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New Perspectives on Linguistic Variation and Ethnic Identity in North America

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Introduction

In the years since the first studies of ethnicity and linguistic variation (Blanc 1964; Labov et al. 1968, Labov 1972; Gumperz 1964, 1971; Giles 1979), analytic approaches to ethnic identity have evolved considerably. Recent rethinking of the concept of *ethnolect* (Benor 2010; Eckert 2008a; Jaspers 2008; Wolfram 2007) reflects a revolution in the theoretical approach to the study of social identity and language. Just as we now recognize that factors such as region, sex, age, and socioeconomic status do not distinguish subcommunities as categorically as early studies appeared to show (Labov 2001; Guy 2013), we also now recognize that ethnicity is also not monolithic or static. Current scholarship proposes a reformulation of methodologies (see Yaeger-Dror and Cieri under review, and references), research questions, and analytic perspectives. The present special issue is another such example. The papers show that an individual's ethnic self-presentation can be highly layered and complex: not only is there tremendous diversity among members of 'the same ethnic group', but one's presentation of self may vary remarkably even within the bounds of a single interaction. This special issue offers both methodological and theoretical suggestions for approaching the complexities of analyzing language and ethnicity in contemporary North American cities.

Despite drawing on a range of different methods, each of the papers in this special issue considers the range of linguistic variability among members of a single, census-defined group, rather than only drawing comparisons between groups. Some (Nagy et al.; Wagner) bring this intragroup approach to more than one group, while others (Becker) consider intraspeaker variation (a decision which is itself impossible from a perspective that frames an individual's ethnic identity as singular and static). Within the context of previous literature (e.g., Yaeger-Dror 1993; Fought 1999; Eckert 2008a; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Hoffman and Walker 2010), the focus on variation within a group or individual reveals that orientation to ethnic identity is linked to linguistic behavior in complex ways. All of the papers explore individuals' evolving or varied presentations of self, shown either through their active identity management in relation to the wider community (Fix; Nagy et al.; Wagner; Wong and Hall-Lew) or (additionally) in relation to their immediate interlocutors (Becker; Noels). The papers consider the impact of these influences on language variation, raising concerns that complicate contemporary models of language and ethnicity in sociolinguistics.

Many North American cities have undergone major demographic shifts since World War II (see Hall-Lew 2010; Yaeger-Dror and Thomas 2010), most relevantly with respect to ethnicity. As a result, current variationist scholarship on speech patterns in these urban spaces must grapple with this socially salient and complex variable, one consequence of which is the challenge of representing that complexity in quantitative

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modeling. This special issue represents a collection of diverse answers to the question of how to build statistical models that encompass the complexities of speaker ethnicity and phonetic variation. The studies represent analyses of highly current primary data, collected by the authors in fieldwork projects undertaken between 2005-2012. The papers cover five urban locations in North America: Columbus, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Toronto. Together, the studies highlight one broadly shared finding: the emergence of more fluid and layered understandings of what constitutes ethnic identity, and how speakers negotiate their own and others' images of their various identities. This insight complicates the analytical concept of 'ethnolect' and has major implications for how future researchers approach variationist analysis in North American cities. However, one unfortunate weakness of the present collection is that this small set of papers underestimates the true complexity of 'ethnic identity'. For example, even limiting the definition of 'ethnicity' to racial or regional heritage, one of the glaring absences here is a discussion centered on Latino/Latina identities, which have been especially foundational to the body of research problematizing the ethnolect concept (Toribio 2000, 2003; Fought 2006; Eckert 2008a; Jaspers 2008; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Bayley forthcoming; Otheguy et al. 2007). No Native American or First Nations groups are represented here (but see, e.g., Dannenberg and Wolfram 1998), nor is 'ethnicity' based on religious heritage (but see, e.g., Benor 2010). While classic studies of language and ethnicity have sporadically considered the sociolinguistic importance of religious heritage as an 'ethnic' designation (e.g., Blanc 1964; Labov 1966; Gumperz 1971), more recent studies have considered the relative salience of religious, local, and regional heritage, and have demonstrated that these factors provide and entail competing linguistic identities (Kulkarni-Joshi, 2013; Yaeger-Dror 1993; Miller 2007; Al Wer and De Jong 2009; Mukherjee 2013; Yaeger-Dror under review). However, the present papers do consider groups which have received relatively little attention in variationist sociolinguistics, for example Chinese Americans (Wong and Hall-Lew, this issue; see also Hall-Lew and Starr 2010, Wong 2010) and Chinese-, Polish-, and Italian Canadians (Nagy et al., this issue; see also Hoffman and Walker 2010), as well as white women with strong African American social ties (Fix, this issue; see also Sweetland 2002).

However, our intention is not for this volume to represent the entire range of issues involving language and ethnicity in contemporary North America, much less beyond, but rather to serve as a call for similarly detailed studies in these and other communities. In the era of globalization, we might especially consider the similarities and differences between the observations made for North American communities as compared those in other parts of the world. Some of the analytical insights that appear in this volume are highly reminiscent of sociolinguistic studies of intragroup variation outside of North America (e.g., Sharma 2011, 2012). At the same time, much recent work in urban Western Europe has documented the rise in "multiethnic" or "multicultural" linguistic repertoires or varieties (see Quist 2008; Svendsen and Røyneland 2008; Wiese 2009; Cheshire et al. 2011; Kerswill 2013), which is a phenomenon not yet studied (or even documented) in North America. If these cases of *superdiversity* (Blommaert et al. 2011) are not present in the same way in the demographically diverse cities studied here,

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one obvious question is what accounts for such a marked difference between North American, Western European, and other urban contexts. The present volume assembles a modest representation of the current state of the study linguistic variation and racial or regional heritage variation in North America, in order to narrow the focus for purposes of a fruitful discussion. We anticipate that future work will broaden the focus to a more varied set of situations and a larger sociolinguistic context.

One strength of the present issue is that the individual papers each present contrasting yet complementary methodologies for determining the significance of social information on linguistic production. Several draw on ethnography to provide 'on the ground' detail about how larger social structures are maintained and how larger social changes progress. The studies consider the linguistic varieties available in each context, including the dominant local norms, the relevant regional varieties, and any ethnic indexical meanings in each community. Each study explores a range of potentially relevant demographic factors, including the role of immigrant generation, years of residence in the community, and the demographic composition of the community. (See also: Aoyama et al. 2008; Flege 2002; Flege et al. 2006; Ito 2010.) These factors augment the already complex set of 'classic' sociolinguistic variables such as speaker age, sex, social status, and education (e.g., Labov 2010). The papers pay particular attention to attitudinal and identity factors that reflect speaker ties to the multiple communities to which they belong. In documenting and analyzing the relationship between local and 'global' patterns of language use, these papers initiate a wider conversation concerning ideological forces which maintain social borders and reflect identity in a late modern world. Noels' contribution provides a complementary cornucopia of methods used by social psychologists to study the same factors.

Sociolinguistics and the Representation of Ethnic Identity

The papers present new linguistic data from ethnically complex urban locations across North America and serve as examples of how linguists and social psychologists represent speakers' sense of ethnic identity. As Bourdieu (1991, p. 221) noted, "Struggles over ethnic or regional identity...are a particular case of the different struggles over classifications." While Bourdieu was referring to broader lived experiences, these "struggles" can also be seen in how sociolinguists make methodological decisions; decisions which ultimately feed back into broader identity discourses. In this way, the papers in this issue join other recent work (Eckert, 2008a; Jaspers, 2008) in taking a critical, reflexive approach toward the analyst's representation of the ethnic identities of the speakers in their research.

The need for this concern becomes most acute when linguists aim to build complex statistical models testing identity factors as predictors of language use. While one of the most exciting aspects of variationist sociolinguistics is the rapidly growing sophistication of quantitative methods, Noels' paper demonstrates the fact that sociolinguists are simultaneously confronted with a growing sophistication in theories of

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ethnic identity that highlight its myriad complexities. Noels' paper has presented us with evidence that social psychologists have a number of theoretical perspectives from which to view a speaker's perception of ethnic identity, and that specific qualitative and quantitative tools can be 'borrowed' from their toolboxes, to evaluate speakers' sense of identity from a given perspective. As we make operational choices in how to reduce identity factors to quantitative vectors, these become choices in the extent to which we choose to simplify that more fluid and complex reality. While the papers in this special issue make those choices differently, all share an interest in these challenges, addressing them either by discussing how best to reduce 'ethnicity' to one or more discrete factors, or how best to justify the inclusion or exclusion of community members represented in a speaker set, or both. Making these decisions is a more challenging task today than it ever has been in North American sociolinguistics, but in all cases the papers seek to define identity with explicit reference to what those identities mean to the speakers themselves and to the communities in which they live. While the papers here take very different approaches to these issues, they each offer useful ways forward toward more adequate analyses of multivalent social variation.

The papers by Nagy et al., Fix, and Noels address this question most directly, albeit in radically different ways. In their paper, Nagy, Chociej, and Hoffman explore the utility of a specific Ethnic Orientation questionnaire (Keefe and Padilla 1987; Hoffman and Walker 2010), as a tool for quantifying an individual's orientation to their own ethnic identity. The 'EO' questions concern a speaker's social network, language use, parent and partner identity, experiences with discrimination, and explicit ethnic identification. The test is based on a questionnaire initially constructed for Chicano identities (Keefe and Padilla 1987), which assumes that the affiliative patterns which accommodation theorists claimed, and which lab-based research had shown to be correlated with second language speech production or perception patterns (Aoyama et al. 2008; Flege 2002; Flege et al. 2006; Ito 2010), could be demonstrably correlated with sociolinguistic variation. Each individual who takes the questionnaire receives an 'EO score' which then becomes the operational representation of ethnic identity. In a tour-de-force cross-corpora comparison, Nagy et al. (this issue) analyze multiple linguistic variables according to EO score, comparing speakers representing six different ethnic groups and multiple immigrant generations in Toronto, Canada. They emphasize that the relative importance of different aspects of ethnic orientation can differ remarkably depending on the ethnic community being studied (e.g., Cantonese or Italian), the linguistic variable under analysis (e.g., VOT or pro-drop), and the analysts' operational decisions. Indeed, one of the most important take-away points from their paper is that the employment of scales operationalizing ethnic orientation does not correlate directly with evidence of the hypothesized results; Nagy et al. in fact find few correlations that can be shared across ethnic communities despite a larger participant sample and a number of different operational criteria. These results prompt us to consider, on the one hand, the relationship between 'ethnicity' as a lived social feature and 'ethnicity' as captured in survey instruments, and on the other hand, the highly complex relationship between individual speakers' identification with their heritage(s), much less an entire community's sense of identification (by any

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measure) and linguistic variation. Kim Noels (this volume) provides a lucid and thorough consideration of these avenues of investigation, contrasting 'conceptual' and 'operational' approaches to the analysis of this variable / bundle of variables.

Noels points out that future research will benefit from the inclusion of both participants' and researchers' assessments of ethnic identity. In some cases, ingroup members' group identifications are so categorical that little 'formal assessment' seems to be required: For example, in the Wagner study (here), the high school students presented themselves as categorically belonging to a single ethnic group, although their ancestry in many cases was actually quite mixed (p.c.). In some cases their claimed ethnic group seemed to be chosen to fit their neighborhood and friendship group, rather than their grandparents' place of birth, but the girls' claimed identity was clear and categorical, and very little in the way of questionnaire extensions appeared to be necessary.

For most studies, however, a simple single question was found to be far from sufficient, and a complex set of questions is either devised and tested, or imported from earlier studies. In the latter case, a questionnaire protocol must be developed after preliminary open-ended question sets are tried. This approach was taken by Fix, who developed a locally appropriate question set specifically tailored for the community she studied in Columbus, Ohio, which she calls the African American Network Strength Score (AANSS); it incorporates the factors found to be relevant through ethnographic observation, rather than focusing on salient variables from earlier nonlocal studies emphasized in the social psychological literature. The AANSS is based in part on the quantification of a wide array of aesthetic and consumptive practices associated with local constructions of African American identity, an analytic innovation that embraces the semiotic aspects of 'ethnicity' as a social factor within the local community. The AANSS also includes a scale of 'network strength' incorporating information about the speakers' network ties as well as information about the affective quality of those ties. Fix draws on the AANSS to account for linguistic differences among a sample of 'white' women with African American social networks who represent a range of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, very clearly demonstrating the tremendous intra-group variability in any analysis of a superficially homogeneous ethnic 'group'. Her paper carries the discussion of language and ethnicity to yet another level by focusing on the women's variable use of features typically ascribed to the hallmark 'ethnolect' of North American variationist study: African American English.

Many sociolinguistic studies have also gone through the similar project of developing a locally relevant question set (e.g., Labov 1966; Thibault and Vincent 1990; Llamas et al. 2009). While this may preclude simple comparisons between studies, we agree with Noels that such studies have the best chance of permitting the development of a greater understanding of speakers' own identity management. While more time consuming than adopting an earlier protocol, devising a locally relevant questionnaire allows the researcher to engage participants in their own terms. This method follows the path first trod by Labov (1963) in Martha's Vineyard, and also the Montreal research group (Thibault and Vincent 1990), which found that even the material cultural

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preferences of their speakers reflected relevant information that could not be accessed more directly. This approach contrasts with Nagy et al.'s 'EO' questionnaire, which focuses on variation in an individual's orientation to 'ingroup' ethnic identity based on conclusions drawn in many earlier studies. As Noels suggests, it may be advantageous to balance the use of both a locally-developed question set and a set of questions known to have produced interesting correlations in previous studies.

Both Nagy et al. and Fix discuss in great detail the methodological considerations behind assigning scores to speakers, and both attend to the vast challenges inherent in the quantification of qualitative information. While this focus on methodology is itself a contribution to the field, the ultimate analytic goal for both papers is to apply these scores to models of linguistic variation. The enormous complexity of findings resulting from this application is both daunting and exciting. There is much still to be discovered about the proper quantification of social factors for the purpose of statistical models.

The other papers in this issue do not use questionnaire data but confront the issue of representing speaker ethnicity in other ways. For example, all the authors faced the question of how to define the speaker set, which speakers to include for analysis and which to exclude. Wong and Hall-Lew (like Nagy, et al.) define the speaker set in a very constrained manner, the criteria for which (like Fix and Wagner) come from ethnographic work, this time in New York City and San Francisco. In both locations, immigrant generation and heritage language variety were found to be salient aspects of the structure of social self-identification among Asian Americans. The current paper consequently focuses (primarily) on 2nd-generation Cantonese-heritage Americans, in contrast with previous studies that treated 'Asian Americans' or 'Chinese Americans' (e.g., Hall-Lew 2009; 2013) as members of a single group. Furthermore, rather than comparing these speakers to members of a local non-Cantonese 'control' group, Wong and Hall-Lew focus on differences between the two regionally defined speaker samples. The results show tremendous linguistic variation even within this seemingly constrained speaker set: not only between regions, but also across age groups and even within demographically similar subgroups. Their cross-regional comparison highlights how the social meanings of the linguistic variants themselves differ relative to global, local, and shifting contexts. The article touches on topics in social psychology and linguistic anthropology: on the one hand, the important role of how a sense of community develops and shifts among and between neighborhood residents (Milroy 1980), and on the other hand, the co-indexing of semiotic elements of linguistic style (Eckert 2000). The authors argue that these factors allow for a more nuanced view of 'ethnicity' as an intersectional social category (see below).

Wagner's paper analyzing the speech of Philadelphia teens draws on ethnography to frame ethnic self-identity in terms of the socially salient contrast most relevant to her field site, a South Philadelphia Catholic girls' high school: Irish versus Italian.¹ In

¹ One fascinating point is that even in the shared high school religious community, where many of the speakers actually belong to both heritage communities, and almost all of them second generation, living in

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addition to finding general correlations between ethnic self-identification and patterns of linguistic variation, Wagner's longitudinal approach also demonstrates that the influence of ethnic identification also varies with a speaker's age and life stage, showing that the importance and predictive value of heritage community 'ethnicity' as a sociolinguistic factor may be stronger, or framed differently, at one point in a speaker's life than another. By detailing difference in ethnic orientation between two different life stages, Wagner complicates the task of analyzing ethnic (and other relevant) identities for anyone working with age-stratified speaker samples.

Wagner's speakers, like the teenagers analyzed in Mendoza-Denton (2008), Bigam (2010, 2012), Cutler (2010), and Bucholtz (2011), among others (see Kirkham and Moore 2013) represent the life stage right before their social universe is restructured for a very different life stage. Her paper is similar to Nagy et al.'s, Fix's, and Wong and Hall-Lew's in focusing on variation and change at a broad community level. In contrast, Becker's paper isolates and emphasizes the influence of social situation, and the dynamics of identity work within the context of a single conversation. Becker's paper details the fluid and layered orientation to identity in the speech of one individual over the course of a single interview. Her analysis draws mostly heavily on qualitative evidence, pairing content-based discourse analysis (see also Fix, and Wong and Hall-Lew articles) with attention to the variants as they appear (Coupland 2007), to see how particular variants align with particular discursive moments. In drawing on insights from the concept of *ethnolinguistic repertoire* (Gumperz 1964; Benor 2010; Sharma 2012), Becker argues that a speaker's sense of ethnic identity, particularly as manifest in linguistic production, may be so fluid that the practicality or reliability of representing ethnic identity as a single statistical vector may itself be called into question. This sobering insight, which appears to varying degrees across the papers, points to another common perspective characterizing contributions to this special issue: the focus on ethnic identities as intersectional and shifting.

Intersectional and Shifting Identities

The pursuit of the most comprehensive and explanatory statistical models of linguistic variation typically relies on the inclusion of multiple social or external factors, treated in the model as independent effects: e.g., socioeconomic class, age or year-of-birth, sex or gender, and ethnicity. One challenge has always been that these factors are not, in lived experience, truly independent. Ethnic self-identification is only one of any given speaker's many interconnecting social identities, and is only one of the identities a speaker may project at a given time. This fact has been central to the work of scholars outside of linguistics working on theories of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005; Nash 2008). Just as the paradigm of intersectionality emerged from what McCall

the same neighborhood and parish community, they chose to identify themselves, and formulate their community division not as, say, 'jocks' or 'burnouts' but rather with the ethnic labels 'Italian' or 'Irish'.

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(2005, p. 1773) called the analysis of “intracategorical complexity,” sociolinguistic research has shown that variation within a particular social group (whether a high school class, a neighborhood community, or an ethnic group) can often be explained by further dividing that group into subgroups according to a different grouping factor. While this complexity is treated in these papers as earlier sociophonetic studies did (that is, factors are still treated as independent), the social theoretic analysis of those facts is particularly attentive to intersectional concerns. This ‘new’ perspective brings the study of language ethnicity more in line with the social theory seen in other sociolinguistic approaches, such as studies of language and sexual orientation (e.g., Barrett 2002; Levon 2011). Podesva (2007, 2011), for example, demonstrates the linguistic consequences of varying intersections between sexuality and social context. Levon (2011, p. 80) notes the clear theoretical connections to studies of indexicality, in that “[i]ntersectionality provides us with a window into what ‘self’ speakers are aiming for and thus with a better insight as to what meaning a variable has in context.” To wit, the papers here argue that ethnic identity can only be understood when viewed in its intersection with other aspects of speaker identity, be it life stage (Fix, Wagner), socioeconomic identity management (Wagner), place (Becker, Wong and Hall-Lew), or immigrant generation (Nagy et al.).

The intersection between ethnic and life stage identities, for example, is one way to frame changes across the lifespan that highlights the ultimate impossibility of analyzing ethnic identity in the same way at each level of an age stratified sample. Earlier work highlighted the “dynamic character” of “ethnolinguistic change” (Giles 1979; Bourhis and Giles 1977), and contemporary sociolinguistics has the good fortune of now being able to draw on a robust body of evidence showing that speakers’ own understandings of their ethnic (and other) identities are not static across the lifespan (see Eckert 2008a, Kohn 2013, Mendoza-Denton 2008, Rickford and Price 2013, Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010). The present papers by Wagner, Fix, and Becker show this as well. Fix, for example, compares three life stages: youth, adolescence, and adulthood, finding very different network strength scores at different life stages, and with some corresponding differences in their patterns of linguistic production. Becker’s micro-level analysis showcases the real-time fluidity in a speaker’s foregrounding of one social identity over another, as well as the intersectionality in that speaker’s simultaneous co-construction of both identities. This snapshot of intraspeaker variation only hints at the tremendous complexities underlying in the negotiation of ethnic identity seen in the more expansive real-time studies. Becker’s paper also connects ethnic identity analysis to work on stance and style shifting (see also Noels this issue; Coupland 2007; Becker 2009), showing how intersectionality raises real challenges for quantitative sociolinguistic approaches to both African American identity and New York identity, both presently (e.g., Fix; Wong and Hall-Lew) and historically (Labov et al. 1968).

Wong and Hall-Lew (this issue, like Wagner and Becker) argue that ‘regional’ identity, like ethnic identity, is best interpreted intersectionally. They suggest that the speakers’ orientation to Cantonese American identity be interpreted regionally, by considering the respective roles of Chinese and non-Chinese social practices in each city. While the results show that the local mainstream vowel pattern under analysis is

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overwhelmingly favored by each set of speakers, understanding why that is so requires an indexical analysis; speaker ethnic identity and the ethnic meaning of the linguistic variants within the local community are both still necessary to explain the 'regional' pattern of the results. This perspective suggests a general reframing of studies of non-white ethnic groups' use of regional variants (see Gordon 2000; Labov 2001; Yaeger-Dror and Thomas 2010); explanations move from a frame of '(lack of) participation' to an analysis of speakers' orientations to indexical meaning. This cross-city comparison speaks to recent evidence from large social media corpora suggesting that social and specifically ethnic similarities between cities predict the adoption of linguistic innovations even across distant geographical areas (Eisenstein et al. 2012).

Wagner (this issue), Wong and Hall-Lew (this issue), and Becker (this issue) all explicitly consider the semiotics of specific variants. Wagner considers the gendered meanings of particular variants as they impact ethnic meanings, and how both are negotiated different a different life stages. Wong and Hall-Lew consider the effect that contrasting regional contexts have on the space of available ethnic meanings. In comparing two very different cities, on opposite coasts, the analysis speaks to how local indexicalities feed into a more 'global' circulation of meanings. In addition, Becker analyses micro-level style-shifting, unpacking extremely local indexical processes. (The latter two papers are interesting to consider in tandem, since both consider the height of the BOUGHT vowel as a marker of both regional and ethnic identities.) A more general, shared perspective from all of the studies in this special issue is that linguistic features are *multivalent*, such that one variant might index an ethnic meaning in one context but a place-based meaning (for example) in a different context, consistent with Eckert's (2008b) recent theory of the *indexical field*. In practice, while a particular variant may be typically analyzed as an index of regional identity, there are contexts when that is not the primary social meaning of that variant. One focus of the present special issue is to consider the possible implementation of phonetic variants as resources for negotiating ethnicity, among other social meanings. In this way, several of the papers here exemplify the relevance of *indexicality theory* (e.g., Silverstein 2003; Eckert 2008a, 2008b; Eberhardt 2010) for studies of linguistic variation marking ethnic, regional and other identities simultaneously.

As we consider how different meanings emerge for the same variant in different contexts, we must further consider how 'context' concerns not only differences at the community level but also aspects of situation, genre, or interlocutor stance. Similarly, the concept of a 'shifting' identity refers on the one hand to long-term shifts such as the transition of a neighborhood from predominantly Irish to predominantly Chinese (see Hall-Lew 2009, 2013), and on the other hand to face-to-face interactional shifts such as changes in conversational topic (see Becker 2009 and this issue). Although crucially different, these two (of many) types of 'context' intersect with each other, as well, such that the salient meanings in a variant's indexical field will differ according to both (or all). The notion of indexicality thus builds on earlier observations by Giles (1979, a.o.), Clément and Noels (1992), Yaeger-Dror (1993, 1994), and others that showed how ethnic identities shift with respect to changes in interlocutor, situation, etc. This perspective is

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also reminiscent of recent work outside of the focus on language and ethnicity, such as Podesva (2007, 2011), who examined the implementation of prosodic variants in distinct social contexts and their indexical meanings. Attention to the interaction between identity and context also situates the papers here with contemporary sociolinguistic work beyond North America, both with respect to ethnicity (e.g., Sharma 2011; Szakay 2008) as well as other social factors (e.g., Drager 2010; Hay and Drager 2010; Drager, Hay and Walker 2010; Llamas, Watt and Johnson 2009). In this vein, none of the individual perspectives presented here are strictly 'new'; rather, our hope is that their application in these rapidly changing social contexts will foster discussions regarding the best theories and practices for grappling with these exciting yet challenging concepts.

Applying New Perspectives

While studies of linguistic variation, language contact, and ethnic identity are hardly new, contemporary research on ethnicity as a sociolinguistic factor can bring new methodological and theoretical insights to bear on future analyses. Today, in Columbus, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Toronto, to name only a few locations, there are literally millions of speakers available to be observed, interviewed, and recorded, and the breadth and diversity of analyses in this paper suggest a wealth of opportunity at hand. The contemporary picture of urban North America offers tremendous potential to investigate which speakers use which variants, to what end, with what underlying motives, and with what meaning, and how those choices interrelate and change. As the papers in this issue show, our world is characterized by substantial flows of immigration both within (Becker; Fix) and across (Nagy et al.; Wong and Hall-Lew) urban areas. Cities are sites of complex and dynamic relations among speakers of different heritage languages, of varying generations and years of residence, and of varying degrees of exposure to and competence in the local language and their heritage languages. This special issue joins other contemporary work in updating early depictions of 'ethnolectal' influence as primarily "contact features" that "survive in the English of the descendants of immigrant families" (Carlock and Wölck 1981, p. 18). Current work moves away from assumptions of causality to focus instead on modeling linguistic variants as meaningful resources for social positioning (e.g., Eckert 2008b; Jaspers 2008). This indexical approach takes us further in understanding how linguistic variants carry and construct ethnic meanings. However, the focus on the variant does not necessarily help advance theories concerning the ethnic identity. While previous research has shown that language use is influenced in part by speakers' sense of affiliation with one or another aspect of personal identity (Giles 1979; Llamas, Watt and Johnson 2009; Noels this issue), many questions remain about the relationship between personal identity and linguistic production.

This special issue also comes at time when our field is enjoying a rapidly expanding array of acoustic, transcriptional and statistical techniques, as well as protocols for field work which have evolved over the years to permit a more nuanced

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understanding and coding of the issues which are relevant to our studies. As phoneticians have shown, our understanding of the limitations and possibilities of cognitive adaptability (e.g., Piske, et al. 2011; García-Sierra et al. 2011; Chang 2012) might also be incorporated into standard sociolinguistic fieldwork protocols. Sociolinguists have become adept at fine acoustic analysis of sociophonetic variables, as well as robust analysis of morphosyntactic variables; both sociolinguists and social psychologists are developing increasingly sophisticated methods of analyzing and coding for social attitudes and ethnolinguistic vitality. The papers in this special issue emphasize the importance of paying careful attention to decisions made in the coding of both community demographics and community ideologies as factors influencing language variation and change. The authors employing surveys draw on attitudinal data, network data, and language use data, while the authors employing more ethnographic techniques draw on content analysis and theories of indexicality to draw out the most relevant emic distinctions. This newly expanded range of information suggests a pivotal moment in modeling the linguistic variability of our complex contemporary social world.

Each of these papers illustrates the complexity and multidimensionality of the influences on speech variation, demonstrating the importance of recognizing speakers' multiple aspects of identity and the ways in which they adapt their speech to construct, evoke, and reflect these identities. These studies show that in order to analyze the multivalent speech characteristics of such (if not all) communities, it may be necessary to expand research protocols to include methodologies which have not always formed a part of the traditional sociolinguistic interview paradigm: attitudinal surveys, content-based discourse analysis, and ethnographic detail. Several of the papers indicate the added advantages of conducting parallel research in different communities in order to maximize our ability to compare outcomes and to discover both general and community-specific strategies and consequences of ethnolinguistic diversity. By examining both intergroup and intragroup variation we obtain a body of evidence that calls for an intersectional analysis, not only with respect to speaker identity but also with respect to the indexical meanings of the linguistic forms. These papers add to a growing body of work that reveals the tremendous complexity of 'ethnicity' both as an operational statistical factor and as a lived experience. The challenge, going forward, will be how to combine these different insights into a coherent picture. It is our hope that the papers in this special issue will serve as potential examples, together presenting a modest but useful snapshot of studies of ethnicity and linguistic variation in contemporary urban North America.

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this special issue, and we would like to extend our sincerest thanks for their comments and recommendations.

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