maryland “O”, I do.”

Carrie (31, African American)

“I think that within the African American community, and on this block in particular, so I won’t go too broad, that dialect varies just as much as any other, but it’s probably more based on...economics than culture. Just like any other, I mean, you know. You’ve got trailer talk versus Harvard talk. Same deal.”

Command of Two Varieties

Nonstandard

- Ebonics (line 7)
- Ghetto talk (line 12)
- Colloquial English (lines 18, 22)

“[I]t’s like a lot of black people, like, even in hiphop culture, the reason why it’s like that, is because it’s like a connection, it’s a colloquial, this is how we get down...”

Standard

- Standard English (lines 18, 24)
- Proper English (lines 13-15)

“But at the same time, you need to be able to go to an office building or, you know, be in school and speak STANDARD ENGLISH.”

“Parents were like me and correcting, you know, “You need to speak properly.””
What does Race mean in D.C.?

- Although nonstandard dialects are sometimes associated with particular ethnoracial groups in D.C., these associations are not fully embraced by some residents.
- In the great majority of cases in which race is mentioned, the topic under discussion is gentrification, one of the district’s most salient socioeconomic issues (Williams 1988, Modan 2007).

Topic-Based Variation

- Closer look at [-t/d] deletion across the interviews of Carrie and Fred, who speak about gentrification at great length and with different orientations.
- Interviews were segmented into series of roughly temporally ordered topics, and deletion rates were calculated for each topic.

Carrie

Claims agency in resistance to gentrification.

- “White people want this town and they are going to take it.”
- “[O]ne of the main reasons I worked at [the satellite radio company] is because I felt like, oh, this big ass company’s going to move in my neighborhood, I’m getting a piece of it. I mean, I don’t know, it’s just I feel a very strong ownership.”
Fred denies own role in spread of gentrification.

- “I hate that term because that, you know, the implication is that I’m, people like me are forcing people out. You know, that’s not really, you know, it’s not my intention to force and make anybody move.”

- “I don’t care if someone in my neighborhood is black, white, Hispanic, uh, poor, wealthy.”

- “[P]eople who may be getting state assistance...you know, some places they can’t afford it any longer. That’s unfortunate, but you know it’s not my fault. I didn’t do it.”

Summary of Pattern 1

- An explanation for the race-based pattern rooted in locally meaningful discourses is tenable.
- Using the deleted variant of [-t/d] may reflect heightened investment in the content of the talk, and may perhaps be viewed as a linguistic means of resisting the forces of gentrification.

Resonance and Fred’s Bystander Stance

Lines

4-5 It’s not my intention ... 
8 it does n’t matter to me ... 
11 it’s not my fault

Pattern 2: Place of Residence

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<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
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<th>%</th>
<th>Factor Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>437/1100</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>0.560</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>468/1300</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
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- Residents of the city slightly favor deletion.
- Residents of the suburbs slightly disfavor deletion.

(This pattern is independent of race and other social factors.)
Introduction

The Study

Race Pattern

Place Pattern

Conclusion

Binary Oppositions (Modan 2007)

City

- Multi-ethnic
- Dangerous
- Disorderly
- Masculine
- Public

Suburb

- White
- Safe
- Orderly
- Feminine
- Private

Mona (40, African American)

Of some people in her suburban neighborhood:

“And they tell me, and I hate this, ‘You’re so well spoken to be from D.C.’! And I hate that. Because...I started off going to college at Howard University and I would tell people that...and that’s what they would say. I’m thinking, ‘Okay, well I’m in college. What would you expect? I can put my verbs together and that sort of thing.’”

This paper explains the significance of two social influences on -(t/d) deletion in terms of locally salient discourses such as gentrification.

Indexical orders enables the teasing apart of ideologies operating at the intersection of language, race, and place.

Linguistic variation may reveal not only the indexical relationships between ways of speaking and racial identity, but also how speakers orient to those relationships.

References

References