Operationalizing Stance as an Independent Variable
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So-called third wave variationist studies have recently focused attention on how social meanings become associated with sociolinguistic variants. Similarly, *stance* is a concept that has been invoked to link local, or micro, analysis with more global, macro patterns of variation and change (for example, Kiesling 2005). In this paper we demonstrate that stance can be operationalized in order to discover reliable patterns of variation use.

Data are from a study of variation of the English (ing) and Coronal Stop Deletion (CSD; also known as /t,d/-deletion) variables in a conversation among eight women from a single community of practice. The speakers show a wide range of variation and different patterns of style shifting, patterns that cannot be explained by identity categories such as class. We therefore turn to stance as a way of explaining this variation. We find that the women habitually create different stances throughout the conversation and in their sociolinguistic interviews, and that these stances correlate with (ing) and CSD variants in regular, predictable, and expected ways explained below.

Stance is defined as the relationships of a speaker to some 'discursive figure' or 'stance object' (in Du Bois's 2007 terms). This discursive figure can be an interlocutor, a person represented in the discourse, ideas represented in the discourse, or other texts. These relationships have been operationalized under four factors:

- affect (positive or negative feeling),
- relative interpersonal solidarity,
- relativeinterpersonal hierarchy, and
- investment (the strength of the assertion, similar to English epistemic stance in adverbs such as *certainly* and *maybe*).

Each utterance of the conversation was coded on a five-point scale for each factor by two raters based on pre-existing criteria based on discourse analystic studies. Discrepancies of over 2 points were discussed and resolved, and the remaining scores were averaged. The average difference across utterances for all stance coding was 0.875, which means that even though they agreed exactly on average about 40% of the time, the coders differed less than one point when they did disagree.

In general, alveolar variants and deletion correlate with high affect, high solidarity, low hierarchy, and lowered investment. However, there were also interactions among speaker, investment and the other stance factors. We provide explanations for these patterns based on previous research on the meanings of these two variables as well as from qualitative analyses of comparable segments from different speakers.

We thus demonstrate how stance can be used to build a stronger foundation for third wave studies. We also provide evidence for the utility and analytic rigor of a method that uses stance, in conjunction with studies of macro variation and qualitative methods based on ethnography and discourse analysis. In addition, while problems with the 'attention to speech' coding scheme (Labov 2001) have been pointed out (Eckert 2001, Coupland 2007), no methods for replacing this model have emerged from those critiques. The method we present in this paper holds potential for replacing the style coding used most often in variation studies.