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Why are wasteyutes a ting?

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Why are wasteyutes a ting?

Abstract

This paper examines lexical enregisterment through TH/DH-stopping in Multicultural Toronto English (MTE), a multiethnolect emergent in the Greater Toronto Area. Sociolinguistic interview data from young MTE speakers reveals an overall ~10% rate of stopping, with teenage males being the primary stoppers. However, despite the presence of stopping in the vernacular of most speakers, certain terms referring to character archetypes - e.g. wasteyutes, mandem - have become sites of enregisterment of TH/DH-stopping in MTE rather than enregisterment of stopping in more frequent words or of stopping itself. We argue that this is because these lexical items implement reflexive tropes, as speakers thought to be stoppers are those who might be labeled wasteyutes or mandem: young, male, suburban, typically non-white, and typically low status. As such, performance of these stereotypical personae fosters indexical linking between sound (TH/DH-stopping) and culturally salient identities (wasteyutes, mandem), cementing enregisterment of these terms in MTE.

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Lauren Bigelow, Tim Gadanidis, Lisa Schlegl, Pocholo Umbal, and Derek Denis

1 Introduction

The relationship between ways of speaking and metadiscourses constructed around these same manners of speech hold significant weight in explaining how ideologies about speech become culturally recognisable. Enregisterment, a term introduced by Agha, is a way of describing this creation of recognisability, and entails “processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms” (Agha 2003: 231). Expanding upon Agha’s work, Johnstone explains the way in which enregisterment can occur and the outcome of this process:

“In order to become noticeable, a particular variant must be linked with an ideological scheme that can be used to evaluate it in contrast to another variant. [...] Once it comes to be interpreted and evaluated with reference to an ideological scheme, a linguistic form has been “enregistered.” A form that is enregistered is one that is linked with a way of speaking or “register” associated with a personal or social identity.” (Johnstone 2009: 160).

Johnstone also notes the importance of ideologies about place in enregisterment processes. In her work on the enregisterment of Pittsburghese, Johnstone demonstrates how a set of linguistic forms linked with a particular local identity becomes recognised as an idealised local ‘dialect’, imbued with cultural value and subsequently commodified.

In this paper, we examine the role of place and local identity in Toronto, Canada related to a localised multiethnolect – Multicultural Toronto English (henceforth MTE) – in an attempt to understand why certain linguistic features come to be enregistered as part of the variety, while others do not. Through their presence in metadiscourse, the lexical items *ting*, *wasteyute*, and *mandem* are enregistered as part of MTE. These words are borrowed from Jamaican Patwah and the way that these words are represented orthographically in textual metadiscourse demonstrates that they exhibit TH/DH-stopping. With this in mind, this paper asks the following questions: Are the orthographic forms of *ting*, *wasteyute*, and *mandem* represented the way that they are because they were faithfully borrowed from Patwah, or do they reflect a general, local vernacular pattern of TH/DH-stopping? If the latter, what predicts the lexical enregisterment of these particular words as opposed to other words that fall within the variable context?

We investigate these questions through a variationist study of TH/DH-stopping in young speakers living in a multiethnic and multilingual region of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: first, we provide a discussion of MTE and introduce some of its linguistic features alongside the public metadiscourse around a fluid set of enregistered lexical items referred to emically as “Toronto Slang”. Then, we present an analysis of TH/DH-stopping in MTE, a phonological process that is orthographically represented in *wasteyute*, *mandem*, and *ting*. Finally, we explore the relationship between TH/DH-stopping and lexical enregisterment.

2 Multiethnolects, MTE, and Toronto Slang

Since the late 1980s, sociolinguists have been investigating novel varieties of various languages spoken in major Northern European cities that have emerged as a result of contact between the community language and languages spoken by recent immigrants. These include *Rinkebysvenska* (‘Rinkeby Swedish’) in Stockholm (Kotsinas 1988) and *Multicultural London English* in London (Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox, Torgersen 2011). These contexts include rapid language shift to the community language, particularly by young people; crucially, the role of immigrant children is recognised as critical (Kotsinas 1988). These new varieties tend to be focused in neighbourhoods of first arrival of immigrants. These neighbourhoods are sites of global immigration rather than communal migration; rather than the settlement of particular ethnolinguistic groups (cf. Chinatown, Little Italy), these neighbourhoods are highly diverse, ethnolinguistically and culturally. A potential result of this language contact scenario is for new

varieties to emerge with features traceable to three sources: related to second language acquisition, related to relevant language/dialect contact, and internal innovations.

A major theme in the literature on multiethnolects is the question of what exactly a multiethnolect is. The two main perspectives are that multiethnolects should be considered either a style (e.g., Quist 2008, Nortier 2018) or a speaker's Labovian vernacular (i.e., their unmarked, unmonitored way of speaking) (e.g., Wiese 2009, 2013). Those who advocate for the former also tend to avoid the term multiethnolect, as 'lect' entails cohesiveness and downplays the dynamic nature of stylistic use and 'ethno-' emphasizes only a singular social dimension. However, as Cheshire et al. (2015: 4) observe, multiethnolects serve a "dual status": they are a stylistic resource for some speakers but a vernacular for others. We view the variationist sociolinguistic approach to multiethnolects articulated by Cheshire et al. (2011: 154) as a middle ground, whereby multiethnolects encompass a "repertoire of [variable] features" (whether lexical, grammatical, phonological or discourse-pragmatic) available in multiethnic neighbourhoods. These many features come from multiple sources – language contact, dialect contact, second language acquisition, innovation – which together form a *feature pool* (cf. Mufwene 2001) that speakers in these neighbourhoods are exposed to throughout their daily lives. From this feature pool certain features may be 'selected' and come to index certain social meanings (e.g., place, race, class, their intersection). In this view, the multiethnolect is the repertoire itself. So, for example, Multicultural London English can be thought of as a particular set of features (e.g., monophthongal GOAT and FACE, TH-fronting, the *man* pronoun, the *innit* confirmational, leveling to *was*, lack of allomorphy with the definite and indefinite article, syllable-timed prosody, a set of lexical items etc.). In this way, speakers can employ features agentively (e.g., for identity construction and negotiation or in reflexive performance of locally-relevant social persona) but can also acquire features as part of their vernacular speech. Two empirically-supported artefacts of this perspective are that (1) multiethnolects are ethnically neutral¹, available to anyone with access to the repertoire (i.e., peer-group is critical) and (2) they are not assumed to be transitory but rather, as potentially a part of young people's vernaculars, features may continue to be present as speakers move into adulthood. This approach also avoids the question of whether multiethnolects are lects or vernaculars; multiethnolects are not conceived of as cohesive ways of talking but as a repertoire which speakers pick and choose from, potentially adopting features into their own vernaculars or styles in different ways. In other words, while one may list and analyse the various features of a multiethnolect, no single speaker will necessarily use all features (either stylistically or vernacularly).

As a settler colonial nation state, Canada has been a country of immigrants since its foundation. However, in recent decades major cities like Toronto have been the destination of migrant populations that span the globe. The number of recent immigrants to the GTA has been increasing. In the 1980s, 370 000 new immigrants landed in Toronto while between 2006 and 2016, 705550 new immigrants arrived (Statistics Canada 2017a). Nearly half of the population of the GTA were born outside of Canada, half identify as a visible minority, and half have a mother tongue other than English (Statistics Canada 2017a). While others – most prominently Hoffman and Walker (2010) – have thoroughly investigated the ethnic enclaves of communal migration in Toronto, many of Toronto's neighbourhoods fit Cheshire et al.'s (2011) description of neighbourhoods where multiethnolects arise. Indeed, what we here call MTE, in analogy to Multicultural London English, we understand to be a multiethnolect.

Relatedly, over the past few years, there has been increasingly common discourse around what is emically called *Toronto Slang*. Media discourse on *Toronto Slang* has been found almost entirely in alternative media (particularly online sources) rather than in mainstream media, and usually takes the form of lists of 'slang' words and definitions intended to inform those ignorant of what constitutes *Toronto Slang* (e.g., Basa 2018). Often, specific highly multicultural suburbs of the city are implicated in these discussions: Scarborough, in the East End of Toronto, and Brampton, a city northwest of Toronto. Another source of metadiscourse is YouTube, where a search for the term 'Toronto Slang' yields over 200 videos (as of late 2019). The prototypical *Toronto Slang* users are thought to be young, mostly masculine, mostly non-white Torontonians.

Toronto Slang features are found at varying levels of the grammar but to non-linguists are all thought to be 'words'. These include purely lexical features, as exhibited in words that may be borrowed from immigrant languages or homegrown: *cheesed* ('irked'), *nize your beak*

¹Ideologically however, there is tension around cultural appropriation (Denis et al. 2020). Particularly as features develop place-based indexicality and, at the same time, ethnolinguistic associations are bleached (see Aarsæther et al. 2017), the question of ethnoracial authenticity is common in metadiscourse.

(‘watch your mouth’), *wallahi* (<Somali<Arabic, ‘I swear by god’), *bare* (<Patwah ‘many’), *bucktee* (<Somali, ‘corpse’/‘drug addict’/general pejorative). There are also discourse-pragmatic features (e.g., confirmational particle *ahlie* <Patwah, concessive marker *styll*) and morphosyntactic features (e.g., pronominal *mans* [Denis 2016], the emphatic suffix *-az*). No phonological features are overtly associated with *Toronto Slang* although the lack of a short-a nasal split is seemingly orthographically represented in the word *fom* = *fam*, a clipping of ‘family’ meaning ‘friend’). Like with European multiethnolects, although speakers have a range of ethnolinguistic backgrounds, particular languages are more influential than others. Many of these features are borrowed from Patwah (and potentially other Caribbean creoles). This borrowing is part of the metadiscursive commentary about *Toronto Slang* and is often discussed in terms of stealing or appropriating Jamaican culture. Somali and possibly Arabic are also sources of borrowings, though these are less often discussed in metadiscourse.

While MTE is a vernacular repertoire for some, we suggest that *Toronto Slang*, the subject of metalinguistic commentary, encapsulates the stylistic side of MTE’s dual status. Despite there being some phonological features of vernacular MTE (Denis et al. 2019), metadiscourse is centered around specific lexical(oid) features of *Toronto Slang*. We focus on three examples: *wasteyute*, a term for a ‘loser’ derived from ‘waste’+‘youth’; *ting*, a derogatory term used to refer to a woman, from ‘thing’; and *mandem*, which is used to refer to a group of men or one’s friends, derived from ‘man’+‘them’. We zero in on these examples as each orthographically represents TH/DH-stopping: the realization of /θ/ and /ð/ as [t] and [d], respectively. TH/DH-stopping is a ubiquitous feature among world Englishes (e.g., Multicultural London English, Chicano English, Polish American English, and British Creole) and learner Englishes, and has been investigated at length by variationists across several different English varieties. For instance, both Labov (1966) in New York and Wolfram (1969) in Detroit have found that stopping is socially and stylistically stratified. More recently, Drummond (2018) found that stopping has also been observed to perform social work as a marker of individual identity in the social practice of grime, hip hop and dancehall culture - as well as values of “toughness” associated with them. In the analysis that follows, we examine *wasteyute*, *ting*, *mandem*, and other lexical items as sites of variable TH/DH-stopping and connect metadiscursive commentary about *Toronto Slang* with this phonological phenomenon.

3 The current study

The data that we used in this study was collected by the last author and a team of undergraduate research assistants (four women of colour in their early twenties) in Brampton, a city within the GTA. Brampton is a highly ethnolinguistically diverse community, home to many immigrants from around the world who arrived in the last twenty years. India, Jamaica, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Guyana are main source. Almost half of Brampton residents have a mother tongue other than English (Statistics Canada 2017b). Speakers in this corpus range in age from 11 to 26 years old and had all lived in Brampton for at least one year at the time of data collection. Recruitment and data collection occurred inside a mall and a library in southeast Brampton, as well as through the personal networks of the fieldworkers. Fieldwork involved three parts: a wordlist, a reading passage, and a sociolinguistic interview. We focus here on sociolinguistic interview data: recordings of these interviews were transcribed in ELAN, and we searched for and analysed every instance of variable TH/DH-stopping within a 20-minute chunk from the middle of each interview.

The current study, drawn from a subset of the corpus, comprises a total of 19 participants aged 11 to 23. The 19 speakers were roughly evenly stratified by age and gender, as shown in Table 1. Ethnolinguistic background was not controlled for in data collection. Rather, the participants reflect the diversity of Brampton with respect to ethnicity, immigration, and language background. Participants spoke a total of 18 languages and self-identified with 39 different ethnic descriptors (many using more than one descriptor).

For this analysis, we delimit the variable context for TH/DH-stopping to include all segments that would normatively be realized as an interdental fricative. After isolating these segments, we coded the realization of <TH> impressionistically as either a fricative or a stop. After exclusion of ambiguous or incomprehensible tokens and those that we perceived as fronted or glottalized, the final token count was 3671. All tokens were also coded for voicing, word position, and self-reported social features of gender, age, and age upon arrival to Canada. A breakdown of factors and their levels can be seen in Table 2.

Gender ²	Age Groups				TOTAL
	11-14	15-17	18-20	20+	
Male	5	2	2	2	11
Female	3	0	2	3	8
TOTAL	8	2	4	5	19

Table 1: Breakdown of age and gender groupings of the sample.

Predictor	Level (<i>n</i> per level)	Example
Gender	Female (1171)	Speaker VE07
	Male (2500)	Speaker DD01
Age	(Centered and scaled)	Range age 11 -23 years
Age of Arrival (in Canada)	(Centered and scaled)	Range age 0 - 14 years
Voicing	Voiced (1475)	<i>that</i>
	Voiceless (2196)	<i>thing</i>
Word internal position	Initial (3218)	<i>that, thing, there, through</i>
	Medial (281)	<i>birthday, anything, other, another, something</i>
	Final (172)	<i>month, seventh, with, fourth</i>

Table 2: Social and linguistic constraints.

4 Results

We found a low but non-negligible rate of TH/DH-stopping in this data set: 9.6% overall. The variation is exemplified in (1) and (2).

- (1) I don't want to make your life more difficult [θ]inking about my problems and [t]ing. (MV03; M/18)
- (2) For like the last two weeks of school, every single period, just going on the PUBG grind, [ð]at's how- [θ]at's how loud [d]at game was. Holy! (NS02; M/13)

Among our speakers, we observe TH/DH-stopping across the board in all linguistic contexts, though the voiced /ð/ context is much more likely to be stopped than the voiceless /θ/ context and stopping is more frequent word-finally and word-initially than word-medially, as shown in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. To examine potential lexical effects, Figure 1 visualizes the frequency of TH/DH-stopping among the lexical items with 30 or more occurrences in the data set; we plot the raw frequency of occurrence of each word on by stopped (light grey) and unstopped (dark grey) realization. Here, we can see that TH/DH-stopping is not circumscribed only to Patwah borrowings such as (*waste*)yute, (*man*)dem, or *ting*, or to the most high-frequency words occurring in the data set. The word *other* is categorically unstopped, *think* is rarely stopped despite being the most frequent /θ/ word, but, consistently, we observe the presence of stopped tokens across lexical items.

Voicing	Stopping rate	N
Voiced	12.4%	2462
Voiceless	3.9%	1202

Table 3: Stopping rate by voicing.

Position	Stopping rate	N
Initial	10.0%	3215
Medial	5.4%	279
Final	9.4%	170

Table 4: Stopping rate by position.

² All speakers identified as either male or female.

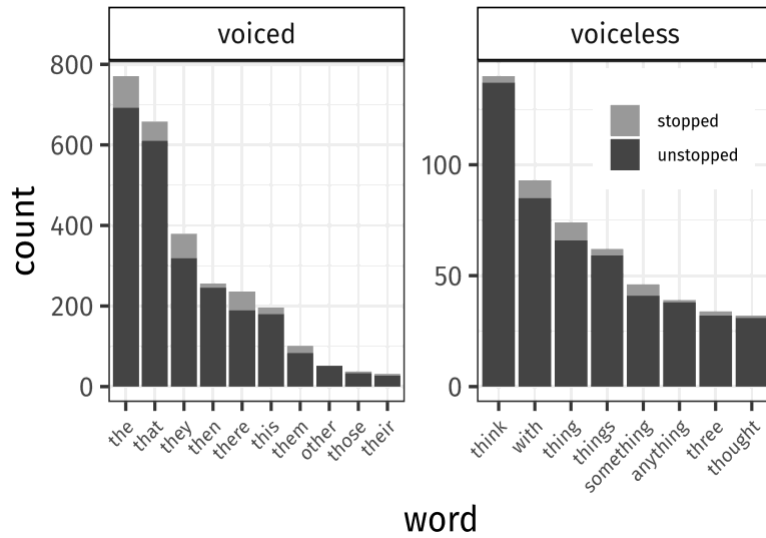


Figure 1: Proportion of TH/DH-stopping within most frequent words.

There is much greater variation between speakers than between lexical items. Figure 2 plots the frequency of stopping in the voiced (light grey) and voiceless (dark grey) contexts for each individual. Some speakers (DD03, DD05) do not stop at all, while others (DD02, NS01) stop frequently. We also see some individual variation in terms of the effect of context, i.e., whether voiced or voiceless fricatives favour stopping (for three speakers, voiceless contexts seem to favour stopping, for the others voiced contexts favour stopping). We include the self-reported gender of each speaker in this figure as well. With two exceptions, those who participate in TH/DH-stopping are men (though there are some men who do not participate).

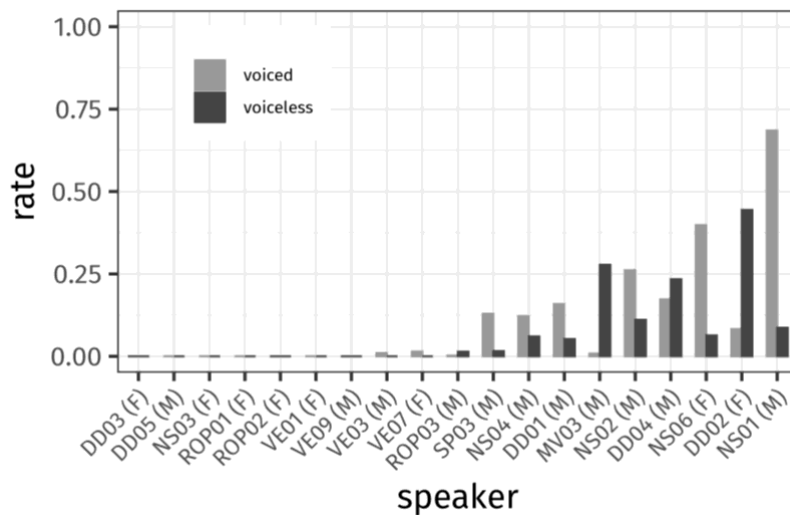


Figure 2: Rate of TH/DH-stopping by individual speaker.

Figure 3 provides a visualization of stopping rate according to the age of each speaker and age of arrival to Canada of each speaker. In the top graph, sorted by age, from youngest to oldest, we see that younger speakers generally produce higher rates of TH/DH-stopping than do older speakers. In the bottom graph, organized by age of arrival to Canada from younger to older, we see that many of the speakers who employ stopping arrived in Canada later in adolescence. However, note that several speakers who stop frequently were born in Canada (the nine leftmost speakers in the bottom graph were born in Canada) or arrived very early in life (e.g., NS01 arrived at age 3).

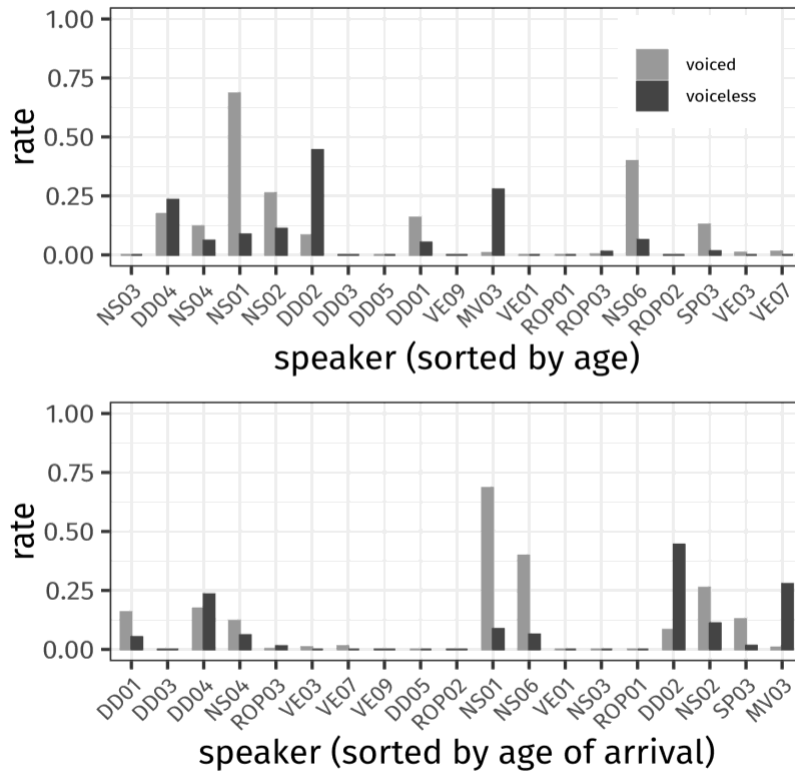


Figure 3: Rate of TH/DH-stopping by age (speakers arranged youngest to oldest, left to right) and age of arrival to Canada (speakers arranged arriving younger to older, left to right).

Finally, figure 4 visualises individual rates of stopping among speakers by age and separates men and women into different facets. This demonstrates that those speakers in the data who produce the highest rates of TH/DH-stopping are primarily younger men.

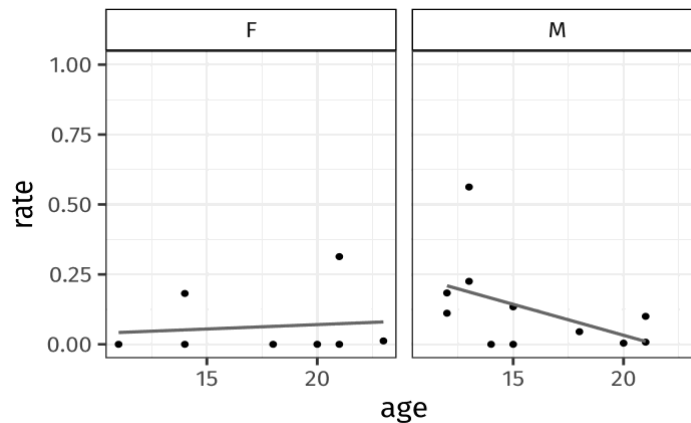


Figure 4: Rate of TH/DH-stopping by individual speaker, grouped by gender.

The trends we observe are corroborated by a mixed-effects logistic regression model, the results of which are shown in Table 5. The regression was run using the `glmer()` function in the R (R Core Team 2020) package `lme4` (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, and Walker 2015). All factors (gender, position, and voicing) were simple-coded. The reference levels for gender, position, and voicing are female, initial, and voiced, respectively. All continuous predictors (age of arrival, age) were scaled and centred such that their mean was 0 and their standard deviation was 1. Positive coefficients indicate less stopping.

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	4.50	0.80	5.59	0.000
age of arrival	-0.91	0.39	-2.31	0.021
age	-0.80	0.72	-1.11	0.268
gender = male	-1.04	0.91	-1.15	0.252
position = medial	0.72	0.30	2.40	0.017
position = final	-0.61	0.35	-1.76	0.078
voicing = voiceless	0.80	0.21	3.70	0.000
gender = male \times age	2.58	0.98	2.64	0.008

Table 5: Mixed-effects regression model. Negative estimates indicate more stopping. All factors are simple coded. Reference levels are female (gender), initial (position), and voiced (voicing).

As shown in the table, there is a main effect of age of arrival, such that a later age of arrival is correlated with more stopping ($\beta = -0.91$, $p = 0.021$). Compared to word-initial position, medial position is correlated with less stopping ($\beta = 0.72$, $p = 0.017$), and final position with more stopping ($\beta = -0.61$, $p = 0.078$).³ Compared to the voiced fricative, the voiceless fricative is predicted to be stopped less often ($\beta = 0.7951$, $p = 0.0002$). And, as observed in the previous section, we see an interaction between age and gender, such that the slope for age (which trends such that younger speakers stop more than older speakers) is steeper for men (who already trend toward using more stopping than women) than for women ($\beta = 2.58$, $p = 0.008$); in other words, younger men are predicted to be more likely than older men to employ stopping. This is consistent with the observations above from our distributional analysis that young, male speakers appear to be the speakers who stop the most.

These observations might lead us to expect that speakers who are matched in demographic criteria will acquire TH/DH-stopping in tandem with one another, and the set of young men, for example, will behave relatively homogeneously. However, the situation is more complicated. Table 6 features two pairs of speakers, with each pair roughly matched in their age at interview, age of arrival to Canada, regional ethnicity, and gender. Despite these matches in demographic criteria, these speakers nonetheless demonstrate divergent rates of stopping. Whether speakers were born in Canada or arrived later in life, does not categorically predict normative or non-normative patterns of TH/DH-stopping. This suggests that this phonological feature is among those features that may be variably deployed by speakers wishing to draw from the feature pool of MTE more generally, though young men tend to be the individuals who do this most.

	ROP01	DD02	VE09	DD04
<i>Age at interview</i>	20	14	15	12
<i>AoA to Canada</i>	7	8	0	0
<i>Ethnicity</i>	Pakistani/Afghani	Indian	Jamaican	Indian
<i>Gender</i>	female	female	male	male
<i>Rate of stopping</i>	0%	18.2%	0%	18.4%

Table 6: Rate of TH/DH-stopping of two pairs of speakers matched in demographic criteria.

5 Discussion

Results of this study of TH/DH-stopping have shown that this phonological feature is non-trivially deployed by the speakers in our sample. Rather than being the result of faithful borrowing from Patwah, TH/DH-stopping in lexical items such as *wasteyute*, *ting*, and *mandem* is consistent with a general vernacular pattern of TH/DH-stopping in this speech community.

³The value of p for the final-position estimate is greater than 0.05, the value traditionally used to classify effects into dichotomous “significant” categories, which are worthy of reporting, and “non-significant” categories, which are not. In this paper, in accordance with guidelines put forward by the American Statistical Association (Wasserstein, Schirm and Lazar 2019), we do not classify effects into dichotomous categories based on “bright-line” rules such as $p < 0.05$; we report p values only as continuous quantities measuring the probability of the data given the null hypothesis.

humorous, memorable, and hence capable of widespread circulation” (2003: 256). For Uriah Heap, [h]-dropping is linked with ‘umbleness, whereas in Toronto, we argue that TH/DH-stopping is linked with the personae of *wasteyutes* and *mandem* in metadiscourse, and it is this linking that renders these terms particularly susceptible to enregisterment and diffusion throughout, and even outside of, the speech community.

This metadiscourse is on full display in the YouTube video *DO TORONTO PEOPLE KNOW TORONTO SLANG? (Part 1 of 3)*.⁵ The video takes the form of a ‘slang challenge’, in which people on the streets of Toronto are challenged by the host to define examples of *Toronto Slang*. The excerpts in (3) and (4) present the speech of one participant, Moosa. Throughout the video, Moosa demonstrates his fluency and knowledge of *Toronto Slang*. In (3) he defines *wasteyute*. We note that in his speech, he uses at least two different voicing: one, which we have underlined, is a didactic voicing that he primarily uses when defining words; the other, which we italicize is what we will call his *wasteyute* voicing which he primarily uses when asked to use the word in a sentence. Through the video, Moosa’s two voicings are primarily differentiated by prosody and rhythm, the use of other *Toronto Slang* features, but also, seemingly, the use of TH/DH-stopping (annotated in the excerpt).

- (3) Moosa: It’s a word you use to describe somebody you don’t like. So usually somebody- just anybody uh [ð]ey annoy you. [ð]ey bo[ð]er you, you-you don’t mess wi[t] [d]em like [d]at, uh [ð]ey’re a wasteyute.
 Host: Can you use it in a sentence?
 Moosa: *Yo, [d]is guy with [d]e microphone’s a wasteyute. ... I’m playing dog, I’m playing.*

TH/DH-stopping is abundant in Moosa’s *wasteyute* voicing and absent in his didactic voicing. Less than a minute later after the host speaks with some other participants, the camera returns to Moosa.

- (4) Moosa: Can I just clarify something? Um, I- I like- what I go to school for requires me to speak English at a very proficient level. Normally I speak regular English, I just know this shit ‘cause I live here. I’m not a- I’m not- *I’m not a wasteyute like [d]at, I swear to God.*

In Agha’s (2003: 243) terms, what Moosa is doing in (4) is an example of *role alignment*: he is explicitly positioning his self-image with respect to the characterological figure (the *wasteyute*) that he simultaneously imbues on this non-normative (non-“regular English”) way of talking. The leap we make is that this certain way of talking (like a *wasteyute*) explicitly includes using *Toronto Slang* but also implicitly includes the phonological process of TH/DH-stopping.

6 Conclusion

We have shown that TH/DH-stopping in the GTA is not only present as faithful lexical borrowings from Patwah, but is also a variable phenomenon within the community. In many lexical items, speakers are deploying TH/DH-stopping as part of a vernacular pattern, drawing on the feature pool of MTE. However, despite the widespread presence of TH/DH-stopping among our speakers, what has become enregistered is not the phonological process of TH/DH-stopping itself but rather specific lexical items which orthographically represent the process: *wasteyute*, *mandem*, and *tings*. We have argued here that use of TH/DH-stopping, specifically by young Toronto men, is consistent with the indexical linking between sound and a culturally salient persona: it is young men who are ideologically implicated as *wasteyutes*, *mandem*, and those who would call a woman a *ting*. However, it is the reflexive nature of this conventionalised persona that ultimately provides a widely available and easily performable stereotype that we argue fosters enregisterment.

⁵<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3umEdWZIViY>>

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