

Constructing ethnicity in interaction¹

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In the present study, I continue ongoing efforts to incorporate social constructionist viewpoints into sociolinguistics by demonstrating how two interlocutors use linguistic resources to project and shape ethnic (and other facets of) identity in unfolding talk. The interaction is a sociolinguistic interview from a large-scale sociolinguistic study of a rural tri-ethnic community in the southeastern U.S. I examine a range of features and types of features and in addition use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Further, I examine the linguistic usages of both the researcher (the interviewer) and the research subject. The analysis confirms that identity is dynamic and multifaceted and is very much a product of ongoing talk, although pre-existing linguistic and social structures also come into play. In addition, the analysis demonstrates that identity is dialogic as well as dynamic and that researchers play a large role in shaping the linguistic usages of those they study.

KEYWORDS: Ethnicity, identity, variation analysis, discourse analysis, social constructionism, Robeson County, North Carolina

1. INTRODUCTION

As insights from anthropology, cultural studies, social psychology, and practice theory continue to find their way into sociolinguistics, researchers in the latter field have increasingly adopted social constructionist approaches that focus on how social actors use linguistic and other cultural resources in the ongoing construction and re-construction of personal and group identity (and hence social structures) in interaction (e.g. Rampton 1999a). Under such a view, identity is necessarily dynamic; in addition, it is increasingly being viewed as (and perhaps is becoming) multifaceted and multilayered as well (e.g. Giddens 1991; Coupland 2001a, 2001b; Mendoza-Denton 2002).

While speaker agency and the unfolding of identity in interaction have long been integral to such approaches to the study of language and society as interactional sociolinguistics (e.g. Schiffrin 1994: 97–136), *Acts of Identity* (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), and *Speech Accommodation Theory* (e.g. Giles 1973), social constructionist views are more difficult to reconcile with traditional variationist approaches. In the latter, the focus has been on establishing correlations between aggregate patterns of language use and social categories such as age, sex and race

that traditionally have been taken to be relatively fixed, at least for the purposes of analysis (e.g. Cameron 1990; Eckert 2000: 43–45). However, in recent years, there have been a number of successful efforts to incorporate localized practice into quantitative investigations of language variation and change through combining quantitative methodology with various types of qualitative investigation, including: ethnographic analyses of localized groups, practices, and meanings (e.g. Eckert 2000); sociological surveys designed to yield insight into local meanings (e.g. Dubois and Melançon 1997; Dubois and Horvath 1999); and analysis of individuals, including individual life histories (e.g. Johnstone 1996) and individual conversations and speech performances (e.g. Coupland 1985; Arnold et al. 1993; Kiesling 1998; Bell 2001). These studies have enhanced our understanding of the interplay between reified structures and speaker agency, as well as of how speakers creatively use linguistic resources in projecting and shaping various facets of their identities, including gender and ethnicity. In addition, researchers investigating the phenomenon of 'crossing' (Rampton 1995, 1999c) have successfully combined quantitative and qualitative methods to demonstrate how speakers use codes associated with groups other than their own as a further resource in shaping ethnic identity.

In the present study, I continue ongoing efforts to incorporate localized practice into quantitative analysis by looking at language use in an individual interaction — in this case a sociolinguistic interview — against the backdrop of the large-scale quantitative study of which it is a part. I examine the linguistic usages of both the interviewer and the interviewee, thus extending the still-limited investigation of how researcher and research 'subject' work together to jointly construct talk and social meaning (e.g. Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson 1992).² My focus is on how the two participants use language in shaping ethnic identity. However, because ethnicity is not neatly isolable from other facets of identity, it is necessary to consider participants' positioning with respect to other types of group identity (e.g. age, regional), as well as personal and interpersonal identities that are adopted, shaped, and abandoned in the course of the unfolding interaction. For example, participants project various personas in fulfillment of particular interactional tasks such as convincing versus entertaining, and, in addition, position themselves with respect to one another and to the talk (e.g. Giles 1979; Coupland 1985, 2001b).

In order to investigate how the two participants in the current study use linguistic resources in shaping and re-shaping their identities, I examine their shifting usage levels for phonological and morphosyntactic features with ethnic and/or regional associations, as well as how these levels compare with general usage levels established in quantitative analyses of group patterns. In addition, I look at co-occurrence patterns of features associated with social groups (following Bell and Johnson 1997; Bell 1999, 2001), as well as how features with group-associational meaning are positioned in unfolding discourse, including how they are positioned with respect to features with interactional and semantic meanings indicative of interpersonal and intergroup alignments (e.g. Holmes 1997; Meyerhoff

2001). Finally, I take into account broader considerations of discourse structure such as topic control, as well as broader semantic considerations, including the content of talk and the interlocutors' attitude toward, or positioning with respect to, this content. Hence, my study also extends ongoing efforts to investigate the interplay of macro-level patterns and micro-level practices by combining variationist-based techniques for investigating stylistic variation with discourse analysis, including interactional sociolinguistic analysis (following, for example, Schiffrin 1996; Kiesling 1998).

2. COMMUNITY CONTEXT³

The interview I examine here was conducted in connection with a sociolinguistic survey of Robeson County, in south-eastern North Carolina, U.S. Robeson County is a rural tri-ethnic community whose residents include approximately 40,460 people who self-identify, or are identified, as White, 30,963 Blacks or African Americans, and 46,896 American Indians, most of whom are Lumbee. A map showing the location of Robeson County is given in Figure 1.

Although notions of ethnic identity and relations among ethnic groups are malleable in Robeson County, establishing and maintaining ethnic divisions has long been important to county residents, and it is impossible to escape ethnic classification in the county context, especially if one has historical roots and/or



Figure 1: Robeson County, North Carolina

long-standing family ties in the area. The quantitative sociolinguistic investigation of Robeson County reflects the ethnic groupings into which people place themselves and are placed by fellow community members, and hence focuses on the speech patterns of three groups labeled 'Whites', 'African Americans', and 'Lumbee Indians' (or 'Lumbee Native Americans'). In addition, although the focus of the current investigation is on shifting ethnicity in interaction, the two participants in the interview I examine do self-identify by ethnic label: the interviewee self-identifies, and is identified by others, as a Lumbee Indian, and the interviewer self-identifies, and is identified, as African American. In addition, the interviewer self-identifies as 'part Cherokee Indian'; however, as I show below, this ethnic identification is not as readily accepted by others. I recognize that the ethnic labels 'White', 'African American', and 'Lumbee' obscure the ethnic complexities of Robeson County; however, I necessarily use these labels in discussing previous quantitative analyses of group speech patterns and, in addition, employ these and other group labels in discussing the history of county ethnic relations. In discussing the individual interview that forms the focus of my investigation, I use the labels 'White', 'African American', and 'Lumbee' where they seem appropriate (or indeed are inescapable), as for example, when considerations of ethnic in-group belonging are highly salient to the two participants, or when they use the labels themselves.⁴

Ethnic classifications have been a site of contention throughout Robeson County's history. The county is situated in the heart of the American South, where a bi-racial classification system has long been firmly entrenched. However, the Lumbee have always formed a significant part of the county population and have long struggled to assert themselves as a separate people who are neither White nor Black. In addition, the Lumbee have struggled to assert their status as an 'authentic' Indian tribe in the face of Western notions that Indians and other non-mainstream ethnic groups must be genealogically and linguistically 'pure', as well as culturally static. Such notions have never been an integral part of Native American conceptualizations of identity, though they continue to pervade American popular (and even scholarly) thought (e.g. Clifford 1988; Maynor 1999). Because notions of ethnic 'authenticity' and ethnic classification are highly salient to county residents, and because ethnicity has been the site of overt struggle for centuries, Robeson County is an ideal site for the examination of how people work to shape individual and group notions of ethnic identity in interaction. Ethnicity-related topics also frequently surface in the sociolinguistic interviews conducted in this community; in particular, the interview I focus on here is rich with discussions of ethnic group relations.

Although the Lumbee are most likely of multi-tribal origin, they have existed as a coherent people in the Robeson County area since well before White and Black English-speaking settlements were firmly established in the region. The ancestral language roots of the Lumbee are unknown, since the first records of Native Americans in the Robeson County area, in the early 1700s, describe an indigenous people who spoke English. It is unclear from whom the Lumbee originally

learned English, though one popular theory holds that the tribe is descended, at least in part, from Sir Walter Raleigh's well-known 'Lost Colony', a short-lived English settlement founded in 1587 on the northern coast of North Carolina.

Despite their early exposure to and apparent assimilation of White culture, the Lumbee were never fully integrated into White society, partly because of racist attitudes long entrenched in the American South and partly because of the Lumbee's strong sense of Indian identity. The Lumbee have long felt themselves to be a cohesive tribe; however, they have continually struggled to be recognized as a separate people by mainstream White society. They had no name, as far as Whites were concerned, until 1885; prior to this time, they were referred to simply as 'mixed', 'free persons of color', or, occasionally, 'free White'. (In fact, sometimes the same family was variously classified as 'free White' and 'free Colored' from one census to the next.)

The Lumbee have continually resisted being forced into the bi-racial classification system that pervades the South, especially since they were usually categorized with Blacks and other 'persons of color' who were relegated to low social status and subjected to discriminatory social practices and often even harsh physical treatment. Sometimes, the Lumbee expressed their resistance to Whites' ethnic classifications through striking out against Whites, as, for example, in a series of violent attacks on Whites during the Civil War. At other times, the Lumbee have ironically expressed their dissatisfaction with dominant culture through their own insistence on their separation from, and superiority over, Blacks. For example, prior to 1835 and the passage of the Revised State Constitution, the Lumbee enjoyed many of same rights as Whites and were even welcome in their schools. After this time, however, the Lumbee were forbidden from White schools. They refused to attend Black schools, however, and many received no formal schooling at all until the first all-Indian schools were established in 1885 after intense lobbying by the Lumbee. Similarly, when the Lumbee were forced out of White churches in the post-Civil War era, they founded their own churches rather than form churches with Blacks.

At the same time that the Lumbee have struggled against the dominant bi-racial classification system, they have also struggled to be recognized as an authentic Indian group. These efforts have been hampered by the dominant culture's belief that the Lumbee cannot constitute a separate tribe, since 'authentic' tribal groups must be of homogeneous rather than multi-tribal origin. In addition there is the belief that the Lumbee cannot be 'real Indians' at all, since many Lumbee have White and Black ancestry and since they have long engaged in 'White' cultural practices (e.g. speaking English, owning their own land) rather than practices more in line with popular stereotypes about American Indians — for example, living on reservations and speaking ancestral Native American languages.

Ironically, as part of their struggle to achieve recognition, the Lumbee have sometimes conformed to Western stereotypes. For example, many Lumbee submitted to the blood tests and skull measurements of a government-appointed physical anthropologist who came to Robeson County in the 1930s to obtain 'scientific proof' of the Lumbees' Indianness, or lack thereof. In addition, in recent

years the Lumbee have adopted a number of stereotypical 'Indian' practices such as holding pow-wows and wearing feathered regalia, even though most of these practices are not part of their own cultural heritage but rather derive from the traditional practices of other Indian groups, often of the U.S. South-West. Such adoptions (and adaptations) have been undertaken by many Native American groups in the eastern U.S. at various points in the last century (Clifford 1988), partly in recognition of outsiders' beliefs regarding 'authentic' Native American behaviors, and partly in these groups' continued efforts to refine their own inner sense of cultural identity. It is important to note that such adaptations do not lessen the Lumbees' tribal integrity, since it is only from a Western perspective that syncretism and dynamism in Native American and other 'exotic' peoples are seen as signs of 'impurity' rather than of the adaptability necessary for any cultural group's continued survival in an ever-changing environment (Clifford 1988; Maynor 1999).

The Lumbee were officially recognized at the state level in 1953. In 1956, they received limited Federal recognition as a Native American group; however, they were denied the entitlements usually awarded to fully recognized tribes, such as land and services. Today, the Lumbee continue to struggle for full Federal recognition, as well as for recognition and respect on the local level, where they are still often considered to be 'mixed' rather than 'true Indian'.

The Lumbee and indeed all county residents also continue to struggle with the ethnic divisiveness that has long characterized the county. Whites, Blacks and Lumbees attended separate schools until the early 1970s, when government mandate forced the integration of county schools. In addition, Blacks and Lumbees have historically been denied full participation in local government as well as equal economic opportunity with Whites. Despite today's legal sanctions against discrimination and segregation, *de facto* segregation persists in Robeson County communities and schools. For example: county high schools continue the local practice of electing three homecoming queens per year, one from each of the long-standing ethnic groups; churches remain segregated; and residents engage in social functions primarily with members of their own ethnic group.

3. THE LUMBEE DIALECT

The Lumbee's sense of ethnic uniqueness is reflected in, and also partly constituted by, the distinctive dialect that has emerged during their centuries of contact with English speakers. This language variety contains a few features not found in neighboring varieties associated with Whites and African Americans, including the use of *I'm* in present perfect contexts, as in *I'm forgot* for 'I have forgotten' (Wolfram 1996), and the use of certain lexical items, such as *toten* for 'omen or portent' and *ellick* for 'cup of coffee' (Locklear, Schilling-Estes, Wolfram and Dannenberg 1996). Other features are shared among county ethnic groups but display unique patterning among the Lumbee. For example, whereas the Lumbee share the use of finite *be* (e.g. *He be talking all the time*) with neighboring speakers

of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), only in Lumbee English can the form occur with an inflectional *-s* (e.g. *He bes talking*) and in certain non-habitual contexts (e.g. *I might be lost some inches* 'I might have lost some inches') (Dannenbergh and Wolfram 1998). In addition, whereas all three groups share the widespread Southern feature of monophthongal/ay/ (as in [ra:d] for *ride* or [ra:t] for *right*), the Lumbee show far lower usage levels than Robeson County Whites and slightly lower usage levels than county African Americans (Schilling-Estes 2000). The Lumbee also show qualitative as well as quantitative phonological distinctiveness. For example, although monophthongal/ay/ is more highly favored before voiced obstruents (as in [ra:d] for *ride*) than voiceless (e.g. [ra:t] for *right*) among county Whites and African Americans, the monophthongal variant in Lumbee English is more highly favored in pre-voiceless than pre-voiced contexts (Schilling-Estes 2000).

4. THE INTERVIEW

The sociolinguistic interview that forms the focus of this investigation takes place between two young adult males, a Lumbee university student (the interviewee) and an African American (the interviewer) who attends the same university. The African American is from a small city on the North Carolina coast, but he has spent considerable time in Robeson County, as he has family connections there. In addition, as mentioned above, he self-identifies as part Cherokee Indian. For the purposes of this investigation, I refer to the Lumbee as Lou and the African American as Alex. Lou is in his third year of undergraduate study at the university, majoring in history, while Alex is a graduate student in the English department. The two met at the university a couple of years before the interview takes place, when Alex was attending undergraduate school there. They lived in the same dormitory, became good friends, and share many friends in common. The interview lasts approximately an hour and 15 minutes; I analyze all but the last few minutes, which are on a separate tape from the bulk of the interview.

As a starting point for this investigation, I divided the interview into several sections and subsections based on topic, since topic has been shown to play a large role in stylistic variation (e.g. Coupland 1980; Bell 1984; Rickford and McNair Knox 1994; Bell 2001; Labov 2001). As we will see, though, topic alone cannot account for all stylistic variation, and we will also have to consider such matters as speakers' attitudes toward their topics and toward each other, as well as more 'mechanical' matters such as their ability to produce particular linguistic forms. The topic-based sections of the interview are as follows:

A. Race Relations

1. Race relations in Robeson County in general (7 minutes, 8 seconds)
2. Race relations in Robeson County during the Civil War (3:15)
3. Race-related issues in (then) current politics (1:46)

B. Family and Friends

1. Lou's family (4:21)
2. Friends at the university (20:45)

C. Race Relations

1. Race relations in Robeson County (2:55)
2. Race relations during the Civil War (2:57)
3. Race relations in the South in general (2:16)
4. Race relations on a national and global level (11:31)

Overall, the interview has more of the character of a casual conversation between friends than a typical sociolinguistic interview between people not previously acquainted. Nearly half the interview consists of the extended discussion of friends, even though Alex's ostensible purpose is to discuss Robeson County, since this is the focus of the research project in which he is involved. In addition, only the very first section, in which the two discuss race relations in Robeson County, has anything of an 'interview-like' feel to it, in the sense that it is dominated by question/answer pairs, with the interviewer asking short questions and the interviewee giving extended replies. Even here, though, the conversation is far less formal than at the outset of many sociolinguistic interviews, as evidenced, for example, in the fact that the interviewer, Alex, feels free to issue a couple of challenges to Lou, who responds readily rather than indicating any sort of offense or awkwardness.

5. THE FEATURES EXAMINED

The phonological and morphosyntactic features examined in the speech of the two interlocutors are:

1. postvocalic *r*-lessness (i.e. *r* vocalization; e.g. [fi^ɹ] 'fear')
2. monophthongal/ay/(e.g. [ra:d] 'ride')
3. third-person singular -s absence (e.g. *He like ice cream*)
4. copula deletion (e.g. *He a nice guy*)
5. habitual *be* (e.g. *John always be working late*)
6. non-standard regularization patterns for past tense *be* (e.g. *They was/n't there, She were/n't home*)

Each of the features has ethnic and/or regional group associations. Postvocalic *r*-lessness and monophthongal/ay/are well-known features of AAVE (e.g. Rickford 1999) and also carry connotations of Southern American regionality, though *r*-lessness has been receding for some time in this region, especially among Whites (e.g. Downes 1998). In addition, monophthongal /ay/ patterns differently for Southern Whites than for African Americans, since the former group shows monophthongization before both voiced and voiceless obstruents (e.g. [ra:d] *ride*

and [ra:t] *right*), while the latter tends to confine monophthongization to pre-voiced environments (e.g. [ra:d] *ride*) (e.g. Rickford 1999). Third-person singular *-s* absence, copula deletion, and habitual *be* are also well-known features of AAVE, and speakers of AAVE show high usage levels for the regularization of past *be* to *was/wasn't*, as in *They was home* or *You wasn't there* (e.g. Rickford 1999).

The wider ethnicity-based patterns for these features are reflected in their inter-ethnic patterning in Robeson County. Robeson County African Americans show high usage levels for *r*-lessness, copula deletion (Dannenberg 2002), and habitual *be* (Dannenberg and Wolfram 1998) *vis-à-vis* county Whites and Lumbee, and, in addition, they show substantial levels for monophthongal /ay/, especially in pre-voiced contexts (Schilling-Estes 2000). They also show high levels for regularization of past *be* to *was*; the picture for regularization to *wasn't* in negative contexts is somewhat complicated by their high usage levels for a local variant *wont* [wont] (also used by county Whites), whose underlying form is unclear (Wolfram and Sellers 1999). In addition, impressionistic observation suggests that third-person singular *-s* absence is largely confined to African Americans in Robeson County, as in the South and the U.S. in general.

The Lumbee show distinctive, intermediate usage levels for *r*-lessness *vis-à-vis* county Whites and African Americans, though younger Lumbee seem to be increasing their usage levels for postvocalic *r*, along with county Whites (Miller 1996; Dannenberg 1998). In addition, as mentioned above, the Lumbee show distinguishing patterns for /ay/ and habitual *be*. Like county African Americans, the Lumbee show high levels of regularization to *was* in affirmative contexts; however, they are the only county ethnic group to show appreciable levels of regularization of past *be* to *weren't* in negative contexts (e.g. *She weren't there*, *It weren't me*), with practically no use of the *wont* variant (Wolfram and Sellers 1999). An outline showing relative usage levels for the six features in different ethnic groups on both a national/regional and more local level is given in Table 1.

I examined the quantitative patterning of the two phonological features, *r*-lessness and monophthongal /ay/, in each section of the interview in the speech of each interlocutor. Because morphosyntactic variables occur less frequently than phonological ones, I was not able to go into this level of quantitative detail for the other features. I calculated usage levels for third-person singular *-s* absence and copula deletion in each of the three main sections (A, B, and C), but only for Alex, since Lou uses hardly any of the morphosyntactic features associated with AAVE. Habitual *be* occurs too infrequently here for quantitative analysis, while regularized past *be* was quantified only in terms of overall usage levels in the interview as a whole, rather than on a section-by-section basis. Despite the difficulty in quantifying usage patterns for the morphosyntactic features, they are a vital part of the current analysis, since their qualitative patterning in unfolding discourse, and their relation to other features (including segmental, discursal, lexical, and broader language features), lend valuable insight into the interlocutors' positioning with respect to ethnic group and to each other.

Table 1: Relative usage levels for six features in three ethnic groups

	General General AAVE	General Southern White	Robeson County AAVE	Robeson County White	Robeson County Lumbee
Post-vocalic <i>r</i> -lessness	+	+ in past; currently declining	+	(+); declining	(+); declining
Monophthongal/ay/ pre-voiced	+	+	+	+	+
pre-voiceless	-	(+)	-	+	+
3rd singular -s absence	+	-	+	-	-
Copula deletion	+	-	+	-	-
Finite <i>be</i>	+	-	+	-	+
Finite <i>bes</i>	-	-	-	-	+
Regularization to <i>was</i>	+	+	+	(+)	+
Regularization to <i>wasn't</i>	+	+	?	?	(+)
Regularization to <i>weren't</i>	-	-	?	?	+

+ = relatively high levels; (+) = lower levels; - = low/negligible levels

6. QUANTITATIVE PATTERNS

Figures for *r*-lessness and monophthongal/ay/in each section of the interview for each interlocutor are shown in Tables 2 and 3 and Figures 2 and 3. Usage levels for third-person singular -s absence and copula deletion for Alex (the only one to show substantial usage levels for these features) in the three main sections of the interview (Sections A, B, and C) are given in Table 4 and Figure 4. Overall levels

Table 2: *R*-lessness in Lou's and Alex's speech across the interview

	Lou		Alex	
	N	%	N	%
Race relations in RC	13/92	14.1	14/31	45.2
Civil War	22/55	40.0	1/6	16.7
Current politics	3/18	16.7	7/23	30.4
Lou's family	12/29	41.4	9/22	40.9
Friends at university	25/82	30.5	43/122	35.2
Race relations in RC 2	7/28	25.0	8/12	66.7
Civil War 2	17/28	60.7	8/18	44.4
Southern race relations	5/25	20.0	11/27	40.7
Global race relations	22/63	34.9	13/43	30.2

Table 3: Monophthongal/ay/across the interview

	Lou		Alex	
	N	%	N	%
Race relations in RC	15/29	34.5	13/21	14.3
Civil War	8/13	76.9	1/5	20.0
Current politics	3/5	60.0	12/17	70.6
Lou's family	4/14	28.6	6/9	66.7
Friends at university	15/28	53.6	34/69	49.3
Race relations in RC 2	6/9	66.7	8/12	66.7
Civil War 2	5/7	71.4	12/24	50.0
Southern race relations	4/9	44.4	7/10	70.0
Global race relations	19/34	44.1	15/27	55.6

for regularized past *be* across the entire interview for Alex are given in Table 5; the overall levels for Lou are given in Table 6. The shaded boxes in Tables 5 and 6 indicate environments for potential regularization. Following standard variationist procedure, percentage levels are based on actual out of potential number of occurrences of each feature examined.⁵

For the most part, usage levels are typical, in that Alex shows higher levels of the features associated with AAVE, while Lou shows lower usage levels for the two

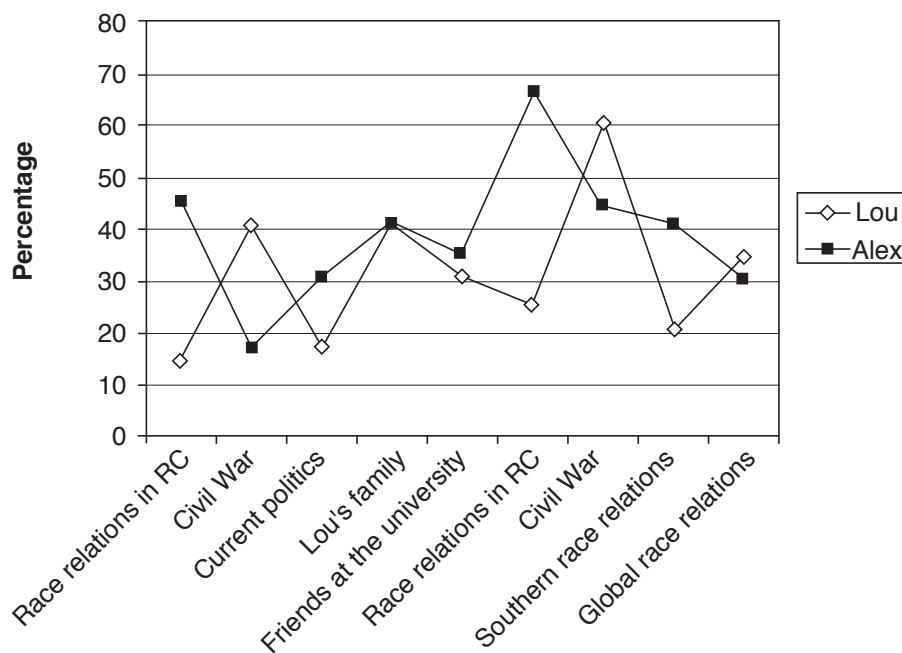


Figure 2: Usage levels for *r*-lessness across the interview

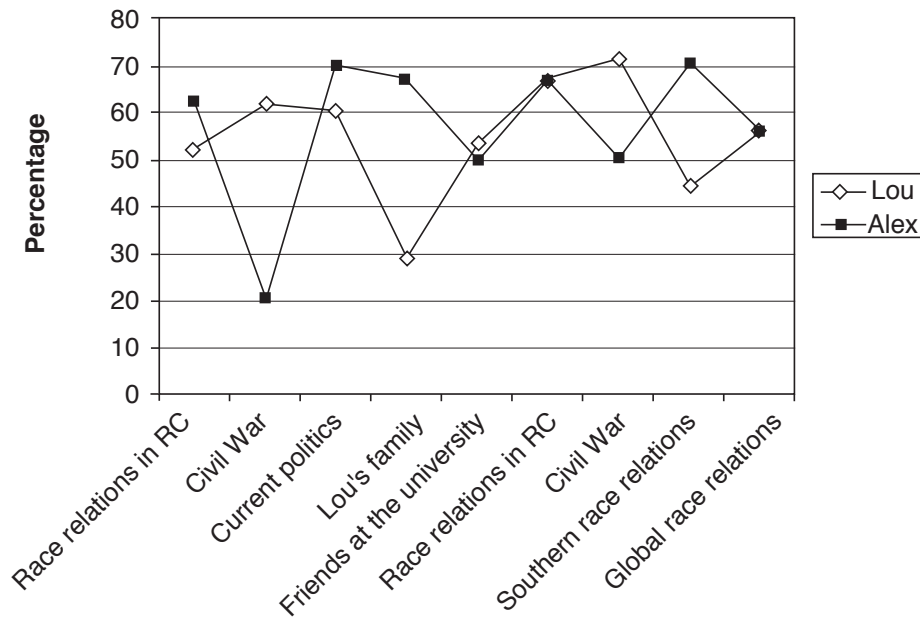


Figure 3: Usage levels for monophthongal/ay/ across the interview

phonological features in Figures 2 and 3 (aligning him with other Robeson County Lumbee) and practically no use of third-person singular *-s* absence or copula deletion. In addition, both show expected ethnicity-based patterns in terms of regularized past *be*, with Alex showing much higher usage levels for regularization to *was/wasn't* (Table 5), as in *You was home* or *They wasn't there*, than Lou, who shows moderate levels of regularization to *was* but no regularization to *wasn't* (and, in fact, no *wasn't* at all), instead showing 100 percent *weren't* for past *be* (e.g. *You weren't home*; *I weren't there*). Further, Alex and Lou both show typical patterns for monophthongal/ay/, not only in terms of overall usage levels, but also in terms of internal linguistic constraints: overall, Alex shows 83 percent/ay/monophthongization before voiced obstruents and only 5 percent in pre-voiceless contexts, while Lou shows the unusual Lumbee pattern in which the monophthongal variant is more highly favored in pre-voiceless than pre-voiced position. (Overall,

Table 4: Third-person singular *-s* absence and copula deletion in Alex's speech across the interview

	3rd singular <i>-s</i> absence		Copula deletion	
	N	%	N	%
Race relations 1	2/3	66.6	5/9	55.6
Family and friends	13/24	54.2	12/26	46.2
Race relations 2	6/12	50.0	2/15	13.3

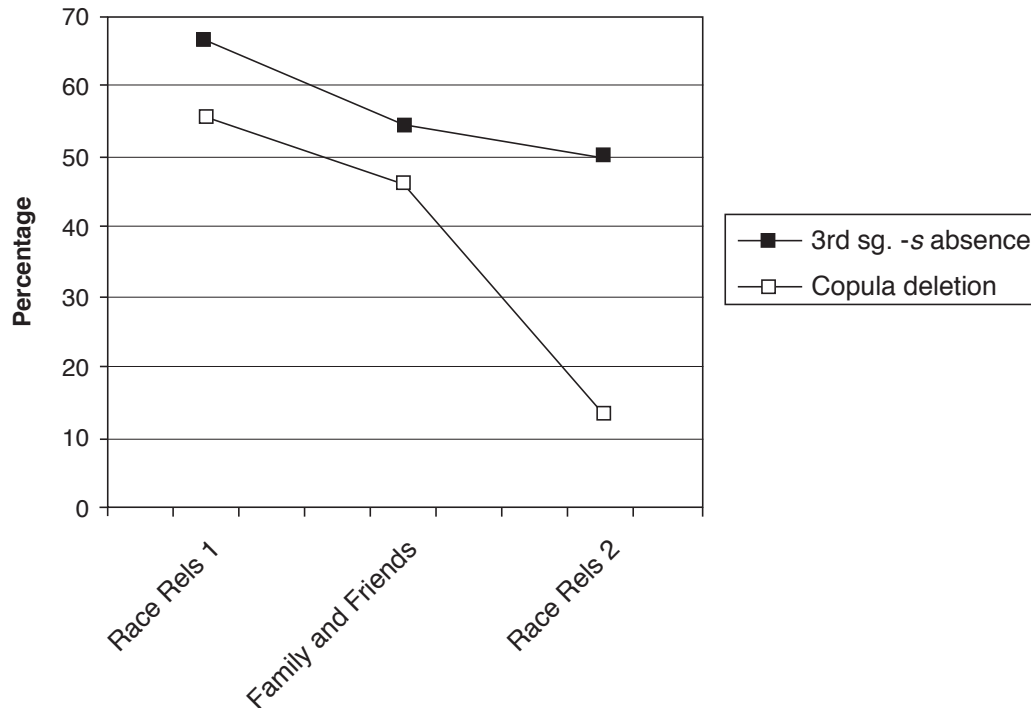


Figure 4: Third-person singular *-s* absence and copula deletion in Alex's speech across the interview

Lou shows 69 percent monophthongization before voiceless obstruents and 45 percent before voiced.)

Despite the fact that the two interlocutors show 'typical' overall patterns, closer examination of their speech patterns in the different topical sections demonstrates that they are not merely 'automata' who simply produce the linguistic forms expected of the ethnic groups with which they are most closely associated (e.g. Giles and Smith 1979: 45–65; Coupland 1985). There is much variability in *r*-lessness and /ay/monophthongization across the different sections, and in addition, Alex shows variable usage levels for third-person singular *-s* absence and copula deletion. At first glance, this topic-based variation is not too surprising; what is more surprising is the exact nature of the shifts in usage level from section to section, as well as the fact that the two interlocutors don't always differ from each other by a consistent amount, or in the same direction.

7. EMPHASIZING ETHNIC DISTINCTIVENESS THROUGH LINGUISTIC DISTANCE

The two show considerably more distance in usage levels for *r*-lessness in the two sections on race relations (Sections A and C) than in the section on family and friends (B). In addition, they show greater distance in usage levels for monophthongal/ay/in the first section on race relations than in later sections.

Table 5: Overall past *be* regularization patterns for Alex (shaded cells = regularized forms)

Singular		Plural	
I was	10	we was	
I were		we were	2
you was	6	you was	
you were	3	you were	2
NP		NP	
the dog was	12	the dogs was	2
the dog were		the dogs were	3
3rd sg pro		3rd pl pro	
she was	32	they was	
she were	1	they were	9
3rd sg ext		3rd pl ext	
there was a dog		there was dogs	1
there were a dog		there were dogs	2

Leveled to was: 9/30 = 30%

Leveled to were: 1/55 = 1.8%

Singular		Plural	
I wasn't	4	we wasn't	
I weren't		we weren't	
you wasn't	2	you (pl) wasn't	
you weren't	1	you (pl) weren't	
NP		NP	
the dog wasn't	1	the dogs wasn't	
the dog weren't		the dogs weren't	
3rd sg pro		3rd pl pro	
she wasn't	6	they wasn't	1
she weren't		they weren't	1
3rd sg ext		3rd pl ext	
there wasn't a dog	4	there wasn't dogs	2
there weren't a dog		there weren't dogs	

Leveled to wasn't: 5/7 = 71.4%

Leveled to weren't: 0/15 = 0%

Further, there is more distance in terms of the morphosyntactic features of third-person singular *-s* absence and copula deletion in the first section on race relations than in other sections, as evidenced in Alex's greater usage levels for the features, largely absent from Lou's speech, in Section A.

Table 6: Overall past *be* regularization patterns for Lou (shaded cells = regularized forms)

Singular		Plural	
I was	8	we was	1
I were		we were	
you was		you was	
you were		you were	
NP		NP	
the dog was	28	the dogs was	2
the dog were		the dogs were	2
3rd sg pro		3rd pl pro	
she was	43	they was	3
she were		they were	34
3rd sg ext		3rd pl ext	
there was a dog	2	there was dogs	
there were a dog		there were dogs	1

Leveled to was: 6/43 = 14%

Leveled to were: 0/81 = 0%

Singular		Plural	
I wasn't		we wasn't	
I weren't	1	we weren't	
you wasn't		you (pl) wasn't	
you weren't		you (pl) weren't	
NP		NP	
the dog wasn't		the dogs wasn't	
the dog weren't		the dogs weren't	3
3rd sg pro		3rd pl pro	
she wasn't		they wasn't	
she weren't	6	they weren't	2
3rd sg ext		3rd pl ext	
there wasn't a dog		there wasn't dogs	
there weren't a dog		there weren't dogs	

Leveled to wasn't: 0/5 = 0%

Leveled to weren't: 7/7 = 100%

One explanation for the linguistic distance in the sections on race relations is that considerations of ethnic group membership may be more salient when the two are talking directly about the subject than when talking about family and friends, at which point considerations of personal friendship are uppermost. Hence, in the sections on race relations, each interlocutor emphasizes his

own in-group belonging by highlighting his ethnolinguistic distance from his interlocutor. Conversely, in the sections on family and friends, the two downplay the ethnic group component of their identities by reducing their linguistic differences.

Ethnic distance is also emphasized more explicitly in the first section on race relations, in the content of the discussion. For example, in this section the two make several direct statements about qualities they perceive to be characteristic of the other's ethnic group (and probably also perceive as negative), as for example, in Extracts 1 and 2 below:

Extract 1⁶

L: So basically what you've got is a tri[a¹]-racial county.

A: Mmhmm.

L: You know, you got Indians on one si[a:]de who just want to be Indians, they don't want to fool with nobody else

A: Mmhmm.

L: at ti[a:]mes.

A: Mmhmm.

L: **You got Blacks that are[r] really unor[r]gan[a:]zed.**

Extract 2

L: The laws pretty much ha—have done this (denied power) to the, to the, to the Blacks in the situation they're[r] in in Robeson County,

A: Mmhmm.

L: where[r] the Indians, they didn't fool with them, they were[r] scar[r]ed of them.

A: **They thought you all were[r] crazy.**

In addition, Alex refers to the Native Americans by an old-fashioned, derogatory term, 'Injuns', in Extract 3:

Extract 3

L: The Home Guar[r]d, the people that stayed there[Ø] (during the Civil War) didn't fi[a:]ght none, they were[r] supposed to or[r]gani[a:]ze coastal for[r]ts. One of them was For[r]t Fisher[r], over[r] there[r] in Wilmington (a coastal North Carolina town).

A: Mmhmm.

L: So the Home Guar[r]d around Lumber[r]ton (a Robeson County town) and around that area said, 'Hey. We got Indians here[Ø] and we got Blacks. They're[r] pretty much free.'

A: **They ain't say 'Indians,' they said 'Injuns.'**

In addition to negative comments and insulting terminology, the two also indicate ethnic division when discussing race relations through overt statements of distance between the two ethnic groups, for example, in Lou's comments in Extract 4:

Extract 4

A: So do the Indians down there[Ø] hate Whi[a¹]te people? Do they—do they hate the Whi[a¹]te man?

L: They'll—they'll wor[r]k with him. But there[r]'s not a basic.. uh

A: They don't trust [him.

L: [harmony. No.

A: They don't trust him.

L: They don't trust him.

A: They trust Blacks quicker[r] than they will Whi[a¹]tes, though.

L: **At the same ti[a:]me, they—they li[a¹]ke to fi[a¹]ght with Blacks,** I don't know if it's a trust factor, see, the, the, the, the Blacks don't have any power.

Finally, ethnic distance is indicated in topic structure and topic control, as for example, when Alex introduces the topic of his Cherokee ancestry, and Lou refuses to pick up on it, abruptly changing the subject instead, as shown in Extract 5:

Extract 5

A: But see, there[Ø] was Indians that was—that always hung around. I mean, my granddaddy and them, they al—always hung around.

L: Yeah, I, [I

A: [And, and, and we even mixed with some of them, you know? And I've got two of them in my, in my, in my blood li[a:]ne, so.

L: **Yeah, it's, it's, it's a lot of, a lot of mixing went on. Uh, as far[r] as history goes, I think another[r].. real important one (event) was dur[Ø]ing the Civil War[r].**

(Discussion of race relations during the Civil War follows.)

8. THE MULTILEVELED NATURE OF ETHNICITY: DISTANCE, CLOSENESS, AND DEPERSONALIZATION

The second section on race relations (Section C) suggests that not only is identity multifaceted, in that group versus interpersonal considerations may play greater or lesser roles in one's conceptualization and display of self at different times, but a single component of identity, such as ethnic group membership, may be highly complex as well. For example, one's conceptualization of ethnic identity may be quite different when viewed on a personal, local level than from a more global, more abstract perspective. In addition, a comparison of the linguistic patterns of the two interlocutors in the two sections on race relations indicates that while stylistic variation may be influenced by the topic of conversation, it is not wholly determined by it, and we need to consider other factors, such as speakers' attitudes toward their topics and toward each other, as well.

For most of the second section on race relations (Section C), the two interlocutors are linguistically quite distant in terms of their usage levels for *r*-lessness, as in the initial discussion. Similarly, although their usage levels for

monophthongal/ay/in this section are a bit more closely aligned, they show greatest difference here in terms of the variant's internal linguistic conditioning, since it is in this section that Lou shows his highest usage levels for the monophthongal variant in pre-voiceless position (76 percent in this section versus 52 percent in Section A and 60 percent in Section B), in contrast to Alex's steady avoidance of the monophthongal form before voiceless obstruents. In addition, the two also indicate their ethnic distance from one another in terms of content. For example, Alex reintroduces the topic of race relations after the lengthy discussion of friends by very abruptly bringing up the racially charged topic of lynching, demanding to know whether Indians in Robeson County were ever subject to the same harsh treatment Blacks had to endure. This is shown in Extract 6:

Extract 6

- A: (Watching Lou eating an orange) Gimme—what, you got some more[r] orange—what you got, a orange?
 L: Yeah, you want a piece of it? It's not sweet.
 A: **So uh, did—did they ever[r] do any lynching down there[Ø]?**
 L: No.
 A: Really? Because they always, I mean
 L: It's been.
 A: have they ever[Ø] lynched.. Indians. That's what I want to know, because they always lynched the Blacks.
 L: Has they always?
 A: Have—have they, have they ever[Ø] lynched Indians?

In addition, the discussion of global race relations (Section C3) begins in disagreement over whether Martin Luther King, Jr.'s non-violent methods should be favored over more violent approaches to achieving civil equity, as encapsulated in the discussion in Extract 7:

Extract 7

- L: He, he (Martin Luther King, Jr.) used the same technique as Ghandi too, as well, um. He said, uh, 'You come against us with vi[a:]olence.. We ain't gonn—we ain't gonna fi[a¹]ght.'
 A: [But, Lou, but Lou
 L: [Non-vi[a:]olence is the only way to win [things.
 A: [Malcolm X said that's not a man. That is not a man. It is not a man.. that will let another[Ø] man put a dog on his children and not fi[a¹]ght back.
 L: Yeah.
 A: That's not a man that will let somebody come in his house and take his son and lynch him. He said—Malcolm X said that wasn't a man.

Despite the linguistic distance that characterizes much of Section C, the two are more closely aligned initially in their usage levels for monophthongal/ay/than in

the first section on race relations; in addition, Alex shows increasing linguistic alignment with Lou with respect to third-person singular *-s* absence and copula deletion, since his lowest usage levels for these forms occur in Section C. Further, by the end of the final section on race relations, the distance in terms of *r*-lessness has all but disappeared, and usage levels for monophthongal/ay/have become congruent as well.

The accompanying evidence of referring expressions and wider matters of content, including speakers' changing attitudes toward the content of talk, suggests that the lessening linguistic distance in this section lies in a lessening of the two interlocutors' sense of ethnic distance as the section progresses, brought about by a lessened focus on personal, local, ethnic relations in favor of a more global perspective.

Throughout the first section on race relations and much of the second section on this topic, the two indicate through their choice of referring expressions that they are viewing considerations of ethnic identity on a personal level. Hence, for example, both make mention of their family connections in Robeson County, and Lou, in bringing up general characteristics of Indians or African Americans, uses pronouns such as *we* or *I* in referring to the Lumbee, and *you* when referring to African Americans, rather than the less personal *they*. This is illustrated in Extracts 8 and 9, from the second section on race relations:

Extract 8

- L: Indians are a very lone breed.
 A: Mmhmm.
 L: I do myself. I don't stick with other[Ø] Indians.
 A: Mmhmm.
 L: Because I'm, you know, I'm just a lone per[r]son.

Extract 9

- L: Now you know as far[r] as I do, you know, my i[a¹]deas.. Whi[a:]te people's i[a¹]deas, [and your[Ø] i[a¹]deas,
 A: [Mmhmm.
 L: and my people don't mix.

As the last section of the interview progresses, however, the two indicate less personal connection to the ethnic groups with which they are affiliated. They cease using *we* and *I* to refer to these groups and their connection to them, instead using terms like 'Blacks', 'Indians', and *they*. This decreasing personalization is accompanied by increasing alignment with respect to topic. Thus, although the discussion of Martin Luther King begins in disagreement, the argument does not last long and the two quickly reach agreement that King's non-violent methods are the more effective after all. In addition, they agree that King increased his effectiveness by making Civil Rights a spiritual as well as a political issue, as illustrated in Extract 10:

Extract 10

L: I mean, it just, it just, it just seems to me like Ghandi, like Mar[Ø]tin Luther[n.t.] King, they were just geniuses in that they could take such a small matter[r] and make it into a big thing, um. . . . He just took something to a spiritual level and then everybody said, 'Wait! Spiritual?'

A: Mmhmm. [Now, now

L: ['See, wait a minute!'

A: now let me tell you my theory, why[a¹] I think he took it to a spiritual level, he took it to a spiritual level, because.. at the spiritual level.. there[Ø] is no cover[r]. You can't hi[a:]de.. on the spiritual level if you claim to be a Christian nation.

Most likely, the decreasing personalization of the second section on race relations is accompanied by decreasing divisiveness because it is only through a broadened perspective on ethnic identity and ethnic relations that the two can move past the ethnic strife that has long pervaded Robeson County (and indeed the American South in general) to embrace (at least overtly) the view that people of all ethnic backgrounds deserve equal treatment.

9. EMPHASIZING INTERPERSONAL CONNECTION: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE CONVERGENCE

As noted above, the section on family and friends (Section B) is characterized by greater linguistic congruence than are the sections on race relations, again most likely because considerations of personal friendship are more prominent here than in the sections on race relations. This suggestion receives support on the semantic level, in both broad and narrower terms. The section on Lou's family begins when Alex suddenly changes the subject from politics (about which the two had been arguing) to Lou's brother, who had been killed in a motorcycle accident several years ago. However, Alex had been under the impression that the accident took place quite a long time ago, and the discussion becomes awkward as he comes to the realization that he has inadvertently brought up a touchy subject. The discussion is transcribed in Extract 11; notice, in particular, lines 31–35, where the awkwardness is at its height:

Extract 11

1. A: Your[r] brother[Ø], tell me about your[r] brother[r].
2. L: My brother[r]?
3. A: Yeah, the one got killed. Didn't you say—how you say—you say he was on a
4. hor[r]se and he got hit by a car[r] or something?
5. L: No, he was on a motor[r]cy[I]cle.⁷
6. A: And ran into a hor[r]se?
7. L: Ran into a hor[r]se.
8. A: Oh, OK.

9. L: Ran [into a hor[r]se.
 10. A: [How old was he?
 11. L: He was eighteen.
 12. A: Really?
 13. L: It was sad.
 14. A: Was it? You can still remember[Ø] that? How old were[r] you when that happened?
 15. L: I was old. I was sixteen [fifteen.
 16. A: [Was you? Uh huh.
 17. L: I mean it just..
 18. A: I can [imagine.
 19. L: [a big tragedy, man. You couldn't really blame as many people as, you know.
 20. A: Were[r] y—was your daddy and mama like angry?
 21. L: No.
 22. A: Oh, [really?
 23. L: [They were[r] just.. [gone.
 24. A: [Just sad. Uh huh.
 25. L: And then—they were[r]n't never[r] the same after[r] that.
 26. A: They were[r]n't?
 27. L: Not after[Ø] you lose [a chi[a:]ld.
 28. A: [They still—they've still changed? I mean, you can still,
 29. you still see they difference?
 30. L: Yeah.
 31. A: **And that's been how many year[Ø]s now?**
 32. L: **That's been, uh, seven, three, six year[r]s.**
 33. A: **Lou, that wadn't too long ago. I thought you was—that was something**
 34. **happened when you was a little kid or something.**
 35. L: No::.
 36. A: Really? And what was his n—what was his name?
 37. L: G--.
 38. A: G--.
 39. L: O--[. (surname)
 40. A: [You know my nephew is named G--?

Despite a lack of overt apology, the two manage to quickly smooth over the awkwardness, partly through rapidly changing the subject and perhaps partly through linguistic congruence with respect to *r*-lessness. (The two are not as linguistically similar here with respect to monophthongal /ay/, with Lou showing uncharacteristically low levels of the monophthongal variant and Alex showing typically high levels. However, this is probably due to internal linguistic rather than social/stylistic considerations: Lou's speech in this section contains the lowest percentage of favoring contexts for /ay/ monophthongization — i.e. prevoiceless /ay/, in Lou's dialect — of any of the sections, at 14 percent.)⁸

Also indicative of the lessened importance of ethnic division in the section on family and friends *vis-à-vis* the first section on race relations is the fact that the two do not talk about, or even mention, the ethnic identity of any of the wide range of friends and acquaintances they discuss in the section on friends, except for one brief question by Alex about a boy called Big Mike, shown in Extract 12:

Extract 12

- L: Now Big Mi[a:]ke in there[r] when he gets drunk.. Alex, the boy wants to fi[a¹]ght!
 [They went
 A: [Really?
 L: they went down to E.C.U. (East Carolina University). You know what them boys was doing [when they got drunk?
 A: [What?
 L: They got to cuttin' tire[a:r]s.
 A: Cutting tire[a¹r]s?
 L: Cutting people's tire[a:r]s. I tell you now, they get vi[a:]olent, Alex!
 A: (Laughter) Is he Indian?

In addition to calling up the divisive topic of ethnic identity, Alex's question also carries undertones of racial prejudice against the Lumbee, who are sometimes referred to by racist non-Lumbee as a violent people, and Lou dismisses it quickly, changing the subject back to a friend they had been discussing earlier and returning the conversation to its friendly footing. This is shown in Extract 13:

Extract 13

- L: I don't know what he is, he's crazy. Uh.. And that's what I'm saying, why[a¹] I miss F---, because F---, F--- wouldn't have that now.

In addition to the semantic content of talk, we can turn to discourse-level features and the discursal organization of the talk as further evidence that considerations of interpersonal friendship are more important in Section B than are intergroup distinctions. Hence, for example, we find frequent use of discourse-level features indicative of high involvement with one's interlocutor (e.g. *y'know*, *I mean*; see Schiffrin 1987), as well as frequent direct address (i.e. the two often call each other by name and various nicknames), in contrast with the near-total absence of direct address in the first section on race relations. Further, although Lou's usage levels for morphosyntactic features associated with AAVE are too low in this interview for meaningful quantification, the placement of these features in discourse seems highly meaningful. For example, not only does one of Lou's two cases of third-person singular *-s* absence occur in the section on friends, but it echoes Alex's use of the form, as illustrated in Extract 14:

Extract 14

L: Well, I mean.. I mean, he has found something that **he does** that I don't believe **nobody else does** better[r], and that's the secret to li[a:]fe.

A: Uh huh.

L: I mean, and that's the secret to a successful one.

A: Fi[a:]nd something that **nobody else do**?

L: **Nobody else do** better.

Further, there are only three tokens of habitual *be* in the entire interview (none of which occurs with an -s ending), and they all occur in quick succession, again in the section on friends. Interestingly, this time it is Lou rather than Alex who introduces the form and Alex who picks up on it. This is illustrated in Extract 15, an extract from their discussion of a mutual friend who had joined a cult:

Extract 15

L: It used to be a old, like, sixties kind of chur[r]ch? But they changed?

A: Uh huh.

L: Jack (term of address), they **be** telling them people some crazy stuff, Alex.

A: How you know that's the one H---'s in?

L: 'Cause, 'cause, uh, M--- told me to watch it (a TV special on cults).

A: You joking. What's the name of it? You don't know what the name of it is? What—what they—what—what they **be** telling them?

L: They **be** telling them stuff like, uh, you got to get twenty member[Ø]s by the ti[a:]me you get in here[Ø]. You get settled, then you got to get twenty member[r]s or you can't stay in this church[n.t.].

In addition to Lou's use of AAVE features in the section on friends, we also find Alex echoing Lou in the use of certain features that are *not* associated with AAVE. For example, even though Alex shows high usage levels for third-person singular -s absence in the section on friends (54 percent; see Figure 4), he still occasionally uses -s forms at certain strategic points. For example, in the excerpt in Extract 16, he uses an -s form in completing Lou's thought; while in Extract 17, he self-corrects to an -s form, suggesting an effort (though not necessarily conscious) to overcome his propensity toward -s deletion in order to achieve congruence with Lou's usages.

Extract 16

L: But you know, um, there[Ø]'s a old saying that goes.. Fondness—I mean, no, not fondness, no, separation? Being away from somebody?

A: **Makes** the hear[r]t [grow fonder[r].]

L: [grow fonder[r].]

A: Not for me.

Extract 17

A: See, I don't know. That stuff (marijuana), it—it **mess** with you—it **messes** with your[Ø] head so much.

Extract 17 illustrates that even when linguistic convergence is desirable, it isn't always easy, or possible.⁹ This is further illustrated in Alex's usage patterns for past *be*. As noted above, overall, Alex shows the high usage levels for regularized *was/wasn't* (e.g. *You was home; They wasn't there*) characteristic of AAVE. However, there are two cases where he uses *weren't*, perhaps in attempted convergence with Lou, who, as mentioned above, uses only *weren't* for past tense negative *be*. Each of Alex's tokens of *weren't* occurs in a section in which considerations of friendship with Lou are uppermost. One is in the middle of the discussion of friends, in a particularly animated section in which the two are talking about sex. This is illustrated in Extract 18:

Extract 18

A: Said H--- was down there[Ø] having sex with a gir[r]l on the couch in the study lounge. Anybody could walk in, [Lou!

L: [(Laughter)]

A: In the study lounge but that—but **you were[r]n't**—**you wadn't** here[Ø] when, uh, J--- and K--- —yeah **you was**.

Even though Alex uses the *weren't* form once, he self-'corrects' back to *wasn't*, suggesting that it may be linguistically difficult for him to converge with Lou on the *weren't* form. Further, his switch back to his own system for past *be* regularization seems relatively permanent, since he uses *you was* right after he uses *you wasn't*.

The other case in which Alex uses *weren't* is in the discussion of Lou's brother discussed above; this is transcribed in brief in Extract 19. This time, Lou is a little more successful in aligning his usages with Alex's, in that he uses *they weren't* without 'correcting' to *they wasn't* (line 28); however, he returns to regularizing to *was* a few lines later (lines 33–34):

Extract 19

25. L And then—**they were[r]n't** never[r] the same after[r] that.

26. A: **They were[r]n't**?

27. L: Not after[Ø] you lose [a chi[a:]]d.

28. A: [They still—they've still changed? I mean, you can still,
29. you still see they difference?

30. L: Yeah.

31. A: And that's been how many years[Ø] now?

32. L: That's been, uh, seven, three, six year[r]s.

33. A: Lou, **that wadn't** too long ago. I thought **you was**—that was something

34. happened when **you was** a little kid or something.

35. L: No:.

In addition, a few minutes later, Alex seemingly makes another unsuccessful attempt to align his usages with Lou's. This time he regularizes to the *were* form but does so in an affirmative context; and further, he fails to regularize to *weren't* in an immediately following negative tag. This is shown in Extract 20:

Extract 20

A: Oh, **he were**[r] beating on her[Ø] or something, **wadn't he**?

The fact that linguistic convergence may not always be possible, even when desired, provides yet another reason why we cannot simply assume that usage levels (or even usage patterns in unfolding discourse) for features with group associational meanings are directly indicative of speakers' intergroup and interpersonal alliances. Rather, we need to take into account a range of features of different types, including those with interactional and semantic meanings as well as group associational ones, in our search for speakers' meanings.

10. ON THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF THE LINGUISTIC VARIABLE

Now that we have explored some of the factors that may contribute to the two interlocutors' greater linguistic distance in the first section on race relations than in the section on family and friends, as well their lessening linguistic distance in the second section on race relations, it remains to examine Lou's unexpectedly greater usage levels than Alex's for *r*-lessness and monophthongal /ay/ in the two sections on the Civil War, as well as their shifting usage levels for these features in the consistently friendly section on family and friends.

I noted earlier that features with group associational meanings may be associated with more than one group and that *r*-lessness, in addition to its association with African American ethnicity is also associated with Southern American (White) identity. Prior to World War II, it was a marker of prestigious Southern regional speech. Since that time, however, it has fallen out of social favor and is now associated with informal speech and membership in localized, vernacular-speaking Southern communities (e.g. Feagin 1990; Downes 1998). Similarly, monophthongal /ay/ is a stereotypical feature of Southern American speech as well as a hallmark of AAVE. Most likely, it is this association with Southern vernacular identity rather than African American ethnicity that underlies Alex's and Lou's high usage levels for *r*-lessness, and Alex's high levels of monophthongal /ay/, in the section on Lou's family, since this topic pertains to a localized community in the rural South and since the two seem to be seeking psychological closeness rather than distance here, as discussed above. It is not likely that a discussion of Lou's Native American kin in Robeson County would call forth the African American associations of *r*-lessness, or that Alex's awkwardness in the discussion of Lou's brother (see Extract 11 above) would induce Alex to emphasize ethnic division through heightened use of AAVE dialect features. In addition,

most of the section on Lou's family consists of a discussion of the antics Lou's uncle, a colorful figure whom the two discuss in a humorous tone rather than with any sort of divisiveness.¹⁰

In the section on friends at the university, a non-local matter, the two use lower levels of *r*-lessness, and Alex uses less monophthongal /ay/ as well. At first glance, it is tempting to say that their lower usage levels for these vernacular features are due to increased formality occasioned by a shift to a topic often associated with formality (e.g. Bell 1984). However, there are no independent measures by which this section could be characterized as more formal than any other. In fact, it is probably the most relaxed. As mentioned above, this section is characterized by high interactivity, as evidenced in the types and frequency of discourse markers and referring terms used and the placement of morphosyntactic features in talk. In addition, there are several animated narratives in this section, another indicator of informality and high involvement with one's fellow interlocutor (e.g. Labov 1972; Tannen 1989). Further, although the topic is indeed friends at the university they both attend, the two rarely talk about the academic aspects of university life, or about the university at all. Instead, topics such as their friends' romantic lives, personal foibles, and illicit activities (e.g. drug use) constitute the bulk of the section. Thus we see that low usage levels for features typically considered to be non-standard or vernacular are not always indicative of formality, or of increased self-consciousness and corresponding decreased 'naturalness', as those in the Labovian tradition often maintain. Instead, it seems that there are many types of relaxed, 'natural' speech, some of which are characterized by high usage levels for localized features, others of which may show lower levels for such features but display other characteristics of informality such as narratives, direct address, and discourse markers of involvement (e.g. Wolfson 1976; Schilling-Estes 1999; Eckert 2000; Milroy and Gordon 2003: 49–51).

11. PROJECTING PERSONAS IN PERFORMANCE

Just because *r*-lessness today serves as a marker of membership in vernacular communities does not mean that its previous associations have been lost. Hence, it can be used, not only to connote current Southern vernacular culture, but also to evoke the past, including the speech of prestigious Southern Whites of days gone by. It seems to be these associations of *r*-lessness that Lou is drawing upon in the two discussions of the Civil War, where he uncharacteristically shows higher usage levels for this feature (and for monophthongal/ay/) than Alex does. In both these discussions, Lou draws colorful portraits of historical figures and events, descriptions characterized by such features as vivid detail, exaggerated prosodic contours (including exaggerated vowel length), (invented) quotes, and, often, high usage levels for *r*-lessness. For example, in the second section on the Civil War he provides an emotionally charged description of Robert E. Lee, transcribed

in Extract 21, while in the first section on this topic, he 'quotes' the Southern Whites who attempted to round up Indians and Blacks in Robeson County to get them to work for the Confederate cause. This excerpt is transcribed in Extract 22, some of which is repeated from Extract 3 above. Note the use of *r*-lessness throughout Lou's description of Lee in Extract 21 and the concentration of this feature in his invented quotes in Extract 22:

Extract 21

L: Man, he was dashing, you know, he had that black hair[r]. He just rode around on his hor[Ø]se, [he was—he was bad.

A: [Mmhmm.

L: By the end of the war[Ø], which only lasted four[Ø] year[Ø]s, he looked o::ld, man.

A: He was old. He had gray—

L: [Beat do::wn.

A: [had gray—had gray—]

L: [Beat do::wn]

A: had gray hair all on his face and stuff.

L: and he'd—he'd fought for[Ø] so long. I mean, he really did.

A: [Uh huh.

L: [I mean, he really got involved.

Extract 22

L: The Home Guar[r]d, the people that stayed ther[Ø]e didn't fi[a:]ght none, they wer[r]e supposed to or[r]gani[a:]ze coastal for[r]ts. One of them was For[r]t Fisher[r], over ther[r]e in Wilmington.

A: Mmhmm.

L: So the Home Guar[r]d around Lumber[r]ton and around that area said, 'Hey. We got Indians here[Ø] and we got Blacks. They're[r] pretty much free.'

A: They ain't say 'Indians,' they said 'Injuns.'

L: Indians, whatever[r]. They said, 'Hey, we're[Ø] gonna round these boys up'

A: [Mmhmm.

L: ['and we're[Ø] gonna get 'em to go to For[Ø]t Fisher[Ø] and wor[r]k on that fort[Ø] for[Ø] the Confederacy.'

In these two excerpts, despite Lou's use of the vernacular feature of *r*-lessness, he is not being particularly 'natural' or unselfconscious. Rather, his speech is self-consciously performative or 'stylized' (Rampton 1995; Coupland 2001a), as he 'puts on' different personas and adopts their ways of speech (or at least what he imagines them to be). This is particularly evident in the latter excerpt, since the quotes clearly represent the words and viewpoints of others. (For example, the Whites in the quotes are referred to as 'we' rather than 'they', while Native Americans are referred to as 'Indians' rather than 'us', 'my people', 'my ancestors',

or some such expression.) Hence, we see that, just as low usage levels for vernacular features are not always indicative of formality, neither are high levels indicative of a casual, unself-conscious context. In addition, we have seen that, by looking beyond aggregate usage levels for phonological features with group associational meaning(s), we can gain greater understanding of which, if any, of these meanings are being called forth when speakers use them.

12. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I have attempted to show that we can gain insight into why speakers use variable features the way they do, including how they use these features in displaying, shaping, and re-shaping personal, interpersonal and group identity, by considering a range of types of linguistic features from a couple different viewpoints — in particular the broad approach of the quantitative sociolinguist and the in-depth approach of the discourse analyst/interactional sociolinguist. Like other investigations of localized linguistic practice, the current study shows that identity, including ethnic identity, is dynamic and multifaceted and is very much a product of unfolding talk. Hence, we have seen that Lou and Alex each seem to highlight the ethnic components of their identities, and ethnic distance from one another, when talking with each other about race relations. Conversely, they focus more on interpersonal connection and less on ethnic distance in the sections on family and friends. In addition, when their discussions of race relations become impersonal (i.e. when they talk about race relations on a national rather than a local level), they seem able to once again focus on interpersonal connection and shared facets of identity despite the seemingly divisive topic.

Despite their subtle shifts in identity through the course of the interview, Lou and Alex nonetheless retain the relatively fixed ethnic identities of 'Lumbee' and 'African American', respectively, in this particular interaction and in their lives in general. This fixity is reflected in, and partially created by, each interlocutor's overall alignment with the ethnolinguistic patterns associated with his own ethnic group, as shown in previous quantitative studies of aggregate data. Hence, through looking both broadly and deeply, we have gained some understanding of the interplay between creativity and rigidity, or individual agency and established patterns of language use — and established social institutions (cf., e.g. Cameron et al. 1992; Bell 1999; Eckert 2000).

Finally, the analysis demonstrates how profoundly the researcher as interviewer can shape the data being gathered. For example, it is likely that Alex helps frame the initial discussion of race relations as adversarial and the section on family and friends as more cooperative through his changing linguistic usages on the segmental, discursal, and semantic level.

Sociolinguistic researchers increasingly have pointed to the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to language in its social setting. I hope that in this investigation I have further demonstrated the value of

integrating different approaches, as well as demonstrated one of several ways in which this might practically be accomplished.

NOTES

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2. Although my focus here is on the researcher as interviewer, I acknowledge that researchers also shape meanings in their analyses. For example, I choose here to focus on ethnicity-related aspects of identity rather than on any of its many other facets. In addition, since I divide the interview into sections based on topic for the purposes of analysis, 'topic' receives great weight as a factor influencing stylistic variation, when perhaps another factor (e.g. the interlocutors' relative comfort with each other based on how long the interview has been progressing) would emerge as a crucial determinate of variation under a different analysis. I thank an anonymous reviewer for the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* for reminding me of the profound effects of linguistic analysts as well as interviewers.
3. The socio-historical information in this section was drawn from Blu (1980), Dannenberg (2002), Dial and Eliades (1975), Maynor (1999), Sider (1993), Wolfram and Dannenberg (1999), and Wolfram, Dannenberg, Knick and Oxendine (2002), as well as from personal communication with Lumbee historians and members of the Lumbee tribe. Population figures are from the 2000 U.S. Census.
4. I use the term 'Lumbee Indian' instead of 'Lumbee Native American' since the former is the term preferred by the Lumbee. I use 'African American' instead of 'Black' in keeping with previous quantitative studies of Robeson County and many current sociolinguistic studies of the vernacular variety spoken by members of this ethnic group, typically termed 'African American Vernacular English' (AAVE). I use the term 'Black' in discussing the history of Robeson County, since Blacks were not considered to be *bona fide* American citizens for much of that history.
5. Although the numbers are necessarily low (since I focus on a single encounter between two individuals rather than aggregate data from many individuals, as is more typical in variationist work), this does not mean they are insignificant or unimportant: Chi-square tests indicate that Lou's differing usage levels for *r*-lessness are statistically significant both within and across the three main sections of the interview (A, B, and C). The other differences (i.e. Alex's differing usage levels for *r*-lessness; both interlocutors' differing levels for /ay/monophthongization) are not statistically significant. However, as Romaine has pointed out (in a personal communication quoted in Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994), tests of statistical significance indicate only *production*-related differences; they do not indicate whether differences are *perceived* as significant by listeners. Quite short-lived shifts in usage level can carry social meaning; in fact, even a single occurrence of a particular feature can serve to signal a style shift or to mark the speaker as a member of a particular social group (e.g. Arnold et al. 1993; Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994: 268–269; Rampton 1999b: 423–424; Coupland 2001b).

6. Note that brackets indicate overlapping talk or inserted phonetic transcription. Parentheses indicate explanatory material, dashes indicate false starts, colons indicate extended vowel length, and a series of periods indicates a pause. (Pauses were not timed for the purposes of this study.) Names appear as initials followed by a series of hyphens. Realizations of potential *r*-lessness and /ay/monophthongization are indicated in phonetic transcription. Potential cases not counted for reasons of lack of clarity, extreme reduction, etc. are indicated by [n.t.] for 'not tabulated'. Also excluded were the lexical items *I* and *my*, as well as discourse marker *like* (e.g. 'It used to be a old, **like**, sixties kind of church'), all of which are almost always very reduced.
7. The apparent /ay/ in motorcycle was not included in the quantitative tabulations, since the underlying form for Lou (and many other U.S. Southerners) is actually [I].
8. It is important to note that not all intraspeaker variation in this interview is a mere by-product of the uneven distribution of favoring versus disfavoring linguistic contexts across the different sections. For example, *r*-lessness is typically favored in tokens with unstressed syllabic *r*, as in *mother*, and tokens with postvocalic tautosyllabic *r*, as in *hear* (e.g. Feagin 1990; Dannenberg 1998). Although Lou shows a lower level of *r*-lessness in the first section (A1) than the second (A2), the first actually has a slightly higher proportion of tokens favoring *r*-lessness (83 percent) than the second (80 percent). Similarly, although Alex shows a high level of *r*-lessness in the second section on race relations in Robeson County (C1) and a lower level in the following section (C2, on the Civil War), Section C1 has a slightly lower percentage of tokens favoring *r*-lessness (92 percent) than C2 (94 percent).
9. This may be especially true for morphosyntactic features, since altering one's morphosyntax may involve the reorganization of entire systems rather than surface alteration of a few features (e.g. Wolfram 1974; Rickford 1985).
10. Of course, we can never say with certainty exactly which social meaning of a vernacular feature a speaker is calling forth at any particular moment — or even *if* they are invoking any of these meanings. However, we can come far closer to understanding which associations are being called forth by looking at a range of features in their context of use, including in very small stretches of talk and even individual usages, than by looking solely at aggregate usage levels for one or two phonological features abstracted from context. Sociolinguists who attempt such understandings are sometimes accused of 'over-interpreting' their data; however, Coupland (2001a: 361) notes that 'under-interpretation' through over-reliance on aggregated frequency data is a very real danger too.

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