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# Indexing the Local

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## **Indexing the Local**

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Globalization divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites -- the causes of division being identical with those which promote the uniformity of the globe. Alongside the emerging planetary dimensions of business, finance, trade and information flow, a 'localizing', space-fixing process is set in motion. (Bauman 1998, 2)

Attention to linguistic variation worldwide is evidenced in efforts to document or revive dying languages; in political struggles over language and dialect rights, national languages, and language in education; and in the commodification of languages and varieties in film, on TV, radio and the internet, in folk dictionaries and on other tourist artifacts. New attention to regional variation has been part of this trend. As Newcastle (England) speech levels to a regional standard in the wake of outmigration (Watt 2002), people start to refer to the Newcastle football club as *The Toon*, spelling the local pronunciation of town (Beal 1999). As island-dwellers in the eastern U.S. encounter more and more outsiders and their dialects die, they cling to one or two local forms (Schilling-Estes 1998, 2002). This is not the first time regional linguistic variation has become salient in political and popular culture. But it seems paradoxical that regional variation should be so noticeable in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the context of the

globalizing trends that are leading people to speak more like people from other places. What are we to make of such apparent returns to the local in the context of globalization? Why does discourse about linguistic variety arise even as the differences between dialects and languages threaten to disappear? Why is this happening now, and when and why has it happened in the past? I hope to show in this chapter that dialect leveling and dialect awareness in fact have exactly the same origins, in social and geographical mobility and discursive practices that arise in its wake. The noticing of linguistic difference that can lead to celebrations of or conflicts over linguistic localness can also lead to the eradication of difference, and the conditions that make dialect awareness possible are the same as those that make leveling possible.

According to globalization theorist Stuart Hall, “[t]he return to the local is often a response to globalization” (Hall 1991: 34). “It is a respect for local roots,” says Hall, “which is brought to bear against the anonymous, impersonal world of the globalized forces which we do not understand” (ibid). I argue that such accounts oversimplify the situation when it comes to the current resurgence of interest in regional dialects. After summarizing research on dialect contact and dialect awareness, I show that, at least when it comes to language, renewed attention to the local is not a nostalgic or desperate *response* to globalization but an inevitable *result* of globalization. While such attention can, as Hall suggests, involve renewed “respect” for people’s local roots, it does not arise from respect. Rather, changes attendant on globalization – geographic mobility, the increased heterogeneity of local demography, and economic change that forces people to re-imagine themselves – are precisely the conditions that most effectively foster dialect

and language awareness. To illustrate this, I draw on work I and my colleagues have done in Pittsburgh, PA, a de-industrializing city in the northeast U.S. (Johnstone, Bhasin and Wittkofski 2002, Johnstone and Baumgardt 2004, Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006). I use the concept of indexical order (Silverstein 2003) to model how social and economic change over the course of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has made local speech forms hearable, first as “markers” (Labov 1972, 178-80) of correctness, care, and the like, and later as examples of “Pittsburghese,” an (imagined) dialect associated with local identity.

### **Regional dialects in contact**

Peter Trudgill’s (1986) *Dialects in Contact* set off a wave of work leading to a more and more nuanced understanding of “dialect leveling,” or the ways in which dialects can lose aspects of their distinctiveness when their speakers come into contact with speakers of other dialects. According to Trudgill’s influential model, contact among speakers who use different linguistic forms might be expected to lead to linguistic accommodation (Giles, Taylor and Bourhis 1973) by speakers needing to express solidarity or avoid miscommunication with others. Over the long run, this process might be expected to lead to the “leveling” of varieties—the reduction, that is, in the number of differences between them. In the U.S. as in Europe, industrialization beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century led people to move from the countryside to the cities. Subsequent developments included the emergence of suburbs and “new towns” during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a current “urban revival” trend that in some cases is shifting poorer people outwards from city centers as wealthier people move back in. The sociolinguistic consequences of these historical

developments have included dialect leveling and the formation of koineized “new dialects” when sets of simplified, mixed, and leveled forms are no longer identified with the source dialects (Kerswill 2005).

Dialect leveling has been documented in many geographic settings, including England (Kerswill and Williams 2000, Britain 2002, Watt 2002), the U.S. (Thomas 1997), and Europe (Auer, Hinskens and Kerswill 2005) and in a number of colonial varieties of English (Trudgill 1986) and other languages (Trudgill 2008). The sociolinguistic consequences of early 21<sup>st</sup>-century urbanization in India, China, and elsewhere have yet to be studied in detail, but it would not be surprising to find the same processes leading to similar results.

However, according to Auer, Hinskens, and Kerswill, “it is too early yet to tell if the internationalisation of economic and administrative structures and the increase in international communication in present-day Europe will strengthen or weaken the traditional dialects” (Auer, Hinskens, and Kerswill 2005: 36). For one thing, when no other variety is part of a speaker’s environment, accommodation is not an option. If urbanization is accompanied by the formation of ethnic or working-class enclave neighborhoods, traditional distinctions may be enforced via dense, multiplex social networks (Milroy 1987). Similar processes, in the context of residential and educational segregation, are responsible for the maintenance of substantial differences between the English of some African-Americans and that of nearby whites. Furthermore, Speech

Accommodation Theory, as well as more recent adaptations of it (Bell 1984, 2001), also allows for the possibility of divergence as well as convergence.

Furthermore, leveling is not the only consequence of dialect contact. Research in the U.S. (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2005) and in the U.K. (Watt 2002, Watt and Milroy 1999) suggests that leveling at the sub-regional level has been accompanied by the maintenance and even increase of dialect differentiation among larger “supralocal” dialects such as Midland versus Northern speech in the U.S. or Northern versus Southern speech in England. On more local levels, too, the linguistic effects of dialect contact are unpredictable. Schilling-Estes (2002) compares two islands off the east coast of the U.S. whose residents are now in massive contact with outsiders. While the pronunciation of /ay/ (as in *tide*) in one of the two post-insular dialects is becoming more similar to that of the dominant outside dialect, the pronunciation of /ay/ in the other of the two is becoming more dissimilar to that of the outside. Schilling-Estes suggests that there are linguistic, social, and attitudinal factors at work to differentiate the behavior of the two island dialects in the face of contact. The details of the sound’s function in the linguistic system, how the local-sounding form is socially marked, and what kind of population shift is taking place all affect the outcome of dialect contact in these two places.

The fact that the social meanings of linguistic forms can change means that forms that once sounded non-local can be preserved if they come to function as part of the local semiotic repertoire. Dyer shows, for example (2002) that forms brought to Corby (an English steel town) from Scotland have come to index Corby identity in opposition to a

nearby English town. In Glasgow, Stuart-Smith, Timmins, and Tweedie (2007) show that the people with the loosest social networks and the most ties to speakers of English are maintaining distinctive Scottish features in their speech, while less mobile working-class adolescents are adopting non-local forms that distinguish them from other Glaswegians.

### **Dialect awareness**

Further complicating the dialect contact picture are attitudes about regional varieties vis-à-vis other varieties that are enacted in various practices that invoke dialect difference. Auer, Hinskens, and Kerswill (2005) discuss “sociolinguistic polarisation,” which they describe as the counterpart of dialect borrowing. Sociolinguistic polarization can be defensive, if people refuse to adopt new forms from elsewhere (in which case it hinders dialect borrowing) or offensive, if people aggressively adopt outside forms (in which case it can lead to new developments such as hyperdialectalism). According to Auer et al., “it would seem that a precondition for sociolinguistic polarisation, be it defensive or offensive in nature, is a certain level of awareness of the spreading feature in the consciousness of speakers of the ‘threatened’ dialect” (2005, 9).

An important strand of research about awareness of regional dialects is the work of Dennis Preston and his colleagues (Preston 1989, Niedzielski and Preston 1999, Long and Preston 2000), who use mapping and other experimental tasks to explore folk ideas about dialect boundaries and the social meanings of dialects. This work describes

attitudes in considerable depth and in some cases explores the consequences of “folk linguistics” for people’s sociolinguistic perceptions (Niedzielski 1999, Fridland, Bartlett and Kreuz 2004). Preston also explores what it is about dialects that can become the focus of awareness (Preston 1996). On the whole, however, this body of work tends to hypostatize dialect awareness, treating it as a mental condition that pre-exists discourse rather than as the emergent discursive phenomenon that it is. The kinds of talk and other behavior that Preston and his colleagues use as evidence of dialect awareness not only point to preexisting ideology but also help create it. Thus it is important to explore not just the consequences of dialect awareness but the processes through which dialect awareness is enacted in discourse.

To do this, we have started to ask new questions about representations of regional variation in writing and other media, performances of regional-sounding speech linking localized linguistic forms to localized identities, metalinguistic talk about dialects and their speakers, and discursive practices involving the commodification of regional varieties. We have begun to view regional speech not just as an automatic consequence of where a person was born or raised, but as a resource for social action (Johnstone 2004). Work on “style” (Coupland 2001; 2007, Eckert 2000, Eckert and Rickford 2001) has showed how social identities can be evoked or created through the use of particular linguistic forms and suggested that, at least for some people and in some ways, regional forms could serve such purposes.



Awareness of regional dialects, and the evaluative attitudes that accompany dialect awareness, are often enacted in stylized performances of localness. On one of the islands studied by Schilling-Estes (1998), the pronunciation of /ay/ (as in *tide*), often in the context of the phrase *hoi toid on the sound soid* ('high tide on the sound side') has come to serve as the key element in self-conscious performances of the receding island dialect. Coupland (1985, 2001, 2007, 2008) has explored how radio and television personalities use features of Welsh English to project particular local personas. Beal (1999) has described how "Geordie," historically associated with the Northumbrian gentry, has come to be overtly associated with the city of Newcastle, in particular its working-class population. Beal contrasts this with the history of metadiscourse about the way people talk in Sheffield, where the local variety is linked less with the city than with the area, Yorkshire (Beal forthcoming). In both cases, a particular subset of locally-hearable forms, often represented in particular lexical items, have come to stand in for the variety as a whole, as when the word *mardy* stands in for Sheffield speech or when the Geordie words *Broon* (Newcastle Brown Ale) and *Toon* (referring to the Newcastle football club) stand in for the Northern long /u/. Hilliard and Wolfram (2003), Johnstone (2005), and others have studied how regional dialects are represented as stylized sets of words in folk dictionaries, and Johnstone has explored the dialect-stylization process with reference to other artifacts such as newspaper articles (Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006) and t-shirts (Johnstone 2007a)

Scholars and laypeople alike pay attention to regional variation when they think it is under threat. Beal (forthcoming) shows how current scholarly discourse about dialect leveling echoes the discourse of two centuries ago:

Premature reports of the death of dialects are nothing new. Many of the urban dialects which are reported in Auer, Hinskens and Kerswill [2005] as becoming indistinguishable are themselves the product of the same ‘levelling’ and ‘diffusing’ processes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the enclosure of common land, the mechanisation of agriculture and the Industrial Revolution provided the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors which caused people to move from the countryside into rapidly-expanding industrial towns and cities. A large number of dictionaries and glossaries of individual dialects were produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. ... Mobility, both social and geographical, is seen as the cause of levelling in [both] the 19th and the 21st centuries. (Beal forthcoming, 2-3)

In England, 19<sup>th</sup>-century dialect dictionaries were accompanied by a boom in dialect literature and the development of regional dialect societies. In the U.S., 19<sup>th</sup>-century “local color” fiction featured respelled representations of regional dialects, and actors performing stereotypical regional characters were popular on the entertainment circuit. The American Dialect Society was founded in 1889, at the height of the “Gilded Age” of industrialization and accompanying immigration from Europe and geographical mobility in the U.S.

A similar burst of regional dialect awareness appears to characterize popular culture at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A British rock band, The Arctic Monkeys, who might once have wanted to sound American (Trudgill 1983, 141-60), now features words associated with Sheffield, their city of origin (Beal 2008). Advertisements feature representations of the dialects of their target audiences, even if these are non-standard or minority ones (King and Wicks 2008). Internet sites now supplement folk dictionaries; one called Slanguage (<http://www.slanguage.com/>) offers to help viewers “talk like the locals in cities around the world.” Coffee mugs inscribed “Bawlmer” are on sale in Baltimore, as are mugs featuring “Pittsburghese” in Pittsburgh. Groups on social networking sites emerge around regional identities, and membership often requires knowing or acting as if one knows, the correct regional words for things.

### **Place, indexical order and the resemioticization of regional forms**

To summarize, economic and cultural globalization and the attending social and geographical mobility and dialect contact seems to result in two contradictory trends: increased dialect leveling and increased talk about dialect. To put in another way, globalization both erases objectively visible linguistic difference via leveling and dialect loss and creates ideological difference among imagined language varieties via increased popular attention to variation. This is because the noticing of difference that occurs as a consequence of dialect contact may lead to semiotic change of two sorts. On one level, dialect contact can lead to accommodation, which can lead to dialect leveling. On

another, dialect contact can spark the kinds of metapragmatic activities that can lead to ideological differentiation among dialects (Gal and Irvine 1995). To account for this, several claims about place, language, and semiotic change can usefully be brought together.

*Localities are products of experience and discourse.* As cultural and humanistic geographers have pointed out, physical spaces are transformed into meaningful places as humans interact with them, imbuing them with value (Lefebvre 1991[1974], Entrikin 1991, Tuan 1991; see Johnstone forthcoming). Different ways of interacting with space lead to different ways of delimiting and describing places. Political boundaries represent one way in which spaces can be made meaningful. Space can be acted on and made valuable through agriculture, landscaping, or building. Physical spaces can be imbued with meaning by how they are experienced, how humans navigate through them, from what angles we view them, what they smell like, feel like, or sound like. Individuals' experiences of the world are necessarily disparate (no two people have precisely the same set of experiences), so in order for intersubjectivity to be possible, different impressions and evaluations of these impressions must be coordinated in interaction. We come to share ideas about boundaries through activities like mapping, about a place's history through books, lectures, and tourist representations, about the meanings of farms or buildings by working in them, touring them, interacting with the things produced there.

One of the activities through which the meaning of a place can be articulated and coordinated is through talk about talk (Johnstone 2004). If the conditions are right –if

there is at least one linguistic form that people can notice that is heard in one city or region and not others, if linguistic difference is ideologically associated with social difference in the sociocultural milieu at hand, and if reasons to notice and talk about such differences arise – then people may link the identity of a place with particular forms of speech.

*Languages and dialects are likewise products of experience and discourse.* As linguists in the humanistic and integrationist traditions have argued (Harris 1981, Hopper 1988, Johnstone 1996), relations between form and meaning do not pre-exist discourse but are rather evoked and created in discourse, as particular forms coincide with particular semiotic effects in individuals' experience. As Michael Silverstein puts it (with respect to a somewhat more restricted domain of language), linguistic forms *index* meanings, rather than *having* meanings (Silverstein 1993, 2003).<sup>1</sup> This is to say that when a form comes to be observably correlated with a semantic or pragmatic function (referential or “social”), the form becomes useable to evoke or create that meaning.

Humans may be born with the tendency to pay attention to talk and to make certain kinds of generalizations and not others about order and form. This means that people who have similar linguistic experiences are likely to make the same generalizations about them or re-use the same words and phrases. Such people can be said to speak “the same” language or variety or to “share” a way of talking. But such sharing is never complete and thus must be renegotiated in every interaction. Just as we continually calibrate our senses of the meaning of a place by talking about it, we continually calibrate our

language, and our explicit ideas about language, as we speak, write, or sign. Languages and dialects, like localities, are “imagined,” to use Benedict Anderson’s (1991) term. They exist as useful, even necessary, ideas, not as things objectively observable by a sociocultural outsider. Associations between particular features of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, on one hand, and imagined “languages,” “dialects,” and “speech communities,” on the other, arise in local social and discursive practices that are enabled and constrained by larger-scale political and economic conditions. According to Silverstein (1993, 408), “users of languages in essence construct culturally particular concepts of [linguistic] normativity that bind subsets of them into ‘language’-bearing groups.” That is to say that “languages” and “dialects” are cultural constructs, produced by a group of people using, orienting to, and/or talking about, a particular set of linguistic features, in a process that also constructs the group itself (Gal and Irvine 1995).

In a study of the history of Received Pronunciation (RP) in Britain, Asif Agha (2006) describes some of the mechanisms involved in the mutual calibration of sets of ideas about form-meaning relations. Agha uses “enregisterment” to label the identification of a set of linguistic forms as a “linguistic repertoire differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register,” which has come to index “speaker status linked to a specific scheme of cultural values” (231). What became RP was once a regional variety, used by socially privileged speakers in a geographically bounded area in southeastern England and not associated with correctness more generally or advocated as a national model for pronunciation. Since the eighteenth century, however, as a result of a variety of prescriptivist ideas and “metapragmatic” activities—activities, that is, that point to a

feature's appropriate context of use--that have circulated these ideas, a set of features of this regional variety have been enregistered as a supralocal standard accent; these features have been represented collectively in the public imagination as a stable variety and maintained across time and region via metapragmatic practices that reiterate the value of this variety and its link to social status and correctness.

Because not all metapragmatic practices involve explicit metadiscourse, or talk about talk, people are not always conscious of links between linguistic forms and social meanings, even when they use the forms appropriately in their own speech. Once the links are somewhat stabilized, however, people can in some circumstances also reflexively respond to the social meanings of linguistic forms, explicitly talking about appropriate usage in handbooks, representing users of the forms in cartoons, and so on.

*Particular forms can index multiple meanings at the same level and at multiple levels of abstraction.* This is a consequence of the fact that language is never completely shared and that different individuals experience the linguistic and sociolinguistic environment in different ways, depending on the context (who is talking, in what circumstances) and the co-text (what else is being said or done at the same time), and meaning can change.. For example, the same linguistic form can potentially index a referential meaning, social class, and/or place. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the form *yinz* [yɪnz] can simply be a second-person plural pronoun; or it can sound sloppy, uneducated, and low-class; or it can sound like “a Pittsburgh thing,” an index of local identity. In order to understand the distribution of meaning of variant forms, we need to take a phenomenological approach,

an approach, that is, that attends to the multiplicity and indeterminacy of indexical relations and to how such relations arise historically and in lived experience (Johnstone and Kiesling 2008)

Michael Silverstein provides a model of semiotic variability that captures the relationship between dialect leveling and dialect awareness. According to Silverstein (2003) relationships between linguistic form and social meaning can emerge and sometimes stabilize at various levels of abstraction. An indexical is a feature whose use can be associated with a sociodemographic identity (e.g., region or class) or a semantic or pragmatic function (e.g., number-marking or formality). An  $n^{\text{th}}$  order indexical is one that has reached a stage in its semiotic development at which, for a particular person or group, its use *presupposes* the existence of an identity or pragmatic function.  $N^{\text{th}}$ -order accounts can be generated by cultural outsiders, if they are “objectively” visible through the ideological grid a particular outsider brings to bear. To say that the feature’s indexicality is presupposing is to say that the occurrence of the feature can only be accounted for with reference to a preexisting grid: a presupposed or pre-chosen way of partitioning social or semantic space, such as a system for dividing people up by region, gender, or class or a preconceived understanding of what constitutes number or formality in language. At this stage, an indexical form is not yet *creative*: neither outsiders nor speech-community members use the form in question to do semantic or social work, because the form is not variable in individuals’ speech. A dialectologist’s noticing that people in the Midwestern U.S. say things like *the car needs washed* (rather than the car needs *to be washed*) while people in the northeast do not comes to the situation with a



presupposed way of dividing up the social world (by region); to the linguist, the forms are  $n^{\text{th}}$  order indexes of region. However, if the linguist were, in speaking to a fellow linguist, to use the form in question as an inside joke or a demonstration of expertise – for example, if a linguist from the Northeast were to enumerate to a fellow Northeastern linguist questions about Midwestern speech that “need answered” – the form is being used creatively, to proffer a claim about identity or expertise. The form is now being used at the  $n+1^{\text{th}}$  order of indexicality.

If the right historical, geographical, and ideological conditions are in place, members of the speech community may come to notice that different forms are used by different people, or in different contexts. They may then begin to vary the usage of these forms in their own speech, depending on whether they are trying to sound more local or more supra-local, more careful or more relaxed, more working-class or less so. When this happens, the features are functioning as  $n+1^{\text{th}}$ -order indexicals. An  $n+1^{\text{th}}$ -order indexical is an  $n^{\text{th}}$  order indexical feature that has been assigned “an ethno-metapragmatically driven native interpretation” (Silverstein 1998, 212), that is, a meaning in terms of one or more native ideologies (the idea that certain people speak more correctly than others, for example, or that some people are due greater respect than others). The dimensions along which indexical meanings vary (locality, carefulness, class, gender, respect, and so on) depend on local (not linguists’) ideas about what linguistic variation can mean. At this stage, the feature has been “enregistered,” that is, it has become associated with a style of speech and can be used to evoke a context for that style. For example, a person can make use of a feature that he or she has noticed is correlated with being working class in order

to create rapport with a working-class speaker or annoy an English teacher. The indexicality of the form is thus creative. As this example suggests, a form can index meaning along a variety of dimensions: the same form can create solidarity or distinction. Different members of a community, differently placed by class, education, gender, mobility, and the like, can use locally-available features to do different kinds of social work and hear them as doing different kinds of work. (In Pittsburgh, women are more likely to hear local features as sloppy, ugly, and uneducated, lining them up with one end of an ideological cline of correctness; men are more likely to hear local features as suggesting localness, solidarity, friendliness, or masculinity, lining them up with one end of an ideological cline that goes from self to other.)

The same process can recur: a feature with  $n+1^{\text{th}}$  order meaning for some people may, for them or for others, come to be reinterpreted in terms of yet another ideological scheme. For example, because particular variants are correlated, in some Pittsburghers' experience, with being working-class and male, a subset of these features has come to be identified with being an "authentic" Pittsburgher.<sup>2</sup> The ideological schemata in play here include the idea that places have dialects associated with them and that prototypical Pittsburghers are working-class men. People who want to create the sense that they are authentic Pittsburghers (in this ideological sense) can use this set of features to set the scene, and people whose perceptions are shaped by the ideological cline of authenticity may hear people using these features as authentic or real Pittsburghers (whether or not the people they hear are using the features for this purpose; cf. Johnstone and Kiesling 2008).

The forms that have been resemiotized (given new meaning) in this way are, from an analyst's perspective, now  $(n+1) + 1^{\text{th}}$  order indexicals.

The process of resemiotization can recur indefinitely. For example, if it is noticed that Pittsburghers are people who talk about "Pittsburghese" (as intense media coverage of the topic has made increasingly likely), and if people associate cities that have dialects with the post-industrial "rust belt" and cities that do not (or are thought not to) have dialects with the new economy, then forms hearable in Pittsburgh have come to have indexical meaning on yet another level.

Historically, in Pittsburgh and elsewhere but not inevitably, the resemiotization process has tended to loosen the semiotic ties between locally-hearable forms and social class and link locally-hearable forms instead or in addition with place. Forms that once only sounded working-class have come, for some speakers, to sound local as well, or for some, only local,<sup>3</sup> and these forms become useful resources in the discursive calibration of people's sense of place. We have described this history in detail elsewhere (Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson 2006). One telling bit of evidence that the linkage of geographically-local forms to place is a relatively recent development is that the term "Pittsburghese," which explicitly links dialect and place, was apparently coined during the 1960s. Self-conscious performances of dialect can also serve to explicitly link speech forms people think of as local with local places. As do the Ocracokers who encapsulate the local "brogue" in the phrase *high tide on the Sound side* [of the island] (Schilling-Estes 1998) Coupland's Welsh stylizers use phrases that both refer to places and provide

“phono-opportunities” (Coupland 2007, 124) for the performance of local-sounding forms, such as *Cardiff Arms Park* with its repeated opportunities for the local pronunciation of long (a:) as [ae:]. In Pittsburgh, the phonological feature most often identified with local speech in the print media is the monophthongization of /aw/, and more often than not the word it appears in is *dahntahn* ‘downtown’ (Johnstone and Baumgardt 2004).

### **Mobility and Resemiotization**

The historical contexts that give rise to the kinds of change in the meaning of regionally variable linguistic forms that I have just describe are ones that foster social and geographical mobility. This can be illustrated with a sketch of the sociolinguistic history of Pittsburgh (presented in more detail in Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson 2006)

The fact that Pittsburgh is located at the edges of the North and South Midland and Appalachia means that there is a large number of sounds, words, and structures that sound nonstandard and can be heard in the area. Simply by virtue of distributional facts, these features are potential  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order indexes, in Silverstein’s sense, of geographic location. A dialectologist using a word list to elicit regional pronunciations could describe the link between speakers’ location or place of origin and the occurrence of these features in people’s speech, for example. Although all of these features are limited in geographical distribution in one way or another, none are heard only in Pittsburgh or in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area. Most features of pronunciation that sound local to Pittsburghers are widespread in central and western Pennsylvania, if not throughout the

United States, and some of the lexical and morphosyntactic features thought of as local can be heard throughout the Ohio Valley or the Midland, Southern, and/or Appalachian dialect areas.

Along with the availability of nonstandard features that could potentially be heard as local, local social and economic history created additional preconditions for the emergence of “Pittsburghese” (Oestreicher 1989, Lubove 1969, Hays 1989). Until World War II, Pittsburgh was relatively isolated. Many European immigrant languages were spoken in the city, but working-class Pittsburghers had little contact with anyone who spoke English differently than they did. Dense, multiplex social networks strengthened local dialect norms (Milroy 1987), and the fact that Pittsburghers had inherited a Scots-Irish-influenced dialect that could be heard as distinctive was almost never brought to their attention.

Historical and sociolinguistic evidence suggests that before the 1960s, the use of regional speech forms could have been correlated with social class and with localness if anyone had done the sociolinguistic fieldwork necessary to establish these correlations. But the  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order indexicality of these forms was rarely brought into higher-order local play. While regional speech features could index class identity for some people (and to some people), many sounded like working-class Pittsburghers because they had no other way to sound. People growing up in working-class families lived in insular neighborhoods within walking distance of the steel mills and other factories where the adults worked, and children went to school and church with their neighbors. These dense, multiplex

sociolinguistic networks gave them access to regional dialect features and little opportunity to become aware that they spoke differently from people elsewhere, that some people would consider the way they talked nonstandard, or that the use of nonstandard features varied with socioeconomic class. Because the usage of regional forms was correlated, in some Pittsburghers' experience, with class, adopting an attitudinal or affiliative stance toward or against working-class identity could involve adopting or not adopting regional forms, but this option was open only to those whose repertoires included both regional and supraregional variants, and the kinds of social and geographical mobility that would give rise to varied linguistic repertoires were available to relatively few people.

As features that can be heard in the speech of working-class Pittsburghers were taken up as sociolinguistic resources,  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order geographically regional features acquired social meaning, coming to do  $n+1^{\text{th}}$ -order sociolinguistic work connected with correctness, class, and place. This became possible in the context of social mobility, which gave Pittsburghers access to new variants of forms that had been relatively invariable in their speech or that of their neighbors. Once forms became variable, the choice among variants could, for some people, be invested with  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order indexical meaning such as class or correctness.

In the post–World War II decades, the  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order indexicality of certain features (their potential to index correctness, class, and locality) itself became usable. While the  $n+1^{\text{th}}$ -order indexicality of these forms continues to make them hearable and usable as markers

of social class, education, and local life experience, the fact that these features could be used these ways became more and more salient. This occurred through metapragmatic practices that selected a subset of the forms that can do  $n+1^{\text{th}}$ -order indexical work, linking this subset to a more stabilized social identity and making these forms available for self-conscious, performed identity work. The raw material for  $n+1^{\text{th}}$ -order indexicality is the existence of  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order correlations, which, filtered through ideologies about connections between correctness and class, become resources for hearing other people's class and education level and projecting one's own. The raw material for  $(n+1)+1^{\text{th}}$ -order identity work is  $n+1^{\text{th}}$ -order stylistic variability, which is filtered through more abstract ideologies about what dialects are and how they are linked to identities. At this stage, people notice that people with more stereotypical Pittsburgh identities have less variable, more regional-sounding accents, and attribute this to an essential connection between place and language. In the process, this subset of nonstandard forms has come increasingly to index localness and less, or more indirectly, class. While they continue to do  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order work as well, regional forms are now increasingly heard as signals of local identity and can be used to project localness. Many of the metapragmatic practices that have made this possible have been metadiscursive, involving explicit talk about talk.

During World War II, many working-class Pittsburgh men were geographically mobile, traveling in the military, and the mostly unionized industrial workers in the post-World War II years were paid enough that they could vacation at East Coast beaches and

elsewhere, where they interacted with people who sounded different and noticed how the Pittsburghers sounded. Demographic change at home also helped create the conditions for talk about local speech. During the 1960s and 1970s, the “baby-boom” grandchildren of the immigrant industrial laborers who had arrived between 1880 and 1920 began to come of age, no longer speaking the homeland language and with weakened ties to immigrant religions (Oestreicher 1989, personal communication). While their parents and grandparents thought of themselves mainly in ethnic or religious terms (as Polish, for example, or Eastern Orthodox), these Pittsburghers began to develop class and regional consciousness. Their increased reflexivity about social identity was also arguably enhanced by the increased speed with which popular culture circulated on television.<sup>4</sup> The ground was fertile for ways of imagining what it meant to be a working-class Pittsburgher, and the existence of variable regional pronunciations that could index class and place, forms that people elsewhere heard as different and Pittsburghers elsewhere identified with home, provided an easily available resource for doing this.

Economic upheaval in the 1970s and 1980s meant vastly increased geographical mobility and resulted in new kinds of talk that led to dialect leveling, at the same time as it led people to link dialect and social identity more explicitly. When local steel production was moved to areas where labor was cheaper, people whose families had lived in Pittsburgh for generations were forced to relocate to find work. Displaced Pittsburghers who visited or eventually moved back brought with them stories about being told they sounded funny (Johnstone 2007a), and nostalgic talk about Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh speech became common in diasporic communities of Pittsburghers (Johnstone and



Baumgardt 2004). New opportunities for talk about talk meant that Pittsburghers became increasingly aware that features of their speech were local in geographic distribution and noticeable to others, and the potential for indexical linkages between local forms and social identities was increasingly made explicit.

Working-class Pittsburgh neighborhoods and schools are less homogeneous than they once were, so young Pittsburghers now come into contact with people who are unlike them at a much earlier age than before. Thus even among people who have not (or not yet) left the city, conditions are conducive to discursive practices that give rise to explicit talk about the indexicality of certain forms. The medical and university sectors of the economy have also grown, attracting students and professionals from elsewhere. The availability of inexpensive housing, studio, and office space in former industrial neighborhoods means that young “creatives” can stay in the city after graduating from local universities. These people notice regional speech features, now as often in mass media representations like folk dictionaries and Web sites that metapragmatically link regional speech and local identity as by actually interacting with locals. They use them in self-conscious performances of “Pittsburghese.” Such performances are invariably reflexive, indirectly commenting on local speech and local speakers, but they can make various kinds of comments, not all of which are seen as derogatory. Performances of “Pittsburghese” can enter into attempts to claim local identity by displaying local knowledge (Johnstone and Baumgardt 2004; Johnstone 2007c). People can win arguments about what Pittsburgh and Pittsburghers are like or show that they are long-time residents or urban hipsters in the know by showing that they can speak the dialect.

Performances of “Pittsburghese” can be intended as, and/or taken up as, gentle teases or degrading insults, depending on whether the performer is an insider or not (Wisnosky 2003). Thus on the stage set by the  $n^{\text{th}}$ -order indexicality of certain local speech features, discursive practices and artifacts have emerged that have enregistered local speech in the local imagination as unique and unchanging and have strengthened and stabilized the ideological links between local speech and place, making other indexicalities less and less available for identity work.

## **Discussion**

We have seen that the conditions that foster dialect leveling are also those that foster the production of locality through the ideological differentiation of imagined dialects. Some variants index supra-locality, and can thus be used in the accommodative speech that leads to leveling. Other forms index locality, and can be used in discourses that shape people’s senses of place and the social identities associated with place. Pittsburgh, where semiotic change of the sort I have been describing is ongoing, offers a synchronic apparent-time view of mobility-induced resemioticization. Some Pittsburghers still live in a sociolinguistic world in which linguistic variation does little or no social work.

These are people who do not notice local accents because they have had relatively little opportunity to hear anything else and because they have rarely had linguistic difference called to their attention. There are Pittsburghers whose own speech is variable but who cannot mimic local speech. Conversely, there are people who perform “Pittsburghese” but who do not use locally variable forms to do sociolinguistic work, and there are people who know about local speech only from seeing it on t-shirts and bumper stickers.

Furthermore, various sets of indexical relations can characterize the same speaker's sociolinguistic competence. Shifting from supra-regional forms to performances of local-sounding forms can index both a nostalgic sense of belonging and a youthful sense of urban hipness. While metadiscourse about "Pittsburghese" arises in speech situations that involve people of all ages, it is middle-aged people who left the city several decades ago because of economic change and younger people who are staying in or moving to the city because of new economic opportunities who participate most often.

The model I have sketched explains the well-known fact that "stereotyped" linguistic forms (Labov 1972, 178-80) often recede and disappear. It is commonly thought that this happens because once people know that a form is socially stigmatized they stop using it. But while this may be true on the level of the community as a whole, it is not necessarily true for individuals, who may know that a form is negatively evaluated but use it nonetheless, either because they cannot hear it in their own speech or because they do not have productive control of both the stigmatized and the newer, non-stigmatized form (Johnstone and Kiesling 2008). Rather, stereotyping in Labov's sense and the recession of locally-marked forms coincide because they both result from the same set of socioeconomic changes, which lead on one hand to dialect awareness and on the other to dialect leveling.

I have focused mainly on one of globalization's effects: economic change resulting in human mobility. I touch, in conclusion, on what the sociolinguistic process I have described suggests with reference to more specific claims about cultural production in the

interdisciplinary literature on globalization. I organize this necessarily brief discussion around several concepts that recur in this body of work: *rupture*; *deterritorialization and the production of locality*; and *virtual places and diasporic public spheres*. Finally, I turn to a brief discussion of the idea of *returning to the local* in the context of globalization.

“Rupture” labels the idea that contemporary economic and cultural change is fundamentally unlike anything that has happened before. Versions of this claim are made by Appadurai (1996) and Bauman (1998), who hold that the extent and ease of geographic mobility and/or communications media that have vastly increased the speed of communication have resulted in “a general break with all sorts of pasts” (Appadurai 1996, 3). This is because the decline of the nation-state in the face of global economic forces means that people are no longer automatically associated with territories from birth and identities are no longer first and foremost national ones. In general, as people move around the globe, identities assigned at birth and assumed to be primordial become less relevant, or relevant in different ways. Social effort is required to produce the identities that were once thought to be inherent. Among these are identities associated with places. “Deterritorialized” people and institutions work to produce locality (Appadurai 1996, 178-95).

The processes of semiotic change I have described have clearly happened before, as Beal’s (1999, forthcoming) work makes clear. “Rupture” is thus too strong a term to describe the contemporary situation with regard to regional forms of speech. But while it may not be the first such moment, we do appear to be in a moment when the production

of locality is hard to miss. As we have seen, when material conditions are conducive, regional speech forms (or forms imagined to characterize regional speech) are being taken up in higher-order indexical performances of localness, even as people become less likely to use these forms in less performance-inducing contexts. Through activities like online and face-to-face talk about “Pittsburghese” and the consumption of “Pittsburghese” t-shirts, folk dictionaries, talking dolls, and websites, Pittsburghers make sense of what it means to be a Pittsburgher in an era when the answer to that question is no longer as obvious as it once was. It should be noted, though, that this is almost entirely grass-roots, bottom-up cultural-production work. Economic-development institutions seeking to “brand” Pittsburgh’s identity do not emphasize, or even mention, the local dialect, thinking it an embarrassing relic of the past<sup>5</sup>. Thus globalization theory’s focus on the role of powerful political institutions and industries in the production of locality needs to be supplemented with a look at the role of individuals outside of institutions and at the kind of grass-roots economy represented by people who sell t-shirts on the sidewalk or dolls and refrigerator magnets over the internet.

A great deal of the work of locality-production is done online, in email, through websites, and on blogs. This is because many of the people who do locality-producing work about Pittsburgh and Pittsburghers do not live in Pittsburgh. In an analysis of an online discussion of Pittsburgh speech (Johnstone and Baumgardt 2004) we found that at least half the participants were ex-Pittsburghers. Active members of the Pittsburgh diaspora (often called the “Steeler Nation” because of their fanatical relationship with the city’s American football franchise, the Pittsburgh Steelers) are often people in later middle age,

who left the city in the 1980s, and members of their families. The Steeler Nation could be said to constitute a diasporic public sphere of the sort that globalization theorists argue has replaced the traditional, physically based public spheres such as 18<sup>th</sup>-century coffee houses (Habermas 1989). From a normative, Habermasian perspective like that of Eco (1986), the Steeler Nation could be said to be a simulacrum of Pittsburgh in which serious discourse about ethics and politics is replaced by football statistics and arguments about whether Pittsburgh speech is charming or embarrassing. From a sociolinguistic point of view, however, this mostly virtual community is engaged in the work of dialect-construal. While they may not increase the number of people who speak the dialect in unselfconscious daily life, such activities help to make people aware of the dialect's existence and, ultimately, to preserve its memory. Metalinguistic activities such as these are only now being added to the set of phenomena sociolinguists are interested in, and it is not yet clear how they interact with our primary object of study, language variation and its role in language change. But whether or not performances of and talk about dialect help in the revitalization of dialects in everyday life (where and when this is seen as a good thing), they have come to be part of people's sociolinguistic world and cannot be dismissed as "inauthentic" or evaluated as only second-best.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that leveling and dialect awareness go hand in hand also provides support for theorists' claim that the effects of globalization are hard to resist. Under globalization, as Appadurai puts it (1996, 187), "The capacity of neighborhoods to produce contexts ... and local subjects is profoundly affected by the locality-producing capabilities of larger-scale social formations." Nothing seems more local than discursive practices like the

production and consumption of folk dictionaries (Johnstone 2005) or t-shirts (Johnstone 2007b) or the broadcasting of radio programs (Coupland 2001) that circulate dialect awareness and celebrate locality by inscribing dialects imagined as unique onto people and locations thought to be unique. In fact, though, these practices become possible only in the context of larger-scale social forces and formations such as the globalizing economy, changing communication technology, and the mass media.

## NOTES

1. Although this is never entirely clear from his writing, Silverstein appears to intend the concept of indexicality to describe “non-denotational” meaning only, seeing denotational meaning as arising from other mechanisms. He objects to the claim that meaning is “indexicality all the way down” (personal communication, November 2007).

2. As noted by Bucholtz (2003) and others, “authentic” is an ideologically-shaped characterization, in sociolinguistics and elsewhere. There are no (objectively) authentic speakers of any variety. Authenticity is, however, locally relevant in the ethnographic setting at hand. There are t-shirts that list the characteristics of the “Authentic Pittsburgher” and people use this term in conversation to describe someone who is close to the prototype of the local persona. (“Authentic” Pittsburghers are often referred to as “Yinzers.”)

3. Speakers who link these forms with place but not with class include people who experience local speech entirely through mediated contexts in which the forms are linked with place but not class. Such contexts include t-shirts and postcards that superimpose local forms on the city skyline and include no “characterological” cues (Agha 2006: 165) such as references to working-class practices or sketches of stereotypical Pittsburghers. In the US, the fact that language forms are nonstandard is not sufficient to enregister them as lower-class. People notice politicians’ regional accents, for example, and talk about them in regional rather than class terms. (Americans hear President George W. Bush as having a Texas accent, but not as coming from the lower classes, for example.)

4. I have no evidence that this was in fact the case in Pittsburgh, but theorists have proposed the idea. I am grateful to Nik Coupland for suggesting this.

5. In the UK, vernacular speech is sometimes involved in attempts to brand cities for tourist purposes (Nik Coupland, personal communication, July 2008).

6. Whether or not reflexive, performative activities like the ones I have been describing are playing any role in regenerating the use of local speech forms in Pittsburgh is not yet known. Like most (if not all) Pittsburghers, I would not want children or grandchildren of mine to grow up with no other option but to speak a stigmatized dialect that is celebrated mainly by people who do not use it (Johnstone & Kiesling 2008). My work is motivated not by the goal of dialect revitalization but by the wish to preserve the



evidence of and promote pride in Pittsburgh speech as an element of Pittsburghers' cultural heritage.

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