

## Speech Style and Authenticity: Quantitative Evidence for the Performance of Identity

Gregory R. Guy & Cece Cutler

The question of what constitutes an authentic speaker (particularly with regard to African American Vernacular English) has been the subject of a number of sociolinguistic debates over the years with some linguists positing the centrality of suprasegmental features (Butters 1984) and others focussing on morpho-syntactic features (Labov 1980). One alternative is to examine quantitative data where the relationship between a variable in different linguistic environments is altered by stylistic effects. Guy 1992 argues that stylistic effects operate quantitatively in the phonology like a post-lexical variable. With regard to t/d deletion, the exponential relationship between morphological categories affecting the process is systematically distorted whenever speakers seriously diverge from their vernacular norm by style-shifting. This arises because the exponential relation depends on the repeated application of the deletion rule within the lexicon, and any effect that occurs only post-lexically is NOT repeated in the lexicon. This distortion can be used to detect the presence and direction of style shifting.

Guy 1991a,b (cf. also Santa Ana 1992) demonstrates a mathematical relationship between three morphological categories for t/d deletion – regular (R) past tense forms (*walked*), irregular (I) past tense forms (*kept*), and monomorphemes (M) (*apt*)-- such that the rate of non-deletion, i.e. retention, in monomorphemes is equal to the cube of the rate of retention in regular past tense forms, while the retention rate in irregular past forms is the square of the regular past (i.e.  $M=R^{**3}$ ,  $I=R^{**2}$ ). These relationships are explained as a consequence of different derivational histories in a lexical phonological model, such that the word classes are exposed to the deletion rule one, two, or three times. Stylistic shifting in the use of sociolinguistic variables is effected by adjustments in usage at the postlexical level; since such effects are not iterated in the lexicon, there is a distortion of the exponential relationship in markedly formal or exaggeratedly informal speech

Data on t/d deletion from white hip hoppers who style shift towards AAVE show this sort of distortion when contrasted with the speech of AAVE speakers. The data come from 10 white males and 1 white female who affiliate with hip-hop as well as two African American male rap artists. The African American speakers fit the exponential model to a token error of less than 2, while the white hip hoppers diverge from it significantly ( $p < .05$ ) with a token error of about 14.4. Incorporating a stylistic factor in which the white hip hoppers have style-shifted towards increased t/d deletion explains these results. The white hip hoppers' underlying probability of retention for t/d deletion is around 85-90% (implying an unmarked deletion rate of around 10% for past tense forms and 27% for mono-morphemes), which is highly consistent with other white English speakers, and their style shift is a reduction of retention by around 45-50%. This data provides strong internal evidence in support of the idea that white hip hoppers are "performing" their hip hop style as a stylistic choice, which is overlaid on their unmarked vernacular usage.

### References:

- Butters, Ronald R. 1984. "When is English 'Black English Vernacular?'" *Journal of English Linguistics*, 17:29-36
- Guy, Gregory R. 1991a. "Explanation in variable phonology: an exponential model of morphological constraints." *Language Variation and Change* 3:1-22.

- Guy, Gregory R. 1991b. "Contextual conditioning in variable lexical phonology." *Language Variation and Change* 3:223-239.
- Guy, Gregory R. 1992. "Social and stylistic factors in variable lexical phonology." Paper given at New Ways of Analyzing Variation Conference, NWAV-21, University of Michigan.
- Labov, William. 1980. "Is there a creole speech community?" In Albert Valdman & Arnold Highfield (eds.), *Theoretical Orientations in Creole Studies*. New York: Academic Press. Pp. 369-388.
- Santa Ana, Otto. 1992. "Chicano English evidence for the exponential hypothesis: a variable rule pervades lexical phonology." *Language Variation and Change* 4:275-289.