

Engendering Identities: Pronoun Selection as an Indicator of Salient Intergroup Identities

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1. The Problem

Don Hindle's (1979) study of the speech of Carol Myers provided a number of significant findings for the study of variation both within a speech community and within an individual speaker's repertoire.¹ Hindle showed very clearly that community-wide phonological changes were reflected in Myers' stylistic variation (and one of Hindle's other major contributions was to offer an operational definition of formality), such that in her most relaxed or informal setting Myers' speech showed the most reflexes of innovative phonological forms, while in the most formal setting, her speech showed reflexes of more conservative community norms. However, despite the fine phonetic discriminations he made, and despite the fact that he proved a sensitive observer of Carol Myers' social situation, Hindle was left with a puzzle. For one vernacular change, (ay^o) (the raising of the diphthong in BITE before voiceless consonants), Myers used more conservative phonological variants at home and with friends, and the most innovative, vernacular forms at the office. This was contrary to the expectation that the more relaxed and informal environment among peers would favor the production of more innovative variants of vowel changes in progress. Since this expectation was borne out for other changes in progress (see Table 1), Hindle looked more closely for potential motivations for this reversal.

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VARIABLE	DOMAIN	
	Office	Bridge Game
(aw)	+ conservative	+ innovative [fronted, raised]
(ow)	+ conservative	+ innovative [fronted]
(ohr)	+ conservative	+ innovative [raised]
(ay)	+ innovative	+ conservative

Table 1: Carol Myer's use of conservative vs innovative forms of four changes in progress in the Philadelphia speech community in two social domains (adapted from Hindle 1979: 138, 170ff)

Hindle noted that there is a qualitative difference between the variables. The (ay) raising is a change for which Philadelphia men are the leaders while the others are changes being led by women. He concluded "[this] suggests that what may be going on is accommodation" (1979: 145), "[Carol Myers] adjusts her speech to be more like the [speech of] the people she is talking to" (1979: 171). However, he also notes that this passive notion of accommodation misses the "expressive" (1979: 171) function of these shifts. He notes that Myers' behavior seems to indicate that innovative forms are not only an index of a lack of formality and Philadelphia-ness, but are also an index of gender; they constitute "an identification that is actively used in social interactions" (1979: 171).

Half a world away, Edina Eisikovits (1987) found strange, see-sawing patterns of variation in her interviews with Sydney adolescents. Eisikovits found that teenage girls exhibited the kind of style shifting we would expect. As illustrated in Table 2, when they were talking to each other (the intragroup condition) they used more non-standard syntactic forms, but in discussions where Eisikovits was also present (the intergroup condition), they used fewer non-standard forms. However, teenage boys showed the opposite pattern. The boys increased the frequency with which they used non-standard forms when they were talking in the more formal situation of an interview with Eisikovits.

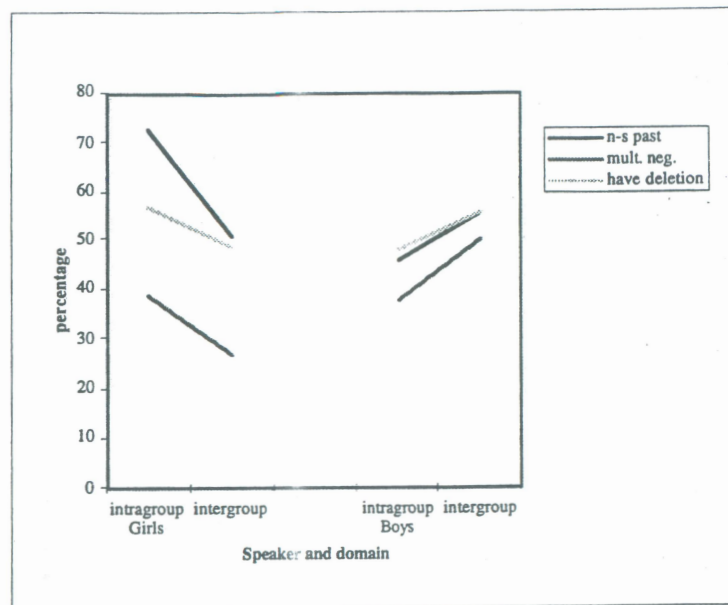


Table 2: Use of non-standard syntactic variants (past tense, multiple negation and deletion of *have*) among Sydneyside adolescents when talking with friends (intragroup) and with an interviewer (intergroup) (adapted from Eisikovits 1987: 49-51).

Eisikovits attempts to account for this unexpected data in terms of accommodation theory. Going back to her interviews she finds a qualitative difference in the teenagers' conversations with her. She concludes that "[t]he female informants in this study clearly showed a far greater identification with the female interviewer than the males" (1987: 55), and that the boys' behavior was strategy of divergence from her own, female, middle-class norms.

Similar studies throughout the variationist canon readily come to mind. Orderly patterns of sociolinguistically stratified variation bleed into untidy anomalies or exceptions. Unable to incorporate them into a systemic account of variation, the investigator explains these anomalies as being the result of the

speaker's accommodation to or divergence from (a) a social identity of the addressee that the sociolinguist asserts (but does not demonstrate) is most salient for the addressee, or (b) a social role which the sociolinguist infers (but does not demonstrate) the speaker identifies their addressee most with. Nor does the average sociolinguistic study that invokes the notion of accommodative convergence or divergence demonstrate any underlying attitude or social identification of the **speaker** that would motivate or direct their behavior (Greenwood 1996 is a notable exception). Notwithstanding, the variation is presumed, in this way, to be both seen and accounted for.

This use of communicative accommodation theory (or CAT) (Giles et al. 1973, Bourhis and Giles 1977, Thackerar et al. 1982, Giles and Coupland 1992, Niedzielski and Giles to appear) has some serious critics. William Labov, for instance, has been dismissive of calling it a theory since CAT is not framed in terms that are clearly falsifiable or predictive. Moreover, its use in sociolinguistics has very often been a hand-waving device used at the last minute to give the impression that the investigator has "explained" all observed patterns in their data.

This paper addresses the following question: is accommodation forever destined to be a *deus ex machina* in sociolinguistics research? Or instead, is sociolinguistics able to provide precisely the sorts of empirical evidence CAT needs to lend weight and precision to its principles and claims?

I believe that there is a role for CAT in the study of language variation and change, because I believe that accommodation principles are the heart of the co-construction and interpretation of social identities. I argue, therefore, for a more rigorous application of accommodation theory in sociolinguistic practice. I will examine in detail a case of communicative divergence and show that the selection of a particular linguistic token plays a constructive role in establishing and defining a relationship between the interlocutors. The task of applying accommodation theory more rigorously in sociolinguistics is by no means impossible, the trick, such as it is, lies in recognising the limits of the different theories and the limits of the numbers.

2. The Data

The data is drawn from recordings of conversational Bislama, the creole spoken in the Republic of Vanuatu, made during nine months of fieldwork in urban and village communities in northern Vanuatu. The data will be used to illustrate two things: one, the manner in which I believe notions of interspeaker accommodation and divergence can and should be used in sociolinguistic analysis. Two, that speaker identity — another theoretical notion much used in current sociolinguistics — is not by definition antithetical to quantitative methods. The process of reflecting and constituting social identities in conversation need not simply be assumed as a theory-internal property of language, but rather can be empirically observed in speakers' linguistic strategies.

Bislama, like most Oceanic languages, marks an inclusive and exclusive distinction in the 1p pronouns, i.e. *mifala* refers to the speaker and some third party, but not the addressee, while *yumi* refers to the speaker and the addressee (and perhaps some other third party).

	Singular	Plural
1st (excl.)	mi	mifala
(incl.)	—	yumi
2nd	yu	yufala
3rd	hem	olgeta

Table 3: Singular and plural pronoun contrasts in Bislama today

Technically, inclusion and exclusion are truth conditional. This is shown in example (1), where the speaker corrects herself when she remembers that her addressee once accompanied her on the same interisland shuttle plane.²

² Examples taken from my database identify speakers by a pseudonym, where they live (Santo, the urban community; Malo, the village community), their sex and age.

(1) Elsina (Santo, F30yr):

yu save from plen mif- because you know the plane we-
yumi tekem long Ambae you and I took from Ambae

But in practice there is some confusion about this, as example (2) shows. Lolan uses the inclusive form *yumi* to establish the orientation for a story she is about to tell, but one of her addressees, Janette, is struggling to remember the event.

(2) Lolan (Malo, F31yr), Janette (Malo, F30yr), Madelin (Malo, F26yr):

J: long naet? it was night?
L: yes yes
mi luk hem [and] I saw him
hem ya yumi stap ya it was when we were there
mi mi ting se I think it was
J: long saed blong opening at the opening of the telephone
haos blong telefon? house?
L: no no
a, bringanbae blong ol elda um, the bring & buy³ for the
elders
M: bringanbae blong eria elda the bring & buy for the area
elders
J: wea? where?
L: no, yu yu no bin kam no, you weren't there
Lisette i kam Lisette came

The confusion here arises because the inclusive form *yumi* is also widely used metaphorically, a fact that is not commented on in the descriptive grammars of Bislama (Tryon 1987, Crowley 1990). In other words, whether or not the addressee was an actual

³ A "bring and buy" is a fundraising event, often for church or school. Families make food, bring it to a central gathering and people buy their dinner for a small cost from everyone's contributions.

co-agent or co-experencer of an event, *yumi* can be used metaphorically to signal that the speaker is prepared to extend honorary participation to them. We cannot say exactly what the speaker intends when using the inclusive pronoun metaphorically like this, but it is enough to say that the effect of metaphorical *yumi* is to blur the intergroup boundaries between interlocutors, and this effect can be clearly derived from the differences in meaning of the two variants, *mifala* and *yumi*. Thus, to some extent, every metaphorical use of *yumi* constitutes a perlocutionary act, akin to dubbing or naming. Whether this use of *yumi* makes the addressee actively identify with the speaker, or whether all the interlocutors recognize the strategy as involving a suspension of belief — play-acting, as it were — is an open question. The answer is a moot point for this paper, although it is surely of some importance to the interactants, particularly if there are mismatches between the speaker's and the addressee's interpretations of the effect of the speech act.

The difference between *yumi* and *mifala* lies in their value with respect to inclusion of the addressee. The first is [+ you] and the second [- you] (Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990, Noyer 1992). However, inclusion is both a referential property and an empathetic property (e.g. people talk about "feeling" left out of decision-making, even when present; guests are invited to feel like part of the family, etc. etc.). This means that when *yumi* is used in a metaphorical way, it is a clear indicator of a speaker's psychological or affective orientation towards the addressee. I will argue that what we are observing is a strategy best described in terms of communicative accommodation.

3. The Identities

Responsible sociolinguistics has always been careful to describe and parametrize variation within a community along dimensions that are most relevant to the speech community itself. In recent years, we have seen a renewed emphasis on this, with researchers contextualising their findings in detailed social or ethnographic observations, perhaps the most familiar exemplar being Eckert's work on adolescents' speech (e.g. Eckert 1989, Eckert and

McConnell-Ginet 1995), but as also demonstrated recently in work by Greenwood (1996), Bucholtz (1996), Fought (this volume).

It is absolutely clear, from even cursory contact with Vanuatu society, that two of the most important identities in social, or public domains, are gender⁴ and membership in a family clan. Gender is linked very closely to biological sex in Vanuatu (as is reflected in my identification of speakers as "female" or "male"). For women, in particular, social identity as a woman is very closely tied to physical maturation and child-rearing, and this role is not as open to contestation as it is in North America. The salience of gender (generally also recognizing its close relationship with sex) has been discussed for a number of social and interactional domains (religion, social grading, economic power, and control of land and reproduction) in Vanuatu by Molisa (1983), Rubinstein (1978), Jolly (1987, 1991), and Kent (1995), and it was also overtly commented on by my informants.

In the village community I worked in, the significance of family group membership is also directly commented on by members of the community. Rubinstein's (1978) work in the same area discusses the salience of the distinction between "Up-hill" and "Down-coastal" communities, and the fact that family groupings are often reified and maintained through distinct naming patterns.

The salience of sex and family membership are directly reflected in the metaphorical use of *yumi* as an inclusion device. Even in interactions that were starkly intergroup contexts, e.g. when someone was explaining how to behave around older men in the community, or how to pollinate vanilla, I found women in the village community freely used the inclusive *yumi* to me despite my outsider status and despite the fact that my stranger status was highlighted by the topic of conversation. This was by no means a peculiarity of how people addressed me. As example (2) showed, Ni-Vanuatu women would sometimes use the inclusive form to

⁴ This is manifested in rather different public roles in Vanuatu, and the different rights and responsibilities of women and men are believed to be customary. However, Ralston (1992) notes that the opposition between "man:culture:public" and "woman:nature:private" is a post-colonial phenomenon in many Pacific cultures. Jolly (1987) discusses changes in women's pre- and post-colonial social status in Vanuatu.

each other, even when the conversation topic was highly contrastive of their experiences. Men were much less likely to extend the inclusive form to me, and sometimes, as shown in (3), they went to some effort to avoid it. NP possession in Bislama is marked by a prepositional phrase. In (3), Livai starts to say 'the place of ...', but stops, choosing to recast the utterance in a way that avoids the need to use a pronoun at all.

(3) Livai (Malo, M24yr):

hem i no olsem ples blong -	it isn't like [our] place
long ples ya	this place

Thus, the intergroup boundary between the genders seemed to be sufficiently salient in most conversations that, as (2) showed, when talking amongst themselves women could override other (truth-conditionally more) relevant intergroup distinctions and address their interlocutor in ingroup terms. Conversely, men required some equally strong intergroup identity to override the distinctiveness between themselves and a woman addressee. So, as example (4) shows, when men did address me with the inclusive *yumi* it was generally when the conversation had shifted to highlight a distinction between the local family groups and some other outgroup.

(4) Obed (Malo, M18yr):

mi no save...	I don't know...
hao nao yumi save go	how we should do it
blong save kasem wan samting	if we want to get something from
long [ples blong olgeta]	[the place that belongs to the people uphill]

4. The Negotiations

That speakers' social identities are negotiated across situations and with different interlocutors is widely accepted in the realms of

intercultural communication and social psychology. Ochs (1992), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) and Cameron (1996) have argued that much sociolinguistic variation is actually an attempt to index⁵ social identities by building or maintaining them through speech, and Holmes (to appear) neatly illustrates this with respect to lexical variables that have semantic meaning and phonological variables that have associative meaning. Holmes provides both kinds of examples because, as she points out, there is no inherent meaning associated with a raised, fronted (aw). What it indexes can only be inferred by a distributional correlation with a particular social category. A variable like *yumi*, however, provides clear semantic cues as to when indexing is going on and what identities are being indexed. This process becomes particularly clear when inclusion is contested by the addressee, as we saw in (2), or problematized by the speaker as we saw in (3).

In this section, I will examine an extended negotiation of the salience of group identities. The topic remains constant throughout the conversation, so the negotiation of identities is done through choice of pronoun. I will show how this negotiation process can be conceptualized within the framework of the model of communication proposed in Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (1994).

In example (5), Vosale and I have been discussing recent changes in how the market is run. Previously, market had started at 4pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and run for approximately 24 hours at a time. The newly elected regional council had decided to allow market to start any time on those three days, which created some problems and some opportunities for the village women who took their produce there. On the one hand, market is very lucrative, and longer hours meant more money. On the other hand, longer hours meant an even more exhausting stint (of up to 30 hours) sleeping and working at the trestle tables. Vosale starts out by addressing me with *yumi*, but changes her choice of pronoun in response to my invariable use of a generic *yu* 'you'.

⁵ Ochs (1992) introduces "index" to refer to the fact that linguistic practices both reflect and construct social identities (cf. Butler 1990). Cameron's (1996) point that this is a process of co-construction is well-taken and should be assumed in the discussions following.

(5) Vosale (Malo, F31yr) and Miriam:

- V: bae **yumi** karem ol ting ya we (incl.) have to bring everything
go long garen go to the garden
karem ol ting i kam long haos... bring everything home...
- M: mo afta tu **yu** stap long maket and then you're at market
long wan de mo wan naet for a day and a night too
- V: yes, be **yu** stap long maket yes, but you're at market
wan de wan naet a day and a night
be **yu** karem watu bigwan but you get as much money as for
olsem kopra, a... copra, eh ...
yes be kopra semak yes and copra's the same
sapos **yumi** katem kopra if we (incl.) cut copra
yumi smokem long hot ea dry it in hot air
sapos i kasem tu bag if there's two bags
maet **yu** no save kasem you might not get
fo taosen 4000 [vatu payment]
- M: be long wan dei long maket but in one day at the market
yu save kasem you can get?
- V: wan de long maket, hemia one day at market, yeah
yumi save kasem faef, fo taosen we (incl.) can get 5, 4000...
be **yumi** go we (incl.) go
stap wan dei wan naet wan dei... stay a day a night and a day...
yumi bitim pei blong kopra we (incl.) get more money
... than for [a bag of] copra ...
M: **yu yu** go wetem do you go with your friends?
ol fren blong **yu**...
- V: yes... yes...
sapos **mifala** fo i go fastaem if four of us (excl.) go ahead
ale i gat tu o tri well, there'll be 2 or 3 others
oli oli kam they come behind
ale **mifala** i stap wet long well, we (excl.) wait for them
olgeta long Naone Ban at Naone Ban

Vosale starts out using the inclusive **yumi**, the form appropriate for a conversation between two women, even though

her addressee is an outsider who she knows doesn't have a garden and who doesn't make her living by selling food at the market. However, I miss the significance of this and reply with the less inclusive form, **yu**, calqued directly from English. Bislama does use **yu** generically, though naturally it lacks the inherent connotations of inclusiveness of **yumi**. In her next turn, Vosale accommodates to my behavior and replies with the same form I used. The effect of undertaking this accommodative gesture is to assert merely that what we share is a set of communicative norms. Given my behavior, this is a more pragmatic claim than the shared group identity asserted by her use of the inclusive **yumi**.

Shortly after this, however, Vosale reverts to addressing me with **yumi**. It seems that she is again trying to affirm the salience of and inclusiveness inherent in our shared gender identity. Again, I reply in a way that confuses the interpersonal dimension of the conversation. It is unclear what I think the most salient intergroup or interpersonal distinction in our conversation is. For a third time, Vosale uses the **yumi** which indicates that the group membership she perceives is most salient to the conversation is a shared one, and for a third time, I reply non-inclusively which suggests that for me the most salient identities in the conversation are not shared ones. Vosale now appears to give up her initial hypothesis, and accepts that she is dealing with someone who views our interaction as an intergroup encounter. This incremental revision attitudes in the light of disconfirming information through a process known as 'bookkeeping' has been described by Rothbart (1981) and Weber and Crocker (1983). In this case, the consequence is that Vosale switches to the exclusive form, **mifala**, to wind up the topic. For the rest of the tape (approximately 45 minutes), she consistently uses **mifala**, both when speaking in generalities as at the start of example (5), and even when other intergroup contrasts are made salient (circumstances under which I noted that even men might use the inclusive forms with me).⁶ My systematic linguistic divergence from the social space she has mapped out for us both eventually leads her to redraw her map of our conversation and to adjust her linguistic behavior accordingly.

⁶ In subsequent conversations, inclusive forms were used again.

5. The Conclusions

My goal in this paper has been to pin down with some confidence the apparently evanescent link between speakers' identities and their linguistic behavior. What I hope I have shown is that by using reliable data, this can be done with as much confidence for linguistic variables as it can for non-linguistic variables such as dress style. I have argued that "reliable data", in this case, means variables that possess some inherent meaning. I have tried to indicate the very creative way in which speakers may use a linguistic variable to negotiate and construct social and personal identities through convergent or divergent behavior. Holmes (to appear) has made the point that the investigation of these sorts of variables is essential in order to strengthen our claims about the significance of, e.g. phonological, variables that are not inherently meaningful. I have tried to show that this kind of work is methodologically realistic, as well as being theoretically desirable.

Thus, there is a place for communicative accommodation within the practice of sociolinguistics, and it can directly assist in our analyses of variation. However, it is important to remember that the principles of accommodation are only substantive when measured against patterns of variation. Interpreting apparent strategies of accommodation depends on knowing a good deal about the general social and communicative norms of the interlocutors, as well as paying attention to sometimes subtle semantic cues in the language itself.

In return, accommodation theory has much to offer sociolinguistics. It focuses our attention on the points in an interaction where identity and interspeaker relations are disputed or actively (co-)constructed. Communicative accommodation need not simply be a last ditch save of messy data, which it so often is in sociolinguistics, but in order for it to avoid this fate, it is up to linguists to apply its principles with rigor, and not hindsight.

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An important secondary question, though, is whether the social factors traditionally used in studies of majority sound change, such as age, gender, and social class, are sufficient for an explanation of sociolinguistic variation in this community. There has been an increasing focus on the use of ethnographic techniques in sociolinguistics. As Eckert (1991:213) observes: "The use of ethnography in the study of variation allows the researcher to discover the social groups, categories and divisions particular to the community in question, and to explore their relation to linguistic form." Eckert's own work has shown the importance of non-traditional social categories, namely the categories of adolescent "jocks" and "burnouts" (e.g. Eckert 1987, Eckert 1991). And Mendoza-Denton 1995 explores the role of membership in different gangs. The use of community-specific categories is not new. As early as Labov's 1972 study in Harlem, for example, there was evidence that gang membership can play an important role in sociolinguistic variation. However, there are still many sociolinguistic studies in which the external factors are selected on the basis of tradition, rather than on observation of the community's social structure.

2. Social Groups

2.1. Gang-related Groups

Among the Latino young adults, several non-traditional social categories came up again and again as ways of identifying themselves and others. In many ways the most intriguing of these, and certainly the most salient in the media, is the category of gang member (also *gang-banger*, *gangster* or *cholo/chola*). But equally important are the relationships non-gang members have to the gangs. First of all, several students were described to me as "not a gang member but he *knows* them." It was clear from looking at several of these cases that *know* means something specific in this type of context. Everyone at this small school, for example, "knows" everyone else in the usual sense, i.e., knows their name and a little about them. This specialized use of *know* means something like "have a connection with," or "sometimes spend

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A Majority Sound Change in a Minority Community

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1. Introduction

Many of the important theoretical developments in sociolinguistics have come from the study of majority communities, particularly from studies of speakers of Anglo ethnicity in urban settings. The study of variation in minority communities, however, is making increasingly significant contributions to the field. A logical sociolinguistic question is whether minority groups have any role in the sound changes characteristic of the majority community. Many sociolinguistic studies focusing on more than one ethnic group have reported that minority groups do not participate in the same local sound changes as Anglo speakers (Labov 1966; Labov and Harris 1986; Bailey and Maynor 1987). And Labov (1994:157) suggests that ethnic minority speakers are not oriented to the local vernacular development at all, but are instead oriented to a national pattern of koine formation within the nonwhite groups. However there are some studies that do show the use of local dialect features by minority speakers, such as Poplack 1978.

This study will focus on a group of Latino young adults between 15 and 32 years of age who mostly live in a single region of western Los Angeles. Many of them attend Westside Park (a pseudonym), the local continuation school for students who have had learning or disciplinary problems at the regular high school. I conducted sociolinguistic interviews in English with the monolingual English speakers, and in both English and Spanish (which I also speak natively) with the bilingual speakers. The data presented here focus only on the English of these young adults, which is a variety of the dialect known as Chicano English. The main question I will address is whether the features of the California Anglo Dialect play any role in the Chicano English of Los Angeles.