Black Professionalism:

Perception and Metalinguistic Assessment of Black American Speakers' Sociolinguistic Labor

by

Kelly Elizabeth Wright

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Patrice Speeter Beddor, Chair
Assistant Professor Sharese D. King, University of Chicago
Professor Barbra A. Meek
Professor Robin M. Queen

Kelly Wright

kellywri@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-8327-9531

DEDICATION

To self-determination.

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ABSTRACT

Metalinguistic awareness encompasses what a language user knows about the relation of social factors (such as age, gender, or race) to linguistic usage, distribution, meaning, or context of occurrence variance. Such embodied knowledge is directly linked to the social meanings available to a given individual across linguistic markets, and thus can highlight the ways in which linguistic markets (and the social meanings enacted through them when people use language) are simultaneously responsive both to personally held aspects of identity and the extant sociohistorical facts which afford identities their social power. To elicit metacommentary stemming from such positionality-based awareness, a new method of sociolinguistic interview is introduced which elevates metalinguistic knowledge to a level comparable to that of speech feature. This dissertation applied this method in interviews with 17 Black professionals from Detroit, Michigan. The design included, for example, a task geared towards eliciting metacommentary on targeted African American Language terms (e.g., *shawty*, *stressed BIN*, and *the N-words*) that converges with some aspects of their positionality (e.g., regionally) and diverges in others (e.g., age- and gender-based knowledges). One major theme that emerged from metacommentary on these terms and other components of the interview method—examined in especially close detail through three case studies—is that the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor does not fully capture these Black professionals' reported motivations for style shifting. Rather, the notion of sociolinguistic labor can be enriched to include linguistic actions which are taken not only to satisfy others, but also to satisfy the self and in service of others.

Metacommentary from these Black professionals on specific elements of their racialized styles that they shift away from in the workplace informed the design of the speech perception experiment undertaken in this study, which assessed listeners' judgments of the relative professionalism of Black professional speech styles. Targeting three non-Standard variables—fortition via TH-stopping (*they* versus *dey*); metathesis (*ask* versus *aks*);, and consonant cluster reduction (*trend* versus *tren_*)—the perception experiment asked: if Black people choose to produce racialized varieties more often in their workplaces, are their identities as professionals

more likely to be rejected by audiences? Across three configurations of paired sentences differing in the number of non-Standard variables, the overwhelming majority of listeners, across demographic categories, prefer sentences with fewer non-Standard variables to those with more such variables from a Black professional speaker. However, the relative influences of these variables on professionalism judgments differed, with the metathesis variable *aks*, for example, presenting evidence of perceptual blocking, indicating that stereotypes about *aks* and its normative incompatibility with professionalism are operative in this study. These findings indicate that when a Black speaker shifts towards the Standard—be that Black-Accented Standard (as tested) or White Standardized spoken English—their style appears to align with listener expectations of professionalism; this indicates that Black professionals are less successful in conveying professionalism when features of non-Standard racialized varieties are present.

In consideration of the interviewees' reports of sociolinguistic labor done to acquiesce to assimilationist Standards, and in light of the experimental evidence indicating preference of speech styles which reflect said labors, I conclude this dissertation by calling for linguists across the discipline to become better advocates for linguistic equity at local and federal levels.

Chapter One Introduction

It is a very grave matter to be forced to imitate a people for whom you know—which is the price of your performance and survival—you do not exist.
James Baldwin

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation consists of two major components: a series of sociolinguistic interviews and a speech perception experiment. The most important goal of these interviews is to hold space for Black people to share their experiences with language, but the method itself is designed to capture metalinguistic awareness (Babel 2015) and recognizes that metalinguistic awareness and its connection to the embodied positionality (Bucholtz & Hall 2016; miles-hercules et al. 2021) of language users have been undervalued in linguistic inquiry. The main research question of these interviews is: What motivates Black professionals to style shift away from their more racialized varieties in the workplace? The discussion of outcomes from those interviews across Chapters Two and Three will lead me to consider an enrichment of the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor (Holliday & Squires 2020). These findings contribute to the developing conversation around sociolinguistic labor, specifically on the ways in which embodied positionality and ideological influences interact with linguistic markets (Zhang 2005).

Metacommentary elicited from 17 Black professionals from Detroit on specific elements of their racialized styles shifted away from in the workplace informed the design of the speech perception experiment (Chapter Four) also undertaken in this study. This experiment asked: Do listeners representing the general U.S. population have an expectation that professional speech is free from non-Standard variables? Another way of thinking about this is, are Black professionals successful when they shift away from their more racialized varieties, or do they have to? The experimental study is broadly situated within the speech perception literature on listener expectations, which demonstrates that social information (like a language user's gender, region of origin, or race) is attended to quickly (van Berkum et al. 2008, Scharinger et al. 2011)

and these types of social knowledge influence listener performance on tasks (e.g., King & Sumner 2014; McGowan 2015). I was inspired most directly by Labov et al. (2011)'s sociolinguistic monitor task, whose authors situated speech in a professional context—a newsroom—and demonstrated that the presence of even a single non-Standard variable (p.442) was enough for a listener to downgrade the speaker's perceived professionalism.

When we begin to consider the ways in which raciolinguistic (Flores & Rosa 2015) and Standard language ideological (Lippi-Green 2012; Silverstein 1979) influences shape perceptual outcomes for Black people on the linguistic market (Bourdieu 1977; Zhang 2005), the overall outcomes from this dissertation speak to the legibility of performances of Black professionalism. For the Black professional, they speak to how these professionals conceive of their own linguistic practices and those of others like them. For those whom the Black professional matriculates with, they speak to how their shifted styles (either towards or away from a Standard target) are taken up and evaluated by wider audiences. This work ends by considering what a preference for assimilationist sociolinguistic labor means and the ways in which linguists as a community of intellectuals can become better advocates at local and federal levels for linguistic equity across disciplines and domains.

In the sections that follow, this chapter will introduce central concepts which will be returned to throughout Chapters Two through Five as the interview and experiment data are presented and discussed. I will begin by anchoring this discussion in the body and its centrality in the production and perception of language. Embodied positionality is also the bedrock upon which considerations of linguistic ideology stand. The next section (Section 1.3) will briefly consider some foundational literature on language ideologies before turning attention to Standard language ideologies, and more specifically their sociohistorical development and function in the United States. Following this I introduce a discussion of metalinguistic awareness, specifically as it relates to embodied positionality and arguments in the literature for why studying discussions about language use is worthwhile. In that section I motivate the creation of the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI). This chapter ends with a consideration of sociolinguistic labor, which opens with an introduction to the concept of linguistic markets and closes by setting up the perception experiment in Chapter Four. I have included a brief section (Section 1.6) on terminology which contains a prose outline for the entire document.

1.2 Positionality

Language issues from living sources[1]; it is produced by the bodies of language users. Thus, linguistic perception inherently engages social experiences. Because people produce language with their bodies—and aspects of our bodies like gender and age and race are inextricable from our social roles—the linguistic patterns we adapt to over time are linked to certain sets of expectations that stem from the historical construction of those social roles. Because of this linkage, our perceptual experiences are always already socioculturally framed and mediated by aspects of our bodies that position us in the social world and afford an individual with their subjectivity. miles-hercules et al. (2020) propose that knowledge building—and thus the meaning-making process that follows—can be shown to be relativistic and egocentric when we observe how the world's languages manage deictic reference to the physical environment and the objects and entities it contains relative to the language user. Positionality is central to this dissertation for two reasons: because the Black professional's Blackness is read off their body in the majority of their daily social being and because, as Charity Hudley et al. (2020) tell us, self-reflexive critique of positionality on the part of the researcher is critical for the development of equitable and representative models of linguistic research and experimentation.

In their consideration of embodied sociolinguistics, Bucholtz & Hall (2016) point towards the inherently embodied nature of both linguistic production and perception. Focusing primarily on the voice, the authors discuss how embodied positionality "locates the body in social space as being of a particular kind" (p.178). Because individuals have knowledge(s) about the ways in which certain bodies are expected to behave (knowledge that is built through the historical construction of social roles (e.g., for elders or women or non-White people)) when the voice emerges from any given body, its meaning will always be interpreted in context relative to the individual user. Language is never experienced in a vacuum and meanings, though they may come to be broadly and commonly held, are not universal or predictable or stable. Bucholtz & Hall's (2016) emphasis on locality and cultural context makes other, non-embodied yet emergent and constructive aspects of positionality relevant, most especially one's regional

[1] Other things we perceive, smells for example, can radiate from the environment itself. Sulfur dioxide has a characteristic smell and can be emitted from volcanoes, which are not alive; this may produce a recognizable pattern when sulfur dioxide is perceived in the environment, but not an inherently social one. Language in all its forms—written, signed, and spoken—is produced by human beings. Even writing, which may be long removed from the human who created it when an individual encounters it, presupposes another human's presence when it is interacted with. The body's involvement in the creation and perception of language is indisputable.

origin or rootedness (Reed 2018) to that identity; their communities of practice (Eckert 2006); cultural products they identify with or other aspects of performance (Eckert 2000; Johnstone 2016; Heaton 2018); and (of particular relevance for this dissertation) their profession (Zhang 2005). Both strictly embodied positionality and aspects of positionality that seat a language user in space and time are relevant to the processes of meaning making—most specifically to the process of deploying raciolinguistic resources in the practice of one's profession.

Bucholtz & Hall (2016) also engage with embodied positionality as it relates to meaning making through sign relationships, invoking Peircian semiosis (1885) (see also Gal 2013; Gal & Irvine 2019) and indexicality (Eckert 2008). For my purposes, what is crucial to glean from this semiotic scholarship is a confrontation of the relationship between positionality and agency. Because aspects of the body are, to an extent, physically bound (we will always age; we cannot be from a non-place), individuals are aware of the types of sign-meaning relations that can and cannot be created by their bodies, and that in the moment these relations can be exploited to toggle the expectations of others. The extent to which someone <u>can</u> exploit the range of expectations available in a given context is mediated entirely by positionality, and this is the foundational observation which underlies Flores & Rosa's (2015) concept of raciolinguistic ideologies. In their consideration of appropriateness, Flores & Rosa (2015) postulate an association of "certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency" that they argue to be "unrelated to any objective linguistic practices", and define this association to be indicative of a specifically *raciolinguistic* ideology. This ideology, or "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979, p.193), does not mark productions by individuals in bodies that fit expectations of preferred variety users in the same way as productions by individuals whose bodies do not fit those expectations. In the contemporary U.S. context, one example of raciolinguistic ideologies in operation can be observed when White people produce cross-dialectically common so-called speech errors or disfluencies in public such as vocalized pauses (Farah 2022) or consonant cluster deletion in experimental settings (King & Sumner 2014). Such productions are often not labeled as deficient when White people produce them, and thus these individuals do not suffer the social, personal, professional, mental, or potentially physical consequences of their speech being labeled as such. It is assumed for these individuals, who exhibit social traits aligned with the expectations of a Standard language user, that their language is Standard (or Standard

enough), regardless of their objective[2] linguistic production. Conversely, for an individual who does not or cannot exhibit the preferred or expected social alignment—for instance because of the ways in which their body presents visually—they may never be perceived as a Standard language user, regardless of their objective linguistic production (Flores & Rosa 2015).

Bucholtz & Hall (2016) (as well as Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003); see Sections 2.4.3 and 3.3) discuss a semiotics of linguistic style that combines the full presentation of self—"all dimensions of language as well as material and embodied resources" (p.180)—making the whole person available for both identity performance as well as erasure. The metalinguistic discourses of Black professionals about their style shifting practices captured in Chapter Two provide data on the mobilization of raciolinguistic variables in a way that reveals a community of individuals who share many identities (e.g., regional; racial) and positionalities yet who are "maintaining and challenging the borders of ideologically recognized and valued kinds of bodies" (Bucholtz & Hall 2016, p.181) through their linguistic practice in different ways. I engage with these discourses most directly in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.2) in consideration of the in-group labels *talking White* and *authentically Black*. Direct and open conversations with differently positioned language users with shared identities from the same community—but particularly the Black community about such embodied-action-marking labels—help us answer the call raised by King (2020) to understand the construction of race and the process of racialization by "undoing the singular narrative of Blackness" (p.293) through the description of the full "expanse" (p.293) of linguistic practices among Black-identified people.

1.2.1 Self-reflexive Critique and Positionality Statement

The singular narrative of Blackness, which (incidentally though not innocently) links the production of racialized styles and varieties to an undereducated young urban Black male speaker (King 2020), stems in part from a lack of self-reflexive critique on the part of the researcher. We cannot conduct research as though our participants or ourselves do not have bodies that significantly condition the outcomes of our research. The fact that our participants have bodies that crucially shape the ways in which they move through the world is often not taken into account in linguistic work. More important than this, however, is engagement in self-reflexive critique by the researcher that asks: How does my body interact with what I produce as

[2] Objective in this case means measurable or definable in, for example, an acoustic sense, as opposed to subjective, such as the ways in which the language user or those perceiving them may categorize or report what is being produced.

a scholar? This self-reflexive critique also answers for oneself, and for the audiences who consume—and hopefully later expand upon—one's work, what one is able to experience and how they are able to experience it from that body (see miles-hercules et al. 2020; Charity Hudley et al. 2020).

My positionality statement is as follows: I am a 35 year-old Black Biracial cisgender woman from Knoxville, Tennessee. I identify as a working class Afrolachian and a member of the Queer community as a bisexual individual. My father is African American and my mother is White; both are college-educated and both are now retired. My father was an integrator, the first African American student to attend the Catholic school in my hometown (that I also attended); being one generation removed from educational segregation is an important part of my positionality that irrevocably shapes my connection to and interest in the creation and maintenance of Standard language ideologies. In addition, I am a so-called non-traditional student, who began her higher education experience later in life at a community college, transferring into a liberal arts school to finish a B.A., and becoming a self-taught linguist before landing in my first official course in the discipline at the graduate (M.A.) level. This pathway into the field also crucially shapes the ways in which I interpret its theory and applications of its findings, which I find most worthwhile when they reach directly into the lived experiences of populations in need of linguistic justice.

I was not raised in a two-parent household. I have always been in daily contact with my father; however, the majority of my African American family has been deceased since my youth. Because my education and employment have occurred entirely in predominantly White institutions, and although I identify as a Black person in adulthood, I do not consider myself to have been socialized in Black spaces.

It is my belief that, to most observers, I am not initially perceived in isolation as phenotypically Black presenting in terms of skin color, hair texture, voice quality, or facial features, nor am I initially perceived in a group as phenotypically White presenting in terms of skin color, facial features, or body morphology. I categorize myself as someone who presents as *ethnically ambiguous*. I recognize that I benefit from White Privilege(s) due to my embodied positionality.

I am a survivor of state-sanctioned racial violence and passive and active racial oppression in my daily social being.

1.2.2 Thesis Overview: Positionality

This work will critically engage with positionality in a number of ways. First, I have just introduced my positionality so that the ways in which my body interacts with this scholarship is made plain. Second, I introduce in Chapter Two a new method of sociolinguistic interview to aid researchers in capturing and more equitably describing the positionality of research participants in relation to language varieties under study. All aspects of this interview method—design, data preparation, and analysis—center positionality. And finally, in Chapter Four, I elevate the gathering and reporting of demographic data to a crucial and expected aspect of experimental design, regardless of research question.

1.3 Language Ideologies

Ideologies have been called many things—"a confusing tangle" (Friedrich 1989 p.300); a "text" (Eagleton 1999, p.1); "shared bodies of commonsense" (Rumsey 1990, p.346); "everyday understandings" (Hill 2008, p.5)—but what is common among their treatments[3] is a recognition of a gathering of ideas, a bringing together of collected, conceptual material around a particular core concept or aspect of social life. Kroskrity (2010) presents a review of the evolution of theoretical perspectives on language ideologies, providing a more full-fleshed definition:

> [ideologies are] beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states…whether explicitly articulated or embodied in communicative practice…[ideologies serve to] rationalize language use; such rationalizations are typically multiple, context-bound, and necessarily constructed from the sociocultural experience of the [language user]. (p.192)

In reality, linguistic ideology functions as an overlay to linguistic operations (e.g., transformational syntax; phonemic parsing) such that they become mutually constitutive. Silverstein (1985) holds that language "is irreducibly dialectic in nature" (p.220) and it is the omnipresent factor of ideology—mediated through sociohistorical past and present, through the Zeitgeist—that contributes directly to this irreducibility (see also Babel 2015). As we begin to

[3] Ideologies are introduced to the Western canon by Destutt de Tracy, a French philosopher interested in developing "a science of ideas and their basis in sensation" (Woolard 1998, p.22). Most unfortunately, the ideas many scholars had at the time were all too revolutionary in nature and these academic efforts were directly maligned by Napoleon (Woolard 1998, pgs.22-23). A direct line can be drawn from de Tracy's efforts to my own in seeking an informed connection between embodiment, which affords us both our perceptual capacities and our social position, and self-actualization, which is mediated through ideology.

consider more deeply the topics at hand—such as embodied positionality and the ways in which visually marked and marginalized aspects of identity (like dark skin) may motivate style shifting practices—this concept of discursive irreducibility will be useful as the instances of usage I will explicate demonstrate that style shifting is never ideologically free, even if those ideologies are indirectly indexed (Ochs 1992). Take, for example, the phenomenon of linguistic discrimination as an illustration of Silverstein's irreducible dialectic between linguistic production and ideological influence. Linguistic discrimination is most broadly defined by myself and colleagues (Craft et al. 2020) as a natural phenomenon that amplifies systemic oppression. Discrimination operates linguistically in two ways. First, it is a natural component of linguistic operation that endows us with the ability to parse the linguistic signal—to discriminate between two different signs or sounds. Second, linguistic discrimination refers to inequitable outcomes for language users as a function of their stylistic choices in context and subsequent evaluation by audiences (Craft et al. 2020). The baseline here is natural discrimination—attending to the difference between, for example, /da/ and /ða/. Linguistic ideologies overlay that operation, amplifying systemic oppression and allowing for the more insidious side of linguistic discrimination to operate, resulting in disadvantageous outcomes for many people, especially accented speakers and racially minoritized individuals. Language users who exist in minoritized bodies encounter the effects of this irreducibility often when they confront raciolinguistic ideologies in operation in the world and workplace. For example, in their discussions of self-censorship practices in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.3), interviewees cite a double standard (see also Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003) wherein their White colleagues' linguistic production remains uncriticized for exhibiting less standardization and less careful performance while theirs is often policed, micromanaged, and punished.

1.3.1 Standard Language Ideologies

Such language-related workplace double standards uphold a linguistic ideology that prefers the linguistic production of one social group over others—the Standard language ideology. Standard language ideologies (Lippi-Green 2012; Silverstein 1979; Milroy & Milroy 2012) are a product of linguistic discrimination. Lippi-Green (2012, p.64) offers a formal definition for Standard language ideology:

> a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class.

By incorporating Flores & Rosa (2015)'s concept of raciolinguistic ideologies into this definition, the operation of the double standard becomes clearer. However, Lippi-Green (2012) tells us that, "If ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible, then the first step must be to make visible the link between the enforcement of standard language ideology and social domination" (p.171). Let's consider, then, the ways in which U.S. dominant bloc institutions came to select the spoken language of the upper middle class as the preferred and/or appropriate variety for usage therein.

When we consider the types of language that people deem to be proper, or believe sound pleasing to the ear, or have determined more appropriate than other types of language for certain venues or forms of address—none of that falls out of the natural evolution of linguistic systems. Those realities are products of who has been in social control over time (Bourdieu 1991). Globally, the individuals who have been in social control have been able-bodied, cisgendered, hearing and speaking individuals; for most of *written* history those individuals have also been male, Christian, White, and monied (Wolf 2010). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, White men and later White people, were participating in a global project of codification that involved the rise of monoglossia in the Global North (Rutten 2019), the establishment of timezones and regularized units of measure[4] (Wright 2022), massive lexicographic projects in the New World (Kendall 2010), the ever-increasing popularity of the usage guide and etiquette genres (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2020), the proliferation of languages of wider communication via Colonialist pogroms (Wright 2017), and the generation of numerous grammars of indigenous languages and translations and transliterations of indigenous texts via religious missionaries across the Global South (Ainslie & Midgley 2020). This is a full scale process of standard*ization*. And I italicize that -ization suffix here so we can be sure to recognize that there is a making and a doing present in this history; there is an agentiveness to these processes. A Standard variety is being codified in these materials by these White authors. It represents—as the Standard does in all societies across time with

[4] This may seem non-linguistic at first blush but these actions result in regularizing deictic expressions and means of reference across languages of wider communication, using Greenwich Mean Time as an arbitrary Standard for the globe to default all industry, and eventually international daily communication, through. Knowing where and when you are means defaulting to this Standard; being able to discuss that state of being requires the same. The common units of measure (like the meter) established during this period were used to divide the world into a grid (longitude and latitude); the exploration and classification of species that accompanied settler colonialism involved the supplanting of local, indigenous names of flora and fauna (not to mention places and peoples) with Latin and Latinate terminology.

hierarchical social structure (Craft et al. 2020)—the preferred linguistic repertoire of the powerful that must be *learned*.

In the United States, Black people were kept away from those learning processes by law. Beginning with the 1705 Codification of Slavery (Omi & Winant 1993), Black people in this country were effectively dehumanized, reduced from a social status equal to White indentured servants to one equivalent with livestock. The 1740 Negro Act (Rasmussen 2010) made it illegal for enslaved Black people to be taught to read, citing literacy as a justification for enslavement, that Africans were "less than human, permanently illiterate and dumb" (Lusane quoted in Coleman 2020, n.p.) and thus needed the paternalistic domination being imposed upon them. Anti-literacy laws remained on the books in northern U.S. states until 1834, and in the South until after Reconstruction (the late 1860s). A century's separation from material knowledge production, as well as self-determination—coupled with the previous three centuries of deliberate linguistic identity erasure embedded in the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Ball, Makoni, Smitherman, & Spears 2003; Bloomquist, Green, & Lanehart 2015; Lowe 2015; Farrington, King, & Kohn 2021)—sets the varieties of Black people in this nation apart.

And while Black people—people of all non-White races in fact (Perea et al. 2015; Lowe 2015)—are absent from all official processes of meaning-making during these centuries, a preferred spoken variety of White English becomes the Standard in the United States—following waves of xenophobia away from the immigrant-rich population centers of New York and Philadelphia (Bonfiglio 2002) to settle in the Inland North dialect region (Nesbitt 2019; Preston 1989). And here is where the links between the points of historical social domination I've outlined above and the Standard language ideologies which passively operate in the minds of contemporary language users become clearer, because over the many generations between the establishment of the U.S. Standard variety and now, the *use* of this variety has become understood as the so-called *proper* thing to do. In the Ann Arbor Black English case (see Smitherman & Baugh 2002) the central question before the court was whether or not Black students—previously segregated as special needs for using Black English—could matriculate with the remainder of the student body and if so, how their education could be conducted equitably. Judge Joiner (1979), in issuing his ruling, provides one of the more striking examples of overtly articulated Standard language ideology (saying the quiet parts aloud as it were) by stating that language users of all races find Black English unacceptable in all formal, creative, and technical writing, in courts, and across professions; Black English is "largely a system that

is used in casual and informal communication among the poor and lesser educated" (n.p.). Not using the Standard variety is seen as an indicator of lower intelligence (Campbell-Kibler 2009, Wright under review) or a difficult—or sometimes even criminal (Wright 2019)—nature, but more than this, assimilation to this variety is required for social mobility. The Standard is more easily produced, or more easily perceived as being produced by White embodied language users, however racialized standardized varieties certainly exist and interact with concepts of propriety and appropriateness to motivate Black professionals' style shifting choices in a number of ways.

For most Black professionals, who can never fully command the preferred variety (White Standardized spoken English) due to embodied constraints, Weldon (2021) reports "there remains a keen sense of the importance of "sounding Black" as a means of constructing an African American identity and demonstrating one's loyalty to and solidarity with the African American speech community" (p.179). Black-Accented Standard, a variety first described by Orlando Taylor (1971), is a variety said to consist of adopted grammatical structures from Standard English combined with the distinct phonology of Black English. Taylor, a career-long advocate of the codeswitching approach for African American equity in education (see Baker-Bell 2020b), struggled to identify for White audiences that Black people could intelligently command the structures and functions of a standardized variety while still sounding Black to many listeners. The existence of a Black-Accented Standard variety of English underscores both the importance of citing and maintaining racial identity in and through linguistic practice for the Black community as well as the operation of raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa 2015). Raciolinguistic ideologies serve to confound audiences that are aligned with the Standard language ideology, not allowing them to hear or see past the racialized bodies of Black professionals and students; they devalue the standardized linguistic production of Black professionals making it very difficult for it to be experienced as objectively competent speech. Raciolinguistic ideologies also necessitate the development of another Standard target for Black embodied users to move towards in their production so they can still remain in compliance with ideological—and thus societal—expectations of linguistic production while protecting their racial identities as well.

It is against this backdrop, then, that, for the Black community, sounding Black is contrasted with sounding White, or sounding proper, which connotes a certain level of education, sophistication, or "correctness" (Weldon 2021, p.179). Weldon reports,

> labels such as “Ghetto” and “Proper”, for example, speak to the salience of certain African American voices (and identities) to elicit social and linguistic commentary. From a linguistic perspective, however, little is known about how listeners assign such labels to speakers’ voices and what social characteristics get indexed through those assignments. (179)

In my discussion of the in-group labels *talking White* and *authentically Black* in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.2), interviewees reveal exactly these types of details along with their considerations of the risks of not assimilating. What is particularly revealing about these conversations with Black professionals about their specific style shifting practices and general construction of racialized self is that they demonstrate Woolard (1998)’s claim that “Linguistic ideology is not a predictable automatic reflex of the social experience in which it is rooted” (p.46). Interviewee metacommentary supports the assertion that linguistic ideology can be understood as a relational mechanism which allows for linguistic variables and varieties to inhabit social meanings in the world. These conversations also demonstrate that those social meanings “indirectly index [fixed macrosocial categories[5]] via associated qualities and stances” (King 2021, p.292; see also Eckert 2008).

Indirect indexicality, which is a theoretical concept prioritizing the ways in which a single utterance can have multiple non-exclusive (and in particular, pragmatic) relations, falls out of Ochs’ (1992) consideration of how gender is actualized by language users. Indirect indexation helps explain how Black professionals can index, activate, reify, support, or align themselves with Whiteness through the use of standardized styles (because of the social history of standardization and the operation of Standard language ideologies encouraging a bias to produce those varieties) when the metalinguistic commentary they provide indicates that the linguistic actions they undertake have nothing to do with Whiteness, but instead are motivated through goals or fears tied to professional or interpersonal spheres. Indirect indexation helps explain how a Black professional can be shifting towards a Whiter style when they report themselves to use a variety like Black-Accented Standard, or to always use the same voice, or explicitly states they do not talk White or proper. It also helps explain how individuals who report undertaking very different linguistic actions or having very different personal motivations might arrive at similar production targets.

[5] Such as age, gender, race, region, and socioeconomics.

1.3.2 Framing Standard Language Ideologies in their Theoretical Context

In my conceptualization of this research, and in particular in my discussion of two case studies on Standard language ideologies in Chapter Three (Section 3.2), I conceive of Standard language ideologies as a type of ideology which functions to combine (at least in part) the four major aspects of ideological function Woolard (1998) summarizes. These aspects (each of which, as Woolard reports, are not without contention in the literature) are: (i) ideologies exist as cognitive products, possessed by individuals; (ii) ideologies are built, in part, through the social and material history of the environment; (iii) ideologies are inherently tools of the powerful, meaning the ideas of the oppressed do not rise to the level of ideology; (iv) all ideological activation involves cognitive distortion of some type. While I do not attempt to claim that all linguistic ideologies exhibit all four of these aspects of ideological function, Standard language ideologies would seem to, at least to an extent. Standard language ideologies are conceptual, and guide the basic notions of most language users towards the production, acceptance, and expectation of a target variety in most domains and registers. It is through this motivated production—which is for many not deliberate or conscious—the Standard language ideology is reified through daily social practice (see Hill 2008, p.19; Wright 2017 for more on reification). However, because human beings are moving through time (a fact that also makes language change continuous and ongoing), that target of production is not stable (meaning what the Standard is and contains changes) and thus users become differently positioned with respect to their motivation to produce the variety and may do so with a variable level of activated awareness. These realities indicate that ideology is not inherently cognitive (although its operation may be seated in the mind), but is also "responsive to the experiences or interests of a particular social position" (Woolard 1998, p.24). Standard language ideologies specifically have an incredibly long history, and the influence they enact—especially over stigmatized language users—is quite strong. When I make statements in this work and elsewhere such as *Standard language ideologies impact all of us* they are made in recognition of this long history, of the singular arch that White Supremacy has drawn across traditions of material knowledge production in all human communities[6]. I do not make such statements to indicate all ideologies

[6] On Silva et al.'s (2020) podcast we discussed the ways in which White Supremacy limited the participation of all non-White races in material knowledge production. I stated "these patterns of oppression predate the printing press" and went on to discuss how, because of the ways in which ideology interacts with the continuous nature of language change, I have come to believe that there is not a human being alive who has not been and is not being currently influenced by Standard language ideologies. I stand by this claim even though there are extant communities which may be geospatially isolated, whose primary means of communication may be oral, and who, to many observers, would appear untouched by the influences of globalization and other traditionally White organized engines of progress. In my opinion, the impact of White Supremacy on the social history of the human race is total

(linguistic or otherwise) operate universally or point to an objective or findable Truth (see Silverstein 1998 for more on T/truth). That said, there are discrete and traceable facts that have led to the development of these signifying practices (Peirce 1974) built around language use in public space, and because ideology is ”dependent on the material and practical aspects of human life” (Woolard 1998, p.25) for its manifestation and reification, the pall of oppressive practices used to legitimate social order (Bloch 1985) remains and thus Standard language ideologies are responsive to the interests of a dominant social position. The schools of thought (i.e., Thompson 1990) which see all ideology as a tool for the acquisition of power ascribe, in my opinion, to ways of knowing that recognize the value systems of normalized Whiteness as an authority and do not value radical thought or change from below. However, the power imbalances present in the positionality of early producers of Standard language ideologically-aligned behaviors (such as Anglicizing family names (Nnamdi-Eruchalu 2018)) are enshrined in its usage, its signification, today. When language users produce more Standard varieties, they oftentimes reinforce the preference for the more Standard varieties that the ideology encourages language users to expect (Woolard 1998, p.25; Hill 2008); the dialectic legitimates an oppressive social order that must be critiqued and if possible, upended.

The fourth point Woolard (1998) includes about ideological nature and operation is that ideologies always include some form of cognitive distortion. Some Black professionals interviewed for this study have aligned themselves with Standard language ideologies so deeply they find their own self-worth to be lacking without a full command of a Standard variety; this is a form of cognitive distortion as a result of Standard language ideologies which has devalued racialized language—and by proxy the bodies producing it. More than this, cognitive distortion can be viewed in certain experimental outcomes. If Standard language ideologies, or ideologies of any kind, create commonsense expectations—for example that professional speech is free from non-Standard features—we might expect any non-normatively indexed feature (like Black phonology) could be interpreted as non-Standardness in such cases. In King & Sumner (2014), for example, the authors found that listeners attached certain expectations of non-Standardness to Black speech such that when a Black voice produced cross-dialectically common non-Standard variants listeners were more likely to recognize them than when a White voice produced them. This association of non-Standardness with Blackness (but not with the White

and irrevocable—it is something to be accounted for, managed, and critiqued in the behavior and development of any and all populations under study.

speaker whom was just as likely to produce the variant) is also a form of cognitive distortion as a result of Standard language ideologies.

For the Black community, Standard language ideologies can be understood as basic notions which can incur risk to the language user's identity both when they are respected and resisted, as movement towards the preferred—proper—variety moves users towards Whiteness (either directly or indirectly), and with that comes disconnection from racialized culture but also (the promise of) social mobility and financial stability if not security. Contrast this with movement away from the Standard, towards sounding Black (or local or gay or like a young woman or any of these in combination), which comes with a connection to the culture but can incur the perception of incompetence, unintelligence, or a bankrupt morality of some kind. In the face of Standard language ideologies, the Black professional is left experiencing what Smitherman (1977, 2006) describes as a "linguistic push-pull" (2006, p.13), risking cultural stability on one hand and social stability on the other. Although this push-pull is not experienced agentively or consciously in every moment of linguistic production, it is not hyperbolic to describe it as omnipresent. The metalinguistic commentary discussed in Chapters Two and Three will engage with reports of this push-pull directly. The perception experiment in Chapter Four will engage with ideologically driven cognitive distortions, asking if the kinds of audiences that exist for Black professionals align with the kinds of audiences this community imagines, which drive their style shifting practices.

1.3.3 Thesis Overview: Standard Language Ideologies

This dissertation will critically engage with Standard language ideologies in two ways. First, it engages through a series of sociolinguistic interviews (Chapter Two) designed to capture metalinguistic awareness (see Section 1.4) from language users who are under pressure to assimilate to White Standardized spoken English in their daily social being as individuals due to their embodiment as Black people and their positionality as professionals. Qualitative analysis of these interviews allows for a view of Black people as agentive language users with access to knowledge of a bevy of repertoires who are "constructing multidimensional identities that vary across multiple planes of social difference" (King 2020, p.293). Second, without presupposing the types of language preferred or perceived to be proper (as King 2020 suggests as a best practice for researchers studying racialized language varieties after the myopic treatments said varieties have received across the canon), the case studies in Chapter Three engage with two interviewees' responses across the breadth of their interviews to create a snapshot of how

members of this community have taken up (or rejected; see Section 3.2) Standard language ideologies. Third, it engages through a perception experiment (Chapter Four) that asks if Black speech must be shifted towards a more standardized style to be labeled as professional sounding. If listeners prefer sentences with fewer non-Standard variables present, this indicates that Black performances of professionalism are more often legible as such to general audiences when shifted away from racialized varieties, in keeping with Standard language ideologies.

1.4 Metalinguistic Awareness

Scholars across a variety of linguistic disciplines have offered several definitions for metalinguistic awareness and in this section instead of summarizing these previous discourses (which in truth arch back to Aristotle in the Western canon), I will focus on the phenomenon and its importance, especially in relation to the goals of this dissertation. Metalinguistic awareness is the aspect of acquired (or learned) linguistic knowledge which encompasses social factors related to language use, knowledge, distribution, meaning, or occurrence variance. Acquired linguistic knowledge involves more than a grammar or set of structured rules for framing utterances. It also involves a vast (and we do not yet have an accurate sense of how vast because this has been woefully understudied) set of rules for how utterances exist in the world. We know the developing human mind (see Piaget 1954) is anticipating the input of such socially (some might prefer environmentally) defined rules for application of knowledge (see Gould & Marler 1987).

As discussed in Section 1.2, all linguistic material is deployed according to societal rules placed on users. Five demographic categories emerge as being particularly salient or relevant to that deployment; it is through (embodied) positionality that these societal rules find their strength. The demographic categories are age, gender, race, region, and socioeconomic status of an individual. In this dissertation, applying these demographics—or factors of positionality—to questions surrounding metalinguistic commentary emergence involves focusing on the ways in which interviewees' reports of how they experience language use as Black professionals reflects the influences these five social factors have had on their linguistic behavior and knowledge development over time. Presumably, it is these social factors that the brain, acquiring language, begins to anticipate in the environment and sorts linguistic input accordingly—indexing it along these various social dimensions as we mature into intelligible communicators. We see some evidence of this in studies of prepubescent children who make use of their metalinguistic awareness of the gendered distribution of acoustic variables to exploit

the range of the F0 spectrum assigned to their embodied gender long before their vocal tracts exhibit the typical physiological differences responsible for giving male-bodied people voices with lower pitches than female-bodied people (Foulkes & Docherty 2006; see also Busby & Plant 1995; Fitch & Giedd 1999).

As adults, what language users know about language use, and what arises to a level of conscious awareness such that language users can subsequently report it (see Silverstein 1981), also stems directly from embodied positionality. Indeed, as Babel (2015) unequivocally states when framing the concept of awareness, "people perceive and produce language through the lens of social categories" (p.xix). Babel (2015) goes on to summarize academic discourses on metalinguistic awareness in variationist sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and perceptual dialectology, all of which agree that users possess knowledge about their language use, that this knowledge is retrievable (it can be conscious; it could be reported) and that awareness itself is "a quality of individuals, albeit individuals conditioned by their social milieu" (p.xx). With this in mind, I argue that some people are, by nature of their embodied positionality, always already more aware of their language use. All linguistic material has a social meaning—be that material a variable like the fortified /d/ in *dey* (which is sometimes racialized and other times regionalized; see Zimmer 2022) or a whole variety like AAVE (King 2020). The usage of linguistic material, however, carries and/or activates different social meanings for individuals based on their lived experiences (many of which are subjectively lensed by one's embodiment). Taking Standard language ideologies once again as an example, which exhibit a preference for the linguistic repertoires of individuals who exist in certain bodies, those repertoires are defaulted and normalized across institutions (especially the increasingly (over time) monoglossic cultures of the Global North). Subsequently, people in those certain bodies from various regions and classes of all genders require less metalinguistic awareness to successfully operate in the world across their lifespan. Their awareness is conditioned by their social milieu, but that milieu asks little of them in terms of linguistic production because what is already natural or comfortable for them is what is expected in most linguistic markets (see Section 1.5). I would argue these individuals are in general less likely to be consciously aware of the ways in which their own varieties and styles—and the varieties and styles of those around them—are used and distributed.

1.4.1 Metalinguistic Commentary in Its Own Right

This positionality-informed metalinguistic awareness will, I hope, become apparent as I discuss the linguistic experiences of Black professionals in detail in Chapter Two. The purpose of this study, however, is not to test the claim of greater awareness; that will remain for future research pursuits. The central research question of that chapter is: What motivates Black professionals to style shift away from their more racialized styles in the workplace? I hypothesize that it is not a desire to sound more White. But is it merely the Standard language ideology in operation? Do these individuals believe their varieties to be inappropriate? Is it an awareness of stigmatization of Black language (as Nylund 2015 contends)? Is it a desire to stay safe (which Baker-Bell 2020a contends is a fallacious desire, in that Black people are never safe no matter how they choose to use language)? By capturing metalinguistic commentary from Black professionals about their language use, the sociolinguistic interview study in Chapter Two aims to answer these questions. In her rethinking of the ways in which scholars across disciplines might best approach the study of race and language, King (2020) stated that a deeper understanding was needed of how "speakers' linguistic behaviors articulate their beliefs about their own social positions on an individual level" (p.294) and, in the course of developing this understanding, (across methods), an effort should be made to include the Black community "in the process of knowledge production" (p.296) as a way to begin to counteract their absence in the previous study of their varieties[7]. King's (2021, p.173) discussion of how Black professionals in Rochester, NY take up or reject a local sound change for economic motivations provides a key piece of evidence that racialized individuals do more with their speech than perform race; they are full people with full lives, minds, and linguistic experiences and who orient to the complete tapestry of linguistic variation in the same ways as have been described for other language users.

I offer a brief, illustrative example from an interview in this dissertation research which demonstrates a Black professional considering how their style shifting practices are conditioned by their racial identity, and the identities of others in the room. One interviewee, Journey (a 25-year-old working in IT; she is being directly quoted here), remarked that she didn't feel like she ever used a different variety at work, that her voice "always sounds about the same". Journey went on to say that she knows she can't use certain words around her White colleagues

[7] King (2021) argues, "Prioritizing race as the most salient dimension reifies minoritized speakers as non-normative, given the fact that the normativity of the supposed White Standard is defined by the productions of local identities in the study of dialectology" (p.161).

because they won't understand them. She tells me that it would be too much work to have to stop a conversation every other word between herself and another Black colleague and loop the White people around them into the meaning of what she termed "slang". Journey reports that while she may sound the same, she doesn't "codeswitch" at work. She is, though, "a little bit more like watered down language wise" and the "whiteness" of her colleagues "definitely plays a factor" in that. Journey's metacommentary demonstrates that not only does she have an awareness of her own production and choices, but also she has an awareness of what the *other populations* around her *know*—which words and their associated meanings and uses in context they are familiar with. She knows too which interlocutors she can engage with the kinds of usage available to her, and in what domains and contexts. This is indeed knowledge that all language users possess, but I would argue that Journey is more aware of it and thus more readily able to report on it because of her embodied positionality. Journey also expresses a knowledge of the histories and meanings of the words she chooses to avoid in reporting that she does not want to do the work of relaying that knowledge to her colleagues. But despite all this knowledge (and the extant sociohistorical pressures I covered in Section 1.3.1 above), it is the avoidance of labor—of this specific, racialized, sociolinguistic labor (see Section 1.4)—that motivates Journey's style shifting (or watering down, as she put it) and keeps her Black language out of her workplace, even though she reports (at another point in our interview) feeling personally very proud to use AAVE and thinking it is equal in status and value to the language of her White colleagues.

This example reveals what I alluded to above—a vast set of rules for how utterances can be used in the world that all language users possess. Indeed, use is, arguably, what language is for. Despite the trove of insight into linguistic structure and function presented by metalinguistic data, its capture has not been prioritized in our field, although there are exceptions[8]. In variationist sociolinguistics in particular, the analytic goal of sociolinguistic interview is often more concerned with counting discrete occurrences of a variable under study than engaging with the actual words and ideas an individual shares. In my opinion, this myopia stems in part from the monolinguistic culture of the United States from which this foundational data collection

[8] Among the approaches that engage with and value metalinguistic discourse as such is perceptual dialectology (although there are several others, including enregisterment; Johnstone 2016), which recognizes that language users possess knowledge about distribution and usage variance, and that this knowledge rises to the level of conscious awareness and can be retrieved through a variety of tasks. The commentary elicited through such perceptual dialectology tasks has especially been used to establish areal dialect boundaries at regional (and sometimes even more finer-grained) levels (see Preston 2002).

approach departs. It is in some ways ironic because, as Rutten (2019) discusses at length, the rise of Standard language ideology in the eighteenth century across the Global North that created our monolinguistic culture[9] was accompanied by direct and public "metalinguistic discourse [on] the increasing importance of homogeneity…signalled by an increase in strictures and a proliferation of prescriptivist language" (p.1). Although the U.S. does not have an official national language or governing linguistic body like L'Académie Française, becoming the country we are today meant valuing discussions about language use.

In my work on language planning and policy (Wright 2017), I engage with the connection between nationalism and necessary metalinguistic discourse. Taking a multilinguistic society like Ghana, for example, the creation of nation therein involved the official discussion of language use, knowledge, distribution, meaning, and occurrence variance with all stakeholders. To avoid such conversations threatens independence movements of all kinds because communication among far-flung and undersourced supporters becomes impossible in the short term, and the solidification of national ideals remains impossible in the long term. Bassiouney (2018), who comes from and investigates multilinguistic societies, agrees that "metalinguistic presentation of a dialect in a new nation-state forging a different identity for itself is essential" (p.8). In her discussion of identity and dialect performance, Bassiouney centralizes metalinguistic awareness and commentary as a site of stigmatized variety survival, noting that it is often only through explicit conversation about what words mean and how they come to have that meaning and how they are meant to be used with others that such varieties survive because for some speech communities vocalizing (or writing or signing) their language in the wider world is a Shibboleth—marking users for persecution or death. Thus, the language—and quite literally the identity itself—can only be transferred, known, and performed through metalinguistic discourse.

It is difficult for me to imagine a more profound seat of linguistic inquiry than metalinguistic awareness, because asking someone about how they use language is asking them to describe how they have come to know themselves and how they negotiate that act of knowledge in and through others in their daily social being. Capturing this knowledge from users of stigmatized varieties—who do not use some of their language varieties often enough in their daily social being for whatever reason—is an act both of linguistic preservation and of liberation. Nylund

[9] And a focus on accented speech in particular.

(2015), in her study of African American speech variation in Washington, DC neighborhoods through sociolinguistic interview, cites the importance of metalinguistic commentary as a "mechanism for individual- and community-level identity construction and negotiation in interaction" (p.139). She argues that this kind of commentary cannot be overlooked, most especially when one is researching language of minoritized communities who "constantly juggle the demands of a 'linguistic push-pull' (see e.g. Smitherman 2006; Rickford & Rickford 2000 [as cited in Nylund]), positioning themselves in relation to the linguistic identities of self and community while also walking the fine line of the demands of a professional world where [their language] is stigmatized" (p.136). In addition, Babel (2015) in outlining the concept of awareness and advocating for the study of metalinguistic commentary in its own right states that "it is imperative that we approach cognitive science with models of social interaction that are as detailed and subtle as is our understanding of linguistic structure" (p.xx). It is in this light that I have developed a new method of sociolinguistic interview—the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview—to provide, first, an immediate means for centering Black people in the study of their own linguistic experiences, and second, to answer calls raised by Babel (2015), King (2020), and others who have been seeking a regularized means to capture the personalized perspectives of individually positioned language users (again most urgently for the study of stigmatized varieties).

1.4.2 Thesis Overview: Metalinguistic Awareness

In Chapter Two, I will introduce a method of sociolinguistic interview designed to elevate metalinguistic knowledge to a level comparable to that of speech feature (Babel 2015, p.xx)—removing speaker production of specific and/or countable elements of a target linguistic variety or style from the goals of elicitation entirely and replacing those goals with that of providing a regularized means for tapping into this understudied and often overlooked data source that can inform theoretical development across the discipline. I reiterate, however, that the most important goal of these interviews is to hold space for Black people to share their experiences with language, which are engaged with most directly through three case studies in Chapter Three. The Black professionals interviewed in Chapters Two and Three provide crucial metalinguistic commentary which informed the design of the perceptual experiment in Chapter Four, specifically providing the non-Standard variables being tested for their relative professionalism when heard in context by a general American (online) listening audience.

1.5 Sociolinguistic Labor

Drawing together the concepts of positionality, language ideologies, and metalinguistic awareness, is the concept of sociolinguistic labor. Sociolinguistic labor is a theoretical concept that builds on Bourdieu's (1991) formulation of the linguistic marketplace but from the perspective of the individual language user. Theorized in relation to their study of the sociolinguistic experiences of Black undergraduate students, Holliday & Squires (2020) use the concept of sociolinguistic labor to account for students' reports of the necessity of "bicultural competence"[10] engendered by their education in predominantly White spaces. Holliday & Squires (2020) define sociolinguistic labor as "the physical, emotional, and psychological effort put into deploying sociolinguistic resources in a way that is meant to satisfy others" (p.421). All people engage in sociolinguistic labor in that we all deploy sociolinguistic resources—or any given linguistic variable—in this way. For example, we may choose not to use certain words—like profanity—because our parents or other elders prefer us not to, even though we'd be perfectly comfortable using those terms with interlocutors our own age. We do the sociolinguistic labor of self-censorship when we are around our elders to satisfy them, to make them comfortable, to show them respect, to keep ourselves out of trouble.

The concept of sociolinguistic labor presupposes the existence of a labor market where this type of work is valued and exchanged. The concept of linguistic markets (and other theoretical models of commodification) has a rich history that meshes well with our discussion of how people, their bodies, and the ideologies which attach to them operate in daily social practice. Marx (1867; 1990) makes a distinction between use and commodification in terms of the human needs a given material (in use) can fulfill when defining the concepts of value and exchange. A material—and for my purposes let's consider linguistic material, even racialized linguistic material like reduced consonant clusters—has utility because it possesses specific properties, aspects that distinguish it from other material and thus make it appropriate to fit certain needs. In Chapter Two, interviewees discuss what types of language production can be labeled as *authentically Black* and in doing so reveal that being in spaces where racialized linguistic styles occur makes them feel more comfortable, more like themselves, and like they are doing less work. In the situations being described, where Black professionals cite less labor-full usage that feels most authentic to their racial identities, we encounter use (as Marx defines it; 1867; 1990)

[10] Bicultural competence is defined by Scheunemann (2011) as "the extension of ethnic identity defined as having knowledge of language, lifestyle characteristics, and patterns of interpersonal behavior of two cultural groups."

that is free from commodification, where raciolinguistic variables (racialized linguistic material) are being employed in their most natural state.

This example highlights that sociolinguistic labor can be undertaken for the self and is initially valued by the user, but all other instances of usage[11] are valued by a preexisting and responsive market, which views the material as a commodity and assesses it based on its value to others or a set exchange rate. Not to put too fine a point on it, but allowing for commodification to include both individual actors and institutional structures helps account for the operation of phenomena like Standard language ideologies in linguistic markets. Like all forms of labor, sociolinguistic labor has the power to produce more value than it contains. The material and social inculcation of Languages of Wider Communication that accompanied industrialization and settler colonialism across the last three centuries is no accident. Their impact on linguistic diversity is clear and devastating. These outcomes result, in part, from the development of a globalized economy that values homogeneity. In consideration of linguistic markets, we can imagine them as where commodified sociolinguistic labor is taking place. Linguistic material is being valued in this market based on an established norm—a Standard of production—that serves as an exchange rate (Bourdieu 1991; Zhang 2005). In the contemporary (and since about 1750 or so; see Bonfiglio 2002) U.S. context that norm of exchange is White Standardized spoken English (in all markets that call for formal, creative, or technical writing, in courts, and across professions). From this perspective, a user produces linguistic material—does sociolinguistic labor—in one of these markets to tell a joke, to gain professional advantage, take up a particular stance, inhabit an identity, or participate in other acts of being. Depending on one's embodied positionality—their proximity to the characterological figure (D'Onofrio 2015) of a Standard language user (Flores & Rosa 2015)—more or less labor (the higher their exchange rate) may be required to satisfy their needs in certain markets. Bourdieu (1991) describes the linguistic market as a structure which imposes itself "as a system of specific sanctions and censorships" (p.37), but more than this, he claims the styles that derive from specific markets to be "a being-perceived which exists only in relation to perceiving subjects, endowed with the diacritical dispositions which enable them to make *distinctions* between different *ways of saying*" (emphasis original, p.38). Bringing together revelations from raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa 2015), embodied sociolinguistics (Bucholtz &

[11] Arguably all contemporary instances of usage are influenced by preeisxting and responsive markets, and many theorists would likely choose to depart from a strictly economic interpretation of labor and take this stance.

Hall 2016), and linguistic ideologies (Woolard 1998; Kroskrity 2010) with the concept of sociolinguistic labor enacted on the stage of a market, the full dialectic process Silverstein (1979) alluded to (discussed in Section 1.3 above) is coming into focus.

To further illustrate this, consider Zhang (2005), who traces the emergence of two linguistic markets in Beijing, wherein urban professionals working for state-run enterprises were observed producing a locally-accented Standard variety without risk in their workplaces whereas Beijing urban professionals working for transnational enterprises (where multilingualism was highly valued) were observed producing an unaccented Standard variety, Mainstream Standard Mandarin. Zhang (2005)'s rich engagement with the sociohistorical facts of recent Chinese history that led to the development of ideologies which differently index locality and Standardness (or more specifically state-mandate following) helps illustrate that participation in such markets "is not completely a matter of personal choice" (p.455). As users with bodies seated in particular moments in time, we have linguistic material at our disposal that has its own social history, its own life in the culture and meaning that is both relative to our bodies and independent from them. A language user chooses an utterance, perhaps style shifting away from a localized or racialized variety in favor of a more standardized one, but the meaning behind the choice—what is being weighed, the value between variables for the user, their exchange rate in the emergent context—is to an extent predetermined by the structure of the market, the stage set for this action to take place upon, the now-containing space, where "the dialectic moment of social process" (Silverstein 1998, p.126) occurs. The urban professionals in transnational enterprises are producing more Standard (unaccented) varieties because, as Zhang (2005) reports, "failure or inability to use it would be detrimental to one's image as a competent professional" (p.455). These individuals do not move away from locally-indexed styles because they eschew Beijing identity, they do so because in their professions those styles are undervalued and/or stigmatized.

There is an extant linguistic market(s) which values Black professional linguistic production as more standardized and such valuing derives from an expectation that individuals exhibiting traits associated with professionalism will produce clear, careful, intelligent-sounding speech. Clear, careful, intelligent-sounding speech is not Black-indexed and thus the Black professional faces a constant conundrum, seeking to imbue their own linguistic material with value free from commodification while also working to adjust exchange rates such that their linguistic material can be more equitably valued when commodified.

1.5.1 Thesis Overview: Sociolinguistic Labor

Many Black professionals in the United States (myself included; see also Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003) report being under pressure, if not requirement, to assimilate to White Standardized spoken English. And for most of us, in our fields, equity in general is still a goal, not a reality. This assimilation to White Standardized spoken English is a necessity, engaged with so that audiences do not *reject the identity* (see Barrett 2017) of the Black language user in a given social role, namely that of a competent professional. Chapter Four reports the outcomes of a perception experiment that directly assesses listeners' judgments of targeted non-Standard speech variables identified by interviewees in Chapter Two as aspects of their racialized styles shifted away from in the workplace or as characteristic of Detroit speech. The main goal of this study is to assess the relative professionalism of Black professional speech styles, as well as the relative weight of three non-Standard variables in terms of their impact on professionalism percepts. Put differently, the main experiment asks, if Black people sound more like themselves at work, are their identities as professionals more likely to be rejected by audiences?

The experimental study is broadly situated within the speech perception literature on listener expectations (reviewed in detail in Chapter Four) which demonstrates that listeners are rapidly attending to social information (van Berkum et al. 2008, Scharinger et al. 2011) in the speech stream and that information can both facilitate (McGowan 2015) and hinder (King & Sumner 2014) their performance on a variety of perceptual tasks. I was inspired most directly by Labov et al. (2011)'s sociolinguistic monitor task. This study tracked listener sensitivity to increased frequencies of the socio-indexical variant ING, specifically of increasing proportions of the non-Standard apical realization [in] within a given time window. Listeners were presented with a series of headline-like sentences read by a speaker who was purported to be a "young woman studying to be a newscaster" and were asked to rate her speech on a scale from "perfectly professional" to "try some other line of work" (p.438). Labov et al. (2011) presented listeners with conditions ranging between 0 and 100% possible [in] tokens and found that as proportions of non-Standard [in] increased, listener ratings of professionalism became more critical—moving toward the *try some other line of work* end of the scale. In fact, Labov et al. (2011) report that "a single occurrence of /in/ has the maximum impact" on speech judgments in a formal speech context. This finding demonstrates that, in a professional context, non-Standard usage is incongruent with listener expectations. Labov et al. (2011), who originally conducted this study in Philadelphia, report replicating the main finding with listeners in South Carolina and New Hampshire, again showing that each deviation from the norm (each additional occurrence of

non-Standard [in]) was proportional to the decrease in professionalism ratings. These cross-regional findings illustrate that listener expectations with respect to the normative incompatibility (Levon 2014) of non-Standard speech variables with professional contexts are dialect independent.

With these findings in mind, and after extensive (but inconclusive; see Section 4.2) piloting with the sociolinguistic monitor task, I developed a perception experiment to test the relative professionalism of three non-Standard speech variables which emerged from the metalinguistic commentary of Black professionals about their style shifting. The goal of this experiment is to determine if Black professionals do indeed need to engage in style shifting practices—engage in sociolinguistic labor—which moves their linguistic production away from their racialized varieties towards White Standardized spoken English to be perceived as professional sounding. The experiment will determine if any such engagement holds for all the targeted variables, or only for the obviously socially stigmatized variables being tested, such as *ask* metathesis. It will also determine if this outcome holds for the general public, or if it appears stronger for individuals who belong to some demographic groups—with certain embodied positionalities—more than others.

1.5.2 Personal Motivations: Sociolinguistic Labor

Another reason I chose to study sociolinguistic labor is I have been carrying its weight around all my life as a Black biracial woman from the American South. I learned to style shift so early in life that I do not possess the fluency in my non-dominant dialects to be comfortable using these voices professionally now that I have achieved a more secure social status. I was encouraged to shift away from racialized styles—by individuals outside and within my Black community of practice—if I wanted to be taken seriously, listened to, or seen as intelligent. I now know that this is by design, that the idea that Black voices do not sound serious, or intelligent, and can be ignored is a product of White Supremacy. Sociolinguistic labor in the community under study relates to the anticipation of listening subjects[12] (Inoue 2006) that are White and that have the power to silence people of color for existing outside the norm. White people in this country have always already decided what is "appropriate" (Flores & Rosa 2015) and are the individuals who have the ability to move the goalposts of appropriateness to serve their ends in the moment. I undertook this research (in the first weeks of March 2020) because I was interested in

[12] Which are not to be confused with specific, known, individual interlocutors or addressees, but can be understood as conceptual entities.

understanding the difference between the audiences minoritized speakers imagine (which influences their style shifting, and which I will investigate in Chapters Two and Three) and the audiences that exist (which are understood through gathering data on those listening to their shifted styles, which I will investigate in Chapter Four).

1.6 Thesis Overview and Terminology Notes

In the body of work that follows, I present in Chapter Two the Metalinguistic Method of sociolinguistic Interview. In that chapter, I will outline the design and methods for this new approach to capturing an individual's metalinguistic awareness, in an effort to elevate a language user's ideas about their own language use and agentive constructions of identity to the same level of value in our inquiry as their linguistic production. The results of 17 interviews with Black professionals from Detroit are analyzed through qualitative data analysis and are presented in a way that prioritizes emergent patterns across the class of interviewees. In Chapter Three, I present three case studies from interviewees which allow for deeper engagement with themes related to research questions—Standard language ideologies and sociolinguistic labor—before concluding the discussion on metalinguistic commentary from Black professionals and what it demonstrates about their motivations for shifting away from racialized styles in the workplace. In Chapter Four, I will present results of a perceptual experiment testing three features of Black varieties—metathesis, fortition via Th-stopping, and word-final consonant cluster reduction—identified by interviewees in Chapter Two as aspects of their racialized speech that they are aware of shifting away from in professional settings or as characteristically Detroit-sounding, or that are identified in the literature and common discourse on Black varieties as highly stereotyped. By presenting 300 listeners with pairs of sentences that feature combinations of these three, Black-indexed, non-Standard speech variables across several conditions, I am able to assess if general audiences do indeed perceive Black speech as professional sounding when Black-indexed variables are present. This dissertation will conclude with a summary and discussion of future directions in Chapter Five.

Some brief points about terminology before continuing with the exposition of this research. In what follows, I will break from tradition and refer to the individuals who sat for interviews discussed in Chapters Two and Three as *interviewees* and those who provided data for the experiment discussed in Chapter Four as *participants* or *listeners*. *The speaker* is a single individual who is neither an interviewee, nor a participant, who recorded stimuli used in piloting and experimentation described in Chapter Four. The organizational approach I have adopted for

the interview data is referred to in the literature as blind coding, but that is ableist, and so I will use *obscured coding* here instead. I use the term *African American Language(s)* or *AAL* to collectively describe Black-racialized language varieties, joining Bloomquist, Green, & Lanehart (2015) in taking a top-down, historical approach to categorization because I feel what unites (Black and non-Black) users of these varieties is their shared social history of enslavement and settler colonialism. The words *Black*, *White*, and *Standard* will always appear capitalized in this work because each are isolable social constructions—not naturally evolved or biological concepts—with their own unique and traceable histories.

Chapter Two Sociolinguistic Interview Study: A Metalinguistic Approach

2.1 Chapter Two Overview

This chapter introduces a new method of sociolinguistic interview focused on capturing metalinguistic awareness and presents the results of a first application of that method with 17 Black Professionals from Detroit, Michigan. Detroit was chosen as the site for this study because Detroit is a majority Black city in the present and historically, one where many who hail from that city and region choose to remain there as professionals (see Boyd 2017)[13], which is different from Black professionals in some other cities like the Mobile Black Professional persona emerging from Rochester, NY described in King (2021). The goals of the interviews themselves are first—and most importantly—to hold space for Black people to share their experiences with language, and to have a platform to reflect on the sociolinguistic labor required by intersectional[14], multiple-minority, public experiences. The goal of the method itself is to

[13] Detroit was also chosen, in part, due to its locality in an effort to leave space to answer the call for reciprocity in (especially sociolinguistic) data collection methods raised by Wolfram, Reaser, & Vaughn (2008) among others. At the time of choosing a site for study it was unknown if conducting in-person interviews (let alone in-person service) in the community would be possible. Most unfortunately, I was not able to locate myself physically in Detroit while studying its residents, but it is my hope to contribute to the Black professionals therein with my expertise or simply my hands in ways that they identify as meaningful in the future.

[14] The Combahee River Collective (Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier) was a group of Black lesbians who, in the 1960s, called for a politics that was explicitly antiracist and antisexist (Taylor 2017). These women found themselves on the periphery of contemporary social movements like the Black Panthers, Women's Liberation White feminists, and anti-war Socialists; their exigence from within these spaces was subject to erasure, just as their independent, external successes were subject to whitewashing and co-optation. The Combahee River Statement recognizes that we are all servants of capitalism, that it is within this base that our struggle is seated, and thus we are always simultaneously combating the global imperialist project under the bound oppressions of racism, sexism, and capitalism. This particular constellation of oppression is intersectionality—a concept defined first in the Combahee statement which should be understood as "the synthesis of these oppressions [which] creates the conditions of our lives" (Taylor 2017). (Intersectionality was quite famously later expanded upon by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in the legal arena, addressing the lack of protection for Black women specifically in the workplace; see also Perea et al. 2015) Thinking about a constellation of oppressions aligns with Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualization of the linguistic market and the ways in which one's positionality determines value and motion of linguistic material. Intersectionality is not conceived of in the Combahee Statement as inseparable aspects of being and character that build up an individual. Instead, intersectionality is conceived of as the combined weight of disparate forces—each limiting freedoms—based on independent aspects of our being and character, each which press us into silence in various spaces; the Combahee River Statement begs us to remember in our most silent spaces there likely are still-quieter people.

elevate metalinguistic knowledge to the level of speech feature in that it should be accorded the same level of value in our inquiry as a user's linguistic production. Apart from support for the validity of the method itself, I am interested both in capturing metalinguistic commentary from interviewees which may provide a better understanding of social factors motivating Black professionals to style shift away from their racialized varieties in professional spaces and in deepening a theoretical discussion about the costs of such daily—positionality-driven—style shifting over the course of the lifespan. I am also interested in identifying the elements of racialized varieties that Black professionals feel are necessary to avoid in professional spaces to be used in perceptual experimentation in Chapter Four.

This chapter will first discuss traditional approaches to sociolinguistic interview and elaborate on my motivations for deviating from them (as introduced in Sections 1.3 & 1.4). I will then outline the design and methods for the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI), describing in Section 2.3 the general goals for each of the interview protocol sections and exemplifying how they were employed in this first application of the MMSI. Following this discussion, I will detail the interviewee recruitment process (Section 2.3.2), data preparation (Section 2.3.3), and the qualitative data analysis process so as to highlight the data-driven, emergent nature of the method being applied (Section 2.3.4). Section 2.4 presents broad findings across interviewees in ways that highlight the types of metalinguistic commentary the MMSI interview protocol captures. Section 2.4.1 presents findings directly related to the method's specific tasks, while Sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 transition into a deeper engagement with key concepts and research questions under study related to motivations for Black professionals undertaking linguistic actions of self-censorship.

The discussion of MMSI findings continues in Chapter Three, which ends by considering the ways in which the metacommentary elicited across Chapters Two and Three allow us to enrich the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor through inclusion of actions reported by interviewees.

2.2 Sociolinguistic Interviews and Metalinguistic Awareness

In his now canonized treatise on Some Principles of Linguistic Methodology in the first issue of *Language in Society* in 1972, William Labov refines for the field the sociolinguistic interview and

its theoretical underpinnings[15]. In this discussion, Labov distinguishes the subdisciplines of Linguistics by the types of data each linguist might draw "his" inquiry from: texts, elicitations, intuitions, experiments, and observations. All of these types of inquiry are, for Labov, united in the singular goal of "writ[ing] the grammar of the speech community" (p.108). The methodological goal of the traditional sociolinguistic interview is the elicitation of a series of contextual styles all individuals are said to possess and, in the article, Labov (1972b) outlines five principles that define (or interfere with) this regularized study of so-called everyday language through the method of observation. The goal of the method is to elicit speech from individuals across a series of conversational styles, and although individuals are encouraged to speak at length and to focus on topics they are interested in (Schilling 2014), the content of their speech—the words themselves and ideas expressed by the individual—can be ignored. During analysis, a linguistic variable or phenomenon under study is quantified across styles to arrive at a defined range of that speaker's or population's production. What is of interest to the linguistic researcher in a traditional, Labovian sociolinguistic interview format (which Becker (2017) defines by these specific design elements and research goals) are the discrete occurrences of a given speech variable under study produced by the speaker during key points of the interview, those when the most casual, or least-attended-to, "vernacular" speech is uttered (p.112). Becker (2017) indicates that "additionally many fieldworkers elicit meta-linguistic commentary, either conversationally or through other tasks" but does not discuss its importance, describe these elicitation tasks, or cite specific studies. Schilling (2014) reports that metalinguistic data, which is incidentally gathered when interviewees are speaking, is sometimes valuable in sociolinguistic research in that it presents researchers with the ability to get around stigmatized language users' poor performance on commonly used tasks like grammaticality judgments.

2.2.1 Deviating from Labovian Sociolinguistic Interview Techniques

I seat my discussion in the origin of the method so as to recognize the absence of a valuing of the ideas of language users about their language use in the birth of the discipline of sociolinguistics and its defining methodology, and in the development of linguistic theory in general. Scholars, but perhaps most notably the perceptual dialectologist Trudgill (1972), have devalued metalinguistic commentary by casting it as unreliable data (and thus best not used in the study of linguistic variation or language regard) when noting that individuals sometimes

[15] Although a formalized interview outline was introduced in Labov (1984)'s Field Methods chapter in Baugh & Sherzer's (Eds.) *Language in Use* textbook (and originally in Labov 1966a), it has rarely been followed step-by-step by subsequent researchers.

over- or underreport their usage of key features under study. Perceptual dialectology tends to focus on the frequency of an individual's use of targeted features rather than on details provided by users about how a speech feature functions amongst others. The argument of some perceptual dialectologists that individuals asymmetrically report feature usage feels thin, as such reports seem like a non-issue with enough data gathered; if the pattern being sought is extant (potentially ideologically-influenced) over- and underreporting should balance out. Moreover, the variables being produced are the object of study under a strict variationist approach, so it remains unclear why the metacommentary and awareness of the user ever need be maligned—even if their reports and their production are asymmetric[16]. More importantly, these types of misaligned reports (all metalinguistic commentary) are data in and of themselves because, as Agha (2006) describes, our behaviors are metalinguistic in nature, they carry pragmatic information and intent. Thus, when interviewees clam up or gush or tell tall tales in response to a given question or term—especially if a pattern can be observed in such behaviors across a population under study—that tells "us something about the properties of speech forms whether by decontextualizing the forms and describing their properties or by evaluating their effects while the forms are still in play" (pgs.152-153). In this light, there can be no unreliable narrators, no incorrect answers, only language users providing informed status reports on their currently functioning linguistic systems.

As reviewed in Section 1.4, although many researchers employing sociolinguistic interview methods in the past have not focused on or even validated metalinguistic commentary, theorists have discussed metalinguistic knowledge and have argued this knowledge is retrievable from all language users (Silverstein 1981), and can contribute to our overall understanding of full linguistic competence. Philips (2013) proposes that metalinguistic knowledge has value as an isolable unit of linguistic production, as do all "units of analysis" (p.83) in discourse structure that can be systematically analyzed, coded, and compared. As a unit of linguistic production, an aspect of (ever)occurring linguistic phenomena, knowledge about language in use has value all on its own. What do we know when we know a language? Individuals with identities that are minoritized or oppressed know how to choose ways to linguistically present themselves in every situation they enter, and this knowledge extends far beyond the baseline assumption captured in Labov (1972b)'s principles of Style Shifting and Attention, that one always has multiple styles at their command and those styles can be ordered along a dimension of attention paid to them

[16] See Chapter Four (Section 4.2) for discussion of more recent, relevant sociophonetic literature on listener expectations which engages with these types of asymmetries directly.

at any given point in time. When your body determines the ways in which you are allowed to move about the world—sometimes by law—you must always pay attention to your language use, you must always have an awareness of the various repertoires at your disposal, what they are composed of, when they are appropriate, and the ways in which you move between them[17]. Babel (2015) notes that language use is irreducibly (and frustratingly[18] for the analyst) social and individual, but that "that a continuing commitment to methodological diversity, to epistemological tolerance, and to open communication [is] essential" if we hope to capture and describe it. By allowing the sociolinguistic interview to focus on something other than the speech that is produced, space is created for linguistic research to "move towards a holistic understanding of human experience, joining the kaleidoscopic shards of our collective partial understandings into a single coherent image" (Babel 2015). Although the rejection of the majority of detail the language user provides in favor of a primary focus on accounting for speech features under study in the founding era of the field is clear, Labov (1972b) does remark that "A field worker who stays outside his subject, and deals with it as a mere excuse for eliciting language, will get very little for his pains" (p.114) and goes on to characterize that, when a speaker gives us more than a basic answer to our questions, it is "a gift". Labov (1972b) tells the linguist that they must exhibit knowledge of the speech community if they hope to "tap the full linguistic competence" of a speaker (p.114). I couldn't agree more that these fuller answers are a gift, so much so that I've developed an interview method based solely on capturing and studying them. And that if one hopes to elicit rich metalinguistic commentary from the community under study, the questions one asks must be relevant to that community—most especially if the body and being of the researcher is incongruent with the bodies and being of

[17] A theme in Barrett (2017)'s study on African American drag queens is the concept of a tripartite self: who one feels one's self to be on the inside, the performance of self one undertakes to display that identity (if one chooses to do so), and what is read by another (how is this self being perceived?). Barrett (2017) also discusses how many in this community rarely feel entirely safe and so are always already hyperaware of both theirs and their interlocutor's stylistic production, noting fine-grained changes and adjusting accordingly.

[18] Babel (2015), Silverstein (1981), and others discuss the frustrations of the dialectic nature of linguistic structure and function from a research perspective, noting the specific challenge that viewing language as a object (required for its empirical analysis) brings. The material of language—phonemes, pitch accents, words on a page—can be studied outside of its cultural context, but only to a point. When that cultural context is included (and this is the basis of the frustration) the analysis become messy and outcomes less predictable due to the social and contextual components of language in use that must be considered. This frustrating dialectic it is not unlike that present when studying molecules in a quantum state (see Greiner & Reinhardt 1996), which limits the researcher to observing either the position (i.e., material state) or motion (i.e., cultural context) of a given molecule, but never both at once. Quantum mechanics, coincidentally, provide the same equations which underlie the Fourier transform used to create the wave functions that generate spectrograms (Greiner & Reinhardt 1996, pgs. 57-74), which enable observation of a sound wave's motion and position simultaneously. It's all connected.

those under study.

I was inspired, in part, to create a metalinguistic approach for sociolinguistic interview through the work and writing of Campbell-Kibler (2009), which centers the language user's intelligence by asking them to talk freely about their perception of target variables and often places them in focus groups outside the lab setting. Hers was the first work I encountered which, though studying speech production, made a concerted effort to explain the ways in which the individuals participating in the research interacted with the linguistic material being discussed. Those few sentences have been formative and inspirational to me as a researcher because they demonstrated another type of linguistic knowledge being valued. Becker (2017), in describing what a strong interpretation of the sociolinguistic interview method might look like, discusses how group interview approaches evolved out of solutions to address the Observer's Paradox (Labov 1972b). In these approaches, so that a researcher could better observe an interviewee's speech without influencing it, interviews were conducted in triads, with two community members speaking to each other. By bringing together individuals who share identities to speak (to a linguist or to one another) about issues that matter to them, "a deep understanding of local semiotics that the sociocultural meaning of embodiment can be recognized" (p.181) through (Bucholtz & Hall 2016) can emerge. Put differently, asking individuals from a given community who share embodied identities—which have traditionally been cast as deterministic in terms of linguistic usage or variation (i.e., racialization versus localization of sound changes; see King 2021)—to tell us about their motivations for using language can be particularly revealing. Work in this vein contributes not only to the ongoing theoretical discussions of materiality and discursive self-actualization, but also to discussions about the ways in which individual perceivers and producers contribute to language change over time (when making ideologically- and positionality-informed stylistic choices and judgments in the moment).

2.2.2 Valuing and Capturing Metalinguistic Commentary

Centering the community under study in descriptions of their own linguistic practice is crucial. Language users should be viewed as authorities in discussions of the usage of their own varieties (Butters 2000, 2002) because they are the people most often deploying the variety in the world, inhabiting it and it them (Bourdieu 1977; Agha 2006). But more important than the sheer valuing of language user intelligence and authority is a recognition of what the study of language in use is seeking, particularly those studies which investigate populations with

identifiably influential macro-social categories of interest like age, gender, race, region, and socioeconomic status. And what such studies seek is a better "understanding of how speakers' linguistic behaviors articulate their beliefs about their own social positions on an individual level" (King 2020). Labov (1972b) and others following him are seeking orderly heterogeneity (Weinreich et al. 1968, which describes structured variation in a geographically-bound polity along class lines), but what exists is a "heterogeneous collectivity" (King 2020) in which each individual community member's distinct, emergent, and often multiple cited meanings and motivations combine into an ongoing "metapragmatic typification" (Agha 2006) of the linguistic practices of the group.

With this in mind, let us consider some ways in which the sociolinguistic interview may gain value when removed from its phonocentric origins or purposes; language is more than speech. Wolfram (1996) used a sentence permutation task in combination with an adapted interview paradigm to confirm the ethnic distribution of a variant observed in North Carolinian speech. The indigenous Lumbee population was using *I'm* as a perfective (as in *I'm been there*), and Wolfram wanted to compare it to Black English (*I been*) and White English (*I've been*). I would argue that a devaluing of so-called naïve language users' ideas about language in general and discussions about awareness being couched in terms of ability and accuracy (see Silverstein 1981) led researchers like Wolfram to default to elicitation tasks and schemes in situations like these. Wolfram is able to describe how the Lumbee *I'm* had extended to past and perfective uses with this task through surveying members of all three communities, but direct discussions of observed constructions with Lumbee people may have yielded the same or richer data about this construction and its history.

Bailey et al. (1997) discuss how their struggle to elicit double modals from Southerners when developing the *Linguistic Atlas of the United States* and attribute their difficulty to the suitability of the sentence frame they were using to elicit the items from locals indirectly (because naturalistic production is the only production which can be legitimately quantified; see Becker 2017). The sorts of issues Bailey et al. (1997) encountered can be avoided by employing targeted tasks—such as one I have developed and will present in Section 2.3.1.4—where interviewees' intelligence[19] is centered and lexical items and aspects of usage are discussed

[19] Their superior intelligence regarding the language variety under study! I am not a user of all the varieties under study, most especially Black-Accented Standard. Most linguists are not users of the varieties they study. Even Labov (1984, pgs.40-41) agrees that it is within the mind of the individual language user that the most sophisticated view of a linguistic system resides. We should trust people

directly. Through such discussion-based tasks, the need for a one-size-fits-all sentence frame is traded for a regularized means of eliciting commentary about variables in use. One could imagine expanding usage-focused and discussion-based elicitation tasks for lexical items like double modals to include any type of utterance, unit of discourse, or modality; the method I am presenting was designed with this kind of expansive accessibility in mind.

Becker (2017) states that, "it is the community pattern that is ultimately of interest" (p.100), and these two examples provide a glimpse of the ways in which incorporating a means of capturing and valuing metalinguistic commentary can augment methods and outcomes in approaches to sociolinguistic interview which seek to describe such patterns. There is a community pattern of usage among self-identified Black people, who share experiences of embodied positionality in terms of belonging to the same macro-social demographic category, who share knowledge of "the discursive doing of race" (King 2020), but individual members of this community need not possess the same social construction of race or races, nor need they perform their shared racial identity in orderly or predictable ways. Recognizing this heterogeneous collectivity in methodological development helps researchers to avoid some of the harms that have been done to stigmatized language communities in the past. For example, "the equation of a bounded vernacular to high rates of non-standard production" (Becker 2017, p.103) led, in the study of African American communities, to the idea that racialized speech is only used to mark racial identity (King 2020). In consideration of the ways in which traditional sociolinguistic interview methods contributed to the popular understanding of AAL in the world (what Dotson 2014 refers to as epistemic injustice), committing to methods which center community knowledge resists erasure (Irvine & Gal 2000) and liberates users (Section 1.5) by casting the variation they exhibit in reporting not as bad data of some kind but instead as evidence of users "constructing multidimensional identities that vary across multiple planes of social difference" (King 2020, p.295).

2.2.3 Resisting Phonocentrism

Apart from the benefits the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (see Section 2.3) may bring through its design, the method addresses one of the more stark issues of inequity in Linguistic theoretical development: phonocentrism. For example, all of the principles in Labov

enough to understand how the system which structures their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors is functioning in their own minds. We should value what they report to us as evidence of that system's operation.

(1972b)'s Some Principles of Linguistic Methodology are inherently phonocentric, as is the design of the sociolinguistic interview itself, in that their primary concerns are the ways in which the interactions of the researcher may influence or taint the production of speech elicited from the individuals under study, thereby producing so-called "bad" data (p.100). Even the oft-cited and sociolinguistically foundational Observer's Paradox (Labov's fifth principle) is not immune from this phonocentrism: "To obtain the data most important for linguistic theory, we have to observe how people speak when they are not being observed" (p. 113, emphasis mine). Henner & Robinson (to appear) discuss the ways in which speech-centric "modality chauvinism" harms not only our epistemology, but also the lives of language users across three centuries. This trend stems from one in the very history of science as a discipline (which intersects with the ideologies of standardization and social control covered in Section 1.3; see also Nader 1996; Clerck 2010; Valente 2011), which as a fledgling enterprise carved out space for the knowledge it would produce at the expense of other extant ways of knowing—religious, indigenous, individual/experiential, etc. (Nader 1996). In creating this boundary, Nader (1996) argues, the formal enterprise of science created the "keystone of modernity" through hegemonic categories (such as primitive versus civilized or simple versus complex), and with it became a power-broker in terms of the normalized relations of human systems. The study of speech has been prioritized over the past 50 years in linguistic inquiry at the expense of all other forms of communication, not only over other forms of linguistic structure. Many linguists (and language-related experts from other fields such as speech pathologists; see Farah 2022) maintain the belief that speech is "the only viable and acceptable form of languaging" (Henner & Robinson, to appear). So much so that in an audit of introductory Linguistics textbooks, Henner & Robinson (to appear) find mention of signed languages in only two of them, and only one with (out of date and incorrect) source material included. Because a focus on speech production has been near total throughout linguistic theoretical development, models and tools for fieldwork and experimentation have leaned heavily phonocentrist as well, shaping the primary research questions of most subdisciplines for the last half century.

Even the more vociferous advocates of embodiment (Eckert 2011), ideology (Irvine 1989), and metalinguistic awareness (Silverstein 1981) have upheld a phoncentrist theoretical position with an evidentiary base firmly grounded in aspects of speech production[20]. Critical discourse

[20] Though see Farnell & Graham (2014) for a deconstruction of the term *discourse* in anthropology's methods and practices. They conclude, "Discourse-centered approaches in linguistic anthropology position speech and related expressive acts, including textualizing practices, as the principal means by which social actors create and recreate social life. They thus open up new ways to conceive of culture…

analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000) approaches are also not free from this phonocentrism, as these approaches often present dialogue isolated from long stretches of a conversation (or recording or film; see Bucholtz & Hall 2016) for the purpose of highlighting key utterances, phrases, or variables for consideration or explication by the analyst, but rarely are those same productions allowed to be qualified by the human being producing them. Nor is perceptual dialectology (Preston 2002, Trudgill 1972), which although is the subdiscipline which places the most consistent value in metalinguistic knowledge, the purpose of eliciting metacommentary in dialectology methods is to support theoretical arguments about the areal distribution of spoken variables, dialects, and changing sound systems over time and in real time. None of this critique is meant to devalue speech as an object of study, or to mark the outcomes of studies like Irvine (1989) and Eckert (2011) as lacking or less rigorous science, or call into question what has been learned through analyzing speech. This dissertation is analyzing speech—both from the perspective of the speech community and from the general listening public—because I find speech to be endlessly fascinating and to contain immense capacity for analysis of the ways in which we do self, especially in relation to how ideology is built and maintained over time. Further, this community—Black professionals—is often directly under threat due to their speech production and so studying it is, as it is for many researchers who study minoritized groups, a crucial aspect of my research program. But I too have been influenced by modality chauvinism. My concern is to highlight here that a defaulting of speech as a primary evidentiary base in language science has led to the analysis of speech even when a language user's embodiment, knowledge, or self-actualization is the primary concern of research. Thus, what is in question are the echo chambering effects of phoncentrist modality chauvinism, ones that have led privileged, centered, and "abled linguists [to] stigmatize the language use of marginalized subjects by referring to their language as disordered" (Henner & Robinson, to appear), invoking deficit models.

This matters for considering the ways in which language users could and should be interviewed about their language use and the parts of their linguistic production worth analyzing once they've shared their experiences with their whole bodies in front of whatever recording equipment they've consented to. As Philips (2013) states "what one can analyze and how it can be analyzed depends on how research was conceptualized in the first place, what motivated

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Ways in which wider social phenomena will be encoded in discourse can rarely be anticipated before ethnographic fieldwork is well underway. They are usually discovered during fieldwork and necessarily vary according to such factors as interactions between the ethnographer and the individuals and community with whom she or he works as well as formal elements of the discourse itself" (pgs.401-402).

decisions about what kind of data to collect, and what motivated decisions about what data to further process" (p.94). Deficit models of language use have been created by and through traditional variationist sociolinguistic approaches. Sociolinguistic survey methods that were initially developed, in part, to address what was viewed as underperformance by Black students in urban school districts (King 2020) contributed to deficit models by delimiting who was Black enough to interview about African American English and what can be counted as examples of racialized language from a set of previously described so-called vernacular features (see King 2020, pgs.286-287; Weldon 2021, pgs.25-45). Although the intentions behind early sociolinguistic work in large, urban Black communities (Wolfram 1969; Fasold 1972; Labov & Harris 1986) may have been altruistic, what resulted has become a decades-long campaign on the part of Black linguists (Spears 1978; Rickford 1985, 1986; Smitherman 1999; Baugh 2000; Lanehart 2001, 2009; Baker-Bell et al. 2020) and Black people (Baldwin 1959, 1961; Coates 2015; Morrison 2019) to defend the validity, uniqueness (but not exoticization), and heterogeneity of Black language and the agency and creativity of its users. This campaign was and is necessary because Black people experience linguistic discrimination every day due to the "weaponization" (Henner & Robinson, to appear) of language across institutions (Craft et al. 2020), which has cumulative effects on personhood, agency, social mobility, and community development. Deficit models, which stem in part from our data collection and analysis methods, continue to enact harms on minoritized language communities. Rather than use the everyday practices of an individual as evidence that extant social boundaries can be manipulated, exploited, and transgressed (as Peirce (1974), Ochs (1992), and others theorizing the connections of body, ideology, and self-actualization through sign-mediated relationships might suggest), Labov (1972b) and other early adopters of sociolinguistic interview methodologies developed *a priori* ideations of what form linguistic production would have to take to uphold extant social boundaries. In providing evidence that class, race, region, and ability could be bounded by language production, sociolinguistics joined "Modern Western Science [in creating] a habit of mind that mirrors the compartmentalized societies in which it is embedded" (Nader 1996).

One study will not right these wrongs, but a regularized means of capturing and valuing language users' ideas and experiences will begin to do so[21]. In Section 1.2.1 I discussed the

[21] See also Philips (2013) and Wortham & Reyes (2021) for discussion of other methods which interpret discourse by capturing information on contextualization through the systematic elicitation of language users' ideas.

importance of self-reflexive critique on the part of the researcher. Aspects of the design of the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview are the outcome of this critique on my part, which observed the phonocentrism of the field and asked what ways it had influenced me as an able-bodied researcher. For reasons articulated in this critique, I feel comfortable taking the position that centralizing speech in the scientific study of language is not necessary to produce robust, well-informed, replicable, and effective scholarship. Throughout this model, the object of study is metalinguistic awareness and the knowledge about language in use it produces, valued for its richness and revelatory capacity, most specifically with regards to aspects of embodied positionality. In an attempt to elicit metalinguistic data from interviewees, the method prioritizes marking and remarking researcher positionality for interviewees, giving them agency within the interview setting, and stating research goals explicitly (in this study, those goals are bringing more, and more accurate, representation of the ideas and experiences of Black people into the literatures on Black languages). These priorities were also included in response to self-reflexive critique (see miles-hercules et al. 2021). Eckert (2001) discusses the ways in which Labovian sociolinguistic interview approaches, and the studies of style and variation issuing from them, suppose that the interview creates a "constructed stylistic world" (by its progression through elicitation styles) which can be compared to the real stylistic world "within which it is embedded and draws upon" (p.119). It is my hope that by taking steps to enrich sociolinguistic interview methods with best practices that recognize interviewee agency and intelligence, less distance will exist between the constructed stylistic world of the interview and that of the real stylistic world in which populations under study live and work and find their being. Crucially, taking such steps can and should create an interview environment such that when those distances arise (they always will), interviewees may feel comfortable commenting on them directly, providing researchers with a deeper understanding of the ways in which topic, context, and interlocutor combine to inform language use in the moment (see Rickford & McNair-Knox 1994).

2.3 Methods

In the subsections that follow I outline the design for the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI), focused on capturing metalinguistic awareness and how this method can be generally applied, and discussing the goals of each section of the MMSI protocol in general terms. I also discuss my methods for applying this design in this first application of the MMSI: a study of 17 Black professionals from Detroit, Michigan.

2.3.1 The Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview

For this study, I developed the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI) to establish what motivates Black professionals to style shift. To this end, I included questions that invite interviewees to comment on their own experiences with sociolinguistic variation in AAL. Knowing what varieties this population is most familiar with, and gathering the examples provided by them as touchstones, is important to the wider project of describing Black language from the perspective of Black language users. Two remaining goals—to address questions about the social factors motivating switching and to identify elements of Black varieties that are avoided in professional spaces—are also met by the protocol design, which allows for these factors to emerge organically.

The general MMSI protocol has seven sections: Introduction, Demographics, Language Varieties, Discussion of Targeted Terms Task, Usage Assessment Task, and Final Interview Questions. In brief, the interview begins with a set of demographic questions and moves into a set of questions about language varieties that includes a discussion of targeted words and phrases. Following this, interviewees engage in an assessment of language usage in various modalities. The interview concludes with a section of questions that serves as an analogue to the classic "Danger of Death" (Labov 1972b, p.113) story, which is intended to focus interviewees' attention directly on the key concepts of interest for a given study. For this study, the key concepts include style shifting, professionalism, and race. A full set of protocol questions including stimuli for the Usage Assessment Task is included in Appendix A.

2.3.1.1 Interview Introduction

There are no specific questions asked or answered in the Introduction section of the MMSI; rather, it serves as a means for the researcher to prepare the interviewee for what will transpire and give them a few moments to adjust to the interview setting. It also allows the researcher an opportunity to share relevant information about themselves. For this study's introductions, I began by welcoming the interviewee and thanking them for giving me their time. I tell them about my racial identity[22], and my interests in better understanding how Black people navigate professional spaces with language and bringing better representation of the experiences of Black language users into the linguistics literature. I state clearly that interviewees have agency in this process: they can choose not to answer any question I ask and they have the freedom to

[22] Researchers applying the MMSI take note: positionality is key to this approach and, as discussed in Section 1.2.1, it cannot be ignored in design, analysis, or reporting.

take the conversation in whatever direction they feel is most relevant to their experiences. I also reassure them that I am not seeking any specific answers but am most interested in capturing their individual impressions of the terms or topics we will discuss. Throughout the interview, I sometimes also describe my own experiences where they may be relevant, as this should be a conversation, and (for this specific study and population) I want to reinforce[23] that I also personally experience racial pressures in the workplace and wider world, even though I may not always visually or aurally present as the Black woman I identify as to every observer.

2.3.1.2 Demographic questions

The demographic questions are designed to put the interviewees at ease, as they are questions whose answers individuals will undoubtedly have ready access to—in this study this section includes questions about interviewees' personal histories as Detroiters and educational backgrounds, for example. This section also captures interviewees' professional trajectories, their ideas on the concept of professionalism itself, how they'd advise new Black employees to navigate their workspace, and their current and future goals. This section—generally applied—creates a rich corpus of demographic detail about the population under study that is also related to broad themes of the study's topic which is comparable across interviewees.

Although my implementation of the MMSI asks questions that aim to address specific goals of this study, it is hoped that the more general design of the MMSI will be used by other researchers who would apply this method with similar goals in mind, but tailoring the specific questions to their study's broad themes, topic, or population. And so in the demographics section, where I've begun to focus interviewees' attention on the key concept of professionalism (as one might observe in Appendix A), another researcher might at this stage of the interview begin to focus on gender identity or hailing from a particular city or region. What's important for this section to establish is that these interviewees are *individuals*, who have rich and varied

[23] Rickford & McNair Knox (1994) claim that interviewees provide richer information that is more likely to be true to life when they are interviewed by individuals who share their identity characteristics, most especially when those identity characteristics are relevant to the topic under discussion. These Black people know they are discussing the expression of their racial identity through their linguistic practice with another person who also experiences Blackness. We should expect that results would differ if a person in a visibly Black body were to have conducted these interviews, in the same way that they would differ if the body was visibly White. This is testable and should be tested in future, as the effects of interlocutor embodiment on linguistic and metalinguistic production are poorly understood. Not all interviewees respond to my mixedraceness in the same way, with some asking immediate follow-up questions about my parentage and some expressed solidarity and kinship with my Blackness while yet others brought it up again in a distancing fashion later in the interview, though for the purposes of this study that discourse remains as yet unanalyzed.

experiences that are worth capturing, and that go beyond what unites them as a group of folks who share identities in a box-checking sense. Only by first establishing how the individual members situate themselves can we begin to conceptualize how the heterogeneous collectivity (King 2021) of the population under study—and the wider community they represent—operates. The demographics section's design also allows space for interviewees to self-identify, so the burden of assigning demographic membership beyond that which qualified them for the study does not fall on the researcher, and can thus be reported with confidence.

2.3.1.3 Language Varieties

The interview section focused on language varieties asks questions about the types of language an interviewee uses, and in this first application of the method begins with a question asking about the ways in which the interviewee feels their language use to be related to their racial identity[24]. The wording of this question is kept intentionally vague, so as not to introduce terminology that might label varieties of language—even introducing a term as leading as *variety* into the conversation—to allow such metalinguistic commentary to emerge from the interviewee organically. The question is asked to gauge how the speaker conceptualizes their linguistic repertoire, and if their usage is representative of (for the purposes of this study) moving between racialized styles. This section also includes some classic dialectology questions—How do Black people from Detroit speak? Where in the country do Black people speak differently? White people?—to allow for metalinguistic commentary about regional variation in AAL to emerge and directly contrasting that with commentary and knowledge about other United States varieties. Gathering data such at this—with a qualitative, evaluative, experiential component—contributes directly to ongoing efforts to placing race and racing place in cross-regional raciolinguistics (Farrington et al. 2021; King 2021).

In the application of the MMSI by other researchers, the Language Varieties section would be generally applied with the goal of establishing a shared metalinguistic knowledge base across the population under study that is relevant to the key concepts of their specific research goals, moving from general to more specific knowledge. For example, the most specific questions included in this study focus on in-group labels (*talking White* and *authentically Black*; see Section 2.4.2) applied by Black people to the speech of other Black people, and ask

[24] *How do you consider the types of language you use to be related to your racial identity?* Holliday & Squires (2020, p.6) used an identically-worded question when analyzing the sociolinguistic labor of Black undergraduates.

interviewees to unpack what those labels seek to mark in one's identity or performance when they are used.

2.3.1.4 Discussion of Targeted Terms Task

In a traditional sociolinguistic interview, one might have interviewees read a word list in an attempt to capture examples of an individual's productions of the sound inventory of the variety under study (e.g. Labov 1984; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991; Meyerhoff 2017; Gafter 2016; Pizarro Pedraza 2018; Becker 2014). The MMSI design is concerned with capturing interviewees' *ideas* about the *kinds* of *language* they produce because of certain *positionalities* or *identities* they possess (embodied or otherwise afforded), thus I developed a task which allows for the capture of comparable observations about the meaning and usage of common words and phrases arising from that identity group[25]. The Discussion of Targeted Terms Task consists of a list of 10 terms, each read aloud in citation form to interviewees (in this first application) who—after each term—are asked to tell the researcher what that word or phrase means and, if they use it, how they do so. As one might suspect, some terms yield richer metacommentary beyond the initial level. The Discussion of Targeted Terms Task can be used to helps researchers understand how the populations they are analyzing situate themselves in the wider tapestry of linguistic variation awareness for individuals. For this study, outcomes from this task can provide important information about what aspects of Black language variation interviewees engage with because a word like *deadass* is more common in New York's AAL varieties than Detroit's; words like *mad* and *corny* have been present and relatively semantically stable in the AAL lexicon for generations; *finna* and *stressed BIN* exhibit interesting morphophonological variation; and *the N-words* have touched all Black lives. Capturing metacommentary on targeted terms is important for purely methodological reasons because interviewees may not be able to explicitly label all the varieties in their repertoire with terminology linguists would recognize, such as Black English Vernacular or Philly Jawn[26], when

[25] I first piloted a rhyming task, but it proved difficult because the elicitation environment (Zoom), and perhaps my instructions, were too artificial. (Also, at the time, I was hoping to use the interviewees' productions for experimental stimuli but the task didn't consistently elicit naturalistic yet professional sounding stimuli over Zoom.) All this to say, for future researchers who are not conducting their work in a global pandemic, other tasks and methods that best fit the study could be placed in this section of the MMSI protocol. The goal of this task-based approach is to capture comparable observations about language use, not an individual's actual production of a linguistic variety. However, the individuals are, in fact, producing language as they complete the task, and if those productions can be captured and measured in a controlled way as the task is completed, it does not weaken the method to do so.

[26] Zhang (2005) reports metacommentary being of use in a similar circumstance, wherein some respondents did not explicitly name the type of tone being discussed, but it became clear which tone was being referenced in the discursive examples they provided, which often included context

answering direct questions earlier in the Language Varieties section of the interview protocol. The Discussion of Targeted Terms Task provides metalinguistic data that can be used to triangulate a language user, in a sense. This task not only accomplishes what a traditional word list sets out to (in that all of the interviewees *do* produce these terms), but we can also capture along with the natural discursive reiterations that occur after first reading the term and the interviewee begins commenting on it an enriched discussion of who uses the term with whom and when (Fishman 1965), where it comes from, personal stories of its usage or explicit avoidance, and discussions of ownership, appropriateness, and identity that are absent from the more parroted approach.

2.3.1.5 Usage Assessment Task

The Usage Assessment Task asks interviewees to assess usage in different modalities: first by listening to, then watching, then reading examples of a given variety or usage in a specific context. Interviewees are given the instruction to focus on how the language is being used and not the content of what they are assessing. In this study, I presented interviewees with examples of Black language usage and asked them to remark on the professionalism of the language and/or its authenticity with respect to Blackness. The goal of this task in the MMSI is to progress interviewees through modalities and/or stimuli where they receive increasing amounts of information that is related to specific key concepts the researcher is interested in (e.g. professionalism or language ownership in this study), so that the final usage assessment example should yield the richest metacommentary. This final stimulus would then, ideally, be data a researcher wants analyzed by their population under study in the most detail. Here is the space where assumptions about the influence of areal borders, class divides, racial tensions, ideological influences, or gender performance, can be most directly explored. By presenting various examples of usages in context to differently positioned community members and inviting them to analyze this usage in an open and direct way, we create space for the social meanings of linguistic variables we are most interested in as researchers (material like double modals or hyperarticulated /t/ or fronted vowels or high rising terminals or saying *the mug is sitting* or encasing one's online username in triple parentheses) to emerge from the individuals who "animate [the] social categories" (King 2021) in which such variables are valued (Marx 1867, 1990; Bourdieu 1991; Zhang 2005).

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metacommentary or demonstration of a mock situation in which the tone might appear, such as during a phone call with one's boss.

In this study, I have chosen five examples of Black language use (which can be found in Appendix A) for the Usage Assessment Task with which to elicit interviewees' metacommentary. Of the selected examples, two come from self-identified Black people and the others represent usages of Black language online by White or non-Black presenting[27] authors. Almost all of the interviewees interacted with all five examples, however some did not analyze all five in an effort to prioritize the data I felt was most important (namely the Nina Simone and Eric Metaxes stimuli discussed below) for analysis while also respecting interviewee time commitments and technology limitations during Zoom calls[28]. The order of stimuli presentation in this task was held constant whenever possible. First, the interviewees are asked to listen (only) to a section of a speech on Black girls' education by Bettina Love, who is a self-identified Black, Queer woman from New York—an author, educator, advocate, and public speaker—and who is speaking Black-Accented Standard, yet whose voice also contains several non-normative qualities that invite metalinguistic commentary about gender and sexual orientation. The next example is a YouTube video of Nina Simone—a self-identified Black woman from North Carolina; a pianist, songwriter, vocalist, public intellectual, and activist—speaking about what Blackness is in an excerpt from a longer interview. Nina Simone is a recognizable icon of canonized Black culture. Her voice is singular and identifiable, placeable in decades outside our own and synonymous with a rhetorical style laid down in the era of Black Power. She is famous both as a musician and as a public speaker. The Nina Simone video invites metalinguistic commentary on a range of historical, rhetorical, Black communication styles, as well as on the public discussion of being Black in one's capacity as a professional. The analyses of Bettina Love—a modern, relatively unknown Black entity—and Nina Simone—a historical, well known Black entity—come together in the realm of public address presenting a distinctly Black, professional style of speech.

The two examples that follow are both from individuals who are appropriating Black language. Lydia Burell is a White woman who was an influencer (brand jockey) on Twitter, whose account has since been suspended (in part because of her appropriative behavior). In the video interviewees respond to, Burell is using a string of terms arising from the AAL lexicon, or what

[27] Lydia Burell has, I believe, in the past self-identified as White, but her social media accounts were scrubbed while these interviews were ongoing and I was unable to confirm her Whiteness through other sources or find a means of contacting her. I attempted to contact Brittany Xavier through the several avenues she makes available to the public with requests to self-identify for this research but she did not respond.

[28] Additionally, during the middle of the time period in which these interviews were being conducted, Lydia Burell's Twitter account was suspended and I was unable to share that video with three interviewees until a clip of it could be made from a Zoom recording where I'd shared the original on the screen with a previous interviewee.

some might consider slang. The Lydia Burell video invites metalinguistic commentary about language and identity, specifically about linguistic appropriation and how it can be recognized. Brittany Xavier is a popular fashion blogger with millions of followers on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. Interviewees respond to a TikTok where Xavier claims to be "Acting like her Gen Z daughter" by using a string of terms arising from the AAL lexicon. The Brittany Xavier TikTok invites metalinguistic commentary about generational usage, innovation, and the ownership of terms, getting at the grey areas between appropriation and youth culture generally. Despite the seeming similarity of these last two usage cases, interviewees provide far from similar assessments of them (as demonstrated in Section 3.2.2), illustrating the power of positionality in perception.

The final example in this first application of the Usage Assessment Task is text only. It is a Tweet from self-identified White, Christian radio show host, Eric Metaxes, which was shared on the screen and the interviewee was invited to read silently to themselves[29]. In this Tweet, Metaxes is responding to a gaff then-candidate Joe Biden made on the presidential campaign trail—saying "You ain't Black" to voters—by mimicking Black language with eye dialect spelling, plantation yard lingo, Civil Rights Era call backs, disco slang, and hip hop stereotyped phrasing—all in the same Tweet[30]. The Eric Metaxes Tweet invites metalinguistic commentary on outright mockery of Black language and the misuse of cross-temporal Black vernacular varieties specifically; this final usage assessment is the data I wish interviewees to analyze in the most detail. This example comes last, in keeping with the MMSI protocol design described above, because I wished to gather as much metalinguistic commentary as possible on this example to demonstrate the shared knowledge among my interviewees that the ways in which Metaxes is using language in this Tweet are inauthentic to living Black language users in the contemporary world. That said, in the interest of prioritizing other outcomes and findings that are more directly relevant to the central research questions of this dissertation—especially those which set up and prepare for engagement with the perception experiment in Chapter Four—the outcomes of the Usage Assessment Task are not analyzed in a separate section. Rather,

[29] Though not all of them do read silently, which is metalinguistic data in and of itself, as Agha (2006) describes and as discussed in Section 2.2.1 above. Some interviewees provided metacommentary about why reading silently was difficult or dispreferred for them, indicating that Metaxes' misspellings and misuse of AAL terms made reading the text silently too difficult. For example, as Lillian (a 45-year-old city council member) read along softly to herself, she also stated the following: "…got yo sefs. Sefs? No choice in dis <5 sec. pause> Hmm, interesting, okay um. What I guess this guy is supposed to be talking Black? Um <11 sec. pause> I don't even understand half of that, so what is got yo~ this is supposed to be selfs?".

[30] Honestly, the caucacity..

metacommentary from specific interviewees elicited during this task, as tied to other themes (e.g., Standard language ideologies), is explicated where relevant.

2.3.1.6 Final interview questions

The closing section is designed to capitalize on the interviewee's (hopefully established) comfort with asking direct questions about language use, distribution, and variance by having them reflect on key concepts directly (some key concepts here are race, professionalism, and style shifting). I begin this section by reiterating that interviewees do not need to answer any questions they don't feel comfortable responding to, and they can take these questions in a direction that feels more relevant to their experience. The list of questions for this section, given in Appendix A, includes more questions than any one interviewee was asked. This overgeneration approach was used first, to give me some flexibility for the reiteration I just mentioned—to have several options to choose from so that the goal of focusing heavily on key concepts can be met while respecting the interviewees' agency when discussing difficult or even traumatic topics—and second, to respect the time constraints agreed to for each specific interview. In all cases, though, the two key questions of this section were asked: what I've termed the Danger of Threat question and a takeaway question. The Danger of Threat question is my analogue to the classic Danger of Death story and, in the way the danger of death story's goal in traditional sociolinguistic interviews is to encourage an interviewee to produce their most unvarnished vernacular speech, the danger of threat question[31] is employed with the goal of having interviewees produce their most unvarnished observation of their linguistic system in use. In this first application, interviewees provide metacommentary on what it means to be aware of one's Blackness, and how that awareness is carried by themselves and others and can shape subsequent behaviors as a result. This question (like that described in the Language Varieties section) is worded generally to allow interviewees to describe whatever experience they are most comfortable sharing and because of this, not all responses are directly related to language use—but they are directly related to race, to foundational aspects of the identities of interviewees which underpin their relationships to public, racialized performances of self. By recounting memorable experiences tied to the racialized self—particularly those experiences where that identity may have been challenged or threatened and the interviewee needed to call upon the vastness and flexibility of their performative repertories—interviewees provide a window into the ways in which they are oriented to the linguistic market in terms of racial identity

[31] *Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt threatened because of your Blackness?*

and what they are willing to exchange for safety, mobility, or equity on the basis of fully expressing that identity. Focusing interviewees' attention on unpleasant linguistic experiences (in general) which are directly related to their identities at this stage of the interview, especially if the researcher has done the work of maintaining conversationality throughout, should yield rich metacommentary which can inform the research questions being assessed in the given study when other researchers are employing the MMSI.

Finally, interviewees are asked to share anything else they would like for me to take away from this interview, in case there was something I did not ask that they would like to speak on, or they wish to return to or clarify, or a message they want to leave for the future. The goal of this takeaway question is, again, to allow interviewees agency to address whatever thoughts they have, or ideas that have emerged or reemerged over the course of the interview. There are several common forms of debriefing (see Philips 2013), including post-interview surveys and transcription notation. However, because I have been explicit about my intentions, classic approaches to debriefing are not needed, as interviewees are already aware of the study's purpose and have had agency throughout. Several interviewees use the takeaway question to reflect on how the exercise of thinking about their language use in this way was healing for them, and I do not know that we could ask for a better reason to continue applying and refining this method.

2.3.2 Interviewees and recruitment procedure

Seventeen self-identified Black professionals from Detroit were interviewed about their experiences with language as both Black individuals and as professionals. Seven interviewees self-identified as men and 10 as women—two women specifically marked themselves as cisgendered; one interviewee self-identified as asexual and three women and three men in the population marked themselves as heterosexual. Their ages range from 25 to 83 years.

The oldest interviewee, Maurice, is a retired Special-Ed teacher. Four other interviewees also worked in education: Alex is a college History professor; Lonnie is a Music teacher; Jerome is an English Language Arts instructor; and Etta is a Special-Ed director for several school districts in Detroit. Three interviewees worked in the non-profit sector: Yolanda is the CEO of her own non-profit; my youngest participant, Solomon, works at the entry level of a new Detroit-based non-profit; and Alisha, whose expertise is in finance, works primarily in fundraising for another Detroit-based non-profit. The remaining interviewees all came from different professions: Aries

works for the Department of Defense; Malcolm is an engineer working primarily in hospitality; Simone is a fundraising executive; Sasha is an entrepreneur running her own consulting business; London is a producer for a Detroit public radio station; Journey works in IT for a financial institution; Chance is a lawyer who founded his own law firm in Detroit; Desiree is an executive who works in web design; and Lillian was running for Detroit City Council at the time of our interview. All names provided are pseudonyms.

This population was recruited via email. I searched online in Detroit news articles and with public-facing professional organizations for individuals who self-identified as Black and emailed them stating that I was a PhD candidate in Linguistics at the University of Michigan writing a dissertation on Black professionalism focused on Black professionals from the Detroit area. I told them how I came to find their information and that I'd like to interview them. I then provided the following details:

> The interview will be conducted on Zoom. Sociolinguistic interviews typically last 90 minutes, but that really depends on how much information you wish to provide. I'll be asking questions about your formative years and your professional trajectory, as well as your opinions on some examples of Black language use in professional spaces. If you are interested, please reach out with any questions you have!

If they reply in the affirmative, I follow up with these screener questions: Do you identify as Black? Are you from Detroit (or surrounding areas)? Do you currently work in Detroit (or surrounding areas)? Do you identify as professional? I then offer them some dates to schedule and state "You'll be compensated $30".

Through this method of cold email recruitment I initially interviewed Lillian, Chance, London, Simone, and Yolanda. These interviewees introduced me to Solomon, Etta, and Alisha through snowball sampling. Alex was an acquaintance of mine previously. Three professional acquaintances with connections to Detroit referred me to the remaining interviewees: Journey, Aries, Sasha, Maurice, Jerome, Malcolm, Lonnie, and Desiree.

Two additional interviews were conducted which were not analyzed. The first was from a self-identified male Queer mixed race individual. While this participant did answer yes to identifying as Black in the screener questions via email, their answers to many interview questions belied that their experiences as a White passing individual (much like myself to many perceivers)

precluded them from being able to comment meaningfully on the specific motivations for style shifting this study is seeking to investigate. The interview was also very short, as only half of the questions were answered with more than a one word "No." response. The other was a self-identified male participant who, once the recording had stopped, revealed to me that he was lying about his current profession, that the job and behavior he'd described himself as having over the two hours and forty minutes we had been speaking was "aspirational" and that he was, in fact, a Detroit police officer. I felt this admission called all the information he provided into question and so removed him from the dataset as well.

2.3.3 Transcription Conventions

The analysis process begins with creating a transcript of the interview. Zoom provides automatic transcription, which can be downloaded as time stamped text (.txt) files. Those files were downloaded and preserved in their raw form. Copies were corrected for accuracy by research assistants[32] (RAs), who watched video recordings of the interviews[33] from Zoom. During correction, the following guidelines[34] were observed for the purposes of this project's current analytic goals: non-Standard forms at the word level (*gonna*, for example) were never replaced with their Standard counterparts; all numbers and dates were spelled out (*nineteen ninety*); abbreviations were not used unless the interviewee specifically used them (e.g. "we were in *SNCC* then"); double quotation marks are used **only** to indicate areas where the speech of another person is reported or imitated. The corrected transcripts were then marked for overlaps, or areas where both myself and the interviewee are speaking at the same time, as well as hesitations, repetitions of words, and vocalized pauses such as *uh* or *um* (which are also sometimes referred to as disfluencies). These markings were made using symbols that are easily removed or edited with Regular Expressions (RegEx, Child 2011) for follow up studies. The RAs were instructed to mark laughter, pauses, and gestures (also with removable RegEx symbology) only when they perceived these occurrences to be rhetorically significant, because these elements will not be part of my current analysis. The transcripts were then cleaned, which involved deleting all of the extra lines and spaces introduced by Zoom's automatic transcription software, combining the lines into speaker-assigned utterances or paragraphs, and adjusting

[32] Due to persistent staffing issues, one RA transcribed 15/17 interviews. The other two interviews were transcribed by two different individuals, one of which had no other engagement with this project.
[33] Per IRB exemption and interviewee consent, only myself, RAs, and committee may have access to these videos.
[34] Appendix C gives a full-fledged version of the transcription guidelines and protocols used, and describes in detail each of the points summarized in this section (as presented to RAs).

the time stamps accordingly. These combined utterances better lend themselves to being processed visually in qualitative coding and analytic software packages than the traditional, numbered, line-by-line orientation favored by classic transcription (Ochs 1979) and critical discourse analysis approaches (e.g., Fairclough 1992; Cameron 1995; van Dijk 1993; Blommert & Bulcaen 2000). Finally, the transcripts are anonymized, replacing all occurrences of the interviewee's real name (e.g. placed by Zoom, interviewee's mention of their own name) with the words *name of person* in parentheses. Once this stage is reached by the RAs, I check the transcripts for obvious errors in the corrections, inconsistent timestamps, or missed instances of anonymization. I also address any flags left by RAs indicating that they could not disambiguate what was being said, using Praat where necessary and leaving flags, indicated by curly brackets, where Zoom (very seldomly) cut out or where I also could not parse what was being said by myself or the interviewee.

These transcripts were produced for analytic purposes only. This description of the conventions used in their preparation was essential to include because it is essential to discuss in print the ways in which a researcher approaches the treatment of any language variety whose analysis requires the production of text from speech, but most particularly when researching stigmatized varieties which have been shown to experience both machine- (Tatman & Kasten 2017) and human-introduced (Jones et al. 2019) error and forced standardization in processing.

2.3.4 Qualitative Coding Methods

In analyzing this dataset I have chosen to employ qualitative coding, a strategy which involves tagging the prepared transcripts with codes in a software package (I used Dedoose 2021) which can then be used to sort excerpts across all interviewees for analysis. Traditional qualitative analysis approaches would define all codes *a priori*, established from the literature on the population or phenomenon under study (e.g., Eckert & Rickford 2002; Johnstone 2005; Campbell-Kibler 2010; Babel 2014; Zimman 2015). Because one goal of this project is to bring better representation of the Black community under study into the Linguistics literature, deferring to that literature for appropriate code choice and definition is counterintuitive. However, a fully emergent approach—where no codes are defined before analysis begins—was also not advisable, and so I adopted a pseudo-emergent approach by which a base code tree was developed from themes I could be confident would emerge because of their connection to questions in the interview or to the population under study—themes like race, professionalism, or Detroit. This base code tree featured two main code groups, KEY CONCEPTS and RESEARCH

Questions. The Key Concepts codes featured five parent groups: Metacommentary, Style Shifting, Professionalism, Language & Identity, and Race. The Research Questions codes featured two parent groups: Sociolinguistic Labor and Ideological Acquisition (Image 2.1).

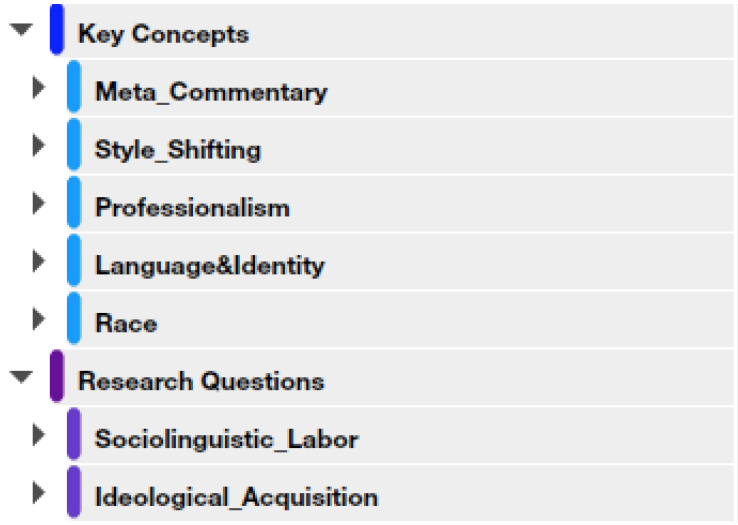


Image 2.1. Visualization of two main (content-ful) code groups, displaying within-group, hierarchical relationships.

An additional main code group—Protocol codes—was used as inherently structural codes linking excerpts to the interview sections in which they occurred; this was done for ease of sorting within the software program.

Once this base code tree was determined, I worked with three RAs in employing an obscured coding approach (Holliday & Squires 2020) to analyze 30% (or 4/17 interviews[35]) of the dataset. In recruiting assistants for the obscured coding task, I chose RAs whose identities differ from my own; embodied positionality is the beating heart of this research. Because harmful language ideologies are maintained—in part—through embodied experiences that are related to our positionality as intersectional individuals, my analytic approaches to evaluating the metalinguistic commentary I've been provided by folks about their embodied experiences must

[35] These four interviewees—London, Chance, Jerome, and Alisha—were chosen in an effort to get a spread of demographic factors and professions represented in the development of the master code tree. These individuals represented four different professions and two were self-identified men (one younger and one older) and two were self-identified women (one younger and one older). In addition, I knew from being present in these interviews that these individuals provided answers which would give myself and my RAs examples of research questions emerging (about Standard language ideologies and sociolinguistic labor) which could provide good training cases for the more complex concepts that needed to be identified in context (meaning would never be stated directly by interviewees).

necessarily be data-driven to temper the effects my own lensing will have on interpretation[36]. The obscured coding approach is a data-driven strategy employed with (ideally) at least some raters who are unfamiliar with the dataset and individuals who come from different subject positions. The three chosen raters met these goals. One is a self-identified advanced undergraduate psychology intern at a midwestern public university who is a transfer student from a community college and who self-identifies as a gender fluid, mixed race *Korean-Chippewa of Sault Ste. Marie* individual; they are passionate about the intersection of mental health and systemic racism and are researching how that shapes outcomes for people of color. Two RAs are students from an independent liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest. One is a self-identified gay, mixed race Japanese-American man who is a junior double majoring in Linguistics and Chinese seeking to expand research that forefronts the self-representation of minority speakers. The other is a self-identified White, Ashkenazi Jewish, 21-year-old, cisgender queer woman, born and raised in New Orleans, whose regional identity is very meaningful to her; she is a junior Linguistics major and Russian minor with an interest in foodways, ethnicity studies, and language preservation. This last RA also transcribed the majority of the interviews (Section 2.3.3), and so was already familiar with the dataset when this stage began.

During the obscured coding stage, raters were applying codes with a traditional approach. This involved reading[37] the transcript from start to finish, creating excerpts anytime an example of a code (which had already been added to the base code tree through the pseudo-emergent approach described above) emerged (i.e., at the utterance level) and tagging it accordingly. RAs were also instructed to tag all excerpts with PROTOCOL codes (which again are inherently structural, used only to sort excerpts by when they occurred in the interview protocol, e.g., in the Demographics section). The obscured coding approach gets its name from the fact that although the whole team is working on the same documents simultaneously (in the initial stage), no individual rater can access what another is doing. This is crucial to the emergent nature of

[36] An example of this is with the interviewee Lillian who (as discussed in Section 2.4.1.7) my RAs perceived to be perhaps distancing herself from the Black community due to her word choices (rarely saying *Black* but using *urban* often). Previously, I had attributed those patterns to her profession as a politician. Neither of those assessments need be correct, but capturing multiple perspectives during the emergent process allows for an ultimately more refined and representative code tree to be developed. This particular observation by RAs about Lillian did not lead to any new code structures being added to the master code tree, but did include new codes being added to existing structures (like URBAN parented under LANGUAGE LABELS). These types of observations from individual RAs are not reported, as they are not related directly to the overarching research questions of this dissertation, but they are maintained in memos and will be addressed in future work on positionality and data preparation.

[37] I encouraged us all to use the audio or video as well, as the transcript is a necessity for the software program, but the conversation itself is the most rhetorically rich example of what transpired.

the process, as we want each individual to experience the data and find patterns in interviewee responses which seem important to them—based on broad themes related to the study's topic and population. Raters were also empowered to add new codes to the base code tree (in any group other than Protocol) to capture patterns they observed emerging. When this stage began, a new code group—Emergent Patterns—was added to house new codes that either were not easily parented right away (because perhaps more examples were needed); needed to be differentiated from my research questions (as discussed in the next paragraph in detail); or weren't connected to my analysis in a meaningful way at this time. The group met weekly to compare notes and discuss the choices they had made—what codes they were finding difficult to interpret in context, where they assigned them, and why—and what new codes they had added. Together, in these sessions, we worked to co-create an ever-more refined code tree. We did this by observing commonalities in emergent patterns noticed between raters, as well as appreciating patterns that went unnoticed by each other, and began to further define and constrain criteria for membership in coded categories.

Here is an illustrative example of how code refining took place. One of the Key Concepts parent codes is Language & Identity and in the base code tree it contained a child code labeled Authenticity. In one of our weekly sessions, an RA discussed several instances of the word *authentic* by interviewees that they were finding difficult to interpret in context because it was unclear if this usage by interviewees was the same as what linguists might mean by authentic uses of language, or what I was aiming for in the specific interview question about the *authentically Black* label, or something else. On Zoom, the four of us considered together several characteristic occurrences of the word *authentic* that the RA has noticed (marking them with memos in the qualitative coding software for these discussion purposes) in context in the transcript(s). We determined together that these types of uses of the word *authentic* were indeed marking something different—a more colloquial and inclusive usage of the word and concept—than what I was hoping to capture with the child code Authenticity (parented under the Key Concepts code Language & Identity), which is directly related to my research questions and stems from an interview question. A new child code—Authentic—was added under the Emergent Patterns group to capture the distinct pattern the RA had noticed emerging, and to allow us to continue differentiating between the two types of authenticity going forward. In addition, the Authenticity code was given the following refined guideline for application: *to be used when interviewees are commenting on authenticity as it relates to linguistic usage or*

perception exclusively. All other references to Authenticity can be tagged using the Authentic[38] *code under Emergent Patterns.*

Once four interviews were coded using the obscured approach described above, a master code tree was developed with a finalized list of codes (Appendix D), with specific guidelines for application where relevant. The remaining 13 interviews were each coded by two individual raters and the first four interviews were subsequently re-coded for consistency with the master code tree[39]. Unfortunately, unforeseen software complications arose that prevented the planned visualizations of code relations. The output of the coding application labor divided between myself and RAs was qualitatively analyzed, as described in the next section. Due to the software issues cited above, this discussion is uncharacteristically (for our contemporary era) prose-heavy.

2.4 Metalinguistic Commentary: Findings Across Interviewees

Discussing at length the elicited metacommentary across all six interview sections from 17 individuals (a total of 40 hours of content) is beyond the scope of this project. Thus, I have opted to report on broad findings from the sections of the interview protocol which provide the clearest examples of the MMSI structure working. First, I will present findings from the Discussion of Targeted Terms Task (Section 2.3.1.4) in a way that establishes some common types of metacommentary that can be seen emerging through the MMSI, and demonstrates how these Black professionals converge and diverge with respect to lexical meaning and usage. Section 2.4.2, presents findings of two specific research questions from the Language Varieties section of the MMSI which ask about the in-group labels *talking White* and *authentically Black*. The goal of this presentation is to deepen the discussion of the racialized varieties under study—as perceived by the community under study—as I begin to unpack their motivations for shifting between them. Following this, I delve into the theme of self-censorship in a section (2.4.3) that

[38] This code does not have specified criteria for application of its own because it is defined through implication as everything that isn't specifically what I am looking for in AUTHENTICITY's criteria. The AUTHENTIC code is essentially not being interpreted, but instead marks places where the pattern I am seeking diverges from others that are present when relevant.

[39] The traditional code application approach used during the obscured coding stage was not employed once the master code tree had been developed because I was advised by Dedoose support to create excerpts of the same length to avoid issues when combining copies of the same transcript (as each was to be coded by two individuals). I thus added all the excerpts myself for this stage (so they would be identically sized and placed in the transcripts) before coding began, beginning when I asked a question and ending when the interviewee finished responding. Codes were added to these large excerpts accordingly.

covers findings across a number of interview sections related to reported linguistic actions of self-censorship, and engages directly with social factors which may motivate Black professionals to style shift away from their racialized varieties in professional spaces. Taken together, the sections on *talking White*, *authentically Black*, and self-censorship aid in developing a shared understanding of terms and concepts for engagement with the three case studies that follow in Chapter Three, which are geared in part towards enriching the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor (Holliday & Squires 2020) through a deeper understanding of agentive constructions of identity. I have chosen to leave for future work a full presentation of results on the remaining interview sections (Demographics, the Usage Assessment Task, and Final Interview Questions, including the danger of threat question), although some responses from these sections are considered when thematically relevant.

2.4.1 Metalinguistic Commentary: Discussion of Targeted Terms Task

As explained in Section 2.3.1.4, the Discussion of Targeted Terms Task is introduced as an alternative to a word list in traditional sociolinguistic interview paradigms. The goal of this task (in this application) is to have Black professionals discuss words and phrases arising from African American Languages (AAL) to capture how these individuals demonstrate both divergent and convergent knowledge states (derived from their positionality, embodied and otherwise (Bucholtz & Hall 2016), ideological stance(s) (Kroskrity 2010), and participation in linguistic markets (Zhang 2005)) as users of Black varieties, of which there are many. While all of these individuals are from the same city, and possess the same racial identity in a box-checking sense, I do not expect them to be users or knowers of the same language(s). That said, because they share embodied positionality to an extent, I do expect them to share experiences that frame their metalinguistic knowledge in such a way that it might converge when reporting on who uses a given term with whom and when (Fishman 1965), where it comes from, and discussions of ownership, appropriateness (Flores & Rosa 2015), and identity. The concepts of rootedness (Reed 2018) and enregisterment (Johnstone 2016) are relevant to the types of metacommentary expected to align and diverge based on embodied positionality. Both Reed's and Johnstone's work explore the ways in which individuals orient differently to place and how that orientation is mediated, in part, through not only their production/perception of linguistic material, but also production/perception of stances toward that linguistic material. Although this chapter is not concerned with production, it is of interest that individuals in studies like Reed's and Johnstone's are often orienting themselves to place differently, thereby producing different linguistic material whereas individuals in King (2021) are orienting

themselves to place differently and in their production “recruit the same kinds of variables, for ideologically related, but nuanced social ends” (p.174). This indicates that production outcomes are not always diagnostic of a user’s positionality-related goals (those being (minimally) derived from age, race, gender, region, and socioeconomic status). When I consider metacommentary from individuals that share many identities which demonstrates multiple emergent meanings for a term, or multiple stances on the appropriateness of *talking White*, this does not weaken the data collected or patterns observed but instead highlights the combined subjectivities an identity group shares and the ways in which those points of view contribute to moving the linguistic material of a variety when it is in use.

This task consisted of 10 terms whose discussion was expected to elicit different types of metacommentary that would address the following questions: Do individuals with shared racial and regional (sociolinguistically-defining) identities (who we might expect to produce language in a similar way) produce metalinguistic knowledge in a similar way? When this produced knowledge diverges, does it do so according to embodied positionality? The 10 terms are as follows: *finna*, *lit*, *bet*, *stressed BIN*, *shawty*, *what had happened was*, *deadass*, *mad*, *corny*, and *the N-words*.

I define metalinguistic awareness as the aspect of acquired (or learned) linguistic knowledge which encompasses social factors related to language use, knowledge, distribution, meaning, or occurrence variance (see Section 1.4). The types of metalinguistic commentary that can arise, then, are directly related to such social factors and parameters of usage. For this task, I chose terms with different sociolinguistic mappings capable of eliciting metacommentary related to factors of positionality (age, gender, region, race, and socioeconomic status; see Image 2.2) as individuals discuss the ways in which those factors may relate to the meaning of a word or phrase or—more importantly—how those terms are used, known, and distributed in the world. If such utterances occurred, they were coded with that type of factor.

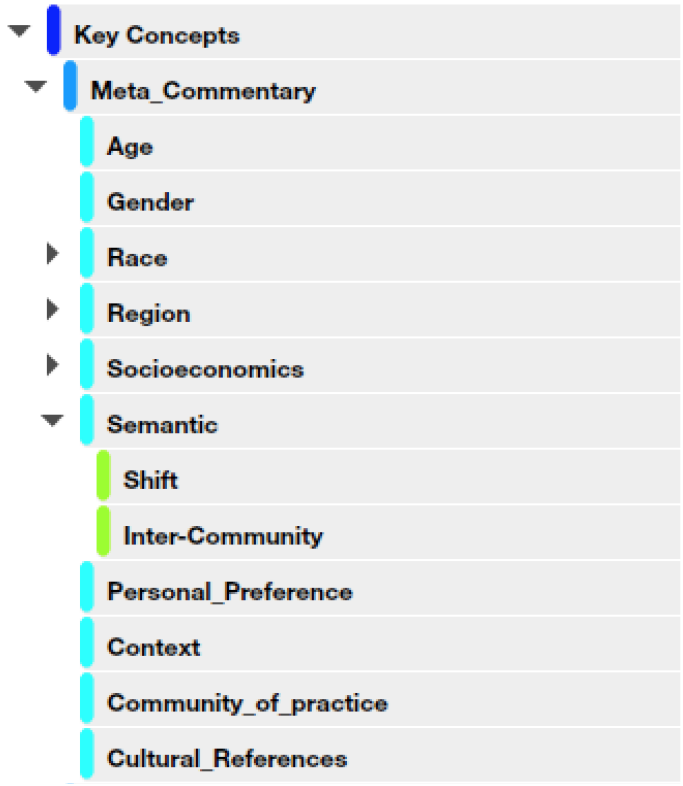


Image 2.2. Visualization of METACOMMENTARY child codes in the KEY CONCEPTS code group, displaying within-group, hierarchical relationships. The child codes of SEMANTIC METACOMMENTARY are displayed because semantic metacommentary is the most common type of commentary emerging in the Discussion of Targeted Terms Task.

Using METACOMMENTARY codes in the KEY CONCEPTS code group (see Image 2.2), my team also marked occurrences of metacommentary related to the contexts (sometimes also referred to in the literature as domains and/or registers) in which these terms are distributed; the communities of practice they might occur in (and how some communities may view them differently than others); specific cultural references to a given term's usage or reasons for certain users knowing or preferring them; and finally statements that indicate an interviewee's personal preference for (or avoidance of) a given term[40]. In the beginning of each of the 10 subsections that follow, I will discuss the types of metacommentary a term was included with the expectation of eliciting.

The instructions for the task are simple. I tell the interviewee I am going to read a word or phrase and have them tell me what that word or phrase means, and if they use it, how they do so. Thus, semantic metacommentary (see Image 2.2) is the most common type of metacommentary elicited through this task because I ask interviewees for it directly by instructing them to tell me what the term means. Metacommentary is also not elicited in direct

[40] See Appendix D for criteria of application for codes.

proportion to the amount of speech uttered. An individual can provide incredibly rich metalinguistic commentary in a few moments in a (fictitious example) statement such as *I hear older Black women say that all the time at the beauty shop and I love it*, which would be coded for AGE (*older*), RACE (*Black*), GENDER (*women*), CONTEXT (*beauty shop*), and PREFERENCE (*I love it*) metacommentary. Individuals can also speak for tens of minutes and not provide any metalinguistic commentary. A targeted task like this one controls for that natural variation to an extent by focusing the language user's attention on their own usage patterns and allows for metacommentary to emerge in a more purposed setting.

Each of the 10 terms under discussion had their own code in the PROTOCOL code group, which was inherently structural (i.e., these codes hold no meaning other than to mark that this question occurred). In each interview, where the discussion of a specific term was taking place, an excerpt was created as described in Section 2.3.4 and was tagged for METACOMMENTARY codes and was cross-coded for other codes from the KEY CONCEPTS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS (see Image 2.1), and EMERGENT PATTERNS groups if those patterns emerged. Because each term has a different sociolinguistic mapping and therefore different potential for metalinguistic commentary, each is discussed in turn below.

2.4.1.1 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Finna*

Finna is a cross-dialectal AAL verb, meaning intending or preparing to (Thomas & Grinsell 2012). Some dictionaries (OED Online; Merriam-Webster n.d. b) treat this term as a shortening of another regionalism, *fixin to*, but this is up for debate as many non-Southern Black language users treat *finna* as a lexeme in its own right. Sixteen of the 17 interviewees provide semantic metacommentary for *finna*, all of them reporting that it means "about to". One interviewee, Journey, was somewhat uncertain about the purpose of the task at first and reported preference metacommentary instead, stating it was a term she uses everyday. Two other interviewees, Lillian and Sasha, also reported preference metacommentary for *finna*, saying it was a word they did not use or worked to avoid in their speech as professionals. Most interviewees embedded *finna* into the sentence *I'm finna go to the store* as an example. Aries (a 30-year-old working for the Department of Defense) provided the richest metacommentary on *finna*, giving several examples of how it is used in context, such as when he is inviting the fellas for a pickup game or when telling colleagues he is going out for coffee, to see if they might also want some.

These responses demonstrate that while *finna*, the most widely used, general word on the terms list, holds the same definition for all interviewees who provided one—even the two who report never using it[41]—there is variation in how these individuals experience the term, and how they feel about it relative to their positionality as Black professionals. Aries' metacommentary demonstrates that he finds *finna* to be appropriate for professional spaces while Lillian (a 45-year-old running for City Council) and Sasha (a 37-year-old entrepreneur) disagree.

2.4.1.2 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Lit*

Lit is a relatively new (within the last decade) cross-dialectal informal AAL adjective, used primarily by Millennials and younger individuals to mean something (and the scope of that something remains debated among lexicographers and language users) was dope or turned up or off the chain or fire or cool (Webb 2018). *Lit* can also mean intoxicated (Merriam-Webster 2021). The purpose of including this term was to potentially elicit age metacommentary from interviewees. Across interviewees, 16 out of 17 (Journey was uncertain about the purpose of the task, but she's a *lit* user) provided semantic metacommentary for *lit*, with 10 of them giving the meaning as an event or occurrence that is particularly exciting or somewhere you really want to be or enjoyed being (and several of them using the above synonyms or others in their comments). An additional five interviewees indicated that people could be *lit*, and Solomon also gave metacommentary about intoxication, saying "she lit could be like look at her, she lit she look great or dang she lit like get her up, shit. You know…any noun having a good time". The oldest interviewee, Maurice (83), provided an older informal usage of this term, "I lit him up", meaning to have a fight with someone (and ostensibly win). Five interviewees provided age metacommentary related to *lit*, with three—Malcolm (40), Yolanda (46), and London—simply remarking that *lit* belongs to the younger generation, but Jerome and Lillian (45) included they felt being too old to use the term themselves. Alex provides race metacommentary stating that she feels *lit* is "no longer um a Black term um it's been appropriated".

The commentary on *lit* reveals positionality differences among the interviewees in that we see their ages influence how they align themselves with the various social meanings available to them through the Black lexicon. Age is also a factor these individuals[42] are keenly aware of as users when determining what is appropriate in the moment, because while these individuals all

[41] This metacommentary reveals this word perhaps wouldn't have been elicited from these two interviewees through traditional sociolinguistic methods.
[42] And, as is safe to assume, most adults.

know what *lit* means and understand how it is being used, several have positioned themselves out of participating in that usage because of their embodiment. Maurice's comments too reveal a classic linguistic phenomenon at work, the solidification of idiolect in adulthood (see Wagner 2012, Sankoff 2019), where new lexical variation has not replaced an older meaning for this term used by his generation in their youth.

2.4.1.3 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Bet*

Bet is an AAL interjection indicating agreement (Lemoine 2021a) that is very common in Detroit usage. *Bet* has been around since at least the 1980s, and tracing its origins (as is the case with many AAL terms) is difficult, as it has spread to many regions in the intervening decades. All 17 interviewees gave semantic metacommentary on *bet*, with 14 of them immediately producing the phrase "Alright, bet", as it is most often locally embedded, after I cited the term. Two interviewees, Aries and Maurice, make the distinction between what Aries calls the "technical definition" of *bet*—meaning to gamble—and the colloquial usage which can index agreement or challenge. Four interviewees unpack the challenge aspect of *bet* when providing context metacommentary. For example, Chance (a 29-year-old lawyer) discusses how *bet* is used on the basketball court when someone issues a challenge about making a particular shot or score and another person accepts by saying "alright, bet". Journey (a 25-year-old working in IT) remarks that she uses *bet* too much, sharing in her preference metacommentary that it is probably her "favorite word" and it has taken on a larger scope, standing in for the word *noted* and essentially all forms of agreement in her discourse. Six interviewees remark on how specifically Detroit *bet* is. Chance describes having to explain to another student, in his first year at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, what *bet* meant when he'd used it in agreeing to hang out that weekend. Chance shared that it was in this early interaction that he realized "how far away Ann Arbor really was from Detroit".

With the discussion of *bet*, we again find results indicating the convergence of these interviewees. Despite them being different ages and professions, and coming from different backgrounds, as Black Detroiters they all share metalinguistic knowledge of this common term's usage and meaning. Journey's and Chance's discussions in particular reveal how such terms can come to sit very closely to one's identity.

2.4.1.4 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Stressed BIN*

Stressed BIN[43] is used to mark the remote past by many AAL users (Weldon 2021, pgs.144-152; Rickford 1999), and exhibits phonological and orthographic variation in its representation across dialectal communities. This term was chosen due to its morphophonological distinctiveness as an AAL construction and its uniqueness in marking the remote past, a grammatical function that White Standardized varieties of English lack. In total, 12 out of 17 interviewees provided semantic metacommentary on *stressed BIN*, and Journey provided preference metacommentary (she is a user). One interviewee's response, Maurice's, was not well captured because of Zoom connectivity issues and was not analyzed. Three participants—Jerome, Lillian, and Etta—all claimed to be unaware of this term. That could, of course, be true. But I suspect that presenting the term (aurally only) in citation form may have contributed to that claim as three other interviewees who did provide semantic metacommentary asked that I first use the term in a sentence for clarification, to which I provided an example like *she BIN on that* or *they BIN working up there*, and this spurred the remote past interpretation they provided.

Of the 12 interviewees that commented, 10 of the 12 discussed how the remote past operates through *stressed BIN* and that it indicates something was ongoing for a period of time, not just happened at some past time. Two of them—Alex and Desiree—described this usage as marking "old news". One interviewee, Alisha (a 32-year old working in finance for the non-profit sector), remarked on the difference between what she termed "regular" *been* and *stressed BIN*, marking the distinction between (White) standardized past and AAL remote past. Two interviewees provide additional regional metacommentary; Chance cites that *stressed BIN* sounds very Detroit to him because it exhibits PIN/PEN merger (using *pin* and *pen* to illustrate[44])

[43] Weldon (2021, pgs.140-178) presents data on *stressed BIN*, testing its status as what Spears (1982) called a "camouflaged form" (p.850). Spears cites *stressed BIN* as such when writing about the development of the Divergence Hypothesis of AAL (see Labov & Harris 1986; Butters 1989; Rickford 1992; Wolfram & Thomas 2002). Spears theorized that some features for Black speakers go relatively undetected because of their morphophonological or grammatical resemblance to standardized features, and can thus take up additional (perhaps covert) social meanings. Weldon (2021) argues "there appears to be a persistent racial divide in the use and interpretation of these forms" (p.143), which is confirmed through an online experiment surveying different racial groups' familiarity with remote past constructions. Weldon finds that Black participants choose the remote past interpretation of sentences like *he been married* at significantly higher rates than White participants across all conditions. None of these points is testable within the scope of the interview data I've gathered here, but the ongoing conversation around *stressed BIN* in the literature and the ways it relates to and can be informed by what these interviewees report and experience matters. Weldon's treatment of *stressed BIN* includes images and sound files spanning the American sociohistorical usage of the construction (pgs.144-152).

[44] Agha (2006) discusses metapragmatic typification by considering how certain typifications enjoy "mass circulation" and that this circulation plays an important role in "establishing the register as a social formation". This aligns with the concept of enregisterment (Johnstone 2016), which helps us understand

and Alex cites that *stressed BIN* is not a Detroit specific term, but is common to "Black speech all over".

Despite the difficulties that may have arisen due to my presentation of the term[45], the majority of interviewees provided metacommentary which reveals that they are users—or at least knowers—of this distinctly Black linguistic construction. Representing emergent metacommentary on constructions like *stressed BIN*, which are structurally unique to racialized varieties, is worthwhile in general but to this study specifically as such constructions are those which are least likely to be present in the workplace when Black professionals shift away from racialized styles. This causes whole veins of discourse, reference, and deixis typically available to Black professionals through such constructions to be out of reach in the performance of their professional identities when they've shifted into more standardized—and thus Whiter—styles, and that they must become (at the very least) more flexible communicators to convey the same information with different terminology that their interlocutors can parse and understand in the moment. Alisha's metacommentary is the most revealing of this flexibility, in that she has at the ready the difference between the two forms of *been* such that we can assume she's capable of consciously shifting between them. Alisha's metacommentary also provides a telling revelation in labeling the White Standardized version of *been* as "regular", metacommentary echoed in Aries' differentiation of a "traditional" definition for *bet* in Section 2.4.1.3—this is evidence that Standard language ideologies are at play here, and have convinced these language users that these distinct aspects of their racialized varieties are deficient, abnormal, or unofficial in some capacity.

2.4.1.5 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Shawty*

Shawty (which features wide orthographic variation) is a term for a person—typically a woman—that someone—typically a man[46]—is attracted to, interested in, or potentially dating (Macmillan

how certain forms become indexed to certain places and practices. Chance has linked the widely circulated PIN/PEN merger example to Detroit registers, making the merger diagnostic of successful production of the register. Similar to the ways in which the typification of vernacular usage became associated with increasing amounts of non-Standard features present (King 2020; Nader 1996), PIN/PEN (whether merged or unmerged, whether towards [ɪ] or [ɛ]) has become diagnostic of regional belonging for many U.S. language users, Black folks included.

[45]And this is an important note to take for future applications of this design, not only in reference to the expected effects of researcher embodiment discussed in Section 2.2 (I do speak a distinctly not Detroit dialect, though an [ɪ]/[ɛ] merged one), but also in thinking about the potential need for embedding terms that exhibit morphophonological variation in a carrier phrase instead of presenting them in citation form, or going one step further and presenting them in their context of usage in some type of media.

[46] Invoking the gender binary here with all the assumptions that entails.

2014, Moreau 2020) arising from the AAL lexicon that enjoyed its heyday in the 1990s. This term was included because of its potential for eliciting gender, age, and context metacommentary. It was also included due to a potential for preference metacommentary, as this term is frequently associated with catcalls, a practice generally looked down upon in contemporary society; terms arising from that practice have experienced recent pejoration (Kendja 2021). *Shawty* can also be used to refer to one's own child or a younger member of the community across AAL varieties, in those instances more often spelled *shorty* or *shortie*. In discussion of *shawty*, 16 of the 17 interviewees (Maurice's answer was again obscured by Zoom connectivity issues) provide semantic metacommentary capturing the catcalling meaning, although it isn't described that way. Instead, interviewees more often embedded it in a carrier phrase similar to *Ayo, shawty! Lemme holla at ya*. While all 16 interviewees are aligned in their initial parse of *shawty*, a few of them include additional and differing semantic metacommentary. Aries indicates that someone's physical height is not captured by the term; Solomon, London, and Alisha disagree, providing metacommentary that someone could be called *shawty* if they are, in fact, short. Alisha in particular, who reports being short statured herself, indicates that she's picked up this nickname on several occasions without any romantic scope whatsoever. Solomon's answer offers both the desired female and the child parse for *shawty* in his metacommentary, stating the following:

> Shawty's a female like, and it's not like oh like tall or like oh shawty like. Or some people be shawty they talk~ they talking bout a kid, like~ like~ like a child oh like like my son oh I see you brought shawty with you, like like your shawty, that's my~ that could be my son. What it could also mean aye I see you brought shawty with you meaning my~ meaning my fiancé. So it's like a woman or it could be a kid.

All 16 interviewees also provide aligned gender metacommentary for *shawty* in that this term is typically used by men towards women they are attracted to, actively trying to flirt with, or currently dating—with Chance adding the colorful qualification "you don't call your wife shawty"[47]. Desiree and Simone provide additional preference metacommentary by stating that they do not use *shawty* because they are women, and Chance simply states he does not use the term. Chance also provides the first example of cultural metacommentary by citing the 2007 song *Shawty* by Plies (feat. T Pain)[48] as a reason why this word is still popular. Additionally, eight interviewees provide age metacommentary, stating that *shawty* is often used by men in

[47] In the same way you wouldn't call her your *girlfriend*, you don't call your wife *shawty* because, she's your *boo*, your *woman*, your *better half*, your *ball and chain* (and any other number of items wives get to enjoy in the lexicon that girlfriends don't).
[48] See Appendix B for a playlist of all songs referenced by interviewees.

reference to younger women. Chance (a 29-year-old lawyer) and Alisha (a 32-year old working in finance for the non-profit sector) also include context metacommentary, discussing how usage of this term might arise "in the neighborhood" or "around the way" when one is walking down the street.

The discussion of *shawty* provides another nice example of aligned metacommentary, where all interviewees capture the same basic meaning of the term. The ways in which they differ stem from the lived realities inherent in their embodied positionality, as women, as short women, as people with young children in their lives. Published sources (Daniels 2021) might claim that the term has a pejorative sense and also is going out of style, yet no metacommentary indicating either of those ideas was captured in this sample. This provides support for my assertion in Section 2.2.2 that there is value added by removing the sociolinguistic interview from its phonocentric origins and goals by focusing solely on metalinguistic commentary in its own right to capture such enriched details about usage. As Butters (2000) argued, "words mean what native speakers tell us they mean" and specifically not what prescriptivists or those appealing to aesthetic value would like them to mean (p.112). Butters (2002) goes on[49] to discuss that the role of the linguist is "to report whatever meaning and rules people have—and, for that matter, to inform readers of dictionaries and scholarly articles if native speakers disagree with each other" (p.328). The metacommentary captured from these 17 Black professionals on *shawty* shows that these users all differ from non-Black lexicographers and lay prescriptivists (Moreau 2020; Daniels 2021; Dictionary.com, who all include a derogatory scope) with respect to the pejoration of *shawty* as well as exhibit disagreements with each other about the scope of the term itself. Capturing these two different types of divergence—from published sources and internal to the community of language users itself (which appears to be mostly due to embodied gender)—are both possible when employing the MMSI, as demonstrated with respect to metacommentary elicited about *shawty*.

2.4.1.6 Metalinguistic Commentary on *What Had Happened Was*

Next under discussion is the phrase *what had happened was*. *What had happened was* is a phrase arising from AAL usage that is most often cited as belonging in discourse before one is about to tell a lie that will usually involve multiple, complicated parts. Popularized by comedians like Richard Pryor and Will Smith, *what had happened was* has moved its way into mainstream

[49] Butters carried on a vociferous debate with several authors in support of native user intuition and metalinguistic content over several issues of the *American Speech* Miscellany section.

usage (through party games like #CultureTags), although it maintains Black-indexing (see Young 2018). All 17 interviewees (who often smile and laugh after this phrase is uttered) provide semantic metacommentary on *what had happened was* stating that it often indicates dishonesty, and 10 include context metacommentary that this kind of phrase is used at the beginning of a drawn out story with unbelievable elements. Lonnie includes race metacommentary stating that not only Black people use this term (see also Monstro et al. 2008), but when they do it indicates a story is coming. Alisha (a 32-year old working in finance for the non-profit sector) and Etta (a 41-year-old Special-Ed Director) both indicate in their context metacommentary that this phrase is often not actually followed by a story, but is used as a joke; when people utter it, there's a shared knowledge state established that whatever event or behavior was being discussed was wild or out of pocket and that allows the conversation to keep going without needing the discrete facts of the story. Two interviewees—Solomon and Desiree—include in their semantic metacommentary that sometimes *what had happened was* is used when someone is telling the truth, but the facts involved in that truth may themselves be unbelievable; Desiree embedded the phrase, remarking "it's gonna sound a little crazy, but what had happened was…". Two interviewees—Journey and Jerome—provide preference metacommentary, with Jerome stating that this kind of usage is "so ignorant", and that people use it when they are trying to be funny but it makes them sound undereducated.

The humorous nature of *what had happened was* is apparent, in that, the majority of interviewees reacted as if I'd just told a joke by merely uttering the phrase. This provides information, as Agha (2006) anticipates, that keys us into the phrase's pragmatic function. The interpretation of this phrase also provides another example where this population is aligned in their understanding of the term in a basic sense, although some interviewees provided richer metacommentary than others. The preference metacommentary by Jerome (a 49-year-old), which included remarks about ignorance, likely relates to his profession as an English Language Arts instructor (at primary and secondary levels throughout his career) because he has undoubtedly heard this phrase uttered by excuse-making students in the past, but more importantly he may disprefer the term because he is hyper-focused on preparing students in his classroom that will represent not only his city, but also his race as educated individuals in adulthood. Metacommentary such as this from Jerome may evidence how the linguistic push-pull cited by Smitherman (1977, 2006) and others is shaping metalinguistic knowledge for this user. Throughout his interview, Jerome discusses many instances where the usage of

canonically Black speech features and terms, and even informal terminology in general, can limit one's opportunities.

2.4.1.7 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Deadass*

Deadass is an AAL interjection meaning seriously, and could be thought of as a cousin of *dead serious* (Lemoine 2021b, Ritzen 2021). *Deadass* was included because of its potential for eliciting region metacommentary; the term arose in New York City's AAL varieties and was long indexed to that region before gaining popularity in recent years due to a proliferation of memes (Adam 2020). In the discussion of *deadass*, 16 interviewees provided semantic metacommentary (Maurice's connectivity issues again prevented him from doing so), with 13 providing the meaning of "completely serious" and the explanation that *deadass* is used, either as a question or statement, to confirm or indicate honesty. One interviewee, Alex, provides a parse of a different word, *dead-ass*, meaning not at all fun or very much not alive, which uses the *-ass* suffix (see Zimmer 2018), a productive compound also arising from the AAL lexicon, which functions as an intensifier for the adjectives it attaches to. Another interviewee, Yolanda, includes this parse as well as the more contemporary one in her semantic metacommentary. Lillian in her semantic metacommentary provides the only completely incorrect parse throughout the entire Discussion of Targeted Terms Task, defining *deadass* as a term meaning "bad in a good way". Five interviewees provide region metacommentary relating to *deadass*. Alisha and Sasha cite its origin as East Coast, with Sasha further refining that to New York; Journey, Solomon, and Desiree all indicate that this term is New York specific. Malcolm provides race metacommentary on *deadass*, remarking that he doesn't hear people of color use it that much, and preference metacommentary stating he doesn't use it himself. Simone also reports she prefers not to use *deadass*.

The expected metacommentary related to NYC regional indexation of *deadass* does emerge here, and there is broad agreement about the term's meaning. This demonstrates that while 13 of 16 interviewees are aware of the meaning of this term, only five of them are familiar enough with AAL regional variation to be able to place *deadass* within its origins. The interviewees who report this metalinguistic knowledge of cross-regional variation report acquiring the knowledge through various personal exposures (such as having friends or acquaintances from the region), not by being users themselves and not through cultural products, as might be expected as well. Sasha (a 37-year-old entrepreneur), for example, who when asked what *deadass* meant, stated she was not a user but demonstrated regional knowledge of the variable's distribution:

> Um I don't use this one, I thought this was more of a~ what is that like they say it's a East Coast, or uh New York thing or something um uh in a~ in a~ like you're an agreement, like uh. Like deadass we're not gonna … I'm in agreement, so.

We know that all Black Americans possess knowledge of U.S. AAL variation to an extent, whether or not they themselves are AAL users, because of their embodied positionality and their requirement to perform Blackness in the world. The regional metacommentary provided in response to *deadass* gives us a glimpse into the extent of this knowledge for these interviewees.

The ways that these interviewees differ with respect to their parsed meanings for *deadass* is also interesting. Both Alex (a History professor) and Yolanda (a CEO) are in their mid-forties, and *-ass* fixing was quite productive and popular while those women were in their twenties, so it is not surprising that they are both aware of that reading for this term. Given her age, together with the fact that this term is not especially common in Detroit usage and was only presented aurally, it makes sense that Alex may not have recognized which meaning I was initially intending to elicit when I included *deadass* in this task. Though, to be transparent, I am not seeking any specific parse one way or another, but included terms I felt I could use to elicit certain types of metacommentary in the initial application of the MMSI method. All of these responses are useful data, even Lillian's incorrect parse. While *deadass* doesn't mean what she reports, the report itself is revealing about Lillian's positionality as an individual with respect to the wider tapestry of Black language use and the Black community as a whole. Throughout the interview, Lillian (a 45-year-old running for City Council) does a lot of rhetorical, stancetaking work to keep the Black community at arm's length[50]. Or at least that is how it appeared to my RAs, who pointed out how seldom she uses the word *Black*, instead using terminology like *my* or *our community* or *urban* to describe Detroit, its inhabitants, and their collective cultural practices. Lillian provides detail about how returning to the city after her education at the University of Michigan isolated her from the communities she grew up in. What we observe in Lillian's incorrect parse of *deadass* may be bicultural competence (Scheunemann (2011), Holliday & Squires 2020) at play, an artifact of the distance created between her racialized self

[50] It is also quite possible that Lillian is keeping me at arm's length and doesn't feel comfortable discussing these issues with someone who may not be thought of as fully Black. Lillian asked several questions about my parentage before answering any of my questions and remarked on me being mixed race more than once during our interview. Those questions arising don't necessarily mean that her answers were reframed in some way, or that she was purposefully holding back (her stancetaking may simply be representative of her character), but we can be certain the potential exists for Lillian, and all of these interviewees, to have provided very different metalinguistic commentary to an individual who visibly and/or aurally presents differently than I did/do.

and her community through the identity bleaching inherent in U.S. higher education experiences (Wright 2021).

2.4.1.8 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Mad*

Mad is an intensifier arising from the AAL lexicon that has been in relatively stable cross-dialectal and informal usage for at least several decades; its meaning and usage patterns are similar to other initially regionally-indexed and now generally informal intensifiers like California's *hella* or Boston's *wicked* (Wiktionary, n.d.). *Mad* was included because of its stability of meaning and its potential for eliciting aligned semantic metacommentary. In discussion of *mad*, 16 of the 17 interviewees (Maurice's connectivity issues[51] prevented him from answering this question) provided semantic metacommentary for *mad*; 14 of them discuss the intensifier usage (*mad* X) as the primary meaning for the term. Alisha and Desiree also provide region metacommentary linking *mad* to East Coast and New York AAL varieties, respectively.

Four interviewees however—Alex, Aries, Alisha, and Desiree—include an additional parse involving a more recent phrase which includes the term: *You mad? You mad* is a phrase associated with trolling and is often used online when someone is up in their feelings about something (see Farlex 2022). Aries (a 30-year-old working for the Department of Defense) describes this well saying "you know you're playing a game, and you know they get upset and they raise they voice or they um you know they do something that just shows emotion at that moment, aggressive emotions, that's when you just hit them like +raises eyebrows+[52] oh you mad?" This *you mad* phrase has been around for a while, at least since 2008, but has taken on some recent semantic extension to have a less confrontational, more boastful scope. Alisha and Alex both comment on how this boastful scope usage of *you mad* is often accompanied by a change in tone or body language, somewhat jokingly, when one is sporting a new outfit or hairdo and looking mad fly.

Jerome's semantic metacommentary on *mad* is different in that his parse of the term is as a synonym for crazy or mentally unstable, he also includes that it is an informal version of the

[51] Maurice's audio issues in fact only lasted a combined total of one minute and 21 seconds. He was my oldest participant (83) and was not able to connect to video via Zoom. We had already spent time attempting to troubleshoot those issues before beginning the interview, so to be respectful of the time he'd agreed to share with me (as well as mindful of my remaining commitments on that day), I opted not to repeat those questions once his connectivity was reestablished.

[52] As discussed in Section 2.3.3, easily removable Regular Expressions were added to mark gestures where transcribers felt they were rhetorically significant.

word *angry*. Another interviewee, Desiree (a 33-year-old web designer), tells a detailed story here about how when she was a child, her father used to scold her for using the word *mad*, telling her "we don't get mad, we become angry". If one were to look up the word *mad* in the dictionary, these are the definitions one would find: informal usages referring to mental instability or anger (Merriam-Webster, n.d. c). Desiree also provides age metacommentary in saying she feels *mad* is a word that belongs to older speakers.

The metacommentary on *mad* captures discussion of a whole different phrase arising from a subset of interviewees, all of whom share the same parse of that secondary meaning and offer it as such. All four in this subset reported being engaged with online, digital culture when asked what types of things they like to do in the Demographics section of the MMSI, Alex more so because of her teenage son than her own hobbies. This additional parse of *mad* also provides a glimpse of the ways in which the AAL lexicon is recycled—or better still, reinvigorated—throughout the generations[53]. In his commentary on *deadass*, Malcolm discusses something similar in that another now common phrase, *no cap*, which also indicates seriousness or honesty, is confusing to him when his 13-year-old daughter says it all day long in his household because when he was young *cap* meant to roast someone. And when I was young, *cap* meant to shoot someone:

> Malcolm: Oh boy, no cap is huge around here, my daughter~ oh my Jesus. she says it all day long. Ooh, you know I tell them now like uh. You know, when I was younger coming up, cap was like
>
> Kelly: [get shot]
>
> Malcolm: [Roasting], yeah ca~ that too yeah. Yeah it's very different than what it is now. Yeah that was uh interesting. |1 sec. laughing| When I was growing up it meant, I~ um, like if you can cap somebody that mean you~ you told a joke about them. [So~] so that was up north but cap was getting shot too. You know um wow. It's lying now right so that~ wow!

This metacommentary covers lexical shift over a 30-year span, and in it we can observe the same lexical pool being returned to multiple times and semantically re-extended, and this type of age-graded change (see Wagner 2012) is at play with respect to *mad* as well. Interviewing individuals from similar populations with differing positionalities offers the potential to assess that type of change in apparent time.

[53] This is a phenomenon common to all processes of bottom-up language change that we can observe at work when employing the MMSI and targeted terms discussion tasks.

The metacommentary from Desiree is revealing in an altogether different fashion. So many of us are carrying around stories like Desiree's about words or phrases we have been scolded for using, times when someone reached into our language, pulled out an utterance, and marked it as bad or wrong or inappropriate. *Mad* generalized in usage (see Ticak 2020) long before Desiree (a 33-year-old woman)'s father was scolding her for using it, which likely means that he was reproducing these same harms done to him by another person who perhaps much more violently marked that particular usage for him. This metacommentary from Desiree is a shadow of Standard language ideologies lurking behind the usage of these terms, of all of these interviewees' knowledge that portions of their repertoire are only appropriate in some cases; that appropriateness-based knowledge is learned through the kinds of interactions Desiree describes, passed on through mantras like the one she repeats here which reinforce linguistic ideologies each time they remain unchallenged (Hill 2008).

2.4.1.9 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Corny*

Corny is a cross-dialectal adjective (Longman n.d.) which, in the AAL lexicon, marks certain sets of uncool behavior[54]. This term was included for its potential to elicit race metacommentary because, in my experience, *corny* marks individuals who exhibit behaviors that are specifically non-Black, for example bad dancing. In discussion of *corny*, all 17 interviewees provide semantic metacommentary on the uncoolness meaning of *corny*, with Chance providing the qualification: "it has nothing to do with the vegetable"[55]. Most (15) interviewees cite that *corny* is about someone trying too hard to act or be a certain way, or specifically not being funny; two interviewees give a tautological response (*corny* is *corny*). Journey (a 25-year-old working in IT) provides additional preference metacommentary stating that she doesn't use *corny* because she knows she has a corny sense of humor and that people often use the word to describe her; she associates the term with clean comedy. Three interviewees—Lonnie, Simone, and Alex—provide race metacommentary related to *corny*. Lonnie (a 50-year-old Music teacher) indicates that he feels *corny* is not a word that is originally Black in its origins. Simone and Alex discuss how Whiteness is captured in the scope of *corny*. Simone states, "it's not just lame, it's White

[54] See Kirkland & Jackson (2009) for a discussion of the psychosocial construction and implementation of Black coolness.

[55] Although most dictionaries do trace the origins of the term in English back to early 1900s usages referencing corn, or more specifically the country folk who worked the corn, and told recycled jokes from the backs of seed catalogues (Merriam-Webster n.d. a, Houghton 2016).

people lame[56] [57]". Alex's metacommentary in this discussion is a reiteration of statements she has made throughout the interview up to this point, beginning in minute two where she remarked that she didn't know how much help she would be to me because she was considered *corny* as a light-skinned Black woman:

> Alex: I'm primarily a homebody. Um I don't go out a lot. Um and sometimes I feel like I don't have a lot of close uh friendships because you're not one hundred percent fully accepted into the White community. Um for example, like uh my son does kung fu and I feel like when we're having events, the White moms just naturally +bringing hands toward each other+ gravitate toward each other and [just start up]
>
> Kelly: [Mm hmm]
>
> Alex: a conversation and I'm excluded. Um and sometimes I don't know if that's just me because you know I'm told that I don't have an approachable face, you know I'm the +makes air quotes+ angry black woman. Smile more, you know that~ that thing <2 sec. pause> But then when I'm around a lot of Black women I also feel~ I do feel that I get along better with Black women but I'm never one hundred percent fully accepted in their circle, because some kind of a way the conversation ends up with teasing—teasing of my corniness, my _speaking while laughing_ flat butt um [my pale skin].
>
> Kelly: [Aw.] No.
>
> Alex: You know, you can't relate to the experience of the Black woman, um…

Again, the metacommentary on *corny* is incredibly rich despite all of the interviewees agreeing on what the word means in a baseline sense. It is not particularly surprising that more metacommentary on the racial scope of this term wasn't elicited here. Simone stated that she

[56] I would like to note that the word *lame* is inherently ableist. It was used by 14/17 interviewees in their metacommentary on *corny*.

[57] The concept of linguistic lameness—or <u>being</u> "a lame" because of the variety one uses—arises from the study of Black language; Weldon (2021, pgs.25-45) covers this history. Weldon reports that "The concept of the linguistic "lame" emerged out" of Labov (1972a)'s study of African American English "that focused disproportionately on the speech of working-class adolescent boys who were core members of the street or "vernacular" culture of the inner cities…Middle-class speakers, among others, were cast aside as linguistic lames, who were presumed to be too far removed from street culture to be influenced by the vernacular. And even *within* urban working-class communities, Labov identified as lames certain "isolated individuals" who did not hang out in peer groups dominated by vernacular culture norms" (p.25). That the majority of interviewees invoke lameness—but not Middle-class-ness or Whiteness—directly in their metacommentary speaks both to the strength of the ideological and material associations Weldon (2021) is illuminating in this discussion and to the operation of indirect indexicality (Ochs 1992; Zhang 2005; King 2021) which may contribute to the prevalence of responses marking lameness but none marking class and few marking race. Outcomes like this leave questions open with respect to how indirect indexicality may interact with an individual's awareness level of given features in play and/or cognitive distortions from ideological operation (Woodlard 1998, Section 1.3.2).

wouldn't normally have mentioned it but, because of who I was[58], she did. I also get the sense that from the two tautological responses and some of the others which were mostly a string of synonyms for uncool, that most users find this term to be so generalized that the racial connotations aren't at a level of conscious retrieval for them, or are perhaps more indirectly indexed (Ochs 1992) to the social meanings *corny* invokes in use. However, for the light-skinned, White-sounding, and goofy members of the Black community, who also push and pull against the ideologies of what embodied Blackness is supposed to not only look and sound like, but also act like in the world, performance of their racial identities within Black communities is often accompanied by such labels. And discussing those in-group labeling practices (such as *talking White* which I will engage with in Section 2.4.2.1) can be difficult for folks, especially when they are harmful to others and can paint the user in a bad light.

2.4.1.10 Metalinguistic Commentary on *The N-Words*

The final terms discussed are *the N-words*. *The N-words* are a grouping of different lexical items (see Grieser 2019) stemming from the epithet *nigger*, used first to label living Black people as cargo during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Kennedy 2002), and from then until the present has been used and is used as an antiblack racial slur. These terms were included for their potential to elicit metalinguistic commentary which speaks directly to shared social realities inherent across the multifarious positionalities associated with Black life. Before introducing *the N-words* for discussion, I remind interviewees that they have agency in the interview and can choose not to answer any question I ask. I then tell them the last words we'll be discussing are *the N-words*, which (for the purposes of this study) I separate into three groups: *nigga* (which I speak aloud as "the version that ends in -a or -ah"), *nigger* (which I speak aloud as "the version that ends in -er"), and *the N-word* (which I described usually with an accompanying gesture drawing a capital-N in the air). I then tell them that because most of my Black relatives passed away in my youth, that these words weren't used often in my household, and so I personally don't feel comfortable saying them aloud, and if they choose to answer this question they can either say them aloud or not. None of the interviewees chose not to speak on *the N words*, and while a full exposition of the remarks they shared, their meaning, and importance is beyond the scope of this project, I will share a summary of those responses here similar to that given for the other terms.

[58] I don't know if that meant a Linguist or someone who identifies as a Black woman or both—or something else.

In discussion of *the N-words*, all 17 interviewees provided semantic metacommentary. All 17 interviewees discussed the differing semantic scope and operation of *nigga* versus *nigger* in detail; 8 interviewees engaged with the semantic mapping of *the N-word*, agreeing that it is a stand in for *nigger* when used. Ten interviewees provided community of practice metacommentary on *nigga* versus *nigger*, Aries in particular speaking at length (four minutes) on how the use of these terms is "very touchy still" in the Black community. Yolanda (a 46-year-old CEO) gave community of practice metacommentary which elaborates on this touchiness as she describes how she feels that all forms of *the N-words* have a disparaging meaning:

> Yolanda: So um then n.i.g.g.a. _spelled out_ I think I said a lot more in my younger years and occasionally I'll say it in c~ you know not in mixed company right, um~ and I'm trying to think of um. I can think about like what my girlfriends you know "girl these niggas be so full of shit." [You know.]
>
> Kelly: [Mmm.] Mm hmm.
>
> Yolanda: Um. And never use n.i.g.g.e.r. _spelled out_ um. Generally, when I'm using n.i.g.g.a _spelled out_ I'm using it in a disparaging way and I think that they're all disparaging in any of their forms. um I think that~ um I~ What I'm more aware~ there are fewer spaces, where I would ever say it and I'm much more conscious of it, um than in the past, where I think I'd sort of bought~ when I was younger like kind of bought into the "well we co-opted it" story. And when I~ when I really reflect on how I use it, I don't use it in that you know, in a~ um, in camaraderie necessar~ you know.
>
> Kelly: yeah.
>
> Yolanda: Generally I'm using it and~ and I don't, I think it's like a word I inherited I don't know that I derive like the the ori~ the original intent right, which was to order people by race and just be able to use it as a put down necessarily, but I think how its evolved over the years, I have embodied it.

These Black professionals struggle with how to position themselves in their various communities of practice—in their various linguistic markets (Bourdieu 1991; Zhang 2005)—with respect to the usage of *the N* words. Alisha shared that this word wasn't used in her household as a child (she was raised by her grandparents[59]), and that in coming into her adulthood and finding comfort in her racial identity after graduating college meant also becoming comfortable mastering the use of *nigga*. London (a 32-year-old radio producer) reports that an older Black woman once told her that *nigga* "didn't sound right in my mouth" and after that interaction she never felt right using it again.

[59] As were a number of my interviewees, many of whom grew up during the crack epidemic (see Boyd 2017 pp. 264-266).

Five interviewees provided context metacommentary, with Solomon stating that *the N-word* is entirely context dependent, in that it never "is just said", it has to be used because "somebody not tryna say *nigger* or they not supposed to". Sasha says that *nigga* absolutely isn't a curse word because it is a term of endearment, used when you recognize something in another Black person—that it is a general term—but you can't say it on the radio. Two interviewees—Lillian and Alex—provide some Detroit-specific regional metacommentary about *the N-words*. Alex reports nine different prosodic contours, what she calls tones, that can be used with *nigga* to signal different pragmatic intents; she qualifies this with perhaps they may be Detroit specific because that's where she learned them. Lillian in her preference metacommentary discusses how Detroit held a public burial[60] for *the N-words* and she feels like the city (should have) moved on from using them and she (with great effort at times) avoids their usage. Etta provided gender metacommentary, adding that she felt *the N-words* aren't used that much among Black women with each other. Three interviewees—Malcolm, Yolanda, and Jerome—provided age metacommentary on *the N-words*, with Yolanda (46) and Malcolm (40) both stating that they used *nigga* more often when they were younger.

Six interviewees provided race metacommentary on *the N-words*, several of them speaking at length on the reasons why White people cannot and should not use *nigga* and/or *nigger* and what it means when they do. Several of them—Lonnie and Aries especially—told detailed personal stories illustrating the usage of these terms by Whites around them in their own lives and the ways in which such usage impacted them. The majority of this racial metacommentary is focused on appropriateness, either on discussing how when White people use *nigga* in particular, they use it in a way that doesn't sound correct, or use it in such a way that misses some part of its semantic scope or impact. Desiree (a 33-year-old web designer) puts this well in saying that for "us" (Black folks) *nigga* has a general meaning, and it could in some cases refer to people of any race, but when White people use it they are using it <u>because</u> they are talking about someone's Blackness; that makes it no different than *nigger*. Sasha includes in her race metacommentary that a White person using *the N-word* construction "doesn't lessen the

[60] This event occurred in 2007 during the annual meeting of the NAACP. It was hosted by then-mayor of Detroit Kwame Kirkpatrick. This event took place shortly after the Don Imus *nappy-headed hos* debacle, when so-called derogatory Black language use by Black people was in the spotlight. This funeral was far from metaphorical. A pine box was pulled through the city, followed by a marching and cheering parade of Detroiters, who entombed the word and its violent history in Memorial Park Cemetery. This is not the first funeral of its kind to happen in Detroit, which also boasts the grave of Jim Crow, buried in the city in 1944 (see Krolicki 2007).

sting" because it means *nigger*, and in a way she'd prefer that *nigger* be used on the news especially, instead of sidestepping it. All of this race metacommentary from interviewees examines the ways in which changing one aspect of an individual's embodied positionality (i.e., their race) reshapes their access to social meanings even though the linguistic material (i.e., lexical items) available in a given individual's repertoire or a given register may remain the same.

Both Aries and Maurice explain that because of the word's origins, a Black person using *nigga* could never mean the things that *nigger* means no matter how the word actually sounds when it is pronounced. Maurice (a 83-year-old retired Special-Ed teacher) reports that what *nigga* marks in the world is a recognition of "survival", and that "Nigga must be a pretty powerful person" to have overcome what we have overcome and still be upright and walking around and achieving today. I include with permission the entirety of Maurice's metacommentary in his own words (in Appendix B), as any summary I attempt here would lose the power of his spoken word.

Responses to the previous nine terms in this task typically lasted an average of 20 seconds per participant, with some individuals on occasion providing extended metacommentary. The average response time across interviewees for *the N-words* is five minutes and 52 seconds; they produced a total of exactly 100 minutes of metacommentary on these terms. This metric alone should convey how these terms impact the lived experiences of these individuals. Slurs occupy a very special place in the lexicon. They cause physiological responses when perceived. They are processed in the midbrain (see Bergen 2016), in the most primitive parts of our cognitive apparati. The memories attached to experiences with slurs are visceral, unforgettable. Slurs break through aphasias, circumventing the pathways of linguistic production broken by stroke and blunt force trauma (see Bergen 2016). These 17 Black professionals share knowledge of *the N-words* built through the generational trauma of slur usage, through acts of linguistic reclamation, through the resistance of linguistic appropriation, and most importantly through self-determination. Each of these individuals presents deep and conscious metalinguistic knowledge of these terms because each of them has, at some point, been made to recognize that they—because of the circumstances of their birth—have been situated within their linguistic markets. Each has had to personally choose how to situate themselves within this history and reckon with how they will actively construct their identities as a Black people with respect to the usage of *the N-words*. Every Black person has an answer to this question for themselves because the world demands we form an answer to this question.

Discrimination is something felt and the knowledge built through that feeling is carried through the body. Experiencing the metacommentary provided by these individuals about their knowledge of *the N-words* firsthand was a profound experience, as a Black woman and as a researcher. To have affirmed what I have only felt, to have echoed what I also know by living in my body through having these words placed on me by others in the world, was a healing and liberating experience that I will carry with me forever. It was, indisputably, a gift.

2.4.1.11 Concluding Remarks: Discussion of Targeted Terms Task

In discussion of these 10 terms with these 17 interviewees, it was my intention in this first application of the MMSI to demonstrate that a wide range of types of metalinguistic commentary can emerge through a task focused on the discussion of lexical items. That goal has been achieved as all but one of the expected types of metacommentary (age, gender, region, and race, but not socioeconomic status) did emerge, as well as the additional types I expected to emerge: context, community of practice, specific cultural references, and personal preference metacommentary[61] (see Image 2.2). Additionally, I posed the following questions: Can we demonstrate that individuals with shared racial and regional identities will produce metalinguistic knowledge in a similar way? When this produced knowledge diverges, does it do so according to embodied positionality? Both of these questions can now be confidently answered in the affirmative with respect to these interviewees. Table 2.1 visualizes

Metalinguistic Commentary Divergence				
	Race	Region	Age	Gender
Finna				
Lit			x	
Bet				
Stressed BIN		(x)		
Shawty				x
WHHW	x			
Deadass		(x)	x	
Mad		(x)	x	
Corny	x			
The N-Words	x	x		x

Table 2.1: Metalinguistic commentary divergence based on factors of positionality from the Discussion of Targeted Terms Task outcomes. Marks in parentheses indicate potential divergence.

[61] As a reminder, in Section 2.4.1, I discussed selecting terms for this task that had different sociolinguistic mappings capable of eliciting metacommentary aligned with five factors of positionality, as well as several additional types of factors (and thus these term's sociolinguistic mappings as well), such as context.

patterns in metalinguistic commentary across the Discussion of Targeted Terms task for the basic emergent metacommentary types. For *finna*, interviewees' metacommentary diverges only in terms of preference or perceived appropriateness of usage of the term in the workplace. For *lit*, metalinguistic knowledge divergence from embodied positionality effects is observed as age determines which meanings users have access to, as well as informing if interviewees prefer to not use *lit* in its contemporary sense, which is reported by some as being indexed to younger people. For *bet*, there is general convergence in terms of meaning and reported indexation of the term, and the metacommentary of two interviewees indicates that terms like *bet*, which are common and have local significance, can come to have personal meaning as well. For *stressed BIN*, there is potential divergence in the regional metacommentary reported, as one interviewee reports that *BIN* feels very Detroit to them and another reports that the construction is used all over, but these two stances need not necessarily be mutually exclusive[62]. For *shawty*, interviewee metacommentary converged in terms of the gendered meaning of the lexical item, but diverged in terms of some interviewees' preferences to not use it specifically because of their embodied gender. This outcome highlights two different types of metalinguistic knowledge at play, both meaning-based and usage-based knowledge, reinforcing that language users can possess understandings of linguistic material they themselves do not regularly—if ever—employ. For *what had happened was* (*WHHW* in Table 2.1), one interviewee diverges from the rest of the group in terms of ascribing ownership of the phrase outside of the Black community. Divergence is also seen again in preference metacommentary, with two interviewees dispreferring the construction, noting a social meaning of ignorance invoked through the phrase's usage, not the humorous pragmatic intent noted by others. For *deadass*, the interviewees who give region metacommentary all converge, but it is a small subset of the population, and thus can be viewed as divergent knowledge of a sort as well. Age-based positionality also determines which meanings interviewees have access to for *deadass*, as with *lit*. For *mad*, three different definitions arise. There is broad agreement on the more common intensifier (*mad X*) meaning, and for the subset that provides the *you mad?* parse there is also convergence in terms of semantic metacommentary (and reporting of potential experiential reasons for having this more contemporary parse at the ready; i.e., active participation in digital culture). For the informal usages of *mad* meaning angry or crazy, there is divergence in that one interviewee interprets *mad* (with these meanings) to belong to older generations. Further, two interviewees attribute this term to a regional origin to this term (which is supported in sources

[62] As someone who hails from a *y'all* speaking region, I assure you both of these things can be true.

cited in Section 2.4.1.8), but the other interviewees do not provide such qualifications. For *corny*, although there is broad agreement on the term's meaning, two interviewees provide additional race metacommentary that exposes a whole host of additional social meanings for the term. For *the N-words* (although all of the captured metacommentary was not shared here) in general interviewees converge on each of these terms' meaning, which groups own them, and who can use them appropriately. Interviewees present divergent stances on whether or not certain groups—like Black women or Detroiters—use *the N-words* often in causal conversation and how these words are performed and analyzed in contemporary Black communities of practice. Metacommentary on *the N-words* captured here also demonstrates multiple types of metalinguistic knowledge at work.

The discussion of many of these terms—*finna*, *bet*, *stressed BIN*, *what had happened was*, *corny*—all converge in terms of their metalinguistic knowledge. With respect to *mad*, some interesting and revealing additional definitions emerge, and for *corny*, although the word's definition remains the same, what the word means in the world appears to be different given the appearance or character of the language user. In discussion of *lit*, *shawty* and *deadass*, there are points of positionality-derived divergence among interviewees that fall along lines of age, and age and gender in intersection, and region, as well as reported experiential and preference influences. Discussion of the term *shawty*, for example, was particularly revealing as it demonstrates that while all interviewees knew that the word had a meaning which cited a specific gender, some interviewees did not use the word because of their own specific gender. Types of metacommentary such as this provide the "deep understanding of local semiotics that the sociocultural meaning of embodiment can be recognized" through (Bucholtz & Hall 2016 p.181), which, as discussed in Section 2.2.1, Bucholz & Hall (2016) cite as retrievable from sociolinguistic research centering embodiment. This metacommentary from interviewees highlights the local semiotics of embodied gender and the ways in which it can be enacted through the use of the term *shawty*. If we understand gender as an isolable concept or social category, one which these interviewees orient themselves to as individuals with bodies but also as members of a wider group, then their knowledge of the ways in which this category operates must be multi-faceted, must involve both themselves and others. The metacommentary on *shawty* reflects just such knowledge, demonstrating that embodied gender can shape the ways in which the lexicon interacts with an individual; this word is, as reported both by interviewees and published sources cited in Section 2.4.1.5, used primarily by men towards women. If a male-bodied individual is called *shawty*, it is a joke or even an insult (a point that Journey made,

in fact, by describing how she likes to get under her boyfriend's skin by calling him this). We also recognize a deeper sociocultural meaning of embodiment through the usage-based preference metacommentary on *shawty* from self-identified female interviewees who indicate not using the term because they are female. This preference metacommentary is different from the age-related preference metacommentary on *lit*, where interviewees' age-based embodied positionality is reported in such a way that it seems to disqualify them from participating in the word's usage. But there is no disqualification involved in these women using *shawty*; they don't do it because they can't, they don't do it because of what it would mean if they do, what using *shawty* says about their womanhood, which provides a deeper understanding of womanhood itself. Preference metacommentary and stories of personal usage point us, for a number of these terms, to ideological and experiential underpinnings of metalinguistic knowledge that lie beyond positionality effects which will be considered for future iterations of the Discussion of Targeted Terms Task and design elements the MMSI protocol in general as I continue to deepen my conceptualization of metalinguistic awareness and value it as an object of study in its own right.

2.4.2 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Talking White* and *Authentically Black*

The Language Varieties section of the MMSI protocol in general is designed to transition interviewees from discussion that is mostly about themselves and contains general questions, some on key concepts which are not directly language related (such as professionalism in this first application) to discussion of key language-specific concepts (such as race and identity in this first application). The most specific questions included in this section in this first application focus on two in-group labels—*talking White* and *authentically Black*—applied by Black people to the speech of other Black people. I first ask interviewees "what does it mean to talk White?", quickly following the question up with my rationale for asking it by stating that "I use the terminology *talking White* intentionally because I've observed it functioning as a label Black people use with other Black people and I am curious what it is marking". Immediately after[63] the interviewee is finished answering this question, I ask about the *authentically Black* label—

[63] This was intentional, not with respect to how these two questions relate to each other, but rather how they best linked the preceding and following sections of the interview protocol. The series of questions that flows into this in-group label series, where the *talking White* question is first, are dialectology questions. They begin specifically and, using a funnel approach, end with a question asking if the interviewee if the way White people from Michigan speak is different than the way Black people from Michigan speak. The Discussion of Targeted Terms Task immediately follows this in-group label series, where the *authentically Black* question is last. I wanted interviewees to be more focused on Black language varieties when we started the discussion task.

typically by stating “okay so my next question is the opposite” or “Conversely, then” to initiate the transition—and asking “What does it mean to you to have an authentically Black voice? And I use *authentically Black* in the same way here, in that, it is a label I hear Black people use with other Black people and I’m curious what it is marking”. In both cases, I am seeking to elicit metacommentary on racialized speech styles—which might be said to inhabit ends of a language variety spectrum both for these individuals and for the community at large—in an effort to better understand how those styles are conceived of (both in terms of the features they contain as well as ideologically). This information will be helpful as I turn to a conversation in the section that follows (on self-censorship) and in the case studies in Chapter Three (on Standard language ideologies and sociolinguistic labor) about the ways in which these individuals move through that variety spectrum. Some overlap with metacommentary covered in other sections does exist as interviewees provide metacommentary in a single utterance that captures multiple themes.

In terms of coding, there are child codes for both White and Black parented under Race, which is itself a child code of Metacommentary in the Key Concepts code group (as illustrated in Image 2.2). These codes exist because explicit mention of what makes language racialized (whether using the specific labels focused on in the two interview questions or not) can arise at any time during the interview. Similar to semantic metacommentary being most common in the Discussion of Targeted Terms Task because it was directly elicited, here race metacommentary (see Image 2.2) is similarly most common. Other members of the Key Concepts group (see Image 2.1) also often co-occur with this metacommentary, including the Authenticity code in the Language & Identity group (see Image 2.1) and Topic of Discussion, which is a child code of Style Shifting (Image 2.3). The Topic of Discussion code is used when style shifting—or moving between language varieties or styles—is discussed directly by the interviewee. It is perhaps important to note that there is a separate code category

Image 2.3. Visualization of STYLE SHIFTING child codes in the KEY CONCEPTS code group, displaying within-group, hierarchical relationships.

in the KEY CONCEPT code group for RACE (Image 2.3), whose criterion for application is *codes related to commentary about race that is specifically not about language use*. Below I summarize the discussion about the in-group labels *talking White* (Section 2.4.2.1) and *authentically Black* (Section 2.4.2.2) across interviewees, unpacking the most illustrative responses to demonstrate how these members of the community conceptualize these labels and the ways in which the labels function socially.

2.4.2.1 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Talking White*

I remember um it being a big thing to say that um you talk like a White person. Um it's like, how do you talk a race? But um we say it all the time, and I mean you know what that means when somebody says it but it's very true how we sort of um attribute um good grammar and speech to a White person um or correct speech to a White person. -Simone, fundraising executive

The *talking White* label is given very specific components in interviewee metacommentary related to performance of a speech style, with eight of the 17 interviewees emphasizing "enunciating" words or using a certain "diction". London (a 32-year-old radio producer) qualifies her metacommentary about diction stating that *talking White* involves "this stronger effort to

pronounce every syllable and word", mimicking the style to exemplify hyperarticulation[64] when sharing this metacommentary. Another five interviewees describe *talking White* as "talking proper"[65]. Four (London, Sasha, Alex, & Solomon) include metacommentary that *talking White* involves a "higher pitch" or different "tone" than Black speech, with London and Solomon qualifying their metacommentary by giving the example of the Valley Girl trope (Hinton et al. 1987, Fought 2002, D'Onofrio 2015). Solomon (a 25-year-old working in the non-profit sector) also includes a specific example of creaky voice being used by White women at the University of Michigan, a component of *talking White* that he attributes to Gen Z specifically. Alex indicates that *talking White*—especially around White people—involves adding a certain "bubbliness" or "lightness" to your tone. Five interviewees specify that *talking White* involves word choice, by stating that it involves both "omitting words" and using bigger "extra flamboyant type words" (with Malcolm and Sasha both using the term *flamboyant*). Here is some metacommentary Journey (a 25-year-old working in IT) provided on omitting words:

> I guess people used to say I talk White because I like enunciated my words. And I mean, I guess, in a way, what they say makes sense? But um cause I guess you know compared to how they were speaking it sounded very much like how you would hear a White person I guess +makes air quotes+ quote unquote speak. Um so I~ I get that part, even though it was still like hurtful to he~ or like~ or at least now more so, like thinking back on it like then I was just like you know "whatever" or I was just like "well whatever like uh" you know. It was almost just kind of like, not a compliment, but just like, okay yeah I'm speaking like how I wanna speak so I guess like I took it as a compliment, I guess, in a way, but now I'm just like, no it's not cool. But um yeah, I guess, there's considered enunciating words, like omitting different words like you know, like contractions in general, but ain't, y'all, and um like different I guess contractions that um like Black~ a lo~ like Black language has that doesn't exist I guess in standard English. Um like I can't think of~ I can't think of it now, but just kind of~ yeah I guess just speaking more standard English.

The most specific metacommentary regarding the components of *talking White* as a perceptible style come from Desiree (a 33-year-old web designer), who remarks "what I think they mean when they say that is speaking in a professional manner right or speaking proper English… Oh you talking White so you're pronouncing the -er on all your words, you're clearly articulating every single word, or you're speaking in proper English." Desiree also includes as a qualification with her race metacommentary that she says is important to note: there are "plenty of White

[64] Although examples of mimicry are certainly metacommentary in their own right (again, Agha (2006) contends that all behaviors are metalinguistic in nature)—and can be rich sources of data. Although they were coded for (see Image 2.3), I have chosen not to analyze them at this time even though several instances are reported where rhetorically significant.

[65] See Weldon 2021 pgs. 100-139 for a full discussion of the rhetorical and social function of the term *proper* when used by members of the Black Middle Class.

people who don't use proper English". London includes a qualification with her race metacommentary on *talking White* as well, adding that it is not only Black folks, but also other non-White races (she mentions several) who are reaching for this target.

This initial metalinguistic commentary demonstrates that the in-group label *talking White* is well known by these interviewees. Although I don't report all of their metacommentary, all 17 had something to say about it, speaking for an average of just under four minutes. Their metacommentary demonstrates that the label is tied to a specific way of speaking, and that this way of speaking is differentiated from typical Black varieties in terms of pitch, attention paid to speech, and standardization. I find the comments from Malcolm and Sasha about the flamboyant nature of words used when one is *talking White* to be indicative of positionality because I find that many people who are not Black view Black variation to be particularly flamboyant, and as a result Black people are often criticized for hypercorrecting or using words like *conversate* (Word History, n.d.) when speaking in a formal context. I would argue that these hypercorrection phenomena are artifacts of this type of metalinguistic knowledge, that *talking White* means using the biggest words one is able to in a given situation, particularly an important or high-stakes setting. The metacommentary from Journey reveals not only details about what comprises the styles labeled *talking White*, but also that such labels are applied to individuals early in life to mark non-Black or less Black behaviors.

Two interviewees provide metacommentary that help us better understand what the *talking White* label is marking by including the questions it contains. Tajfel & Turner (1979) discuss the attachment of questions to labels and their value for understanding the label's function with respect to "the mediation of *socially shared* systems of beliefs" (p.36, emphasis original). Maurice (an 83-year-old retired Special-Ed teacher) provides socioeconomic metacommentary, noting the label was most often used when citing class differences when he was growing up. Maurice tells us he was from the so-called "ghetto", but there were "well off uh to do Black people" who lived a few miles away that folks called *elites* (pronounced [iːlaɪts][66]). Maurice's recollection continues with race and community of practice metacommentary that these Black people did not talk like the Black people in his neighborhood, that they sounded White, and that this made the folks from the neighborhood question them: "You're like us in everything but the way you sound. And so we kind of think like are you really the way you sound? Are you really

[66] I make a point of noting this pronunciation because Maurice made a point of noting this pronunciation.

the way you sound or are you really Black like me inside?" The *elites*' voices engendered distrust according to Maurice because it was never clear if these individuals were choosing not to sound like the folks who lived in the so-called ghetto: "You don't sound like us, is that because you don't want to?". Yolanda (a 46-year-old CEO) also speaks at length about questions that underlie the usage of the *talking White* label, stating that "our talking White was always about the relationship to the master", reflecting on the origins of all Black language varieties in general being linked to enslavement (see also Ball et al. 2003; Bloomquist et al. 2015; Farrington et al. 2021). Yolanda's race metacommentary indicates that when someone is labeled as *talking White*, it is really the other person asking "are you trying to assimilate? Are you denying us to be in the house with master, you know?"

This metacommentary from Maurice and Yolanda is valuable because it clues us in to long-standing dynamics at play within the Black community with respect to the public performance of racial identity. Tajfel & Turner (1979) include that American Black people in particular have long denigrated any sort of behavior that seems to indicate "positive attitudes toward the dominant out-group" (i.e., Whites). Weldon (2021), as discussed in Section 1.3.1, indicates that these sorts of attitudes and behaviors contributed directly to the development of the Black-Accented Standard variety, one which maintains the language users' Blackness while approaching the propriety *talking White* as a practice was developed to uphold in the linguistic market(s). The community of practice metacommentary from Maurice and Yolanda captured here indicates that, for these two individuals, those sentiments are still present and active in at least their understanding, if not their use, of the *talking White* label. Distrust can be engendered among the Black community when a Black person shifts away from their more racialized styles (which is when a *talking White* label is most likely to be applied to them).

Three interviewees provide metacommentary related to *talking White* as a practice. Jerome attributes this practice to "our elders, older African Americans who had to deal with things, the ancestors who were able to go off to college and better themselves and learn so that they could survive in the world, White world or whatever. And then, oh you're talking White". Etta's context metacommentary is similar in pointing out that there's an expectation that one will talk White "in school and in your work environment". However, when with her friends—who are also educated—they "aren't always using grammatically correct usage because our guard is down". Sasha (a 37-year-old entrepreneur) also provides context metacommentary and discusses the ways in which being active in the working world has made *talking White* part of her life, so much

so that her family calls her “the boujee one” and she attributes that to her corporate work life. This label bothers Sasha and influences her style shifting practices because she doesn’t like being called *boujee*; she discusses being motivated to shift into a more racialized style around her family and reports that at work “I’ll make sure I’m trying to use proper diction and English when I’m actually presenting but it’s hard cause you go back and forth and you’ll slip.”

This metacommentary from Jerome, Etta, and Sasha begins to answer the questions posed by Maurice and Yolanda. None of these individuals provide reasons for *talking White* that seem to indicate a desire for assimilation to White culture as such. This is key because, although the cited community tensions around assimilation remain extant in the memories (and perhaps ideologies) of some interviewees, those interviewees who report engaging with *talking White* as a practice have not conceived of it[67] as one that allows for assimilation into Whiteness, an action that is unavailable to most Black professionals because of their embodiment. Jerome indicates that *talking White* was done for survival, and Etta indicates that it is an expectation. Etta (a 41-year-old Special-Ed Director)’s explicit discussion of her shifting practices that emerged when providing metacommentary on the *talking White* label also points toward usage of such a style for survival because she characterizes contexts when her racialized style is present as one in which her “guard” is down. In this light, *talking White* is armor—put on to protect Black workers and learners in a White world that never wanted them in the first place. This kind of metacommentary is revealing because it indicates that for those individuals, at least among these interviewees, who admit to engaging in the practice of *talking White*, we find that it is not done for any of the nefarious intentions hinted at by Maurice and Yolanda (i.e., assimilating with White masters)—quite the opposite. The practice is engaged with to protect Black life.

We also find in Sasha’s community of practice metacommentary that the tension still exists between the necessity for *talking White* created by the conditions of the working world and the distrust among her family members created by shifting away from racialized styles, and that this tension creates sociolinguistic labor for Sasha. Sasha is experiencing bicultural competence by keeping both her styles active, and she reports being mindful of the daily maintenance of her

[67] Indirect indexicality, of course, plays a role here in that, as more standardized styles are produced, individuals are in some aspects assimilating to Whiteness, due to the history of standardization and the ways in which upholding White interests are embedded in the use of Standard language, as discussed in Section 1.3.1. This indirect indexation is effectively incidental and does not negate the reported motivations of the interviewees or invalidate the ways in which they conceive of the varieties they move towards or from.

speech patterns, but that she can only maintain her repertoires to an extent and can "slip". This indicates that Sasha is aware of being monitored in her workplace (where using a Whiter style is expected and the *talking White* label is not likely to arise) as well as at home. For Shasha, a so-called slip at work is something noticeable and potentially harmful to her image or position, but she attributes the negative impact of such slippage to switching into her more racialized style to avoid being called *boujee* by her family. Sasha's metacommentary reveals the power a label like *talking White* can have as a motivator for style shifting as she discusses her practices directly and in doing so demonstrates her willingness to (or perhaps compulsion to) take up daily acts of sociolinguistic labor—moving between and effortfully maintaining her active varieties across contexts and communities—in an effort to resist the label (or those akin to it) being applied to her, along with the willful break with the culture (the assimilationist tendencies) it can imply.

Three interviewees provide context metacommentary related to situations where the *talking White* label might be used. Alisha, whose regular speaking voice might be described by some listeners as White sounding, discussed earlier on in our interview an event where someone used the *talking White* label against her to start a fight but claimed that was the only time anyone has ever said it directly to her. In this discussion, Alisha (a 32-year old working in finance for the non-profit sector) states that "I have been told right like I talk different, like people say that to me all the time" and proceeds to discuss her experience on dating apps. Alisha recalls one interaction in particular with a man she did end up dating for a while who revealed a few months in that he couldn't stand her voice at first because when he'd first met her it was "so jarring that my voice didn't match my appearance". Jerome provides metacommentary demonstrating a similar phenomenon in discussing several times in his life when White people have complimented him on his speech by saying something like "Oh God you talk so well". Jerome (a 49-year-old English Language Arts instructor) adds that when he receives comments like this he often thinks "cause you think I'm Black I don't know how to use Standard English?" Following this, Jerome speaks at length on the fallacy of the *talking White* construction, about how there is "no such thing as proper, it's either Standard or non-Standard" and that it all depends on where a person is that determines how they are going to sound. Jerome's context metacommentary ends with an example of how Standard English just doesn't fly "in the hood… cause imma tell you, if you talking like that you know somebody's gonna try you."

The final example comes from Chance (a 29-year old lawyer), who in answering this question about the *talking White* label explains how he feels that what label marks is related to the ways

in which he is expected to use language in the courtroom. Chance states “I don’t talk White or I don’t talk proper. I just make sure that I say my words, I enunciate, I say them slowly so that people can hear.” Chance emphasized the point of not *talking White* several times, saying “I don’t feel like I have to do that. I don’t enter spaces where I’m feeling like I can’t be myself cause life’s too short”. Throughout the Language Varieties section of the MMSI, Chance provides rich metacommentary on the ways in which his language use relates to his identity as a Black man in his city and in his profession. I cover some of Chance’s metacommentary in the next section as well, but here it is relevant that Chance, like Jerome, also makes a very clear distinction between the linguistic actions he is undertaking on a daily basis and the indexation of Whiteness specifically through those actions. As discussed in Section 1.3.1, the concept of indirect indexicality (Ochs 1992) allows me to claim that Whiteness is indirectly indexed through the use of all standardized versions of English so that I may recognize the oppressive history of the Standard in its contemporary usage, but it would appear that Chance’s reported mindset and behaviors are working to decouple that indexation—that he doesn’t conceive of his use of Standard forms as clearly or even indirectly indexed to Whiteness but instead as indexed to correctness or professionalism (as perhaps traditionally described in the literature). Chance’s opinions of the social meanings his Standard usage activates and how they relate to Whiteness may reflect those of many other Black professionals employing Black-Accented Standard varieties across linguistic markets. In the interest of engendering the epistemological tolerance Babel (2015) calls for, I hold both Chance’s and my own ways of knowing may produce equally valid interpretations of this community’s style shifting practices, in that such practices (being at once individually and intuitionally located) can simultaneously engage in agentive transgression of extant social boundaries while also being bound by them. Chance’s metacommentary is especially revealing, in that it indicates he has re-indexed *talking White* not to an assimilationist or culture-erasing speech style, but instead to the courtroom register in his daily practice, and I would argue competing ideological influences to be what motivates a language user to take up such mental work, work that entails discursive self-actualization.

By unpacking the metacommentary on the in-group label *talking White*, a picture of a Whiter speech style has developed as well. The label itself certainly marks a style of speech, one that is higher pitched than typical Black varieties (as remarked by four interviewees), and that involves careful articulation and standardization. The metacommentary from Alisha about her dating experiences as well as that of others reveals that this community is aware that listeners have certain expectations about how people in certain bodies are going to produce language.

This comes as little surprise to linguists, but seeing the knowledge emerge in reflections on daily practice by the lay community is revealing, and important to capture especially from members of a community whose language use is central not only to their social mobility, but also to their in-group belonging (as they are those who possess the greatest authority to comment on the history, scope, and function of such community-shaping pragmatic objects). The race metacommentary from Desiree and London about Black people not being the only ones who *talk White* emphasized that they have thought about how the embodied positionality of White people and people of other races interacts with *talking White* as a practice, and about how so-called proper speech affects them and the ways in which everyone is encouraged to shift towards it (through Standard language ideologies). The metacommentary from Jerome and Chance shows that these individuals have done a lot of mental work to distance themselves from the Whiteness implied (through the *talking White* label and its history) or perhaps inherent in the variety they shift towards in the daily practice of their professions, likely as a way to compartmentalize, elevate, and/or protect their identities as Black men and Black professionals. Though the interviewees' descriptions of the *talking White* label might initially seem to point towards its marking the use of White Standardized spoken English, what emerges when digging deeper into their metalinguistic commentary are in fact centuries-old tensions in a community whose linguistic and racial identity performance remains under constant public scrutiny, both from within and from without.

2.4.2.2 Metalinguistic Commentary on *Authentically Black* Voices

Talking Black feels more comfortable. It feels like I'm being myself, like it kind of separates me from other races or other people and it feels like even though people try to copy it, it's just like one thing that can't be taken away from Black people. -Journey, IT worker in finance

As a reminder, the question about the *authentically Black* label immediately follows that on the *talking White* label and is cast as the opposite, or comparison, case. In brief, the *authentically Black* label's components are characteristically different from that of the *talking White* label. This difference is well captured in metacommentary from Simone (a 41-year-old fundraising executive), who states that she interprets the *authentically Black* label as being applied to "what feels natural and embracing that". In these interviews, three components associated with the *authentically Black* label that emerge from metacommentary and could be linked to a specific style of speech are the following: using slang, speaking with a lower tone, or speaking with a certain style or flava. These comments come from four interviewees, Lillian, Sasha, Journey,

and London. The rest of the metacommentary refers to more general components of the ways in which *authentically Black* is used, what it might be referring to, or how interviewees are interpreting it and include being relatable (8 out of 17) or being true to oneself (5 out of 17), being comfortable (Journey, Solomon, Aries, and Maurice), and being able to speak up for oneself (Jerome and Desiree).

Two interviewees provide metacommentary with respect to the origin of speaking styles labeled *authentically Black*, attributing the rise of distinctly Black ways of speaking to enslavement and our collective resistance to it[68]. Maurice discusses how, for Black people, speaking differently than Whites has always been a choice and that "to begin with a lot of slang, what people might call bad use of language, bad speech… it was kind of a way of mocking the dominant culture. We might say something um a certain way to spite the way that it was presented to them."[69] London discusses this history as well when answering this question, seeking aloud for an answer, stating "going even further back to slavery and not having that right to learn how to read and write and so going off hearing, trying to articulate *I don't want to* so *I ain't no nevermind* you know things like that. So I don't know is that considered authentic Black language?"

The metacommentary provided by Maurice and London can be understood as the other side of the coin from the history that Yolanda provided in Section 2.4.2.1 in her exposition of the historically-rooted questions which underlie the *talking White* label. Here, speech labeled *authentically Black*—equated with the use of so-called slang or non-Standard constructions like "I ain't no nevermind"—is couched in resistance to Whiteness and White dominance. Indeed, London cites the very histories discussed in Section 1.3.1, the anti-literacy laws which kept Black people absent from material knowledge production and thus shaped their varieties into what they are today. There is indeed something shared about these histories that affects all Black people in this country, no matter which linguistic varieties are present in their personal repertoires; this metacommentary indicates that London (and perhaps others) perceive that this shared reality creates something that can be labeled as *authentically Black* in the speech patterns of African Americans. This authenticity, then, is what is perhaps in question when Black individuals are observed *talking White*, because—as Yolanda wondered aloud—are they trying to assimilate towards instead of actively resist White dominance? Choosing to move away from

[68] Indeed, this is how Smitherman (2006 p.3) described it as well.
[69] This idea of a resistance to or mocking of dominant culture being present or formative in the origins of African American Englishes is well covered by Morgan (1993), who refers to such lects as "counterlanguage" (see pgs.241-251).

racialized styles is choosing to move away from the racialized self. We know, however, that this choice is never quite that simple, that not every person who exists in a Black body possesses mastery of non-Standard Black varieties or has command over the fullness of the repertoires at their disposal to move through them in a fluid manner. The choice of presenting the racialized self in public, of doing what feels most natural or of mocking the dominant culture, comes at a cost—costs to opportunity, livelihood, and personhood; resistance to White dominance has always been life threatening.

Four interviewees provide metacommentary related to how they interpret *authentically Black* as a label. Alisha states that with regard to authenticity, she "interprets voice as perspective", and that seems to be the case for most interviewees as well, who do not provide metacommentary that is similar to that elicited on the *talking White* label, such that a given speech style it is marking could be identified. Alex's metacommentary provides a concise summary of the ideas behind the voice-as-perspective interpretation that many interviewees seem to share. She states that *authentically Black* speech is that which "represents you as a Black person" because we aren't a monolith; Black life isn't all struggle and poverty. Alex (a 43-year-old History professor) continues, "but a Black voice is your ability to, even if you did not live that experience, you can relate to all the experiences of Black people and your authentic voice is you being able to tell your story and be yourself." Desiree provides a nice three-point list of what it means for one to be speaking in a manner where the *authentically Black* label might apply. That is 1) "you are Black. African American, Caribbean you know whichever version", 2) being honest about your feelings, environment, and the situation, 3) "having the courage to articulate that", sometimes in different ways to all the stakeholders in your life. Aries provides similar metacommentary, but qualifies his further by adding that because some Black individuals may have different exposure to "the streets", and thus may not sound the way folks expect speakers labeled *authentically Black* to sound[70], those individuals (with less exposure to the streets) might be reaching outside of language—"into their actions"—to index Blackness, but that this doesn't affect the authenticity of their identities in any way.

This metacommentary about voice-as-perspective on the surface might seem contradictory to some metacommentary captured in the previous section, which indicated that individuals who sound White in some way cannot identify with the Black community. Given the comments I

[70] Note that the idealized Black speaker Aries is invoking here echoes the archetype introduced into the Zeitgeist through early variationist sociolinguistic work, as discussed in Section 1.2.1.

reported in that section—especially those from Sasha (with respect to being called *boujee*) and Alisha (with respect to dating) about sounding Whiter—I do not want to downplay that real and important conflicts endure. However, the metacommentary about the voice-as-perspective seems to indicate that having one's speech labeled *authentically Black* has much more to do with the content of one's utterances than the structure or sound of the utterances themselves, given the pronounced lack of specifically articulatory or structural details provided. This is very different from having one's speech labeled as *talking White*, according to the elicited metacommentary in Section 2.4.2.1, which seems to indicate that label is applied almost exclusively based on how one sounds or the words one chooses. As Aries puts it, *authentically Black* speech must be accompanied by actions. Black folks will be the first to tell you we are not all the same, that there are myriad ways to be Black in this world, and that they are all valid and beautiful. What allows for Black speech to be labeled as *authentically Black* is first, the shared history that created Blackness as a social category for these individuals to exist in, and then enacting that existence in such a way that Blackness is represented. This metalinguistic commentary from Alisha, Alex, Desiree, and Aries indicates the importance of experience (e.g., more or less exposure to the streets or being part of the African diaspora), demonstrating that these individuals are aware of what is and is not shared among a wide group of people who all claim the same identity. These Black professionals are working—in real time when answering this question—to account for the various positionalities they are aware of, maintain equity between them, and maintain distance between the two labels under discussion to account for distinctions in the social meanings they enact.

With respect to usage of language that is labeled *authentically Black*, four interviewees—Solomon, London, Alisha, and Journey—provide the richest metacommentary. Solomon (a 25-year-old working in the non-profit sector) discusses how authenticity translates into being comfortable:

> Like when I'm around all Black folks or I feel comfortable conversation I don't have to, I don't feel like I have to perform. I don't feel like my words are a performance like I don't have to, you know, speak like this to be respected or seen as intelligent. I can talk however I choose to talk whether that's you know the King's English or the English I speak in my home. That's being authentically Black and that can be different for whoever you are. Like I'm from Detroit so I don't go around using slang from other places…that wouldn't be me being authentic you know. I don't go around calling folks mo; I'm not from DC. Like you know I know what the word mean, I can use it in context, but why would I do that?

Solomon's metacommentary reflects that from several other interviewees, that for speech to be labeled *authentically Black* it cannot be putting up a front of some kind, but rather involves speaking a variety that is true to you, no matter what you actually look like or what your experiences are because there is no one way to be Black; the way to not be Black is to misrepresent yourself, which can happen when employing racialized linguistic material. London (a 32-year-old radio producer) provides cultural metacommentary which reinforces this point when discussing a central character from the movie *Strictly Business*: Waymon Tinsdale, a straight-laced Black professional in middle management. There's a scene in this movie where Waymon goes to Harlem for the first time and starts saying things like "yo, my brotha" and, as London so aptly observes, "it's like dude that's not authentic to who you are you know what I mean so. You can feel when it's being perpetrated". Waymon is definitely a Black man, but has stepped outside of what is true to his experience and put on some language that doesn't belong to him. Alisha comments on this feeling, this knowledge of perpetration as well. She states first that she does not "believe in the blaccent", but then goes on to reflect on how it must exist because "people put it on and it sounds put on". This is metacommentary that every interviewee (13 out of 17[71]) who interacted with the Lydia Burell example during the Usage Assessment Task shared, that one can "just tell" when Black language is being used by someone who doesn't have the experience to back it up. Journey's statement on language and appropriation which frames this section speaks to this as well, stating that "even though people try to copy it, it's just like one thing that I feel like can't be taken away from Black people".

These last metalinguistic comments concerning appropriation demonstrate that although the interviewees did not describe specific components of a speech style that the *authentically Black* label consistently marks, there is indeed an *authentically Black* speech style out there because there is a style consistently recognizable to these interviewees when used inauthentically. This inauthentic or appropriative usage is often attributed to individuals who do not have the right exposure to use certain AAL terminology correctly, be that in terms of a prosodic signature or in terms of meaning[72]—or in terms of individuals who are not being true to themselves, as we see with London's illustrative example of Waymon Tinsdale. Solomon shares regional

[71] As a reminder, as discussed in Section 2.3.1.5, not every participant interacted with all of the usage assessment data due to time constraints (my own and theirs) in an effort to prioritize what I felt were the most important examples of assessment. The Lydia Burell video was taken down from Twitter during the course of these interviews and because of that, three interviews took place without the option to view that data. (For subsequent interviews, a video made from a previous interview's Zoom recording was used.)
[72] Commentary on both of these types of correctness arose from several interviewees in discussion of using *the N-words*, for instance.

metacommentary demonstrating his command of wide cross-regional AAL social meanings (including greeting examples from Chicago, St. Louis, and the wider DC, Maryland, and Virginia area as well), but at the same time he provides metacommentary describing why it would be inauthentic for him to use that variation productively in his environment: because it would not be authentic to him or his identities as a Black Detroiter. Journey's metacommentary indicates that language like this—language which is labeled *authentically Black*—can never be taken away from Black people, which may seem shocking to some linguists given how much we know about the ways in which AAL variation has become an engine of bottom-up language change across mainstream varieties of English. It is this realness-factor that Solomon and London are citing explicitly, this aspect of being true to oneself, that Journey is pointing towards with her metacommentary. If *authentically Black* voices are those which are the most honestly uplifting the experiences of Black people, if they are those which make Black folks the most comfortable in whatever settings they find themselves in, then indeed that is not something that can be appropriated away from the culture. That makes authenticity a moving target—something felt—and something that is continually redefined as the experiences of Black people continue to evolve. Whereas *talking White* remains a specific kind of speech style that (sometimes indirectly) indexes a specific kind of Whiteness, a Whiteness of power and prestige, a Whiteness that thrives in the rarified air of prescriptivism and appropriateness, a Whiteness that points backwards in time instead of forwards. These are the ways in which this Black professional community conceives of the speech styles that sit at either ends of their performative spectrum, styles they move through in the moment based on the various demands of their workplaces and wider social lives.

2.4.3 Metalinguistic Commentary on Self-Censorship

There is no specific question in the MMSI protocol about self-censorship; it is the first broad theme I will consider (in addition to Standard language ideologies and sociolinguistic labor in Chapter Three), examples of which will be discussed across interviewee interviews. As visualized in Image 2.3, Self-Censorship was a child code under Style Shifting, parented under Topic of Discussion. The Self-Censorship code was defined thusly: *To be used when interviewees cite linguistic actions they are aware of taking when moving between racialized styles. These codes should be tagged to excerpts only when the interviewee is referencing themselves.* Not all discussion of style shifting, tone policing, or the more specific in-group labels *talking White* and *authentically Black* the previous section covered will involve discussion of specific actions of self-censorship. These topics arise independently of the mention of specific

linguistic actions of self-censorship, and the key distinction is that self-censorship actions are reported as something the interviewee themself specifically does or doesn't do; they are not captured by a discussion of shifting as a practice in general or how or why a certain group of people might produce a shifted style. That said, the SELF-CENSORSHIP code does at times co-occur with codes across the STYLE SHIFTING code group (see Image 2.3), as well as the METACOMMENTARY (especially its child code RACE; see Image 2.2) and LANGUAGE & IDENTITY groups (see Image 2.1; and its child code APPROPRIATENESS). Some overlap will occur in this section as we look at some metacommentary examined in previous sections with fresh eyes to discover how metacommentary elicited about what a given label marks (for example) contains evidence of specific linguistic actions taken by a given interviewee as well.

Each distinct linguistic action mentioned by interviewees was assigned a code of its own (as a child code of SELF-CENSORSHIP; it has no other child codes). Across all interviews, 34 unique linguistic actions of self-censorship were reported, emerging during different points in the MMSI protocol, most often in response to the first question in the Language Varieties section[73] or to the question in the Final interview section on tone policing[74]. Jerome and Alisha did not report any linguistic actions coded as self-censorship[75]. Below I summarize the discussion on the theme of self-censorship across the remaining 15 interviewees, unpacking the most illustrative responses to demonstrate how this community conceptualizes their self-censorship practices and using their elicited metacommentary to continue addressing what motivates them to shift between their racialized styles. The most common linguistic actions of self-censorship to emerge are adjusting word choice and tone.

And you shouldn't have to think about that, you shouldn't have to suppress how you feel about a comment or something that someone said because you're Black and you're afraid of losing the things that you got, you know? Um, so you know I want people to hire me because of my work effort you know because of my resume and stuff like that, not because of how I act. Oh he's one of them different Black people…You're not like everyone else, you know, you talk proper and

[73] *How do you consider the types of language you use to be related to your racial identity?*
[74] *Do you find that you are tone policed for your language use?* (sometimes followed up by or substituted with *Do people call your speech or writing angry or aggressive or say you have an attitude?*)
[75] Jerome's transcript was rated once by all four raters, as it was one used to generate the master code tree, and was rated again by me for consistency with the master code tree after it was generated. Alisha's was rated by two RAs with the master code tree.

you know, you're educated…Don't get it twisted, I'm just like every other nigga. -Aries, Department of Defense

In terms of word choice, London and Lillian both discuss limiting their usage of *the N-words* (see also Section 2.4.1.10) specifically in professional or public usage. Solomon also discusses how elders in his family taught him that using "profanity was a sign of a lack of intelligence" and that lesson influences his so-called codeswitching practices at work, where he does not use profanity in an effort to avoid accidentally using *nigga* around White people. For Solomon (a 25-year-old working in the non-profit sector), shifting in the workplace is all about word choice, which involves not only what feels right for the setting, but also what will minimize his sociolinguistic labor. Solomon reports, "just like them asking like "oh what does this mean" and stuff like that I ain't got time to be explaining you know why I said this and not that and what this mean and all that so like I do get really you know watered you know toned down a little bit". The metacommentary by Desiree (a 33-year-old web designer) provides agreement on both counts: she doesn't use profanity at work and her language use at work is generally context dependent. She remarks that, when working in a corporate environment (which was a job she held in the past), White individuals in management "might be cussing in some of the kickoff meetings or you know being very candid…I never took that for granted um and I never allow myself to get that lax in a professional environment". Desiree provides several types of metacommentary simultaneously when discussing how growing up in a city like Detroit, "whose population is 85% Black", makes her feel like her word choices are "always about context" and are done more as "a sign of respect" for whomever she is responding to than as a reaction to their race or station. For Desiree, it is most important that her responses take on "a polite friendly tone", so much so that she runs all her professional correspondence through Grammarly software to ensure it, because she's been accused of sounding unfriendly in the past[76]. Sasha reflects on similar contextual reasons for engaging in tone control, which she states involves moving between linguistic styles. Sasha equates this movement to the cognitive experience of bilingualism described to her by a college roommate: "that's kinda how I feel is I start with my Black, hood, you know original, language first and then I translate it to the work language; makes you just constantly feel on I guess in both cases."

[76] This information was volunteered by Desiree during the Demographics section of the MMSI, in minute 8, not in response to the tone policing question.

These most common linguistic actions of adjusting word choice and tone are reported by Solomon and Desiree through context metacommentary. Their focus on the situations they find themselves in demonstrates that these individuals are intent on fitting their language to the demands of register or domain—to the demands of linguistic markets—and may highlight the ways in which their metalinguistic knowledge is arranged and deployed. Sasha's metacommentary indicates that she feels like both of her varieties need to always be active for her to engage in racialized style shifting in her workplace, that for her to control her tone in the ways that the professional register she is moving through demands, she needs to hold multiple linguistic codes active at once and reports that this type of activation is taxing. Sasha's need to pay attention to tone is engagement in sociolinguistic labor; when Sasha acquiesces to the ways in which her specific workplace register suggests her tone of voice be controlled, she has taken on sociolinguistic labor and thus all the work she's doing becomes a little harder. Solomon's metacommentary indicates that he is avoiding working harder by not keeping his racialized variety as active and allowing his production to be a little "toned down". Both of these individuals are producing similar language, or performing similar personae (Zhang 2005, D'Onofrio 2015; King 2021), in the workplace as Black professionals, but their metacommentary reveals different motivating factors for taking similar linguistic actions.

A number of interviewees report that they engaged in self-censorship practices more often in their younger years. Yolanda (46) remarks that she does not "have to filter language as much" around Black and Brown folks now that she's been using language as a site of healing through her career as a writer and speaker. Journey discusses filtering as well in recalling that she spent time around people from many different cultural backgrounds growing up, especially in her religious life. She says "I feel like I tried to water myself down a little bit too so that I wouldn't appear as~ so like you know maybe people would like maybe people would think better of Black people if I like made a good quote unquote example". Alex also reflects on feelings of racio-cultural ambassadorship as a light-skinned Black woman, who had difficulty fitting in with White women, but whom they were comfortable enough around to ask her all of their race related questions. Alex wanted to be open with these White women, and describes how the self-censorship practices she'd established at work made their way into these social situations of racio-cultural ambassadorship in her youth, where she was also trying to set a good example of open and accommodating Blackness:

> When I was younger, I was more polished. But I was also more perky. Because I was accused of being um Black girl with an attitude and a tone. So when I was working in customer service, you would get that um those super bubbly White

> girls on the phone like Hey, how's it going how are you today blah blah blah _mimicking a faster-paced, higher-pitched style_ and when I didn't do that I was rude…I would find myself doing that around people, when I got around White people, I used the customer service voice.

Chance also describes a situation early in his career where self-censorship was a part of his daily professional practice. One of Chance's first jobs was as a telemarketer, which involved cold calling. Chance reports that in this position he would take a number of linguistic actions to disguise his race, including using a higher pitched voice to sound "lighter" over the phone, using this adjective multiple times. Chance goes on:

> I was um seventeen. And so I was you know growing up in Detroit, I'm doing cold calls and I'm getting hung up on as soon as I say hello you know. I'm living in Detroit and I'm having this impression that people think Black people are scammers and things like that, and so I'm like okay maybe I should try not to sound Black and so that was an identity crisis um to be honest. And having to shorten my voice and um try to sound like a different race just because I was nervous of being found out that oh my gosh this Black guy is tryna ask me for money.

Journey and Yolanda report above that self-censorship practices were most common to them as younger professionals. In reflecting on these periods of usage they provide context metacommentary that characterizes their racialized language use as something that can be filtered; language that can be present in a more natural state when people who are not White are there to receive it. When contexts (which for Yolanda do not exclude the usage of Black language by their nature) begin to include people of other races or different cultural backgrounds, racialized language begins to signal different social meanings, different things about Black life that those individuals may not understand. As Solomon discussed above, perhaps then one waters down their racialized language because they don't want to do the work of bringing differently positioned people up to speed. As Alex's race and community of practice metacommentary indicates, polishing what she perceives to be the rougher parts of her more natural language state—her tone—could be undertaken to ensure things said around White people aren't misconstrued. As Journey (a 25-year-old working in IT) indicates, that watering down action could also be undertaken because one doesn't want people to assume bad things about all Black people from the linguistic actions of a single Black person—perhaps the only Black person other individuals are regularly exposed to. Journey's metacommentary points towards a recognition of ideological reification (Hill 2008; Wright 2017), that actions which confirm linguistic stereotypes—like the production of non-Standard variables by non-White (or non-normative) people—can be used to further reinforce the indexation or linkage through

raciolinguistic ideologies of Black (or non-normative) bodies with linguistic deficiency or even deficiency more broadly.

None of this metacommentary necessarily indicates movement *between* racialized styles; none of these interviewees have explicitly characterized these actions as such in the sections of metacommentary I've shared. They are, however, reporting linguistic actions taken to obscure parts of their speaking styles they are aware to be racialized at certain times for certain reasons. And as Chance's context metacommentary indicates, there may be a whole host of actions one might take to mask the perception of Blackness in a voice-only context to an attempt to achieve better outcomes with any potential interlocutor. Chance's awareness that the single word *hello* can carry enough racial information for him to be detrimentally linguistically profiled is supported by the findings of Scharinger et al. (2011), which demonstrates that areas of the brain that recognize voices "quickly extract speaker identity, dialectal and racial information from spoken words" (p.2336). Thus, all the linguistic actions he was undertaking may have been worthwhile.

Additionally, Jones & Shorter-Gooden's (2003) African American Women's Voices Project, which chronicles the experiences of 333 U.S. Black working women from 2000-2002, reports at length on the *watering down* phenomenon, extending it to the invisibility of the Black woman in the American workplace. Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) discuss this phenomenon from the perspective of tokenization, what I have termed above racio-cultural ambassadorship. Tokenization, in my opinion, is something that is placed upon you; someone else tokenizes you, calls you out, makes you become an example of your race or gender or other embodied positionality. Ambassadorship is something you take up; as Journey and Alex report, it is a feeling you place upon yourself, a labor you choose and actions you engage in willingly, if under sociocultural pressure to do so. Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) discuss how being one of a few Black women in a workplace makes an individual "highly visible" and this "leads to heightened pressure to perform in a stellar fashion" (p.158). As the Black individual is doing their best to acculturate to this new workplace or social space, they are moving further and further away from themselves if they become more successful in a White space as they keep watering down (as Jones & Shorter-Gooden are describing it, their full presentation of racialized self, not merely linguistically). Eventually, the Blackness of this individual disappears entirely: "'Now that we see you', the White workplace seems to tell them, "we're going to try not to notice that you're there'" (p.158). This invisibility harkens to the epigraph of this dissertation from James Baldwin; it *is* a very grave matter indeed for these individuals—Journey, Alex, Solomon, Chance—to water

themselves down just enough to not cause trouble for themselves or others, but perhaps also enough to be ignored by the people around them.

Several interviewees do discuss their motivations for engaging in self-censorship directly, either in the past or present. Journey reports that, when she was younger, she didn't "want to look ghetto or whatever" and this is why she watered herself down around people of other races, to be a good example of the Black race. Lillian shares a related story about attending a summer program in scholarly research through her high school that was hosted at the University of Michigan. During this program, Lillian was competing and winning in Chemical Engineering and Chemistry and a White woman had come up to congratulate her on the ribbons adorning her projects. A Physics teacher at their high school had coached them on what to say while visiting U of M's campus: "When someone asks you what school you go to you don't say Kettering, you say Charles F. Kettering". Lillian recalls saying "Charles F. Kettering" to this woman, and the woman responding, "Wow you're so articulate". Lillian spent time discussing how this comment from the White woman has stuck with her over the years, how it was a "backhanded compliment", because it meant that this woman didn't expect someone who went to Lillian's school or looked like her to be able to speak well. Lillian always speaks well now. In their treatise on "languaging race" (p.3), Alim & Smitherman (2012) consider the ways in which the concept of articulateness interacted with former U.S. President Barack Obama's rise to power and presidency. The authors examine the use of the term *articulate* in detail by surveying 50 (racially-diverse) undergraduate students and find that, for Black people, the word *articulate* in reference to speech is indeed, as Lillian claims, a backhanded compliment, even a specific "form of racism" (p.33). Individuals from other racial backgrounds felt the word *articulate* could be used in a complimentarily fashion without issue.

Sasha (a 37-year-old entrepreneur)'s motivations for self-censorship come from an impression that when she is being direct or passionate, she is perceived as aggressive. Desiree and Alex share this impression. Sasha cites several strategies she takes at work to mitigate being seen as aggressive, including sandwiching her suggestions in between compliments, because, as she states below:

> everything I do has been cited you know in the past as angry or you know you're being a little aggressive. I'm not saying anything different than he just said across the table right…but I have had to like when I'm in my board meetings you know even if I have something to say and I'm passionate about it, I have to make sure I'm kinda sitting back when I say it, I have to make sure like I don't lean forward,

> so there's things over time that I have learned because no matter how soft or nice I try to say it, it just they see aggression when I say it, so.

Chance also has noted the ways in which his passion is mistaken for aggression. Chance attended law school and part of that course of study involves conducting mock trials, wherein Chance learned the types of linguistic actions he needed to engage in so as not to be perceived as aggressive in the practice of his profession:

> Do I pay attention more to how I enunciate words? Yeah I do. Especially if I'm speaking to a client or you know speaking to the court. I make sure that my words are clear and easy to be understood right, and I also have to make sure that I don't get too excited when I'm talking because, while I was in law school, I would be competing in mock trial and…I'd be very passionate about something really trying to bring it home and I'd have uh people say, and now mind you I'm one of the few Black men at school, people would say you know "It feels like you're yelling at me" You know and I have said, "Well, I'm not." You know, "I'm not yelling." But they, I had to understand that, you know there's a certain way that people view Black men um like I mentioned earlier, our voices are naturally deeper, and so it just comes off different. And so I have to be mindful of moderating my tone to not give off the impression that I'm yelling.

Aries adds to these impressions of perceived aggression the presence of a certain fear related to speaking up, of using one's *authentically Black* voice, in the workplace "because of the cost that you may lose your job, you may lose your um status". Alex extends this fear of speaking up into the wider world, telling two long stories, one about a hospital stay and one about finding a new pediatrician for her son, when she was perceived as being aggressive or having *a tone*, and was left without treatment. Although Alex feels like she doesn't do much shifting between styles at work, because she's never really been an Ebonics speaker (although she knows it and uses it some with her friends and family from East Detroit), she is aware of engaging in some linguistic actions of self-censorship in the present because of this fear. Alex reports, "we don't have the ability, as Black people, but especially women, to speak up for ourselves. And that's when my tone is changed, and sometimes I do become self conscious of it".

Desiree offers presenting oneself in such a way that they will be "taken seriously" as her motivation for engaging in linguistic actions of self-censorship. When discussing these motivations, Desiree (a 33-year-old web designer) gives the colorful examples of an individual not expecting the concierge to speak French when they arrive in Cancun or the tour guide to speak Spanish when they are at the Louvre in her context metacommentary. She goes on to say that "when it comes to African American vernacular you know what I'm saying um I don't really always think that like oh um I'm ghetto or you know speaking like this or anything like that"

but that there are certain situations where using that voice just isn't expected and "while you can find people that may understand you um while you may find people that are willing to meet you halfway um something is gonna get lost in translation; people might not necessarily think that you're a viable source".

Chance also reflects near the end of our interview on this idea of not being taken seriously, or always being seen in a certain way if he isn't doing something to control the ways in which his language is being perceived because of his embodied Blackness, remarking:

> When I was in law school, um just having to you know do competitions and having to do a voice check, so to say. That was, you know, that was something I had to overcome uh that was something that I had to realize, okay, this is the world I'm in you know I hey, all I can do is control what I can control, and what I can control is myself…I had to accept that okay I'm dealing with people who may have a preconceived notion of me. You know uh and I have to speak a certain way, because I understand how they're looking at me and I had to accept that.

In Journey's community of practice metacommentary about the motivations for her linguistic actions of self-censorship, she doesn't provide a story for why she feels like she "didn't want to look ghetto or whatever" in front of non-Black people, but Lillian's story about the *articulate* encounter with the White woman at the summer science fair provides an illustrative example of why Journey might feel that way. Young Black people are often coached by their elders in the Black community, as Lillian was by her Physics teacher, on how to become ambassadors when they leave the safety of the neighborhood. And when the lessons are perhaps not that explicit, many of us also experience the kinds of traumatic interactions Lillian describes (and Jerome describes in Section 2.4.2.1)—being encountered by members of the White race who are surprised by our intelligence, our fluency, our less-than-ghetto nature.

Many Black people are also all too familiar with having to rein in their passion, as Sasha (a 37-year-old entrepreneur) and Chance describe, because it is misconstrued as aggression. Hill (2008) outlines a folk theory of racism[77] which engages (from a top down, generalized stance) with the ways in which perceptions of aggression operate in these spaces. Hill (2008, pp. 158-

[77] Hill (2008) defines the folk theory of racism in Chapter One of her book. In summary, a folk theory is part of the common sense order of the world, akin to ideologies. The folk theory of racism holds that race is inherently biological and can be traced to geographic origins. Every human being belongs to at least one racial group, and that eventually through interbreeding, the races will all become one. The folk theory also hold that racism is a matter of actions, thus White Supremacy is something that cannot be a product of structural racism, but is only enacted by cross-burning, hood-wearing, lynch-mobbing, totally one hundred percent out and proud White Supremacists.

174) discusses the ways in which the many assumptions that stem from the folk theory of racism have led to White racism becoming part and parcel to common sense aspects of mainstream U.S. culture. It is no secret that Black people are perceived as aggressive or inherently violent. Wright (2017, 2021), expanding on Hill's (2008) work, engages with this concept by demonstrating that Black athletes are described with adjectives more related to brute force than skill. Sasha and Chance's context metacommentary about withholding their passion in the workplace[78] speaks to their awareness that each subsequent perception of Black aggression has cumulative consequences for the reification of such cognitive products like the folk theory of racism. As Hill (2008) describes, "Each time this common sense plays out in talk and behavior, these fundamental ideas become available anew, and people use them to understand what has happened and to negotiate interaction" (p.19). This common sense here referring, in our discussion, to the misconstrual of impassioned Blackness as aggression. What we learn from Aries' and Alex's additional metacommentary with respect to their fear of speaking up as a motivator for self-censorship practices is that the stakes are much higher than reification of cognitive products—that one's social mobility, that one's access to healthcare, can be taken away if Black people do not remain attentive to the varieties they are producing, inside and outside of the workplace, because of their embodied positionality. In the discussion of the in-group labels *talking White* (Section 2.4.2.1) and *authentically Black* (Section 2.4.2.2), Maurice and Jerome both include metacommentary which touches on Black generations past having a necessity to engage in practices which included self-censorship, potentially so much so that they were unrecognizable or under suspicion in their own communities (according to Maurice) or so much so that they had adopted a new variety all together in Standard English (according to Jerome). These interviewees—Sasha, Chance, Alex, Jerome, Desiree, Aries—report engaging in self-censorship in the present, and for many (I would assume) do so for the same necessities needed to "survive in the world, White world" (see Section 2.4.2.1) like mobility, validity, and care that Jerome and Maurice's metacommentary pointed towards as motivating Black professionals to take similar actions as far back as a century in the past. That these motivations and linguistic actions of self-censorship remain stable in this population indicates stability in the value—or exchange rate—of racialized linguistic material in professional linguistic markets; it indicates that racialized linguistic material has remained under- or de-valued in such a way that

[78] This practice is so well known in the Black community to have been satirized on the popular Comedy Central show Key & Peele (2012), which depicted a recurring character, Luther, as President Obama's "anger translator". Luther represents a stereotyped version of Black aggression, while the Obama character delivers staid prose in his iconic Black-Accented Standard variety. An example can be found here: https://youtu.be/-qv7k2_Ic0M

Black professionals continue to struggle not only with expressing a full range of emotions, but also with self-determination.

Desiree (a 33-year-old web designer) describes how a Black professional using their racialized variety in the workplace might create a situation where “people might not necessarily think that you’re a viable source”, even if they were “willing to meet you halfway”. The example about encountering French-speaking professionals in Cancun or Spanish-speaking professionals at the Louvre she provides is a potent and illustrative one, because most of us can place ourselves in the situation in which we would be willing to meet such an individual halfway (as Desiree suggested), but might find ourselves wondering if the information they provide is genuine or complete. The idea that a Black professional who is not using White Standardized spoken English in the practice of their profession might not be a viable source of information has teeth (I offer an illustrative example in Section 3.3). Young (2010) engages with this idea, citing a 2004 survey from the National Commission on Writing (p.112) which reports that a third of employees at the nation’s blue-chip companies at the time were not strong writers. It is safe to assume that a third of employees are not viewed as less than viable sources in the practice of their professions; it is perhaps only those for whom raciolinguistic ideologies are also at play who suffer under such distinctions or work to mitigate them. Chance for example has had to accept that he must “speak a certain way” to practice his profession because the people he interacts with have certain expectations about how Black people behave, and if he does not behave accordingly, they can summarily dismiss what he has to say. When Chance tells us that he speaks clearly so that “people can hear”, it means more than compelling his articulators just so to create sound waves that travel across the room unhindered.

Finally, three interviewees provide metalinguistic commentary that reveals these behaviors, these linguistic actions, are indeed about censoring the *self*. Near the end of the Demographics section of the MMSI (as described in Section 2.3.1.2), there is a question about what advice interviewees would give to a new Black employee joining their workspace. In answering this question, Aries (a 30-year-old working for the Department of Defense) says that he wants to be able to tell this fictional employee they don’t have to worry about the way they dress, and that they don’t have to worry about codeswitching, but he can’t do that, he can’t say “be yourself, don’t try to um think that you have to be someone else because you are in this work environment”. Aries goes on, remarking:

> These are stigmas I wanna break. It's hard um and I still probably do certain things today uh when in meetings you know, using proper English, you know, uh making sure I'm not the tardy person…just certain things like that because I feel like anything that we do is magnified compared to what they do.

Alex also places an emphasis on linguistic actions that obscure markers of Blackness in one's speech style being actions that also obscure the self. She remembers very clearly a moment in her life when she decided not to do this anymore. Alex was a student in the History department at the University of Michigan, a "primarily White male dominated" place, to which she had transferred from a Detroit community college. Being there, she said:

> the pressure on yourself to be perfect included your speech and presentation…and then I always say, Barack Obama happened. Barack Obama was a well spoken, intelligent, highly educated and his amazing wife, but they didn't put that extra enunciation and you know how are you doing today, you know they didn't do that. So, I'm educated, but I'm Black. So, I'm not going to put pressure on myself to change my tone to accommodate you, to make myself look more approachable and less aggressive. And once I do that I actually feel more comfortable in my own skin and in my zone, and to me that makes me a better presenter, a better speaker, because you're not putting that extra pressure on yourself to be something that you're not.

Alex goes on to discuss how useful her natural speaking voice is in the classroom, how it makes her more accessible as an instructor to her community college students, and how she wants to sound like Oprah who also always uses her heritage to her advantage. Chance also speaks about using his heritage to his advantage now in the courtroom, using it as "seasoning" when necessary in a way that other lawyers can't because they don't have access to his experiences, to his positionality. Chance was drawn to his profession, in part, because of the "identity crisis" he suffered as a telemarketer at seventeen when he chose to "try to sound like a different race" at work. He calls up this experience again later in his interview, remarking that "to be honest, I wasn't that successful at it. I couldn't fake it for that long. You know, I realized early that I don't like working where I'm faking it. I don't feel like I'm living to the fullest of my potential if I'm having to be someone else".

Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) also discuss the very real feelings that Aries, Alex, and Chance share—that engaging with linguistic actions which shift away from indicators of Blackness in their language use can mean shifting away from who they are as people. The authors, in cataloging the mental toll the so-called double duty Black women do in the workplace takes, claim:

> The workplace is where Black women feel they must shift most often, engaging in a grown-up game of pretend as they change their voices, attitudes, and

> postures[79] to meet cultural codes of workday America as well as the broader societal codes of gender, race, and class…Many women testify to spending several hours a day feeling profoundly disconnected from who they truly are, a loneliness that may remain long past quitting time, when the dishes are washed and the children are in bed. Some come to feel so fragmented that they end up believing there is nowhere they truly fit in. (p.150)

Throughout the course of their interviews, Aries, Alex, and Chance each report actively finding ways to bring their racialized styles into their respective workplaces. However, each of them also reports practicing linguistic actions of self-censorship that cannot be avoided in their professions because of the ways in which they are perceived due to their embodied positionality as Black people. These kinds of linguistic actions are engaged in due to immense social pressures, because of fear of incurring great risk to body and being[80]. Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) (see also Keels et al. 2017; Hutton 2022) reinforce that these choices are not valueless outside their immediate protective impact, that obscuring the self each day—even in small ways—has an effect, and that those actions can have deep, cumulative, personal consequences.

Table 2.2 summarizes the major themes on linguistic self-censorship emerging from these Black professionals' metacommentary. These themes seem to indicate that, in general,

[79] As Sasha described above with respect to not leaning forward in board meetings.
[80] Which are not in any way unfounded; see Holliday, Burdin, and Tyler (2015).

Emergent Self-Censorship Themes	
Linguistic Actions	Reported Motivations
Avoiding profanity	To mitigate perceived lack of intelligence To mitigate risk/double standards in workplace
Tone control	Disguise race Be more accommodating To not be perceived as rude To be understood To fit in
Filtering	To mitigate being seen as a bad example of Black race To fit in Too much work otherwise
Using the Standard	To not seem ghetto Because you thought I was gonna seem ghetto Because it is expected To be understood
Mitigating perceived aggression (including changing embodied stance, volume, speech rate, etc.)	To be taken seriously To be seen as a viable source To be seen at all To stay safe

Table 2.2: Common linguistic actions of self-censorship and what motivates them, as reported through interviewees' metalinguistic commentary

individuals style shift for individual motivations. Although there are commonalities in the types of linguistic actions taken, each interviewee speaks to their individual reasons for engaging with them. Each of these personal accounts contains information that illuminates motivations for self-censorship which stem both from ideologically- and market-driven forces. Lillian and Jerome, for example, are both motivated through sociocultural ambassadorship to produce the Standard variety because they want to be viewed as intelligent, upstanding members of the community; this is a stance that reflects and reifies Standard language ideologies, which mark something deficient in the character of the non-Standard language user (Section 1.3.1). Others, like Desiree and Sasha, say less at work, acquiescing to what the linguistic market expects of Black women (which, according to Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003 is fading into the background). These divergent individual motivations, seated under the umbrella of self-censorship as a practice, reveal that similar social meanings can be enacted from differently positioned users, taking up different stances, when acting in similar markets or employing similar linguistic material.

That very few interviewees name the specific varieties they move between in the practice of their professions—or at the very least are aware of silencing—gives ground for understanding how this community conceives of the styles they move through. As in the metacommentary on

authentically Black voices, which did not single out a specific style of speech but focused on the ways in which using those varieties makes one feel or seem in the world, there is similar metacommentary on self-censorship which centers not on the featural components of styles shifted away from, but on the ways in which linguistic actions of self-censorship affect the language user. This metacommentary begins to elucidate ways the heterogeneous collectivity of Black professionals may come to share metalinguistic knowledge of how to "animate [the] social category" (King 2021 p.174) or persona of Black Professional, as it is through a shared feeling or sense of appropriateness that these interviewees seem to gauge in the moment whether or not they can safely "season" their linguistic production with more racialized material. This sense being developed through individual experiences and stances, but converging on a set of shared behaviors due to the inelasticity of the linguistic market for Black professionals in terms of self-expression.

2.5 Discussion

This chapter presented the development and first application of the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI). The aspects of this application that were discussed in particular detail are the outcomes of one elicitation task—the Discussion of Targeted Terms Task (Section 2.3.1.4)—and the findings from interviewees' metalinguistic commentary elicited in responses to two specific research questions from the Language Varieties section of the MMSI which ask about what the in-group labels *talking White* and *authentically Black* are marking. I similarly delved into the theme of self-censorship, a topic that spanned multiple MMSI sections and engages directly with social factors which may motivate Black professionals to style shift away from their racialized varieties in professional spaces. Taken together, the outcomes of analyses of the interview data establish that the MMSI protocol is successful in eliciting the types of metalinguistic commentary it was designed to elicit (as discussed in more detail in Section 3.4.1).

Through this elicited metacommentary I also demonstrated that positionality (embodied and otherwise) matters in several ways with respect to informing or shaping the metalinguistic knowledge interviewees reveal. In their discussion of terms like *corny* and *the N-words*, interviewees reveal that my positionality—the aspects of my racial and professional identity and the stated purpose for the data I am collecting—influenced the information they were reporting. All told, across the 40 total hours of interviews, nine of 17 interviewees noted that they were sharing some point of information they would not otherwise, but chose to do so because of my

positionality. Researcher identity, as well as the topic under discussion and the ways in which it relates to that specific identity, have been shown to have facilitating and/or hindering effects on interviewee production by Rickford & McNair-Knox (1994), and these results indicate that not only do these audience-based effects remain extant, but that language users are sufficiently aware of them to discuss them openly if they are comfortable enough with their interlocutor to do so. That said, if I appeared more phenotypically Black- or White-presenting (to the extent my embodied range allows) on a given day, that may have influenced outcomes, and I intend to control for such variation in the future by designing interview attire that can remain consistent.

Positionality informs metalinguistic awareness, in that we observe interviewees providing reports on lexical meaning that converge and diverge along lines of age, gender, race, and region (see Table 2.1). Convergence and divergence is also observed in terms of the same aspect of embodied positionality, as discussed with respect to *shawty* in Section 2.4.1.11, where interviewees converge in terms of reports of the gendered social meaning of a term, but diverge in terms of reports of their individual (dis)preference for using the term due to their embodied gender. Positionality also informs style shifting motivations, which are much more varied than expressing racial identity (King 2020)—White or Black. Interviewees discuss moving towards the style marked by the *talking White* label because it is a necessity for mobility, because they want to fit in, because they want to stay safe. Interviewees discuss moving towards producing language that can be labeled *authentically Black* because it makes them feel more comfortable, because it doesn't feel like work, because it is what is most true to themselves. Becker (2017) indicated that the reasons a researcher engages in sociolinguistic interview study is to describe "the community pattern". What emerged from this positionality-informed metalinguistic commentary is a fuller picture of the community pattern of Black professional style shifting, and the wider pattern of "the discursive doing of race" (King 2020). Race is inseparable from the actions of racialized people; we can't take Blackness off our bodies (although some corporations sure do try and make us believe that's possible; see Reyes 2020). However, having this community unpack their conceptualizations of the productions of racialized styles (and I am including *talking White* here) illustrates the distance between the material reality of race and the discursive self-actualization of a racialized life, which often (though not always; see Maurice and Yolanda's metacommentary on *talking White* in Section 2.4.2.1) do not cite racial identity as motivation for the linguistic actions they undertake. Representing the fullness of social meanings made by these individuals helps to get at what Agha (2006) calls the "multiple coordination problem", which seeks to understand how an individual's partially overlapping

perspectives on forms and values can yield regularized interactions in certain contexts. In discussing *authentically Black* speech, both Journey and Yolanda discuss the ways in which they feel context itself doesn't do much to determine whether or not they are going to be using AAL features. What determines that is the presence or absence of Black people in a given space because of the specific social meanings (like being ghetto or being aggressive) the use of AAL features can invoke. What is of note in this metacommentary is a demonstration of the knowledge these individuals possess about the ways in which the bodies of other people can toggle the social meanings available in a given context; White people show up and the words in your mouth start to mean something else.

This kind of metacommentary begins to reveal why interviewees like Aries, Alex, and Chance—who feel compelled to use their AAL features at work—still labor under the necessity to produce more standardized styles in those spaces as well. Assimilationist sociolinguistic labor remains present across this community of Black professionals, which seems to indicate that market valuation and ideological influences can potentially override individual drives and stances.

Further elaboration and interpretation of these findings is provided in Chapter Three. In that chapter, I turn to three case studies, which are geared in part towards enriching the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor (Holliday & Squires 2020) through a deeper understanding of agentive constructions of identity. Using the case study approach allows for an in-depth look at a single interviewee's entire interview session with the consideration of a specific theme in mind. That chapter ends with a broad discussion of findings emerging from Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Three Case Studies

3.1 Chapter Three Overview

This chapter presents case studies which will provide a more in-depth engagement with the themes of Standard language ideologies (Section 1.3.1) and sociolinguistic labor (Section 1.5) this dissertation is primarily concerned with. As in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.3), these case studies, also drawing on broad thematic sections, are not restricted to responses to specific interview questions, but instead cover responses spanning the breadth of an individual interviewee's metacommentary on a given theme. The first two case studies (Section 3.2) contrast metalinguistic commentary from two interviewees—Jerome and Solomon—on the theme of Standard language ideologies. These case studies engage with the ways in which these omnipresent ideologies shape style shifting practices of individuals who share positionality in terms of race and region, but may orient to the linguistic aspects of their professional identities in different ways.

The third case study (Section 3.3)—covering Simone's interview—focuses on sociolinguistic labor, presenting metacommentary illustrating the ways in which a professional Black woman has taken on additional linguistic effort in the workplace throughout her career. The case study approach provides an in-depth engagement with these themes. This chapter ends by combining revelations from the three individuals presented in these case studies with Chapter Two's across-interviewee findings about linguistic actions of self-censorship and the effects of embodied positionality on metalinguistic knowledge distribution to enrich the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor to account for a wider range of agentive constructions of identity.

3.2 Introduction: Two Case Studies on Standard Language Ideologies

Standard language ideologies, as discussed in Section 1.3.2, are cognitive objects developed through historical social domination which passively operate in the minds of all language users. These ideologies exhibit a bias toward White Standardized spoken English (in the contemporary United States), which enjoys institutional support as the preferred usage in all formal, creative, and technical writing, in courts and across professions. Assimilation to this variety is required for

social mobility. Although Standard language ideologies influence all of us, these ideologies—these cognitive objects—can be actively resisted or suppressed. Many of us are likely familiar with doing the mental—and subsequent social—work involved in the suppression of ideologies such as American exceptionalism, misogynoir, and ableism to name a few, and how that work in our own interior, cognitive lives can become expressed through our language use through the ways in which we refer to our fellow countrymen, the exploits of dark skinned women, or the differently abled.

In this section, I present two case studies that demonstrate how two interviewees—Jerome and Solomon—represent opposite ends of the spectrum with regard to the uptake of Standard language ideologies. These case studies will cover responses spanning the breadth of these individuals' interviews that demonstrate their orientation to Standard language ideologies. These two individuals were chosen because, across the 17 Black professionals interviewed, they appear to represent the individuals who have least (Jerome) and most (Solomon) resisted the uptake of Standard language ideologies, which in their operation devalue and delegitimize interviewees' racialized variety production in domains outside their homes and neighborhoods. Engaging with these case studies helps to illustrate the ways in which Standard language ideologies are influencing the community under study—Black Professionals—all of whom (but in particular Sasha, Chance, Alex, Journey, Desiree, and Aries; see Section 2.4.3) acquiesce to assimilation to the Standard required for social mobility to an extent while also laboring to find ways to incorporate and value their racialized language production in the practice of their daily social being.

3.2.1 Jerome: A Case Study on Ideological Uptake

Because some of our people um are not educated and may not have you know and haven't been anywhere so when they get out somewhere and they're just used to who they are, you know, they don't know how to voice themselves in a manner that is productive for them. And I'm not saying you forget who you are, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that your voice matters, but you know if you _sighs_ you tryna get a job. -Jerome, an English Language Arts instructor

Jerome grew up in Southwest Detroit, in an area called "the hole", near where the streetcar used to stop on Schaefer. He recalls walking to his elementary school when he was young, which was located in his neighborhood. Jerome is a father of three, has two M.A. degrees, and

has been working in education for over 20 years—teaching K-5 for 14 years and now middle school. He aspires to complete a doctorate when his youngest is off to college.

Education wasn't always something that Jerome valued, but in high school it became clear when he started playing football that he could earn a ride to college if he invested himself both in the sport and his studies. Early in the interview, I ask interviewees to reflect on memorable experiences from their school years, and in answering this question Jerome recalls transitioning from a young man with anger issues into "the man" who was in the National Honors Society, in the local newspaper, and had the eye of college recruiters.

Before becoming an educator himself, Jerome places clear value on education as an avenue out of "the hole" which he grew up in. He describes engaging with academic and athletic achievement because he knows it would assist his parents in paying for college. Later in our interview, in discussing the *authentically Black* label, Jerome includes metacommentary[81] on "the ancestors who were able to go off to college and better themselves and learn so that they could survive in the world". The characterization of the pursuit of higher education here as something that would better oneself underscores a valuing of education—and through it the acquisition and mastery of Standard language—as something that adds worth to a person. Other interviewees (e.g., Maurice and Yolanda) also discuss African American elders needing to use White language to survive in the world, of that being a necessity, but they do not discuss the pursuit of education in this way, of it adding value to the ancestors as people. This characterization of becoming acculturated to White ways of knowing as becoming better demonstrates at the very least, in the young Jerome, fertile ground for the uptake of Standard language ideologies. Couple this with the contagious urban myth that playing sports (or joining the military) will be the Black family's ticket out of poverty (Morris & Martin 2019; Wright 2021), and the stage for Jerome is now fully set.

Jerome is an English Language Arts instructor. In the first 20 minutes of our interview, Jerome describes his professional trajectory in detail. We talk about the various school districts he's worked in and the different challenges they've presented in terms of their various resources and levels of racial diversity. At the end of the Demographics section (see Section 2.3.1.2), I ask all interviewees about their current and future goals, and Jerome discusses transitioning into a

[81] This metacommentary is also discussed with respect to *authentically Black* voices in Section 2.4.2.2 above.

more administrative role, which he feels has eluded him for some time. Jerome has been applying for administrative jobs in school districts across Southeastern Michigan for years, and describes one interview where he is certain that he didn't get the job because he made a mistake—he used a single word he shouldn't have: *hungry*. He described the utterance like "they were asking me about and when I finished the statement I said, you know, I'm ready for this, I'm hungry. That's not, you know, interview language that you should use". I asked him to say more about why the word *hungry* didn't fit the situation. He stated the following:

> Because when you're in a room in Ferndale at that time…uh you know because when you are coming to a district and you, and the interview panel is predominately all uh White you know you…but still that's still not the professional language to use.

I will discuss Jerome's reaction to *hungry*, but I would also like to add another interaction that stands out to him. He reported being reprimanded for his style and presentation during a year working for a school district in Germantown, Maryland. In this instance, a reading specialist was visiting his classroom, and his students were especially rowdy that day. He was attempting to get them to settle down, but to no avail, so he raised his voice saying "ladies and gentlemen, sit your butts down and get back to work". That afternoon, he received a long email from the visiting specialist "scolding" him for being so "harsh" with the students, and his principal had been cc'd. By the next morning, he was in her office, and the principal told him to control his language with the students in the future saying "I didn't hire you to be a Detroit drill sergeant". Jerome chalks this reaction up to him being a large, loud, Black male—the only one on staff.

These two early career events have had a significant impact on the ways in which Jerome controls his linguistic performance today, and the ways in which he characterizes what appropriate language use is for his students (which we will discuss below). Jerome attributes his inability to secure a position as an administrator to the use of a single word, *hungry*—one that was merely non-Standard in that context (meaning not particularly racialized)—being perceived as unprofessional. Attributing the dispreferred outcome of the job interview to the utterance of this single word—and adjusting his subsequent linguistic behavior accordingly—are artifacts of the cognitive distortion inherent in (as discussed in Section 1.3.2) linguistic ideological operation (see Woolard 1998; Thompson 1990). Jerome monitors his language use carefully so as to avoid disadvantageous outcomes such as this one, and the incident in Maryland. The *butts* debacle involves multiple individuals with power over Jerome—but specifically two White women—finding that, again, his use of a single word (albeit with increased volume and in a

different context) is inappropriate—so much so that he should be censured for it, that they should step into his classroom and adjust his behavior. Jerome absorbs all of the responsibility for what took place in the classroom, placing the blame on his embodied Blackness. The idea that Standard language ideologies might be at play—because the word *hungry* is actually not that bad, because raising one's voice over the din of a classroom is actually not that bad, because the word *butts* is actually not that bad, because telling students to sit on them when they are off task is actually not that bad—or that maybe he just was not a good fit for that Ferndale job, or that out and out racism from the two White women in Germantown might be at play is never considered. Jerome lives through these experiences and holds on to their negative outcomes as evidence—as ammunition—for why one needs to be careful not to produce racialized (or as he terms it, non-Standard) language as a professional.

Later in our interview, during the discussion of the label *talking White*, Jerome recalled the time during his M.A. program that he learned about Standard language. It was a pivotal moment for him. He stated, "When I took some classes at Wayne County Community College uh reading classes and things of that nature, one of the professors a adjunct then, I said the word proper. He said "There's no such thing as talking proper, it's either Standard English or non-Standard English". Jerome repeats this phrase several times throughout the interview. When asked how his language use relates to his racial identity, Jerome answers "I know how to use Standard English versus non-Standard English". He characterizes Standard English as something to be used in "a professional setting or doctor's office" and non-Standard English to be used "with the boys". In this discussion, Jerome also remarks that he believes that if he was "just talking to somebody, somebody would probably think that I'm African American, in a sense".

Jerome knows that there is a Standard variety, that it has a name (which is not knowledge all the other Black professionals interviewed shared), and that it belongs in certain venues and that his racialized variety—the one he uses "with the boys"—does not belong in those same venues. He is aware of moving between varieties, and in doing so, always sounding Black regardless of style chosen. The placement scheme he has adopted was handed to him by an instructor when he was in the course of learning how to become an educator. The term *proper*, as a characterization of White speech or the Standard variety as such, has, for all intents and purposes, its own racialized semantic scope (see Weldon 2021, pp.100-139). Jerome is not participating in the same usage parameters, the same invoked social meanings, as his fellow interviewees with respect to the term *proper*, as he is the only one who makes the very clear

appeal to White ways of knowing. In saying “there’s no such thing as talking proper”, Jerome aligns with Standard language ideologies by invoking languagelessness, robbing the racialized meaning of its semantic scope, thereby invalidating the lived experiences of Black people which give it that scope.

Jerome’s M.A. thesis is on “urban fifth graders reading comprehension and the Black English Vernacular”. His philosophy as an instructor is centered on “tryna help students become better readers” and in a “Detroit public school on the straight up deep East side” he tested a method for improving reading comprehension in students: codeswitching[82]. In discussing this approach, Jerome invokes his Standard versus non-Standard English mantra, noting that “unfortunately in this world you have to know when to use Standard English”. Jerome “tells kids all the time” that every word “has multiple meanings”, and the non-Standard English meanings are “nothing but slang”. Learning to move between these two varieties is important, Jerome says, because “slang is not gonna be on the standardized tests, so if you can learn what this word is and the terminology and the way you use it, you will be able to read and understand better”. Jerome discusses advocating to his White colleagues as well for them to become more aware of the non-Standard language being used in the communities around them so that they might be better able to teach their students how to codeswitch.

Jerome wrote his M.A. when the codeswitching approach was seen as much more equitable than it is today, although he admits to continuing to adopt this approach in his contemporary classroom. The 1974 Ann Arbor Black English case (Smitherman & Baugh 2002) led to the school district adopting a plan very similar to Jerome’s, in that White instructors were made aware of the structure and function of Black English, and taught to use those structures as comparative examples in the teaching of reading and writing. The goal of this effort was to first remove the Black students from the Special-Ed classes they’d been placed in because of their first language, and second to aid students in the transition to Standard English competency. Judge Joiner’s (1979) decision, granting equal educational access to Black students in Ann Arbor, was based on the importance of Black people assimilating to White ways of speaking so they could achieve social mobility:

> Children need to learn to speak and understand and to read and write the language used by society to carry on its business, to develop its science, arts and culture, and to carry on its professions and governmental functions…"Black

[82] References to this were coded as such with the CODESWITCHING code in the STYLE SHIFTING group as visualized in Image 2.3.

> English" is not a language used by the mainstream of society—black or white. It is not an acceptable method of communication in the educational world, in the commercial community, in the community of the arts and science, or among professionals. It is largely a system that is used in casual and informal communication among the poor and lesser educated.

Jerome's adoption of a plan that largely does not deviate from the Ann Arbor solution demonstrates his uptake of and alignment with Standard language ideologies. Requiring students to learn the Standard while simultaneously devaluing their racialized varieties "has a deleterious effect on Black Language speakers' humanity" (Baker-Bell et al. 2020) as it upholds the dichotomy established in Judge Joiner's decision that Black varieties have no place in mainstream society, cannot be used to communicate complex ideas or for creative expression, and belong to the unintelligent or under-resourced.

Jerome details several stories about his interactions with students throughout his interview, but one that is particularly revealing arose during our discussion of *the N words*. There, he recalled a time, again during his year teaching in Maryland (in what he described as a very multicultural population), in which among a large group of kids "the White kid said to the Black kid, 'Hey,' you know 'you guys acting ghetto'". Jerome goes on to provide a folk etymology for *ghetto* about the origin of the word, discussing how we (Black folks) all thought it meant "the hood" when we were growing up, but how its "real" meaning came from the Jewish ghettos of the Holocaust. Jerome pulled the White student into his homeroom the next day and taught him about the forced segregation of Jews during WWII. Recalling the event, Jerome goes on to say, "Yep, and so what has happened as years went by; somehow the word *ghetto* transformed into the African American community and then not only did it transform into the African American community, it was how you were acting".

Jerome tried to turn this instance of interracial schoolyard taunting into a teachable moment with this White boy, but in it, he also dismisses the cultural value attached to racialized language use, to AAL terminology that names the very streets he lived on as a child, that his students live on today, that labels practices some of his fellow interviewees identify with and hold dear (although it also admittedly labels practices some actively distance themselves from or fear being associated with). Both perspectives are valid and important—of course learning about the Holocaust matters and this chapter of *ghetto*'s origin story is a powerful one—but Jerome's perspective demonstrates significant Standard language ideological uptake.

During the Usage Assessment Task, in his evaluation of the Nina Simone stimuli (see Appendix A), Jerome offers commentary on her level of professionalism. Jerome reacts very positively to Nina Simone, as do all of the interviewees who interacted with her content. He enjoys the way in which "she's talking to our people" and admires her usage of the colloquialism "by hook or crook". I ask Jerome if she sounds professional. He responds:

> Oh man, lemme tell you something, to some people they would say no because of some of the terms and words that she used, but here's the thing, she may not have talked professional but she reeled you in, she compelled you to listen and it was genuine. Sometimes talking in Standard English or being professional can come off as fake.

I include this metacommentary from Jerome's Usage Assessment Task response to underscore that, even if he does not often or actively produce a racialized variety in the practice of his profession, he knows the difference between varieties members of his community move through, he has knowledge of how they are arranged in the sense that he is aware of the various social meanings they can invoke—and he does switch, he does use and know his racialized variety, as he reports in Section 2.4.2. Like Desiree who reports in Section 2.4.3 (on self-censorship) that there are certain situations where the so-called vernacular isn't expected, like London, Alisha, Journey, and Solomon who report in Section 2.4.2 (on in-group labels) having a sense for when language is used inauthentically, Jerome's metacommentary shared during his assessment of Nina Simone demonstrates he participates in this knowledge as well, knowing that there are times when speaking the Standard isn't being true to oneself or one's message, and that those listening will likely meet a speaker using a less standardized variety in those contexts halfway (as Desiree's metacommentary suggests is possible).

Jerome's answer to a question posed to a subset of interviewees in the Final MMSI section further reinforces the influence of his positionality with respect to the influence of Standard language ideology and his performance of self. I asked, "have you ever used a Whiter voice to stay safe?" And Jerome described two separate encounters with police. In one, he is coming home from a frat party at Eastern Michigan University and stopped at a Denny's on the way home. The Denny's happened to be closed, but there was a police officer in the lot, who started following him as he pulled out. Jerome pulled into the next gas station and:

> soon as I get out the car here she go rolling down the window, "You live around here?" "Yeah I live right down the street." "Well, I saw you at Denny's." I said, "Yeah, I'm hungry. I wanted to get something to eat." But in my mind I said you know what, stop tripping cause you already been drinking and that's all she needs. So I had to go on a professional mode.

Here Standard language is a tool, one used to diffuse a bad situation. Sometimes, obscuring the self is necessary. Aries, Alex, and Chance all describe themselves as individuals who do not switch styles regularly. However, as discussed in Section 2.4.3, these three individuals who each actively resist the omnipresence of Standard language ideologies to bring aspects of their racialized language use into their workplaces all also admit to knowing they must, at times, engage in linguistic actions which censor their racial identities. Fear, tokenization, and resisting racial stigma are cited as motivations for self-censorship in Section 2.4.3, but interactions like the one Jerome cites above (and worse) are the reasons we (Black folks) know how to shift in the first place. Holliday, Burdin, and Tyler (2015) analyze the traffic stop of Sandra Bland[83], whose perceived "non-compliance" by Officer Encinia led to her being removed from her vehicle only to die later in police custody. When Jerome tells himself to "stop tripping" the resulting changes in his behavior have linguistic consequences—he shifts into "professional mode"—in an effort to control the outcome and avoid one like Bland's.

Standard language ideologies impact all of us. This interview happened to capture a good number of examples of the ways in which they have impacted Jerome because of his embodied positionality as a 49-year-old Black man who teaches English Language Arts. His uptake of, his alignment with, Standard language ideologies is not surprising, nor is it something to belittle or condemn. It is an artifact of Jerome's positionality; his profession centers on preparing students to command the Standard variety across domains and modalities. Jerome has been impacted by Standard language ideologies throughout his career—as a student when he was labeled as special or different for merely producing standardized language, as a graduate student when the varieties he commanded were given official titles, and as a researcher when he began to reckon with how to prepare students for a world which he knows "unfortunately" will include the reality of using Standard English (with all the weight that entails). Jerome (for reasons I cannot speculate on without further metacommentary) has chosen not to resist that unfortunate reality, and instead to go along to get along, to cast down his bucket where he is, and equip his students for what he feels they need to get as far as they can in a world that expects little more than ignorance and poverty from them. I can speculate, however, that raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa 2015)—which operate in such a way that they equate non-normative bodies with linguistic deficiency—can create states of internalized shame (see Lowe 2015, Rosa 2016,

[83] #SayHerName

Keels et al. 2017) across the Black community (and Latinidad and d/Deaf and others) such that Black speech is seen as something needed to be fixed or repaired or hidden, or worse that the individual user is somehow lacking in character or morality or ability. Jerome's classroom is a place where that last point is not upheld—where it is clear the person producing the language is worthy of fulfillment and joy. The next case study engages with another interviewee—Solomon—who is not content with accepting any of these unfortunate realities, and who rejects linguistic work engaged with for the sake of the status quo.

3.2.2 Solomon: A Case Study on Ideological Resistance

Professionalism to me is getting your tasks done as they are assigned to you and that's where it begins and ends. Everything else is just superficial for real to me. -Solomon, a public policy non-profit employee

Solomon grew up off of East Warren and Cadieux in Detroit. His father's family has been Detroiters for generations, and his mother is from Chicago; being a Black Midwesterner is a central part of his identity. Solomon's family lived in Grand Rapids as well for a few years while he was in elementary school, and he describes this area as more racially mixed, "about 50/50" Black to White population. Solomon works for a Detroit non-profit focused on public policy, and his job is to work with multiple organizations and identify collaborative opportunities between them to make them better advocates for the communities his parent organization serves. He also hosts a podcast with a friend. His end-stage career goal is to become mayor of Detroit[84].

The memorable school experience that Solomon recalled during our interview was about taboo breaking, demonstrating in the first 10 minutes of our discussion that he is a resistor of commonly accepted, language-related, social practices:

> It's like when I first decided like, I wanted to use like a cuss word. And I was like in second or first grade and I was like you know what like—and I thought about it, I was like I wanna cuss like right here, like I wanna use this word. And instead of saying just no, I was like hell naw…I just made up my mind I wanna like, today's the day, gotta let this out gotta let it fly.

Solomon provides extensive metacommentary about his relationship—and the relationship of Black people in general—to profanity (he mentions "cussing" 24 times throughout our interview), demonstrating extensive metalinguistic knowledge of appropriateness with respect to the use of

[84] I sincerely hope Detroit is lucky enough to one day be served by the vision this man has for his city.

specific linguistic material, and the way in which this appropriateness changes both as one moves between contexts and across the lifespan. Solomon's metacommentary also reveals how his thoughts about usage—or perhaps his ideological stances toward usage—make him differently positioned from others he shares identities with.

Another interaction which further illustrates these points came in our discussion of the relationship of language use to racial identity where Solomon discusses being a child and observing his parents switching into a White voice on the phone. This was a practice he noticed going on around him, and he discussed how he identified the style as specific to dealing with White people because what he heard his parents using wasn't their "parent voice" or their "friend voice" or any of their other voices they used in conversation with folks in the community. Solomon reports that he knew using this voice was something he was supposed to do when he entered the working world, and he did try it once, but it did not fit him:

> And for a while like I was with it, I was like alright. And then it nah it was like last year I decide alright, I got this new job I was like, I'm not doing that. I got this new job, I'm not bout to be in here talking all like uh hey how are you doing. _spoken with raised pitch_ Like, I was on a Zoom and heard my voice I was like, I don't talk like this like, you know I'm not about to do that, I'm not of course I'm not you know just in here cussing up a storm or nothing like that. But I mean I'm not bout to be super you know changing my voice nothing like that.

In addition to his choice to switch less in a new position, Solomon provides other metacommentary relevant to his alignment with the working world. When asked what advice Solomon would give a new Black employee entering his workspace, he offers that this individual should know "White people are easily impressed" and gives an example[85] about how knowledge that is common to Black folks from just living Black lives seems "groundbreaking" to White people who have never considered things from their perspective. In Solomon's opinion, Black people do not need to be concerned about impressing White people as part of their work life because "you're here for a reason, they didn't hire you to see you fail—that's a waste of their time—they brought you in, they think you can do the job, so let's just you know let's do it".

These two examples—characterizing the moment Solomon decided he wouldn't assimilate to more standardized styles at work anymore and recognizing the value in Black ways of

[85] It was too long to report here but, in short, he discusses once mentioning that sometimes folks make too much for food stamps but not enough for food and that upon hearing that statement, the company leaders realigned quarterly objectives at the non-profit. I do not mean to indicate all Black people are food insecure.

knowing—reinforce the claim that Standard language ideologies are not part of Solomon's overall value system. From an early age he started shucking their influence by flaunting the bounds of appropriateness and cursing before most U.S. children adopt the practice (around age 11, see Bergen 2016, pp.168-178). Solomon is aware of the Black cultural practice of style shifting, he has observed it in use by the adult members of his family and community, and has an idea of the context in which moving towards a more standardized style is most useful, of when he is supposed to engage in the practice. In entering his second job after college, Solomon (25) reports moving away from the practice entirely; he cannot stomach it ("I'm not about to do that"). And his advice to a fictional Black colleague demonstrates that movement toward White Standardized spoken English does not structure his concept of reward or punishment in the linguistic market of his profession because it isn't mentioned (as it is by others like Aries in Section 2.4.3, who reports wishing he did not have to bring it up). He lays out his philosophy of why switching away from a racialized style—or racialized presentation of self in any vein of behavior—is useless labor to engage in, and in this discussion reveals a sense of self worth similar to that of some older interviewees (e.g., Yolanda, Aries, Desiree) who have come to this understanding through years of experience in their professions and engagement with such daily sociolinguistic labor.

Solomon's rejection of Standard language ideologies subsequently changes his behaviors and sets him apart from other members of his community. However, he is aware that Standard language ideologies exist and operate in the world, and he must exist and operate with and through them as well. In our conversation on the *authentically Black* label, Solomon indicates that being around Black people is when he can speak most comfortably:

> When I'm around Black folks or I feel comfortable conversation, I don't feel like I have to perform. I don't feel like my words are a performance like I don't like have to you know speak like this so I can be respected or seen as intelligent.

This metacommentary reinforces the fact that even though Solomon may have personally rejected Standard language ideologies, and feels something in his active, daily resistance to the pressure they exert, he likely does acquiesce to them on occasion for reasons other than the mere avoidance of sociolinguistic labor like describing word meaning to White colleagues (as reported in Section 2.4.3 on self-censorship). This acquiescence only extends so far—and not as far as that of other Black folks—as metacommentary Solomon provided in response to the interview question on tone policing demonstrates:

> I talk kinda loud, you know, but like uh sometimes the level of my voice gets policed like even by other Black folks like we around like “Aye, bro” like you know “we in” +moving hand down+ “kinda like lower your voice.” Like but in my mind, I’m not yelling, I’m not trying to be loud, I just talk loud. I grew up in a home with loud people, so if you grew up in a home with people all talking loud, you learn to speak loudly. I’m not yelling at you. I’m not tryna draw attention, so when I go out somewhere, we go out somewhere, I’m speaking loud you like “Aye bro” _whispered_ like. You know it’s like you wouldn’t do that if we wasn’t around these type of folk or whatever, you’re worried about my loudness being perceived as ghetto.

Additionally, Solomon demonstrates that his stance differs from the other members of his community when offering metacommentary on the *talking White* label. In this conversation, we talk about how one can “speak proper” and still sound like “a Black person from the city or whatever”. Solomon harkens back to our earlier discussion of observing his parents on the phone, switching into a Whiter style[86], and remarks that Black people engage in this practice of *talking White* because “they want to seem less Black like less threatening less harmful”, but that one’s Blackness can’t successfully be hidden that way. Solomon feels the *talking White* label—and more importantly the practice itself—is useless, and his metacommentary here demonstrates that his rejection of Standard language ideologies is rather complete, in that he’s already established that the ideas of reward or potential punishment one might face in the corporate setting are not motivators for him, and here he demonstrates the ideas of protecting oneself (ostensibly to avoid potential punishments for sounding Black, corporate or elsewhere) are not motivators for him either. As covered in Section 2.4.3, Solomon does feel he possesses multiple varieties, and reports being somewhat “toned down” at work (mostly with respect to word choice) as an avoidance of sociolinguistic labor. Solomon reports this being a reality of existing in an almost all White workplace; his engagement in these shifting practices does not call into question his rejection of Standard language ideologies. The behavior and the mental state are not mutually exclusive and one is not a product of the other; rather, they represent the ways in which ideology and linguistic function become mutually constitutive—illustrating the discursive irreducibility cited in Section 1.3 (see also Silverstein 1985). Solomon enters linguistic markets daily where he negotiates opposing ideological demands which influence the level of agentiveness possible in his discursive self-actualization.

[86] Mimicking that style and sounding almost cartoonish—spritely—in the attempt, which indicates how ridiculous he perceives the practice to be.

The ways in which Solomon engaged[87] with the Usage Assessment Task[88] provide several examples of his positionality with respect to Standard language ideologies[89]. In response to the Bettina Love lecture audio, Solomon gives an uncharacteristically short comment, mentioning only that the speaker sounds female, not from Detroit, and "academic". The next example is a YouTube video clip of a Nina Simone lecture, and Solomon's response is his most animated of the entire interview. He is beaming as he speaks, commenting excitedly on her canonically Black rhetorical style:

> That's actually very great. I love~ that's~ she, ooh! She's a great speaker! It like I was a part in it where she kinda like she's like repeating the same word at the start of the sentence, and it's kinda like reminds me of like church like it's like the thing like preachers do like when they have a point they will repeat the same word over and over and over again at the start of a sentence or the end of a sentence to like drive the point home…And then she kinda like pulled it back like alright let me like +makes a fist and pulls it towards him+ she felt herself getting riled up, it was like lemme pull back, and she got back in her calm you know self again.

Our discussion of Nina Simone continues for several minutes, and Solomon reflects on how her voice sounds like a certain generation of Black people—how when an older Black person is speaking to you they do so with a characteristic style that says "Aye, I want you to hear every word I'm saying. I need every one of these words to land, cause I'm tryna tell you and teach you something…I'm tryna inform you. I want you to take this with you, it's like here, it's like a gift almost".

As discussed in Section 2.3.1.5, the Bettina Love and Nina Simone examples were included in the Usage Assessment Task in part because both presented usage of Black professional speech by Black women who make/made a living giving speeches presenting to similar audiences. Both women speak with identifiably Black voices, and both women are speaking on Blackness as a topic in the clips I've included, which is itself a faux pas (as some interviewees

[87]Solomon truly provided the richest metacommentary of all the interviewees, and I mention this here because there is potential that his heightened level of awareness of social meanings, the various repertoires available to the people around him, and the ways in which they move through them, as well as his own production patterns and choices, may be a result of his personal rejection of Standard language ideologies and the active, daily resistance that entails in all the domains he exists in. Although identifying individuals with such ideological stances may be challenging through screening practices, this is a testable hypothesis, and would be worth studying in future research.

[88]This task is described in detail in Section 2.3.1.5 and examples of all data provided to interviewees are available as Appendix A.

[89] As a reminder, as discussed in Section 2.4, a full treatment of the Usage Assessment Task has been held for future work. Although other interviewee responses weren't relevant to the themes being discussed there, Solomon's responses to all the stimuli happened to be relevant to this discussion.

have alluded to in their metacommentary, namely Aries and Alex). Solomon does not react to the content of Bettina Love's example, essentially dismissing her Black-Accented Standard speech as sounding academic. This could be an artifact of it being the first example under assessment; some interviewees take some time to warm up in the task. His reaction to Nina Simone is quite the opposite, who also is speaking in a Black-Accented Standard variety of her era (although it is peppered with some identifiable AAL lexical items and her speech is more regionally marked than Love's to the untrained ear). The kind of speech that Nina Simone is presenting, speech that embraces Black words and does not shy away from Blackness in the performance of professionalism, in front of an academic audience no less, is the kind of speech that Solomon values and aspires to move towards in his daily practice. The kind of speech that Bettina Love is presenting has a quality in it (although it is not named directly in Solomon's commentary) that he doesn't readily identify with. As seen with Jerome's assessment of the Nina Simone stimuli in Section 3.2.1, he too values Nina Simone's speech style for its authenticity and directness, but it is likely that in the practice of his profession, Jerome would align more along the lines of Bettina Love's production.

Next, Solomon assessed the Lydia Burell video as a clear example of linguistic appropriation, as did the majority (13 out of 17) of interviewees as discussed in Section 2.4.2.2. His response to the Brittany Xavier TikTok "Acting like my Gen Z Daughter" that follows also finds that her performance of AAL words and phrasing presents linguistic appropriation, is offensive, and is not simply mimicking Gen Z language[90]:

> See White folks think that Black slang is like pop culture, they think that this is like some like they think it's trendy. And it's like no this is who I am. And that's why it's disrespectful like my language is not some like trend for you to like you know make TikToks about, this is not you talking to your Gen Z daughter, this is how Black people talk. Period…It's not some pop culture moment, this is how Black people communicate, and you know mocking someone's language is mocking their culture like you're making a mockery of my culture and my people, that's why it's offensive.

Solomon's response to the Xavier TikTok cites the phenomenon of so-called Black slang being passed off as a mainstream trend (see Baker-Bell 2020a pp.12-14). Part of the operation of Standard language ideologies involve defaulting and normalizing Whiteness and White language, such that White people are allowed to <u>own</u> all the variation around them that they

[90] As discussed in Section 2.3.1.5, the Xavier TikTok was included to elicit metacommentary which could tease out just these types of distinctions—when is usage borrowing, appropriation, change from below, or something else?

choose[91], and can subsume from below whatever becomes most advantageous into the Standard deliberately (see Hill 2008, pp.158-174). Solomon's positionality allows him to see past what other interviewees don't here, into the sociohistorical roots of Xavier's appropriative behaviors, because he has rejected Standard language ideologies so thoroughly.

Solomon also assesses the Eric Metaxes tweet, reading it aloud and shaking his head at all of the misspellings and misuses of AAL terms it presents (see Appendix A). His response, "That's like the other extreme like White people they go to like oh thinking that our~ they go from thinking that our language is super trendy or pop culture to saying we talk like slaves like, not even slaves like minstrel show type slaves like". Every interviewee who interacted with the Metaxes data had a negative reaction to it (with Alisha and London also invoking minstrelsy in their metacommentary) but Solomon speaks for several minutes and by the end is visibly upset—pale and shaking—because of how detrimental this kind of characterization of Black speech makes him feel, makes his people seem to others in the world. Solomon is hurt by the fact that people view Black folks this way, that their speech can be on the one hand used to sell mugs and T-shirts (see Baker-Bell 2020a pp.12-14), but on the other hand treated like so much filth. These kinds of perceptions of Black people are what motivated individuals like Journey to shift away from her racialized style in her youth, to be careful not to use a single contraction around people of another race (as reported in Section 2.4.2.1), because she didn't want to be taken as a bad example of her own. Because people like Eric Metaxes exist in the world, who think that all Black people produce language that is almost imparsable when read, that sounds like the most saturated version of a dialect produced by individuals separated from linguistic material for centuries by law, but who (like Judge Joiner) attribute those types of language use to poverty and ignorance.

Solomon distances himself from performing Whiter styles not because of perceptions (informed by raciolinguistic ideologies) like the ones people like Eric Metaxes carry, but because he knows that no matter how "proper" a style he produces, he is always going to sound like "a Black person from the city", and that is <u>who he is</u> and who he wants to be in the world. The Standard language ideology that operates in and around all of us may encourage many people to shift towards the Standard variety, but Solomon is hype to that bullshit and ain't about it; in the takeaway portion of the interview, he encourages all Black people to take up a similar stance:

[91]Which is why the debate about who can and cannot use *the N Words* is such a public and persistent one.

> So I think about it like this, if I had to say one thing and it's the only part of the interview that made it to your paper or whatever's going on, uh I want Black people to know that we don't have to perform for White people. That's not our job; that's not our role; that's not our duty. We don't have to do that. Be you. Like be as comfortably Black as you can be, you know, to get done like what you gotta get done, like don't be afraid. You don't gotta be using slang or like that in a workspace, but don't ever make yourself uncomfortable for a White person's comfort. Them days is over with. Them days is done. We don't gotta do that. You know it is what it is, if they can't appreciate you at your Blackness, you know, whatever level of Blackness you determine you gon show them, then that's not a place you need to be at anyway. They don't deserve your labor. They don't deserve your time, and there's somebody who will hire you, who will treat you with the respect you deserve, allow you to be who you are in that space.

Solomon's liberating takeaway illustrates a stark difference between his positionality and Jerome's with respect to Standard language ideologies. Jerome lumps all racialized styles together as non-Standard English, characterizing all non-Standard English word meanings as "nothing by slang". Jerome imagines workplaces that will never be accepting of racialized speech or non-Standard usage of any kind. In his takeaway, Solomon demonstrates his view of racialized styles as a spectrum, one in which so-called slang may be present or not present, and one along which an individual moves depending on their comfort level. Solomon's view aligns with that of the several other interviewees (e.g., Journey, Aries, and Maurice) whose metacommentary in Section 2.4.2.2 indicated that the content of varieties that can be labeled *authentically Black* is dependent upon the identity of the user, that the authenticity is determined in the moment by the ways in which the individual is most comfortable with or being true to themselves when producing language. Jerome's uptake of Standard language ideologies (as discussed in Section 3.2.1) makes his view much more rigid and does not allow him to be as consciously aware of the variation of style that he himself possesses (as evidenced by his linguistic production during the interview), or to value it in himself, the Black people around him, or the Black students he teaches and researches in the practice of his profession. Solomon's resistance to Standard language ideologies allows him to be more aware of the variation around him, to understand its origins and importance, to celebrate it, and to encourage that celebration in others.

3.3 Simone: A Case Study on Sociolinguistic Labor

In this section, I will present a case study on the theme of sociolinguistic labor, which covers responses spanning the breadth of Simone's interview. As discussed in Section 1.5, sociolinguistic labor, defined by Holliday & Squires (2020) as "the physical, emotional, and

psychological effort put into deploying sociolinguistic resources in a way that is meant to satisfy others" (p.4), is an activity we all engage in, but for Black professionals the satisfaction of others often means assimilating to standardized styles in the workplace by shifting away from their more racialized styles. These types of sociolinguistic labor are especially potent for Black women, who are also under pressure to assimilate to White ways of presenting themselves in terms of hair style and dress, and labor under the cultural trope of the Angry Black Woman (Weissler 2021), and thus find few opportunities to present their authentic selves as they stake a place in the working world (Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2002). Simone's career trajectory—which this case study will engage with—illustrates the ways in which a Black woman navigates such pressures, and the metalinguistic commentary Simone produced throughout her interview illustrates the ways in which sociolinguistic labor operates in daily practice and leaves its mark on agentive constructions of identity.

Regardless of what I think professionalism is, I'm still fitting into the mold of what others think professionally is in order to get my work done. - Simone, fundraising executive

Simone was born in Pontiac, Michigan[92] at the height of the crack epidemic. Growing up during the crack epidemic is a reality shared by all of my interviewees in their 40s and 50s. Her grandparents, like those of many other Black Americans (see Boyd 2017, Farrington et al 2021), migrated North to find work in the booming auto industry. Her grandparents and her parents did not attend college, but her aunts and uncles and many of the adults in that generation did; education was highly valued, seen as a sought-after and prized avenue for social mobility and advancement. Simone shares memorable experiences from her school years that involve corporal punishment and racial profiling. She remembers being sent to the principal's office for sneezing in class and attributes that kind of regular behavior from teachers in her young life to "misinformation" that White people have developed about "us". Simone remarks that she has learned to deal with this kind of behavior because she feels it is "based off of the images we see and the exposure we have and the stories that other people tell".

This metacommentary from Simone sets the stage for the rest of our interview. She is an incredibly generous person, which is evident from the ways she describes serving her

[92] Pontiac once held several divisions of the General Motors manufacturing corporation, including their bus division; the bus Rosa Parks would not yield her set on in Montgomery, Alabama was made in Pontiac. Pontiac, which is located 20 miles Northwest of Detroit, is the county seat of Oakland County and remains a majority Black city.

community, interacting with her children and partner, and discussing how she mentors young professionals coming up in her trade. Simone's interests are placed in serving her community, although her life has not been without it's challenges, and she has spent a lot of time reckoning with and letting go of the ways people behave towards her because she is different. Her metalinguistic commentary in the early stages of the interview reveals an awareness of knowledge distribution, in that Simone has come to know how ideology is built through exposure to story and image, and the ways in which presentation of self can activate one's reaction towards you. Simone is aware of the ways in which Black people have been described in the world, through being one herself, through living through the crack epidemic, through growing up in a majority Black city. Simone has developed this knowledge through years of successfully navigating her linguistic market, and encourages young Black professionals in her field to always be mindful of how they present themselves, even though their young White colleagues may not be so mindful and do not seem to suffer consequences:

> Um in fact, I was just talking um so the founder of the organization that I work for now is a young Black man um he's in his thirties, and so we were just speaking the other day about um you know he's like yeah I met with um a potential um partner, and you know he's like he owns all of these different~ these different real estate ventures and all this property downtown Pontiac, and he shows up to the meeting driving this dirty Ford pickup truck, he's got on a T shirt and a pair of jeans and he's comes into the meeting, and you know we're having the meeting. He's like "I can't do that." I'm like you're right, you can't. You can't. You know uh it's~ it's different for us and it shouldn't be but the reality is you're right, you cannot, not and expect to you know have a voice at this table.

Simone was a high achieving student throughout her school years, beginning college at 16. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in Chemical Engineering three weeks after 9/11. Simone had two job offers, but the engineering industry stagnated after the attack, and both of her offers were rescinded. Simone needed employment fast and found work as a front desk receptionist at a Jewish organization in Detroit. Simone is not Jewish, but during her time working there she learned everything she could about the new community she found herself in. She began dressing and wearing her hair more conservatively, after which she was offered a full-time position and she accepted.

It was at this organization Simone learned her trade in fundraising, setting up and then managing the organization's first donor database. It was also at this organization that Simone really learned how to codeswitch:

> As the front office receptionist, my own mother would call (name of organization) and I would answer the phone and she would be like "Can I speak with (name of

> person)" |laughing 2 sec.| I'm like Mom, it's me. |laughing 1 sec.| But that's how severe the codeswitching was.[93]

Simone remained at the Jewish organization until it became apparent she would never be promoted to management because she was not Jewish. She moved through several organizations before being recruited as the manager of annual giving at a prominent Detroit family attraction. After spending several years there, Simone moved into the career stage she is in now, which involves working for a community foundation, sitting on a number of boards, and running her own consulting business as a fundraising executive.

Detailing Simone's trajectory matters because it matters very much to see what she has accomplished and to know the path she took to become what she is now: a Black woman in control of her professional life. Simone has faced roadblocks and gatekeeping that stifle the progress of many other people, but she was able to forge ahead, creating new skill sets for herself and giving back to her community along the way as well. In her first job after college, Simone began immediately navigating the demands of bicultural competence, having to assimilate to the expectations of Jewish cultural ways of being by covering her tattoos and wearing a weave all the time. For the readers who may not be aware of the labor involved in maintaining a weave, it requires considerable physical and emotional labor, as well as ongoing financial commitments. This labor is in addition to the already noted sociolinguistic labor, which included performing a role in which her voice was unrecognizable to her own mother. All of this effort was put forth to satisfy the community around her, the Jewish community, who ultimately benefited from her expertise when she created and maintained their first ever digital donor database. But this community did not reward her for all of that labor, sociolinguistic or otherwise, by promoting her because her identity was never sufficient for acceptance in their community, despite Simone nearly obliterating her own for their comfort.

In discussing her thoughts on what professionalism as a concept is, Simone provides metacommentary about how she is often "engaging with donors which nine times out of ten means I'm talking to a White person". Simone remarked that early in her career it felt "very important to sort of be accepted in that space" and because of that she felt like she was "compelled to always be on point"[94]. Simone moves from that metacommentary into the story about her mother calling the front desk, and then returns to the thought of being compelled to

[93] Transcription guidelines described in Section 2.3.3 discuss anonymization and marking protocols.
[94] Similar to commentary from Alex in Section 2.4.3 and Etta in 2.4.2.1.

sound or act a certain way—a Whiter way—and how she noticed that this didn't apply to her colleagues. Simone felt like workplace standards were always more rigidly applied to her. She provides an example in discussing receiving a full page email from a supervisor once detailing the grammatical rules on appropriate usage of *over* versus *more than* after she'd made a so-called mistake in an announcement that had gone out to donors. Fellow employees' announcements had been similarly conversational—which is what the genre calls for—with usages that could also be considered grammatical errors, but these employees were never scolded. Simone remarks that she puts less reliance on codeswitching now than she did earlier in her career (like Yolanda, Journey, Alex, and Chance also report in Section 2.4.3) because she now has credentials to back up anything someone might call into question, but she qualifies that statement by providing the quote which opens this section:

> I'm still fitting into the mold of what others think professionally is in order to get my work done. Like I can look past that because I know my end goal is about improving the quality of life for people in Pontiac and if it means that I have to play into what you believe professional is to make that happen then I'll do it.

In this five-minute discussion (beginning with Simone's metacommentary on donors and ending with this statement about acquiescing to other's expectations of professionalism), it becomes apparent that sociolinguistic labor has always been and remains a daily aspect of Simone's professional life. Despite being someone who is her own boss now, because the work she does is public-facing and requires that she engage with White donors the majority of her time, Simone still finds herself in situations—in linguistic markets—where she will acquiesce to what others expect in her presentation of self, even though she is aware of that not being as much of a necessity as it was in the past. Simone's metalinguistic commentary here about talking to White people meaning she needs to be "on point" indicates a necessary awareness of the social meanings available, an awareness of the fullness of the repertories at her command at any moment. It also reveals that Simone is making an effort to keep her mind sharp—doing sociolinguistic labor—so that she may move through those repertoires at a moment's notice. Fundraising isn't necessarily an environment where hyper-standardized varieties would be present, like Chance's courtroom or London's news desk. Simone has to woo her clients, she has to schmooze. But she also has to give off the sense of a good personal pedigree and make the organization she represents appear above reproach—and with that come clean clothes, clean hair, and clean language. Getting into character every day for this kind of presentation of self is sociolinguistic labor, labor that is required of anyone in such a position, but because Simone is a Black woman the expectations of the space she is entering require her to

deracialize herself everyday to an extent. Contemporary professional linguistic markets require all Black professionals to linguistically deracialize themselves everyday to an extent. Knowledge of this additional labor is reflected in Simone's metacommentary about observing that her colleagues were not treated the same, were not doing the same amount of sociolinguistic labor, because they were not given notes about grammatical rules from their boss. Simone indicates that she feels this double standard was racially motivated, “because I was Black it must be because I don’t know the rules? My mistakes were always attributed to a lack of knowledge”.

Another example of Simone’s reactions to sociolinguistic labor in the workplace comes from her time managing annual giving at the popular Detroit family attraction. When she first arrived in this position, entering into management for the first time, she noticed quite quickly that there was a Black woman (over ten years her senior) there who was consistently receiving terrible performance reviews and had a tense relationship with her direct supervisor. Although this woman had a very energetic personality and was great in the room with donors, she did not have a strong command of grammatical conventions which showed in her email correspondence. Simone remarked that because of this woman’s poor grammar, “nobody could see the value she added in other areas”. This individual was often relegated to menial tasks—even manual labor—during public events. Simone wanted to do right by this woman, and so advocated for her to be treated more equitably. She finally convinced the higher ups to enroll this individual, a professional in her mid 50s, into a webinar for grammar improvement. But, these kinds of courses can only help so much, and it didn’t fix all of Simone’s colleague's issues. The individual was given some new responsibilities at work, but these opportunities involved establishing an elaborate process by which Simone would edit all of this individual's email correspondence before passing it up the chain or out to donors. Simone reflects on this experience by pushing the inappropriateness of this woman’s language use off onto the education system; it wasn’t this woman’s fault for not knowing the rules because “the teachers aren't trying to correct your grammar, they're fine with Ebonics and whatever vernacular you choose to display”. She goes on to say “I feel like older Black people who worked in environments with White people, they've been forced. You weren't accepted or you weren't gonna move forward in this role if you didn't know proper grammar but now there's less of that, there's less people sort of enforcing it”.

Simone’s metacommentary with respect to others not being able to “see the value” that this individual added is an indictment of both Standard language ideologies and raciolinguistic

ideologies at work, which convince people that non-Standard language users are not worth investing in or are incapable of accomplishing or cannot be trusted with important tasks, and these perceptions are only further compounded when the user exists in a minoritized body. Because of her language use, the good things this woman had to offer were essentially invisible to the people around her, no matter how good she was in the room. But Simone was able to see this woman's potential because of her own embodied positionality which allows her to push past the influence of both Standard language ideologies and raciolinguistic ideologies in this case. Simone does so much sociolinguistic labor for this woman! First, the sheer recognition that this individual had something to give belies that Simone has done and is doing sociolinguistic labor by moving through her own varieties on the regular. Then, Simone communicates what she has recognized to others who had been not only ignoring, but also punishing this person for her racialized language use in their workspace. Simone championed her, and did what she could to protect and project her intelligence by getting her colleague some training. Although it was training that would aid another Black professional in shifting away from her racialized styles in the workplace, it would allow that Black professional to remain in the workplace. And when that training failed to completely accomplish its goal, Simone brought this individual the rest of the way there herself, doing the daily work of applying her own linguistic resources, her knowledge of various social meanings invoked only through standardized linguistic material in this linguistic market, to aid this individual in transferring her ideas into a style they could be received through. What a profound act to do for another person, but what tedious, difficult, and burdensome sociolinguistic labor to take up as well.

Simone's mention of the education system at the end of this story, however, is rather revealing, as it removes any blame for the oppressive (dare I say violent) treatment these Black women experienced by the organization both of them were serving[95]. The pedagogical approaches Simone cites are more equitable[96] than the practices of the organization she was working for, an organization which shunned an employee and forced her into doing manual labor instead of using the expertise she was hired for because of some messy emails, an organization which found its solution in placing additional (and I would assume unpaid) labor on the back on another Black woman. Simone's inability to recognize the culpability of the organization or the additional labor she had endured speaks to the insidiousness of such sociolinguistic labor done

[95] Consider this alongside the way Jerome shifts the blame for the negative outcomes he experiences on to his own body and away from potentially racist individuals or ideological forces at play in Section 3.2.1.
[96] But see Smitherman (1995), Baker-Bell (2020a), and Baker-Bell et al. (2020) for more on this.

over the course of the career and lifespan as part of one's daily social being. Acts of style shifting away from fully expressing our identities in public are recognized as necessities, as things we must accept to get along, and in doing so each day we become a little less bothered by it—we become acculturated to it. More than this, sociolinguistic labor isn't as noticeable or worrisome when it is something we have accepted, that is required of us to reach a certain goal, or if it is something taken on in enlightened self-interest, as Simone said "you weren't gonna move forward in this role if you didn't know proper grammar". If the goal is something the Black professional wants more than resisting, they begin to justify the reasons why they shift as something broader than appeasing the individual actors they meet everyday who are, in fact, the ones for whom their performance of an acceptable—Whiter—self is for. There is an internal narrative that accompanies the psychological aspect of sociolinguistic labor, and these are the types of cognitive consequences it engenders; they are not unlike the types of cognitive consequences that give rise to stereotype threat in minoritized populations (Operario & Fiske 2003, Tajfel & Turner 2004).

In our interview, when we discussed the concept of authenticity in relation to Black language use, Simone recalled a time when she was preparing a presentation for a Detroit non-profit organization a few years ago. She had prepared the two and a half hour speech—"turned on my White speech and got all my grammar corrected"—but then when she started practicing, Simone realized she could not give the talk this way:

> it was way too hard for me to try to figure out what I was gonna say and change the way I was gonna say it um so I decided that I just needed to focus on delivering the content that I wanted to deliver and how they were gonna get it was authentic (name of person) and that's how I did it and they loved it.

In the Usage Assessment Task, when responding to the Bettina Love content, Simone also remarks on authenticity in a similar way, including the following:

> I also thought they sounded professional um but to a point, almost like um is it authentically how they would present the information or were they saying it to people who would judge them um based on how professional they thought they were. And to me it sounded like they had people in the room, or um people who are observing or would be observing would have some expectancy about professionalism um in hearing them speak.

Simone shares a moment of resistance to sociolinguistic labor, when she knew that she needed to reach for her most authentic style—for a racialized style—to deliver the content she wanted to the audience she was speaking for. This metacommentary is revealing because it demonstrates how Simone was able to craft this presentation, had it all buttoned up, but when she got ready

to start practicing it, let the language fill her body, that's when she knew, "It didn't feel good"—it wasn't authentic, it didn't satisfy her. And in this moment she decided not to do the labor of satisfying others. Simone spoke in our interview at length about how non-profits served her and her family when she was young, when her parents were struggling. And when she was in a position to speak to a group of people managing those organizations, serving individuals who were very much like her younger self, she chose to speak not only from a place of experience, but also with the voice which matched that experience as well.

The remarks about Bettina Love are also revealing in their own right because Love is a Black professional public speaker, someone who does exactly this for a living. And in the performance of her professionalism must confront a similar mental calculus often: which voice to use to convey her message. Simone picks up on a hint of something held back in Love's production (something that Solomon perhaps also noticed, but does not name in his metacommentary in Section 3.2.2), some sense of self that isn't coming all the way through, and attributes that to the audience Love is speaking for, who might be in a position to evaluate what is being said. I pulled the usage example audio from a video Love has up on her website; it is a lecture she gave in a large public forum. Speaking at predominately White institutions about issues of racial inequities, one would imagine[97], likely creates a situation where being the most authentic version of yourself is difficult for a Black professional woman whose career is focused on advocating for Black women, and Simone notes something held back in Love's voice, something that the other interviewees do not remark on. Simone attributes this holding back to the audience Love is in front of, which makes one consider if the potential exists for presenting similar information in a (professional) situation where there is not always already an expectation about the content or character of one's speech.

These final examples reveal sociolinguistic labor to be something one feels, something one does, and something one knows in themselves and others. Simone's experiences with assimilation during her early career, existing and eventually accepting a racialized double standard, are products of sociolinguistic labor. Simone's attempt to align her colleague's intelligence with how she is viewed in the workplace by helping her shift her writing into a corporate-approved style every single day is a product of sociolinguistic labor. Simone's recognition of the times when communicating her identity through her own racialized style is the

[97] and to which I can personally attest

more appropriate course of action and her recognition of the effort others may be making to hold their own racialized styles back are products of sociolinguistic labor. Simone is just one Black professional, one Black woman in America, but her story is indicative of the sociolinguistic labor involved in the daily social being of all Black professionals.

3.4 Discussion

Apart from holding space for Black people to reflect on their experiences with language—work I am most proud to have undertaken and to have used these pages to have presented a summary of and preserved for their posterity—Chapters Two and Three also had three research-oriented goals. The first relates to an introduction of the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI) and a discussion of outcomes from a first application of that method. The second relates to using metalinguistic commentary elicited through the MMSI to determine the motivations of Black professionals (or at least the 17 individuals from Detroit interviewed here) have for shifting away from their racialized styles in the workplace. And the third relates to using the elicited metalinguistic commentary related to several broad themes across interviewees to inform an enrichment of the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor. I will treat each of these goals in turn.

3.4.1 Discussion: First Application of the MMSI

The Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI) was successful in eliciting metalinguistic commentary from interviewees across all sections of the interview protocol. The elicited metacommentary reported for questions about in-group labels *talking White* and *authentically Black* is representative of the types of rich metacommentary elicited throughout the Languages Varieties section of the MMSI, which provided data on regional variation that is familiar, contexts and communities of practice interviewees find themselves in, and cultural products that reflect their experiences with language. The Discussion of Targeted Terms Task findings captured well interviewees' ideas about the kinds of language they produce by demonstrating that this population of Black professionals from the same city generally agree on what these 10 terms mean and how to use them in context, although their positionalities as individuals (which are exemplified in their metacommentary) demonstrate that the ways in which they use and orient to these 10 terms are very different and appear to be especially informed by their individual experiences and preferences. This outcome demonstrates that by distancing from traditional approaches to sociolinguistic interview—like reading word lists which only capture a speaker's pronunciation of a word in citation form and perhaps their definition as

well—a much more nuanced and accurate picture of word meaning in real time at the community level, and in apparent time across surveyed age groups, can begin to be developed. The Usage Assessment Task was not reported on in its entirety, but relevant examples that were included in the discussion of broad themes (Sections 2.4.2.2, 3.2, and 3.3) demonstrated that direct engagement with examples of usage in context can yield convergent metacommentary on specific and complex contextual factors, such as linguistic appropriation and the usage of Black-Accented Standard. Each of the Usage Assessment Task stimuli (Section 2.3.1.5; see also Appendix A) succeeded in eliciting the intended types of metacommentary. The Final interview questions section proved incredibly fruitful as it elicited metacommentary that formed much of the discussion of the broad theme of self-censorship (Section 2.4.3), indicating that it is perhaps the case that (much like with the danger of death story) focusing interviewee's attention on unpleasant experiences can yield rich and relevant responses (see Section 2.3.1.6).

Overall, from a purely methodologically-based consideration of successfully elicited metacommentary in this first application of the MMSI, one aspect that I find most fruitful for development in future iterations of this method are reports from interviewees that indicate they have knowledge of what a term means, how it is used, and who uses it, but (like Lillian and Sasha with respect to *finna* in Section 2.4.1.1[98]) they themselves do not use it (either in certain contexts or at all). This indicates that observation-based or naturalistic elicitation methods (such as Bailey et al.'s (1997)) which rely on sentence frames may not have been successful in capturing data of any kind about dispreferred terms from individuals like Lillian and Sasha, or may have gone so far as to conclude that groups with their identity characteristics (like women or Black women) do not produce the term (or the features it carries). But as language users ourselves, we know that knowing a word and not using it is perhaps not a particularly unfamiliar knowledge state. In consideration of embodied factors and the ways in which awareness interacts with how a marginalized individual must keep themselves safe in the world (see Barrett

[98] Lillian and Sasha are discussing not using *finna* specifically in professional spaces (such as those in which Zhang (2005) observed and surveyed Beijing professionals), but there are instances where some interviewees state simply something like *I don't use that one but it means X* or similarly indicate not engaging in a practice. For example, Sasha (Section 2.4.1.7) indicated not using *deadass* but provided semantic and region metacommentary and Aries (Section 2.4.2.2) indicated not using the label *authentically Black* to refer specifically to language use because he feels Blackness cannot be reliably read off the voice. Future iterations of the MMSI will employ more specific questions to tease apart the difference between what metacommentary about non-usage indicates when it cites certain contexts or audiences which trigger exclusion versus total exclusion and the ways in which this shapes variance across other planes of analysis (such as meaning, distribution, and occurrence).

2017, Guys 2022), metacommentary like this begins to bring into question just how active a language user needs to be in a given social role, context, or linguistic market to possess knowledge of the social meanings certain linguistic material can enact through those roles, contexts, or markets. For example, Jerome, both in his discussion of *talking White* in Section 2.4.2.1 and in the metacommentary I collected in our examination of Standard language ideologies in Section 3.2, reveals having knowledge of AAL variation (what he calls slang) and discusses certain contexts and communities he uses the variety in, like with his frat brothers. Jerome admits that he does not use this language very often, in the same way that Alex admits she isn't really an Ebonics speaker in Section 2.4.3, but both of these individuals know these varieties well. They know them well enough to have converged with other interviewees when reporting on word meaning, they know them well enough to have shared struggles with linguistic racism similar to those of other interviewees also. I would argue that if these individuals never used the Standard variety, they may know it just as well as they know Ebonics or slang—that many Black people who are rarely, if ever, observed using the Standard variety know it quite well. Their positionality as Black embodied individuals—one that engenders bicultural competence through the constraints of linguistic markets—demands awareness of registers one may never need be an active participant in because racio-cultural ambassadorship is rarely a two-way street and so many of us learn through observation what we need to watch out for, what it looks like when we are being taken advantage of, when to see danger approaching with a smile. As new applications of the MMSI are developed, tasks which enable users to more directly report on the words and varieties they do not use and why will be incorporated to deepen an understanding of what can be known about language varieties and the social meanings they invoke even when those varieties aren't directly employed by a language user in their performance of self.

3.4.2 Discussion: Black Professionals' Motivations for Style Shifting

I posed a series of questions stemming from the literature in Chapter One (Section 1.4.1) related to potential motivations Black professionals may have for shifting away from their racialized styles. I developed the MMSI as a means of eliciting metacommentary on these motivations directly. The first question is: Is it merely the Standard language ideology that motivates Black professionals to shift in the workplace? The answer for these 17 Black professionals is: never. A general "bias" (Lippi-Green 2021, p.64) for the preferred variety of the powerful does not account for all the linguistic actions this population is taking on a daily basis, but more than this it does not jive with their accounts of their own behavior. Even Jerome

(Section 3.2.1) and Lillian (Section 2.4.3)—who appear to be the most aligned with Standard language ideologies based on their statements about their own language use and that of others—aren't motivated to assimilate to White Standardized spoken English because they believe it to possess an inherent goodness. Both of these individuals were motivated to move towards it, in part, because of the positionality entailed by their professions and in part because of linguistic traumas they experienced. Both Lillian and Jerome had their linguistic production responded to with surprise when it did not align with listener expectations; it was too Standard. This kind of reaction—stemming directly from raciolinguistic ideologies on the part of the perceiver—did not feel good to them because they both, to an extent, want to be people others expect to sound proper. That is what motivates them to style shift—and to shift so often they only produce their racialized styles "with the boys" or to the extent they become disconnected with common variation, as with Lillian and *deadass* (Section 2.4.1.7). This near-unidirectional style shifting can oftentimes reach beyond linguistic presentation into other aspects of self performance such as dress and hair styling as well (see Jones & Shorter-Gooden pp.147-175). These individuals are motivated by the avoidance (at least in part) of a very specific psychosocial trauma that is related to (though not entirely caused by) Standard language ideologies and the linguistic expectations they set up. Lillian and Jerome, like the other interviewees, are not motivated to style shift for a single, simple reason—like indexing Blackness—but instead make choices in the moment based on a host of personal, contextual, and ideological factors to enact the social meanings they are seeking with the linguistic material available to them. It would seem, for Lillian and Jerome, the social meaning they are most often seeking to enact is professionalism; indirectly indexing competence, reliability, and expertise are their goals. They are not most often seeking to enact the social meaning of being a Standard language user as such; indirectly indexing Whiteness, propriety, and an inherent goodness or normalcy of the variety are not their goals. All of these social meanings may be enacted or available in the linguistic market when "the dialectic moment of social process" (Silverstein 1998, p.126) occurs. Digging deeper into metalinguistic commentary such as this, which exposes individual motivations and separates them from ideological, extant or sociohistorical, and market-based influences on usage, could allow for a more focused consideration of individual language user agentivity in the analysis of language variation and change over time.

The next question asked in Section 1.4.1 with respect to motivations is: Do Black language users shift because they feel their racialized styles to be inappropriate for professional settings (as Holliday & Squires 2020 report)? The metacommentary I elicited across interviewees does

not show this to be a primary motivating factor, at least not one that was explicitly reported. The only metacommentary elicited which uses the word *inappropriate* in this way came from Desiree (Section 2.4.3) when she discusses the French-speaking concierge in Cancun. While only Desiree marks her racialized variety as inappropriate for the workplace explicitly, we can be confident that other interviewees are motivated to shift, if not because they feel their variety is inappropriate, then because they are aware it is stigmatized (as Nylund (2015) contends). Aries uses the word *stigma* (Section 2.4.3) in his advice to a fictional Black employee when discussing his desire to move past the need for switching styles in the workplace. Chance's discussion of preconceived notions about Black men (Section 2.4.3) also provides metacommentary suggestive of being motivated for similar reasons. But the specificity of motivations with respect to inappropriateness or awareness of stigmatization for other interviewees is murkier, especially considering that several report making efforts to use their racialized styles when possible in their professions.

The final question asked is: Do Black professionals engage with style shifting from a desire to stay safe? Safeness here at times referring to physical safety and maintained freedom and autonomy (as Jerome discussed; Section 3.2.1), to mitigating risks in the workplace or other social spaces from the ways Black-indexed speech, behaviors, or Blackness in general is perceived (as Journey (Section 2.4.2.1) and Chance (Section 2.4.3) discussed), or to protecting ones' own energies (as Solomon and Yolanda discussed; Section 2.4.3). The motivation to stay safe is absolutely present, emerging from metacommentary across interviewees, and is reported more often (and with more specific details) for self-identified women than men[99]. Whether or not using standardized styles in the wider world will protect these individuals (Baker-Bell 2020a, pp.87-88, claims it cannot), this is a driving factor behind style shifting practices for Chance, Alex, Jerome, Alisha, Desiree, Aries, and Sasha.

In addition, at the end of Chapter Two, I raised a point about the ways in which the bodies of certain language users can reshape the social meanings available in a given context. This point was made in consideration of Journey and Yolanda's metacommentary considering the ways in which language they would be perfectly comfortable using with other Black people in the room becomes uncomfortable to use if just one White person enters the room because that language takes up—or can take up—different social meanings for that White person. Journey especially

[99] This may be an artifact of my positionalities as a researcher.

speaks to a fear, one that remains, that she will be heard using non-Standard forms and the perception of all Black people could suffer because of it. Solomon also provides some metacommentary which points towards the ways in which audience composition changes feature valuation when he discusses the ways in which other Black people will shush him in public spaces, but particularly those spaces that have a lot of White people in them[100]. In these public spaces, Solomon's volume isn't an issue among his Black friends until more White people show up, more people who enter the audience and can activate the social meanings of *ghetto* and *aggressive* now while Solomon is speaking, when previously they were not available (or active or in play or being exchanged). These three examples brush up against the current conceptualization of operation of a linguistic market, as a stable entity which sets value for the linguistic material passing through it based on an external (or Standard) rate of exchange. The performances of all actors within the market may not earn the same valuation, but they should have access to the same social meanings. What these interviewees are describing is instead a market in which certain sets of actors determine which social meanings are in play, or essentially redistribute exchange rates according to the social meanings implied through their embodied presence, both of which are fundamental deviations from the current theoretical ground and beg thorough investigation.

Taken together, these reported motivations for style shifting—as a reaction to linguistic trauma, from an awareness of stigmatization (of Blackness and of AAL) by audience members, to mitigate various risks—point once again to the importance of positionality and the importance of accounting for multiple, intersectional perspectives and experiences when analyzing the engines of stylistic change in the moment and over time.

3.4.3 Discussion: Enriching Sociolinguistic Labor

Across these interviews with 17 Black professionals from Detroit, the metalinguistic commentary they provided about their experiences with language revealed that their purpose for engaging with sociolinguistic labor—what I will simplify to *the deployment of sociolinguistic resources* for the purposes of this discussion—reached beyond satisfying others. Interviewees like Journey, London, and Lillian deploy their sociolinguistic resources to satisfy themselves, as does Simone (whose examples of course are the most thoroughly unpacked with respect to this theme; Section 3.3). Movement towards or away from a racialized variety can be effortful, as Alisha's

[100] "you wouldn't do that if we wasn't around these type of folk or whatever, you're worried about my loudness being perceived as ghetto."

metacommentary on *nigga* (Section 2.4.1.10) indicates; as she was reclaiming her racial identity after completing higher education, she also had to do the work of becoming comfortable using this term. But, she took up that labor for herself.

It is also important to recognize the avoidance of sociolinguistic labor as an action which not only motivates style shifting, but also as one which satisfies the self. Solomon in his takeaway message tells Black professionals "don't ever make yourself uncomfortable for a White person's comfort". I wrote that on a sticky note the day of our interview, stuck it on my bathroom mirror, and every time I see it I feel pretty great thinking about all the sociolinguistic labor I am not going to do ever again. Focusing on this good feeling has led me to contemplate what it means to use language at a state of rest, when one isn't engaging in any additional sociolinguistic labor. This is the aspect of usage—a restful state, one that is more satisfying to the self—that interviewees refer to when they note their comfort when producing their more racialized varieties. This is language use that is free from commodification (Marx 1867; 1990), that exists outside of market influence or valuation (Bourdieu 1991; Zhang 2005). In the metacommentary captured in the discussion of the *authentically Black* label (Section 2.4.2.2), Solomon and London cite examples explaining that it marks using language in such a way that a realness-factor, an aspect of being true to oneself, is upheld. Journey's metacommentary in this discussion also points to usage in a state of comfort, one that is free from additional labor, being preserved by being true to one's self (which for Journey is most easily accomplished in racially diverse spaces).

Authentically Black as a label, then, is marking both speech that can be produced purposefully and speech that is produced at a state of rest. It marks racialized speech deployed with a purpose when sociolinguistic labor is taken up, satisfying the self—as Simone (Section 3.3) chooses to give her speech to the non-profits in her racialized variety "and how they were gonna get it was authentic [Simone]", as Alex, Chance, and Yolanda bring their voices into their professions—to satisfy the self, but more importantly to be honestly uplifting the experiences of Black people. This aspect of being true to one's self involves accepting sociolinguistic labor into your life, it means putting in the work to represent the community <u>you</u> are from with your usage (as Solomon's example of not using D.C. terminology and London's example of Waymon Tinsdale suggest), and using what you say to speak honestly about the experience of your Black life, as Desiree, Alex, Aries, and others claim.

Authentically Black also marks racialized speech deployed with ease, when sociolinguistic labor is put aside, satisfying the self—as Solomon in Section 2.4.2.2 in his remarks on the *authentically Black* label marking speech being produced when he doesn't feel like he has to perform: "Like when I'm around all Black folks or I feel comfortable conversation I don't have to, I don't feel like I have to perform. I don't feel like my words are a performance like I don't have to, you know, speak like this to be respected or seen as intelligent. I can talk however I choose to talk." Etta's metacommentary on the *talking White* label (Section 2.4.2.1) also points towards a laborless (or less labor-full) state of language use, such as when she is together with her educated Black female friends and they are not always using the Standard because they have their "guard down". Meaning you can drop your guard, you can pull your walls down around your sistahs and use your language in a state of rest.

Metacommentary captured across the MMSI interview sections and themes reported in this chapter also illuminates the ways in which sociolinguistic labor can be taken up in service of others. Solomon provides some additional reflection to his assessment of the Nina Simone stimuli (Section 3.2.2), stating that older Black folks speak to you in a particular register and that when they do, it signals to you that information is being transferred, that truths are being passed down. Using sociolinguistic resources in that way, and maintaining the metalinguistic knowledge needed to recognize when someone is serving you in that way, are both acts of sociolinguistic labor. Alex and Chance both provide examples of the ways in which they include their racialized varieties in their workspace, and how that makes them more approachable to the communities they serve. Alex, a community college History professor, and Chance, a lawyer working to increase financial literacy among fellow Black Detroiters, both had to learn how to communicate in different registers to achieve their credentials and exist in their professions, but now that they are there, they've decided to be more representative in their linguistic production—more accessible, more real—in a way that serves the ones around them. It is not easy to pull your racialized (or marginalized in any sense for that matter) linguistic variety into the dominant sphere, into a market where it is not valued. It takes real work that one has to want to engage in; part of this engagement is for Alex and Chance, but it is done in service of their communities as well as they hold up a mirror to those around them and reflect what is possible. The most striking example of sociolinguistic labor in service of another comes, of course, from Simone (Section 3.3), who took up the daily task of employing the linguistic resources she commanded to transfer another Black woman's ideas into a register where they could be seen.

The metacommentary collected from interviewees is also riddled with examples of sociolinguistic labor done to satisfy others. Interviewees cite motivations for shifting—which by necessity involves the deployment of sociolinguistic resources—that involves fear, racial tokenization, resisting racial stigmas, diffusing interactions with police, and preempting the perception of negative racial stereotypes, among others. As so many of the interviewees describe, they need to do extra work—additional sociolinguistic labor—to ensure that speaking from their body does not result in their message not being heard (Chance in Section 2.4.3) or them not being seen as a "viable source" (Desiree in Section 2.4.3). This labor could manifest as simply as not leaning forward when speaking at a board meeting to avoid being perceived as aggressive and unprofessional, as Sasha describes (Section 2.4.3), which then could lead to the dismissal of her ideas as merely impassioned, not important. This labor could also be much more serious and self-effacing, like taking multiple actions of self-censorship such as changing one's name, pitch, word choice, and speech rate over the phone as Chance describes (Section 2.4.3) or changing essentially everything about the way you present yourself such that you are not recognizable to those closest to you, as Simone describes (Section 3.3). Fifteen out of 17 interviewees report being aware of participating in linguistic actions of self-censorship like switching into a more Standard variety, changing the words they use, and adjusting their tone daily in the practice of their professions. The metacommentary captured in this first application of the MMSI indicates that sociolinguistic labor is entailed across contexts for Black professionals for a variety of reasons, and that this labor does extend beyond the satisfaction of others. Most of these individuals feel compelled to continue engaging, in the practice of their professions, in sociolinguistic labor that moves them away from using linguistic varieties which most closely align with their expression of self. This labor is, most decidedly, done to satisfy demands that are situated outside of the Black language user.

What remains for us to consider now is: are they successful? I have shown how this community conceives of their shifting practices, and have shown their motivations for moving away from their racialized styles in the workplace. Several of these interviewees have professed that they do not feel that shifting is important or necessary for them, that they resist the old notions that their elders held about more Standard varieties being appropriate or necessary, and that this kind of sociolinguistic labor does not need to be engaged with any more for Black people to be perceived as competent professionals; they can sound like themselves without risk of negative judgments. Other interviewees feel that a single non-Standard word slipping out can cost a Black person important advancement opportunities, or seriously harm the way that others

characterize their entire race, and that even though needing to shift may be unfortunate, it is necessary because society still holds preconceived notions about Black people—that their racialized speech sounds unprofessional (and worse). The speech perception experiment in Chapter Four engages with these shifting practices directly, and intends to identify for this community what legible performances of their professionalism are. Is Black speech judged to be less professional sounding when even a single non-Standard, racialized feature is present? Or is there a difference in the judgments of certain features relative to others, which would allow us to let Black professionals know what can be safely incorporated and what is best to still be avoided? Or, do we find that, as Desiree predicts, the presence of all Black speech features marks Black people as sources who are less than viable in professional contexts?

Chapter Four Perceptions of Black Professional Speech

4.1 Chapter Four Overview

This chapter reports the design and results of an experiment that tested the perception of non-Standard speech variables within a specified social context. In a Paired Sentence Comparison (PSC) task in which stimuli were produced by a Black accented speaker, listeners judged the relative professionalism of sentences that contained all Standard variables or one or more non-Standard variables. The targeted variables were identified by interviewees in Chapter Two as properties of their racialized varieties that they are motivated to shift away from in the workplace or that are characteristic of Detroit, and/or have been identified in the literature and common discourse on Black varieties as highly stereotyped.

The chapter begins by considering relevant background literature which identifies the expectations listeners have about speakers' production patterns and the ways in which these expectations have been shown, experimentally, to correlate with different socioindexical features of language users and consequently for differently positioned listeners as well. The chapter then describes a series of pilot experiments which led to the development of a PSC task, followed by an exposition of its design and results. As expected, those results demonstrate that listeners across demographic categories in the general population and across conditions being tested tend to choose sentences with no or fewer non-Standard speech variables as more professional sounding than those with more non-Standard variables.

4.2 Introduction

Factors of an individual's (embodied) positionality (Bucholtz & Hall 2016) such as age, race, gender, region, and socioeconomic status have been shown to affect both speech production and perception (Clopper & Pisoni 2005). The sociophonetics literature shows that meaningful patterns can emerge when considering these five categories in the interpretation of listener performance specifically with respect to their expectations about how others produce language. For example, Hay et al. (2006) tested perception of the ongoing NEAR/SQUARE merger in New Zealand English. This merger in progress was reported to be further along at the time in

younger, working class communities. In this experiment, listeners heard words produced by speakers who make distinctions between NEAR and SQUARE vowels. Listeners were asked to identify the word they heard; across participants, a given auditory stimulus was associated with the photo of different purported speakers varying in age and class[101]. Among other findings, the authors report on listener-specific characteristics and perceived speaker characteristics that influence judgments in the perception task. They find that men assume merger more than women do, although this effect decreased as listener age increased. This result highlights that intersectional identities (gender and age) of listeners, stemming from their embodied social roles, influence socio-indexical perception. Hay et al. (2006) also report that the speaker's perceived age and social class and listeners' own production patterns for these vowels (whether they are merged or distinct) influence accuracy of lexical identification. Hay et al. (2006) interpret these findings as evidence that listeners' experiential categories are both linguistic and social, and that listeners' remembered experiences of speech input are simultaneously encoded for both linguistic and social information (see also Johnson 1997, Pierrehumbert 2001, and Sumner et al. 2014). These and other data are consistent with the interpretation that encoding of both linguistic and social information contributes to expectations about the produced speech patterns of certain types (e.g., older or younger, urban or rural) of individuals. Simultaneous encoding of social and linguistic information indicates something fundamental about the ways in which our mind necessarily interfaces with the world through our perceptual apparati, with individuals at the center of a sensory network[102], encoding (perhaps even discrete) linguistic experiences not only alongside information about their sources, but also potentially according to our expectations based on past experiences with[103] those types of individuals as well.

McGowan (2015), among others (e.g., Clopper & Pisoni 2005; Hay et al. 2006; Babel & Russell 2015), has shown that the information we have experienced about how certain types of people

[101] Hay et al. (2006) used four photo conditions and a no photo control condition. The photos included an "older" photo, a "younger" photo, a "middle class" photo, and a "working class" photo (p. 463).
[102] As stated in Section 1.2, linguistic perception is relativistic and egocentric. Most adults carry a fully developed (although some individuals have had injuries, illness, or atypicalities which have prevented this state) and independently operating linguistic system which encodes new information in ways that are influenced by all of our previous experience of the world.
[103] Or ideas about; *experiences* can be entirely cognitive, as well as physical. I do not have siblings, but I have experienced the concepts of sorority and fraternity, I understand what brothers and sisters are, I have a good idea of what the relationship entails, and that knowledge influences the ways in which I organize information when I am observing others even though these are social dynamics that I do not participate in through my own embodied positionality, even though this knowledge is built through observation, not practice. The influences of entirely cognitive experiences include those of ideologies, especially as discussed in Section 1.3.2.

who exist in certain types of bodies can actually facilitate our processing of linguistic variables because we make predictions about how people are going to sound, which can improve comprehension when those expectations are met. In this study, McGowan (2015) builds on Hay et al.'s (2006) approach, using photos to encode social information, and presented listeners aurally with a Chinese-accented English speaker reading a series of paragraphs and visually with one of three images: a Chinese-American woman, an American woman, or a raceless, genderless person silhouette as the purported speaker. Listeners are asked to transcribe each sentence the speaker has said and when the images are congruent with the speaker's identity—when their Asianness is represented both aurally and visually—listeners are more accurate in transcribing what the speaker has said than when their expectations are not met (as when presented with images that are socially incongruent with the voices they are hearing). McGowan (2015) engages with several sets of experimental results that have been interpreted in terms of a "bias model" (Rubin 1992, Lippi-Green 2012, p.64, & Niedzielski 1999) whereby stigmatized identities (in McGowan's study, Asianness) can interfere with linguistic processing in some way. McGowan's findings, though, indicate that listener expectations about a social group's linguistic production can facilitate their processing, even if that social group's linguistic production is widely stigmatized (creating the potential for those expectations to be built from less than generous observations and information is perhaps higher). D'Onofrio (2019), expanding on McGowan's (2015) study, used a series of images of the same Korean actor in a variety of outfits to demonstrate the influence of raciolinguistic ideologies on the facilitation effects being discussed here. D'Onofrio (2019) indicates listeners' expectations are less attributable to "particular manifestations" of Asianness as such and more to "combinations of semiotic resources [which] may include listeners' assumptions of an L1 American English speaker" (p.363). D'Onofrio's (2019) work approaches perception, and the influences of expectations on perception, as shaped "not only by "actual" social experience with individuals, but also by broadly circulating ideologies surrounding these categories and the personae that inhabit them" (p.363).

van Berkum et al. (2008) also show decisive evidence that listeners are attending to social information (like speaker age) in speech that informs and perhaps facilitates their online (neural) processing. The authors' main research question is: When do listeners take into account who the speaker is? And at the risk of oversimplifying some of the relevant neurolinguistic issues, I include a surface-level discussion of this work because the finding here is foundational to my understanding of the ways in which we—very rapidly—take social information into account when

comprehending the language used around us. In this study, van Berkum et al. (2008) constructed sets of sentences, some which presented semantic anomalies and some which presented social anomalies. An example of a semantic anomaly sentence is *I spread my warm toast with socks*. Here the word *socks* is unexpected, regardless of the person speaking. An example of a social anomaly sentence is *I drink a glass of wine before bed* read by a child, which provides listeners with information that is socially unexpected. In using electromagnetic encephalography to measure if and how fast the listener responds to these key words in language centers of the brain, the authors find that speaker identity (across a variety of categories) is processed within 300 milliseconds, which is within the same window established for sentence meaning (evaluated through comparison with semantic anomaly conditions). They conclude, and I emphatically repeat: "The linguistic brain is not just combining words in a context-free semantic universe confined in a single person's skull. It immediately cares about other people" (p.589).

Another foundational study which captures the ways in which an individual's expectations shape their performance is Niedzielski (1999), wherein listeners from Detroit heard 50 sentences read by a fellow Detroiter and were asked to match a vowel in a target word (e.g., *house* or *pop*) from a list of six (acoustically manipulated) vowel targets. These listeners were split into two groups, one which received an answer sheet with the word *Michigan* written at the top and one which received an answer sheet with the word *Canadian* written at the top. Listeners in the *Canadian* group were told the speaker was Canadian and those in the *Michigan* group were told the speaker was a Michigander; both groups received identical stimuli in which the speaker (again, a Detroiter) was reading in her natural speaking voice, which included raised (or more Canadian-indexed and/or stereotyped) vowels. The results suggested that the expectations of listeners in the *Michigan* group about how Detroiters are supposed to sound encourages an overcorrection outcome wherein these listeners match the raised /aw/ the speaker actually produced with an exceedingly low vowel from the list, one "a good deal lower than *any* /aw/ produced by *any* female speaker in Detroit" (pp.66-67). This overcorrection outcome did not emerge in the *Canadian* group. Niedzielski (1999) suggests that the labels atop each answer sheet the participants were using to have been "the only thing" that would have caused this outcome (p.66). The labels themselves, however, are not doing such causal work. Rather, the expectations an individual carries about others—expectations which influence their rational orderings of the world (see Section 2.4.3), expectations which stem from their embodied positionality and the very nature of perception itself (see Section 1.2)—are activated by the

inclusion of such labels. When Niedzielski (1999) had the ingenious idea to place “CANADIAN” in red atop those answer sheets (p.66), this labeling had the subsequent effect of activating sets of expectations in listeners about how they themselves—Detroiters—sound. The listeners in the *Michigan* group do not “hear” the /aw/ raising the speaker is producing, Niedzielski (1999) argues, because the speaker’s description as a Michigander did not align with other Michiganders’ expectations about the types of people who produce raising (p.69). Detroiters often produce raised vowels in a number of phonetic environments, but do not usually attend to that variable produced within and by their own community[104]. It is only when Niedzielski (1999) is able to toggle those expectations into a more active state (p.79), using social information about the speaker’s purported national origin that raising becomes perceptible and those listeners’ performance on the matching task is unhindered to an extent.

Another study which underscores the ways in which hindrance plays a role in listener expectations is King & Sumner (2014). These authors tested whether General American (GA) listeners recognize words with “standard, infrequent, and dialect-independent variants" (p.2915) more quickly when produced in their own dialect than when produced in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The (standard, infrequent, dialect-independent) GA variant tested is word-medial consonant cluster reduction (*friendly* versus *frien’ly*) and the (nonstandard, dialect-dependent) AAVE variant tested is TH-fronting (*toof* vs *tooth*). King & Sumner (2014) find that words with Standard variants (here [nd] rather than [n_] and [θ] rather than [f]) are <u>both</u> more quickly recognized when produced by a GA speaker, despite the word-medial consonant cluster reduction variant being produced dialect-independently by almost all speakers of English. King & Sumner (2014) demonstrate that mean response times to non-Standard variants are shorter when produced by the AAVE voice, indicating that listeners have an expectation when hearing this type of voice that a speaker will be producing non-Standard variants. In King & Sumner (2014)’s study, the perceived normative incompatibility (Levon 2014) of Black speech with Standardness is effectively blocking the presence of a Standard feature in the AAVE voice from impacting the listeners’ decisions. The knowledge that General American language users have about their own linguistic production or dialect distribution does not aid them in this task (just as Niedzielski’s (1999) participants are similarly unaided), because it is not the objective distribution of produced variables that determines listener performance on this task but instead

[104] Similarly, Interviewees in Section 2.4.2.2 all produced varieties of speech that (to my trained ears) would align with canonical descriptions of AAL, but none of them provided detailed accounts of specific variants or features that are indicative of authentic Black speech.

their expectations about how certain groups produce language. That the non-Standard variants facilitate recognition when produced by a Black speaker and the Standard variants when produced by a White speaker is consistent with Flores & Rosa's (2015) claim about the operation of raciolinguistic ideologies which equates racialized bodies (and the language issuing from them) with "linguistic deficiency", regardless of their "objective linguistic practices" (p.150).

Having established that individuals have expectations about the linguistic productions of others that can facilitate (McGowan 2015, van Berkum et al. 2008, King & Sumner 2014) or hinder (Niedzielski 1999, King & Sumner 2014) perception, I turn to studies that assess how that information is stored. Sumner & Samuel (2009), in testing r-fullness, a variant associated with the Standard variety in the U.S., present listeners with a series of primed lexical decision tasks to determine how cross-dialect variants are stored, specifically investigating the ways in which listeners' exposure to a dialect affects their reaction time. Across a series of three experiments, the authors present listeners with pairs of words ending in *-er* spoken by either a Standard speaker or an individual with a New York City dialect. The first experiment tests the effects of phonological similarity (/bekə˞/ vs /bekə/) of auditory primes on lexical decision, and shows that participants who have less exposure to the NYC dialect (which is not r-full) exhibit longer reaction times in conditions when there is no Standard prime present than when primed with a Standard token (/bekə˞/)[105]. The second experiment builds on these experience-based findings to determine how different dialect variants interact with lexical activation, and shows that Standard speakers treat variants from the NYC dialect more like "nonwords" (p.495), showing a significant processing cost. The third experiment is designed to better understand how dialect variants are cognitively represented long term, and reports a priming effect only when the dialect of the prime and the dialect used by the participant in the lab setting were both the Standard. Sumner & Samuel (2009) report that it is experience—more than geographic location alone—that predicts listener behavior. This finding indicates that experience as a metric includes the myriad ways a listener can come in contact with a given variant besides its simple presence in the ambient speech surrounding them. The authors conclude that listeners from all regions have been exposed to r-fullness "through their experiences" with "orthography, education, and media" (p.439). Heaton (2018) has also shown that the types of media one consumes can have profound effects on how listeners perceive such socio-indexical variants. For example, if a listener regularly watched shows with Southern characters who were

[105] See pp.491-492, especially Figure 1, for description of the four conditions Sumner & Samuel (2009) tested in context.

portrayed as unintelligent, they were also more likely to rate Southern speech (which is often not r-full) as unintelligent as well. Another study to consider with respect to experience, Babel & Russell (2015), has shown that a listener's social network plays a role in their performance in a study that asked participants from a large Canadian city to self-describe the ethnic identities of their friends, family, and colleagues. The presence (or absence) of Chinese individuals within this network was shown to predict listener accuracy on transcription of Chinese-Canadian speech. Babel & Russell (2015) argue that the composition of an individual's social network informs the development of "internal models of linguistic awareness and knowledge based on their experiences, real and imagined, with individuals in the world" (p.2832).

These results relating to individual experience with other people in our networks (Babel & Russell 2015), the types of media we consume (Heaton 2018), and the institutions[106] we move through (Sumner & Samuel 2009) align with the ways in which Operario & Fiske (2003), Keels et al. (2017), and other psychologists have determined that stereotypes operate in relation to perception in the moment and can influence the development of individual beliefs and collective ideology over time (see also Hill 2008; Tajfel & Turner 2004). Listener expectations have long been discussed in the literature as a function of our perceptual system. They indicate the ways in which an individual is using the input signal to make sense of what a given speaker is saying, to speed up processing by anticipating what will be produced next, and to reinforce what has just been produced. As a field, though, over the last several decades of collected experimental research on perception we've learned that there are two sides to the expectation coin, and that while sometimes our expectations do indeed facilitate processing—like with McGowan's (2015) and van Berkum et al.'s (2008) findings—we find that oftentimes the opposite is just as likely, which Niedzielski (1999) and King & Sumner (2014)'s results point towards. Stereotypes are what we find lurking on the other side of that facilitation coin, potentially slowing down listener processing. Stereotypes are sets of expectations which affect our processing pathways, which Operario & Fiske (2003) report contain "beliefs reflecting relationships between groups" (p.24) and discuss the ways in which a given social situation can trigger how perceivers use a given stereotype. Social situations—or participation in various linguistic markets (Bourdieu 1991; Zhang 2005)—make an individual's embodied positionality relevant in the moment. The demands of a situation can toggle the activity level of their linguistic expectations and determine

[106] Orthography, media, and education are all institutional products that are developed, maintained, and reified through such sociopolitical apparati.

if their beliefs about inter-group relations or categorized expectations they hold about others will facilitate or hinder their processing.

One study illustrating this comes from Calloway (2021), which placed listeners in situations that induced a pseudo-social role and assessed the ways in which this role influenced their perception of speaker gender. Calloway (2021) is assessing the extent to which sibilant categorization—which has been demonstrated to be highly sensitive to perceived speaker gender (Munson et al., 2006; Winn et al. 2013; Bouavichith et al., 2019)—is influenced by listener's perceived power when listeners are presented with incongruent sources of information about speaker gender. Calloway uses visual and auditory information to cue speaker gender, and finds that socially powerless individuals[107] are sensitive to both cues while socially powerful individuals are less sensitive to visual information. This result points towards perceptual blocking because, when presented with incongruous social information, Calloway (2021) concludes, powerful individuals do not seem sensitive to such information arguably because they enjoy social and cognitive affordances from their perceived power (Fiske 1993, S.A. Goodwin et al. 2000), which allows them to process information in such a way that defaulting to their initial expectations about the people they perceive often does not come with a cost. The additional stream of information (in Calloway (2021), the visual) can be ignored or blocked for whatever reason by these powerful individuals in perceiving center of gravity for /s/. This result is intriguing to me because although the social distinction of power was assigned to these individuals briefly, within the bounds of the experiment, an effect is observed that echoes conclusions made by psychologists about the ways in which individuals who wield influence and control over others behave; the inducement of that social role was sufficient to activate expectations that influenced listener behavior, indicating that individuals may possess a vast repository of expectations, that can be activated in a given social or experimental setting through a variety of means.

For my purposes, I am most interested in determining if the reported style shifting practices of the interviewed Black professionals are legible as performances of professionalism to general audiences. The findings from the literature discussed in Chapter One show that Standard language ideologies are deeply seated in the United States and that they are in many ways specifically antiblack. I propose that Blackness and professionalism are normatively

[107] These individuals are assigned to high- or low-power groups through a series of experimental tasks; power is not determined by any metric external to the experimental setting.

incompatible percepts. It is no secret that Black speech is widely perceived as unintelligent and unprofessional. Indeed, the first descriptions of an African American variety of speech from the 1880's label it as "baby talk" (Baker-Bell 2020b). The continuous downgrading of Black speech across our institutions has reinforced this idea even among Black speakers, who report feeling their racialized varieties to be inappropriate for professional settings (Holliday & Squires 2020; Section 2.4.3). By presenting listeners with an experimental task where they must assess the speech of a Black speaker as more or less professional, when that speaker is producing both a Standard variety and key non-Standard Black-indexed features, I hope to determine if perceptual blocking arises and if so, in which cases—for which variables under study—it appears most potent.

Finally, in Craft et al. (2020), my co-authors and I argue that "the discrimination of basic linguistic units inherently engages the social experience of producing and interpreting language" (p.391). It is this truth that, in my opinion, allows for indexicality to operate and presupposes the existence of a sociolinguistic monitor—the aspect of our computational linguistic system which is sensitive to the social experiences of language users, and gives rise to the experimental results discussed above[108]. Labov et al (2011) investigated the characteristics of this sociolinguistic monitor. As discussed in Section 1.5.1, they hypothesized that the sociolinguistic monitor or socially sensitive computational linguistic system is sensitive to a given variable's frequency and they experimentally assessed listener sensitivity to increasing proportions of the non-Standard apical realization [in] of the socioindexical variant ING in a social context where one would expect the Standard to occur: a newsroom. The literature on stereotypes (e.g., Operario & Fiske 2003) shows that listeners are more likely to bring their stereotypes to bear on a perceptual task when social context is encoded (because they are able to imagine themselves in a social scenario where such judgments may occur). Correspondingly, Labov et al. (2011) found that increases in non-Standard [in] was proportional to the decrease in professionalism ratings.

With my research question concerning Blackness and professionalism in mind, I first chose the sociolinguistic monitor task for the experimental design for this dissertation. In doing so, I knew that listeners would bring their Standard language ideologies to bear on this task and I hypothesized that they might do so in ways that invite perceptual blocking (as in Calloway 2021

[108] Put simply (as established in Section 1.2): we make language with our bodies, and the brain is expecting that; positionality is inherent in the perceptual experience.

and King & Sumner 2014). This hypothesis was motivated by the fact that the task would focus on a specific social situation, possibly making it more likely for listeners to use the hindrance side of their expectation coin. Moreover, the task is already designed with the evaluation of professionalism in mind and therefore my findings could mesh well with the professionalism-related discussion in Holliday & Squires (2020) with respect to sociolinguistic labor I also hope to engage in. But, as discussed in Section 4.3, the sociolinguistic monitor task I piloted extensively was ultimately unsuccessful, leading me to use a different method for testing the professionalism of non-Standard speech variables that I've termed the Paired Sentence Comparison (PSC) task (discussed in Section 4.4).

4.3 Background Pilot: the Sociolinguistic Monitor Task

In the context of the MMSI (Chapter Two), I asked Black language users why they style shift away from Black varieties in professional settings. I piloted a sociolinguistic monitor task (Labov et al. 2011) to assess if listeners judge Black people as being successful in conveying professionalism through such shifting (or conversely unsuccessful in conveying it when features of their non-Standard racialized varieties are present). As just discussed, I found the sociolinguistic monitor task potentially promising because it focuses listeners' attention on indexical variants by presenting speech embedded in a social context which presupposes conformity to community norms of careful speech. Labov et al. (2011) do this by labelling the speaker as a job applicant—a potential "Newscaster" (p.438)—and asking the listener to rate the applicant's speech based on fittedness for that job. To assess whether the sociolinguistic monitor effect reported in Labov et al. (2011) using the socio-indexical variant ING would hold when using a) a Black speaker producing a Black-Accented Standard variety and b) a variable more specific to AAL variation than one, like ING, that is found cross-dialectically but does not rises to the level of general awareness that Labov has termed a "stereotype"[109] (Labov 1994, p.78), I designed a sociolinguistic monitor task that featured 10 word-final /nd/ consonant clusters before vowel-initial words or at the end of a sentence (and never at a morpheme boundary) embedded in contemporary (but non-triggering) news headlines. Word-final consonant cluster reduction—which does occur in casual speech dialect-independently—is especially indexed to Black speech when it occurs preceding vowel-initial words[110]. Consistent

[109] Not to be confused with the more colloquial usage of stereotype discussed extensively in Section 4.1 and elsewhere throughout this text. Here, Labovian stereotypes form a trichotomy with *markers* and *indicators*, and are said to be variables which are salient to both in-group and out-group members and often function as a basis for negative evaluations of performance.
[110] Wolfram & Fasold (1974), Baugh (1983), Rickford (1999), and King (2020) echo this claim.

with Labov et al.'s (2011) findings with this task, I predicted that with increasing instances of consonant cluster reduction, listeners would become less likely to rate the speaker's performance as professional.

Due to the nature of my research questions, verifying that the speaker's voice was reliably heard as Black was essential, and thus stimuli were normed on Prolific.co (hereafter Prolific), an online participant recruitment service, by 80 listeners who heard a self-identified 30-year-old Black woman college professor from Rochester, New York reading six brief news headlines with 10 target /nd/ clusters, five occurring before vowels and five occurring phrase finally, in either a fully Standardized or non-Standardized condition (between-subjects). This norming showed that 55 of the 80 participants raced the speaker as Black. With confidence from this finding, I proceeded to design and run several different versions of the sociolinguistic monitor task, but the expected pattern (see Labov et al. 2011) was consistently weak. Two versions of the sociolinguistic monitor task were run with very few changes to the method presented in Labov et al. (2011) except that several design choices needed to be made because important aspects of that design were not specified. For example, the authors do not state explicitly how many conditions each listener heard, nor the order of stimulus presentation in each condition. In the first two pilots, approximating design as best I could from the published paper and personal correspondence with authors, the results appeared entirely random; listeners (in free responses) were clearly sensitive to the variation (i.e., they noticed the /nd/ clusters), but the professionalism ratings showed no distinguishable pattern. I opted for different orientations of the stimuli in a new version such that, rather than prioritizing the balance of their phonological environments (vowel-initially vs phrase-finally) for each condition, the reduced cluster stimuli were now evenly spaced, so that listeners heard the same number (increasingly) in each condition irrespective of context. However, this change also produced no clear effect. I then shortened the total duration of the reading passage in order to isolate more salient /nd/ clusters and simplified the task (using eventually a 3- rather than 7-point Likert scale).

In the final, simplest sociolinguistic monitor design that tested three between-subjects groups who received different orders (of percentages of non-Standard variables per the passage being tested), I found a very weak pattern, but only when the responses were generously binned, and not always in the expected direction. I piloted this same design using the voice of another speaker, a self-identified 31-year-old White Minnesotan woman, to determine both if the weak pattern found for one condition in the expected direction would be replicated, and to attempt to

disambiguate if the feature being tested or the racialization of the voice being tested was responsible for the weakness of the sociolinguistic monitor effect in these pilot results. But here again there was no evidence of a monitor effect. Thus, I pivoted to the experimental task I describe below which, in principle, can be used to evaluate the professionalism of *any* non-Standard variable, not merely hypersalient ING-like speech features.

4.4 Paired Sentence Comparison Task

The Paired Sentence Comparison (PSC) task more directly assesses listeners' judgments of targeted non-Standard speech variables. In each experimental trial, listeners hear a pair of sentences (only presented aurally), and choose which sentence sounds *more* professional: Sentence A or Sentence B. The main goal of this study is to determine if Black speakers are successful in conveying their professionalism when features of their racialized varieties are present. Put differently, if Black people choose to incorporate aspects of their racialized varieties more often into their linguistic practices in the workplace, are their identities as professionals more likely to be rejected by audiences?

4.4.1 Task Motivation and Design

In each sentence pair, listeners hear paired sentences that differ in the number of non-Standard variables. I chose three variables which are directly relevant to my population under study, either because they emerged specifically during our interviews or because they address my research questions related to the legibility of performances of professionalism by Black language users, Standard language ideologies, and perceptual blocking (Campbell-Kibler 2009, Campbell-Kibler 2011, Pharao et al. 2014, Levon 2014) or both. These are:

- Fortition via Th-stopping | *they* → *dey* | a feature of the phrase *What up doe?*[111] identified by 90% of interviewees as indicative of Detroit speech (Labov 1966b; Thomas 2007; Walton 2016)
- Metathesis | *ask* → *aks* | a highly salient, Black-indexed, non-Standard, and deeply stereotyped speech feature and lexical item (Wolfram & Thomas 2002; Thomas 2007; Tatman 2013; Cole et al. 2022)
- Word-final Consonant Cluster Reduction | /nd/ → /n_/ | several interviewees remarked that in the daily practice of their professions they must work to ensure the ends of their

[111] A song of the same title by Detroit artist Danny Brown can be accessed here: https://youtu.be/YC3L77CIL6g; see Fader (2013).

words are *clear* or fully *enunciated* (Thomas 2007; Wolfram 1994; Bailey & Thomas 1998; Rickford 1999, pgs.3–14)

Three types of sentence pairings using these variables were chosen. Set 1 presents listeners with one sentence with all Standard variables and another sentence with one non-Standard variable. Set 1 seeks to answer: Do listeners have a tendency to choose a sentence with all Standard variables as more professional than a sentence with one non-Standard variable?

Set 1 was successfully piloted (results are reported in Section 4.4.2 below), and so Sets 2 and 3 were developed to further describe the relationship of the target variables to one another. In Sets 2 and 3 there is no longer an all Standard sentence present.

Set 2's purpose is to test if the effect of the presence of non-Standard variables on professionalism percepts is cumulative. In each sentence pair, listeners receive one sentence with one non-Standard variable—*dey* for example—and the other sentence features that same variable along with another non-Standard variable:

- We heard **dey** might ask about a new trend in stock options.
- We heard **dey** might **aks** about a new trend in stock options.

Set 3 asks if the presence of a given variable outweighs the combined non-Standardness of the other two. Set 3's purpose is to determine which of the three non-Standard variables being tested has the largest impact on professionalism percepts. In each sentence pair, listeners receive one sentence with one non-Standard variable—*aks* for example—and the other sentence features the other two non-Standard variables.

- We heard they might **aks** about a new trend in stock options.
- We heard **dey** might ask about a new **tren_** in stock options.

Table 4.1 summarizes for quick reference the relationship of the three Sets to one another and the ways in which the three variables being tested are distributed within them.

PSC Task Condition Breakdown			
Condition	Sentence Type		Total Pairs
	More Standard	More Non-Standard	
Set 1	All Standard / 0 Variables	1 Variable {A, B, or C}	3
Set 2	1 Variable [A]	2 Variables [A + B]	6
Set 3	1 Variable [A]	2 Variables [B + C]	3

Table 4.1. The Paired Sentence Comparison Task condition breakdown by sentence type. The letters A,B,&C are placeholders to indicate the number and type of non-Standard variables in each condition.

4.4.2 PSC Pilot Design and Results

To test the PSC Task and the three non-Standard variables, a pilot study was conducted with Set 1 sentence pairs, that is, with an all Standard sentence paired with a sentence with one non-Standard variable. A self-identified 30-year-old Black woman Linguistics professor from Rochester, New York produced these sentence pairs by recording several iterations of each sentence first in her Black-Accented Standard variety and in what she terms her AAVE variety (but what I will refer to as a Black non-Standard variety for consistency with the description of methods and results reporting).

Two sentences with different wordings were pilot tested to ensure the consonant cluster reduction (word-final /nd/) variable was being carried by a sufficiently salient word. The wording options piloted are as follows:

- We heard **dey/they** might **ask/aks** for a mutual **fund/fun_** option
- We heard **dey/they** might **ask/aks** about a new **trend/tren_** in stock options.

In addition, for each sentence wording, two groups of between-subjects orders were tested to ensure that sentence pair order (all Standard first or second) was counterbalanced for participants, and that the sentence pairs themselves were randomized.

Eighty pilot participants were recruited via Prolific, and after giving informed consent, were presented with the following instructions:

> In this study, we are investigating perceptions of professional speech, presentation of self, and being understood by the general public. In a few moments, you will hear a business woman reading pairs of similar—but not identical—sentences and be asked to choose which sentence in each pair

sounds more professional. You will be able to replay the sentences, if needed, to compare them more than once. We ask that you listen with headphones. Please click the arrow to proceed when they are connected and on comfortably. Thank you!

On the next screen, the participant saw two play buttons labeled with the following instructions: Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence A; please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence B (see Appendix E). Below the play buttons is a reminder for the participant that they can listen as many times as needed, followed by two radio buttons for selecting either Sentence A or Sentence B as the *more* professional sounding sentence. Each of 80 participants in a given group heard the three sentence pairs in Set 1 (one pair for each of the three non-Standard variables; fortition via TH-stopping, metathesis, and consonant cluster reduction), in random order.

Trends in the results showed no effect for order and thus I've aggregated the groups in Figures 1 (*fund* sentences) and 2 (*trend* sentences).

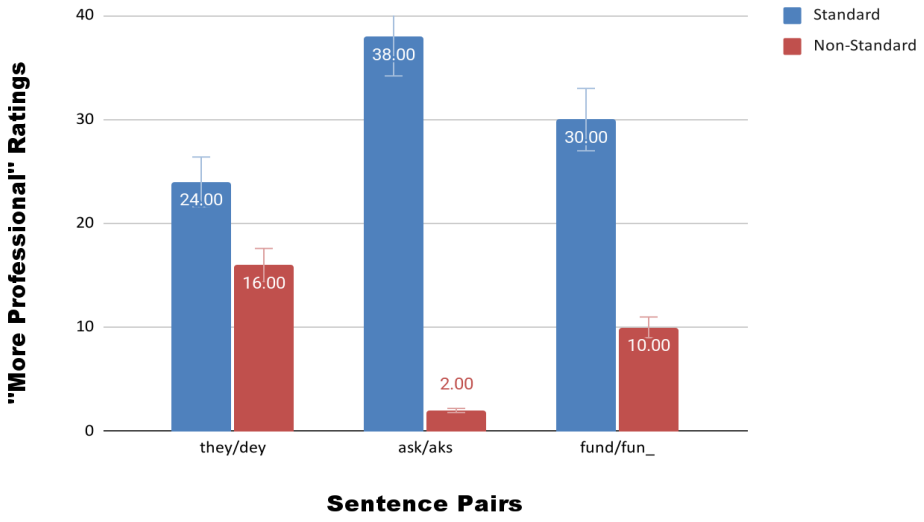


Figure 4.1. The PSC pilot outcomes for sentences ending with *fund*. N=40 Blue bars (left bar in each pair) and red bars (right) represent Standard and non-Standard sentences, respectively.

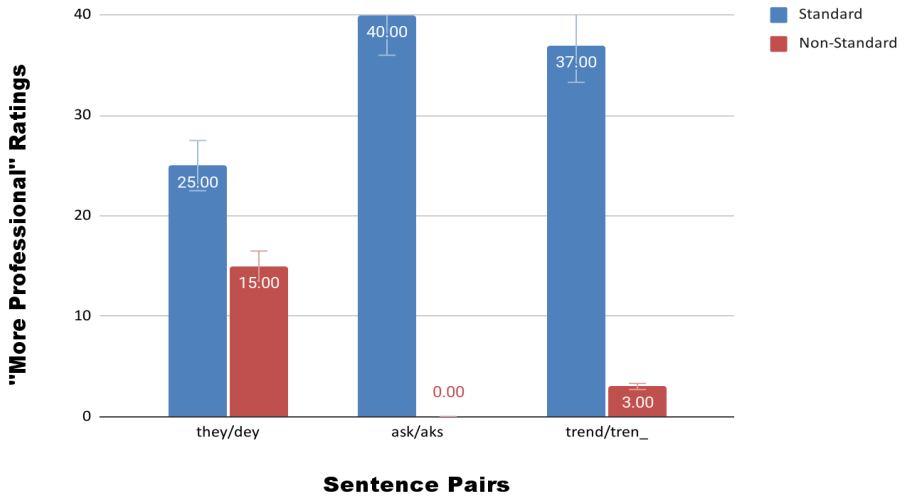


Figure 4.2. The PSC pilot outcomes for sentences ending with *trend*. N=40 Bar types are as described for Figure 4.1.

The results demonstrate that these features are indeed salient to listeners, and serve as a baseline indication that, when listeners are presented with an utterance with a (single) non-Standard variable, they have a tendency not to label it as professional when the comparison sentence uses a Standard version of that variable. Due to the strength of this effect in all conditions, it was determined that only one of the *fund* and *trend* sentence types would be needed in the main experiment; the *trend* type was chosen because the results of this wording presented the stronger baseline effect. However, the final voiced alveolar stop in *heard* that immediately precedes *dey/they* could be dampening the effect for that variable, and thus a wording change was made, substituting *knew* in its place, and new stimuli were recorded.

4.4.3 Main Task Stimuli

For the main experiment, the same self-identified 30-year-old Black woman Linguistics professor from Rochester, New York who produced the sentences for the pilot studies recorded several iterations of the target stimuli sentence—*We knew they might ask about a new trend in stock options*—in her Black-Accented Standard variety and in what she terms her AAVE variety (referred to here as a Black non-Standard variety). From the Black-Accented Standard iterations, one was chosen which exhibited a natural and non-distracting prosody, by which I mean the end of the sentence did not rise or fall abruptly, nor did the onset indicate conversational focus which could potentially be misconstrued out of context. This iteration forms what will now be referred to as the sentence frame—and also serves as the *all Standard sentence* in Set 1's sentence pairs.

Sets 1-3 require a total of seven sentences: one with all Standard variables, three with one non-Standard variable, and three with two non-Standard variables (see Appendix B for audio links to stimulus sentences). To create the six stimuli sentences with at least one non-Standard variable, I isolated instances of *tren_*, *aks*, and *dey* produced by the speaker across her iterations of the sentence in her Black non-Standard variety that best matched the prosodic contour and intensity where their Standard counterparts occurred in the frame. Using Praat (version 6.0.29, Boersma & Weenik 2017), the Standard tokens were removed from the frame at acoustic zero crossings and the chosen non-Standard tokens were excised at zero crossings and spliced into the frame at that splice location. Minor adjustments (typically deleting a single pitch pulse or bit of frication) were made, if needed, to reduce audible clipping at the site of the splice. Through this method, the paired sentences in each trial are phonetically identical except for the target variables plus, as explained below, a flanking word.

The *dey* token was excised from the onset of the stop closure for /d/ to the onset of the closure for /m/. In the chosen frame, the /t/ of *might*, which precedes the *ask*/*aks* token, is produced as a flap /ɾ/ (a perfectly natural and expected production for this word in this context). However, splicing *aks* after this particular *might* resulted in the flap no longer being salient, which risked *might* being heard as not having a final stop—a potential confound in that this word might also sound non-Standard. To avoid this problem, for utterances with *aks*, I replaced *might ask* from the frame with *might aks* excised from the non-Standard utterance, preserving a final /t/ percept for *might*.

Also, the overall intensity of the sentences varied across the speaker's multiple iterations. One consequence of this variation is that, in the case of non-Standard *tren_*, there were no productions in this speaker's non-Standard Black variety that had high enough intensity and fit the prosodic contour of the frame that also contained a fully realized nasal consonant. The chosen stimulus has a yet more reduced final consonant cluster that, although lacking a distinct nasal murmur, has a nasalized, glottalized vowel; it is an entirely naturalistic production from a Black professional speaker, one that when rated by several members of my research community was not determined to be substantially more or less professional sounding than the other two variables being used for this version of the experiment. Due to the already elided nature of the nasalized, glottalized vowel in reduced *trend*, the most natural-sounding splice was achieved by excising and splicing *tren_ in* into the frame rather than only *tren_*.

4.4.4 Main Task Experimental Procedure

The pilot did not reveal any effects for order of presentation—be that the order in which participants heard the sentences (all Standard first or all Standard second) or the order in which participants heard the pairs themselves. Thus, there were no strong predictions for ordering that could inform potential groupings in the experimental design and a fully randomized approach was adopted. In the task, each listener heard four sentence pairs. Three of these pairs were randomly selected sentence pairs, one from each of Sets 1-3, presented in a random order. The fourth sentence pair was the *ask*/*aks* pair from Set 1, which was removed prior to randomization to serve as a diagnostic case for all listeners. This sentence pair was chosen as a diagnostic case because the *ask*/*aks* condition presented the strongest effect in the pilot results (binning across outcomes presented in Figures 4.1 and 4.2). It was presented to all listeners to establish their baseline response. All participants received the diagnostic pair last.

With the exception of the stimuli being presented, the experimental setup and instructions[112] are the same as those described for the pilot in Section 4.4.2. Appendix B provides links to the auditory stimuli and Appendix E provides a mock-up of the experimental design.

4.5 Extended Demographics Survey

After completing the PSC task, participants are presented with two optional tasks: an extended demographics survey and a stereotype endorsement measure. These tasks are included primarily to better describe listeners' positionality as individuals and to secondarily assess the ways in which their positionality may influence their performance on this task.

While some demographics are retrievable for Prolific users who opt-in to such data dispersal, this information maximally specifies age, national origin, first language, sex, and employment status. In an attempt to cover the demographics most relevant to my research questions and in an effort to provide participants as much agency as possible with respect to their self-

[112] One minor addition to wording was added to the instructions in that participants were also encouraged to complete the task in a quiet place, as well as while wearing headphones. Additionally, because no effects of order were found in the pilot results, no strong predictions with respect to order were made for Sets 2 & 3 before this experiment was run, and thus the randomized approach was adopted, eliminating the need to separate participants into groups. To choose which sentence in a given pair would be assigned the A slot (and therefore heard first), I used the random number generator (RAND) function in Google Sheets to assign each pair a number, sorted them accordingly, assigned each pair an A or B in turn, and then used this pseudo-random assignment to determine which sentence in the pair listeners would hear first.

identification, I developed and included the extended demographics survey described below, a full mock up of which is included with Appendix E.

After completing the PSC task, listeners will proceed to a new screen where they receive the following instructions:

> This section will ask you a series of demographic questions. All of the questions in this section are optional, but your self-identification will aid us in providing more accurate (if anonymized) descriptions of those who participated in this study and provided data for our research. If you feel comfortable doing so, please provide the following demographic information about yourself:

The first question is forced choice and asks participants for their age, providing radio buttons for eight age groups, beginning at 18-24 and ending at 85 & over. Next is a two-part gender identity question that asks participants to check a box (or multiple boxes) that best describes their gender from a list of several options and to indicate how they would like to have their responses grouped by gender for the study, from which they can choose only one option. Participants then have the option of responding to free-response questions about their linguistic history (what language(s) do you speak, write, or sign?), regional history (what nation or state are you from?), and profession (which can be used to assign current socioeconomic status). The demographics survey ends with a two-part racial identity question styled like the gender identity question followed by a series of four free-response questions about ability (do you consider yourself to be able-bodied?); sexual orientation; political affiliation; and religious affiliation.

The stereotype endorsement measure section followed the demographics section and consisted of four pairs of statements seeking responses from listeners on a 7-point Likert scale about their beliefs on how speech operates in the world in comparison to their thoughts on the beliefs of others. This section took listeners approximately one minute to complete. The stereotype endorsement measure outcomes have not been analyzed at this time and will be reported along with future developments of this research.

The experiment ends by asking participants to copy a unique verification code which is returned to Prolific so I may verify their participation and release their compensation of $10/hour for this 10-minute survey.

4.6 Participants

Sets 2 and 3 were not piloted due to time constraints, but because the baseline effect established in the pilot of Set 1 was so robust, a power analysis was not warranted to determine the number of participants needed. More important than the robustness of the baseline effect to this point is perhaps the centrality of positionality to this dissertation and my desire for this experiment's population to be as representative as possible within the limits placed by conducting this research during a global pandemic. On Prolific, to gather a representative sample, one must recruit a minimum of 300 participants, which is well above whatever a power analysis—based on mostly fabricated data for Sets 2 and 3—would have returned.

It was important to me to gather as representative a sample as possible for this study because we are suffering from a categorization crisis in sociolinguistics. *A priori* categorization is fraught with issues like researcher-perceived gender or race forcing binaries that may bias results. As we strive for antiracist and decolonial work in linguistics (see Charity Hudley, Mallinson, & Bucholtz 2020; King 2020, 2021) we must create space for participants to self-define and allow for categories to emerge. We cannot do this if we allow small sample sizes (approximately 30 participants) to remain the norm in experimental linguistic work[113], sample sizes in which represented minority groups are often too low for significance testing. I have thus made self-identification and representation a priority in my methodology, including an extended demographics survey that I imagine as one which could become a general tool for any type of linguistic work. Given this broad goal of the tool, I do not have strong predictions about the effects of all the demographic categories I will be reporting on in this section (but see Section 4.7 for some literature-based predictions). I have, though, both gathered and reported extended demographic data with two purposes in mind that are crucial, in my view, to the development of equitable and representative models for experimental best practices. First, such surveys allow participants the agency to self-describe their identities in a fuller sense. Second, such surveys afford researchers the opportunity to transparently report on the nature of the populations who provide us with our data (which may then be analyzed and critiqued over time).

As reported in Section 4.4 above, all questions in the demographic survey were optional. Three hundred participants responded to the age question and, as seen in Figure 4.3, 25-34 year olds

[113] Of course there are very good reasons for why some experimental approaches have small sample sizes. For example, electromagnetic articulometry is particularly invasive and time consuming and large functional magnetic resonance imaging studies are prohibitively expensive even among the well-resourced.

were the most represented age group, with 106/300 responses. No participants reported belonging to the 85 & over age group.

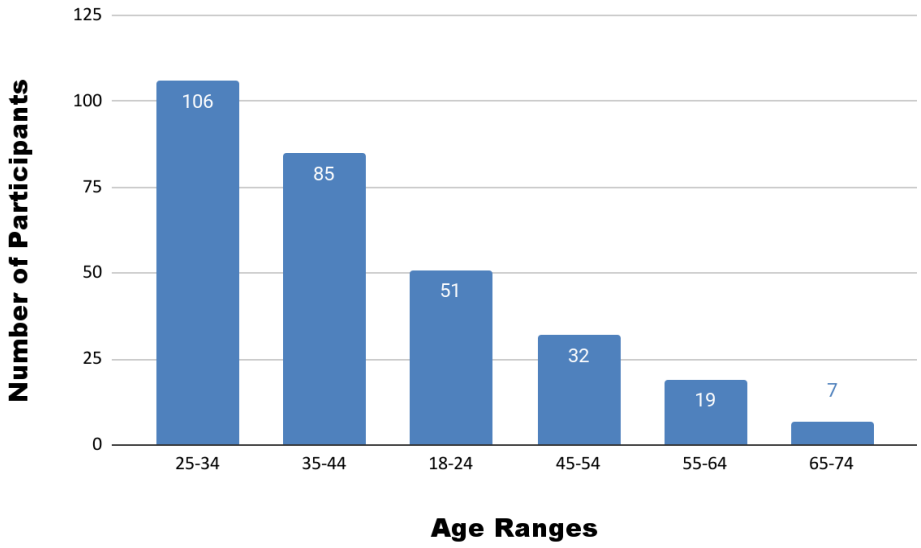


Figure 4.3. Participant age ranges. N=300

In the two-part gender question, 160 of the 299 participants who responded indicated they would like to be categorized with women for the purpose of analyses, and 97 indicated they would like to be categorized with men. There were 5 participants who asked to be categorized in a group labeled *other*. Thirty-seven participants indicated they did not want to have their gender taken into account during the analysis process, and so will be treated like the two participants who chose not to answer this question.

In terms of nation or state of origin, Prolific allows a researcher to filter by country (among other things), and I limited this study to people in the United States. I chose not to limit it to citizens or individuals whose first language was English, because I am interested in how the general U.S. public encounters Black language in professional settings. Only one of the 300 participants who answered the origin question indicated being from another country originally: Germany. All the other participants indicated being from the United States originally, with 46 of the 299 participants giving *United States* (or some variation of that) as their only answer to the question[114]. The most represented states are Florida and New York, each with 27 of the 299

[114] The question being: What nation or state are you from? And where have you spent the most time?

participants and there were eight U.S. states not represented[115]; the top 10 are shown in Figure 4.4 below.

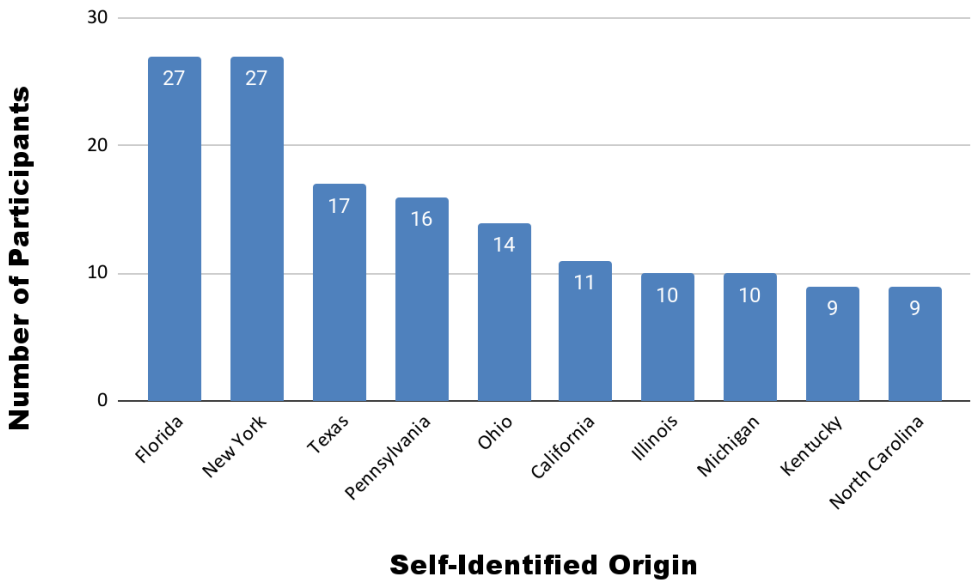


Figure 4.4. Most represented participant origins.

Participants could specify the language(s) they speak, write, or sign and what they would consider their native[116] or first language. One participant left this question blank. Of the remaining 299 participants, 37 indicated some degree of bi- or multilingualism, representing a wide array of languages including Khmer, Bulgarian, and Telugu as first languages, as well as Spanish, Polish, and Haitian Creole as additional languages. One participant reported knowledge of American Sign Language. The majority of participants (262)—as expected in a large sample from the U.S.—reported English, with 233 of them writing that single word as their answer and nine participants qualifying their answer with the word "only" or highlighting that they did not know any other languages or modalities. One participant added the qualifiers "Standard American" to English in their report.

In terms of employment across participants, a wide range of professions were represented; 170 distinct professions across the 295 participants who answered this question. The largest groups are, not surprisingly on a site like Prolific where individuals come to participate in studies to

[115] Alaska, Delaware, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, Utah, & Wyoming.
[116] This term is problematic (see Cheng et al. 2021) and I struggled with including it, but I opted to do so because it is used and accepted by the general public, although I am quite uncomfortable with the concept as a researcher and person.

make (extra?) money, college students (24) and the otherwise unemployed (19). Some language-related professions that were represented include three speech language pathologists, one copy editor, one English Language Arts teacher, and one lawyer.

In the two-part race question, 209 of the 297 participants who responded indicated they would like to be categorized with White people for the purpose of analyses, and 27 indicated they would like to be categorized with Black people. There were 21 participants who asked to be categorized with two or more races, 16 with Asian people (including Middle Eastern people), and 12 with Hispanic people. Twelve participants chose to be categorized in a group labeled *other*. Because race is a central consideration of this research, I did not avail participants with the agency of opting out of racial categorization (beyond that afforded by simply not answering this optional question) as with the two-part gender question.

In terms of ability, 298 participants answered the question: Do you consider yourself to be able-bodied? Of these, 287 answered in the affirmative, and one participant qualified that with the word *mostly* in parenthesis. Nine participants answered “no” and one participant answered “N/A”.

Of the 297 participants who answered the sexual orientation question, 125 of them responded with some version of the word *heterosexual*, with one participant qualifying that as “normal”. Another 87 additional participants categorized themselves as *straight*. Thirty-five participants self-identified as *bisexual*, seven as *Lesbian* (six out of seven using the capital L), five as *asexual*, and five as *gay*. There were 15 participants who expressed a sexual preference instead of an orientation with 11 indicating men and four indicating women. One participant wrote “Hey, Sexual”.

Of the 287 participants who answered the political affiliation question, 105 of them self-identified as Democrats, 51 as Independent, and 25 as Republican without qualifiers of some kind (such as *leans* or *mild*). In addition, 32 participants indicated they had no political affiliation.

Lastly, of the 283 participants who answered the religious affiliation question, 92 of them indicated having no religious affiliation. There were 27 distinct religions represented across the remaining participants, with Christians (57), Catholics (35), and Agnostics (33) forming the largest groups.

4.7 Predictions

Pilot testing showed a strong baseline effect for Set 1: sentences with no non-Standard variables were judged as more professional than sentences with one non-Standard variable (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). I predict that the same pattern will emerge in the main experiment. For Set 2, which tests if the baseline effect is cumulative, I predict that listeners will be more likely to label sentences with one non-Standard variable as more professional sounding than sentences with that same variable and another (two total). I predict in Set 3, which assesses the relative weight of the three variables under study (metathesis, fortition via TH-stopping, and consonant cluster reduction) in terms of perceived professionalism, that listeners will most likely label the TH-stopping variable *dey* as professional sounding, followed by the consonant cluster reduction variable *tren_*, followed by the metathesis variable *aks* as least professional. The metathesis variable *aks* is predicted to sound least professional to listeners based on the well-known salience and stereotyped nature of the variable. That said, the overlapping error bars for the Standard choice outcomes in Figure 4.2 (see Section 4.4.2) for *aks* and *tren_* variables indicates that, while the ordering *dey* > *tren_* > *aks* is predicted, actual outcomes may be more similar between *aks* and *tren_* than between either of those two non-Standard variables and *dey*.

While I have reported on an array of demographic factors in Section 4.6, as mentioned therein, the primary goal of gathering that data and reporting on it in a fuller manner than is typical was to first allow participants the agency to describe their own identities beyond simply checking a few boxes and second to move towards normalizing transparent reporting on the nature of the populations who provide us with our data. Although I do not have predictions for all of the reported demographic aspects, predictions for some variables can be made based on the current literature and on metacommentary reported in Chapters Two and Three. For example, Bucholtz & Hall's (2016) discussion of embodied positionality (see Section 1.2), which suggests that factors of positionality (like age, race, gender, region, and socioeconomic status) may influence production and perception, is reinforced by interviewee metacommentary. This commentary (see Section 2.4.1.11, especially Table 2.1, and Section 2.4.2.2) indicates that such factors do indeed underlie personal preferences driving individual interviewee usage, and their thoughts on the usage of others. Thus, I predict that age, gender, and region of participants might could have the strongest effect on outcomes in the Paired Sentence Comparison (PSC) task.

In consideration of Standard language ideologies in Section 1.3.1, I established (consistent with Lippi-Green 2012) that these beliefs which influence our rational ordering of the world operate throughout the lifespan, deepening through maturity and exposure. Thus, I predict that older listeners may be more aligned with Standard language ideologies in their expectations of professional speech and therefore may be more critical in their ratings, exhibiting a preference for more Standard variables across conditions.

In consideration of the operation of the potential sociolinguistic effects of perceived gender, psychologists researching gender stereotypes (Hentschel et al. 2019; Glick & Fiske 1996) have demonstrated that on surveys men generally describe women as having less leadership competence or categorize them as having less agency. Thus, I predict that self-identified male listeners may be more critical of a woman's voice when she is speaking in a professional role[117], exhibiting a preference for more Standard variables across conditions.

In consideration of the phenomenon of local prestige (Labov 1966a, Trudgill 1972, Giles & Billings 2004, Wright (under review)), in which a speech variety that may be negatively evaluated in the more general community is assigned a higher level of prestige by members of the local community because the listener experiences pride in being a user themselves and exhibits solidarity when evaluating the variety's usage, I predict that listeners from the same region as the speaker may be less critical of non-Standard variables in her speech, and therefore perhaps more likely to label them as professional.

I do not predict there to be strong effects of listener race on this task. Specifically, I do not expect there to be a difference in the likelihood that a White listener will choose to label a sentence with fewer non-Standard variables as professional than the likelihood that a Black listener will do so. We are all laboring under the influence of Standard language ideologies; they are older than these constructed races, older than print itself. I predict that a majority of listeners, regardless of their race, will have an expectation that professional speech is free from non-Standard features. Further reinforcing this prediction, especially in relation to race, is the literature on stereotypes (Ottati & Lee 1995; Operario & Fiske 2003), which suggests that minoritized individuals can often uphold stereotypes about their own group. Moreover, a number of the interviewees in Chapter Two reported that, across the span of their careers and for some

[117] As a reminder, the speaker is described as a business woman in instructions to participants.

even in their secondary or primary education, it was their Black supervisors or elders who have most often been the ones to tone police and punish their usage of non-Standard features, who have most often openly encouraged assimilation to standardized styles, who have most often reinforced Standard language ideologies.

4.8 Results

This section reports the results for Sets 1-3 and the diagnostic condition. As described in Section 4.4.4, I used a between-subjects design (listeners were randomly assigned one sentence pair from each set) although all participants ended the task with the diagnostic trial that paired the all Standard sentence with non-Standard *aks* (chosen based on the robustness of the effect for that pair in pilot testing).

A histogram of the results for the diagnostic pair is given in Figure 4.5. (Because there are no other diagnostic sentence pairs, running advanced statistical comparisons on the outcome is not warranted.) Here we see that a mere 22 out of 300 listeners did not choose the all Standard sentence as more professional sounding when the *aks* variable is in play.

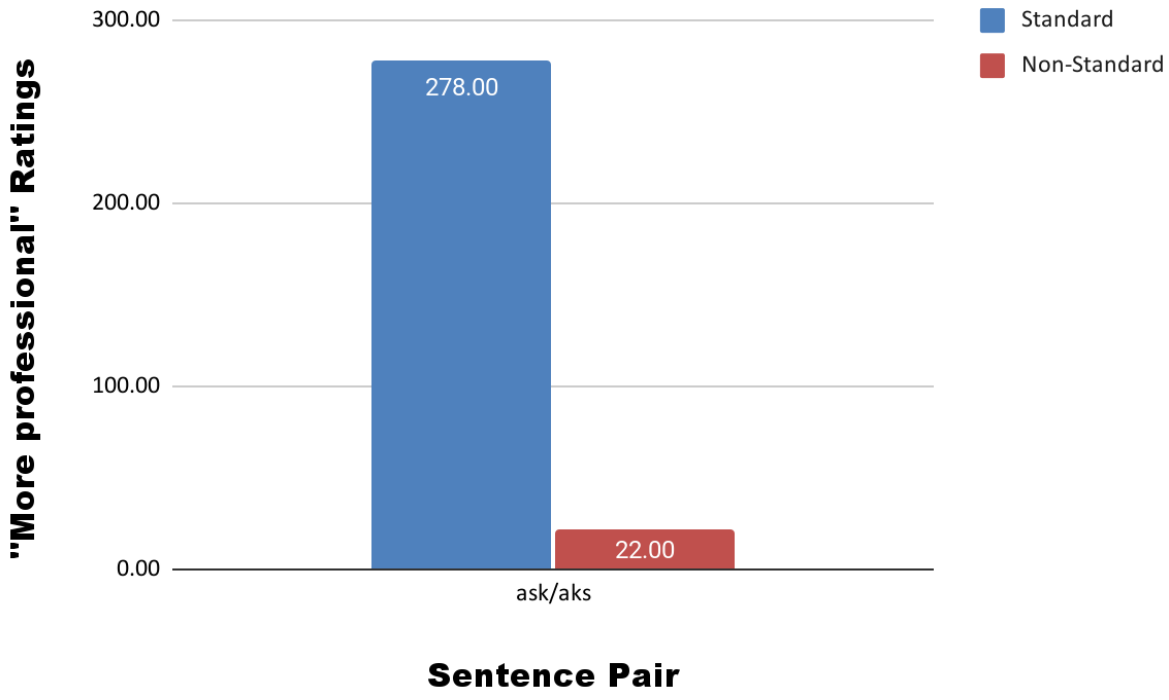


Figure 4.5. Number "more professional" judgments (n=300) for the diagnostic sentence pair. Bar types are as described for Figure 4.1.

Including this diagnostic for all 300 participants serves as means of assessing attention post hoc as well, in that I am able to determine if these 22 individuals are outliers in their responses to Sets 1-3 and were perhaps rapidly clicking through the form to get paid. These 22 individuals seem to behave as expected across conditions. It would appear, then, that these listeners heard a sentence featuring non-Standard *aks* and did not perceive it to be unprofessional sounding; this outcome gives me confidence that listeners were generally attentive to this task.

As a reminder of the task design discussed (presented in Section 4.4.1), Set 1's purpose is to establish a baseline effect by asking if listeners have a tendency to choose a sentence with all Standard variables as more professional sounding than a sentence with one non-Standard variable present. (The non-Standard variable *aks* was excluded from Set 1, though, as it was separately treated as the diagnostic variable). Figure 4.6[118] presents the results from Set 1, showing that indeed this baseline effect is established for these listeners, as it was in the pilot, with respect to fortition via Th-stopping when comparing *they* and *dey* and with respect to consonant cluster reduction[119] when comparing *trend* and *tren_*.

[118] This figure presents data from 301 participants because one individual began but did not complete the experiment and that individual was randomly presented with the Set 1 sentence pair first (trend/tren; they chose the all Standard sentence). I neglected to remove this individual before processing all the data through R but felt that reporting one condition with an extra participant would not influence the outcome.
[119] As a reminder, the final consonant cluster in *trend* is yet more reduced in the non-Standard token selected (see Section 3.4.3), and presents a nasalized, glottalized vowel and no distinct nasal murmur, as was naturally produced by the speaker, a Black professional, when using her AAVE variety.

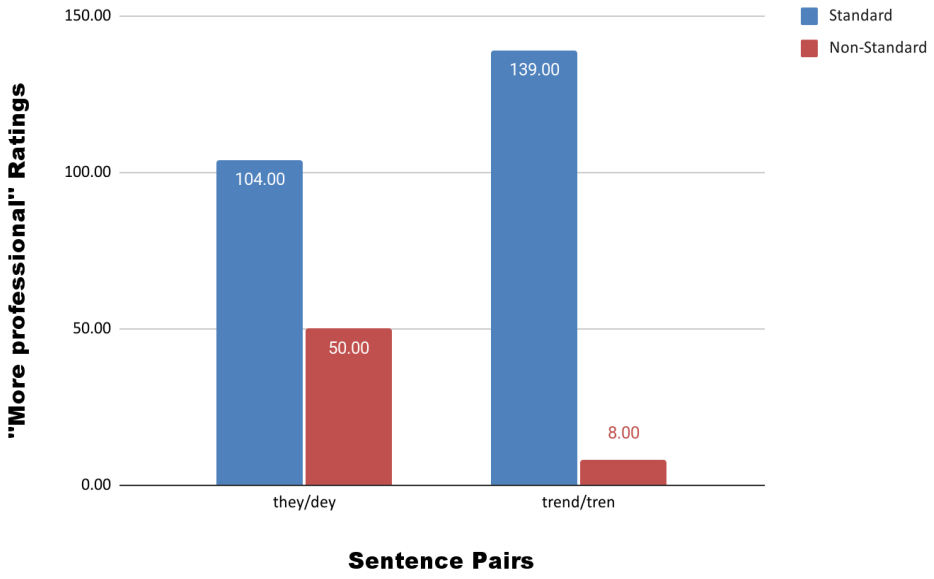


Figure 4.6. Number “more professional” judgments (n=roughly 150 per pair type in this between-subjects design) for Set 1 pairs. Bar types are as described for Figure 4.1.

The outcome of Set 1 was evaluated using a generalized linear model (GLM) through the glm package in R (R Core Team 2018) with a dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1. The independent variable in this model is sentence pair (e.g., a given non-Standard speech variable in comparison to its Standard counterpart) and the dependent variable is the binary outcome of that choice, 1 or 0, 1 indicating the listener chose the non-Standard variable as more professional and 0 indicating the listener chose the Standard variable[120]. The GLM reports log odds, which predict the likelihood that an outcome may occur. The intercept (or reference level) is being hypothesis tested at a log odds of zero (or a 50% probability of occurrence). The other level(s) is interpreted with respect to the intercept. The question being asked by this model is: What is the likelihood that listeners will choose a sentence with no non-Standard variable as more professional sounding than a sentence with one such variable?

Comparison Conditions		Coefficient	Odds	Probability	P-value
1	dey/they (intercept)	0.7227	2.05 to 1	67.21%	2.75e-05
2	trend/tren_	2.1323	8.43 to 1	89.40%	1.16e-07

Table 4.2. GLM outcomes for Set 1.

[120] m_1=glm(data=set1, is_standard ~ comparison, family = "binomial")

Table 4.2 reports GLM outcomes for Set 1, presenting log odds as coefficients, as odds (which have been converted to the exponential scale using the exp function in R), and as probabilities[121], along with their associated P-values. The modeled outcome is given in Figure 4.7, which demonstrates consistency with the raw data presented in Figure 4.6 and shows that listeners are significantly more likely (*p* =1.16e-07) to choose the all Standard sentence as more professional when the other sentence in the pair features non-Standard *tren_* than they are when it features *dey*. The outcome for the sentence featuring non-Standard *dey* occurs at a probability greater than chance (50%; see Table 4.2, Row 1), showing us that the effect for this variable is not random. Because there are only two conditions in Set 1, considering another rotation of this model (which would place the *trend/tren_* pair as the reference level) was not warranted.

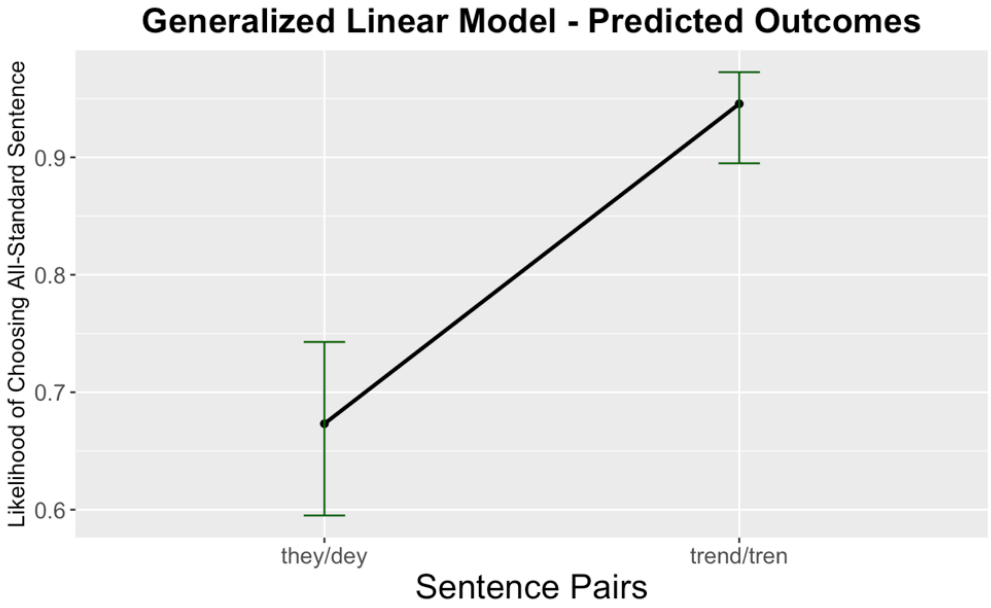


Figure 4.7. Model predictions for likelihood of choosing the all Standard sentence in Set 1.

In Sets 2 and 3 there is no longer an all Standard sentence presented to listeners. Set 2's purpose is to determine if the effect of the presence of non-Standard variables on professionalism percepts is cumulative. Set 2 included six possible sentence pairs, featuring combinations of the three non-Standard variables being tested such that one sentence pair

[121] I converted odds to probabilities by hand. Taking Table 4.2, Row 1 for example: 2.05 / 1 + 2.05 = 0.67213 x 100 = 67.213

featured a single non-Standard variable, and the other sentence in the pair featured that same variable along with one other variable.

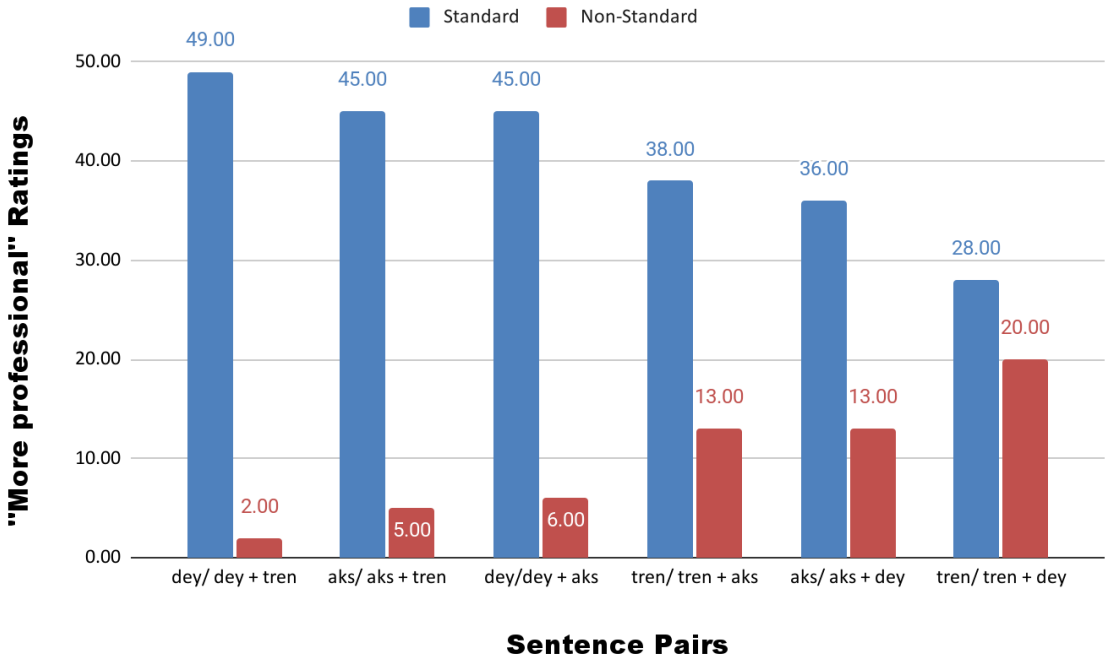


Figure 4.8. Number “more professional” judgments (n = roughly 50 per sentence pair comparison condition) for Set 2 pairs. Bar types are as described for Figure 4.1.

Visual inspection of Figure 4.8 reveals that the baseline effect established in Set 1 and piloting is cumulative in that, for the six possible combinations in Set 2, listeners are consistent in choosing sentences that feature one non-Standard variable as more professional than when that same variable occurs in combination with a second non-Standard variable. Figure 4.8 also illustrates that the cumulative effect, though generally present, is considerably greater for some variables than others.

For Set 2, as for Set 1, each participant only heard one sentence pair; thus each of the six comparison conditions has a total of 50 responses across the 300 participants. Results were again analyzed using a generalized linear model (GLM) using the glm package in R[122]. Table 4.3 summarizes the outcome of this model, whose intercept/reference level can be interpreted in the same way as that described for Set 1 (being hypothesis tested at 50% probability of occurrence). The glm function in R is set to assign a reference level by default alphabetically, but that was not meaningful or interpretable in this case. The level ordering presented in Table

[122] m_2=glm(data=set2, is_standard ~ comparison, family = "binomial")

4.3 was arbitrarily chosen as a starting point to mirror that of the raw data presented in Figure 4.8 to determine if the pattern presented there could be reflected through linear modeling as well. The gml model run on this data, though, was not an ordered model. Figure 4.9 gives the modeled predictions which are consistent with the raw data presented in Figure 4.8.

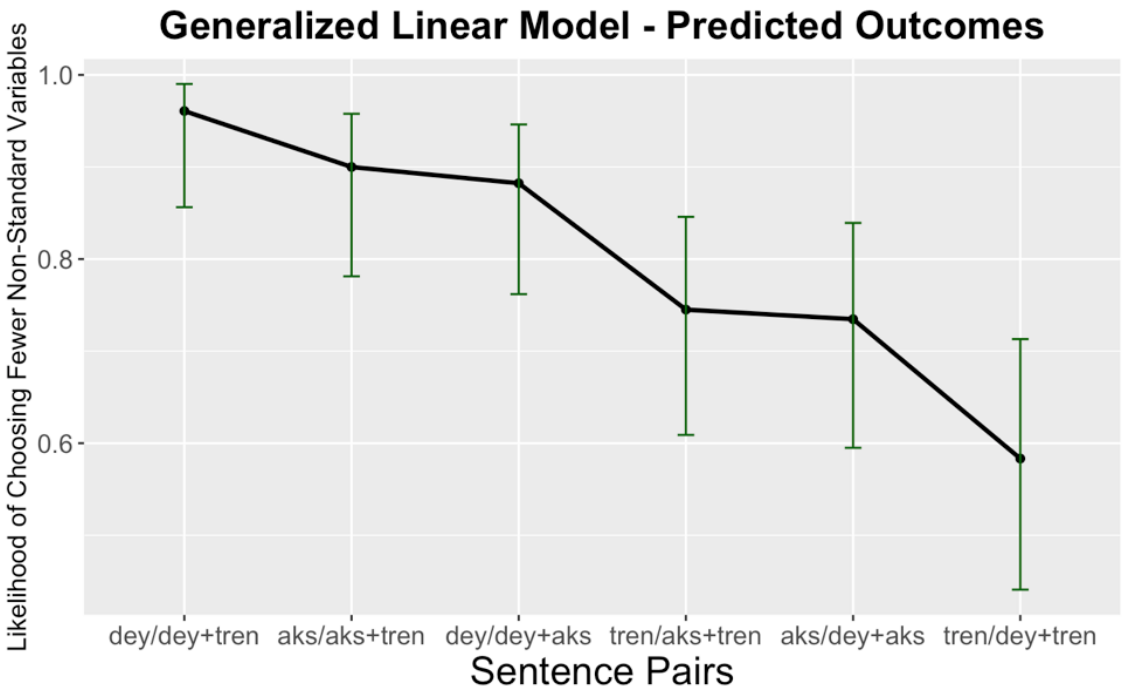


Figure 4.9. Model predictions for likelihood of choosing the sentence with one non-Standard variable in Set 2.

Comparison Conditions		Coefficient	Odds	Probability	P-value
1	dey/dey + tren (intercept)	3.1987	24.5 to 1	96.08%	9.19e-06
2	aks/aks + tren	-1.0014	0.37 to 1	27.01%	0.245097
3	dey/dey + aks	-1.1838	0.31 to 1	23.66%	0.159759
4	tren/tren + aks	-2.1260	0.12 to 1	10.71%	0.007085
5	aks/aks + dey	-2.1801	0.11 to 1	9.91%	0.005814
6	tren/tren + dey	-2.8622	0.06 to 1	5.66%	0.000236

Table 4.3. GLM outcomes for Set 2; first rotation (see text for explanation).

This rotation of the GLM model for Set 2 describes the outcomes for these sentence pairs only with respect to the reference level, the *dey* versus *dey* + *tren_* comparison condition. The outcome for this condition is significantly well above 50% (p = 9.19e-06), showing that including non-Standard *tren_* in addition to *dey* significantly lowers the probability of rating that sentence as professional sounding. The same pattern emerges, and is not significantly different from the *dey* versus *dey* + *tren_* pattern, for *aks* versus *aks* + *tren_* (Table 4.3, Row 2) and *dey* versus *dey* + *aks* (Row 3). The remaining sentence pairs (Rows 4-6), though, do differ significantly from the reference level (*dey* versus *dey* + *tren_*). These data show, for example, that for pairs in which *tren_* is the only non-Standard variable (Rows 4 and 6), listeners are significantly less likely to show the cumulative effect than for the *dey* versus *dey* + *tren_* reference pair.

While the results of this rotation of the model are helpful to understanding the findings, one rotation does not provide all of the comparisons necessary for Set 2, and thus several other rotations of this model were conducted. I established through visual inspection (of data plotted as in Figure 4.9) that different rotations yield the same outcome[123]. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 give the outcomes of the subsequent rotations, comparing results for sentences pairs that share the

	Single-Variable Sentence Outcome Comparisons					
	dey/dey + tren	dey/dey + aks	aks/aks + tren	aks/aks + dey	tren/tren + aks	tren/tren + dey
Coefficient	1.1838	2.0149	1.17865	1.01857	0.7362	0.3365
Odds	3.25 to 1	7.5 to 1	3.25 to 1	2.77 to 1	2.09 to 1	1.4 to 1
Probability	76.47%	88.24%	76.47%	73.47%	67.64%	58.33%
P-Value	0.15976	Intercept	0.03926	Intercept	0.090351	Intercept

Table 4.4. Model predictions for comparisons of Set 2 sentences that share the same single non-Standard variable, Th-stopping *dey* (leftmost columns; peach), metathesis *aks* (middle columns; teal), and consonant cluster reduction *tren_* (rightmost columns; rose).

same single non-Standard variable sentence (Table 4.4) and those of sentence pairs that share the same two non-Standard variables sentence (Table 4.5). Table 4.4 shows that, as observed above, the difference in outcomes between sentences in which the one non-Standard variable *dey* is not significant (p = 0.15976). For the sentences in which the one non-Standard variable is

[123] In that although the coefficients and P-values may change as the reference level changes (as they should), the overall relationship between comparison conditions do not, i.e. the *dey*/*dey* + *tren_* pair is always highest in the plot wherever it is ordered (level (1-5) or intercept).

aks, listeners are more likely (p = 0.03926) to show the cumulative effect (i.e., to choose the one non-Standard variable sentence as more professional) when the other variable is *tren_* than when the other variable is *dey*. With respect to the sentences featuring the one non-Standard *tren_* variable, this outcome is marginally significant (p = 0.090351), indicating at best a weak model prediction that *tren_* + *aks* yields more of a cumulative effect than *tren_* + *dey*.

To compare sentence pairs that share the same two non-Standard variables in Set 2, a slightly modified[124] GLM model was run to determine the likelihood that listeners choose the two-variable pair as more professional sounding. The question being asked by this model is: What is the likelihood that listeners will choose a sentence with more non-Standard variables as more professional sounding?

	Double-Variable Sentence Outcome Comparisons					
	dey/dey + tren	tren/tren + dey	aks/aks + dey	dey/dey + aks	tren/tren + aks	aks/aks + tren
Coefficient	-2.8622	-0.3365	0.9963	-2.0149	1.1246	-2.1972
Odds	0.06 to 1	0.71 to 1	2.71 to 1	0.13 to 1	3.08 to 1	0.11 to 1
Probability	5.66%	41.52%	73.05%	11.50%	75.49%	9.91%
P-Value	0.000236	Intercept	0.06594	Intercept	0.048694	Intercept

Table 4.5. Model predictions for comparisons of Set 2 sentences that share the same two non-Standard variables, *dey* + *tren_* (left-most columns; peach), *aks* + *dey* (middle columns; teal), *tren_* + *aks* (right-most columns; rose).

The outcomes of this model, given in Table 4.5, corresponds to the red (or right hand) bars in Figure 4.8. It is clear from visual inspection of Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9 that *dey* + *tren_* sentences have different outcomes and that those outcomes depend on the one non-Standard variable sentence they are paired with (*dey* or *tren_* respectively). The model outcomes reported in Table 4.5 (leftmost columns) correspondingly show that listeners are significantly less likely (p = 0.000236) to choose the *dey* + *tren_* sentence as the more professional one when the alternative has only *dey*[125] than when it has only *tren_*. For comparisons involving the

[124] m_N=glm(data=set2, **is_nonstandard** ~ comparison, family = "binomial")

[125] Reminder: this model is essentially flipped, so the coefficients are almost all negative and the outcomes are reported as individuals being less likely to choose a sentence as more professional. This *less likely* outcome corresponds in Figure 4.8 to a smaller red/right side bar and a larger blue/left side bar for a given comparison condition.

*tren_* + *aks* sentence (rightmost columns), the model again predicts a significant difference that depends on the single non-Standard variable comparison sentence, with listeners being less likely (p = 0.048694) to choose the *tren_* + *aks* sentence as more professional when the alternative has only *aks* than when it has only *tren_*. And finally, the outcome for the sentences featuring *dey* + *aks* are only approaching significance. That said, their relationship to each other as described in Table 4.5 seems to echo that in Figures 4.8 and 4.9 in that there is a trend for *dey* + *aks* to sound more professional when the alternative has only non-Standard *aks* than when it has only non-Standard *dey*.

Taken together, these outcomes for Set 2 are broadly consistent with predictions in Section 4.7 with respect to establishing the cumulative nature of professional percepts in that listeners judge sentences with fewer non-Standard variables as more professional sounding, although some combinations of variables show this effect more strongly than others.

Set 3's purpose is to determine if, for any of the target non-Standard variables, the presence of one non-Standard variable might outweigh the other two. Thus, the sentence pairs in this set allow us to determine which of the three variables has the largest impact on professionalism percepts in this context. Visual inspection of Figure 4.10 indicates that the fortition via TH-stopping variable *dey* has the weakest impact on professionalism judgments in that it is the most likely to be chosen as professional sounding (leftmost pair of bars), and the metathesis variable *aks* has the largest impact in that it elicits nearly the same number of "more professional" judgments as the other two variables combined (rightmost bars).

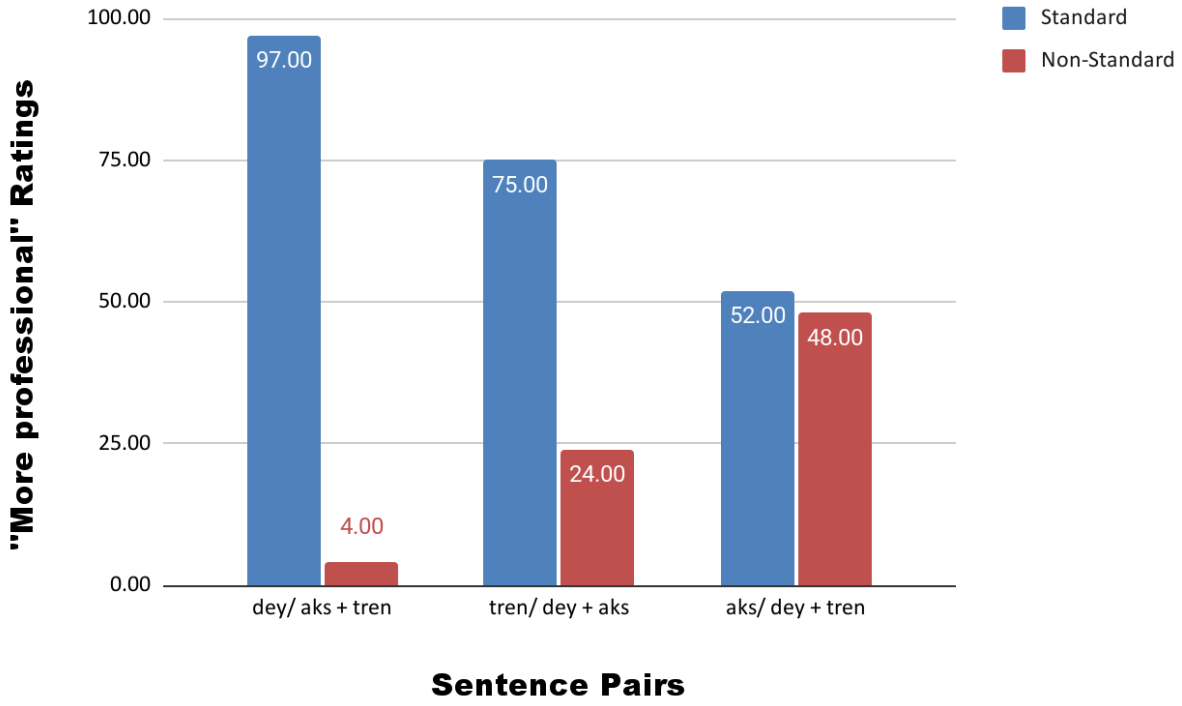


Figure 4.10. Number "more professional" judgments (n = roughly 100 per sentence pair comparison condition) The fortition via TH-stopping variable *dey* has the weakest impact, followed by the consonant cluster reduction variable *tren_*, followed by the metathesis variable *aks* which has the strongest impact. Total N=300. Bar types are as described for Figure 4.1.

The outcome of Set 3 was analyzed in the same fashion as Sets 1 and 2, using a generalized linear model (GLM) in R[126]. The GLM predicting outcomes for Set 3 was also assigned an arbitrary ordering for a first rotation based on the pattern observed in the raw data in Figure 4.10. The gml model run on this data was also not an ordered model. The outcome of the model was plotted and is presented in Figure 4.11, which shows, consistent with the pattern in the raw data, that the single non-Standard *aks* metathesis variable does indeed have the largest impact on professionalism percepts—or weighs the most—out of the three variables under consideration.

[126] m_3=glm(data=set3, is_standard ~ comparison, family = "binomial")

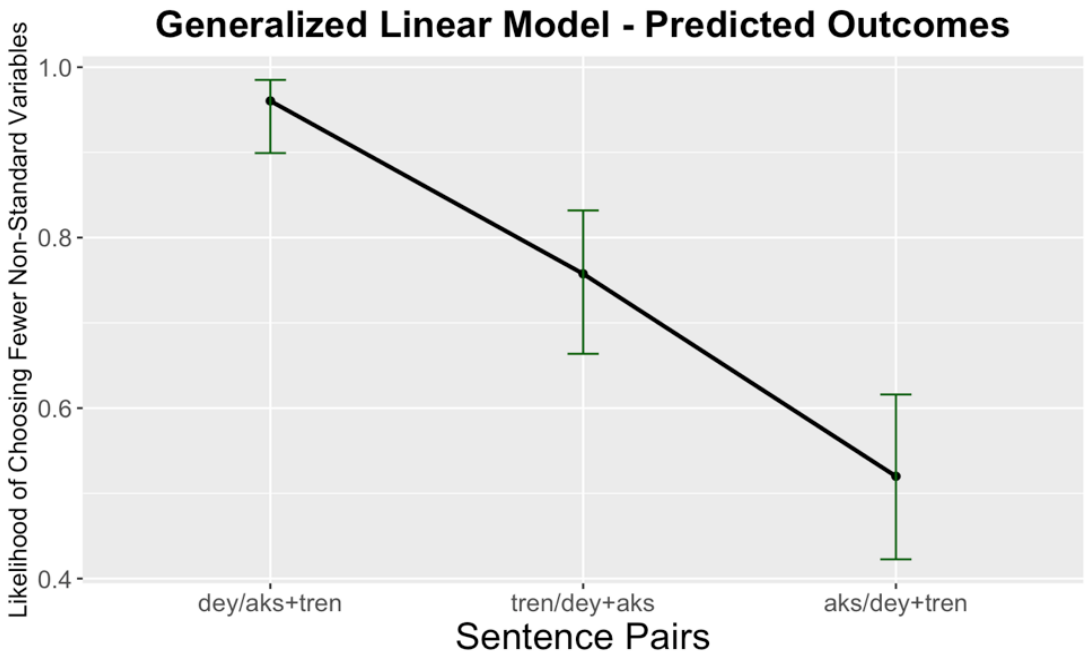


Figure 4.11. Model predictions for likelihood of choosing the sentence with one non-Standard variable in Set 3.

The outcomes of the three possible rotations of this model are given in Table 4.6. The first rotation (leftmost set of columns and shaded in peach) aligns with the ordering presented in Figures 4.10 and 4.11. Each rotation places the next comparison condition in the reference

	Non-Standard Variable Weighting Comparisons								
	dey/ ask + tren	tren/ dey + aks	aks/ dey + tren	tren/ dey + aks	aks/ dey + tren	dey/ ask + tren	aks/ dey + tren	dey/ ask + tren	tren/ dey + aks
Coefficient	3.1884	-2.049	-3.1084	1.1394	-1.0594	2.049	0.08004	3.10837	1.05939
Odds	24.25 to 1	10.71 to 1	3.85 to 1	3.12 to 1	0.35 to 1	7.76 to 1	1.08 to 1	22.38 to 1	2.88 to 1
Probability	96.04%	10.71%	3.85%	75.73%	25.93%	88.58%	51.93%	95.72%	74.23%
P-Value	Interc.	0.000262	1.40E-08	Interc.	0.00059	0.000262	Interc.	1.40E-08	0.00059

Table 4.6. GLM outcomes across rotations for Set 3 results.

position, allowing a full assessment of the ways in which these variables relate to each other. Table 4.6 illustrates that there is a significant difference in the outcomes of all three of these comparison conditions from each other across rotations. This demonstrates that these non-Standard variables behave differently with respect to the ways in which they interact with a listener's professionalism judgments. This outcome is consistent with predictions made in

Section 4.7 for Set 3 with respect to weighting the three variables under study in terms of perceived professionalism; listeners are indeed most likely to choose the sentence with only the fortified TH-stopping variable *dey* as professional sounding, followed by the sentence with the consonant cluster reduction variable *tren_*, followed by the sentence with the metathesis variable *aks* as least professional. This outcome will be expanded upon further in the discussion section to follow.

In Section 4.7 I made several additional predictions related to specific demographic outcomes: age, gender, and region. Given the fairly stable professionalism judgments relative to the number of non-Standard variables across conditions reported above (Sets 1-3 and the diagnostic pair) there is some reason to expect that analysis according to these characteristics might not be particularly revealing, but in the interest of thoroughness, I'll report the findings. Self-categorized gender did not have a significant effect on outcomes for any condition. None of the age groups large enough for significance testing[127] produced significant outcomes across Sets 1-3. However, for the diagnostic pair, contrary to my prediction that the oldest listeners would perhaps be most influenced by Standard language ideologies thereby exhibiting a preference for more Standard forms, the model predicts the youngest listeners (18-24 year olds; N=51) to be the most likely age group to have chosen the all Standard sentence. Specifically, the generalized linear model (GLM) in R with Age as a factor[128] shows 18-24 year olds to be more likely (coefficient=2.7726; odds=16 to 1; probability=94% p =3.18e-06 at intercept) to choose the all Standard sentence as more professional sounding. That there is an age effect seems somewhat counterintuitive, given that nearly all (278) individuals chose that sentence in the diagnostic pair condition, however the 22 individuals who chose the sentence featuring *aks* came from across all age groups.

Regarding the 27 individuals from the same region as the speaker (who hails from Rochester, New York), because of the randomized nature of the design, the Ns were too small for significance testing across Sets 1-3. My visual inspection of this subset suggested that these listeners chose sentences with fewer non-Standard variables as more professional at roughly the same rates as other listeners across Sets 1-3. However, with respect to the diagnostic pair, there were three listeners who reported New York origins who chose the sentence featuring the non-Standard *aks* variable as the more professional sounding in the diagnostic case. Given that

[127] 25-35 N=106; 35-44 N=85; 18-24 N=51; 45-54 N=32 — See Section 4.5 for demographics reporting.
[128] m_4age=glm(data=set4, is_standard ~ as.factor(set4$Age), family = "binomial")

only 22 participants overall made that choice, three out of 27 in the New York origin group doing so could (extremely speculatively) hint at a local prestige effect in play.

4.9 Discussion

The main experiment, employing a Paired Sentence Comparison (PSC) task, tested listeners' perception of non-Standard speech variables produced by a Black accented speaker. Across three conditions presenting different configurations of sentence pairs, listeners judged the relative professionalism of sentences that contained zero to two (0-2) non-Standard variables. The design of Set 1 sought to answer the question: Do listeners have a tendency to choose a sentence with all Standard variables as more professional than a sentence with one non-Standard variable? The results indicate that, yes, this tendency is present across this group of listeners for both variables tested in Set 1, *dey* and *tren_*, and for the diagnostic case testing *aks* metathesis as well. The overwhelming majority of listeners—across demographic categories—prefer sentences with all Standard variables from a Black professional speaker, and this outcome holds regardless of the order in which they receive the all Standard sentence or the order in which the pair from Set 1 appears in a given trial. Listeners appear to readily choose the all Standard sentence as more professional sounding. This outcome holds reliably and robustly for an identifiably Black voice across all of these non-Standard variables.

Set 2 was designed to determine if the effect of the presence of non-Standard variables on professionalism percepts is cumulative. The results indicate that, yes, adding a second non-Standard variable to an already non-Standard sentence sounds less professional, and this holds for all combinations of the three variables. While the overall outcomes exhibit a clear preference in that regard, and do uphold the central issue being tested (namely the cumulative nature of the effect), there is variation in the outcomes of Set 2 with respect to the strength of a *more professional* percept for certain variable combinations that needs some unpacking. The metathesis variable *aks* is itself a socio-indexical variant and could be said to rise to an ING-like level and function as a stereotype in the Labovian sense (Labov 1994), in that the general public is likely aware of the operation of *aks* as a linguistic entity in the world that might signal something about an individual's character when used. That said, visual inspection of Figures 4.8 and 4.9 and model outcomes in Table 4.5 indicate that the reduced consonant cluster variable *tren_* has a greater effect than *aks* on professionalism percepts in Set 2's outcomes despite the social status of the variant itself arguably not being elevated to the level of a Labovian stereotype. Recall that, in Set 2, listeners are presented with pairs of sentences in which the

more non-Standard sentence has the variable that is present in the single-variable sentence along with a second non-Standard variable. The outcome for *tren_* demonstrates a blocking effect where adding a second non-Standard variable (either *dey* or *aks*, see Table 4.5) has little effect. In the *tren_* versus *tren_* + *dey* comparison condition, the outcome begins to approach a toss up, where the influence of *dey* on professionalism judgments is nearly completely obscured. While this outcome is not by itself necessarily surprising, what is unexpected is that this outcome is not mirrored in the *aks* versus *aks* + *tren_* comparison condition. If listener expectations (about professionalism, appropriateness, etc.) are built through experiences and/or metalinguistic knowledge, we would perhaps expect them to be most robustly expressed for items like *aks* which rise to the level of Labovian stereotype. The strength of the effect observed with *tren_* may be indicative of something about the ways in which it is being perceived which reveal glottalized, nasalized reduced cluster variants produced in phonological environments before vowels to be rising to such a level of wide community awareness (and thus greater potential for both stigmatization and in-group iconization).

A possible factor that I considered is whether the ordering of the variables in the stimuli sentence might play a role in outcomes for Set 2 as well. As a reminder the sentence is: *We knew* ***they/dey*** *might* ***ask/aks*** *about a new* ***trend/tren_*** *in stock options.* Although one could imagine a scenario where the position of *trend* tokens at the end of the sentence might carry a potential recency effect that would bias choices, I would also expect to see a corresponding dampening effect in all cases where *trend* is present in two-variable sentences in Sets 2 and 3 and that isn't the case. I suspect that in both the case of *tren_* versus *tren_* + *aks* and *tren_* versus *tren_* + *dey* in Set 2 we are observing in part some influence of the nature of the specific *tren_* token used in the main experiment, which presented a nasalized, glottalized vowel without a distinct nasal murmur. Glottalization in a variety of phonological environments, including word-final reduced consonant clusters, is itself socio-indexical of Black speech in its own right (Smitherman 1977, Wolfram, Thomas, et al. 2008), as is preceding vowel nasalization in reduced clusters with nasals (Bailey 2001 p.76, Thomas 2007), and future research will need to be conducted to disentangle the effects at play with respect to these influences on these findings.

Separate from thoughts about the relative influences of *aks* and *tren_* on professionalism judgments, the outcomes also suggest that *dey* has a weaker influence on these judgments that must be considered. Fortition via Th-stopping is a socio-indexical feature of Black speech (see

Zimmer 2022), but the *dey* variable in particular cannot be said to rise to the level of stereotype that *aks* does in that the *dey* token listeners are hearing does not experience the heightened awareness associated with Labovian stereotypes as a specific lexical item itself, but is instead a word being used in the stimuli sentence to exemplify a given socio-indexical feature: fortition via TH-stopping (similarly to *tren_* being used to exemplify consonant cluster reduction). In addition, even with the replacement of the word *heard* with the word *knew* after piloting (as discussed in Section 4.4.2), when listeners are comparing a sentence with all Standard variables to one with a single non-Standard variable, for example, they are more likely to choose the sentence featuring the *dey* token as professional sounding than the sentences with *tren_* (Set 1) or *aks* (diagnostic pair, Figure 4.5). It is of course possible that this non-Standard feature is simply judged less negatively in a professional context (and because I chose to include the feature due to its relation to Detroit and not Black professional style shifting specifically, that isn't a wholly unsafe assumption in this case). However, the highly systematic judgments in Set 1 for *dey* (combined with the *dey* outcomes in Set 2, although in that condition *dey* is in comparison with other highly salient variables) lead me to believe that some of these listeners may have been choosing the sentences featuring one non-Standard *dey* variable thinking they were hearing an all Standard sentence. Future research, potentially using different or multiple tokens featuring fortition via Th-stopping, perhaps using semantically hypersalient or multisyllabic words as well as function words, will need to be undertaken to disentangle the effects at play here.

Set 3 was designed to weigh the variables being tested with respect to one another. The results indicate that these variables are weighted differently, and those different weightings are consistent with my predictions that *dey* is the most professional sounding of the three, followed by *tren_*, and flanked by *aks* as the least professional sounding. Regardless of whether or not *dey* has a weaker influence due to salience for some listeners, it is not surprising that it would be preferred to *aks* and *tren_* in combination with each other given the salience of *aks* and *tren_* and the rate at which those two variables are dispreferred in isolation. Indeed, the salience of *aks* is so strong that, in Set 3, it comes close to having a blocking effect in that listeners are as likely to choose the *dey* + *tren_* sentence as professional as they are to choose the one non-Standard variable *aks* sentence (Figure 4.10). Although a yet stronger blocking effect here would result in an outcome where a majority of listeners preferred a sentence with more non-Standard variables to a sentence with a single *aks* variable present, this outcome nonetheless suggests that listeners' stereotypes about *aks* were activated. Another case that presents a pattern similar to Set 3's *aks* versus *dey* + *tren_* in these data, which might also be attributable

to perceptual blocking, emerged in Set 2 where the effect of two non-Standard variables is significantly (see Table 4.6) diminished when the single-variable sentence involves *tren_* and the comparison sentence has *tren_* + *dey*. The outcome in the *aks* versus *dey* + *tren_* comparison condition arguably shows an even stronger blocking effect (although across-set statistical models were not run). Stereotypes about *aks* and its normative incompatibility with professionalism are perhaps responsible for substantial across-listener variation in this condition. In Set 2 listeners were always comparing a sentence with a single *aks* token to a sentence that also featured an *aks* token and a second non-Standard variable; in Set 3 listeners are being asked to weight *aks* against the other two variables in terms of professionalism. And the results indicate the 100 participants who received that sentence pair were split in their judgments. When viewed in addition to the diagnostic case, where all 300 participants were asked to decide between *ask* and *aks* in terms of professionalism, the choice is strikingly not in favor of the highly salient, Black-indexed, non-Standard, and deeply stereotyped speech feature.

The outcomes of this experiment also speak to the design motivations for the PSC task itself, namely, providing a measure that more directly assesses listeners' judgments of targeted non-Standard speech variables than the sociolinguistic monitor task. The sociolinguistic monitor task (Labov et al. 2011) focuses listeners' attention on indexical variants by presenting speech embedded in a social context which presupposes conformity to community norms of careful speech. This embedding, however, takes place within a large and complex paragraph, and when one is researching speech features that are not ING-like—or do not rise to the level of stereotype in a Labovian sense—the task loses the benefits of that contextual focus, in my opinion (and as supported by the weak results of my multiple pilot tests with this task). The outcomes obtained using paired sentences, and indexing social context more subtly both in the instructions to participants and in the wording of the sentence itself[129], demonstrate that listeners produce reliable judgments of a range of non-Standard variables in terms of professionalism. That range stems from the awareness level of the general population of the variables under study—levels of awareness the literature indicates can likely be toggled with more or less social information added to the instructions given to participants (Bouavichith

[129] Both stimuli sentence wording options that were piloted (see Section 4.4.2), and that used in the main experiment, make subtle reference to business or finance contexts, in keeping with the persona established for the speaker (described as a business woman) in the instructions. (As a reminder the stimuli sentence used in the main experiment was: *We knew they might ask about a new trend in stock options*.)

2019), or more information added during the stimuli stage, like images of speakers as in Hay et al. (2006). One can imagine testing any number of conditions and permutations of non-Standard variables using a PSC task type of design—even in other modalities—that the sociolinguistic monitor task simply does not lend itself to because of its various complexities.

In Section 4.7 I predicted that a majority of listeners in this experiment will expect that professional speech is free from non-Standard features. The results suggest that those expectations are present. In Sets 1-3 and the diagnostic case, when presented with a pair of sentences with a varying number of non-Standard variables present (0-2), listeners are, with the exception of the blocking conditions just discussed, choosing the sentence with fewer non-Standard variables as more professional. This indicates that if Black people sound more like themselves[130] at work—if they choose to employ their racialized varieties more often—their identities as professionals are more likely to be rejected by audiences. As discussed in Section 4.2, listeners are very rapidly attending to social information in the speech stream and that information influences their linguistic choices (e.g. Niedzielski 1999, Hay et al. 2006, McGowan 2015, Calloway 2021). The results of this experiment may or may not be informed by the perception of social information, by judgments of the speaker's perceived gender or race or the Standardness of her speech—although it is safe to assume those types of judgments were made about her speech, if passively[131]. The precise socio-indexical source of the information that led to listeners' decisions does not matter if the speaker's identity as a professional can be downgraded by the presence of a single non-Standard variable in her usage. Labov et al (2011) report that "a single occurrence of [a non-Standard variable] has the maximum impact" in the sociolinguistic monitor task (p.442). What the outcomes have demonstrated is that listeners are certainly capable of monitoring for the occurrence of a single variable in professionalism contexts, upholding Labov et al. (2011)'s findings that listeners will judge a speaker who presents more Standard (in terms of weighting as well as quantity) variables to be better suited than those who present fewer Standard variables in professional contexts. This experiment used only one speaker, and thus I cannot make explicit claims on whether or not these results uphold, for example, those of King & Sumner (2014) with respect to listeners having an expectation that a Black speaker will produce non-Standard features. That said, these findings do allow me to claim that when a Black speaker produces a speech style that is shifted towards

[130] Recall that in Sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 interviewees referred to their more racialized styles as language that reflects the self; I do not intend to characterize all Black language users as a monolith or indicate that racial indexation is a primary goal of usage with this statement.
[131] Meaning I made no active attempt to manipulate them, as in the other studies listed.

a Standardized variety—be that Black-Accented Standard (as tested here) or White Standardized spoken English—that style appears to align with listener expectations of professionalism. This indicates that Black professionals are unsuccessful in conveying professionalism when features of non-Standard racialized varieties are present. It would seem, then, that Black professionals do indeed need to engage in style shifting practices—in sociolinguistic labor—which moves their linguistic production away from their racialized varieties towards a more Standardized one to be perceived as more professional sounding. Chapter Five turns to a discussion of the meaning of such stable outcomes for the legibility of Black professional speech and the implications for the lived realities of Black people with respect to their safe and equitable performance of self in their professional lives and daily social being.

Chapter Five General Conclusions

5.1 Summary and General Discussion

This dissertation assesses the ways in which Black professionals perceive their own language production in relation to the ways that listeners from the general population perceive different varieties of language produced by a Black speaker in a professional context. This is accomplished through a two-pronged methodological approach involving first a series of sociolinguistic interviews centering the community under study and second a perception experiment testing the perception of targeted features of the community's language production by the general public.

I elicited Black professional's assessment of their language production by means of the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI), which I developed (Chapter Two) as a tool to capture metalinguistic commentary and to value metalinguistic awareness as an object of study in its own right. I specifically applied that tool to interviews conducted with 17 Black professionals from Detroit, Michigan and, through a series of sections featuring questions about interviewees' personal and professional linguistic experiences throughout their lives, I was successful in eliciting the range of metalinguistic commentary I sought through the inclusion of targeted stimuli, questions, and tasks (e.g., metacommentary about specific positionality-related social mappings like region and gender, metacommentary about usage in communities of practice, and metacommentary about usage in contexts or in relation to cultural products; see Sections 2.4.1 and 3.4.1). Specifically, Chapter Two's main research question was: What motivates Black professionals to style shift? This question was explored through discussion of interviewees' conceptualization of racialized linguistic repertoires, especially the in-group labels *talking White* and *authentically Black*. That question was further analyzed by considering these professionals' metalinguistic commentary through the lens of three broad themes: linguistic actions of self-censorship and—continuing in Chapter Three's case studies—the uptake of Standard language ideologies and sociolinguistic labor. The metalinguistic commentary collected here shows how these themes converge in the style shifting practices of Black language users across their professional lives.

In particular, style shifting for the Black professional often means engaging in self-censorship. Many of the interviewees—like Solomon, London, Maurice, and Yolanda (Section 2.4.2.2) and Alex, Aries, and Chance (Section 2.4.3), who report their sense of self as central to their shifting practices—are motivated to shift away from expressing themselves in the workplace due to influences I attribute to Standard language ideologies at play in the linguistic market. In the linguistic market, the now-containing space (as described in Section 1.5), Standard language ideologies influence the exchange rate set for language varieties, determining which productions—from which bodies—have the most value and can be the most successful in a particular context. When Black professionals are motivated to shift towards a more Standard variety, be that White Standardized spoken English or Black-Accented Standard (as discussed in Section 1.3.1 and as experimentally investigated using the *all Standard* sentence in Section 4.4.3), they do so in recognition of the exchange rate across linguistic markets which values standardized production from all language users. Entering a working world where Whiteness, Standardness, propriety, straightness of body morphology and hair texture, quietness, neutral color schemes, and more are defaulted necessitates engagement in self-censorship for the Black professional; it means shifting away from their identities as individuals and working to make themselves invisible to an extent (see Section 2.4.3 and Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2003).

All of this shifting, done under intense societal pressures, requires work; a specific kind of labor—sociolinguistic labor—engaged with to express oneself (when racialized languages are being produced and shared) or to censor oneself (when racialized languages are being held back). However, with the protection and preservation of self in mind, many Black people (individuals like Solomon and Yolanda) do not feel the need to engage in assimilationist sociolinguistic labor to perform their identities as professionals—they feel that this kind of labor is no longer a necessity, a thing of the past, minstrelsy that the integrators of the Civil Rights Era who were dodging lynch mobs at every turn felt was needed—and so they choose to move away from sociolinguistic labor that satisfies others. By employing the MMSI, I was able to engage with these Black professionals in a way that allowed for an enrichment of the theoretical concept of sociolinguistic labor, from something done merely to satisfy others or in response to ideological or market forces into something engaged with agentively despite those forces to satisfy oneself or in service of others as well (see Section 3.4.3). The ways in which the interviewees describe their conception of the linguistic varieties they move through (e.g., in Section 2.4.2), from both individual and cultural perspectives, helps us to understand when

Black professionals are explicitly attempting to index race in their language use—like when Chance is "seasoning" his production in the courtroom or Alex is trying to be like Oprah in front of her History students. These conversations reveal that these language users are aware of instances of explicit racial indexation through their language use and that, at least for these individuals, these instances are not common, occurring either when they are actively attempting to be more true to themselves or when they are feeling at rest in communities of color. Such metalinguistic commentary is indicative of what Alim (2016) calls "fluid raciolinguistic practices" and "as agentive acts of self-positioning, these practices allow us to imagine the possibilities for destabilizing hegemonic and oppressive processes of racial categorization" (p.8). Most reported instances of usage by these Black professionals do not involve situations of direct racial indexation. Interviewees characterized most instances of usage with different motivations (see Table 2.2). Accounting for these motivations (which, as discussed in Section 1.4.1[132], is a central goal of this work) allows for an understanding of how language users' "linguistic behaviors articulate their beliefs about their own social positions on an individual level" (King 2020, p.294). King (2021) appealed to indirect indexicality (Ochs 1992; Zhang 2005) to demonstrate that groups of Black professionals take up or reject local sound changes for economic motivations, not racial ones only. Similarly, by appealing to indirect indexicality I am able to demonstrate that these Black professionals are not motivated to shift because of a desire to index Whiteness (or Blackness), but rather move towards or away from standardized varieties in the workplace for a range of motivations, what are rarely explicitly racial ones (see Table 2.2). By capturing metalinguistic commentary from Black professionals about their language use—and by considering more than what is directly, majoritively, categorically, or canonically indicated by usage of a variety or feature—we come to understand that a user's embodiment may be ever present (and thus influential) but may nonetheless not drive someone to actively employ linguistic material in the moment as they achieve discursive goals (such as getting someone to trust you or getting someone to perceive you as intelligent).

The ways in which embodied positionality may operate in the background led me to consider the ways in which ideological influences, which are similarly held by individuals but also sociohistorically developed and maintained (as are social categories like race and gender), are also indirectly indexed through the reported linguistic actions of the population under study. The collective influence Standard language ideologies do have is in choosing a target for all of these

[132] And wherein I hypothesize the motivations behind Black professional style shifting do not involve a desire to sound more White.

language users, in defining for this community what their linguistic production will move towards in situations when they go into “professional mode” in front of a police officer (as Jerome reported in Section 3.2.1) or “tone down” their production at work because it is easier (as Solomon reported in Section 2.4.3). The resulting production may be a variety that linguists (or lay language users) would label Black-Accented Standard or Ebonics or even White Standardized spoken English, but what is recognizable through this metacommentary is that individuals who share embodied positionality (and thus are similarly controlled by forces in the linguistic market) can have very different motivations, take different linguistic actions, and produce different linguistic varieties all in part because of a drive towards the same idealistic target. That target is Standard language production, and it is such because Standard language is the type of language use that is most easily commodified. This recognition may aid future researchers in understanding how “macro-processes” of positionality “are brought into being through everyday interactions” (Alim 2016, p.9).

These are early contributions emerging from the consideration of metacommentary as an object of study in its own right in experimental sociolinguistics. Metalinguistic data is valuable because the language user is a receiver, perceiving and categorizing linguistic data as they experience the discrete moments of their life, and using it to contribute not only to an ever-evolving, internal, conception of self, but also to an ever-evolving, external, collectively held, known and usable entity we refer to as *the language*. The discussion of linguistic experiences provided by these interviewees, whose stories I hope to share more richly with respect to emergent themes in the future like those able to be explored as case studies in Chapter Three, have added to ongoing theoretical conversations with respect to sociolinguistic labor, embodied positionality, and raciosemiotics (Smalls 2020). Future studies employing the MMSI will add to a growing body of metalinguistic data that can further contribute to our understanding of the ways in which language, as a social process, is renegotiated in every utterance as language users “reconcile powerful linguistic ideologies with the social interactions that make up the substance of our everyday lives” (Roth-Gordon 2016, p.62).

The ways that listeners from the general population perceive language produced by a Black speaker in a professional context was investigated in a speech perception experiment (Chapter Four) that was grounded in the sociophonetics literature showing that the social structuring of phonetic variation leads to socially informed—or, in some cases, stereotyped—listener expectations. I hypothesized that, in general, listeners would have an expectation that

professional speech is free from non-Standard features, and that hypothesis was broadly upheld. When asked to choose the more professional sounding sentence in a paired sentence task, listeners generally judged the sentence featuring fewer (between 0-1) non-Standard variables as more professional sounding (than the one featuring more non-Standard variables). This outcome holds reliably and robustly for an identifiably Black voice across each of three non-Standard variables being tested, but the findings with respect to the ways in which the specific variables under study are weighted differently from one another speak to how these variables can make different contributions to racialized style. With respect to the legibility of performances of professionalism, for the Black professional community, some non-Standard variations are more negatively evaluated than others. In the study reported in Chapter Four, *dey*—representing fortition via TH-stopping—had the weakest influence on judgments and so arguably may be preferred to *aks*—representing metathesis—and *tren_*—representing consonant cluster reduction. The *dey* variable is potentially the most recognizable to listeners, perhaps not as a lexical item in its own right as *aks* may be, but as a member of a group of frequent lexical items (e.g., *these*, *that*, *those*, *this*) that participate in the dialect-independent phonological process of fortition via TH-stopping. Although the variable itself was chosen for inclusion both through metacommentary elicited from the Black professionals under study (which pointed to its social meaning as both Black and regional) and the multiple descriptions of AAL which list fortition via TH-stopping among its many indexical features, it is possible that production of a fortified /d/ is more forgivable in a professional context due to the frequency of the class of sounds it belongs to, at least in comparison to the salience and indexation of the class of sounds it was being tested against in this study[133]. For Black professionals who are doing the sociolinguistic labor of working to incorporate aspects of their racialized varieties into the daily practice of their professions, then, it would seem that beginning with non-Standard features that are dialect independent is perhaps advisable[134]. For variables like *aks* (which functions as a lexical item, is perceptually hypersalient, and is racially-indexed) and *tren_* (which is also perceptually salient and most racially-indexed in a vowel-initial environment), Black professionals who may be moved to heed advice like Solomon's in his takeaway message and

[133] It is also possible that due to the nature of the question, listeners are not marking the other variables or competitor sentence they are hearing as specifically unprofessional sounding, but less professional sounding than what it is being compared to. This is informative for our purposes of weighting and understanding these variables in concert, but it is perhaps less useful information for the living Black professional attempting to make informed choices about their linguistic production in the moment. More experimentation in the future, with refined and varying directions and steps for debriefing, will be conducted to provide more fine-grained data for these purposes.

[134] Please read this as having the potential to incur less risk; I would not be so presumptuous as to offer legitimate advice for how other Black people should choose to express themselves in the world.

want to begin sharing as much of their Blackness as they are comfortable, need to be more aware that inclusion of features like these into their daily practice may incur immediate and critical judgments of their performance. Taken together, the experimental results provide evidence that Black people still need to be concerned about using their racialized varieties in the workplace safely, as the 30-year-old Black woman college professor who lent her voice to be used in this experiment was most successful in conveying her professionalism to general audiences when her speech was shifted toward a more Standard—Whiter—style.

Smalls (2020), in outlining a theory of raciosemiotics (as the study of "meaning-making about and through race" p.233), discusses the ways in which scholarship on race and language across the last half century has gone beyond traditional models of semiotics[135] "to provide the historical grounding needed for better understanding the processes through which signs are imbued with meaning and how they may be intended and interpreted by different kinds of people" (p.235). The combined interview and experimental method developed and presented here provides a regularized means for studying both the intended usage (potentially in apparent time) and current, wider interpretation of given signs[136]. In their metalinguistic commentary, interviewees provide an evaluation of signs (i.e., lexical items, in-group labels), of what they mean, or how they as users intend to employ them (or perhaps how they interpret or evaluate them being used if they report not being users themselves). Through this evaluation, we come to understand both their motivations for style shifting (namely, the types of audiences they imagine) and the types of material they shift away from in a specific context. The perception experiment allows for direct evaluation of the interpretation of the linguistic material interviewees have identified in that specific context (i.e., professional spaces)—to determine if different types of people imbue those signs with the same meaning as the original users, to determine the ways in which the audiences those users imagine differ from the audiences that exist.

That this population of Black professionals imagines different types of audiences, and that these imagined audiences motivate their style shifting behavior in different ways, emerge in the

[135] The model of semiotics introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure creates a one-to-one relationship between sign and referent, creating a means through which the meaning of linguistic material like the phoneme or grapheme could be accounted for (or at least translated theoretically). But this theory lacked a means of accounting for meaning making in the moment or how signs are reinterpreted differently by different actors over time. Charles Peirce's contribution to semiotics involves adding consideration of mediation itself, or an interpretation step, into analyses of signs. Smalls (2020, pgs.233-236) lays out this history and claims that Black-identified scholars studying race and language have extended the Peircian model by helping "to map race and language's overlapping genealogies and ideological affinities."
[136] In any linguistic context, not merely racialized ones.

metacommentary reported in Chapters Two and Three. I provide three brief examples. Chance (Section 2.4.3) reported knowledge that people listening to him have certain expectations for how Black men are going to sound and act; Chance imagines audiences that are critical of characteristically Black-indexed speech, motivating him to shift away from his racialized styles at work. Desiree (also in Section 2.4.3) indicates that there may be some audiences who would be willing to "meet you halfway" if one was using their more racialized styles; Desiree imagines audiences that might accept a more linguistically equitable space but claims it comes at the cost of those around the non-Standard language user losing confidence in their expertise, motivating her to shift away from her racialized styles at work. In Solomon's takeaway message (Section 3.2.2), he compels Black people to show as much of their Blackness in their professional speech as they are comfortable with and, that if these actions are met with resistance, to move on to a place where Black people are accepted as complete individuals; Solomon imagines audiences who will not reject the identities of Black professionals using non-Standard speech and is motivated to use his more racialized styles more often at work.

The 300 listeners who participated in the speech perception task (Chapter Four) provide some evidence concerning the audiences that exist. I had expectations, based on the literature and borne out from my alignment as a scholar and human, that a given listener's embodied positionality would shape the ways in which they engaged with this task. Despite theoretically grounded assumptions that positionality might play into the ways in which listeners complete this task, listener demographics did not reveal clear influences on professionalism judgments. This population, though representative in a variety of demographic categories, did skew heavily White and politically Democratic, so perhaps judgments of the out and proud racist are not well captured here, as well as those of the overly-critical Black person interviewees warned of—but perhaps neither of those types of judgments are particularly relevant. The stability of the outcomes across experimental conditions and across represented demographic categories does suggest the omnipresence of Standard language ideologies which may have an outsized impact on judgments of professional speech, resulting in the dispreference of the three non-Standard variables under study, and perhaps Black professional speech in general. The audiences that exist, the audiences that Black professionals perform for, are ones who expect to hear a Standard style in a professional context. Essentially everyone expects to hear a Standard style in a professional context. Standard language ideologies (Section 1.3.1) help in understanding the ways in which linguistic ideologies generally operate within and through the body and within and through linguistic markets—developing across time (in the specific case considered in this

research, through acts of oppression) and leaving marks both in our individual cognitive and institutional collective operation; being expressed through direct talk about language use; and being enacted and maintained through individual actions of sociolinguistic labor across the lifespan. The results of the perception experiment seem to indicate that the monitors of the past (see Cornelius & Barrett 2020; Wright 2021) are still clocking choices made by Black people in the performance of our professionalism and that we need to continue to be aware of that in our daily social practice as we do the work of making the decision—in the moment—of whether we want to be perceived as competent (at least linguistically, at least initially) or whether we want to be perceived as Black (just like every other nigga, as Aries put it in Section 2.4.2.2). It would seem that being perceived as both remains an option we must hope future generations of Black professionals may one day enjoy.

In addition, this dissertation engages with metalinguistic commentary as an object of inquiry in its own right that can provide insight not only into linguistic structure and function, but also into the operation and maintenance of linguistic ideologies. Chapter One framed the discussion within the concept of positionality, which recognizes that the body is central to perceptual experiences of both researcher and participant and must be referenced continually throughout the research process, most especially when outcomes are analyzed and critiqued. Positionality as a methodological motivator was engaged with most directly in Chapter Two (Sections 2.2.3 and 2.3.2) But, in Chapter Four, care was taken to make a full reporting of participant demographic information in an effort to transparently represent those providing me with data. Data such as these are crucial to capturing patterns of imbalance and inequity and should be valued (see Charity Hudley et al. 2020; Wright & Weissler 2021; Weissler 2022). Moreover, in the context of gathering these detailed data, I found that individuals provide keywords in their demographic surveys (like “normal” in terms of their heterosexuality, “leans” in terms of their political affiliation, or “only Standard American” for linguistic background) that give us additional insight—clues that sometimes contain data informing us of their positionality—to their awareness of or alignment with certain social meanings. In these results, these data had the potential to contribute to understanding outcomes[137] and to help confirm or rule out other types of ideological influences that might be at work (besides Standard language ideologies) or intersectional alignments of positionality that might be driving observed patterns (as with the metacommentary on *shawty* and *mad* presented in Section 2.4.1 and discussed in Section

[137] This was a potential I didn’t need to tap into for these analyses because the patterns were stable and observed variances explainable.

2.4.1.11). People who qualify their responses—who provide extra words—are trying to communicate something. In the instructions, participants are told what they write matters, that it will be taken into account when we look at their data—data they cannot return to. But more than this, all experimental participants deserve the respect of being acknowledged, of having what they provide be appreciated as issuing from a person, of having the body, mind, and being of the individual behind the data point be knowable.

In centering Black voices in this dissertation, I made an explicit choice not to include a White speaker (for comparative purposes) in the speech perception experiment reported in Chapter Four. I did so because I do not believe White speech is a default and I do not believe it should enjoy the normalized status it currently does in the field of Linguistics. I wanted my work to centralize Black voices without apology and I am proud to have done that. Some folks reading this discussion may be bristling at these race-heavy conclusions without a White voice to buttress them. I submit to you for comparison the overwhelming majority of the theoretical linguistic canon, which was built—without challenge—on observation and analysis of the production and perception of White minds and worldviews, and was said to stand in for the general knowledge state of all human linguistic systems. I ask readers to consider there are other ways of knowing and that mine is no less valid because it is different.

5.2 Future Directions

Going forward, I plan to conduct work to further refine the protocol for the Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview (MMSI), focusing on developing strategies for elicitation of different types of metalinguistic commentary. In addition, a general framework for questions will be developed so that any application of the MMSI, in any population or with any specific research questions, could ideally yield comparable results for subsequent analysis, critique, and refinement. Finally, with respect to metalinguistic interviews, it is my intention to develop an open access digital archive[138] to house my own future research as well as that of others employing the MMSI who may wish to contribute. I also imagine this resource including open source interview, recording, and transcription protocols so community members may access the tools needed to interview each other and preserve their own ideas about language use, knowledge, distribution, meaning, or occurrence variance without the aid (some might say intrusion) of a linguist, if desired.

[138] This being a data repository that interviewees would opt into during the informed consent process.

The outcomes from the PSC task used in the speech perception experiment have left questions that need to be teased out with respect to the ways in which the three variables under study relate to each other. That said, the implications from these findings with respect to the literature cited on listener expectations speak to the reliability of listeners to make professionalism judgments based on the non-Standard variables presented. In my previous research (Wright (under review)), I have demonstrated that using different adjectives can influence speech judgments. I am anxious to see the ways in which evaluations of speakers may change when listeners are being asked which sentence in a pair is more *pleasant* or more *correct* sounding instead of which is more *professional* sounding. The outcomes of both Niedzielski (1999) and Operario & Fiske (1993), among many others, suggest that the activation of certain stereotypes can be toggled on or off depending on which social situations of judgment are cued. Investigating which speech features trigger a negative evaluation more robustly in professionalism-specific contexts may help underscore which non-Standard features are ostensibly the most risky for Black professionals to produce in linguistic markets.

Having fine-grained experimental evidence of this kind may aid scholar-activists as they continue to advocate for better pedagogical models that serve the budding Black professional, ones that reach beyond the codeswitching approach which clearly is not serving the whole community involved in the communicative process. Many scholars advocate, from a purely theoretical standpoint (for example from a translanguaging perspective; see García & Wei 2014), for a departure from a view of language use as that which employs specific linguistic varieties (opting instead for a preference for describing linguistic repertoires). However, from a policy perspective, successfully communicating and addressing the lifelong asymmetries sociolinguistic labor creates will remain difficult to accomplish in our current (aggressively uninformed and easily distracted) political climate without couching this labor as movement between whole varieties[139]. As discussed in Section 2.2.2, the ways in which our community of scholars has described the types of linguistic material we analyze directly impacts the communities that linguistic material belongs to, and can shape how those people move through the world for generations to come. With this in mind, purposeful engagement with a necessary

[139] See Rickford & King (2016) pgs. 951-955, which discusses several examples where accented English speakers were not afforded due process in the U.S. court system (when speakers of so-called foreign languages would have been). This is the same reason users of AAL do not enjoy the same equal protection in the U.S. public school system that English language learners do (Smitherman & Baugh 2002).

distancing between the terminologies of theoretical development and the terminologies of scientific communication must be ignited. If almost everyone perceives the presence of non-Standard variables as less professional sounding—with some of those individuals being Black professionals themselves—then this demonstrates that we, as linguists, must do better in communicating to educators and lawmakers at all levels the equity of the linguistic codes around us. The assimilationist approach upheld in codeswitching pedagogy and defaulted to across linguistic markets requires an untold amount of invisible sociolinguistic labor from already minoritized groups—labor we are just beginning to describe let alone understand the long term psychosocial detriment caused by carrying it. Additionally, the implications assimilationist sociolinguistic labor has for creating asymmetrical production patterns that may influence (or drive) language contact and change over time need to be investigated. There is no other group of experts who can intervene appropriately with their combined knowledge base to address these real and growing imbalances; the first step is gathering more data and being indefatigably vociferous in the reporting of its revelations.

Outside of goals directly related to components and outcomes of this dissertation, my future directions include continuing to advocate for interdisciplinarity inside the academy and linguistic justice outside the academy.

5.3 Thoughts in Conclusion

In his takeaway message, Maurice (an 83-year-old retired Special-Ed teacher), discussed that he finds Linguistics as a field fascinating because it allows researchers like me to trace the special history of Black people in America, which language use sits at the heart of:

> Maurice: I~ think um, first of all, I think you have a great field. Uh I wish I'd taken uh more more more courses and~ language in general. Uh the development of~ language I mean all the way back from you know, uh an evolution how~ how did we~ ever really learn uh to be uh the speakers that we are now, all the different languages and things like that, it's just a phenomenal thing out the human species, brain can just adapt
>
> Kelly: [Yeah]
>
> Maurice: [and I] find it fascinating and uh uh +clears throat+ my takeaway uh~ is what am~ what I hope uh you might uh keep in mind is um is that uh uh the the the way that that as Blacks in this country, we came here not speaking, we came here not knowing how to speak and what to speak, we have to learn and learn it all, and now we come all the way from that, to a young African-American girl the speaker, poet uh nationwide. I can't think of her name now.

> Kelly: Oh, Amanda Gorman!
>
> Maurice: Yes, just think how getting off of those ships, slaves, and just look at that young Black woman and say "wow, what a development" |laughing 1.5 sec.|. Yeah, I would say that uh there's a track record in the history of our language here um there's a track record there, that is fascinating and~ I, I think you're in a field where you can you can follow that track right along. It's uh I hope that uh uh enlightens you.

With Maurice's thoughts in mind, I want to consider a stanza from the poem *Fury and Faith* by Amanda Gorman (Gorman 2021): "Whether we prevail is not determined / By all the challenges that are present, / But by all the change that is possible" (p.156). Farrington et al. (2021) trace geotemporal patterns of population movement in African American communities beginning during the Great Migration (approximately 1910-1970), which have resulted in what they term the African American Vowel System (p.5). In doing so, they tell a story of a dialect (or many dialects) which persist despite almost unimaginable challenges (see also Weldon 2021, pgs.1-24). Maurice reflects on some of those challenges here (as did London; see Section 2.4.2.2), remarking that Black people were separated from each other during the Middle Passage and on plantation yards so they could not communicate. Each of these individuals daily holding on to a language in their heads no one around them understood, that perhaps they were in fear of using, but a language nonetheless in operation—responding to the social environment, acquiring new knowledges, new features. As the centuries pass, new varieties spring up out of the disparate systems that remained, counterlanguages (Morgan 1993, pgs.241-251) are born, and what was once only a solitary system of despair and struggle became a conduit of community play and praise and joy[140]. Challenge bringing change. To get to where Black people are now—to be heads of state and justices and poets laureate of the United States—has required, as Maurice stated, that Black people "learn and learn it all". This ongoing, generational learning task has required more than textbooks; it required direct observation and experiences, it required the acquisition and transfer of metalinguistic knowledge(s)[141]. As a community categorized first in this nation with an official, legal (i.e., mercantile, see Lowe 2015) definition that limited their access to material knowledge creation, Black people have since prevailed linguistically as a community (a heterogeneous collective) which can enjoy participation in the

[140] Listen to the playlist in Appendix B. You'll hear it.
[141] We observed examples of the transfer of such metalinguistic knowledge when Lillian's Physics teacher told her to make sure she said *Charles F. Kettering* if someone inquired about her education (Section 2.4.3) or in the special tone the voices of elders take on when they are tryna tell you something that Solomon noted in Nina Simone's speech (Section 3.2).

shared knowledge of a range of robust dialects and styles—racialized and standardized—that are shared not only among Black embodied individuals, but also which serve as bottom-up engines driving the American English, music, fashion, and pop culture lexicons. A long and unforgiving road may yet stretch before us, but what Black language use has evolved into is something to be cherished and respected. And so I'll say it loud: I USE BLACK LANGUAGE AND I AM PROUD!!! I, like Maurice, hope that consideration of this trajectory enlightens future researchers, that they are inspired to delve deeper into "the systematic ways in which language varies among racialized individuals both linguistically and socially while understanding which of those features, or styles, become indexical of blackness [or any race] and why" (Farrington et al. 2020, p.11)—to do this work, most especially in minoritized, disabled, or otherwise marginalized communities, by centering communities under study in analyses of their linguistic production.

Finally, if you've read this dissertation and find yourself wondering what you can be doing or what may come next, as far as addressing any number of the systemic issues pointed to in this work, I encourage you as your own self-reflexive critique begins to start with the reference list. The materials I accumulated in this research represent decades of work on race and language; they include works from other disciplines like History and Economics and legal scholarship, and there are also multimodal works of art and popular culture engaging with the topics under discussion alongside less formal presentations of academic work that can be engaged with by wider publics. Those seeking to learn more about any of the core topics of this dissertation—or in furthering linguistic justice directly (see Baker-Bell et al. 2020)—can find a resource that fits their desired level of engagement in this list of materials, can find something that provides an entry point which will be recognizable and accessible to them, so they may begin engaging with the issues raised here in a deeper way.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Metalinguistic Method of Sociolinguistic Interview: Protocol Questions and Stimuli

Demographics:
How old are you? How do you identify?
Where did you grow up?
Where did you go to primary school?
Can you share one memorable experience from your school years?
How do you like to spend your time? What are a few of your favorite things to do?
Describe your professional life. What kind of work do you do? What is your job like day-to-day?
If a new, Black employee were joining your professional space, what advice would you have for them on successfully navigating it?
What does professionalism mean to you? What qualities does a professional have?
What are your current and future goals? What do you hope to accomplish in life?

Language Varieties:
How do you consider the types of language you use to be related to your racial identity?
Do you consider yourself a speaker of multiple varieties?
How can you tell if other Black people are from your region/area?
What other White people? Can you tell if they use language differently than Black people from your region/area?
What does it mean to you to 'talk white'?
What does it mean to you to have an authentically Black voice?

Discussion of Targeted Terms Task:
I'm going to list some words and phrases and ask you to tell me what they mean and how you might use them:

- Finna
- Lit
- Bet
- Been
- Shorty
- What had happened was
- Deadass
- Mad
- Corny
- The N Words

Usage Assessment Task:
When you are looking at the following samples of Black speech, I want you to think specifically about the way these speakers sound (not what they are saying) and how that might be different from or similar to the way you sound. Feel free to write down some notes, and we can listen to them more than once if needed.

Statement: Bettina Love: Black Girls (End at “If we are gonna talk about the issues impacting our most vulnerable, it’s Black girls”)

Nina Simone: https://www.youtube.com/watch?vm=c3ClwX7oyXk (End at “By whatever means necessary”.)

Lydia Burell: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dPkTNokNcZ3kWCdGcoDMFTgLXSBqnb-u/view?usp=sharing

Gen Z Vocabulary: https://twitter.com/aavenb/status/1360628421617979394?s=20

Eric Metaxas

Final Questions:
Do you find that you are tone policed for your language use? (i.e. do people call your speech or writing angry or aggressive? have an attitude?)
What kinds of feedback do you get?
Are there specific words or phrases you’ve been told to avoid in your speech, personally or professionally?
Do you get called bitchy or rude or angry or aggressive or told you have an attitude?
Do you find that sometimes people recognize your Blackness and tune out the content of what you are saying?
Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt threatened because of your Blackness?
Do you ever use a white(r) voice to stay safe?
What would you like me to take away from this interview?

APPENDIX B

Dissertation Links

- Maurice's Metacommentary on *the N-Words* : https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IilrIAOD0gRCOuV5OJJ5r6JNgNuo5zji/view

- Dissertation Playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0ppFesq2gGRpMPqg31z7SR?si=5NwIzVwTR1-Y86RRwr_u_w&utm_source=copy-link
  This playlist was curated by suggestions made by interviewees of songs by Detroit-based and Black artists who speak to them in some way. All songs and artists mentioned as cultural references by interviewees during the course of their interviews on language use were included as well. Playlist-making is a longstanding practice in Black cultural, rhetorical, and pedagogical traditions. This playlist is best enjoyed when shuffled.

- Main Speech Perception Experiment Stimuli Links
  1. All Standard sentence: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oLbH7pDa6Re8MoWpVEa4bv6lPmH5stPg/view?usp=sharing
  2. Single-variable *dey* sentence: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f3dUMtU18IX-bH4aQLn7aVk8vclzlrXw/view?usp=sharing
  3. Single-variable *aks* sentence: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kApfJHww5I7XUrx_ISy3CC5BdpbgP5cf/view?usp=sharing
  4. Single-variable *tren_* sentence: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KMiXXebFwTjdRXOuk3LwGX7zqaavag1-/view?usp=sharing
  5. Double-variable *dey* + *tren_* sentence: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KwfDZRq-hY-hdb_JVm3KgpUZgLolIYz9/view?usp=sharing
  6. Double-variable *aks* + *tren_* sentence: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yek3klLqqR6UHp_3StcsH9jTV6FEtP0Z/view?usp=sharing
  7. Double-variable *dey* + *aks* sentence: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xm05Re5S8_WQurbAtIQgBTS4ITf9Vuev/view?usp=sharing

APPENDIX C

Transcription Guidelines and Protocols

The goal of transcription is to reproduce speech faithfully and consistently, creating an authentic representation of the language in use. Transcripts (not recordings or videos) become an official record, shared with the public and other researchers, and as such their accuracy is critical.

Transcription progresses through four stages: Correction, Marking, Cleaning, and Anonymization. Correction is about taking the auto generated Zoom transcript and making it accurate to what was said in the interview. Marking is about establishing consistency across the body of texts and highlighting specific things we want to analyze. Cleaning is about making the transcript readable. Anonymization is about protecting the identities of interviewees. The items marked in red are those that must be consistently added to the document; I've created a quick reference document (reproduced below) to aid you throughout the process.

Preamble

- Always take notes!
    - Note taking is always important during transcription to document your thought process as you make choices about how to categorize certain utterances. For our purposes, note taking is especially important as it will speed and enrich our qualitative coding process that will come after these transcriptions are completed. Taking notes on points the interviewee is making, ideas you have, utterances you find interesting and worth unpacking, and most importantly the patterns you notice will help us engage more deeply with these texts as our analysis process begins. Your notes are private unless you choose to share them!

Step One: Correction

- Non-Standard forms are **never** corrected or replaced with their standard counterparts
    - For our purposes this will apply at the word level, so we will use words like *finna* or *gonna*, but we won't be marking things like *singin* with no word-final [g].
    - Choose a spelling for a non-Standard form and mark each occurrence with the percent symbol following. Example: finna% We will discuss these examples and decide on a common spelling.
- Other protocols:
    - Spell out numbers/years (nineteen ninety) unless the number is specifically spoken.
    - Do not use abbreviations.
    - When you come across an utterance you don't understand, mark that space in the transcript with curly brackets. Example: I was talking { } yesterday. You may also fill the bracket with your best guess. Example: I was talking {calmly} yesterday.
    - Adjust commas, periods, and other punctuation only when the Zoom transcription has placed them in a way which feels inauthentic or inaccurate to how you perceive the utterance. It is not important that a sentence end with a period or

that commas are present where they'd normally appear in writing, but there is no need to delete them all.
    - Double quotation marks should be added when the speech of another person is reported or imitated. Example: And then she was like "she's so aggressive" and I was like...; White people be like "oh my God"

Step Two: Marking

- We mark overlaps, hesitations, repetitions, disfluencies, and pauses.
    - Overlaps: Bracket the phrase with brackets. Example: [oh that's interesting] All overlaps must be placed on a new line following the speaker's name, with a timestamp.
    - Hesitations: Place a tilde after the hesitation. Example: you will sing th~, you'll sing your part
    - Repetitions are not to be corrected or erased.
    - All vocalized pauses (or disfluencies) are to be transcribed (*uh*, *um*, *like*, etc.)
    - Pauses that are perceived as rhetorically significant should be marked for duration using angled brackets. Example: < 8 sec. >
    - Laughter from the interviewee that is perceived as rhetorically significant should be bracketed with pipes. Example: | 2 sec. |
    - Pronunciations that are perceived as rhetorically significant should be marked by a note immediately following the utterance set off with underscores. Example: i'm not a singer _sa:nger_ (here the colon indicates a long vowel); haha I guess _whispered_
    - Gestures that are perceived as rhetorically significant should be bracketed with plus signs where the gesture occurs. Example: You know +shrug+ I'm not sure what she was thinking.

Step Three: Cleaning

- Cleaning the document
    - Combine lines into utterances. This step involves deleting all spaces and extra material between a forward slash and the continuation of the text. The beginning and final timestamp must be retained for each utterance block (see screenshots below).
    - Ensure all added utterances and overlaps have speaker and timestamp information added. Ensure that anytime a speaker changes, that this is indicated with a new line.
    - Remove all line numbers.

Step Four: Anonymization

- Anonymizing the document
    - Once the document is cleaned, we will replace all occurrences of the interviewee's name with their alias, found in the logbook page two. My name does not need to be anonymized, but can be reduced to Kelly.
    - Replace individuals named with *name of person* in parenthesis. Example: I hated Miss (name of person) in school. This convention can be applied to the interviewee's name if mentioned directly. Example: I said to myself, (name of person), you've got to buck up!
    - Typically, we would also replace street, school, or business names at this stage. But because my research questions relate directly to Detroit and Professionalism, I need this information retained for the time being. We may go

back through the dataset and do this anonymization step once our qualitative analysis is completed.

Quick Reference Document:

Overlaps	[oh that's interesting]
Hesitations	you will sing th~
The imparsable	I was talking { } yesterday.
Pauses	< 8 sec. >
Laughter	| 2 sec. |
non-Standard forms	finna%
Quoting or Imitating	"she's so aggressive"
Pronunciations	_sa:nger_
Gestures	You know +shrug+

APPENDIX D

Master Code Tree and Code Criteria for Application

Protocol: *Organizational codes related to interview protocol sections and key questions. These codes will **not** be further refined as they are structural codes and purpose is purely organizational. They will be color coded to reflect their structural nature.*

- ➢ Introduction
- ➢ Demographics
  - ○ Defining Professionalism: *This code specifies a key question in the protocol structure that asks interviewees the same question participants in my norming study also answered.*
- ➢ Language Varieties
  - ○ Lexemes: *This code specifies the section of the interview where the AAL lexical words and phrases discussion task occurred.*
    - ■ Finna
    - ■ Lit
    - ■ Bet
    - ■ BIN
    - ■ Shawty
    - ■ What had happened was
    - ■ Deadass
    - ■ Mad
    - ■ Corny
    - ■ The N Words
- ➢ Usage Assessment: *This code specifies the section of the interview where the usage of Black language assessment task occurred.*
  - ○ Bettina Love
  - ○ Nina Simone
  - ○ Lydia Burell
  - ○ Brittany Xavier
  - ○ Eric Metaxas
- ➢ Closing
  - ○ Danger of Threat: *This code specifies a key question in the protocol structure that is my analog to the classic danger of death question.*
  - ○ Takeaway: *This code specifies a key question in the protocol structure where I ask interviewees if they have anything else to offer that I didn't ask or would like to provide about the key concepts.*

Key Concepts: Codes based on broad themes related to the study's topic and population.

- ➢ **Meta Commentary**: *Commentary about social factors related to language use, knowledge, distribution, meaning, or occurrence variance.*
  - ○ **Age**
  - ○ **Gender**
  - ○ **Race**

        - **Talking White**: *To be used when commentary is about usage of terms or varieties that differ based on a sociolinguistic category: race. When interviewees are reflecting on Talking White, they aren't reflecting on moving between varieties, they are reflecting on what makes language use racialized.*
        - **Talking Black**: *To be used when commentary is about usage of terms or varieties that differ based on a sociolinguistic category: race. When interviewees are reflecting on Talking Black, they aren't reflecting on moving between varieties, they are reflecting on what makes language use racialized.*
    - **Region**
        - **No Region**: *To be used if and only commentary is made about language sounding like it comes from nowhere, or the interviewee never has any idea where a certain group of people sounds like they are from.*
        - **Detroit**: *Codes related to commentary on language use in Detroit*
        - **Other Midwest**: *Codes related to commentary on language use in Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, and greater Michigan*
        - **South**: *Codes related to commentary on language use in Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, & Texas.*
        - **East Coast**
            - NY
        - **West Coast**
            - LA
    - **Socioeconomics**
        - Poor people sound like
        - Rich people sound like
    - **Semantic**: *To be used anytime an interviewee provides commentary about a word or phrase's meaning or meanings, or states directly that they do not know what a word or phrase means.*
        - **Shift**: *to be used when an interviewee remarks on a word or phrase's meaning changing over time (or meaning more generally)*
        - **Inter-community**: *to be used when an interviewee remarks on a word or phrase's meaning (or meaning more generally) being different among different social groups (and should be cross-coded accordingly).*
    - **Personal Preference**: *To be used when an interviewee provides a personal evaluation of a word, phrase, or certain type of language usage - by themselves or others.*
    - **Context**: *to be used when an interviewee remarks on certain situations where a word, phrase, or certain type of language may or may not occur or seems to fit.*
    - **Community of Practice**: *to be used when an interviewee remarks on certain communities where a word, phrase, or certain type of language may or may not occur or seems to fit AND/OR how belonging in or being adjacent to a given community shapes language use, knowledge, or ownership.*
    - **Cultural References**: *To be used when specific examples of individuals in entertainment or history with voices that exhibit specific characteristics are given that exemplify topics under discussion; those topics should also be cross-coded.*
- **Style Shifting**: *Commentary related to moving between one variety and another with different communities, in different social situations, or for different rhetorical purposes.*
    - **Tone**: *To be used when the colloquial usage of tone emerges in interviewee commentary or responses.*

- **As a topic of discussion**
  - **Codeswitching**
  - **Masking**
  - **Self-Censorship**: *To be used when interviewees cite linguistic actions they are aware of taking when moving between racialized styles. These codes should be tagged to excerpts only when the interviewee is referencing themselves.*
    - **Enunciate**
    - **Word choice**
    - **Speech Rate**
    - **Shorten_Voice**
    - **Sound_Different_Race**
    - **Speak_Clear**
- **Mimicking another style**: *This is the **only** time raters will pay attention to the language variety produced by the interviewees.*
- **Style Labels**: *To be used if and only if an interviewee is discussing styles (or varieties or languages or however they happen to be categorizing them) **they themselves posses and are aware of moving between**, either currently, in the past, or in specific social, contextual, professional, community, or racialized environments.*
  - **Phone Voice**
  - **Corporate Voice**
  - **AAVE**
  - **Black English Vernacular**
  - **Black Vernacular**
  - **On Camera Voice**
  - **Legalese**
  - **Non-Standard**
  - **Standard**
  - **True Voice**

➢ **Professionalism**: *Codes related to commentary about professionalism generally (not language use specifically). Assign new codes to emergent patterns that seem interesting or important.*
- **Career Trajectory**: *To be used if and only if an interviewee is discussing their career trajectory specifically. Other formative experiences should be coded elsewhere or not at all.*
- Goals

➢ **Language & Identity**: *Codes related to commentary about language use and its connection to identity broadly, as contrasted with metacommentary about specific social elements of usage like age, gender, etc.*
- **Authenticity**
  - **Feeling Real**
  - **Ownership**
    - **Nigga v Nigger**
- **Appropriation**
- **Appropriateness**

➢ **Race**: *Codes related to commentary about race that is specifically not about language use.*
- **Tokenization**: *Comments about being the only person of color in an environment*
- **Ambassadorship**: *Comments about feeling like one must behave in a certain way because they are being perceived as an example of the Black race*

- **Profiling**

Research Questions: *Codes related to research questions in this dissertation, namely: What motivates Black professionals to shift away from their racialized styles in professional settings?*

- S**ociolinguistic Labor**: *The physical, emotional, and psychological effort put into deploying sociolinguistic resources in a way that is meant to satisfy others (Holliday & Squires 2020)*
  - **BiCultural Competence**: *To be used when interviewees provide commentary which belies an awareness of different ways of being (or linguistic and social repertoires) that must necessarily change as they (or others) move between (racialized) environments.*
  - **Crisis**: *To be used if and only if an interviewee uses the word crisis (or identity crisis) directly, or is discussing a similar concept with other terminology in regards to their output of sociolinguistic labor.*
  - **Effort**: *To be used when interviewees reflect on the toll the work of maintaining racialized professional personae*
  - **Preparation**: *To be used when interviewees provide commentary on their awareness of a need to deploy sociolinguistic resources in the workplace to satisfy others and how they have prepared themselves for this reality.*
- **Ideological Acquisition**: *Codes placed on commentary which relates to the uptake of Standard Language Ideologies*
  - **Educational History**: *To be used when interviewees reflect on their personal or professional educational experiences - or those of African Americans (or I suppose any group) broadly - that are relevant to Ideological Acquisition.*
  - **Languelessness**: *A theoretical concept in Linguistics; an ideology that demonstrates multilingual individuals have relegated their minoritized, or non-dominant, varieties to a status below that of language in their minds.*
    - **Imparseability**: *To be used when interviewees indicate that certain language use cannot be read or understood.*
  - **Language Labels**: *To be used any time an interviewee describes a type of language, be it that of their own community or another community, especially when that description is tied to how individuals who possess specific (often social) characteristics use language in an identifiable way.*
    - **Ghetto**
    - **Street**
    - **Proper**
    - **Articulate**
    - **Mess**
    - **Slang**
    - **Loud**
    - **Relaxed**
    - **Aggressive**
    - **Assertive**
    - **Chill**
    - **Passionate**
    - **Uneducated**
    - **Politically Correct**
    - **Bass**
    - **Educated**
    - **Clear**
    - **Fancy**

        - **Bad**
        - **Wrong**
        - **Twang**
        - **Better**
        - **Harsh**

Emergent Patterns: *Codes assigned based on observed patterns while this dataset was being coded for key concepts and research questions*

- **Detroit City**: *Codes related to commentary about Detroit that is specifically not about language use.*
- **Family History**
- **Authentic**

APPENDIX E

Paired Sentence Comparison Task: Qualtrics Mock-Up

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q1 Informed Consent Form

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study about professionalism.

The person in charge of this study is Kelly E. Wright, a graduate student at University of Michigan Department of Linguistics. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Patrice Speeter Beddor.

Procedures

You will hear a speaker reading pairs of sentences, and then will be asked to evaluate which is more professional sounding. This survey consists of 3 sections and will take approximately 9 minutes. This questionnaire will be conducted with an online Qualtrics-created survey.

Risks/Discomforts

Risks are minimal for involvement in this study. Although we do not expect any harm to come upon any participants, electronic malfunction of a personal computing device is possible, though extremely rare and uncommon.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for participants. However, it is hoped that through your participation, researchers will learn more about how people perceive different professions.

Confidentiality

All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator and her directors will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

Compensation

There is no direct compensation from the primary investigator, however, participants may access this survey through services which provide compensation for participation. (You will be paid through Prolific.)

Participation

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your personal or professional status. If you desire to withdraw, please close your internet browser and notify the principal investigator at this email: kellywri@umich.edu.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact the principal investigator, Kelly Wright, at kellywri@umich.edu, or her faculty advisor, Dr. Patrice Speeter Beddor at beddor@umich.edu or the University of Michigan Office of Research Ethics and Compliance.

As part of their review, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences has determined that this study is no more than minimal risk and exempt from on-going IRB oversight.

Q2 I have read, understood the above consent form, and desire of my own free will to participate in this study. I have printed a copy of this form if I so chose.

- o Yes (1)

o No (2)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Instructions

Please provide your unique Prolific ID:

_____

End of Block: Instructions

In this study, we are investigating perceptions of professional speech, presentation of self, and being understood by the general public.

In a few moments, you will hear a business woman reading pairs of similar—
but not identical—
sentences and be asked choose which sentence in each pair sounds more professional. You will be able to replay the sentences, if needed, to compare them more than once.

We ask that you listen with headphones in a quiet space. Please click the arrow to proceed when they are connected and you are comfortably seated away from background noise. Thank you!

>>

Start of Block: Set 1 dey/they

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence A.

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence B.

Reminder: you can listen as many times as needed!

Which sentence sounds more professional?

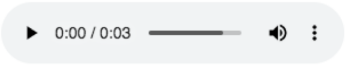
Sentence A

Sentence B

>>

End of Block: Set 1 dey/they

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence A.



Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence B.

Reminder: you can listen as many times as needed!

Which sentence sounds more professional?

Sentence A

Sentence B

>>

Start of Block: Set 2 dey/deyaks

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence A.

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence B.

Reminder: you can listen as many times as needed!

Which sentence sounds more professional?

Sentence A

Sentence B

>>

End of Block: Set 2 dey/deyaks

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence A.

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence B.

Reminder: you can listen as many times as needed!

Which sentence sounds more professional?

Sentence A

Sentence B

>>

Start of Block: Set 3 dey/akstren

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence A.

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence B.

Reminder: you can listen as many times as needed!

Which sentence sounds more professional?

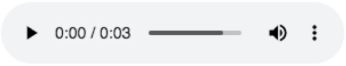
Sentence A

Sentence B

>>

End of Block: Set 3 dey/akstren

Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence A.



Please click the play arrow to begin listening to sentence B.

Reminder: you can listen as many times as needed!

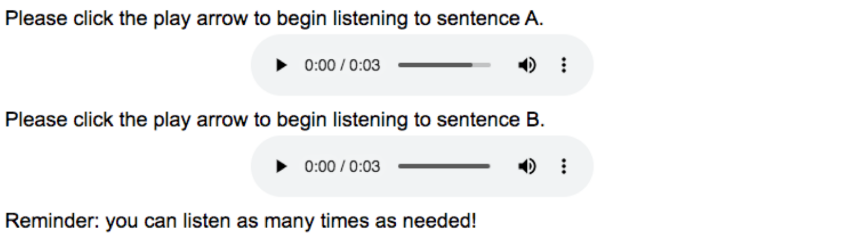
Which sentence sounds more professional?

Sentence A

Sentence B

>>

Start of Block: Diagnostic ask/aks



End of Block: Diagnostic ask/aks

Start of Block: Demographics

This section will ask you a series of demographic questions. All of the questions in this section are optional, but your self-identification will aid us in providing more accurate (if anonymized) descriptions of those who participated in this study and provided data for our research.

If you feel comfortable doing so, please provide the following demographic information about yourself:

Age What is your age group:

- o 18 - 24 (1)
- o 25 - 34 (2)
- o 35 - 44 (3)
- o 45 - 54 (4)
- o 55 - 64 (5)

- o 65 - 74 (6)
- o 75 - 84 (7)
- o 85 & Over (8)

Page Break

Although these are broad categories, what best describes your gender identity? (check all that apply)

- ▫ Woman or female (1)
- ▫ Man or male (2)
- ▫ Transgender (3)
- ▫ Agender (4)
- ▫ Genderqueer or gender fluid (5)
- ▫ Non-Binary (6)
- ▫ Questioning or unsure (7)
- ▫ Other (please describe) (8) _____

For the purposes of this study, how would you like your responses grouped?

- o With women (1)
- o With men (2)
- o In an "other" category (3)
- o I prefer not to have my gender taken into account (4)

Page Break

What Nation or State are you from? And where have you spent the most time?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What language(s) do you speak, write, or sign? And what would you consider your native or first language?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Page Break

What do you do for a living?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you consider yourself a professional?

- o Yes (4)
- o No (5)

- Other (please explain) (6) _____

What qualities in a person do you associate with professionalism?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Page Break

Although these are broad categories, what best describes your racial identity? (check all that apply)

- South Asian (1)
- East Asian (2)
- Middle Eastern (3)
- Black or African American (5)
- White or Caucasian (6)
- Hispanic or Latino (7)
- First Nations or Indigenous (8)
- Other (please describe) (9) _____

For the purposes of this study, how you would like your responses to be grouped?

- With Black people (1)
- With White people (2)
- With Asian people (including Middle Eastern people) (3)
- With First Nations people (4)

- o With Hispanic people (5)
- o With people of two or more races (6)
- o In an "other" category (7)

A few more brief questions:

- o Do you consider yourself to be able-bodied? (please answer yes or no). (1)

_____

- o What is your Sexual Orientation? (2)

_____

- o What is your Political Affiliation (if any)? (3)

_____

- o What is your Religious Affiliation (if any)? (5)

_____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Stereotype Endorsement

In this study, we are investigating perceptions of professional speech, presentation of self, and being understood by the general public.

In this final section of (optional) questions, we invite you to respond to the following statements which ask about your beliefs on how speech operates in the world and to compare them to your thoughts on the beliefs of others.

Page Break

I believe that the way someone sounds reveals something about their character.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (6)	Agree (7)	Strongly Agree (8)

(8)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Other people believe that the way someone sounds reveals something about their character.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
(4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Page Break

I believe that if someone has bad intentions they are revealed in the way that person speaks.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (8)	Strongly Agree (9)
(4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Other people believe that if someone has bad intentions they are revealed in the way that person speaks.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
(4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Page Break

I believe that certain types of people always sound angry no matter what they are talking about.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (8)	Strongly Agree (9)
(4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Other people believe that certain types of people always sound angry no matter what they are talking about.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
(4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Page Break

I believe that if someone has an accent that means they are unable or unwilling to speak English well.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (7)	Strongly Agree (8)
(4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

Other people believe that if someone has an accent that means they are unable or unwilling to speak English well.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (7)	Strongly Agree (8)
(4)	o	o	o	o	o	o	o

End of Block: Stereotype Endorsement

Start of Block: Validation Code

Thank you! Please copy this code 76621321 and submit it to Prolific for your compensation.

You will not be able to return once you leave this screen.

End of Block: Validation Code

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