Who is an Eastsider?
Community Narrative and Ideologies of Authenticity

Kathleen Shaw Points
University of Texas, Austin

1. Introduction

Austin, Texas is a medium sized city, with a population just below 1 million, and it is growing. In the 1990s, Austin's population grew by 48% and was recently rated America's most rapidly growing city (Austin Chamber, 2011; Fisher, 2011) East Austin, Texas is defined by the city as the area located between IH-35, Town Lake and Airport Boulevard. It has historically been home to Austin's African American and Hispanic population after Austin was legally segregated in 1928 (Koch & Fowler, 1928). At the time, the area that would become East Austin was actually outside of city boundaries; currently there are sections of East Austin that could be considered to be "downtown." In recent years, the housing market in Austin proper has become prohibitively expensive for many middle class people, while East Austin remains relatively affordable and increasingly attractive to prospective homebuyers. An influx of middle class Anglo homebuyers has resulted in gentrification. There has been a push within the community to preserve local landmarks and historic buildings and to curb development in response to gentrification. Such discourse serves to raise awareness of East Austin as a separate place from Austin proper, and a place that is changing from what it had been; this in turn potentially raises awareness of a specific, and changing, East Austin identity. With this in mind, residents might have ideologies of whom or what "counts" as authentically East Austin. In a case study of East Austin, it is important to identify such ideologies in order to better understand the community at large.

My paper will explore ideologies of what is authentic Eastside[35]. I will explore who is an authentic member of the community and what is considered to be authentic East Austin. With regard to ideologies of authenticity, two questions that are important are the following: Who decides? Does it matter? These are questions we might ask as research

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[35] The terms *East Austin* and *Eastside* are currently used interchangeably, both in East Austin and in Austin at large; my thanks to Jurgen Streeck for pointing out that this was not always the case. I interpret the widespread use of the toponym *Eastside* as an example of the perceived trendiness of East Austin by the greater Austin community.

questions of a field site as well as of our academic ideas of authenticity. If we are to consider authenticity in our research, it is necessary to examine these questions.

Notions of authenticity and the authentic speaker have lately and rightly been called into question in sociolinguistic literature. As linguists, we recognize that "the authentic speaker," someone who was born in a certain place, speaks the local vernacular, and doesn't have any outside influence to their speech or consciously monitors their output, doesn't really exist. Even so, as linguists we are still tied to the ideology in many of our research endeavors, such as dialectology work and work on sound change. Bucholtz (2003) problematizes traditional conceptions of authenticity:

> "The idea of authenticity gains its force from essentialism, for the possibility of a 'real' or 'genuine' group member relies on the belief that…[they] possess inherent and perhaps even inalienable characteristics criterial of membership" (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 400).

There can be no doubt that essentialism is problematic, and yet authenticity is still important. "Authenticity matters. It remains a quality of experience that we actively seek out, in most domains of life, material and social" (Coupland, 2003, p. 417). Authenticity does matter both in academia and outside the ivory tower. We want the authentic experience, whether it is in matters of local culture, such as cuisine, or in interactions with others. Nobody wants to participate in something that cannot be deemed to be authentic.

Eckert (2003) reminds us that the ideological construct of authenticity is important, too, in research. "Authenticity is an ideological construct that is central to the practice of both speakers and analysts of language" (Eckert, 2003, p. 392). Authenticity is important particularly in a local context, to local speakers. It could be used to determine in-group membership, or out-group membership. For analysts, without the construct of authenticity, much dialectology work would be impossible. Even if we as researchers try to shy away from notions of authenticity because of the problem of essentialism, it's still somehow cognitively real for our speakers. This makes ideologies of authenticity difficult to ignore. Much of our work as linguists depends on this ideological construct. However it's crucial to pay attention to whose ideological construct we, the analysts, take as the "right" authenticity. Is what I think is authentic the same as what my informant thinks is authentic? Does my informant's view match the community's view at large? Does the community even have a unified view?

Rather than talk about authenticity, Bucholtz (2003) suggests we instead talk about *authentication*. She defines authentication as "the outcome of constantly negotiated social practices" (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 408). Thinking about authenticity as a negotiated social practice, rather than an essentializing one, seems to fit better with our current academic ideals. Instead of the researcher designating authenticity, authentication is what speakers do in interactions with other speakers whom they deem authentic.

2. Data

The specific questions I will consider in this paper are as follows: How do East Austin residents authenticate other East Austin residents? How do they authenticate East Austin itself? The data are taken from sociolinguistic interviews conducted with nine current residents of East Austin; both in response to the overt question *who is an Eastsider?* as well as from opinions expressed spontaneously throughout the course of the interview. All of the speakers presented consider themselves to be Eastsiders and are roughly between 40-60 years old. They are chosen from a larger data set and are representative of

the views expressed at large. The transcriptions presented here have been edited to enhance readability.

2.1 True Eastsiders

Modan (2007) studied an area of Washington D.C. undergoing gentrification. We can draw many parallels to the situation in East Austin. Modan looks at the neighborhood residents' use of language to mark particular people as being authentic to the area – those who are not from the suburbs, those who are not Anglo, those who are not middle class. By marking a subset of their neighbors as authentic, they both overtly and covertly mark other neighbors as inauthentic (Modan, 2007). We might expect East Austin residents to express a similar ideology, perhaps with three groups of people: people who were born in East Austin, people who moved later in life but had lived in East Austin for a long time (specifically pre-gentrification), and people who had moved to East Austin recently. Initially, I predicted the only group who would be judged to be "true" Eastsiders would be those who were born in East Austin. Instead, these categories don't seem to be relevant at all. The population shift resulting from gentrification does not allow for a static view of authenticity. Rather this situation illustrates the dynamics of negotiation involved in authentication work. In East Austin, discourse about who is a true Eastsider is certainly authentication; it is a negotiated social practice of embracing the community as one's home at a minimum. The majority of participants talk about two categories of authentic East Austin residents: (1) those who were Born and Raised in the community and (2) those who Earn It by giving back to the community in some way.

Matthew[36] is an Anglo man who has lived in East Austin since the early to mid 1980s. In Examples (1) and (2) below, we can see that he considers true Eastsiders to be those who were born there.

(1) Uh, born, raised, lived in... haven't left for very long. It would piss you off and drive you crazy if you had to live somewhere else, you know the people and the places that a lot of other people wouldn't know, if they weren't from here.

(2) It's the second- it's the next generation that really is true.

Among the qualifications he lists for a person to be a true Eastsider are born, raised, actively want to live there, and know the area well. But the single qualification that matters the most is being at least a second generation resident – being born there. Matthew explains his belief further in Example (3).

(3) So, no, you can't take- you can't take somebody from Mars and stick them on earth and have them die there and say, well they became a true native. It just doesn't happen.

To this end, Matthew does not consider himself to be a true Eastsider even though he is active in community organizations and fits many of the qualifications he lists in (1). Ironically, residents that he would consider to be true Eastsiders have suggested his name as a person I should interview about East Austin. Matthew may not consider himself to be an Eastsider, but others certainly do. The fact that others consider Matthew to be a true Eastsider is evidence of the authentication of this status in their eyes.

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[36] All names are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Madison is an Anglo woman who had lived in East Austin for about 10 years at the time of the interview. In Example (4), she tells us that there aren't any authentic East Austinites.

(4) When you say Authentic East Austin, I don't think there's like a big neighborhood or a huge swath, where I could identify that. Because they've been displaced.

She feels that authentic East Austin does not exist anymore due to gentrification, which has led to many local residents and businesses being displaced. The people that have been displaced by gentrification are largely African American and Hispanic. They are often elderly and many have owned their home for generations. Though Madison doesn't explicitly say that Authentic Eastsiders have a race/ethnicity qualification, it is implied in her comment since it is not the newer Anglo residents who are being displaced. In fact she confirmed in a follow up interview that she does see Authentic East Austin as having a race/ethnicity distinction.

Nadra is an African American woman who has lived in East Austin for over twenty years. She describes people who "walk the walk" in East Austin as being true Eastsiders. While this could mean anybody who participates in daily life in East Austin, or those who work to build the community, she confirms in (5) below that they also have to be African American. In her interview, she describes the Elders and the Eldresses of the community as those who were part of the original displacement to East Austin in the 1920s.

(5) But I'm talking about those people who look like the people who were of those Elders and Eldresses I mentioned before.

Like Matthew, she gives a further example to illustrate her point.

(6) If you are Italian. Italian heritage. Born and raised in, I don't know, in Brooklyn. And you take a job in Japan. And you stay there, and you meet somebody in this corporation who's, you know, from Indiana. And y'all get married. And you have a child there. Japan is not calling that child Japanese.

From Nadra's point of view, even if Anglos move to East Austin and raise children who are active community members, neither the parents nor the children will be considered Eastsiders. The line "Japan is not calling that child Japanese" makes the race/ethnicity distinction quite sharp. In order to be a true Eastsider, you have to look like the Elders and Eldresses – you have to be African American, otherwise East Austin will not call you an Eastsider.

To this point, we have seen evidence that a true East Austinite is one who is born and raised in the community, and likely is African American or Hispanic. Example (7) represents a viewpoint where birthplace as well as loving the community is important. Nora is an African American woman who has lived in East Austin most of her life.

(7) A real East Austinite really would be someone who, kind of adopts this place and accepts it. But on the other hand, it's someone who's lived here all their lives.

Here we see two competing views: both that a real East Austinite has to be born on the Eastside, and someone who adopts the community. Nora moved to East Austin when she was three and, because she was not born there, she does not consider herself to be a true Eastsider. Like Matthew, this is ironic because other residents have authenticated her status by suggesting I interview her, as she is a "real" Eastsider. By excluding herself

from the category of true Eastsiders, she further highlights the importance of being born into the community.

In Examples (8) and (9), a different viewpoint is expressed. Both speakers feel that you can become a true Eastsider if you earn it through your actions. The first speaker, Jerry, is a Hispanic life-long East Austin resident. He is involved in community activism for East Austin as a whole as well as for his particular neighborhood. For him, what is important to be an Eastsider is whether you work to make the community a better place. In (8) below, he says that you can earn the title of being an Eastsider if you accept the community and work to strengthen it.

> (8) If they come in and they embrace, you know, what's here. But then help the community work, to better it? Then. You earn. I mean, you definitely earn. The title being, you know, of calling East- of being an Eastsider.

Leo echoes Jerry's opinion in (9). But Leo also feels that everyone has to give back in order to be a good community member. It's not only the new residents who need to do this, but also everyone in the community shares this responsibility.

> (9) If you're going to be coming in and profiting within the community, try to give back. And that's not just to new people, that's to people that are here now too, you know? My grandpa's business. My mom's business. You know try to help the community that you're a part of, you know? Show, I think if people can do that you know, that shows initiative, which then gives them a badge of credibility. That's how you get Eastsider status.

East Austin residents authenticate two different, possibly competing, ways of being an East Austinite. You can "be" Eastsider by virtue of being born in the community or of being a particular race/ethnicity. You can also "do" Eastsider by being active in the community in positive ways. For the people who "are" Eastsiders by place of birth, there is still a necessary element of loving the community. Both of these views represent different ways in which authentication as an Eastsider can be negotiated in social practice. These different views reflect different ideologies of East Austin. It seems that these views reflect ideologies of an older, traditional East Austin juxtaposed with a new, possibly trendy East Austin.

2.2 Authentic East Austin

In terms of what is authentic East Austin, there are qualities that are frequently mentioned: neighborhoods, historic houses or buildings, and knowing your neighbors. Example (10) is from Matthew. His description sounds like a real estate agent's description. He uses words like *great, well-established, neat houses, close to downtown, convenient to everything*.

> (10) I live in a great neighborhood. Always have, really good people, it's old, well-established, there's a lot of folks that live there that have had families there for a long time. Neat old houses really close to downtown, super convenient to everything.

Matthew describes his neighborhood in a very positive light. He says his neighborhood is a great neighborhood with good people in it, and has always been this way. In another portion of the interview, he talked about his neighborhood when he first moved in. He

described drug dealers and prostitutes doing business in his front yard; which seems contrary to his description of the neighborhood being a *great* neighborhood. The illicit activity no longer occurs – at least in Matthew's area, and it doesn't seem to have colored his opinion that his neighborhood is a great place and always has been.

Susanna is an African American woman who moved to East Austin when she was a child. I asked her to describe East Austin as if I had never been there. She initially said, "It's getting better," implying that East Austin was formerly a bad or undesirable place. In response to what prompted the change, she talks about the strength of the neighborhood associations in (11) below.

(11) So the neighborhood associations are really strong in East Austin, thank God. Yeah, they've gotten stronger. Gotten a lot stronger.

Having a strong neighborhood is seen as very desirable for Susanna. The neighborhood associations are often tasked with keeping development in check to curb gentrification. A strong neighborhood association would certainly be a positive thing in that regard. She credits the strong neighborhood associations and the people who participate in them with the positive change that she sees in East Austin.

Henry is a Hispanic man who has lived on the Eastside since shortly after he was born. In Example (12), he talks about saving the neighborhood from the threat of overbuilding.

(12) Basically we're trying to save the neighborhood, by and large. (Dealing with) changes.
    KSP   So what do you think you're trying to save it from?
Over-building.

It seems that he shares many of the same values with Matthew in (10). He views the neighborhood as something of value, something that is important, and something that is under threat. As such, his neighborhood is something that is worthy of being saved from drastic changes that over-development would bring.

In (13) and (14) below, Marina talks about knowing her neighbors. She is a life-long Hispanic resident of East Austin. For Marina, knowing your neighbors is a unique thing that is particular to East Austin. This sentiment is echoed among many of my participants – that the traditional neighborhood culture where everyone knows everyone else does not exist in the rest of Austin.

(13) Because we know who the people are. We can tell you, oh, so-and-so has a child, and two children, or is single, or whatever. And that's unique.

(14) So we can walk down the street and know if there is a vehicle that doesn't belong there, or looks out of place, or we don't- it's not a waving thing, we actually speak to each other.

Marina thinks it's important and special that her neighbors actually speak to each other and know each other. Their interactions are not surface level only – they don't just wave to each other they actually have conversations. She sees this as an important characteristic of East Austin that the rest of the city does not share. In fact, this specific opinion has been expressed by many of the participants.

In talking about what East Austin really is, it is Neighborhood. Residents describe the concept of Neighborhood rather than any particular neighborhood, or the specific

neighborhood in which they live. The statements participants make about East Austin relate to Neighborhood in all of the examples presented above. For these participants, East Austin is Neighborhood. The neighborhood structure is seen as special to East Austin, and I would argue that this is a reason for East Austin's recent desirability. Residents talk about knowing who their neighbors are and interacting with them, and see this as a distinguishing feature of East Austin. Many older residents say that new residents often do not take the time to get to know their neighbors, and that is seen negatively.

3. Conclusion

To sum, there are multiple ways of characterizing East Austin. In terms of who is an authentic East Austin resident, there are two primary ways in which this is imagined. There are people who are Eastsiders by virtue of their place of birth, possibly coupled with race/ethnicity. This view was displayed by Matthew, Madison, Nadra and, to some extent, Nora. There are also people who become Eastsiders by being active in the community and "earning" that status. Jerry and Leo describe this ideology, as well as Nora to a lesser extent. In terms of what is authentic East Austin, residents talk about East Austin as an entity. East Austin is neighborhoods that are worth saving, neighborhoods that have value. This is very consistent among all of my participants. They describe the close-knit relationship among neighborhood residents, and highlight how unique this relationship is with respect to other areas of Austin.

Participants in my research have clear opinions about who "counts" as a true Eastsider. Every participant was asked to describe who is a true Eastsider, and every participant easily did so. It seems clear that there are community ideologies about who is an authentic resident. To the extent that these ideologies permeate the community at large, they serve to authenticate certain groups of people as those who truly belong to the area. Because the opinions expressed by the participants in my study follow the two models described in this paper, it is reasonable to conclude that these ideologies generally exist in East Austin. Likewise, participants spontaneously discuss the importance and the uniqueness of the East Austin Neighborhood at large. It is tempting to hedge this statement and say that the importance and uniqueness are merely perceived by the participants, but I argue that this is a component of the social practice of authentication in East Austin. Because these opinions exist, the qualities of *important* and *unique* plainly *are* qualities of the East Austin Neighborhood, not merely perceived qualities. People share these opinions across East Austin, including those who do not live in the same physical neighborhood. Because residents can and do discuss these themes spontaneously, it is evidence that participants do have mental images of who and what is authentic to East Austin, and that these images are important as they discuss East Austin. Following Coupland (2003), authenticity matters in many domains of life; in East Austin the ideology of authenticity and the social practice of authentication serve to highlight the singular character of East Austin.

As we reexamine our academic ideas of authenticity, we should be careful not to discard too much. Ideologies of authenticity permeate our lives and the lives of our research participants in complicated ways. These ideologies are cognitively real and worth exploring in local contexts. Researchers have much to gain by understanding local ideologies of authenticity. Such ideologies can be key to understanding local dynamics and therefore to interpreting data. No matter how they talk about it, the residents are actively constructing East Austin as a place different from what it had been, and actively redefining the geographic area and the people who live there. Through narrating about Eastside identity, residents are narrating and authenticating not only their own identity but also the identity of their neighbors as residents of the Eastside. They are constructing the

Eastside as a particular place that is different from what it has been, and redefining the groups that reside there in terms of their involvement with the community in some cases rather than race, as was originally what made a person an Eastsider.

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 Department of Linguistics
University of Texas at Austin
1 University Station B5100
Austin, TX 78712

kmshaw@mail.utexas.edu