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Investigating “self-conscious” speech: The performance register in Ocracoke English

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ABSTRACT

This article examines PERFORMANCE SPEECH in the historically isolated island community of Ocracoke, North Carolina. Over the past several decades islanders have come into increasingly frequent contact with tourists and new residents, who often comment on the island’s “quaint” relic dialect. In response, some Ocracokers have developed performance phrases that highlight island features, particularly the pronunciation of /ay/ with a raised/backed nucleus, i.e. [ʌ¹]. The analysis of /ay/ in the performance and non-performance speech of a representative Ocracoke speaker yields several important insights for the study of language in its social context. First, performance speech may display more regular patterning than has traditionally been assumed. Second, it lends insight into speaker perception of language features. Finally, the incorporation of performance speech into the variationist-based study of style-shifting offers support for the growing belief that style-shifting may be primarily proactive rather than reactive. (Keywords: Ocracoke, performance speech, style-shifting, stylistic variation, register, self-conscious speech.)*

Here I examine a speech register that has received little attention in mainstream language variationist literature, namely PERFORMANCE SPEECH, defined as that register associated with speakers’ attempting to display for others a certain language or language variety, whether their own or that of another speech community. Speakers may employ this register in the sociolinguistic interview, because such a speech event is characterized by a focus, whether overt or covert, on how people speak rather than on what they say. The performance register also occurs in natural conversations, e.g. in studies of dialect imitation (Butters 1993, Preston 1992, 1996). Anthropology-based studies of communicative patterns (e.g. Bauman 1975) show that performance speech may even play a central role in the daily speech patterns of certain communities, particularly where languages or dialects are receding in the face of encroaching varieties. In such communities, the dying language is often reduced from a primary vehicle of daily communication to a mere object of curiosity, or “object language” (Tsitsipis 1989), which may then be performed for outsiders. But despite the pervasiveness of performance speech,

language variationists have tended to dismiss it, because their focus has traditionally been on unselfconscious or “natural” speech (e.g. Labov 1966, 1972b). Certainly, performance speech is highly self-conscious: Speakers focus sharply on speech itself when they demonstrate a speech variety for others.

The current study shows that valuable insights about language variation can be gained through investigating performance speech. In particular, I demonstrate that performance speech may display quite regular patterning, rather than the irregularity traditionally associated with a shift toward an exaggeratedly vernacular version of one’s dialect (e.g. Labov 1972b, Baugh 1992). Further, I show that patterns found in performance speech may help answer questions related to the perception of language features – since in performing their own or another dialect, speakers may seize upon features of the dialect that are “important” or “noticeable” to them at some level, whether conscious or unconscious. Finally, I argue that the incorporation of performance speech into language variation study offers evidence to support the growing belief that style-shifting may be primarily PROACTIVE rather than REACTIVE. This belief stands in sharp contrast to traditional variationist-based views on style-shifting. These have been shaped in large part by two models: Labov’s “attention to speech” model (1972a), which holds that speakers shift styles in reaction to the formality of the speech situation; and the “audience design” model of Bell 1984, which (in its original formulation) indicated that speakers shift styles primarily in response to the different audiences with whom they converse.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SETTING

My study is centered on performance speech as it occurs in Ocracoke, an island community of about 600 year-round residents, located on the Outer Banks island chain off the coast of North Carolina. Ocracoke was first settled in the early 1700s by people of English descent. The island community existed in relative isolation from mainland dialect areas for about 250 years, developing in that time a distinctive dialect which residents and outsiders often call “the brogue.” This dialect is characterized by the retention of relic features from the Early Modern English period, as well as by a unique combination of elements from various Southern and Northern dialect areas that is unparalleled in mainland North Carolina (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1996). Since World War II, islanders have come into increasingly frequent contact with tourists and new residents, and the traditional dialect is fading as a result (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1995a). As the Ocracoke dialect recedes, it is becoming an object language. It is a rather widely recognized variety, complete with its own name, and it is the subject of frequent comment by islanders and outsiders. Islanders are becoming increasingly accustomed to requests for samples of their “quaint” object dialect. In response, community members have developed stock phrases that highlight island features, including the highly salient production of the /ay/ diphthong with a raised and

backed nucleus (that is, [ʌ¹]) which has come to characterize the Ocracoke, or "hoi toider" (i.e. 'high tider') dialect.

THE RATIONALE FOR A CASE-STUDY FORMAT

In the earliest investigations of the variable patterning of linguistic features across different speech styles, most notably those of Labov (e.g. 1966/1982), style-shifting was treated as a controlled device rather than a naturalistic phenomenon. Researchers investigated the aggregate style-shifting behavior of numerous speakers across a set of predefined stylistic contexts within the sociolinguistic interview (e.g. casual style, careful style, or reading style) in order to arrive at the community-wide patterns for style-shifting which, it was believed, would shed light on the process of language change within the community. However, subsequent researchers have become increasingly interested in investigating style-shifting in its own right rather than in the service of the study of language change; correspondingly, they have shown a growing interest in investigating style-shifting as a naturalistic phenomenon, rather than utilizing it as a research heuristic.

To arrive at the principles underlying style-shifting in real-life conversational interaction, individual and small-group studies are more appropriate than large-scale surveys, because small-group studies allow for detailed examination of the conversational contexts and personal identificational considerations that surround the style shifts in question. For example, Coupland's studies of style-shifting in the speech of one speaker, a radio announcer in Cardiff, Wales (1985, 1998), have yielded invaluable insight into the use of stylistic variation as a means of projecting different personal identities (or facets of a single identity) at different points in a given speech event. Such insight would be obscured if the speaker under study had been grouped with a number of other speakers according to such catch-all categories as socio-economic class, gender, or ethnicity – rather than being viewed as an individual whose identity is dynamic and is constituted far more subtly than as the intersection of a number of demographic classifications. Similarly, the study by Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994, of style-shifting within and across interviews in the speech of one speaker, interviewed by several different fieldworkers, provided the first empirical confirmation of the notion (which stems from Bell's "audience design" model for style-shifting) that audience members have more influence on speech style than do other conversational factors such as topic or setting. Again, the insights offered by this case study would have been lost in a large-scale survey, in which speech styles that appear to be of a similar type are grouped together, even if the conversational contexts in which they occur are vastly different.¹

SPEAKER CHARACTERISTICS

Because I too am concerned with the naturalistic study of style-shifting, I employ a case-study format in the current study. I focus on the performance speech of one

member of the Ocracoke community, Rex O'Neal, a male born in 1953, who has exhibited a strong propensity toward performing the Ocracoke dialect, for both outsiders and community members, since I first met him four years ago. This speaker, who has lived on Ocracoke all his life, is a member of a large, well-known island family who can trace their island heritage a number of generations. Rex is a fisherman and carpenter, and he maintains a high degree of contact with non-islanders as well as islanders. In addition, he is a key member of a high-profile, tight-knit group of male islanders whose communication networks frequently extend to non-islanders, chiefly through tourist-related trades such as hotel or rental property ownership. Members of this group place a strong value on the traditional Ocracoke brogue and use it to mark their identity as "authentic islanders"; a number of them pride themselves on their ability to "lay the brogue on thick" for tourists and prying sociolinguists.²

My investigation of Rex's performance speech is focused on a particular rote phrase which Rex recites ten times during the course of our audiotaped and videotaped conversations with him (about four hours total). This phrase is as follows:

- (1) It's high tide on the sound side. Last night the water fire. Tonight the moon shine. No fish. What do you suppose the matter, Uncle Woods?

This phrase refers to a belief held by some island fishermen that fishing will be poor on days preceded by a night on which the water is lit by phosphorus from decaying marine life ("water fire") or a night that is moonlit. The "sound side" refers to the side of Ocracoke Island that faces the Pamlico Sound and the North Carolina mainland rather than the Atlantic Ocean; Uncle Woods appears to have been an ancestor of Rex's. However, like performance phrases in a number of speech communities, this phrase derives its relevance in conversational interactions not from its propositional content but from its being interjected into conversations at points where linguistic display seems appropriate – an issue I discuss below. Further, like other performative utterances, Rex's performance phrase is characterized by special linguistic features, such as rhyme, exaggerated intonational contours, and special phonetic features. These features include exaggerated /t/-raising, as in [fiʃ] for *fish*, the pronunciation of the *-ire* sequence as [ar], as in [far] for *fire*, and the exaggerated raising of the nucleus of the /ay/ diphthong which forms the focus of the current study.³ In addition, the very fact that Rex's performance phrase is a rote or formulaic utterance serves to align it with performance phrases in a number of speech communities.⁴ The first sentence of the performance utterance (*It's high tide on the sound side*) appears to be a common saying in Ocracoke; the remainder of the utterance seems to be unique to Rex, although several of Rex's various accounts of the origins of the phrase indicate that an older islander or group of islanders (possibly even Uncle Woods himself) invented the phrase.

In the following three sections, I focus on how Rex performs the above phrase, specifically his phonetic production of the nucleus of the /ay/ vowel in utterances

of this phrase. Then I extend the investigation to encompass the question of why Rex utters this performance phrase to begin with – i.e., what prompts Rex to shift into performance register at certain points during an interview.

ACOUSTIC DATA

The quantitative portion of this investigation centers on the acoustic phonetic analysis of the nucleus of the /ay/ vowel in the seven utterances of the performance phrase above that I classified as performative in nature, based on the fact that they were either directly solicited or were of no relevance in terms of propositional content. I did not include tokens that occurred in the three utterances of this phrase in which propositional content was relevant, i.e. in utterances the speaker produced in order to explain the referential meaning of the phrase rather than to display the Ocracoke dialect. For example, in the portion of a videotaped interview transcribed below, I measured as performative tokens of /ay/ occurring in 2a, but not those in 2c–o.

- (2) a. RO: High tide on the sound side, last night the water fire, tonight the moon shine. No fish. What do you suppose the matter Uncle Woods? (laughter)
 b. V: Now. . . now tell me what you [said.
 c. RO: [Alright.
 I said, "High tide on [the sound side,
 d. V: [High tide on the sound side, yeah
 e. RO: Last night the water fired"
 f. V: Water fired?
 g. FW: Yeah, that's the phosphorus in the water. You ever, you [ever
 h. V: [OK, yeah]
 i. RO: go to the ocean you'll see the. .
 j. V: Last night [the water fired
 k. RO: [Well the old people used to call it, uh, water fire, [when the
 far – fired.
 l. V: [Water
 fire, yeah? Last night the water fired, OK.
 m. RO: Yeah, and "tonight the moon shine."
 n. V: At night the moon shine.
 o. RO: "And tonight the moon shine," so they had – one night they had the water fire
 against 'em, the next night they had the moon shine agin 'em.

For comparative purposes, I also conducted acoustic phonetic analyses of representative tokens of the nucleus of the /ay/ diphthong in two styles that may be roughly classified as "non-performative" (but see below). One of these styles characterizes Rex's speech when he is engaged in one-on-one conversation with a fieldworker; the other occurs when Rex enters into an extended conversation with several of his brothers during the course of one of our interviews with him. The interviewer remained present during this conversation, but he was not a participant. In other words, when Rex's brothers arrived at the interview site, the fieldworker's role changed, in the terms of Bell 1984, from that of "addressee" to that of "overhearer", i.e. a known listener who is not ratified to participate in the conversational exchange.

Because the distinctive character of Ocracoke /ay/ lies in the fact that its nucleus is higher and farther back in vowel space than the /ay/ variant that is typically considered “standard,” my comparison of Rex’s /ay/ vowel in three stylistic contexts focuses on height and backness. The acoustic properties of a given vowel that correspond to the articulatory-based properties of height and backness are the frequencies of the first and second formants (hereafter F1 and F2) of the vowel.⁵ The frequency of F1 correlates inversely with the articulatory-based measure of vowel height: High vowels display low F1 values, and low vowels show high F1 values. F2 correlates with frontness and backness; front vowels show high F2 values, while back vowels show low values. If F1 is plotted against F2 on a graph in which the origin is situated in the upper right-hand corner, the resultant format plot approximates the traditional vowel chart, in which high vowels appear higher on the chart, front vowels appear on the left, and back vowels on the right.

In order to produce the sound spectrograms which allowed me to measure F1 and F2 values, I utilized the Kay Elemetrics Computer Speech Lab (CSL), Model 4300B. Analog conversational speech was digitized via CSL, and select words containing the /ay/ diphthong were sectioned off from the speech signal. The /ay/ vowel and a portion of the surrounding environment were then sectioned off from each word, and a wide-band spectrogram with a 100-point transform was produced. I then performed a Linear Predictive Coding (LPC) analysis, with a filter order of 12, on that portion of the spectrogram which I identified, visually and auditorily, as the steady-state nucleus of the /ay/ diphthong. Mean F1 and F2 values for each token, as calculated by CSL, were then noted and utilized in my study. A portion of my analysis also involves the measurement of the duration of the diphthongal nucleus in relation to the duration of the diphthong as a whole. The diphthongal nucleus was identified as discussed above; to measure the length of the entire diphthong, I selected the maximal portion of the diphthong that appeared to be free of the influence of preceding and following consonants.

I obtained F1 and F2 values for as many tokens of performance /ay/ as possible, and I then determined the mean F1 and F2 values of these tokens in each of the four phonological environments in which /ay/ occurs in Rex’s performance phrase: before word boundary (*high*), before voiced obstruent (*tide*, *side*), before voiceless obstruent (*night*, *tonight*), and before nasal (*shine*). I did not measure tokens of /ay/ in pre-liquid position (*fire*), because /ay/ was categorically realized as [a:] in this item. Similarly, I determined mean values for the first and second formants of the /ay/ nucleus in four phonological contexts in Rex’s conversational speech with his brothers, and in his conversation with the fieldworker. Results are given in Table 1 and graphically presented in Figure 1. Standard deviations for F1 and F2 in each of the three speech styles and four phonological environments are given in Table 2.

The number of tokens of /ay/ in performance speech is necessarily limited, since Rex performs his rote phrase only seven times; and there are only six tokens

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TABLE 1. *Mean values for Rex’s /ay/ nuclei*

Context	Following Environment	F1	F2
Performance	# (N = 6)	481.93	864.35
	Nasal (N = 5)	617.51	1086.56
	Vd. Obs. (N = 12)	471.38	1037.09
	VI. Obs. (N = 10)	617.46	1097.74
Conversation with brothers	# (N = 5)	620.89	967.68
	Nasal (N = 2)	569.77	1020.25
	Vd. Obs. (N = 5)	599.96	984.78
	VI. Obs. (N = 5)	557.17	970.24
Conversation with fieldworker	# (N = 5)	656.20	1099.23
	Nasal (N = 9)	677.42	1172.87
	Vd. Obs. (N = 6)	631.91	1040.80
	VI. Obs. (N = 5)	564.58	1132.96

of /ay/ per phrase, not counting /ay/ in *fire* (unless portions of the phrase are repeated, as was the case in several instances). The number of /ay/ tokens in Rex’s conversation with his brothers is limited as well, since the conversation was short. In addition, not all tokens of /ay/ in these two contexts were suitable for measurement; I measured only those tokens of /ay/ that occurred in main word-stress position in content words, and only those tokens that were of sufficient amplitude and clarity to yield readily interpretable spectrograms. Similar limitations affected my measurements of /ay/ in Rex’s conversation with the fieldworker.⁶ Further, I elected to limit measurements in this stylistic context to fewer than ten tokens in each environment, because these measurements were for rough comparative purposes rather than definitive analysis.

Because of my limited data, the patterns that emerge from the acoustic analysis should be taken as suggestive rather than unquestionably representative of general patterns in the Ocracoke speech community.

THE REGULAR PATTERNING OF PERFORMANCE /AY/

In previous studies of /ay/ in Ocracoke English (e.g. Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1995b), we demonstrated, through quantitative tabulations based on impressionistic phonetics, that the traditional Ocracoke variant displays regular patterning in non-performance speech according to following phonological environment: Raised /ay/ occurs most frequently before voiced obstruents, next most frequently before nasals, and least before voiceless obstruents. (Tabulations were not conducted for /ay/ in pre-word-boundary position.) Interestingly, when we focus on pre-obstruent environments, we find that the ordering of constraints affecting /ay/ raising is the opposite of that affecting /ay/ raising in a number of

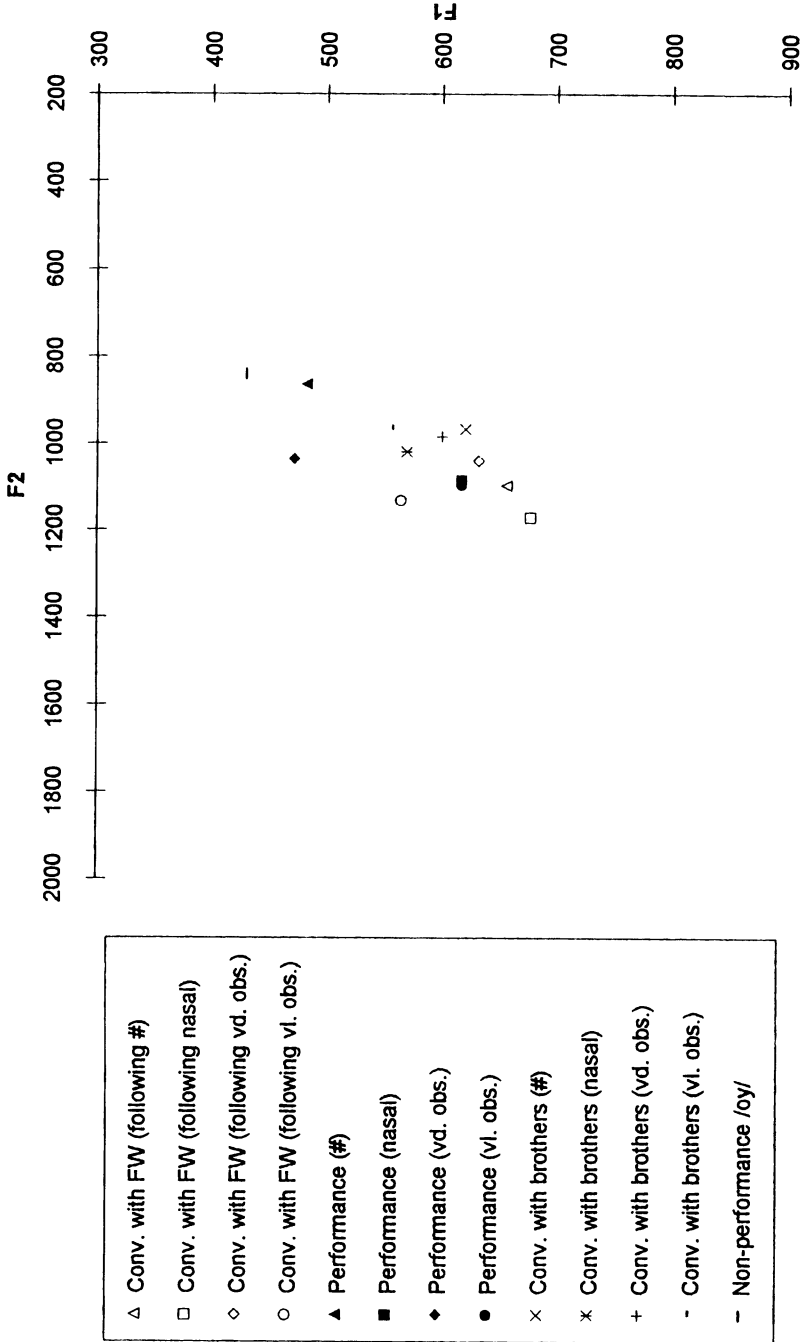


FIGURE 1: Mean values for the /ay/ nucleus in three stylistic contexts.

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TABLE 2. *Standard deviations for Rex's /ay/ nuclei*

Context	Following Environment	F1	F2
Performance	#	110.52	71.73
	Nasal	113.69	63.24
	Vd. Obs.	177.86	118.61
	Vl. Obs.	58.77	54.71
Conversation with brothers	#	6.83	7.79
	Nasal	63.40	200.68
	Vd. Obs.	3.01	6.85
	Vl. Obs.	3.89	7.16
Conversation with fieldworker	#	165.70	45.77
	Nasal	55.76	90.14
	Vd. Obs.	97.36	79.97
	Vl. Obs.	95.74	17.49

other varieties of English, including Canadian English (e.g. Chambers 1973, 1989), Martha's Vineyard English (Labov 1963), and even “standard” English, in which we find such word pairs as [ra'd] ‘ride’ and [rΛ't] ‘right’. Although there seem to be phonetic/phonological reasons for the unexpected patterning of raised /ay/ in Ocracoke (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1995b), we maintain that the patterning is strengthened by social factors. Raised /ay/ in general has served as a marker of islander speech for generations; however, it is pre-voiced raised /ay/ that has achieved most prominence. This is evidenced in, or perhaps results from, the widespread usage by both islanders and outsiders of the phrase *It's high tide on the sound side*, which contains two tokens of prevoiced /ay/ but no pre-voiceless /ay/, coupled with a corresponding shortage of phrases in which pre-voiceless /ay/ is prominent. Further, the identification of Ocracokers with pre-voiced raised /ay/ is cemented by the occurrence of this variant in the label by which residents of the Outer Banks are known throughout North Carolina – “hoi toiders.”

When we extend our examination of /ay/ to performance contexts, we find regular patterning as well. First, the nucleus of performance /ay/ (mean F1 value = 547) is generally higher than that of non-performance /ay/ (mean F1 value = 610). Further, we find that the nucleus of performance /ay/ is highest in exactly that context where it occurs most frequently in non-performance speech in the Ocracoke community in general and in Rex's speech in particular – before voiced obstruents.⁷ This parallel patterning is particularly intriguing in that it is pre-voiceless rather than pre-voiced /ay/ that displays greater height in Rex's conversation with his brothers and with the fieldworker, based on the limited number of tokens I measured (mean F1 value, non-performance, prevoiceless = 561; mean F1 value, non-performance, pre-voiced = 616). In other words, it is

only in performance speech that /ay/ displays both greater height and greater frequency of occurrence in prevoiced than in prevoiceless contexts.

In addition, we find that, except with voiceless obstruents, the degree to which /ay/ is raised in Rex's speech obeys the same constraint patterns in performance speech as in his conversation with the fieldworker: /ay/ is somewhat raised before following nasals (mean F1 value, performance = 618; mean F1 value, fieldworker conversation = 677), more raised before following word boundary or pause (mean F1 value, performance = 482; mean F1 value, fieldworker conversation = 656), and most raised before voiced obstruents (mean F1 value, performance = 471; mean F1 value, fieldworker conversation = 632). These findings suggest that the patterns of linguistic variation observed in self-conscious speech are not necessarily different from, or less regular than, those observed in non-self-conscious speech; hence, self-conscious speech may lend valuable insight into the study of the overall patterning of language variation and the directionality of language change. This assertion runs counter to the assumption of sociolinguists working in the Labovian tradition that self-conscious speech is of little value in obtaining a picture of the linguistic system of a given community, because it is non-self-conscious speech that is truly reflective of language as it patterns in daily conversational interaction. This position is stated succinctly in Labov's Vernacular Principle, which holds that "the style which is most regular in its structure and its relation to the evolution of the language is the vernacular, in which the minimum attention is paid to speech" (1972b:112).⁸ The Vernacular Principle has led sociolinguists to focus on speech which they determine to be non-self-conscious, at the expense of stylistic varieties such as performance speech, which are identified as self-conscious. However, my data suggest that at least one self-conscious speech style, performance speech, does display a degree of regular patterning: It appears to be sensitive to the same phonological constraints affecting conversational speech and thus should not be lightly dismissed.

At first glance, it appears that the findings of the few sociolinguists who have studied dialect performances run counter to my findings regarding the regularity of this type of speech. For example, Preston 1996 indicates that speakers' imitations of other dialect varieties are often inaccurate and incomplete in their inclusion of specific dialect features, although he has no data on speakers' performances of their own dialects. (See also Bell 1992 and Butters 1993, who also investigate speakers' imitations of other dialects.) Preston does indicate, however, that speakers' imitations improve in accuracy and completeness when the variety being demonstrated is a folk artifact, i.e. an object variety, and when the imitation is in the form of an overt performance – particularly a performance that invokes certain stock characters, or what Preston terms "folk artifacts at the person level" (1996:64). In particular, Preston cites the results of one study in which Anglo-American speakers were asked to read a list of sentences in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). When these speakers merely read the sentences in

reading style, attempting to produce AAVE features “analytically” as they proceeded, their readings yielded few features of the dialect. However, when they turned the sentences into performances, their use of AAVE features was more extensive, especially when they adopted a stereotypical African American “persona” for use throughout the list of sentences.

It may well be that Rex’s ability to accurately perform raised/backed /ay/, down to the level of phonological conditioning on the extent of raising, may be largely due to the fact that he demonstrates his dialect through artistic performance, rather than through mere discussion, and to the fact that he clearly adopts the persona of a jovial old fisherman when he gives his performance. In addition, further study of “self-performance” may reveal that people are better at performing their own dialects than those of others.⁹

Of course, there is a sense in which we can say that Rex’s performance /ay/ displays less regularity of patterning than his non-performance /ay/. As evidenced in the greater standard deviations in Rex’s performance vowel values vis-à-vis his non-performance vowels (see Table 2), Rex’s vowel values cluster less neatly around a single phonological target in performance than in non-performance speech. However, it is questionable whether decreased ability to hit a phonological target can be correlated with increased attention to one’s speech, as Labov maintains. Little research has been done on quantifying “attention to speech” (e.g. Broadbent 1962); in addition, acoustic phonetic analyses of speech produced by speakers who are paying careful attention to clear articulation vs. more casual speech indicate that, in careful speech, vowels are more tightly clustered around target values than in casual speech, where vowels are more scattered and display a tendency to move toward mid central position (Shearme & Holmes 1962, Fant et al. 1974, Chen 1980, Chen et al. 1983; see Moon 1991 for summary and discussion). Further, studies of speech produced in noisy environments (e.g. Ladefoged 1967) reveal that speech becomes highly disorganized at extreme noise levels, i.e. at noise levels in which speakers are not able to “pay attention” to their speech in the sense that they are not able to monitor it.

Just as performance speech cannot be classified simply as “irregular,” speech styles that are not overtly performative cannot be neatly termed “regular.” Looking again at the standard deviations that characterize vowel values in each speech style, we find a greater scattering of /ay/ tokens in phonological space in Rex’s conversation with the fieldworker than in his conversation with his brothers. If such lack of tight clustering around a phonological target is indicative of increased attention to speech, then my acoustic data may indicate a greater degree of self-consciousness on Rex’s part in the unfamiliar context of a sociolinguistic interview than in the familiar speech situation of conversing with his brothers. Further, there may be a sense in which Rex’s conversation with the fieldworker is performative, if not overtly so – with Rex performing what he perceives to be a language variety more standard than his own, rather than less standard, as in his overt performance phrases.¹⁰ At any rate, my data indicate that overt speech

performances, particularly performances of one's own speech, may display more regular patterning than has previously been supposed.

PERCEPTION AND PERFORMANCE

Given that performance speech does display some regularity of patterning, it should prove useful in the investigation of issues pertaining to the quantitative analysis of the patterning of variation in language. In particular, performance speech may lend insight into how speakers perceive dialect variants and how their perceptions relate to their production of these variants – an issue that has received a good bit of attention in recent sociolinguistic study (e.g. Labov 1994). As Labov makes clear, merely asking speakers about their linguistic perceptions is likely to yield dubious information about speakers' actual perceptual abilities and practices. As he says (Labov 1994:352), the reliability and validity of the "ask the informant" method "depends on the doubtful assumption that informants have free mental access to their language." Even if we credit speakers with thorough knowledge of their own perceptual abilities, we must not assume that they are able clearly to articulate this metalinguistic knowledge – that they are able adequately to perform what Labov (1994:403) terms the "labeling function" with respect to linguistic variants. Further, there is evidence that, although non-linguists can accurately report on their usage patterns at such overarching levels as the pragmatic, their metalinguistic ability diminishes significantly at the level of the phonological variable (Silverstein 1981).

It is imperative, then, that we seek ways other than direct elicitation to obtain information on perception. We may devise tests, such as Labov's Coach Test (1994:403–6), in which information on perception is obtained indirectly, perhaps through means of an artificially constructed story whose interpretation depends on speaker perception of a particular phonetic variant. Or we may try to discern perceptual information through naturalistic speech events such as the speech performance. When speakers attempt to "put on" a dialect for an audience, they have available to them only those features they can perceive; further, there is evidence that the greater perceptual awareness speakers have of a given language feature (whether this awareness is at the conscious level or not), the greater the extent to which the feature will figure in their demonstrations and discussions of the language variety in question (Silverstein 1981, Preston 1996). Thus, through examining performance speech, we can gain insight into which aspects of linguistic production are most salient to the performer.¹¹

The correlation between degree of awareness and extent of use in speech performance appears to be evidenced in Rex's performance utterances. Studies of speaker awareness of language features indicate that speakers demonstrate greater awareness of linguistic features that are referential, such as content lexical items, than of those that are non-referential, such as vowel variants uttered in isolation. It may well be that Rex utilizes raised/backed /ay/ to such a great extent in his

speech performances because the stereotypical Ocracoke /ay/ variant is closely linked with the lexical items *high*, *tide*, and *side*: This variant is always demonstrated with the phrase *hoi toid* or *hoi toiders* (and often demonstrated with the longer phrase *Hoi toid on the sound soid*) rather than by uttering the vowel in isolation. Thus when Rex utters the first sentence of his performance phrase, he is perhaps producing a lexical caricature rather than a strictly phonologically based performance. The linking of the Ocracoke /ay/ variant with *high*, *tide*, and *side* may also account in part for why Rex's performance tokens of /ay/ display the phonological patterning which has been observed: Rex's performance /ay/ is most raised in exactly those contexts in which it occurs in *hoi toid* – before word boundary and voiced obstruents. Rex's awareness of raised /ay/ in other contexts may not be so great, and so he does not exaggerate it so greatly in *night*, *tonight*, and *shine*.¹²

Further insight into the links between perceptual salience and performance speech can be gained by examining not only the height of performance /ay/ but also its backness. Referring back to Fig. 1, as well as to the numerical values in Table 1, we note that the degree to which Rex exaggerates the height of performance /ay/ is greater than the degree to which he exaggerates its backness. In fact, the mean F2 value for performance /ay/ in the crucial category of following voiced obstruent (1037) is nearly identical to the mean F2 value in pre-voiced position in Rex's conversation with the fieldworker (1041), even though the mean F1 values for pre-voiced /ay/ in these two stylistic contexts are quite different (mean F1, performance = 471; mean F1, fieldworker conversation = 632). If it is correct that speakers emphasize features of which they are most aware when giving speech performances, then it would appear that the raising of the Ocracoke /ay/ variant is more salient for Rex than its backing. This supposition finds support in the fact that a number of laboratory studies of speakers' vowel perceptions indicate that height differences are more perceptually salient than fronting/backing differences (e.g. Flanagan 1955, DiPaolo 1992, Labov 1994).

A further pattern we observe with respect to performance /ay/ in Ocracoke is that the length of the nucleus, as a percentage of the entire length of the diphthong, is consistently shorter than the nucleus of non-performance /ay/ in all phonological contexts. Figures for nucleus length in four phonological contexts and two stylistic contexts are presented in Figure 2. Each bar indicates the proportion of the steady-state /a/ nucleus to the remainder of the /ay/ diphthong, which consists of a transition to the /i/ offglide and the /i/ offglide itself. Short bars indicate /ay/ variants which are realized with full offglides (since most of the diphthong consists of transition + glide), while longer bars indicate glide-shortened /ay/. Note that non-performance tokens are taken from Rex's conversation with the fieldworker.

The /ay/ vowel in mainland Southern American English is characterized by nucleus lengthening and glide shortening (e.g. Thomas 1995, Schilling-Estes 1996) or complete monophthongization (as in [ha: ta:d] 'high tide'), and this glide short-

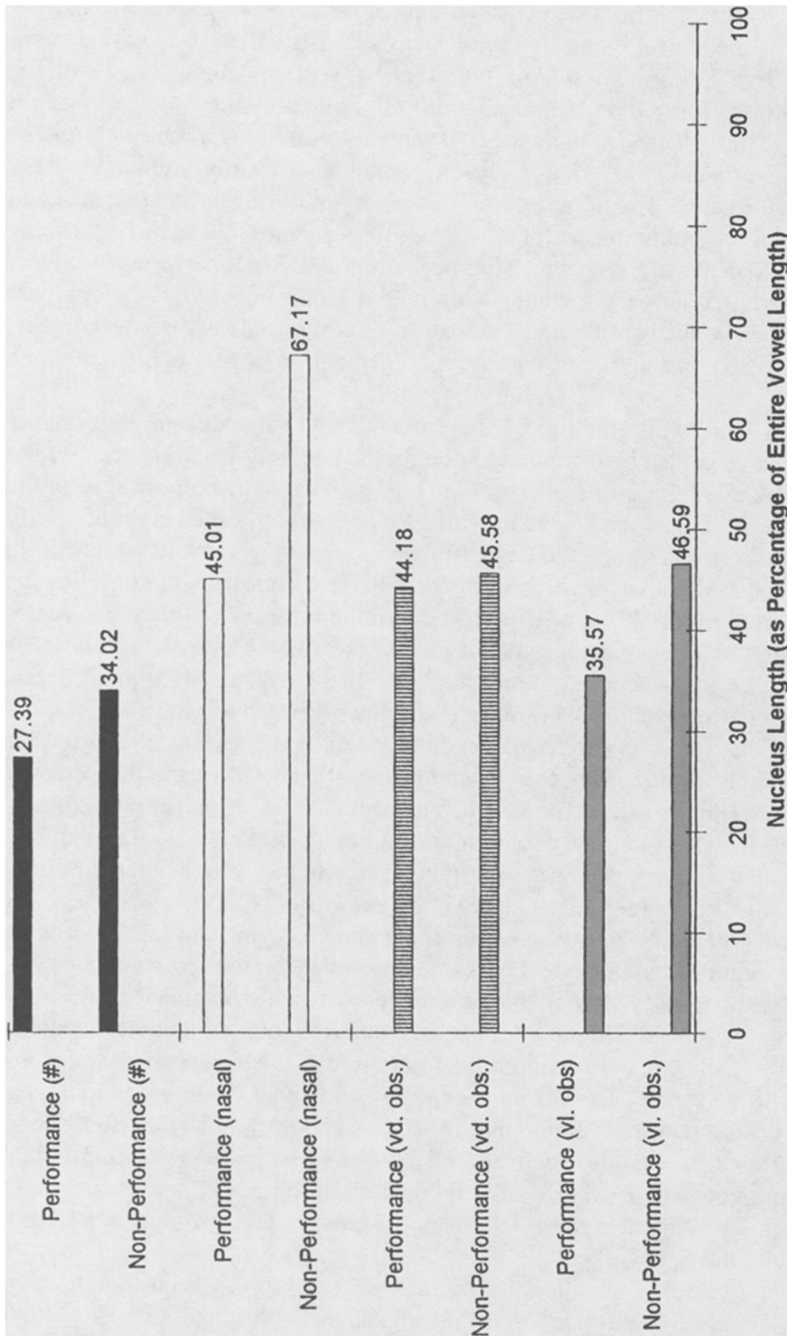


FIGURE 2: /ay/ nucleus lengths in performance and non-performance speech.

ening is highly salient among both Southerners and outsiders to the region. In Ocracoke, which borders the mainland South but prides itself on its unique, non-Southern-sounding speech, the traditional /ay/ vowel is set apart not only by the position of its nucleus but also by its relatively diphthongal quality. Fig. 2 indicates that Rex seizes on this aspect of Ocracoke /ay/ in his speech performances, since he indicates shorter /ay/ nuclei (and hence longer glides) in performance than in non-performance speech in all four phonological contexts examined. Interestingly, the difference in nucleus length in performance and non-performance speech is least in the pre-voiced environment, where the nucleus occupies 44% of the entire /ay/ diphthong in performance speech and 46 percent of the diphthong in non-performance speech. These nearly identical values for nucleus length probably stem from the fact that the extreme height of performance /ay/ in the pre-voiced context vis-à-vis other phonological environments is sufficient to render pre-voiced performance /ay/ distinctive. Interestingly, in his discussions of Ocracoke pronunciation, Rex never explicitly contrasts Ocracoke /ay/ with unglided variants, focusing instead on the differences between Ocracoke [a^h] and non-Southern [a^l]. Thus performance speech reveals to us a facet of vowel perception for one speaker which we otherwise might not have been able to discern.¹³

We can also examine performance /ay/ with respect to its relationship to the /oy/ phoneme. Ocracokers are often characterized by outsiders as pronouncing the /ay/ vowel as [ɔ^l] (or [o^l]), and non-islanders often imitate Ocracokers by saying [hɔ^l tɔ^ld] for [hɑ^h tɑ^hd]. However, Ocracokers readily perceive the difference between their raised/backed /ay/ and phonemic /oy/. Even in Rex’s exaggerated performance speech, a margin of safety is maintained between /ay/ and /oy/, as evidenced in the positioning of performance /ay/ and non-performance /oy/ in Fig. 1, and in the mean F1 and F2 values for performance /ay/ (F1 = 547, F2 = 1021) vis-à-vis those for non-performance /oy/ (F1=429, F2=841).

RESHAPING NOTIONS OF REGISTER AND STYLE

When we include the performance register in the study of language variation, we gain insight not only into speaker production and perception of dialect variants, but also into the very notion of register itself, as well as the related notion of speech style. Defining the terms “register” and “style”, or stylistic variation, has proven somewhat elusive in the course of the development of sociolinguistic study. Both refer to linguistic variation within the speech of an individual speaker, rather than across speakers or speech communities. A register is generally held to be a readily identifiable speech variety that individuals use in specific, well-defined speech situations (e.g. Wolfram 1991:307); style may be defined as language variation, in general, across different situations of use (e.g. Finegan & Biber 1994). The two are by no means mutually exclusive; in fact, register can be viewed as the convergence of a number of stylistic variables into one recogniz-

able speech variety, and so it is really contained within, rather than separate from, the notion of style.

Two models that attempt to describe and explain stylistic variation have held sway in the sociolinguistic study of the past two decades. The first is Labov's "attention to speech" model (1972a), in which stylistic variation is conditioned by how much attention speakers pay to their own speech as they converse. Speech registers, under this model, fall along a continuum according to self-consciousness of speech; less self-conscious varieties are labeled "casual" or "informal," and registers characterized by more self-consciousness are termed "careful" or "formal." Less self-conscious registers are also held to be further removed from standard or prestige language varieties than more self-conscious speech, which tends toward what the speaker perceives to be more standard speech.

The second major model that seeks to explain stylistic variation is Bell's "audience design" model (1984). Under this model, stylistic variation is conditioned by who is in a speaker's audience. This audience includes not only the person or people to whom speakers address their words, but also non-addressed participants in multi-party conversations and non-participants of various sorts, including ratified listeners and eavesdroppers. Addressees and other audience members need not be immediately present, as in the case of a radio or television audience (cf. Bell 1991 for a detailed discussion of the nature of the media audience). For Bell, speech registers may still be classified as formal or informal; but level of formality is determined not by how much attention the speaker pays to her own speech, but by her perception of the formality level of her audience's speech. A speaker may adjust her speech toward that of her audience – i.e., she may attempt to converge with the speech patterns of her audience members – or she may diverge from them if she wishes to distance herself from her audience in some way.¹⁴

Labov's "attention to speech" model has been largely abandoned for a number of reasons, including its unidimensionality and the impossibility of quantifying speakers' attentiveness to their speech (cf. Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994:237–39). Bell's model has fared better, but it has not been nearly as widely tested, or even as widely criticized. Further, both models are now being questioned because both view style-shifting as primarily reactive. Under Labov's approach, style-shifting is seen as a reaction to a change in the amount of attention paid to speech; under Bell's model, it is seen as a reaction to a change in the composition of a speaker's audience. It should be noted, however, that the formulation of Bell 1984 does include a somewhat proactive dimension, which Bell terms "initiative style shift." This type of shift is triggered not by the shifting composition of the speaker's audience, but by the speaker's shifting her focus from this audience to an absent person or persons (which Bell refers to as a "referee group") with whom she wishes to identify. However, initiative style shift plays only a minor role in Bell's 1984 model; most style shifts are viewed instead as responsive to shifts in audience. Recent investigations in style-shifting (and the related phenomenon of code-switching), including Bell 1998, have revealed that it does not appear to be

possible to characterize style-shifting as primarily triggered by contextual factors (e.g. Goffman 1981, LePage & Tabouret-Keller 1985, Arnold et al. 1993, Coupland 1985, 1997, Rampton 1998). Rather, style-shifting is primarily a means whereby speakers alter the images of self which they project for others. Sometimes these alternations are triggered by changes in the conversational context, but more often they are not; in fact, they often serve, in and of themselves, to bring about contextual changes (see below for further discussion).

An examination of Rex's shifts into performance register offers further evidence in support of more proactive approaches to style-shifting than those offered by Labov 1972a and Bell 1984, as well as in support of a less unidimensional approach than that offered by Labov 1972a. As already discussed, acoustic measurements of Rex's speech in performance and non-performance contexts offer little evidence that increased attention to speech is responsible for Rex's shifts into the performance register: Rex's performed /ay/ vowels display the same sensitivity to phonological conditioning as these vowels in non-performance speech, and so do not display the increased irregularity that Labov maintains should accompany increased attention to speech. Further, the irregularity that can be observed in Rex's performance vowels – the greater scattering of these vowels in phonological space, vis-à-vis non-performance vowels – has yet to be correlated with increased attention to speech by experimental study. In fact, it is suggestive of decreased rather than increased attention to speech.

In addition, under a model that places speech styles along the single dimension of formality/informality, we are forced to label Rex's performance style as formal, because it is characterized by a high degree of attention paid to speech. Thus we must place Rex's exaggeratedly non-standard performance speech in the same category as any exaggeratedly standard speech he produces, which is also considered to be formal rather than casual in style. Certainly, Rex's performance phrase is formal, in the sense that it is a rote phrase that conforms to a pre-set form. However, it is obviously a very different type of speech from the exaggeratedly standard speech that is usually given the label of "formal." In Labov's model, though, we cannot capture this difference.¹⁵

Similarly, models of style-shifting based on audience design fall short when we factor in performance speech. In order to demonstrate this, let us look at the conversational contexts surrounding Rex's performance utterances. In two instances, Rex provides his performance phrase without being asked to do so; these are transcribed in exx. 3–4. The first performance utterance is situated as follows: The fieldworker had been conducting a taped interview as Rex worked outside on his crab pots. After several of Rex's brothers drove up, Rex, his brothers, and the fieldworker began a conversation about various college basketball teams. Side A of the tape ends in the middle of this conversation. Side B begins as follows, with Rex's first utterance presumably a reply to his brother, CO, who must have just asked what the fieldworker, Chris C., was doing. Note that Walt is the director of the sociolinguistic fieldwork team.

- (3) a. RO: Chris is taping me. I don't know what he's taping, but he's taping some shit is what he's taping (laughter)... No, he's down on a school project there. Down there with Walt, that. . . Walt?
- b. CO: Yes.
- c. RO: He's down there and
- d. CO: (???)
- e. CC: You met Walt?
- f. CO: Uh uh.
- g. RO: Yeah, he met him last week, down at the. . .
- h. CC: He's crazy, isn't he?
- i. CO: Yeah, he is.
- j. RO: (laughter)
- k. RO: My mai:n ma:n!
- l. CC: My main man!
- m. RO: (laughter) That's what he kept telling me. "Hi, my main ma:n!"
- n. CC: Yeah, he listens to these ta – he – he's always listening to these tapes and. . . and uh. . . The people are saying, you know, people ask him, we'll be out doing an interview and people will ask us, you know, well, "Who's your boss?" We'll say, "Oh, that goofy guy." [(laughter)]
- o. RO: [(laughter)]
- p. CC: That goofy guy, Walt, you know.
- q. RO: (laughter)
- r. CC: (laughter) And he listens to these tapes. (laughter)
- s. RO: He got a – I got him going with that high tide on the sound side. (laughter)
- t. CC: What – what'd he say to that?
- u. RO: Huh? Oh, [ye –
- v. CC: [Did he get all excited?
- w. RO: Oh, my God, yeah! Came out there, he said, he said, "I'm studying speech." I said, "Well, it's high tide on the sound side. Last night the water fire, tonight the moon shine, no fish!"
- x. CC: No fish! (laughter)
- y. RO: "What do you suppose the matter, Uncle Woods?" (laughter)
- z. CC: (laughter)
- aa. RO: Well, he got a laugh out of that. He did.

The second time Rex utters an unsolicited performance phrase also occurs right after a tape change. Just before this change, Chris and Rex had been conversing about various subjects related to the general topic of increasing tourism on Ocracoke. Tape 1 ends in the midst of this conversation, and Tape 2 begins as follows. Chris had been instructed to begin all new tapes by announcing the name of his interviewee and the date.

- (4) a. CC: This is Tape 2, Rex – Rex O'Neal here on Ocracoke. Which it's March. . . third, still.
- b. RO: Yep, still March the third. (laughter)
- c. CC: (laughter)
- d. RO: Still March the third. And it's high tide on the sound side. And last the water fire tonight the moon shine, and it ain't no fish. And what do you suppose the matter, Uncle Woods?

A cursory examination of the conversational context preceding Rex's shifts into performance speech in each of these instances indicates that the shifts do not appear to be triggered by shifts in Rex's audience. In the first instance, although the audience had indeed been redesigned to include Rex's brothers, this redesign occurred some time before Rex uttered his performance phrase – and only after an

extended conversation about basketball had first taken place. In the second instance, there is no audience change at all.

However, if we examine more closely the contexts surrounding Rex’s performance speech, there appears to be some change in audience composition after all. Note that Rex’s performance phrase is closely preceded both times by the fieldworker’s changing the tape. Although a speaker’s audience in a sociolinguistic interview is generally considered to consist of a single fieldworker (or this fieldworker plus a few other participants), in reality the audience is larger, because it consists not only of immediately present participants, but also of the non-present linguist or linguists who will listen to the tape-recorded interview. Sociolinguists do not typically discuss this non-present audience or consider its effects on style-shifting, but speakers indicate awareness of this audience, at least at certain points in the sociolinguistic interview. For example, in the large collection of sociolinguistic interviews that I and my colleagues have collected in North Carolina, I have found a number of instances in which speakers interrupt the flow of the conversation to ask who will be listening to the interview on its completion. These interruptions often occur when the speaker is about to disclose confidential information or discuss a taboo topic. In addition, speakers sometimes even directly address absent linguists – as reported, for example, by Preston (p.c.) and Bell (p.c.). These direct addresses have been noted to occur when taboo topics arise or when speakers wish to criticize absent researchers for some reason, perhaps for having designed a particularly distasteful interview task.

A third trigger for a shift in focus from the present audience to the non-present audience may be a sudden focus on the technical matters of the tape-recording process itself. Goffman (1981:236) reported that radio announcers who conduct interviews with studio guests often shift their focus from these guests to the non-present home audience when they must attend to the technical details of production. Similarly, it may be that Rex shifts his focus from the fieldworker to the linguists who will analyze his taped interview when the fieldworker foregrounds the technicalities of recording the interview by changing the tape. A close examination of ex. 3 provides evidence that such a shift has indeed taken place. Although a conversation about basketball had been thriving when Side A of the tape ended, when Chris turns the tape over, this conversation is halted and a new one begun, as Rex is forced to explain why the fieldworker is handling audio tapes in the midst of a seemingly natural conversation. The head of the research project in which Chris is involved becomes the new topic of conversation, and Chris twice mentions that the research director, Walt, listens to the tapes Chris makes of his conversations with Ocracoke residents, once in 3n and again in 3r. Thus a sharp focus has been placed on those who will analyze Rex’s speech once his conversation with Chris is finished.

Similarly, in ex. 4, we observe a shift in focus toward this absent group of analysts. This time the tape change is followed not by a conversation about the leader of the research team who will analyze Rex’s interview, but by a direct

address to these researchers. Chris initiates this direct statement to the researchers when he identifies the tape – a task he undertakes not for himself or for Rex, but for the analysts who will need to keep a large body of taped data organized. Rex recognizes the audience being addressed and addresses them as well, by presenting a speech performance to the tape recorder rather than directly to Chris.

We could argue, then, that Rex's performance phrases are triggered by a shift in audience composition. Prior to the tape change, the audience is composed solely of the fieldworker; after the tape change, the audience also consists of a group of language analysts.

However, under Bell's "audience design" model for style-shifting, changes in audience design bring about shifts in style because speakers try stylistically to converge with or diverge from their audiences as they converse. If we maintain that Rex shifts into performance style when he is suddenly speaking before an audience of linguists, there is no sense in which we can say that his new speech style represents convergence, unless we (or Rex) believe that linguists sit around conversing in exaggerated Ocracoke dialect. Similarly, the concept of divergence does little to explain Rex's style-shifting. Most likely, Rex assumes that his audience of linguists speak standard, very formal English. And while Rex's speech performance is certainly widely divergent from standard English, he just as easily could have indicated divergence from standard-speaking linguists by speaking in the non-standard yet non-performative style he uses in his conversation with his brothers.

Further, if we attempt to explain Rex's shifts into performance style in terms of initiative style shift – i.e. in terms not of audience members but of another group with whom Rex is trying to converge when he shifts speech styles – it is by no means clear who this reference group may be. When Rex gives a speech performance, is he trying to sound like older islanders (real or imagined) who used to speak in exaggeratedly vernacular speech? Or is he perhaps trying to sound like an imagined highly vernacular version of himself or one of his age cohorts? The answer is not clear. Even if we grant that Rex's switch to performance speech represents initiative style shift toward a referee who is more vernacular than he, we have addressed only the question of whom Rex is accommodating toward, not the more central question of what might trigger his shifts toward this style.

In order to understand why Rex shifts into performance style, we must begin to conceptualize style-shifting not only in terms of convergence with or divergence from audience members, but in terms of the roles (both real and metaphorical) that conversational participants play with respect to one another during a given interaction. These roles are in part derived from social relations that are relatively permanent, e.g. in the case of a mother conversing with her child, or a supervisor talking with an employee. But they also have to do with individually based expressions of identity, which may be more transient than ascribed social roles, e.g. in the case of a mother who acts as a playful friend to her child one moment, and so speaks in lighthearted, conversational style, but as an authority

figure the next, when she assumes a commanding tone. Role changes and corresponding style shifts undertaken in the service of identity projection are not necessarily or even primarily conditioned by changes in contextual factors external to the speaker, but rather are initiated internally, and they often serve to bring about changes in the conversational context. Thus, as we shall see below, it should not be surprising to find that similar changes in contextual factors are sometimes accompanied by quite different style shifts.

Approaches to style-shifting that go beyond a convergence/divergence framework, in which style-shifting is essentially reactive, to a framework based on more proactive considerations of individual role and individual identity, have been discussed in one form or another by a number of researchers in style-shifting and code-switching. Goffman, for example, notes that conversational interactions are characterized by changes in “footing” – i.e. changes in the role(s) which speakers assign to themselves and each other within their minds – that may have little to do with changes in elements external to the participants, including changes in audience composition. Romaine (1995:172–5) discusses the application of Goffman’s notion of “footing” to code-switching. Similarly, in their discussions of code-switching, LePage & Tabouret-Keller note (1985:115) that a number of factors besides speakers’ desire for convergence with audience members must be considered in the analysis of code-switching, including an examination of whether speakers’ “motives” for converging with other speakers are “sufficiently clearcut and powerful” for actual convergence to take place. In other words, for LePage & Tabouret-Keller, speakers are not bound to react to other speakers’ speech styles but may proactively assert their own style if they have no strong motivation for convergence. In addition, Blom & Gumperz 1972 maintain that, while some code-switching is indeed conditioned by factors external to the speaker, including audience, other code-switches are not. They refer to the former, reactive type of code-switching as “situational switching,” and to the latter, more proactive type as “metaphorical switching.” In both types, it is role relationships that are central, rather than convergence/divergence. Situational switches are effected when role relationships actually change – e.g. when someone in a position of authority enters a room, and several subordinates who have been talking among themselves in a low-prestige code switch to a higher-prestige code. Metaphorical switches, by contrast, involve changing role relationships among conversational interactants whose actual social roles do not change during the course of the conversation – e.g. when a person in authority also happens to be a personal friend of one of her subordinates and switches back and forth between prestige and non-prestige codes in conversation with the subordinate.¹⁶

Proponents of a convergence/divergence-based approach to style-shifting maintain that accommodation to one’s audience holds a central place in speakers’ minds because it is through such accommodation that speakers achieve solidarity with audience members. However, Coupland claims that, in determining degree of “solidarity” with the audience, a number of factors must be considered besides

how similar a speaker's speech style is to that of her audience members. For example, as a prelude to his discussion of style-shifting in the speech of a well-known Cardiff, Wales, radio announcer, Coupland 1998 notes

A local radio broadcaster may achieve a degree of solidarity with a community audience not so much because his/her dialect style, at some point and in some respect, "resembles their own." Rather, "solidarity" might be analysable as a complex of inferential processes whereby listeners reconstruct social and personal images, of and "through" a speaker, which carry familiar or inclusive cultural echos, in some specific domain of experience, and against a specific backdrop of cultural experiences and assumptions.

In other words, listeners may feel a high degree of solidarity with a radio announcer whose speech is quite different from their own, as long as the speech the announcer is producing allows listeners to conjure up cultural images which are shared by the listeners and the announcer. Thus, Coupland concludes, "Degrees of similarity between a newsreader's dialect-style and our own styles as individual listeners are only the most tenuous index of a global outcome that we label 'solidarity' or 'distance'." While it is fairly easy to view non-accommodative shifts as proactive rather than reactive, Coupland argues that even accommodative shifts and other shifts which appear to be "conditioned" by the conversational context, in the sense that they are viewed as "appropriate" to the conversational context, are every bit as proactive as obviously non-accommodative shifts. He states, "From a self-identity perspective, shifts that are 'appropriate' are nevertheless creative in the sense that speakers opt to operate communicatively within normative bounds."

Rex O'Neal's shifts into performance speech are more fully explained if we conceptualize them not as attempts to converge with the non-present audience of linguists on whom he focuses, following tape changes, but rather as a means of fulfilling the role into which he casts himself in relation to this audience. He and other Ocracokers are accustomed to visitors, including linguists, asking for samples of the "quaint" Ocracoke dialect, the fame of which has spread far beyond the confines of the island community. Rex is also accustomed to visitors expressing disappointment when they listen to islanders engaged in daily conversation and realize that the dialect is not "British English" or "Australian English" or, most commonly, "Elizabethan English," as they have been led to believe. In fact, islanders have reported to us that visitors sometimes inform islanders that they are not "talking right," because their dialect is not quite exotic enough (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1997). Thus, when Rex focuses on the fact that he is participating in an interview so that his speech can be examined, he casts himself in the role of performer of the most distinctive island dialect he can muster, in order to give the linguists exactly what they want to hear – and then some. He is not converging with the linguists, and he is diverging from them in a very specific way, in order to fulfill a very specific role. Nor is he converging with anyone else, since no one on Ocracoke really talks or ever talked the way he talks in his speech

performance.¹⁷ He is, however, evoking the cultural image – of the old-time Ocracoke waterman; in effect, he is playing a part.

It is crucial to note that Rex is not playing the part of the quaint, heavily vernacular fisherman in RESPONSE to his focus on his audience of linguists. When he focuses on this audience, he could shift just as readily into exaggeratedly standard speech as into exaggeratedly non-standard speech; in fact, it is a common belief among sociolinguists that a shift in the direction of the standard is the expected result of a sudden focus on one's speech as an object of study. Thus Rex's shifts into performance speech must be viewed as proactive rather than reactive. He has a choice as to how he wishes to appear before his audience of linguists, and he opts to assume the role of the quintessential quaint islander rather than the role of someone who is less quaint, and who speaks "better", than outsiders often assume.

Further evidence for Rex's speech performances being indicative of role-playing, rather than simple convergence or divergence of speech style, is provided by Rex himself. In ex. 3, he does not directly offer a speech performance to the fieldworker (or to the tape recorder, which represents the non-present linguists who are a crucial part of his audience). Instead, his performance is embedded in a narrative in which he PLAYS A PART – that of the quaint islander who performs his dialect for Walt, the head of the research team. Thus, through his "performance within a performance," Rex foregrounds the fact that his performances are connected with role-playing, rather than merely trying to sound "like" or "unlike" those for whom he is performing.¹⁸

Rex's "performance within a performance" also has the effect of enabling Rex to place himself in a couple of different role relationships at once. His role with respect to the non-present linguists is clear – Rex is a dialect performer, plain and simple; but his role with respect to the fieldworker, Chris, is not so straightforward. For 45 minutes before the performance phrase in 3 was uttered, Rex and Chris had been engaged in a sociolinguistic interview in the form of a friendly one-on-one conversation between two individuals who were getting to know each other. Chris was expert in keeping Rex's focus from the fact that he and his colleagues would later analyze Rex's speech. Note, for example, how he minimizes the importance of the linguistic analysis to be conducted by referring to sociolinguist Walt Wolfram not as a prominent researcher who performs detailed analyses and uncovers important findings, but as "some goofy guy" who is "always listening to these tapes" for some obscure purpose. Thus Rex most likely casts himself as Chris's friend, rather than as an object of study, for most of the sociolinguistic interview. However, when Chris's efforts on keeping the focus away from language study are thwarted by his changing the tape, Rex is forced to become an object of study for Chris, since Chris is in fact part of the research team. Through crafting a narrative in which he presents his performance to the head of this team rather than directly to Chris, Rex is able to remain in the role of "friend" to Chris, even though he now acts as "research subject" as well.

Such balancing of several role relationships through the use of narrative has been discussed by Goffman 1981, who maintains that while a narrator is telling a story, he or she is able to take on new roles (or new “footings,” in his terms) only with respect to other characters in the story; the role relationships that hold among the narrator and the audience remain constant during the telling of the story. Under the view of Blom & Gumperz 1972 (which I extend to incorporate style-shifting as well as code-switching), all metaphorical style shifts – i.e. all shifts that are not conditioned by situational changes – enable speakers to maintain multiple role relationships. As they put it, metaphorical switches “allow for the enactment of two or more different relationships among the same set of individuals” (1972:425). Thus even style shifts that do not occur within a narrative enable speakers to balance several sets of role relationships among a single group of conversational participants.

We can see such a balancing act in the second instance of unsolicited performance speech that we have from Rex, ex. 4. This time, Rex presents his performance not as a narrative in which he performs for the leader of the fieldwork team, but as a direct address to the tape recorder that represents this team. Because Rex performs for the tape recorder and not directly for Chris, he is able to maintain his friendly footing with Chris in this instance as well, even as he takes on, once again, the role of a dialect performer who is an object of study.

We may follow Coupland in maintaining that even style shifts that are seemingly conditioned by external situation are in reality internally motivated, in that speakers CHOOSE to effect style shifts that correspond with shifts in the external situation. In this light, we begin to view style-shifting in general as a way for speakers to maintain multiple roles. (For example, if friends who are conversing in a non-prestige variety switch to a more prestigious variety when an authority enters the room, they are not relinquishing their friendly relationship but layering over it a temporarily more detached relationship.) Such a view of style-shifting recalls Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia” (1981), the notion that each individual’s speech is in reality comprised of many voices – the many registers (or genres) that are woven together to form the fabric of language, with each register evoking a particular cultural identity or ideological position. Speakers fuse together fragments from different registers as they shape their individual speech. In thus “speaking through the voices of others,” they evoke the cultural images and ideological stances that each “voice” conveys; in other words, they adopt various roles with the various “voices” they employ. In this sense, all speech is performative, since all speech consists of taking on the roles of others through speaking their words.

Earlier in this article, I mentioned the difficulty of neatly separating “performance” speech from “non-performance” speech. For example, I noted that we can fairly readily view both of Rex’s “non-performance styles” as performative. In his conversational speech with the fieldworker, Rex performs the role of a relatively educated man who willingly participates in a university research project

“SELF-CONSCIOUS SPEECH” IN OCRACOKE ENGLISH

by answering interview questions in a fairly standard speech register. In his conversation with his brothers, Rex performs the role of an insider who possesses knowledge of the Ocracoke community that is not shared by the college-educated fieldworker. In this case, it is more important that Rex use extremely non-standard speech, which cannot be penetrated by the fieldworker, than that he portray the old-time Ocracoke dialect. Thus, as mentioned above, he utilizes vernacular features from surrounding dialects as well as traditional Ocracoke features in this segment of the interview, whereas he utilizes only features of the Ocracoke variety (albeit in exaggerated form) in his speech performances. This blurring of the lines between performative and non-performative speech that we observe in Rex’s sociolinguistic interview accords well with Bakhtin’s view that all speech is performative. Further, if we accept Bakhtin’s view, then we are fully justified in including overtly performed speech in the study of language variation. In fact, we have strong motivation to do so, because our understanding of the patterns underlying overt performance will surely clarify our understanding of language patterning in other speech styles – including seemingly “natural” or “casual” speech, which is every bit as performative as Rex’s exaggeratedly dialectal performance utterances.

CONCLUSION

Although language variationists tend to dismiss self-conscious speech styles such as performance speech, my investigation has shown that the study of performance speech is valuable for a number of reasons. First, it exhibits regular patterning, just as does speech traditionally characterized as non-performative in nature; hence performance speech may be used to further the investigation of the patterned nature of linguistic variation that drives language variationist study. Second, speakers highlight features of which they are most aware (whether at the conscious or unconscious level) when they give a speech performance; hence performance speech may further our understanding of issues related to speaker perception of dialect variants. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, performance speech does not fit neatly into models that view style-shifting as a primarily reactive phenomenon; hence it forces us to reshape these models with a new focus on the proactive nature of style-shifting. Anthropologists have long recognized the prominent place of linguistic performance in speech communities throughout the world (e.g. Bauman 1975); language variationists can no longer afford to treat this type of truly natural speech as if it were a mere aberration.

NOTES

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The following transcription conventions are used:

(i) Two left brackets in vertical alignment indicate overlap between the end of one speaker's utterance and the start of the next speaker's:

- b. V: Now. . now tell me what you [said.
 c. RO: [Alright.
 I said "high tide on [the sound side,
 d. V: [High tide on the sound side, yeah

(ii) A following right bracket on the second utterance indicates that the entire second utterance is overlapped by the first speaker's utterance:

- FW: Yeah, that's the phosphorus in the water. You ever, you [ever
 h. V: [OK, yeah]
 i. RO: go to the ocean you'll see the. .

(iii) Words or group of words in phonetic transcription also appear in brackets. The distinction between this use of brackets and the preceding uses should be clear in all cases.

(iv) My comments on transcribed utterances are enclosed within double brackets.

(v) Three dots (...) indicate a long pause; two dots (..) indicate a shorter pause. (Pauses were not timed since they are not crucial to this analysis.)

(vi) A dash (–) indicates a false start.

(vii) A colon (:) indicates a lengthened vowel.

(viii) (???) indicates an incomprehensible utterance.

(ix) Non-speech vocalizations such as laughter are enclosed in parentheses.

¹ Coupland 1998 succinctly states that stylistic variation is most appropriately studied at the individual level:

what is appropriate for surveying the aggregate behaviours of communities and their subgroups is not necessarily appropriate for the unravelling of contextual variation through style-shifting. When it comes to social stratification by class, gender or age, individuals do not have the answers: the patterns that matter operate beyond the scope of the individual case. But when we come to the analysis of style, we see the individual interacting within her/his own space, time and relational contexts. We can of course seek to generalise about "what most people stylistically do," and the results are informative and important. But this exercise is reductionist in that it rules out any possible interpretation of the LOCAL intra- and inter-personal processes which are style's domain.

Of course, the limitation of the case study format is that it precludes generalization about "what most people do." Thus, while Coupland's investigation of a single Cardiff radio announcer tells us a great deal about how this speaker masterfully manipulates dialect features such as raised, fronted /a:/ in the service of identity creation and re-creation, there is an inevitable trade-off, in that the study tells us nothing conclusive about how raised, fronted /a:/ functions stylistically in the Cardiff community as a whole.

² Exactly what constitutes "authentic islander" identity is a matter for extended discussion. Schilling-Estes & Schrider (1996) suggest that this identity is largely that of the stereotypical old-fashioned waterman. In large part, this character seems to be a composite of the images of rugged fishermen which traditionally have dominated written and visual portrayals of island life and which have captured the imaginations of tourists (and even researchers) who travel to the islands in search of "genuine" watermen – and "genuine" vernacular dialect. This image is not embraced by some men on

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TABLE A.

Context	Following Environment	No. Raised/Total	Percentage Raised
Conversation with brothers	Nasal	5/7	71%
	Vd. Obs.	5/6	83%
	Vl. Obs.	5/11	46%
Conversation with fieldworker	Nasal	21/61	34%
	Vd. Obs.	14/27	52%
	Vl. Obs.	21/74	28%

Ocracoke who do not place as high a value on physical toughness as do the men in Rex's tight-knit social group. Further, this image is not even available to women, since they cannot project physical toughness if they also hope to project some measure of traditional feminine identity.

³ "Exaggerated raising" refers to the greater height of vowels in phonetic space in performance speech than in non-performance contexts. The term "exaggerated" may also be used in several other senses. For example, it may refer to speakers' usage of a variant at a higher percentage rate than in "non-exaggerated" speech; it may refer to the use of a variant in contexts (e.g. phonetic, stylistic) in which it would not normally occur; and finally, it may be used to refer to the addition of features to a variant, or even the addition of entire variants in the service of a speech performance. For example, it appears that Rex may add the feature of lip-rounding to raised /ay/ in his speech performances, and that members of Rex's all-male social group add vernacular variants from neighboring mainland varieties, including monophthongal /ay/, to their island speech when demonstrating the extreme vernacularity of their speech (cf. Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994).

⁴ Certainly, the patterning of phonological variation in rote performance phrases may well differ from the patterning of variation in non-rote performance speech. However, since speech performances are so often rote in nature, it does not seem inappropriate to make claims about performance speech in general based on the investigation of rote performances only. Further, rote phrases are more clearly distinguished from spontaneous utterances than non-rote performance phrases are from "non-performance" speech – an issue I discuss in the following section and in the section on style shifting. Thus, by focusing my investigation on a single rote performance phrase, I avoid the complications inherent in attempting accurately to divide non-rote performance speech from non-rote, non-performance speech. In addition, there are precedents for treating rote phrases indistinguishably from other performed phrases. For example, Coupland 1997 includes in his investigations of dialect performance such rote "catch phrases" as *Hark, hark, the lark, in Cardiff Arms Park, Well there we are*, and *That's half tidy*, while Preston includes in his studies of dialect imitation (1996:66) such rote phrases as *Y'all come back now, you hear?* (used in imitation of Southern American speech) and the following, used in imitation of New York City speech: *Tree little boids, sitting on a coib, eating doity woims and saying doity woims* (1996:51).

⁵ Put simply, a formant is one of the characteristic overtones which serve to distinguish a vowel from vowels of differing quality (cf. Ladefoged 1993:192 for more discussion of formants and their analysis).

⁶ Unfortunately, a good portion of the first interview conducted with Rex is of poor sound quality, because Rex and the fieldworker chose to hold the interview outdoors in a windy area while conducting a rather loud activity (mending Rex's crab pots). This interview, which lasted more than two hours, is also our longest with Rex. What the fieldworker lost in sound quality, however, he more than made up for in the relaxed nature of the speech he obtained – and in the long-term friendship with Rex which he initiated, and which all members of our fieldwork team have subsequently enjoyed.

⁷ Quantitative tabulations of /ay/ in Rex's non-performance speech yielded the figures shown in Table A.

⁸ Labov's principle is based on the extensive analysis of the patterning of linguistic variation in New York City speech (Labov 1966) and thus has a strong empirical foundation. However, his analytical methodology renders his findings with respect to style-shifting somewhat questionable. For example, Labov's classification of all speech styles along a single axis of formality obscures important distinctions between different types of formal and casual styles. For example, very different speech styles occur when a speaker reads a passage provided by an interviewer, and when the speaker discusses academic matters; these would be treated as similar styles, since both are formal in nature. Similarly, very different styles occur when a speaker becomes emotionally involved in a political discussion, and when a speaker tells an animated narrative about a near-death experience; these would be labeled simply as "casual" style. In addition, the insistence of language variationists on the primacy of vernacular speech in investigating issues of language variation and change seems out of keeping with Labov's observation that the most advanced tokens of forms undergoing change are often found in self-conscious speech, even if the overall speech SYSTEM which typifies self-conscious speech (Labov's focus is on vowel systems) does not accurately represent the system toward which the changing language variety in question is actually moving (see Labov 1966, particularly Chap. 14).

⁹ I am currently in the process of investigating speakers' demonstrations of their own dialect in Smith Island, north of Ocracoke in the Chesapeake Bay. Like the Ocracoke dialect, the Smith Island language variety has become an "object dialect" as the island emerges from its historic isolation. The demonstrations I have so far investigated have not been in the form of artistic performance but are nonetheless very accurate. For example, Smith Islanders are known for an unusual /aw/ variant characterized by a fronted glide, as in [hæ's] 'house'. When talking about this variant (e.g. "We say [hæ's]"), islanders demonstrate it with phonetic accuracy, as revealed in spectrographic analysis. In addition, islanders are also able to accurately demonstrate the non-glided fronted variant which characterizes mainland and older island speech. Further, islanders indicate some awareness of phonological conditioning on the variability of /aw/, in that they frequently demonstrate pre-voiceless glide-fronted /aw/ (e.g. [hæ's] 'house'), which is used at a high percentage rate in the island community, but they less frequently display pre-voiced or pre-nasal glide-fronted /aw/ (e.g. [dæ'n] 'down'), which is much rarer in Smith Island (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1997).

¹⁰ Of course, one might just as easily claim that Rex's conversation with his brothers constitutes a speech performance in which he and his brothers put on extremely non-standard speech in order to assert, through their thickly accented, barely comprehensible speech, that they are insiders to the Ocracoke community, while the fieldworker is clearly an outsider. I return to this point in the section on style-shifting below, in which I discuss the notion that all speech styles may be considered performative.

¹¹ Of course, accuracy of imitation is not always the goal in speech performance, and so speakers may not utilize features of the dialect they are performing even if they are fully aware of them – or they may use features which they know are not a part of the dialect being performed. Both Preston 1996 and Bell 1992 indicate that even highly inaccurate performances are often quite successful in that they evoke the desired response, usually laughter, from audience members. It may even be the case that select use of a few features makes for better performance than exhaustive use of all dialect features of which a performer is aware, much as dialect writing is usually more artistically effective if features are used sparingly (Preston 1996:65–66).

¹² However, Rex does NOT display an ability to perform the traditional Ocracoke /aw/ vowel, which is realized with a fronted glide (e.g. [sæ'nd] 'sound'), even though the variant should be every bit as closely linked with the lexical item *sound* as raised/backed /ay/ is associated with *tide* and *side*. In fact, acoustic measurements of Rex's /aw/ vowels in performance and non-performance speech (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1997) indicate that his /aw/ glide is actually farther back, i.e. closer to the standard variant, in performance than in non-performance speech. This patterning suggests that the raised/backed /ay/'s that Rex produces in performance speech are not based on lexical caricature but are indeed performed phonological variants.

¹³ Preston 1996 has also found that speakers do not discuss monophthongal /ay/ when talking about Southern speech, even though they utilize the variant in speech performances. Thus both Preston's work and mine indicate that speakers reveal linguistic perceptual abilities in speech performance which they are not able to express in metalinguistic comment. In other words, speakers may provide "definition by ostentation" (Preston 1996:66), even though they are not able to attach labels to dialect features (Labov 1994:403).

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¹⁴ This convergence/divergence framework is based on the Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) of Giles and his colleagues (e.g. Giles & Powesland 1975). Bell extends Giles's notions by articulating the different kinds of audiences which affect speaker convergence/divergence, as defined in terms of the various levels of addressees of which audiences are composed. Further, Bell applies SAT to the investigation of the patterning of specific linguistic variables. Because I examine audience make-up in my analysis of performance speech in Ocracoke, I highlight Bell's framework rather than Giles's.

¹⁵ Of course, the formality/informality continuum remains useful in analyzing style shifting in sociolinguistic interviews which have been designed to yield various speech styles in which formality correlates with heightened standardness, as in Labov's "word list" style, and informality with heightened non-standardness, as in his "casual" style (cf. Labov 1972a).

¹⁶ My brief definition of Blom & Gumperz's "situational" and "metaphorical" switching is by no means to be taken as definitive. There is disagreement over what these terms mean, largely because Blom & Gumperz do not define the terms very clearly. (Cf. Myers-Scotton 1993:54-55 for further discussion. I largely follow Myers-Scotton's interpretation of Blom & Gumperz in the definitions I present.)

¹⁷ We have no evidence, for example, that islanders' /ay/ diphthongs were ever as raised and backed as Rex's performance vowels, even in previous generations. In fact, in my dissertation I suggest that the raising and backing of the /ay/ vowel which serves to mark Ocracoke speech is a relatively recent development – and that, if anything, the /ay/ nucleus was lower in phonetic space in generations prior to that of Rex's parents than it is in the speech of older Ocracokers today. Further, Rex adds an element of lip-rounding to his performed /ay/ vowels which appears to be only marginally present in non-performed raised/backed /ay/ among older Ocracoke speakers.

¹⁸ Because speakers play various roles when presenting narratives, with each role being associated with its own speech style or styles, much information on style-shifting is obscured if one simply assumes, with Labov, that narratives offer clearcut cases of "casual" style. Further, narratives tend to be performative in a way that discussions are not and thus should be viewed cautiously when attempting, in a Labovian framework, to delimit casual, non-self-conscious speech from more self-conscious styles.

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