[t]inking About Takoma:
Race, Place, and Style at the Border of Washington, D.C.

Jessica Grieser
Georgetown University[1]

Language practice is instantiated in community as a means for community members to show affiliation or distance (cf. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Bucholtz, 1999; Labov, 1966 and others). But what, exactly, do we mean by a "community?" We might understand community to be defined interpersonally based on shared social practice (Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert & McConell-Ginet, 1992) geographically (Becker, 2009; Johnstone & Kiesling, 2008; W. Labov, 1972a; William Labov, 1963, 1966), but in all instances, linguistic practice is a means for community members to index themselves as members of that community.

Yet for most people, the meaning of *community* comes from understandings of community as delimited by physical space; a neighborhood, a city, a school. Those who reside, do business, or otherwise inhabit that physical space become members of the community which that physical space defines. Tapping into the language practices of those who inhabit a physical space can shed light on discourses that are meaningful to the members of that community, and also on the ways in which the community understands itself.

The present study examines topic-related style-shifting in two speakers from one neighborhood in the District of Columbia. I argue that these speakers use an ethnoracially-marked phonological variant (stopping of interdental fricative) as a means of both indexing racial identity for themselves and also of rejecting the construction of their community as racialized space.

1.0 Style-shifting As a Means of Expressing Community Identity

Many studies of language and place have looked rather extensively at groups of speakers, and the ways in which they collectively use linguistic variables to index ideologies of place and community membership. The most well-cited of these is Labov's (1966) study of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and the linguistic features, particularly post-vocalic /r/ deletion, which index a lower east-side identity for the speakers there. This identity was found to be tied to other facets of group identity relevant to the lower east side community, such as race, class, and orientation toward other New York communities. Thus the indexical field (Eckert, 2008) for post-vocalic /r/ deletion at the time of Labov's study might encompass things such as "working class" and "blackness" as well as indexing residency in a particular locale.

These indexical links may shift, however, with the way the landscape itself changes over time. In her in her revisit to the Lower East Side, Becker (2009) explores the meaning of post-vocalic /r/ deletion forty years after Labov's initial study. In the intervening years, the lower east side has become a heavily gentrified and trendy area, home to Greenwich Village and other highly-desirable communities in Manhattan. Becker posits that in the face of so much migration to the area, /r/ deletion has become a marker of an "authentic lower east side" identity which allows longtime residents to make a linguistic differentiation between themselves and the gentrifying newcomers to the neighborhood.

Studies of the speech of entire communities such as these provide a great deal of information about what kinds of variants are available for speakers to draw upon. Yet studies of many speakers within a community which explore macro-level connections between language practice and identities of place and race may overlook subtleties in the complex negotiation of situating oneself as a member of a particular community through one's language practice (Podesva, 2007; Schilling-Estes, 2004). While interspeaker variation studies are useful tools to explain the ways ideologies and identities of place are negotiated, closer examinations of variation within the speech of individual speakers, known as intraspeaker variation, or style shifting, sheds light on the ways the practices ascribed to any given group function on an individual level. Speakers may vary their speech in order to indicate a stance (Du Bois, 2007) taken toward an individual or concept, which has been argued to motivate variation at both the segmental (Podesva, 2008) and suprasegmental (Nielsen, 2009) level; to express distance from or solidarity with a real or imagined audience (Bell, 1984; Hay, Jannedy, & Mendoza-Denton, 1999; Rickford & McNair-Knox, 1994); to create or reject indexical links between language and racial identity (Anderson, 2008; Podesva, 2008), or to embody a particular character type (Podesva, 2007).

These multiple meanings which can be expressed through style shifting make intraspeaker variation a rich resource for understanding the kinds of links that speakers may make between themselves as members of a particular place-based community—the connections which turn physical space into socially meaningful place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). Yet thus far relatively few studies have examined intraspeaker variation as a means of exploring how individuals may use style shifting to indicate ties to the locales in which they live and work. The current study, which examines topic-induced style shifting in the speech of two African American residents of the same neighborhood in Washington, D.C. is an exploration which intends to begin to fill this gap.

2.0 Takoma D.C./Takoma Park MD as (A)Racial Space

It is often the case that discourses of place evoke discourses of self, for as one negotiates oneself as a member of a particular community, one also identifies with or distances oneself from the character type which may be associated with that community. For example in Johnstone and Kiesling's (2008) work, to accept the identity of "Pittsburgher" is to also tie to higher-order indexical links which ascribe a particular character type, that of the white male steelworker, to the identity of "Pittsburgher." In Modan's (2007) exploration of the District of Columbia community Mount Pleasant, to embody the identity of a Mount Pleasant resident is also to take on an identity of urban, multiethnic cosmopolitanism. These sorts of place-to-character links make discourses of place an interesting site to explore the ways in which ideologies of race, class, urban/ suburban, and the like become codified in a physical space. The present study examines one such physical space, the neighborhood of Takoma, D.C./Takoma Park, Maryland.

Takoma/Takoma Park (hereafter called Takoma) is a neighborhood directly on the border between Washington, D.C. and Montgomery and Prince George's counties, Maryland. Considered one of the wealthier neighborhoods of Washington, D.C., Takoma has a median household income of $66,600 as of the 2010 census according to the Takoma Park Census and Community Information Website (TPCCI), approximately $14,000 more than the national median. The neighborhood is also relatively ethnically balanced, with a population that is 49% white and 35% African American. It is also a highly educated community, with over 91% of its adults residents holding high school diplomas, and 53% holding bachelor's degrees or higher.

Its relative racial balance, as well as its situation at the border of suburban Maryland and urban Washington D.C. makes Takoma a site uniquely positioned for analysis of discourses about place and race in the Washington D.C. region. By examining the ways residents of Takoma talk about themselves and their community, we can find both discourse and phonological evidence that sheds light on speakers' ideologies of themselves and their community.

3.0 Method

The present study combines variationist sociolinguistic techniques with discourse analysis to unearth some of the ways in which members may situate themselves as racialized members of a supposedly race-neutral community. Below I will discuss briefly the variable under study, the informants, and the quantitative methods used to study this variable.

3.1 The Interdental Fricative

This study explores phonological variation in a particular segment, the voiced and voiceless interdental fricative [ð] and [θ]. Fortition of these segments to [d] and [t] respectively is a known feature of African American English (AAE) (Fasold, 1972; Labov, 1972b; Rickford & Rickford, 2000; Thomas, 2007) and has been shown to be used in audience-directed and topic-based style-shifting (Grieser, 2010; Rickford & McNair-Knox, 1994). In addition, studies such as the one conducted among Cajun English speakers by DuBois and Horvath (1998) have tied the fortition of the interdental fricative to both gender identity and community affliation. In the present study, I use topic-based

style-shifting to examine the ways in which this feature helps two speakers characterize their neighborhood as aracial space.

3.2 The Informants and Interviews

The data for this study come from two sociolinguistic interviews conducted as part of the Language and Communication in the District of Columbia (LCDC) project (Schilling and Podesva 2008), an ongoing project of the Georgetown University Department of Linguistics. Peter, the first informant, is a fifty-seven-year-old, African American resident and owner of a barbershop in the neighborhood.[2] A lifetime D.C. resident who has lived mainly in the neighborhoods surrounding Takoma, Peter owns two barbershops, one in the Takoma neighborhood and one in Anacostia, a neighborhood in Southeast D.C. Peter is a frequent user of a number of features of AAE at multiple linguistic levels.

Mona, the second informant, is a professional African American woman in her forties. She, too, is a lifelong resident of D.C., having grown up along the Sixteenth Street corridor, a main thoroughfare through Northwest D.C. which in recent years has become a place where a number of the city's wealthier black population has come to settle (Graham, 1999; Robinson, 2010). She holds a bachelor's degree from Howard and a law degree from George Washington. For these reasons, these two speakers provide an interesting means of exploring not only how people see themselves racially within a community but also how this may or may not mesh with identities related to social class.

3.3 Quantitative Method

In order to hone in on the function of the variable as it relates to topic-based style shifting, tokens of the interdental fricative were coded for phonological and lexical factors as well as discourse factors which might affect the realization of the variable. The linguistic factors coded were preceding and following phonological environment, lexical category of the word (functional vs. lexical) and position of the interdental fricative (word-initial, word-medial, word-final). Discourse factors coded were the sex of the speaker and topic (the focus of this study).

The interviews were coded exhaustively for tokens of the interdental fricative within the topics of Takoma, of the DC/Maryland community more broadly; race talk (as defined by Myers & Williamson, 2001); and talk about language. The first pass coded the tokens impressionistically, and the impressionistic coding was checked by examining spectrographic image of approximately 10% of the stopped tokens in PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink, 2010). Tokens were coded for all non-standard realizations: [Ø d t f v]; only the [d t] realizations were analyzed. Instances where the presence or absence of an interdental fricative were ambiguous, such as sentences like "We are part of [ə] community" (Peter), where [ə] could be either the indefinite article or a null realization of the interdental fricative on a definite article, were excluded from the analysis. In addition, realizations where a final token was followed by a glide [j] were excluded; such instances often resulted in palatalization of the final segment resulting in the affricate [ʧ] and making it difficult to determine the precise realization of the fricative. In total, 506 tokens were coded from the Mona interview and 852 tokens were coded from the Peter interview, for a

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[2]. This study was conducted by two interviewers of two different races, and as such, has been the subject of further study on addressee-induced style shift by the author (Grieser 2010).

total of 1358 tokens.

Statistical analysis of the factors under consideration was performed using multivariate regression in Rbrul (Johnson, 2009).

4.0 Data and Results

All data were coded for four linguistic factors: preceding phonological environment, following phonological environment, lexical category of the word, and position of the interdental fricative; and two discourse factors: sex and topic (age of the speakers and community of speakers were controlled for in speaker selection). All factors, linguistic and discourse, were found to be significant predictors of stopped realization of the interdental fricative in a binomial step-up and step-down regression. Below I consider each linguistic factor in turn, and finally turn to the social factors of speaker and topic that are of particular interest to this study.

4.1 Linguistic Factors

Table 4.1.1 Linguistic Factor Effects

	factor	tokens	% stopped	factor weight
lexical category				
	functional	1014	0.246	0.666
	lexical	344	0.015	0.143
preceding segment				
	vowels	387	0.191	0.964
	coronals	502	0.239	0.953
	pause	112	0.214	0.94
	consonants	356	0.157	0.933
following segment				
	consonants	124	0.185	0.995
	vowels	1227	0.205	0.986
position				
	initial	1171	0.219	0.693
	final	55	0.273	0.616
	medial	132	0.023	0.217

Tokens were coded for precise preceding and following phonological environment and examined for similarities in behavior across any identifiable natural classes. Based on this, the preceding environment was collapsed into four categories: vowels, coronal consonants, non-coronal consonants, and pause; following environment was collapsed into three categories: vowels, consonants, and pause. Both preceding [p=0.029] and following [p = 0.027] environments were found to be significant predictors of stopped variants. For preceding environment, vowels were found to have the strongest effect, followed by coronals, pauses and consonants; for following environment, consonants were found to

have a more significant effect.

In addition to phonological environment, the position of the interdental fricative (word-initial, word-medial, word-final) was found to be a significant predictor of stopped realization [p=0.033]. Finally, lexical category was found to be a significant predictor [p < 0.0001], with functional words being much more likely to be stopped than lexical words.

Table 4.1.1, above, lists the linguistic factors found to affect the realization of the interdental fricative, in descending order of effect as determined by factor weight.

4.2 Social Factors

Studies have shown that usage patterns of features of AAE vary across differing social classes (Labov, 1972c; Rahman, 2008; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Thus it is unsurprising that Mona and Peter, who differ substantially in social class and social circles which they inhabit, exhibit quite different rates of th/dh fortition. Peter's stopped realization rate is nearly twice that of Mona's, as shown in the following table.

Table 4.2.1: Total N and % of stopped and fricated realization by speaker

	fricated		stopped		total N
	N	%	N	%	
Mona	444	87.75	62	12.25	506
Peter	640	75.12	212	24.88	852
Total	1084	79.82	274	20.18	1358

Sex of speaker (which in this two-speaker sample indicated the individual speaker) was found to be a significant factor in explaining th/dh realization [p=0.0035]. It is evident from both the descriptive statistics and regression that this comparison can reveal something about the ways in which speakers of two different classes might use a feature of AAE. Thus far, most studies of AAE have privileged the working-class male speaker (Peter in this analysis) as being the speaker of the most "authentic" AAE. Yet the U.S. black population continues to grow more socioeconomically diverse (Robinson 2010), and thus it is important to think about the ways in which black speakers who do not fall into this traditionally-analyzed group of authentic vernacular speakers use features of AAE. To do this, it is necessary to look more at more localized usages of AAE features, and the roles they play in creating social meaning for those who use them.

We see exactly this sort of localized variation in Mona's speech. Although on the whole, Mona uses the stopped variant just over 12% of the time, in one stretch of race talk encompassing 18 tokens, she uses a stopped variant six times and a null variant once, accounting for more than 33% of her total tokens in this stretch of speech, almost three times her overall rate for the interview. In her talk about gentrification and whites moving into Takoma for instance, the stopped variant is used quite frequently:

1. When I grew up there[d]
2. it was predominantly an African-American community,
3. Mhm.
4. and now, white families are starting to move into the[d] community.

5. As well as Latino families,
6. and-just-
7. when I was growing up
8. it wasn't that[d] ... white families couldn't live there[d]
9. because it was just
10.   "Oh we don't talk to them[d] white
11.   But it was just- they[ð] just didn't .   Yeah.
12.   Um, and-77 so they[d] started ... um ... close to the[ð] Metro station,
13.   and then[ð] just kind of branched ... further[ð] out
14.   and ...
15.   They[ð] were accepted ,
16.   but it was just when I went to- to high school at Coolidge ...
17.   I don't think[θ] I had any white in my graduating class.

It is possible that by using an AAE variant to talk about white migration into black space, Mona is able to linguistically situate herself as an original and authentic member of the community like those in Becker's (2009) study, as well as to reclaim and reify the space as "black space" through the use of black-associated speech.

Mona's patterning with regard to the variable exists not only at the level of certain topics in relation to the entire interview, but also across even smaller stretches of talk within a broader topic. If we examine lines (11) through (13), for instance, we see that of six instances of the interdental fricative, all but one are realized fully fricated. This is in contrast to the rest of this stretch of speech, where all but one realization are stopped. Why is this? Looking more carefully at the content of these three lines, Mona is speaking specifically about the integration of Takoma, as white residents "started close to the Metro station" and "then … branched further out." Thus we see the same pattern rarified on an even smaller level: as talk moves from the beginning of the neighborhood's integration to the point that white members are accepted, so Mona's speech moves away from an African American style of speech.

Peter, although a user of the stopped variant at almost twice Mona's rate, makes very sharp distinctions in his use of the variant in constructed dialogue (Tannen, 2007) for himself and for characters he portrays as being either hapless or very successful. In part of the interview, Peter tells a very animated story about the panhandler approaching him and providing a very close estimate of his day's earnings, and expresses his own puzzlement as to how the panhandler managed to come up with the figure he quotes. His realizations of the interdental fricative variable play a significant role in his construction of the differences between himself and the panhandler. Consider the following (realizations of the variable are marked in parentheses):

1.   He had came down
2. and asked me for two dollars
3. and I asked him I said wait a minute
4. because I know he expecting me to come off real crazy whuhhh
5. I said let me get this([d]) straight
6. You want me to give you two dollars
7. You want me to reach into my pocket and the([ð]) money that([ð]) I stood
     there([d]) all day long and cut hair with
8. take my money and give it to you
9. so you can go back up into the(Ø) woods

10. ad smoke some crack (on) the([ð]) milk crate
11. and drink beer with the([d]) money that([ð]) I made all day
12. Is that([ð]) what you asking?
13. Is that([ð]) what you said because I'm not understanding
14. (4 lines omitted)
15. How he'd know how much money I got?
16. I'ma standing here watching everyone's come in here
17. because its certain ones of them(Ø) around here
18. they([d]) ain't going to get in nobody's chair but your chair
19. especially them([d]) gals
20. they([d]) come down there(Ø) for the(Ø) eyebrow arch
21. and they(Ø) don't mess with([d]) the([d]) rest of them(Ø)
22. I know they(Ø) came to you.

In this stretch of narrative, Peter positions himself as the hard worker in contrast to the panhandler's laziness; consider lines f-j, where Peter portrays himself as having "the money that I stood there all day long and cut hair with" in contrast to what he supposes the panhandler will do with the money: "so you can go back up into the woods and smoke some crack on the milk crate". He shows this difference through his descriptions of the panhandler, but he also uses the variables in the speech itself as part of his positioning.

In Peter's constructed dialogue for himself, in lines d-l, he uses the interdental fricative ten times. Of these ten, only four are stopped (40%). By contrast, in his constructed dialogue for the panhandler, all eleven instances of the interdental fricative are realized with the nonstandard, stopped variant. Because more standard realizations of a variable are commonly conflated with higher levels of education and higher status, Peter uses standard realizations of the interdental fricative in his own constructed speech as a way of reinforcing the distance between himself and the panhandler, and to paint himself as the educated hard-worker, which is congruent with his description of the panhandler's laziness in contrast to his own industrial work in the shop.

These sorts of close discourse analyses reveal the stopped variant to be doing a great deal of work for both speakers in constructing their ideologies of place and in constructing racialized, socioeconomically-stratified characters. In order to better quantify what was going on within the interviews, all 1358 tokens of dh/th were coded exhaustively for topic. This coding followed a "bottom-up" approach often used in coding phonetic factors; just as one might begin by coding each consonant separately and then examining if effects pattern according to natural classes, so the topics were first coded for the specific topic such as "cat" or "dog" or "vet" and then these things collapsed into larger categories such as "pets." This ultimately resulted in topics grouped into four categories: talk about language and language practice (language), talk about Takoma as a community (Takoma), talk about other communities in D.C. and Maryland (DCother) and talk about race (race), in order to test the hypothesis that speakers might use th/dh to contrast Takoma with other neighborhoods. When all four topics were included in the statistical model, topic was found to be a statistically suggestive, but not significant, predictor of stopped realization $[p < 0.08)]$. However, it seems evident from the micro-level analyses presented above that topic is salient for the speakers; their speech patterns according to what and whom they speak about. This evidence justified the running of a second regression model, this time collapsing all community talk into one category, and all race talk into another. On this run, topic emerged as a statistically significant predictor of the stopped variant $[p = 0.024]$.

Table 4.2.2 Topic Effect on Realization

factor	tokens	% stopped	factor weight
race	109	0.294	0.592
language	34	0.118	0.49
other	1215	0.196	0.418

5.0 Discussion

It seems very clear from discourse-level analyses of the speakers' data that the interdental fricative does work in the construction of racial identity and in the reification of Takoma as racialized space. However, clearer statistical evidence would come from the speakers using the feature more or less in talking about Takoma than in talking about other D.C. neighborhoods.

One explanation for the statistical modeling may come from the way race is codified in D.C. space. The two most recent censuses show increased migration of upper-class whites into the western quadrants of D.C., with increasing poverty and growing minority racial populations in the other two quadrants. Thus D.C. neighborhoods are often imbued with a sense of racialization—to talk about the heavily-black Southeast neighborhood of Anacostia is to talk about blackness, to talk about the predominately white neighborhoods in the upper Northwest is to talk about whiteness. Thus in the same way talk of language often cannot be separated from larger Discourses about race (Podesva 2008), to talk about D.C. as physical space is similarly to implicitly talk about race.

The lack of statistically significant difference between Takoma talk and non-Takoma talk, particularly in light of Mona's interview, may also indicate the speakers' different understanding of Takoma vs. D.C. more broadly. Takoma, to its residents, is consistently referred to as race-neutral—the idea is that the community is first and racial divides are not salient for its members. The lack of distinction between Takoma-oriented talk and non-Takoma-oriented talk may be best interpreted as a reflection of this general valuing of race neutrality and multiracial acceptance that is dominant throughout the Takoma community.

6.0 Conclusions

Variationist analyses provide insight into a community's macro- and micro-level language practice. They give us information about salient separations in discourse for particular speakers. Yet it is also important to situate variationist study within locally salient discourses of identity, which often are tied to place.

We have long understood that phonological variables may codify local, place-oriented identities (Labov, 1963). In the small study of Mona and Peter, their use of the variable in question is revealing with regard to its use to index racial identity. Talk about the District of Columbia occasions different use of the variable than does talk about race. Yet within talk about the District of Columbia, there is not a difference in the use of an ethnoracially-marked variant between talk about Takoma and talk about D.C. more broadly. I suggest that this is a sign that for these speakers, Takoma is to be interpreted as racially neutral space.

Further work is needed to examine whether or not this lack of distinction between District of Columbia talk and Takoma talk exists for more Takoma residents. In addition, while the rates of use of the variable support the hypothesis of a continuum in black speech styles which is related to social class, this is a very small sample of only two speakers, who, although contrasting on an area (class) in which this study is interested, do not provide so much evidence that generalizations can be made much beyond their own style. A greater number of informants across a variety of socioeconomic classes and careers would provide additional insight.

In his interview, Peter comments, "Doesn't make a difference whether I'm black you white or what nationality you are. We've gotten past that you know….Doesn't make a difference whether it's D.C. or Maryland, bang! We are a part of a community." It is this attitude which characterizes Takoma as a haven of race-neutral unity. Because to talk about D.C. is to talk about race, to balance Takoma talk with talk about other parts of D.C. is to implicitly reject race as a salient discourse of Takoma—it positions Takoma as exactly the race-neutral space in which Takoma residents take pride.

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Jessica Grieser
Georgetown University
Department of Linguistics
Box 571051
Poulton Hall 240
Washington, D.C. 20057-1051
jag257@georgetown.edu