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Anna Marie Trester

entitled Improvising onstage and off: Combining variationist, discourse, and anthropological approaches to style

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

This dissertation is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and any and all revisions required
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IMPROVISING ONSTAGE AND OFF: COMBINING VARIATIONIST, DISCOURSE,
AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO STYLE

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Linguistics

By

Anna Marie Trester, M.A.

Washington DC
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IMPROVISING ONSTAGE AND OFF: COMBINING VARIATIONIST, DISCOURSE, AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO STYLE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exploration of “style” or the use of language to project a social persona or identity (Coupland 2004; 2007; Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes 1998, 2002, 2004), focusing on a community of performers of improvisational theater in Washington DC, with whom I conducted ethnographic research from January 2005 through July 2007. Working from within a "speaker design" approach to style, I suggest increased use of anthropological approaches to style (including use of ethnography and the study of performative contexts of language use) as well as discourse analytic approaches. Specifically, I illustrate how discourse aspects of language function as a resources that speakers use agentively and creatively in interaction.

There has been a considerable push in recent years to integrate anthropological and discourse analytic approaches in variationist stylistic inquiry to better understand the social meanings of style. This research continues and expands this development, suggesting that ethnographic and discourse analytic approaches enrich variationist analyses in two general ways. First, the approaches to data collection and analysis

entailed in the anthropological and discourse analytic paradigms motivate a critical re-examination of some of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of traditional variationist studies of style. Secondly, discourse analysis provides the researcher with discourse features as units for analysis, discourse analytic frameworks for uncovering and interpreting the connections among language and social meaning, and a perspective on how identity is negotiated in interaction as achieved through discourse analysis itself.

While studies of linguistic style continue to draw mainly from linguistic structure at the level of phonology, morphology, and syntax, I consider relatively broader features of language including the choice to perform (or the choice to avoid performing) a socially recognizable dialect, the use of the voices of others through quotation (constructed dialogue) to reflect information about self, and the collaborative negotiation of frame shifts to playfully enact frame shifts and play spontaneous intertextual games. I suggest that such units drawn from higher levels of linguistic structure provide a more complete picture of the linguistic resources speakers have available to them in constructing, negotiating, and performing identity.

Additionally, I suggest that discourse frameworks (including framing, footing, stance, alignment, positioning, and intertextuality) contribute greatly to our understanding of linguistic style by linking up micro-level linguistic processes to more macro-level processes including the negotiation of social meaning. Framing, for example, helps us to understand how speaker awareness of frame, or “what is going on in interaction” (Goffman 1974) determines what language can be used (e.g. dialect performance) and

what social significance such language carries in different interactional contexts. Finally, I argue that discourse analysis itself allows for the active tracking of the negotiation of meaning in interaction, including metacommentary about group members' use(s) of language. I argue that the unique ways in which such features are deployed in interaction contribute to this group's style, which has implications for identity.

Ultimately, I suggest that a combined variationist, ethnographic, and discourse approach to style enables the analyst to better understand the range of stylistic resources that speakers have available to them to construct, negotiate, and perform identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction of the problem

This project is an analysis of linguistic style - the choices that speakers make when using language which come to define how they interact and who they are. Drawing from extended ethnographic engagement with a community of performers of long form improvisational theater, I identify aspects of their linguistic style (offstage) influenced by the genre of theater that they perform (onstage). While traditional studies of style have tended to consider the patterning of linguistic features at the levels of phonology, morphology, and syntax, I consider features of language including the choice to perform (or the choice to avoid performing) socially recognizable dialects, the use of the voices of others through quotation (constructed dialogue) to reflect information about self, and the collaborative negotiation of playful frame shifts and use of entextualization (creation of “texts”) to play pattern games. I view these and other aspects of style as resources for constructing, creating, and performing identity. Identity will be understood in this investigation through observing the “practices that people attend to in working out their meaning in the community” (Eckert 2000: 41). Such practice will be understood as shedding light on how both personal and social aspects of identity are negotiated.

While I locate my research within the tradition of variationist sociolinguistics, specifically speaker design approaches to style (viewing speakers as using language

agentively and creatively to construct, negotiate, and perform social identity), I draw from anthropological and discourse analytic perspectives at all stages of this project. As will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 2, there has been a considerable push in recent years to integrate variationist, anthropological, and discourse analytic approaches in better understanding the links between micro and macro-level patternings of language. My research continues this development, suggesting that ethnographic and discourse analytic approaches enrich variationist inquiry into style in two general ways: First, the approaches to data collection and analysis entailed in the anthropological and discourse analytic paradigms motivate a critical re-examination of some of the basic theoretical and methodological assumptions of traditional variationist studies of style. Further, I suggest that discourse analysis provides the researcher with more satisfying ways of uncovering and interpreting the connections between language and social meaning in three ways: 1) discourse level features, 2) discourse analytic frameworks, and 3) a critical focus on the achievement of identity in interaction. Thus, the two main theoretical contributions of this work are 1) to integrate ethnographic, discourse analytic, and variationist approaches to style and 2) to investigate broader aspects of style than are typically studied in traditional (variationist) approaches. Additionally, by considering speakers who are very aware of their own use(s) of language, this work also contributes insight into the relationship between language and performance.

1.2 My engagement with the topic

My involvement with improv began as a personal one. Rushing across campus during my very first week of classes at Georgetown, a blue handmade flyer announcing improv auditions caught my eye. Unexpectedly, I felt a pull to be involved: a pull which stayed with me through the weekend. This surprised me because although I had been a big fan of improv when I was a student at the University of Arizona, I had never thought about performing it myself at the time, nor had I thought about it much in the intervening ten years. I attributed the sudden renewed (stronger) interest in improv to be motivated by a need for a creative and social outlet, having just moved to a new city and experienced a career change in dedicating myself to a PhD program after working for many years. Also aware of preparing myself for teaching, I knew that improv could only increase my comfort level when speaking in public, so I decided to give it a try.

And so it was that I found myself (at 30 years of age and during the first week of my doctoral program) auditioning with a group of 18 year olds for a spot in the Georgetown Players Improvisation Group (or G-PIG as they call themselves). It was terrifying! I had never actually performed improv before, and here I was performing for the *very* first time while being evaluated by an entire room full of strangers. I am not proud to admit that after about thirty minutes, I excused myself to get a drink of water and never came back. However traumatic that first experience was, reflecting back on the circumstances that had brought me there, I realized that the initial desire remained, so I decided to find a way to explore improv in a slightly less face-threatening way.

Over the course of that year, improv came to be a big part of my life outside of school as I attended weekly improv classes, rehearsals, and performances. I became increasingly proficient at crucial improv skills including heightened listening, pattern recognition, storytelling, and the tools for creating compelling characters (known as “character work”). As I was increasingly socialized into the improv world, this so-called “outlet” from my academic life came to be filled with people just as keenly aware of language and social interaction as any linguist. Still, I continued to view improv and linguistics as separate aspects of my life. Improv was nothing more than a creative outlet from my academic work, despite the fact that during that first semester of both improv and graduate school, it would often be the case that the same aspects of linguistic structure that would be the focus of linguistics classes during the week would be the focus of improv class on the weekend.

Gradually, I began seeing more and more connections among (and through) improv and my various interests in language, until finally, one day in improv class, I recognized the possibility of using one to explore the other. Our improv teacher was asking us to think about how the word “mom” can be an identity resource for a performer in two different ways. As our teacher explained, pronunciation of the [a] vowel can signal different kinds of regional identities while at the same time, the referring term “mom” also serves to construct relationships among characters onstage. While this knowledge of phonology and discourse analysis of course drew from linguistic skills that I already possessed, I recognized in this moment a new way of connecting them through

applying them to improv.¹ Thus it was that in one moment, the thing that had begun as a creative *outlet* from my graduate studies turned into the *subject* of my graduate studies, and one that helped me understand my graduate work in a new way.

1.3 Approach

It was nearly two years after the initial realization of my academic interest in improv that I began the project with Washington Improv Theater (WIT) described in this dissertation. Ethnographic engagement with the community began in January 2005 and continued until June 2007, and involved participant observation at weekly rehearsals and performances, attending organizational meetings, trainings, and community outreach, and conducting interviews with group members. Over the course of more than two years, not only did I collect more than 70 hours of video and audio recorded data, but I took on a number of roles within the organization, including that of student, volunteer, administrator, audience member, teaching assistant, teacher, and performer.

I began the ethnography with an interest in capturing aspects of style (offstage) cultivated onstage by the practice of improv. And while my linguistic training made certain aspects of their offstage style very salient to me from the outset (including their use of accents, their highly developed storytelling abilities, a facility with pattern recognition and with jumping into and out of character), as an ethnographer, I wanted to achieve an analysis that resonated with the experiences of group members. An

Until that time, I had also understood my research interests in variation, discourse and ethnography to be separate interests.

unfortunate aspect of many traditional studies of style noted by Eckert and Rickford (2001) is “the tendency to focus on individual variables” which “abstracts away from what speakers themselves perceive as style” (4). I wanted an analysis that would not only resonate with group members, but one that could be of use to the group going forward.

Following Duranti (1997), I took two central concepts of ethnography to be my guiding concerns in the project. First, I wanted to achieve a balance between the perspective of an insider and that of an outsider (between emic and etic perspectives), and additionally, I wanted to establish “a dialogue between different viewpoints and voices....the voices of the people studied, of the ethnographer, and of his [sic] disciplinary and theoretical preferences” (87). As it happened, a technical difficulty with my recording equipment called my attention (almost at the very end) to the progress I had made on both fronts over the course of the project. A series of problems with my tape recorder and microphone resulted in my having to interview Juliette (one member of the troupe) three times and at three very different stages of the project. Looking back at these technical problems (which were very frustrating at the time), I now view them as opportunities, for it was in preparing for the third interview that I reflected back on the two previous interviews as moments in the ethnography. I recognized that the subtle changes in perspective I had undergone as an ethnographer had occurred so gradually (and almost imperceptibly) that it took having the three conversations as anchors in order for me to recognize the changes and understand how they had impacted my analysis. To illustrate this development, I will now briefly describe these three conversations.

I first interviewed Juliette very early on in the project, before I had a sense for which relevant identity categories the ethnography would reveal, and even before I had a sense for the linguistic units that would form the basis of the analysis. The tape recorder completely malfunctioned before the interview even began, so we decided to just have dinner and hang out. Looking back at my field notes from this conversation, I realize that many of my concerns at that stage reflected my outsider perspective and status, including parallels that I was drawing between the beginning stages of ethnography and the beginning stages of an improv scene.² Although I had already been participating with this community for nearly a year at this stage, Example 1, taken from my field journal, still very much reflects the perspective of an outsider. For example, while I describe being able to understand their style better, I nevertheless acknowledge not yet being fully “in the loop,” as may be seen below:

Example 1: from my field notes after first interview with Juliette

Watching them warm up backstage and realizing that what looks like a conversation becomes a warm-up and you can't exactly pinpoint where it started – even the people who are engaged in it don't always seem to be able to tell! What happens is just that a normal conversation becomes focused somehow – a pattern is recognized and played with and that takes things to a new level

<a study of frame would be most useful here!!">

That they all communicate so well they can all move into a game frame without any really evident markers of frame or contextualization cues.

Parallel to me feeling really out of the loop with the group and that suddenly feeling a curtain lifted – not that I am in the loop, just that there feels to be less of a concerted effort to keep me out of it, or something. That in getting more of the jokes, I am now a part of the group more

These field notes reflected my dawning awareness of a very salient aspect of this group's style, the sudden frame shift out of conversation and into performance for the playing of

² As I explained to Juliette, in both cases, you don't know exactly what is going to happen or what you are going to find, but you have faith in your abilities (and those of your collaborators) that it will all work out somehow.

spontaneous intertextual games (which will be analyzed in Chapter 6). Observe that not understanding this aspect of their interactional style had made me feel like a concerted effort was being exerted to keep me at a distance. My gradual feeling of integration within the group paralleled my dawning mastery of the mechanics of this aspect of style.

The second interview with Juliette was difficult to schedule because Juliette was at that time in the process of moving to New York, and because I had become very involved in WIT myself in the capacity of teacher and performer (in a different troupe to the one I was studying). Ironically, at this stage Juliette had achieved something of an outsider perspective, having recently left the troupe in preparation for her move, while my own comments (I realize in retrospect) reflected an almost complete absorption in the perspective of community insider. Unbeknownst to us, as Juliette shared thoughtful insights about aspects of membership that she was already beginning to miss (including most notably, her enjoyment of their unique linguistic and interactional style), the battery inside my microphone was slowly dying. Only the very beginning of this conversation was actually audible on the tape recording.³

Although very little of this conversation remains, I do have a strong memory of our conversation and how my own point of view was informed by my own involvement in the WIT community. For example, although the focus of this conversation was aspects of linguistic style that make the WIT community and the troupe under analysis unique,

³ Even more unfortunate is that I have no notes from this conversation because when I came home that evening, I checked the very beginning of the tape, and, thinking that it was fine, decided to skip taking field notes, as it was late and I was tired.

many of my own contributions were in the form of evaluating my own abilities at mastering the subtleties of this style.

Looking back at this second conversation in preparation for the third, I also realized that I had at that point drafted chapters about two linguistic features (dialect performance and intertextual games) but had been struggling with how to incorporate what I saw as a very different interest, my observations about discourse marker *oh* and constructed dialogue. Although I kept noticing the use of *oh* as I was transcribing and reviewing the interviews, I had been interested in *oh* long before I started this project. Thus, I thought my awareness of this feature was some sort of “interference” resulting from my training and not “true ethnography.” Ultimately, I found that not only did use of *oh* illuminate something important about this group’s style (as will be explored in Chapter 5), but the choice to analyze *oh* reflected my final shift as an ethnographer through bringing my own voice as linguist into the conversation of the ethnography.

Fortunately, Juliette agreed to meet with me a third time, and through this third meeting, I realized why the previous two had been necessary. Ethnography takes time, sometimes a lot of time. While two years of engagement is fairly standard for an ethnography (perhaps even on the short end), it is certainly more time than I had originally anticipated spending in the field. However, looking back now, I recognize why this time was necessary. As observed by Ron Scollon (PC), this isn't so much because of how much there is to learn. It's more to do with the changes that you yourself have to go through to gain multiple perspectives as an ethnographer. Scollon reasons that nobody

can gain multiple perspectives quickly because gaining a new perspective entails loosening up on an old one. For me, time was necessary to achieve a balance in my perspective within the community and it was also necessary for me to more fully bring my diverse interests in linguistics into the conversation of the ethnography. I can perhaps somewhat ironically call this my “*oh* moment” because it was my acknowledging a research interest in the discourse marker *oh* that ultimately cemented my own analytical grounding within this ethnography as both a variationist and a discourse analyst.

1.4 Aspects of improv style

Over the course of the ethnography, one very salient aspect of improv style that jumped out at me was the degree to which this group of people relish being playful with language. In the interview with Myfanwy (one of the members of the troupe under investigation) when I ask if playfulness with language is characteristic of her style in particular, she responds that it is a trait which many improvisers share:

Example 2

1. Anna: Just kinda being playful, like almost like highlighting language.
2. Myfanwy: uh huh
3. Anna: Do you see that as something that definitely you do,
4. Myfanwy: yes
5. Anna: would you say that that's more
6. would you say that that's more typical of you individually
7. or do you think that could be more generalized?
8. Myfanwy: I, I think it is a trait that lots of improvisers share though not all of them.
9. But a lot, you know improvisers are verbal people and they like to talk and they like
10. language, and they think you know language can be funny.
11. I mean some improvisers, not so much, but a lot of them do.
12. and just the just a turn of phrase can make them laugh, just the way you say something or
13. a word you make up like “laundramatiers.”
14. That-, the whole scene can just hang on this one word.
15. And you know, for somebody who likes language and, you know, I'm-

16. that's, that's you know something I enjoy too.
17. And um, also when people make mistakes with language, on stage, that's another thing.
18. I'm not above, you know, a scene about somebody who just said, you know, "expresso"
19. instead of "espresso" or making fun of them for "nucular" rather than "nuclear",
20. you know, things like that. So...

In this example, Myfanwy calls attention to morphology (word coinage of "laundromatiers" in line 13) and phonology (mispronunciations "expresso" and "nucular" in lines 18 and 19) as features of language available for play. And I have certainly witnessed many examples of this playfulness with language, in one instance observing Myfanwy to playfully affix -y to turn the verb "eat" into an adjective, saying "I'm feeling *'eaty'*" to mean "I'm feeling hungry enough to eat" However, I assert that the style of these group members may also be very productively explored at many other levels of language structure. I will illustrate this by exploring use of the lexical item "yes and" within the community. I will show how the phrase is not merely an important lexical item for community members, but that it also characterizes a way of interacting that is at the core of improv.

Certainly, an important part of being a member of any community involves knowledge of specific lexical items shared by community members. An example of one such emblematic lexical item for this group would be the phrase "yes-and," a phrase which refers to an attitude of agreement and a willingness to accept the ideas and suggestions of fellow players (as will be explored in further detail in Chapter 3). When a performer contributes an idea to the interaction, players are taught to respond "yes-and..." displaying not only agreement but a willingness to extend and expand on the

suggestion. The “and” of “yes-and” involves building on the original suggestion, making it more infused with drama, and ideally heightening the “stakes” the emotional tension between the characters. “Heightening” is the improv term for this second element of “yes-and.” Onstage, heightening is crucial to ensuring that scenes develop. The skill is cultivated in foundational improv classes, and drilled through repetition (to which I can attest, having been the teacher doing the drilling) until it becomes second nature.

Additionally, heightening is central to how group members interact and relate to one another both onstage and off. While use of the phrase can signal group identity, interacting in a way that exemplifies “yes-and” through heightening is perhaps an even more effective way of reflecting group identity, as evidenced in Example 3 below, taken from an e-mail from the artistic director encouraging students to participate in an upcoming community-wide performance opportunity (a jam).

Example 3

This is a note to encourage all WIT students to come out and hit the jam this Sunday at Flashpoint (7pm). Spontaneous and wonderful things do occur at the jam, and it is always a pleasure to see complete strangers **yes-and-ing** one another like champs.

While knowledge of the phrase “yes-and” itself is important in interpreting what this e-mail means, an underlying assumption of community members is that any member will know how to apply the rule of “yes-and” through heightening in interaction.

After years of practicing improv, group members don’t always realize that they apply heightening to conversations offstage. Sometimes this is realized only after a conversation (with someone who is not heightening) goes awry, as may be seen in the following example taken from the (third) interview with Juliette. Comparing a

conversation to a game of volleyball, Juliette observes that the style of improvisers is sometimes easiest to recognize when it isn't shared.

Example 4

1. Juliette: absolutely, I m-mean in-in a conversation or an-a outing whatever,
2. being at the bar with other improvisers,
3. naturally you are one upping on one another
4. you are heightening, you are, you're creating like [y-you're]
5. Anna: [yea, that was] the third thing I think-
6. Juliette: -yeah, I mean y-you-you're so attuned to: those rules?-
7. Anna: -right.
8. Juliette: I mean, it's the idea of, there are these rules in improv that you have to know
9. but then you're supposed to forget about them
10. and then when we're at the bar we've forgotten about them but we naturally do them-
11. Anna: right-
12. Juliette: -ya know? and, yeah, when y-you're trying to like, mess around with other people
13. who don't necessarily do, improv, they like, it fall-it falls short like ya know
14. you set your volley or whatever and l-you're like "oh you missed the ball"

When interacting with a group of fellow improvisers, aspects of their style including heightening are applied "naturally" (line 3) or subconsciously. When interacting with people who share these same aspects of style, the conversation feels good, it flows.

When the same rules are applied in a conversation among people who do not share this style, the interactional consequences can be a feeling of having tried and failed to engage a conversational partner who "missed the ball" (line 14 above).

Broader aspects of this group's style such as *heightening* most caught my attention during my ethnographic participation often because these were the aspects of style that most signaled my outsider status at the beginning. I suggest that these (which I will call discourse) aspects of style are at the heart of comments sometimes made by community outsiders that it is at times very hard to follow a conversation among a group of improvisers. While certainly, this group is comprised of very intelligent and well-read

individuals, I argue that their conversations become difficult to follow due to aspects of their style rather than because of references made to science, politics, or perhaps the *New Yorker*. A linguistic perspective on improv thus adds to our understanding of features of language and interaction that characterize group interactions, especially when these features are not salient to group members themselves.

Before giving an overview of the dissertation, I would like to just observe that although the analysis in this dissertation ultimately involves more offstage interactional contexts than onstage performances, it was time spent watching this troupe perform onstage that focused my attention to their highly developed awareness of the intricacies of social interaction. This awareness, cultivated onstage, carries over into their interactions offstage, which became evident after observing them rehearse and play together over the course of many months. During this time, I gained an appreciation for their tremendous creativity, their ability to carefully listen, their awareness of language, their ability to shift into and out of the performance frame, and their highly developed abilities at recognizing, remembering, and making connections (particularly among texts). Aware that these abilities are present in conversation more broadly, I wanted to capture how improv can target and cultivate such aspects of linguistic style, and to illustrate how linguistic style in turn works in reinforcing group membership and identity. It is hoped that the present analysis of one group of improvisers' linguistic style may be understood as having wider application in understanding how linguistic style works within social groups more broadly.

1.5 Overview of the chapters

In Chapter 2, I provide background to my study by exploring previous work on style, beginning with traditional variationist approaches. I illustrate that while there has been a considerable push in recent years to integrate anthropological and discourse analytic approaches in variationist stylistic inquiry, the tendency has been to focus on phonological and morphosyntactic units. I illustrate that ethnographic and discourse analytic approaches motivate a critical re-examination of some of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of traditional variationist studies of style. For example, I suggest that the patterning of broader levels of linguistic structure (including dialect performance, discourse markers, constructed dialogue) provide a more complete picture of linguistic style and motivate a broadening of the terms “style” and “variation.” Finally, I consider research which has been done to integrate variationist, discourse analytic, and ethnographic perspectives, and I consider how the present study continues this development.

In Chapter 3, I detail my ethnographic participation with Washington Improv Theater (WIT), as well as with a group of short form performers as part of an earlier pilot study. I provide some background on improv as a style of theatrical performance, focusing on differences between the short form and long form formats, and then provide details about the participants in the present study (members of one of the house troupes at WIT). Finally, I give a sense for the data collected by describing the process of my own integration as ethnographer and the four main interactional contexts observed.

Chapter 4, the first data analysis chapter, explores dialect performance⁴ (in this case the self-conscious use of linguistic features to index culturally recognizable groups). I explore how dialect performance is used to create characters in long form performance, comparing the onstage and rehearsal settings. I present quantitative data to show that while dialect performance occurs infrequently overall in long form improv, it occurs even less frequently onstage than in rehearsal. To explain this patterning, I evoke Goffman's (1974) notion of framing (participant's sense of "what is going on in interaction"), and following Coupland (2004), I explore frame at three levels (socio-cultural, generic, and interpersonal). To understand performers' use (and avoidance) of culturally meaningful information evoked through dialect performance, I utilize discourse analysis of performers' metacommentary (commentary about language), to explore how awareness of frame determines what such language can be used and what language can *mean* in different contexts.

Chapter 5 focuses on interviews with performers, considering how the discourse marker *oh* works to realize the identity potential of constructed dialogue (Tannen 1989). Specifically, I identify two uses of *oh* when used to preface constructed dialogue, which build out of the functions of *oh* in everyday interaction, and which exemplify Bakhtin's (1986) concepts of uni-directional and vari-directional double voicing (the stances that a

⁴ While many contemporary sociolinguistic scholars maintain that all language is performative (cf. Coupland 2007), such work has come to recognize different levels of performativity, based on such elements as the degree to which speakers call attention to the performance, or the "knowingness" of the display. Given a theoretical orientation to all language as performance, instances of dialect performance, may be viewed as "high performance."

speaker can take towards an utterance of another). I identify a use of *oh* not explored in previous research in which *oh* conveys negative *stance* (speaker's evaluative orientation) towards constructed dialogue. I illustrate how this process is related to *footing* (analyzed as a shift in speaking role in Goffman's production format of talk) and *positioning* (speaker's identity construction relative to what is said) to negotiate locally salient identities, including that of long form performer. Ultimately, I suggest that *oh* is a tool for *realizing* the identity potential of constructed dialogue.

The last data analysis chapter, Chapter 6, explores group members interacting at their most relaxed (hanging out backstage). From this setting, I isolate one very salient aspect of their style, the spontaneous creation and playing of games involving playfulness with intertextuality (the relationships among texts). I explore how these games depend upon and develop improv skills including heightened listening and pattern recognition, and I relate these skills to the three pieces of the process of intertextuality identified by Bauman and Briggs (1990) *entextualization* (creating texts), *de-contextualization* (rendering them extractable), and *recontextualization* (reincorporating them somewhere else). Finding the cultivation of intertextual skills to be an important part of the socialization of newer members in the group, I consider how performers' ability to actively track and utilize intertextuality in interaction colors their style.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I consider how this combined approach (incorporating variationist, ethnographic, and discourse analytic perspectives) contributes new insight to speaker-design-based approaches to style. Additionally, I consider intertextuality as an

analytical lens through which aspects of this groups' style considered in previous chapters (dialect performance and constructed dialogue) may be understood as ways of using texts to create identity. Through consideration of the style of a group of people very aware of their use of language, it is hoped that the present investigation provides further insight into how speakers "use the resource of language variation to make meaning in social encounters" (Coupland 2007: quote from back cover).

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COMBINING APPROACHES TO STYLE

2.1 Introduction

The present work is an investigation of linguistic style, approached from a "speaker design" perspective (Schilling-Estes 2002). For the purposes of this investigation, style will be explored in terms of the choices that speakers make with language and the social meanings that these choices carry. Current sociolinguistic research into style has witnessed increased integration of insights from anthropology (including ethnography and performative contexts of language use) and discourse (features and frameworks). This dissertation is intended as a continuation of this trajectory with particular focus on the increased incorporation of discourse analysis. I am not the only researcher presently urging for this increased integration of discourse in studies of stylistic variation.

Coupland (2007) is one very important recent example:

So much of sociolinguistics nowadays is grounded in analyses of discourse and social interaction that...it would be strange for variationism *not* to move into that arena. This move might allow us to find other, more integrative, sorts of sociolinguistic truth (9).

Acknowledging that many researchers are calling for this integration, what I claim with this work is simply increased attention to the specific ways that discourse analysis provides the variationist researcher with more satisfying ways of uncovering and interpreting the connections between language and social meaning. Specifically, I

suggest that there are three aspects of discourse analysis which enrich stylistic inquiry. These are: 1) discourse level features, 2) discourse analytic frameworks, and 3) a critical focus on the achievement of identity in interaction.

As part of this increased integration, as will be explored in this chapter, I suggest a broadening of the terms “style” and “variation” as they have traditionally been used. While a traditional variationist view of style encompasses only shifts between speaking “more carefully” or “less carefully” within the context of a sociolinguistic interview, I consider how “conversational style” (Tannen 1989) “ways of speaking” (Hymes 1972) and “style as distinctiveness” (Irvine 2001) enrich our understanding of what comprises style and the many ways that social identity is negotiated through language. Further, I suggest expansion of the term “variation” which rather than being understood narrowly as referring to sameness at some “underlying level of language structure” (Schiffrin 2006: 10), should be understood as referring to “characteristics of a particular group’s way of speaking” which “differ from that of other groups” (Coupland 2007: 6).

I begin this chapter (Section 2.2) by defining “style” and reviewing traditional variationist approaches to style specifically “attention paid to speech” (Labov 1966), audience design (Bell 1984, 2001), and speaker design approaches (Schilling-Estes 2002). In Section 2.3. I consider anthropological approaches including Hymes’ (1974) “ways of speaking,” and Irvine’s (2001) “style as distinctiveness.” In Section 2.4, I outline “conversational style” (Tannen 1984), and then consider the specific analytical contributions of discourse analysis to the study of style. In Section 2.5, I consider how

the approach to data collection and analysis entailed in the discourse analytic and anthropological paradigms motivates a critical re-examination of some of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of traditional variationist approaches (which continue to inform stylistic inquiry). Finally, I review the work of researchers who integrate variation, discourse, and ethnography in style research.

2.2 Style

Style, at its core is simply a “way of doing something” (Coupland 2007: 1). Linguistic style, therefore, has to do with ways of speaking, exploring “how speakers use the resource of language variation to make meaning in social encounters” (Coupland 2007: quote from back cover). According to Bell (1997), “speakers talk in different ways in different situations, and these different ways of speaking can carry different social meanings” (240). Speakers always have alternatives. Because they choose “a ‘*that way*’ which could have been chosen instead of a ‘*this way*’” (Bell 1984: 145), to study linguistic style is to observe the linguistic choices that speakers make and to consider what these choices mean.

Being a member of any community involves being able to read the meaning of styles. Coupland (2007) gives the example of the design choices that make a house belong to a particular style (i.e. the “rustic” style of Swedish house building). In this case, features might include choice of materials (timber frames), decorative flourishes (red stain), or architectural decisions (a distinctively tiered roofline). Coupland notes that

together, these features “mean something” and as competent members of a community we know how to recognize the features and interpret what they mean. Regarding language, then, we understand the different social meanings associated with different ways of speaking, and we know how to creatively use these resources to negotiate our identities. Further, we know how to read and interpret them when they are used by people we are speaking to. It is the job of linguists to contribute insight into about any and all aspects of language which play a role in this negotiation, drawn from as many levels of linguistic structure as we are able to identify. We might observe for example, that a range of features together can “mean” long form improv performance (as will be explained in greater detail in the following chapters). These aspects of style may include, for example, the avoidance of dialect performance, playful use of frame shifts to create characters, and use of intertextuality for the creation of spontaneous games in interaction. An approach which is uninformed by discourse would likely miss such features in its account of style.

I should note that while I suggest critical re-examination of many aspects of the variationist approach, my work is informed by this tradition, and I must begin by acknowledging its influence on my work. To understand how speaker design approaches fit within the variationist tradition, and how they developed out of it, I will now provide some background on the variationist tradition of sociolinguistic research.

2.2.1 Traditional variationist approaches

William Labov's 1966 study of New York City English launched the field of variationist sociolinguistics and first established the connection between individual linguistic choices and societal patternings of language. In the tradition of variationist research which he established, the analyst begins by identifying "variants" (different ways of saying the same thing). A classic example is Peter Trudgill's (1974) work in Norwich, England which considered (among other phonological variables) the realization of the variant /ŋ/ as in "working" as either [n] or [ŋ]. Quantitative measurements are used to display how the systematic patterning of units provides a means for understanding how speech is connected to social concerns. Exploring the patterning of [n] and [ŋ] across the speech of members of five social classes, Trudgill found that higher social class correlated with more frequent use of the [ŋ] variant. Thus, variation between [n] and [ŋ] is analyzed as being "conditioned" by social class.

One enduring result of Labov's foundational work is a view of language as existing along a continuum from "careful" speech to "casual" (or "prestigious" to "stigmatized"). For example, as the variant [ŋ] in Norwich England or rhotic [r] in Labov's work in New York City are seen more frequently in the speech of members of higher social classes in society. This is taken to mean that there is a certain amount of social prestige associated with that variant. Further, Labov's work revealed that individuals may be shown to vary their speech, adjusting towards more "prestigious"

features when paying careful attention to speech, and demonstrating more use of “stigmatized” features ([n] in Norwich or [r] lessness in New York City) when not paying careful attention. These two findings form the basis for Labov’s theorizing that styles can be thought of as varying based on the amount of attention the speaker is paying to his/her speech. This model, known as “attention paid to speech” is also one of the guiding principles behind the sociolinguistic interview, which is designed to trigger shifts in attention to speech and thus shifts in style.

2.2.2 Language style as audience design

An early critique of Labov’s attention to speech model came in the form of the Audience Design model, developed by Allan Bell (1984), based in social psychological insights from Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles and Powesland 1997 [1975]). At the core of Bell’s theory is the observation that people orient their speech to their audience, based on a variety of studies done by Bell and other researcher including his work on radio news anchors (“presenters”) in New Zealand. Focusing on the phonological variable /t/ intervocalically (in the phonological environment between two vowels), Bell compared the realization of this variable as either a flap [ɾ] (standard in the US) or the [t] (standard in New Zealand) by presenters who speak at one recording studio on two different stations (a national radio station (YA) and a local community station (ZB)). Bell found that the flap was used more frequently on the national station (where a more American-sounding pronunciation was the standard), and the more New Zealand-oriented variable

when speaking on the local station. In other words, these speakers varied their pronunciation based on the different imagined audiences. Bell advances an interpretation of linguistic variation based on audience design, drawing from Goffman's participation framework (1982), which explores the reception of an utterance in terms of audience roles (addressee, overhearer, e.g.). Goffman's participation framework and production format will be treated in greater detail later in this chapter.

Bell's more agentive, dynamic, and creative conceptualization of speaker use of language marked an important shift in theorizing about style. Although the responsive component of this model received the most attention initially (and the initiative aspect was highlighted more explicitly only in later versions of his work), Bell's early work (1984) is nevertheless informed by an orientation to speaker agency, calling style "interactive – and active" (142). Drawing from concepts like Goffman's participation framework (which Bell observes are more "commonly used in analysis of broad conversational style"), Bell's work is the first of its kind to draw from what I term in this analysis "discourse analytic frameworks" (for Bell: "macro extralinguistic factors") in a study of stylistic variation.

One assumption of the variationist approach that Bell does not explicitly challenge, however, is the almost total reliance on phonological features in the illumination of style. While Bell acknowledges a range of linguistic features as comprising style, from "microstyle" (quantitative analysis of small-scale linguistic variables) to "macrostyle" (qualitative linguistic phenomena such as turn-taking,

politeness strategies, and address systems), his own study analyzes only the patterning of microstyle features, specifically, phonology (1984: 146). More recently, Bell (2001) has been incorporating discourse-level features including the patterning of discourse marker *eh*. Thus, while Bell's work is an important first step in illustrating how discourse analysis can inform stylistic inquiry, more such work is needed.

2.2.3 Speaker design approaches

Developing out of the initiative component of audience design approaches, speaker design approaches to style view language as a resource that may be creatively and strategically used by speakers to achieve certain objectives in interaction, including the construction and performance of identity. Although fairly recent within variationist sociolinguistics, there is already a rich tradition of research in speaker design approaches as represented in the work of Barret (1999), Bell (1984, 1999, 2001), Coupland (2004, 2007), Cutler (1999, 2005), Eckert (2000), Kielsing (1998), Mendoza-Denton (1999a, 1999b 2002), Rampton (1999), Schilling-Estes (1998, 2004), among numerous others.

Speaker design approaches to style have been involved with recent changes in theorizing the connections between language and social life, including a move away from a conceptualization of language as a reflection of existing fixed social structures (e.g. gender, socioeconomic class, region), and an adoption of social constructionist approaches, in which “language and society are viewed as co-constitutive” (389). Under such an approach, speakers are understood to use language agentively and creatively to

construct, negotiate, and perform social identity. Following Coupland (2004), I take the central concern of a speaker design approach to be that of sketching out “the architecture of socio cultural differences” and locating linguistic choices as “social actors’ agentive initiatives” within these social structures (9). In other words, to understand how speakers use the resource of language to navigate social terrain (informed by variationist studies of phonological and morphosyntactic patterning). Chapter 4, which explores dialect performance, exemplifies this integration by drawing from variationist work on African American English to inform the ways that this variety may be used creatively in performance and what such performance means.

Schilling-Estes (2002), one of the major theorists behind speaker design approaches, suggests that key aspects of such an approach include a view of speakers as *agentive* and *creative*:

(1) speakers do not shift style merely, or primarily, in reaction to elements of the speech situation (whether formality or audience) but rather are quite active and highly creative in their use of stylistic resources, and (2) not only are speakers *not* bound to elements of the external situation as they shape their speech, but they use their speech to help shape and re-shape the external situation (whether the immediate interactional context or wider societal forces), as well as their interpersonal relationships and, crucially, their personal identities (378).

Under such a view, language does not merely *reflect* but plays an active role in achieving or *constructing* identity. Speakers use their speech to “shape and re-shape” situations, relationships, and *crucially* identity. In this investigation, identity will be understood as an interrelation between personal and group categories understood in terms of how speakers orient to these categories – i.e. that of long form performer. Linguistic features

(and the social meanings associated with them) function as resources that speakers can creatively and actively utilize in interaction.

As I outline in the rest of this chapter, I understand the further integration of discourse analytic and anthropological methodologies and analytical frameworks as being key to furthering researchers' ability to track the negotiation of sociocultural meaning in interaction, and for highlighting "the sociocultural meaning of linguistic variation" (Dubois and Sankoff 2001: 282). In the following section, I begin by considering the contribution of anthropological approaches. I understand extended ethnographic engagement as being crucial for enabling the researcher to gain a better understanding of the social architecture of a community and also for facilitating exposure to the full range of meaningful linguistic choices available to community members (i.e. hair, makeup, dress – Mendoza Denton 1999b).

2.3 Anthropological approaches

One of the earliest anthropological researchers to be concerned with style is Dell Hymes, a linguistic anthropologist, whose understanding of style connects to related linguistic concepts "variety" and "register." For Hymes, "major speech styles associated with social groups can be termed *varieties*, and major speech styles associated with recurrent types of situations can be termed *registers*" (440). Thus, the concept of "style" operates between these two, capturing the interconnectedness of language as it is used situationally to the ways it operates at the community-level.

Such an integrated model suggests alternate means for exploring language change beyond the variationist conceptualization of varying usage levels for particular features over time or across generations. For example, recent work by Agha (2005) a linguistic anthropologist, explores how registers are created and how they change, what he terms “enregisterment,” a process by which “distinct forms of speech become socially recognized as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of users” (38). In other words, he explores how it is that ways of speaking become associated with communities. While he understands register to be broader than style, Agha builds his concept of register by evoking features treated in the present investigation as aspects of style. For example, he explores how speakers make use of voices that are not their own in the course of interaction (in the sense of Bakhtinian double voicing – explored in Chapter 5 of this work), suggesting that this type of social characterization is related to the process of dialect performance (explored in Chapter 4). Thus, aspects of *style* which I explore in this dissertation may be understood to be related to broader social conceptualizations of language such as recent work on register. The interrelatedness (noted by Hymes) among style, register, and varieties continues to inform our conceptualization of how language can be agentively and creatively used and how this changes language in the process.

2.3.1 Ways of speaking

For Hymes (1974), styles are “ways of speaking,” for the purposes of which, he intended that the word “style” be used “neutrally, generally, for any way or mode, all ways and

modes” (434) of using language. Evoking Ervin-Tripp’s (1982), distinction between *rules of co-occurrence* and *rules of alternation*, Hymes explains that style is something that may be thought of either in terms of the features that go together which identify a style of speech (co-occurrence), or in terms of choices that speakers make among styles (alternation). Referring to the latter category of alternation, Hymes notes that “persons are recognized to choose among styles themselves, and the choices to have social meaning” (435). Choices can involve “what we choose to mean, to whom, when and where” (434). It is Hymes’ initial broad and general use of “style” that I adopt in this project. Crucially, style is influenced *by* and shaping *of* characteristics of the speech event, and thus the researcher must investigate style in context. For this, Hymes suggested case studies conducted following the ethnography of communication (to be explored in Chapter 3).

Also noting that style “crucially concerns distinctiveness” Irvine (2001) observes that distinctiveness always operates “within a social framework.” She suggests that style “depends on social evaluation” which interacts “with ideologized representations” for example, ideologies about femininity (21). Thus, to interpret style, we must have a nuanced understanding of the social framework within which it operates. We must understand how distinctiveness is evoked (linguistically) and be able to locate the relevant social identities (and idealizations of these identities) which speakers orient to in interaction.

2.3.2 Style as distinctiveness

Irvine explores style as distinctiveness by illuminating speech contrasts in a Wolof village in Senegal where there are two very salient ways of speaking associated with opposite social groups: the *geér*, a high ranking noble group, and the *gewel*, known as griots, who are low-ranked socially. The “noble” style of speech is restrained, slow, laconic, and cautious. In public, the nobles will often remain silent or will whisper something to the griot, who will then repeat it elaborately, given that the griot style of speech is loud, effusive, dramatic, and excitable.

In Wolof social life, the speech differences of these two styles have come to be connected to social identity through a process of iconization by which the different ways of speaking exemplified by members of these two groups are taken as indications of the *inherent* social differences between the classes. As Irvine explains:

Linguistic features occurring at many levels of linguistic organization are vertically integrated along an ideological axis that contrasts them, along with their associated social images, according to the temperaments that supposedly “cause” the differentiation. And the linguistic differentiae themselves offer linguistic images that (iconically) share qualities with the social images they represent. Thus, for example, the linguistic image of the slow speaker coincides with the image of a person supposedly slow to act and slow to change allegiances, while the dynamic speaker is supposedly fast-moving, emotionally volatile, and changeable (38).

In this analysis, Irvine explores more than 20 linguistic features drawn from many levels of linguistic structure including phonology (i.e. vowel height, contrasts in vowel length, pitch), morphology (use of concord, use of noun class markers), and syntax (use of left dislocation by the griots as an emphatic device, incomplete sentence structures on the part

of the nobles). Additionally, Irvine enriches her analysis by also exploring the patterning of discourse-level features including frequent use of repetition on the part of the griots. Irvine's study provides a model for researchers intent on exploring the social meaning of a clustering of linguistic features.

Style as distinctiveness gives us another powerful way to conceptualize speaker agency. If Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles and Powesland 1997 [1975]) suggests that speakers accommodate their speech style to their addressee in order to win approval (seeking social attractiveness or seeking communication efficiency) "style as distinctiveness" provides an understanding of the shifts that can be made in the other direction, to evoke identity through heightening a linguistic contrast. A view of this process as it unfolds in interaction will be provided by Schilling-Estes (2004) in Section 2.5.3 of this chapter. Additionally, "style as distinctiveness" has been explored by researchers including Bucholtz (1999a) in terms of "negative identity practices," linguistic features that speakers use "to distance themselves from a rejected identity" (211). For example, in the present study, aspects of long form improv style like the avoidance of dialect performance will be understood as evoking distinctiveness from the style of short form performers.

I will now turn from the contribution of anthropological approaches to style to a consideration of discourse analytic approaches.

2.4 Discourse analytic approaches

Discourse analysis is notoriously difficult to define, but may be understood as an approach to the analysis of language which focuses on context. According to Schiffrin (1994), there are two main paradigms within discourse analytic traditions: structuralist and functionalist (21), which yield somewhat different definitions of discourse. While a structuralist perspective yields a definition focused on the unit under analysis, a more functionalist approach understands discourse as “language use,” as may be seen in Fairclough’s (1992) definition: “discourse for me is more than just language use: it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of *social practice*” (28: emphasis mine). For Fairclough, and researchers who approach the analysis of discourse functionally, language is viewed as a resource for creating meaning in interaction. The present analysis is informed by both approaches to discourse.

2.4.1 Conversational style

Within the discourse analytic tradition, Tannen’s (1984) work on “conversational style” is perhaps the best known for exploring speaker style. For Tannen, your style is your way of speaking. She observes that “anything that is said or done must be said or done in some way, and that way constitutes style” (8). To achieve an understanding of style, she explores a range of linguistic features, noting that “the *combination* of particular devices makes up the style of each speaker (31: emphasis mine). In characterizing “high involvement style” for example, Tannen draws from various levels of linguistic structure

including phonology (expressive phonology and intonation) to rapid use of questions (to demonstrate enthusiasm) to relatively broader levels of linguistic structure like topic (a preference for personal topics, a tendency to shift topics abruptly, to introduce topics without hesitation, or to persist on a topic). Such features provide insight into the types of linguistic features which might be analyzed as discourse strategies or discourse units in analyses of style.

Tannen's work is informed by the work of her mentor John Gumperz (1982), whose work reveals that people make sense of what others say based on information that is communicated at many levels of linguistic structure, including those well below the level of consciousness. For Gumperz, such "contextualization cues," can include "any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signaling of contextual presuppositions," intonation for example (131). Contextualization cues can be verbal (phonetics, intonation, speed, volume, or word choice) as well as non-verbal (eye contact, head position, facial expressions, hand gestures, and position, proximity). Importantly, they shape, reflect, and give meaning to interactions. For example, observing that speakers from Panjabi cultural and linguistic backgrounds to sometimes have communication difficulties with English speakers from a British cultural background (even when these speakers shared a high level of communicative competence in English), Gumperz identified linguistic features contributing to these misunderstandings, including for example, ending requests with falling intonation (which gave the sense of a command). Subtle and subconscious cues like intonation were thus revealed to have considerable

interactional consequences including frustration (on the part of both parties), and even suspicion of discrimination (on the part of the Panjabi participants).

Similarly, Tannen understands features of style as “conventionalized ways of establishing rapport,” in other words, the ways that speakers show that they are interested in the conversation and the people engaged in it. Returning again to the example of the “high involvement” style speaker, Tannen observes that such speakers might for example make use of “machine gun questions,” marked by high pitch, reduced syntactic form, fast rate of speech, and directness of content. For a high involvement speaker, questions may be used to signal listenership (to show they are listening and involved), but someone who has a “high considerateness style” might interpret such features very differently. This might include having a sense of being overpowered or overwhelmed in the conversation. However, such strategies are “habitual” and “more or less automatic,” such that when features of style are shared, conversations tend to result in “synchrony” or “a satisfying sense of harmony” but when style is not shared, conversations may result in “a sense of dissonance” or “negative or mistaken judgments of intent” (150). Unfortunately, because speakers are largely unaware that they have these aspects of style themselves much less that they have expectations about how these aspects are used by other people, such misunderstandings can rarely be addressed directly. Instead, speakers often come away from a conversation with a negative impression about speakers with different styles, for example, that they were rude, disinterested, or uninteresting (and in the case of Gumperz’ speakers, that there was malicious or racist intent).

While Tannen acknowledges that much work remains to be done to continue the description of features and devices that constitute conversational style, including documenting the “devices that make up different styles” (150), her work has had a lasting impact on conceptualizations of discourse analysis as relevant to the study of style. It is hoped that the present analysis is a further step in the integration of discourse in studies of style, including the description of “features and devices” of style.

As I have mentioned, I suggest that there are three specific ways that discourse may be incorporated in studies of style. These include 1) exploration of use of discourse features, 2) use of discourse frameworks, and 3) a critical focus on the achievement of identity in interaction. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will consider each of these aspects in turn, beginning with discourse features.

2.4.2 The operationalization of discourse units

One important aspect of variationist theory that is currently under critical pressure is the choice to explore variation largely through the patterning of phonological and morphosyntactic variables. For example, Coupland (2001), who investigates Welsh realizations of the diphthongs [ow], [ej], and [aw]), Schilling-Estes (2004), to be reviewed in Section 2.5.3 below, and Kiesling’s (1998) exploration of [ŋ] vs. [n] among fraternity men. According to Schilling-Estes “examining as many features as possible is crucial in any research enterprise concerned with speaker meaning (390). Recent definitions of style reflect a growing interest in drawing from discourse features,

including Eckert (2000) who defines style as “a complex construction of lexicon, prosody, segmental phonetics, morphology, syntax, discourse” (3) and Schilling-Estes, for whom “[style] may involve any level of language organization, from the phonological and morphosyntactic to the lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and discoursal” (2002: 376). However, while there is increased interest in incorporating discoursal features, discourse is often recruited only to explain the patterning of phonological or morphosyntactic features (through use of discourse frameworks or the focus on interaction that discourse analysis provides).

Falsetto, for example, is often cited by variationist researchers as a discourse feature as noted by Alim (2004), reviewed in Section 2.5.4 below. While discourse analysts would likely not call falsetto a “discourse feature,” discourse frameworks are often recruited to explain the meaning and use of this (phonological) feature. The study of quotation is another area where discourse and variation are positioned to contribute to each other. Quotative verbs, for example, were cited by Tagliamonte (2005) in a recent plenary address at NWAV (the annual variationist conference), as one of the most interesting “discourse features” she has encountered in her research. However, Tagliamonte’s work on quotatives (and that of the majority of variationists, as will be reviewed in Chapter 5) focuses almost entirely on *how* speech is reported (interpreting this *how* very narrowly, consisting almost exclusively of quantitative investigations of quotative verbs), thus neglecting *what* gets presented or *why* this is interactionally important. I suggest that such work suffers from a lack of utilization of discourse features

and frameworks, most notably the rich work on identity functions of constructed dialogue.

Such work on falsetto and quotation serve as a testament to the ways in which discourse and variation are potentially mutually informative. However, they also illustrate that much more work remains to be done in this capacity and the value of such work to linguistics researchers. According to Johnstone (2008) discourse analysis “moves the description of competence up a level, by providing models of the knowledge that enables people to produce and interpret paragraphs, stories, conversations, and arguments, and exploring the ways in which interlocutors both draw on and jointly create structure as they interact” (77).

Within discourse analysis, there has been much work in capturing the patterning of discourse-level features, including for example research which reveals the underlying structure behind spontaneous conversational narratives (Labov and Walletsky 1967, 1997), structural and interactional functions of discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987), variation in choice of referring terms (Schiffrin 2006), or the patterning of constructed dialogue (Hamilton 1998, Johnstone 1987, Tannen 1986). However, such research has not tended to be considered “style” research per se by researchers in stylistic variation. Instead, many variationist researchers argue that discourse units pose a challenge to traditional models of variation (cf. Lavandera 1979, Schilling-Estes 2004)¹. A restricted

¹ Schiffrin (2006) proposes that one solution to this problem is to find discourse slots whose “structure is relatively easy to delineate” (12), which I have done in the present investigation by exploring discourse

understanding of the term “variation” to include only “alternative realizations of a single underlying form” (Schiffrin 2006: 12) contributes to such difficulties in incorporating discourse units. I suggest that for stylistic inquiry to advance, one development which seems to be critical is the expansion of what comprises “variation.”

2.4.3 Discourse analytic frameworks

Within discourse analysis, one important tradition that I evoke in this project is that of Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), an approach to language informed by the work of Erving Goffman and John Gumperz. Researchers in this tradition aim to discover how speakers use language to communicate information about who they are, and how they relate to one another in an interaction. I have reviewed the contribution of Gumperz above, and will now briefly consider the contribution of Goffman to this tradition of research before considering how IS fits in with the study of style.

Goffman’s insights into the workings of social interaction, and particularly his work on the “production format” of an utterance have been an enduring legacy of his work, and are of particular importance in the present investigation. His (1981) work on footing, defined as: “a change in alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance” (128) motivated analytical attention to the inherent complexity within notions of “speaker” and “hearer” in an interaction. His exploration of speaking roles is known as the “production

markers in the beginning slot of constructed dialogue, and the use of dialect performance in the construction of a character.

format” and his work on the “participation framework” brings the same critical attention to the receiver of an utterance, the hearer. While both aspects are relevant to the present analysis (and to the analysis of theatrical performance broadly), I will focus on the production format here, as the present work draws more heavily from Goffman’s work on speaker roles. Goffman suggests that the notion of the “speaker” can be decomposed into that of an ‘animator’ (someone who physically utters the words, ‘the sounding box’), an ‘author’ (someone who composes the words but may not be responsible for the content), and a ‘principal’ (someone who is committed to the words said). In the present investigation, linguistic style is characterized by heightened awareness of these speaking roles, and a propensity to call attention to them in interaction, as evidenced through dialect performance, constructed dialogue, and intertextual revoicings.

While researchers within the IS tradition would not explicitly locate their work as investigating “style” per se, their goals include understanding how speakers use language to negotiate social meaning, which are in line with recent approaches to style, in particular, the more recent conceptualizations of identity as actively constructed, dynamic, and as achieved interactionally (as reviewed in Section 2.2.3 above).

In this analysis, I employ a number of frameworks from the IS tradition, including for example, framing (participant’s sense of what is going on in interaction), stance (speaker’s evaluative orientation to what is said), and footing (analyzed in this investigation as shifting alignments to talk as reflected in shifts in speaking role in Goffman’s production format of talk). I suggest that such frameworks provide the

analyst with more compelling analytical tools for connecting micro-level analysis of linguistic features to macro level social processes and meanings. For example, in Chapter 4, framing (understood at three analytical levels) allows me to make sense of the observed avoidance of dialect performance by connecting work that has been done in the variationist tradition on varieties including African American Vernacular English (AAVE), to the analysis of the performance of this variety.

Discourse analytic frameworks have become increasingly used in studies of style, including frame (Coupland 2004), and stance (Kiesling 1998). For example, Schilling-Estes (2004), reflecting on the role of discourse frameworks in her own work, notes:

my study also extends ongoing efforts to investigate the interplay of macro-level patterns and micro-level practices by combining variationist-based techniques for investigating stylistic variation with discourse analysis, including interactional sociolinguistic analysis (165).

In the present work, I also draw on discourse analytic frameworks to contextualize the patterning of features; however, the patterning that I seek to contextualize is that of *discourse* features, instead of the patterning of phonological and morphosyntactic features traditionally explored.

2.4.4 Discourse analysis

Discourse analytic units allow the researcher to capture the patterning of language at levels of linguistic structure previously underexplored in studies of stylistic variation while discourse analysis itself allows for contextualization of this observed patterning by

tracking how the negotiation of meaning is accomplished in interaction. For example, Rampton (1995), speaking about his work with a community of teenagers in the UK, asserts “only discourse analysis will show what particular social divisions actually meant to local youngsters, and how they managed them in interaction” (27). In the present study, social categories and meanings reveal themselves to be present in language that is itself about language (i.e. speakers’ metapragmatic commentary).

While more traditional variationist studies often seem to treat an individual’s linguistic behavior as best understood as an instance of the behavior of the larger groups or categories to which this individual belongs, this static conceptualization of identity has long been complicated by scholars of discourse including Schiffrin (1996) who observes that “we may act more or less middle-class, more or less female, and so on, depending on what we are doing and with whom” (199). Such a view is entailed in a discourse approach which explores the emergence of identity in interaction.

Importantly, as noted by Coupland (2007) discourse analysis should not simply be viewed as an alternative methodology to traditional quantitative variationist approaches.

Approaching social identity through discourse is not simply a methodological alternative to, for example, quantitative indexical approaches...[D]iscursive social action is where culture and social identities ‘live’ and where we can see them taking shape. The styling of social identities against a backdrop of social norms and ‘collective social memories’ is the heart of the process (108).

Because it allows access to the negotiated meaning of linguistic practice in interaction, such an approach enables the researcher to account for language as it is used in a variety of interactional contexts.

Finally, discourse analysis provides the analytical means to approach data that have been problematic in traditions which make assumptions about the existence of and need for “naturalistic data.” For example, the present study includes data from overtly performative contexts of language use (theatrical performances), which has until recently been considered too “inauthentic” for the purposes of sociolinguistic inquiry (as will be explored in Section 2.5 to follow). The adoption of discourse analytic perspectives entails a critical re-examination of many such underlying assumptions of traditional variationist inquiry.

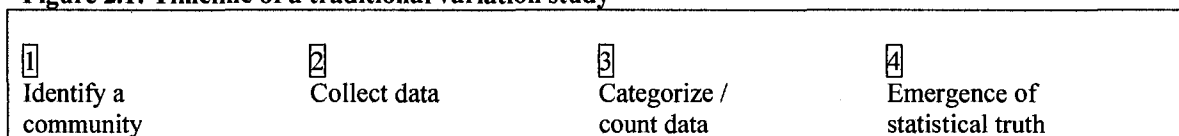
2.5 Combining approaches

Having provided a broad overview of a range of approaches to style and the contribution of discourse analysis (in the form of discourse units, discourse analytic frameworks, an analytical focus on interaction), I will now present my understanding of how these come together in a combined approach. I will do so by first outlining the timeline of a traditional variationist study, identifying particular stages where ethnography and discourse analysis enrich data collection and analysis. Additionally, I will consider how discourse and ethnography motivate critical re-examinations of some traditional (variationist) assumptions about theory and method, and I will then review the work of some researchers who have adopted a combined approach in their analyses. Finally, I describe my own approach.

2.5.1 Timeline of a traditional variation study

Coupland (2007) and Wardaugh (2006) provide helpful and detailed overviews of the stages of variationist research, Wardaugh describing investigations in variation more generally, and Coupland focusing on studies of stylistic variation. I present these stages in the form of a timeline in Figure 2.1 below, followed by a description of each stage, then highlighting the critical pressure being applied at each stage by current research. I should note that neither researcher assigns numbers to these stages as I do, nor do they maintain that a study must necessarily proceed in this order. I have done so in this discussion for ease of reference and with the aim of highlighting moments where I view ethnographic and discourse analytic perspectives as contributing most effectively, based on my own experiences in the variationist research tradition. Any misrepresentations of Coupland or Wardaugh must be understood as entirely mine and as reflections of my own perspective.

Figure 2.1: Timeline of a traditional variation study



According to Coupland (2007), an important early stage in a traditional variation study is “to identify a group of people who share a geographical characteristic” (5). Within this larger group then, based on “supposedly objective social criteria” sub-groups are identified, for example, young females living in Birmingham, Alabama with working class jobs (5-6). As we will consider, developments within sociolinguistic theory in the

last forty years (in particular the move to constructivist approaches to identity) pose major problems to such static conceptualizations of society and social identity. For example, Wardaugh (2006) notes that one of the major problems in traditional approaches to language and society is that social space is multidimensional whereas systems of classification are unidimensional” (151).

2.5.2 Identifying social groups and linguistic units

Wardaugh (2006) argues for a critical examination of any social grouping made by sociolinguistic researchers, because the ways that people experience community is subjective, multifaceted, and subject to change.

In the extremely complex societies in which most of us live, there must always be some question as to the reality of any kind of social grouping: each of us experiences society differently, multiple group-membership is normal, and both change and stability seem to be natural conditions of our existence (151).

Thus, essentialist, static, and monolithic approaches to identity (organized from an external point of view by the researcher) are difficult to reconcile with those of more dynamic and agentive constructivist perspectives and may be in tension with the lived experiences of identity of community members. Mendoza-Denton (2002) suggests that investigators’ determination to resolve the conflict between analysts’ and participants’ categories “can be seen in a strengthening trend towards ethnographic studies which look at situated practices and at participants’ explicit interactional orientations” (478).

Ethnographic engagement presents a compelling way to challenge such external conceptualizations of community, as one of the main goals of extended ethnographic participation is to reveal locally salient conceptualizations of communities and membership informed by the speakers themselves. Because identity categories emerge locally in interaction, they cannot be identified a priori. One example of such an ethnographic approach is Eckert's (2000) work with a community of students at Belten High in Detroit. In this work, Eckert observes students' styles, or "places in the world" to sometimes be negotiated oppositionally (e.g. jocks vs. burnouts), sometimes claimed relative to other major styles in the school (e.g. jock, punk, teacher), sometimes relative to broader categories external to the school (e.g. country) and sometimes by reference to things that are not categories or groups at all, but specific embodiments (e.g. Detroit, danger, trouble, friendship, individuals). Crucially, Eckert argues that the categories themselves, the participants' orientations to them, and the specific ways in which they are embodied (and challenged) are particular to this community and may only be discovered through extended ethnographic engagement. Ethnography will be treated in greater detail in the chapter to follow.

2.5.3 Collecting data

Returning to our timeline of a variationst study, the traditional means of sampling the speech of the different groups is "through extended one-to-one sociolinguistic interviews" (Coupland 2007: 6), or by means of "a questionnaire designed to elicit data

illustrative of the use of the variable or variables that are being investigated (Wardaugh 2006: 153). The centrality of the sociolinguistic interview as research tool in variationist traditions has come under scrutiny in recent work, given that in some cases, such methods for eliciting data may pre-constrain the type of data that will be collected, as well as pre-determine the possible findings (for example use of overly standard or formal language, possible artificiality of the interaction, lack of questions from the interviewees, elicited rather than emergent narratives).² As such, researchers are increasingly drawing from language used in a variety of interactional contexts, including for example Bell's (1984) research which served as an implicit challenge to the use of the sociolinguistic interview as primary sampling method, given that he instead examined radio broadcasts as a source of data.

Researchers in the discourse analytic tradition have long utilized data drawn from a range of interactional contexts including for example, dinner table conversations (Tannen 1984), family interactions (Gordon 2002), internet discussion board postings (Hamilton 1998), and holocaust narratives (Schiffrin 2000). The rich findings of such work highlight "the need for researchers to use a multiplicity of data collection

² This is not to suggest that interview data is not without analytical value. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, researchers such as Eckert (2000) have noted that sociolinguistic interviews, because they are conducted by an interviewer seeking to learn about the life and community of a relatively unknown interviewee, are prime sites for interviewees' identity display, calling them "prime sites for a "performance of identity (79). In my own work (as will be explored in Chapter 5), I show that interviews that are purposely centered on questions of self- and group-identity yield invaluable information. Nevertheless, other types of data are valuable, and I suggest, necessary for an integrated approach.

techniques to better approximate the complexity of a speech community” (Mendoza-Denton 1999).

Increasingly, stylistic researchers are drawing from additional (and more complex) sites of interaction, as evidenced for example in Podesva’s (2006) observation of speakers participating in “unstaged conversational speech,” at work, home, a social barbeque, etc., Angermeyer’s (2006) exploration of interactions in small claims court, Kiesling’s (1998) observations of fraternity members in a range of interactional contexts (meeting, socializing, interview), and Barrett’s (1999) work on drag performances in nightclubs, to give but a few examples. The present work contributes to this trend by analyzing data reflecting the regular interactional contexts of improvisational theater performers (including onstage performance).

2.5.4 Categorizing and counting data

Proceeding then through the timeline, from the data collected, the variationist researcher typically “counts how often a particular speech feature is used” (Coupland 2007: 6), identifying the distribution of the linguistic variants in the data. The researcher would be interested to know how often a “non-standard” or local variant is used as compared to the frequency of use of a more “standard” variant, such as monophthongal [a:] vs. the diphthongal [aj] form in the case of Birmingham, Alabama. Coupland notes that a typical finding might be that while most speakers use a mixture of standard and non-standard forms, “overall frequencies of use would probably differ across speakers and sub-groups”

(6). Thus, a main assumption made by traditional approaches to style is that “what is interesting and socially interpretable in relation to dialect style is exclusively variation” (defined narrowly, focusing on quantitative patterning), rather than by focusing on styles in the context of their use (Coupland 2001c 187).

Nik Coupland, who has figured prominently in this discussion, has been an important voice in the movement toward advancing variationist sociolinguistics. His body of work seems to have developed in a response to aspects of variationist work (such as its quantitative bias) which have constrained how speaker style has traditionally been understood and analyzed. As early as 1985, he was known for being vocal about his observations that sociolinguistics had developed into a field with a bias for quantitative methods. This drive for quantitative analysis, an important aspect of traditional approaches to style, is currently being challenged by researchers arguing for example that a focus on quantitative patterning alone can obscure the individualistic and agentive nature of the projection of identity in interaction. What Coupland (2001c) describes as a “quantitative bias” (186), Schilling-Estes (2002) identifies a strong preference for quantitative analysis the “hallmark of variation study” (376).

Coupland suggests that quantitative approaches consistently fail fully theorize the interaction of language context, while at the same (ironically) maintaining a methodological constraint on research based on awareness of the importance of situation in determining speaker’s linguistic choices. This latter dimension he argues, has limited researchers to focusing on factors like setting, participants, activity type, channel and

topic, when instead they could include context by also considering questions of speaker motivations, and speaker agency (153). Qualitative discourse analytic approaches to language remind us that while broad overall patternings of use of linguistic features are interesting, they do not tell the whole story.

Evidence of Coupland's interest in more fully theorizing context is apparent in his early studies of a travel assistant (1980) and a radio personality (1985), whom he observed to style shift based not only on to whom they were talking, or what they were talking about, but as part of active attempts to shift the nature of the interaction or to accomplish different situational goals. These interactional goals included, for example, being helpful, forging connections with listeners, or being playful. Additionally, he continues to advance sociolinguistic theory in recent work (2001, 2004) by focusing on language that is overtly performative, including such settings as onstage theatrical performance. Coupland argues for the centrality of such performative uses of language by observing that as speakers we increasingly come into contact with language (and garner much of our information about its attendant social meanings) through mediated contexts including film, radio, television, and theater. Moreover, such settings in turn, allow speakers to accomplish identity work using language creatively, to playfully stage and acknowledge cultural realities that they are aware of. Dialect stylization (to be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this analysis) is one such important use of language, serving as "a means of deploying normative community speech forms at one remove, without overtly subscribing to the norms of tradition and cultural continuity, but

also without discrediting their cultural value” (2001: 372). Such work has opened the door for including previously understudied aspects of speakers’ lived language experiences within the sociolinguistic agenda.

2.5.5 Performance

As we have discussed, performance has been investigated by sociolinguistic researchers in a variety of contexts, ranging from theatrical performances of pantomime in Wales (Coupland 2004, 2007) the quasi-theatrical performance of accent in science-fiction role-playing games (Bucholtz 2001), the stylized talk of radio presenters (Coupland 2001), and the performance of identity in drag queen performances (Barrett 1999). Additionally, performance has been explored even in instances of speakers performing phonological features of their own variety for outsiders in the context of a sociolinguistics interview (Schilling-Estes 1998). Such research is particularly compelling, for such linguistic display serves well to demonstrate that all language is involved in the performance of identity. Evidence of performance in the “everyday” suggests that overtly performative language (including improvisational theater) may well be viewed as informative about the performance and experiencing of identity more broadly. In other words, if linguistic performance occurs even in ‘everyday’ contexts, self-conscious uses of language provide valuable insight into how language can be used by speakers as a resource in the “active creation, presentation, and re-creation of speaker identity” (Schilling-Estes 2002: 388).

The trajectory of speaker design approaches to style within sociolinguistics outlined above increasingly points to the relevance of reflexive (including metadiscursive commentary) contexts of language use. According to Schilling-Estes (2002):

The investigation of selfconscious speech, even overtly performative speech, seems essential in a research program in which stylistic variation is viewed as a resource for creating and projecting one's persona - that is, with performing an identity' (395).

If language itself is understood as an active and creative production through which speakers create and display personal, interpersonal, and group identities, this lends "to an emerging understanding that all language is performative, and identity too as an ongoing performance rather than a pre-existing given" (Schilling-Estes 2006: introduction to panel on performance at Sociolinguistics Symposium 16).

An interest in performative contexts of language use naturally builds out of a conceptualization of identity as performed, as exemplified in Coupland's (2007) introduction to his chapter titled "High Performance and Identity Stylization":

Once we recognize speakers' agentive role in constructing meanings in how they contextualize variation, and when we also recognize that speaking involves a degree of metalinguistic awareness, it seems right to talk of speakers *performing* speech (146).

In anthropological approaches, performances are understood to be rich with social significance and cultural meaning, and are informative about the culture(s) from which they are produced. For Bauman and Briggs (1990), performances "move the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically" (62). Such contexts have

long been recognized as rich sites for observing and appreciating the complex ways in which language may be used creatively to accomplish a variety of sociocultural and interactional tasks.

2.5.6 Emergence of a statistical truth

Returning one last time to our timeline, after the data has been collected, counted and analyzed, typically “a type of statistical truth would emerge,” which would enable the researcher to say that overall, there are “some distinctive tendencies of pronunciation” for members of this community (Coupland 2007: 6). According to Wardaugh (2006), the primary concern in variationist inquiry is to “see how linguistic variation is related to social variation” (146). To do this then, variationist researchers “relate [linguistic] variants *in some way* to quantifiable factors in society, e.g. social-class membership, gender, age, ethnicity and so on” (147, emphasis mine). In other words, while variationists build connections between micro-level patterning of linguistic features and macro-level social processes (i.e. identity) this connection has traditionally been assumed to be a direct one-to-one direct indexical link. For Coupland (2007), this undertheorizing of the connection between language and meaning is one of the major problems with the variationist approach which “assumes that a direct indexical link exists between a sociolinguistic variant and a social meaning” (21). As I will demonstrate with this analysis, discourse analytic frameworks provide more satisfying ways of theorizing *how* it is that language can have social meaning.

2.5.7 Timeline of a combined study

With the present investigation, I suggest a broadening of the exploration of style to encompass “social styles” (discussed above). Accomplishing this will involve examining all stages of variationist inquiry (as outlined above), searching for underlying assumptions that constrain the process, and identifying alternative strategies and goals of inquiry. I now present the stages of research for an integrated variation, ethnographic, and discourse analytic study in Figure 2.2 below. For ease of comparison, I also present Figure 2.1 again.

Figure 2.1: Timeline of a traditional variation study

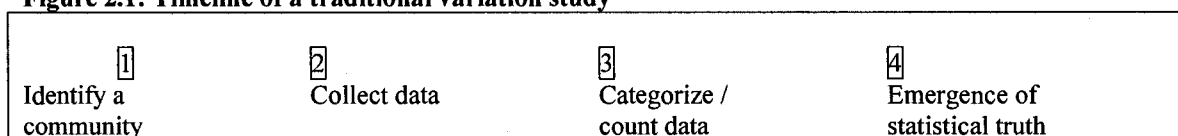
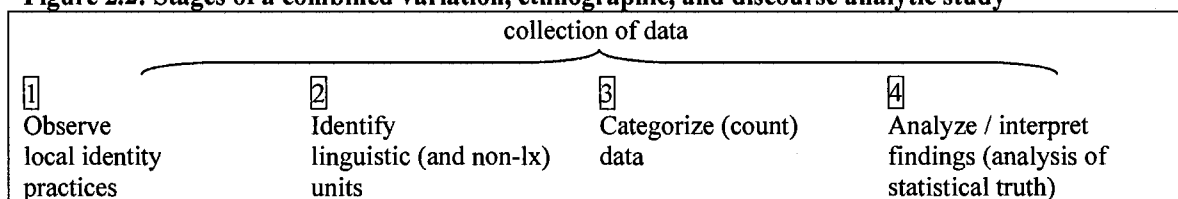


Figure 2.2: Stages of a combined variation, ethnographic, and discourse analytic study



An ethnographic approach informs the study of style at all stages, beginning with a process of data collection that is ongoing throughout the study (rather than a single stage in the project). This is reflected in Figure 2.2 above by removing “data collection” as a stage in the timeline, placing it instead at the top of the figure, to indicate that it is ongoing, iterative, and also that all of the stages of the process themselves constitute data.

As we have described, the process of identifying the community itself (Stage 1 in a traditional variationist approach) is discovered in an ethnography by attending to local

identity practices and ideologies. Thus, rather than identifying a “community,” the first stage in a combined approach is that of attending to local identity practices, observing how identity is constructed in this group by attending to local language practices.

Further, a combined approach provides different units for the exploration of style including non-linguistic features (dress, hair, etc) used by speakers to evoke distinctiveness as well as features at different levels of linguistic structures (including importantly discourse-level features). Thus, Stage 2 in Figure 2.2 accounts for both the collection of linguistic and non-linguistic data. Stage 3 is largely the same for Figures 2.1 and 2.2, the only difference being that the combined approach does not limit analysis to “counting” the data (which entails a quantitative approach). Analysis in a combined study may be quantitative, qualitative, or both. Finally, as seen in Figure 2.2, for the last stage of the process in a combined study, emergence of a statistical truth is only one possible result. Interpretation of findings is made more rich by extended ethnographic engagement with the community (and may involve returning to the community to ask for reactions to analytical findings).

I view discourse analysis as contributing especially to stages 2 and 4 – the stages in which linguistic units are selected and findings interpreted. Two researchers who have productively integrated discourse analysis in speaker design approaches to style are Schilling-Estes (2004) and Alim (2004). I will review the work of each briefly here, before describing my own approach to the integration of discourse in style.

2.5.8 Previous research

Schilling Estes (2004) investigates identity construction in a sociolinguistic interview conducted as part of a larger study of the speech of Robeson County, North Carolina. Focusing on the shifting usage of phonological features (postvocalic r-lessness, monophthongal [ay]) and a range of morphosyntactic features (third person singular –s absence, copula deletion, use of habitual *be*, and “was/wasn’t” and “were/weren’t” regularization patterns) across the sociolinguistic interview, she explores how the interviewer Alex (an African American) and the interviewee, Lou (a Lumbee Indian) use these features to shape their identities. While she finds speakers’ overall use of features to be what might be expected (i.e. the African American speaker uses more linguistic features associated with AAVE), a closer look at the moment-to-moment negotiations over the course of the interview reveals moments of marked linguistic distance or similarity. For example, while discussing the topic of race relations, Alex displays greater use of third person singular –s absence (a feature associated with AAVE).

One possible explanation for this behavior offered by Schilling-Estes is that “in the sections on race, each interlocutor emphasizes his own in-group belonging by highlighting his ethnolinguistic distance from his interlocutor” (178). However, finding a second section on race relations in the same interview which does not display the same patterning, she suggests that a more nuanced and multifaceted explanation is required. Drawing from discourse analysis, she urges the consideration of factors such as speakers’ attitudes toward their topics, and toward each other, as evidenced, for example, in the use

of discourse features of high involvement style (Tannen 1989), animated narratives, direct address terms, and discourse markers of involvement (“you know” and “I mean”). Ultimately, Schilling-Estes finds that identity is “dynamic and multifaceted and is very much a product of unfolding talk” (190). Importantly, her study serves as an illustration of what may be gained by considering “a range of types of linguistic features” from both “the broad approach of the quantitative sociolinguist and the in-depth approach of the discourse analyst / interactional sociolinguist” (190). Additionally, this study provides valuable insight into precisely the type(s) of identity work that can be obscured by an approach which explores only quantitative patterning.

Another study which exemplifies the integration of ethnography, discourse and variation is that of H. Samy Alim (2004), who explores style shifting in a Black American speech community (Haven High in Sunnyside, California). In this work, Alim argues “for a theoretical approach to style shifting that integrates *both* sociolinguistic (to be explored below) *and* discursive features and strategies as they are employed and manipulated in interaction (17: emphasis mine). In considering some of the features which he identifies, I hope to illustrate how Alim’s conceptualization of “sociolinguistic” and “discourse” features differs slightly from the types of units I will consider in the present investigation (18). In doing so, I hope to illustrate the increased use that may be made of discourse analysis itself.

For Alim, there are two types of “speech style,” which he divides into “sociolinguistic style” and “interactional style” (18). While “sociolinguistic style” is

based on quantitative variation analysis at the phonological and morphosyntactic levels of linguistic structure (i.e. copula and third person –s absence, glottal stop and final [t] and [d] deletion), “interactional style” is based on qualitative discourse analysis at higher levels of linguistic structure (e.g pitch range, turn taking) as well as non-linguistic strategies. In his study, discourse features explored include “falsetto,” “suck teeth,” and “high overlap” which, while oft cited are but some of many discourse features which are available for analysis. In fact, Alim identifies many such other linguistic features in his work, although he does not refer to them as discourse features, instead calling them “cultural modes of discourse” (which include *call and response*, *rappin’*, *signifyin’* and “structured speech events” including: *playing the dozens*, *rhymin’*, *battlin’ mode*). An account of style which draws from all three aspects of discourse I have identified (features, frameworks, discourse analysis itself) can account for the patterning and use of such linguistic features in an account of style.

Alim argues for the need to draw from both discourse and variation, saying that “an approach to style that integrates sociolinguistic variation, interactional analysis, and ethnographic fieldwork will get us much farther down the road to understanding how and when speakers shift their styles” (230). For example, using copula absence to exemplify the connection between “sociolinguistic” patterning and discourse analysis, Alim asserts that while “varying levels of copula absence may correlate with the identity characteristics of interlocutors, we have no way of telling HOW that is accomplished unless we examine deeply and thoroughly the structure of the talk that is produced”

(230). However, it is not until nearly the very end of his analysis that Alim actually shows how it is that the connection of discourse to “sociolinguistic” variation actually works for his analysis. Focusing on the discourse particle “O-*kay*!” (glossed to mean YESSSS!: emphasis in original) as a strategic display of solidarity (specifically for Black females, or SISTAS in his analysis), Alim suggests that such features illustrate how speakers can co-construct a speech style. Using this discourse particle, for example, one speaker could “invite informality” from the other (229). While underscoring the value of identifying “discursive strategies linked to Black American Interactional styles” Alim does acknowledge that much of his own analysis focuses on “sociolinguistic variables” and that “more research needs to be done regarding interactional strategies” (18). The present project is intended as an illustration of the increased use that may be made specifically of discourse *features* in such an enterprise.

2.5.9 The present study

As I have illustrated throughout this chapter, the present investigation is intended as a contribution to an ongoing trend of integrating approaches in the study of style, with particular interest in exploring the systematic patterning of discourse features, and exploring how this connects with broader aspects of style (in the sense of Tannen’s conversational style). In this way, following the distinction described by Schifffrin (2006), the present investigation considers both *variation in discourse* by capturing the patterning of discourse-level features, as well as *discourse variation* study by taking a

broader view of the style of a community (long form performers) and considering what aspects of their style make them different from other groups. Observe that this distinction also parallels Schiffrrin's (1994) structuralist and formalist approaches to discourse.

The discourse in variation (or structuralist) focus in my work may be seen most clearly in Chapters 4 and 5 which consider the systematic patterning of broad features of linguistic structure (dialect performance, discourse markers, and constructed dialogue). The discourse variation (or functionalist) perspective may be seen most straightforwardly in Chapter 6 which explores entextualization as an aspect of style. Rather than exploring entextualization as a unit of variation (i.e. from a structuralist perspective), the analysis in Chapter 6 considers how this aspect of style functions as social practice among community members.

Thus the present investigation is intended as a continuation of two main trends in speaker design approaches to style: a focus on overtly performative contexts of language use (including metadiscursive commentary), and a view of language as used creatively in the performance of identity, achieved by the integration of anthropological and discourse approaches to style. In Chapter 3 which follows, I provide a detailed description of my data and my ethnographic engagement with the community under analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPROV AND ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Introduction

This project is an ethnography conducted with a community of improvisational theater performers in Washington, DC. As the goal of this study is to capture discourse aspects of linguistic style, I sought to engage with this group in a variety of settings, reflecting a range of their regular interactional contexts (including onstage performances). However, because I wanted more specifically to observe how aspects of their onstage interactional style manifest in offstage interactions, the majority of these data are collected from interactions recorded offstage. Ultimately, the data which I analyze for this project comprise just over 70 hours of video and audio recordings taken from four main interactional contexts (onstage performances, rehearsals, interviews, and backstage time). Throughout this chapter, I will highlight how more than two years of participant observation with this community enables me to meaningfully contextualize and interpret these linguistic data. Additionally, I will demonstrate how my perspective as an improviser, and my training and research background as a sociolinguist impacted the collection of data and influenced interpretation and analysis.

I begin this chapter (Section 3.2) by providing some background information about improvisational theater (improv), including important differences between the short form and long form formats. In Section 3.3, I detail my own orientation to ethnography

by way of chronicling my fieldwork experience first with a short form troupe as part of an earlier pilot study, and then with the long form company Washington Improv Theater (WIT), the group under investigation in the present work. In Section 3.4, I describe the audio and video recorded data collected as part of this study, including details about the four main interactional contexts: onstage performances, rehearsals, interviews, and backstage time. Finally, to highlight the ways in which my experiences and training as a sociolinguist (in variation analysis, discourse analysis, and ethnography) shape this project, I end this chapter (Section 3.5) by briefly considering the only two academic studies (of which I am aware) to have been done to date on improv. Amy Seham (1997, 2001) approaches improv from a theater studies perspective, and R. Keith Sawyer's (1997, 2003) perspective is informed by sociological theories of emergentism. I use their very different interpretations of quite similar data to locate myself and my analysis.

3.2 Improv

There are many different types of artistic improvisation (in music as well as various other types of performances), but for the purposes of this investigation, I focus on a genre of theatrical performance known as improvisational theater, or improv. Improv is unscripted, playful, creative, and humorous theater whose origins lie in games developed by Viola Spolin for children's peer play. According to the historical research done by Sawyer (1997), Paul Sills (Viola Spolin's son), took her therapeutic exercises and developed them into a format for theatrical performance at the University of Chicago,

founding the Compass Players in 1955. Since then, improv continues to expand and is now performed around the world in a variety of styles, which may be “grouped loosely into two main approaches,” long-form and short form. Of these, short form is the more popularly well-known (174). While I base my analysis on the long form format of improvisation, I will begin by describing shared characteristics before highlighting what distinguishes them.

Fundamentally, both styles of improv share two main characteristics: 1) there is no script (performances are created in the moment) and 2) performances are collectively improvised, meaning that “each performer’s actions are influenced by the others” (Sawyer 1997: 175). Further, also noted by Sawyer is that “although each actor’s participation seems not to be scripted, a highly structured performance emerges” (175). Ironically, when improv works well, people in the audience will sometimes not be convinced that what they have witnessed could have possibly been made up on the spot. According to *Truth in Comedy* (written by two of the founding figures in improv, Charna Halpern and Del Close in collaboration with a third author, another improviser, Kim “Howard” Johnson), widely respected and acknowledged to be *the* handbook on improvisation:

True improvisation is getting on-stage and performing without any preparation or planning. Sounds easy, doesn’t it?
Even audience suggestions aren’t necessary.
Strictly speaking, improvisation is making it up as you go along.
(Halpern, Close, and Johnson 1994: 13-14)

A similar definition comes from Mick Napier, a well-known improviser from Chicago, whose book *Improvise: Scene from the Inside Out*, is in many ways, a response to the description of improv set out in *Truth in Comedy*:

What the hell is improvisation?
Shall I take the long road or the short road?
I'll take the short one – who has time?
Improvisation is getting on a stage and making stuff up as you go along.
(1994: 1)

What neither of these definitions highlights is the degree to which success in improv is interactionally-based. The response of the other performer(s) to what is being made up actually determines how/if the scene will move forward. An analytic perspective focusing on interaction (such as discourse analysis) thus adds to our understanding of improv enabling us to explore features of language and interaction that are attended to and cultivated by practitioners. For example, because the response of fellow performers determines how interactions unfold, listening and the ability to respond quickly are highly valued skills, which are actively cultivated both onstage and off.

Although improvisation is based upon creativity and spontaneity, Halpern et al. maintain that there are certain core principles or “rules” that performers must adhere to in order to perform it well. If the common task of improvisers is that of creating a temporary reality, this task is facilitated by these basic principles or “rules.” Knowledge of “the rules” comes from improv classes, from discussions among improvisers, and most explicitly in books written about improv like *Truth in Comedy*. Among these, by far the most important rule is “yes and.”

3.2.1 Yes-and

“Yes-and” is central to improv. The “yes” part of the phrase is reflective of a general attitude of agreement and acceptance, while the “and” entails that performers must also actively build on or “heighten” the choices (developing and building on ideas, increasing the tension, emotion, etc.). The worst thing that an improv performer could do (the antithesis of “yes-and”) would be to “deny” or “block” an idea instead of “yes-anding” it. Halpern et al. (1994) give what is now a famous example of denial in *Truth in Comedy*, a scene in which two characters (a husband and wife) are talking about divorce.

Describing this scene, the authors explain that the performer playing the husband committed to the emotional reality of this scene by voicing his distress about the emotional repercussions of their divorce on their children. His partner in the scene, who the authors later reveal was Joan Rivers, destroyed this reality by going for a joke by denying the existence of the children.

Husband: Honey, but what about the children?
Wife: We don't have any children!

Of this interaction, the authors observe: “Naturally, she got a huge laugh. Naturally, she had completely destroyed the scene” (48). Denial in improv destroys the offer made by the other performer because it takes away from the reality of the scene, robbing it of its emotional resonance, often causing the unfolding interaction to come to a grinding halt.

By contrast, acceptance and agreement display a willingness to explore, extend, and expand the reality of the scene, giving the scene life, propelling the interaction

forward. Ideally agreement will help performers to uncover important information and relationships within the scene. As observed by Ellen McCarthy, in a recent piece on Washington Improv Theater for the *Washington Post*:

There either are or aren't a bunch of rules that matter in improv, but the premise at the core of the endeavor is agreement. If one player points to the ground and says, "Look at those flowers," it's the basic job of his partner to accept that she can see flowers. And then, probably, to respond in a way that adds context, propelling the scene forward: "Wow, I guess we're not the only ones to visit Grandma's grave today" (Washington Post, January 12, 2007).

Agreement in improv is also talked about as "support" and is essential for establishing the trust necessary to be able to undertake the formidable task of getting up onstage and performing in front of strangers with no script for nearly an hour.

3.2.2 The rule of three

Another way that heightened awareness of interaction manifests itself in the improv community is through shared ideologies about how interactions work including for example, the "rule of three." The "rule of three" is a belief that the third element of a pattern has special significance, for example, that the third time a joke is repeated it will often elicit a larger audience response than the first or second instance. Additionally, the third position in a pattern is understood as bearing special responsibility. If one character were to enter the scene complaining of a broken nail, for example, a second might follow suit by coming onstage and complaining about a broken arm. It would then be understood that a third performer entering this scene would assume the responsibility of

“heightening” or otherwise guiding the scene to a resolution. For example, by complaining about suffering from something more medically grave than a broken arm, or by subverting expectations, complaining of a broken heart, perhaps. Awareness of the importance of the third contribution to a n emerging pattern will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The rule of three is often spoken of as something mysterious and inexplicable, having to do with unconscious cognitive responses to patterns, as may be seen in the following quote from *Truth in Comedy*:

For some inexplicable reason, things are funnier when they happen three times. Two isn’t enough, and four is too many, but the third time something happens, it usually gets a laugh. This is a basic, but mysterious, rule of comedy. The same mechanism in the brain that likes to see patterns seems to thrive on this “Rule of Threes” (Halpern et al. 1994: 89).

Improv performers are very aware of things that come in threes, and will often call attention to the rule of three in offstage interaction, as will be explored.

3.2.3 The importance of the audience

Improv is thus a particular kind of experience for those who practice and perform it, but it is after all, designed to be experienced as a theatrical performance. One feature of improv that makes it unique in this respect is the degree to which the audience is involved. As discussed above, an audience suggestion is not strictly “necessary,” but it is the most common way that improv performances get started, as may be seen in the following example, which features the beginning of the show recorded on April 18th,

2006. Players took the stage, forming a single line across the back, and facing the audience. Nunez stepped forward, and said the following:

Example 1

1. Nunez: hello welcome everyone
2. uh we are <name of troupe>
3. we are gonna be performing some long form improv for you tonight
4. uh exploring the connected world that you help us create
5. uh so in order to help us create that think back to your days today
6. uh an interaction with somebody
7. somebody shout out a line of dialogue that they heard or said today

Observe that from the very first moments here, the audience is presented with the idea that they are connected with what they are about to see, that it will be inspired by their lived experiences, which in fact, will help create the world they will soon be witness to (line 4).

Many books have observed the involvement of the audience as an aspect of improv that makes it uniquely compelling to experience as an audience member. One example comes from Jeffrey Sweet's *Something Wonderful Right Away*, an oral history of Second City, a famous improv troupe from Chicago:

The audience is a collaborator, and so, for its own sake as well as for the cast's it wants the improv to succeed. By the act of taking the audience into its confidence, the company has largely broken down the wall dividing participants and observers. There is a sense of shared interest which creates, for a brief but invigorating time, a sense of oneness, an intense experience of community. It is warm and cozy, the air crackles with invention and psychic energy and *everybody belongs*. (Sweet, 1978: xl, emphasis in original)

Because audiences know that that what is unfolding before their eyes has never been seen before, and will never be seen again, this contributes to a heightened sense of connection to and ownership of what develops before them onstage.

Finally, improv performances demand a lot of their audiences. If success at performing improv requires heightened awareness of people, of language, and of social interaction, an appreciation of improv demands much of the same. Improv performances can be reflexive and self-knowing, performers may poke fun at themselves or at genre conventions, they may call attention to mistakes as they occur, drawing focus to a particular (mis)pronunciation or word choice. Performers understand repetition and recognition of emerging patterns to be among the most satisfying ways of creating humor. However, for something to be recognized as a repetition or a pattern, audience members must have noted and stored the first and tracked the subsequent references right along with the performers. Thus, improv demands an audience that is just as keenly observant (of language, of social interaction, and of emerging patterns) as the performers.

3.2.4 Short form and long form

As mentioned above, the different styles of improv may be grouped into either long form or short form. In order to understand the analysis which follows, it is important to have a sense for some of the differences because long form (the type of performance considered in this analysis) is often understood in contrast to short form. As may be inferred by their respective names, length of the forms is one important difference, but the philosophies of the forms also differ. Additionally, many long form performers have strongly negative feelings about short form, including that it is not challenging enough (for performers or for audience members), that it is too reliant on jokes and pre-structured games (what they

call being “gimmicky”), and it is not emotionally “real” enough, including that it has an unsatisfying way of achieving humor (as will be explored in depth throughout the discussion to follow). As such, for many long form performers, an important touchstone for the negotiation of their identities as performers is “not short form.”

Short form is more widely known than long form, partly through television programs like *Whose Line is it Anyway?*, Nick Cannon’s show *Stylin’ Out* on MTV, and NBC’s recent venture *Thank God You’re Here*, as well as the existence of nationally and internationally franchised short form theaters like *Theater Sports* and *Comedy Sportz*. The short form style of performance is fast-paced and oriented around the playing of a series of games in quick succession. *Ninety Nine Things*, for example, is a punning game, relying on the formula “99 ____s walk into a bar, the bartender says, ‘we don’t serve ____s here’ so the ____s say ‘_____’.” For example, if the suggestion were “trees,” a performer might say “99 trees walk into a bar, and the bartender says ‘we don’t serve trees here’ so the trees say ‘fine, then I guess we’ll just leave!’”

Short form performances consist of a series of such games (each game lasting about two or three minutes); success in this format depends on finding fast resolution through humor that is the result of puns and punch lines, often involving the portrayal of easily recognized stereotypes or caricatures. By contrast, the use of structured games is not a part of long form improv performances. Instead of games, long form performances are organized around a series of “scenes,” bounded interactions that are stitched together out of small, everyday moments (which may or may not themselves be funny). The long

form style of performance is slower and more exploratory, and scenes tend to be longer than games, sometimes lasting up to ten minutes. Long form performers tend to be more interested in creating powerful characters and portraying honest emotions than they are in creating comedy and achieving laughs per se. Instead, they strive for humor that is achieved organically, often through cultivating patterns that emerge within the unfolding performance. Practitioners of long form understand this process to be a more satisfying way of creating humor. They believe that when audience members can make connections for themselves, they “respond much more enthusiastically than if they had just heard a punch line” (Halpern et al. 1994: 29).

Although long form performances do not involve playing pre-selected games, there are elements of the performance that are prearranged. For example, performers have an idea of the general style and structure within which they will play, and the mechanics by which one scene will transition to the next. Such pre-arranged decisions about structure and style are known as the “format.” Formats may be intricately structured, as is the popular long form format known as the Harold, in which performers know in advance that their performance will consist of nine scenes, organized into three acts (containing 3 scenes per act). In a Harold, the first three scenes (scenes A, B, and C) establish characters, relationships, locations, and ways of interacting that are then revisited in the second and third acts. In other words, scenes A, B, and C are followed by scenes A2, B2, C2, and then scenes A3, B3, and C3. Performers work to unify the range of ideas introduced in the first act as ideas and characters resurface, and patterns emerge

and overlap over the second and third acts. In order for structures and patterns to emerge, long form thus demands that performers be paying careful attention and be quite highly skilled at recognizing and forging connections. Their ability is underscored when performing in front of audience members who recognize that connections which have emerged before their very eyes could not have been scripted or planned in advance.

Finally, long form improv differs from short form in that it is often very personal. It is viewed by many who practice it as being capable of articulating important emotional and cultural truths. Interactions, characters and dialogue that comprise long form performances are often drawn from the performer's life experiences, feelings about the world, observations and memories. Performers may "reveal" themselves emotionally onstage, showing aspects of themselves that they might not normally disclose, but they understand being vulnerable in this way as being crucial to the success of a performance.

As Josh explains in his interview:

Example 2

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1. Josh: | I don't know yeah you just kinda grab whatever is the top thing that on your mind |
| 2. | and a lot of the- a lot of times it might be an example from your real life |
| 3. | or just something that you've thought about recently |
| 4. | a story someone else told you |
| 5. | or just like something else |
| | |
| 74. | you do reveal yourself out there onstage |
| 75. | but that's kinda the nice thing about it |
| 76. | you know is to kinda like be vulnerable |

Although playful at its core, performers believe improv to be important for many reasons, including that it challenges them to make themselves vulnerable on a regular basis.

To preserve this potential, performers will at times avoid portraying issues onstage that could be misinterpreted as treating them too lightly (as may happen in short form). For example, while the use of recognizable accents (which will be explored as dialect performance in Chapter 4) is ubiquitous in short form, it tends to be more selectively used and even at times actively discouraged in long form. Such avoidance may be understood as an “oppositional identity practice” (Bucholtz 1999a) by which performers establish their own identities as performers of long form by avoiding practices understood to be associated with the performance of short form.

Having now outlined the general differences between long form and short form, I will now provide a description of my own ethnographic engagement with the improv community in Washington, DC. To introduce this discussion, I will first describe and review the literature on ethnography as a methodological tool.

3.3 Ethnography

If, as Eckert (2000) observes, the goal in studying linguistic variation were to simply observe and quantify the internal mechanisms of linguistic change, researchers would not need to concern themselves with the social context. However, because our enterprise as sociolinguists is precisely that of understanding the social *meaning* of variation, we strive to understand as much as we can about how it is that language variation is *used* by speakers to dynamically construct, negotiate and perform (facets of) identities. However, as researchers, we do not have direct access to identity. Instead, we must base our

understandings of identity on that which we may observe of the “practices that people attend to in working out their meaning in the community” (41) including linguistic variation. For Eckert, and for many researchers working within speaker design approaches (as explored in the previous chapter), the methodological approach for capturing and interpreting such practices is ethnography.

Ethnography, an approach to understanding social organization from anthropology, was introduced to linguistics by Dell Hymes. Bringing ethnography to linguistics, Hymes (1972) established a new field, the ethnography of speaking:

A general theory of the interaction of language and social life must encompass the multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning. The relations within a particular community or personal repertoire are an empirical problem, calling for a mode of description that is jointly ethnographic and linguistic (39).

To address the empirical problem of capturing “the relations within a particular community” (39), Hymes introduced the now well-known SPEAKING grid, designed to help the linguistic analyst to identify community-specific “rules of speaking.” For Hymes, the concepts which need to be kept in mind include:

S	Situation (Setting and Scene)
P	Participants (Speaker, Addressor, Hearer and Addressee)
E	Ends (Outcomes and Goals)
A	Act Sequences (Message form and Message content)
K	Key
I	Instrumentalities (Channel and Forms of speech)
N	Norms (Norms of Interaction and Norms of Interpretation)
G	Genre

Exploring these concepts, the researcher discovers “the ways in which speakers associate particular modes of speaking, topics, or message forms, with particular

settings and activities” (36). For Hymes, and for researchers of language who have continued in the ethnographic tradition (cf. Duranti 1997, Eckert 2000, Mendoza-Denton 1999, Saville-Troike 1982) ethnographic engagement is essential for discovering and making sense of language practices in context.

Duranti (1997) defines ethnography as “the written description of the social organization, social activities, symbolic and material resources, and interpretive practices of a group of people” noting that “such a description is typically produced by prolonged and direct participation in the social life of a community” (85). Additionally, for Feagin (2002) “the only way some aspects of language behavior can be understood and analyzed is through such an undertaking” (23). In many ways, ethnography is organized around the idea that being an outsider to a culture gives you a unique perspective, enabling you to see things which those inside the culture cannot. As Saville-Troike (1982) explains:

One of the best means by which to gain understanding of one’s own ‘ways of speaking’ is to compare and contrast these ways with others, a process that can reveal that many of the communicative practices assumed to be ‘natural’ or ‘logical’ are in fact as culturally unique and conventional as the language code itself (4).

Ethnography itself, it is important to remember, is ultimately a product of the background and personal history of the ethnographer and his or her interactions within communities. The best ethnographies, according to Duranti (1997), are ones in which the researcher “establishes a dialogue between different viewpoints and voices...the voices of the people studied, of the ethnographer, and of his [sic] disciplinary and theoretical preferences” (87).

In the presentation of my analysis throughout the dissertation, I seek to allow both “direct access to how members represent their own actions” (Duranti, 1997: 87) as well as my own background and training as a sociolinguist researcher (as explored in Chapter 2), and my background and training as an improviser (as a student, a performer, and a teacher). When possible, I present the voices of participants in this study directly, including metacommentary in the form of direct reflections on use of language. To provide insight into my own interactions and experiences with the community under investigation, I first chronicle my experience with a pilot project. Then I describe my entry into the community under analysis in the present study.

3.3.1 Pilot project

My linguistic research on improv began with a pilot project in Washington DC conducted from 2003 – 2004. For this project, I recorded and analyzed weekly rehearsals of a short form group called the Minnesota Chongas, who met at Comedy Sportz in Arlington Virginia, while taking improv classes together. I was one of three original members of this group, which formed when after finishing the three levels of training offered at this theater, we continued to meet weekly to practice together at a member’s home. I became interested in studying this group’s style when I realized that the main reason for these weekly get-togethers was not preparation for performance (as is usually the case for an

improv troupe) but was instead owing to a shared enjoyment of engaging in a particular playful style characterized by a playfulness with language.¹

For nearly a year, as a full participant of the group, I also conducted ethnographic research, participating in and observing the community's use of language as a means to uncover information about their culture. I found these data to be a compelling means of exploring and applying a number of discourse analytic frameworks and features including positioning theory, turn-taking in interaction, framing, footing, use of referring terms, constructed dialogue, intertextuality, among many others. Some of these features will be explored and defined in the present study, including constructed dialogue, framing, footing, and intertextuality. For definitions and explanations of others, see Johnstone (2008), Schiffrin (1996), or Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001).

Recalling Saville-Troike's (1982) observation that to uncover one's own ways of speaking, one must "compare and contrast these ways with others" (4), I recognized that because this was the first improv group that I had experienced, I began to realize that achieving an understanding of which patterns of behavior were group-particular and which were influenced by improv broadly was going to be difficult if not impossible. As Duranti (1997) has observed, ethnography implies two apparently contradictory qualities" which are:

- (i) an ability to step back and distance oneself from one's own immediate, culturally biased reactions so to achieve an acceptable degree of "objectivity" and

¹ Although it may seem antithetical to the nature of improvisation to have regular rehearsals, rehearsal (as will be discussed later in this chapter) is necessary for practicing and maintaining the skills of heightened listening, communication, and teamwork.

(ii) the propensity to achieve sufficient identification with or empathy for the members of the group in order to provide an “insider’s perspective – what anthropologists call “the **emic** view” (85: emphasis in original).

An ethnographer works to become integrated and engaged in the practices of a community so as to understand these cultural practices, but crucially, must also find a way to maintain analytic distance, objectivity and reflexivity so as to be able to recognize them in the first place and then analyze them.

I knew that my own competence with improv (having now had a year of training and an additional year of regular practice) was a major asset. Not only did it enable me to recognize and understand aspects of the Minnesota Chongas’ style, but, additionally, I knew how to implement them as part of being a linguistically competent member of the community. For example, Alim (2004) in an ethnographic study of style shifting in a hip hop community, notes that “familiarity alone does not suffice; facility of use is also crucial” (44). For Alim, data collection was greatly enhanced by his ability to “recognize both when [black language] was *being employed and when to employ it*” (44:emphasis in original). However, acknowledging the importance of a high level of engagement with the community, a researcher must also maintain awareness of not becoming too integrated. It was possible that my core membership in the group might limit my ability to maintain the requisite distance so as to be able to identify and analyze which linguistic practices were significant for this group.

I found that it was difficult even to recognize exactly how “inside” I was in this community until I began analyzing the data I had collected. Through analysis, I discovered that in addition to being a participant in nearly every interaction I had collected, my own status as core member of the group manifested itself in interaction in myriad ways. For example, in a detailed analysis of turn-taking, I observed that my core membership in the group manifested itself in an imbalance with regard to the frequency and ease with which I took and held the floor in group conversation. Further, as my project continued, and the group comfort level with being recorded increased, it seemed that awareness of being observed was increasing rather than decreasing. A frequent response to a scene that they were happy with became “Hey! That was really great! Anna, did you get that on tape? Can I get a copy?”

Finally, an intertextual analysis of an interaction which came to be known as the “toilet slam,” convinced me that my presence (as researcher) was taking on a life of its own within the group. The interaction I analyzed involved my having procured evidence (by having caught on tape from the next room) the loud manner with which one of the group members “slammed” the seat of the toilet down when he was finished using the bathroom. As the shared story about his bathroom habits was told and retold, I became aware that my tape recorder was one of the major characters in this story. Additionally, a major part of the evaluative section of the narrative (Labov 1972b) was the fact that a linguistic researcher (me) was analyzing this interaction as part of a linguistic study (Trester 2004). Because one of my primary interests was precisely to observe and

analyze the linguistic construction of identity, the extent to which their being studied had become an important part of this group's identity was of concern. While these were certainly compelling and powerful data to analyze, I had hoped to be less conspicuously integrated in them myself (at least for the purposes of my dissertation work). Thus, I decided that I would draw from these experiences to be able to work with another group of improv performers. I sought out a community that I could understand by virtue of my previous exposure to improv, but to which I myself, crucially, was an outsider.

Because Chicago is the home of improv, it might be considered the natural setting for such a project, as has been the case for all academic research conducted on improv to date (cf. Sawyer, 1997, 2003; Seham 1997, 2001). However, I knew that my own interest lay more in understanding the interactional norms of a particular community of performers. For my purposes, more important than finding a troupe that was practicing in one of the major improv cities in the U.S. (Chicago, Toronto, or New York) would be to find a group willing to allow in-depth and prolonged observation and engagement with them. Additionally, I wanted to find a group that was oriented to and engaged with the local community and more particularly, I hoped to find a group of people that were themselves reflective about the art form. In Washington Improv Theater (WIT), I found a group that surpassed all of these expectations.

As I researched improv, I learned that what I had known as "improv" was actually one type of improv, namely short form. When I came across the book *Truth in Comedy*, I became aware of the philosophical, almost spiritual orientation to the art form on the part

of long form performers, as exemplified in this paragraph describing the phenomenon of “group mind”:

Audiences have witnessed the group mind linking up to a universal intelligence, enabling them to perform fantastic, sometimes unbelievable feats. It only happens when the group members are finely attuned to each other, but it almost seems like they are tapping into the same universal consciousness that enables individuals with special abilities. Somehow, we are able to connect to it – and all improvisers know the value of connections (Halpern et al. 1994: 93).

I realized that long form would be best suited to my research interests. Because I was residing (and pursuing my PhD) in Washington DC, I began exploring how to go about gaining access to a group of practitioners of long form locally.

I learned that Washington Improv Theater (WIT) is the only theater in Washington DC devoted to the practice and performance of long form. Thus, in January 2005, after having seen a few of their performances, and having gained an appreciation for their smart, strongly emotional, and character-driven style of play, I signed up for the first class in their training curriculum, *Foundations of Improv*. I decided that a class would achieve the dual goal of familiarizing me with the practice of long form and enabling me to meet community members. As is the case for most improv communities, classes are the means by which most new members get integrated into WIT.

This class marked the beginning of my ethnographic engagement with WIT. Over the course of nearly three years, I have since taken a number of classes, in addition to assuming a number of roles within the organization. My analysis is enriched by having had the experience and perspective of both audience member and performer, of

both student and teacher, as well as that of administrator, employee and volunteer.

Owing to my participation in this community, I have been introduced to many of the smaller and independently owned artistic performance venues in DC (the Warehouse Theater, the Studio Theater, the Source Theater, DC Arts Center, Woolly Mammoth, and Flashpoint). I have learned about and participated in DC community and cultural events including Adams Morgan Day, Arts on Foot, the Kennedy Center open house, the DC Comedy Festival, Crafty Bastards craft fair, and my first ever community council meeting. This exposure to the broader DC community has been both personally rewarding, and has been valuable contextual knowledge in understanding WIT's involvement in the life of the city.

Additionally, improv has become a big part of my life beyond my involvement as a researcher. I continue to be involved in this community as a teacher, a performer, a volunteer, a fan, and a friend to many group members. Crucially, however, I am not a member of the troupe under analysis, and I have endeavored to achieve a level of distance through maintaining a researcher role within the group.

3.3.2 My entry into the community

My entry into the WIT community happened gradually and in several stages, as I will describe in the following section and in Section 3.4. I had not initially appreciated the difficulty involved in getting comfortable myself and having group members feel comfortable with my presence given how easy it had been for me to record during the

pilot study, and given that this is a community of performers who are used to being observed. As I came to understand, being performers, group members are actually much more aware of what it really means to be observed and are perhaps even more protective of the rare private time that they do have that a group of non-performers would be. In the end, it was a nearly year before I felt like I had achieved anything like “entry” into the community. As I present these data, I will highlight critical moments of my own transition, and those of community members.

Beginning with my Foundations of Improv class in January 2005, I proceeded through the classes in WIT’s training program, and soon began volunteering my time to the organization. In May 2005, I began speaking with core community members (including my teacher Jerry) about my ideas for doing a dissertation project with WIT. It became clear that in order to gain access to one of the three house troupes, I would need to have the permission of the artistic director, Adam. Thus, on July 13th, 2005, I set up a meeting with Adam, and despite leaving all my prepared notes on my printer at home, I managed to improvise my way through a description of both linguistics and my own interests as a researcher. Adam and I discovered that we were graduates of the same undergraduate institution (University of Arizona), where we had both first been exposed to improv. Adam expressed enthusiasm and support for my idea (which has been unwavering throughout the project), and he arranged it so that I could participate with the troupe under investigation, a troupe for which he himself served as director.

3.3.3 About Washington Improv Theater (WIT)

Washington Improv Theater (WIT), is a professional long form theater collective comprised (at the time of observation) of three performance ensembles, called “troupe” or “house teams” who give regular performances in Washington, DC. Although WIT has no dedicated permanent theater space presently, they are a resident member of Flashpoint, an arts organization “dedicated to nurturing and growing emerging artists and cultural organizations” (Flashpoint’s website, accessed April 15, 2007). To help grow WIT, Flashpoint provides the organization with both office space and shared access to a theater space in the Gallery Place / Chinatown area of downtown Washington DC.

The theater is run as a non-profit organization, and much of the day-to-day management of the organization is handled by a host of volunteers, who staff the theater at performances, maintain the website, and develop and market the theater. Like most improv theaters (Sawyer 1997), WIT does not sustain itself from the box office intake but largely through improv classes, offered during evenings and weekends at a local arts school in Washington DC’s U Street area. WIT’s curriculum is comprised of seven levels of eight-week class sessions beginning offered approximately four times a year. Additionally, WIT offers professional workshops designed to target specific skills such as workplace communication and teambuilding principles.

WIT was originally founded in 1986, and although disbanded in 1992, was then re-founded with a new artistic director in 1995. Since then, WIT has been working to establish itself as the premier improv troupe in Washington DC, and has been described

recently by the Washington Post as being “at the forefront of Washington's swelling improv scene” (January 12, 2007). WIT performs regularly at national festivals including the Chicago Improv Festival, the Del Close Improv Festival (in New York City), Dirty South, (a festival in North Carolina), and the recently organized DC Comedy Festival.

At the time of observation, membership in the WIT community included approximately 20 performers in the three house teams, three administrative employees (the artistic director, the assistant artistic director and an intern), an eight-member board of directors, a roster of approximately a dozen teachers, more than 40 regular volunteers (known as “operatives”), roughly 40 players who participate in a weekly practice group known as “the Field,” nearly 100 students in the classes program, and hundreds of fans, friends, family, donors, and former performers. Over the period of observation (2005-2007) this community experienced tremendous growth and continues to expand, as exemplified by the fact that, at the time of writing, there are two new house teams, and at a recent festival called “Improvapalooza,” there were 27 performance ensembles formed under the WIT “umbrella,” including an all-female troupe, of which I am a performing member.

For community members (with the exception of the artistic director), improv is not a full-time job, but it does represent a significant commitment of up to four nights a week and often much of the weekend. Commitments may include teaching, attending rehearsals, giving performances, and attending administrative and organizational meetings. Although improv represents a significant commitment of both time and

energy, it is also tremendously rewarding, creatively, artistically, as well as socially.

Members report that improvisers comprise much of their social circle, and there have even been two couples who have met and subsequently married through involvement with WIT.

WIT has a strong orientation to the local Washington DC community, as displayed through the theater's mission statement, represented in Example 3 below.

Example 3

1. WIT's mission is to UNLEASH the creative power of improv in DC:
2. We ENGAGE audiences with performances that exhilarate and inspire.
3. We IGNITE the play in Washington with a revolutionary training program.
4. We CREATE a home for improv, connected to the life of the city.
5. The revolution will be improvised.

(WIT website, accessed March 16, 2007)

This statement orients to DC, speaking about improv as a tool for actively engaging and inspiring members of the local community. As the only long form professional improv theater company within the District of Columbia, and also as the only improv theater run as a non-profit in DC, WIT views their organization as playing a special role in reaching out to and engaging with the community. Comedy Sportz, one of the other large local improv theaters is not actually located within DC, but instead in Arlington, Virginia. The Improv, a very well-established local theater, is (ironically) not a venue for improv (although they do teach improv classes), but instead a venue largely for stand-up comedy.²

² While within comedy circles, The Improv is understood to be almost universally associated with stand-up, among people unfamiliar with improv, this naming practice has been observed to cause a deal of confusion.

Before introducing the individual participants in this study, I want to return to the question of what improv is, by way of exploring how improv is understood by WIT. When these improvisers get philosophical about their art form, they often talk about how practicing improv can help you in life. Promotional materials for WIT's improv classes suggest that the awareness cultivated by improv has broader application, including for example, improving one's ability to work as part of a team. In such discussions, it is often these core principles (listening, support, and trust) that are identified. In her recent piece about WIT written for the Washington Post, Ellen McCarthy begins by calling members of this troupe "poet-psychologist-philosophers," going on to explain:

Once they get past the part about why it's fun and full of laughs and a really good time, they'll get to the part about how it's transcendent and magical, how it has changed them or saved them, how improv is like life and if only life were a little more like improv, the world would be a richer, brighter place (Washington Post: January 12, 2007).

But if long form performers generally tend to be rather philosophical about the art form, WIT has its own unique form of improv philosophy. And because style is a central concern in this project, I want to allow WIT to first present their style (in their own words) before giving my own observations. Example 4, taken from the performance program, explains their sensibilities as performers to their audience.³

Example 4

1. Improv is theater created spontaneously in direct response to the present moment.
2. The moment includes the players and their impulses, the audience, and the world around them.
3. By committing completely to illuminating and heightening the moment at hand,
4. players act as directors, writers, musicians, and even sound crew for the performance.
5. Themes and story develop from the spontaneous choices made by players.

³ In the performance program, this was printed as two paragraphs (the break between lines 6 and 7 as I have presented it here). I present the passage with numbered lines for ease of reference and analysis.

6. While scripted theater strives to be “in the moment,” improv by definition starts there.
 7. The process is raw and exposed to the audience,
 8. casting spectators as collaborators rather than strict observers.
 9. Not all improv is comedy, but WIT shows are,
 10. because we enjoy the comedic response more than the tragic.
 11. The comedy we strive for is both personal and universal,
 12. played at by illuminating the truth of the characters and situation at hand.
- (WIT performance program, November 11th, 2005)

This passages reveals aspects of WIT’s style, including linguistic style for example, word choices like “raw” and “exposed” (line 7), adjectives which would not typically be used to describe comedy, and which would never be found in a description of short form. Further, in lines in lines 9 and 10, improv is described as a type of theater that is not necessarily funny, which, given that their performances do tend to be comedic, is a choice that locates their style of play as existing along a continuum. To clarify, WIT suggests that their shows are funny not owing to constraints of the art form, but because they “enjoy the comedic response more than the tragic.” As revealed in lines 12 and 13, WIT approaches humor striving to evoke both a “personal and universal” response by “illuminating the truth of the characters and situations at hand.”

Finally, register choices in this passage, including referring to the audience as “spectators,” and “collaborators” are striking given that in the short form community explored as part of the pilot study, members of the audience are referred to as “the loyal fanz” (following the convention of spelling “sports” with the letter “z” in the theater name “Comedy Sportz”). Choices such as “collaborator” instead of “fan” for example, provide a glimpse of the depth this community believes improv to possess and how serious members are about something that on the surface may appear to be silly.

Specifically, performers understand that improv has taught them to be more attuned to interaction, including being better able to listen and more aware of the needs of others. Another idea of central importance revealed by this passage is that of being “in the moment,” a theme that will reemerge throughout this dissertation. Resonating with therapeutic and religious discourses, the concept of being in the moment will be understood in this dissertation by exploring how this philosophy is displayed through use of constructed dialogue as part of the construction of their identities as long form performers. For now, let us just observe that for this community, being in the moment involves being fully present and alive to your scene partners in the unfolding interaction.

3.3.4 Participants in the present study

As I have mentioned, during the period of observation, WIT was comprised of three in-house performance ensembles, also known as teams, house teams, or “troupes.” While much of the participant observation (including interviews) involved WIT broadly, the rehearsals, backstage time and performance recordings were conducted with one of the three house troupes, who had been in existence at that time for approximately three years. I will now describe this troupe, including demographic information about the participant members. However, to protect the anonymity of participants, I will not refer to this troupe by name, and will use only pseudonyms (chosen by the participants themselves) to refer to individual members.

When I began my observations with the troupe, it was comprised of seven members, three men and four women, ranging in age from their mid 20s to early 30s, who were young professionals and students in the Washington DC area. All participants were from the US, although none originally from DC itself. Racially, all of the group members identified as white, with the exception of Michael, who self-identified as Persian or “not white” in the interview and in other interactions I observed with group members. Figure 3.1 below presents demographic information about participants (listed alphabetically by pseudonym) including age, gender, and length of participation:

Table 3.1: Information about troupe members considered in this study

Pseudonym	Gender (Age)	Details
Greg	Male (27)	Auditioned into the troupe in April 2004
Josh	Male (28)	One of the original members of troupe (formed April 2003)
Juliette	Female (25)	Auditioned into the troupe in April 2004
Michael	Male (24)	Auditioned into the troupe in April 2004
Myfanwy	Female (32)	One of the original members of troupe (formed April 2003)
Nunez	Male (31)	One of the original members of troupe (formed April 2003)
Rachel	Female (28)	Moved to this troupe from another WIT troupe in May 2005

It is the case for improv troupes generally that there is a great deal of turnover within and among performance ensembles. Troupes do not tend to stay together very long.

Although the troupe under analysis is relatively permanent (having now been in existence for four and a half years) individual membership in the troupe certainly provides no exception to the turnover rule. At the time of observation, there were seven members, and while at the time of writing, there are still seven members, only two of them are the same people. Five of the seven have moved to other cities, many to pursue acting opportunities. Five new members have been brought in through a series of auditions.

3.4 Data

Beginning in October 2005, I began recording onstage performances of this troupe (after receiving permission from each of the group members individually). Recording shows was easily done because performances are already recorded as part of normal operating procedure of the theater. I had already signed up to be a volunteer, so I simply requested responsibility for the video camera, which not only gave me an official role and tasks to complete (which I was eager to have at these beginning stages of the ethnography) but also granted me access backstage. I had not even thought to ask permission to record backstage as part of my participation as an ethnographer, but I came to understand this time as an important site of engagement for community members.

After a month, I began attending and recording weekly rehearsals, and I also asked permission to record them backstage. This ended up being one of the most difficult requests for me to make as part of the ethnography, because I had by then come to appreciate how private this time is for community members (not even their director is allowed backstage when they are preparing for a performance). Initially, to lessen the imposition, I left an audio tape recorder running, and absented myself, which I came to realize was not interpreted as lessening the imposition, but instead felt like more of an intrusion and was read as an attempt to spy on them unobserved.⁴

Ultimately, group members and I got to know each other better through individual interviews (which began in December 2005), which marked an important transition of

⁴ The belief that the cassette recorder was an attempt to spy was expressed to the tape recorder on more than one occasion, which I discovered during the process of transcription.

increased mutual comfort. Additionally, a change in directors for the troupe in January 2006 marked another turning point for me of more complete integration. Upon first entering the community, I had sought to achieve a type of invisibility at rehearsals by asking the director to ignore me (which is of course impossible in any circumstance, but particularly unrealistic given a group whose awareness of their surroundings is so cultivated and heightened). As was the case with the tape recorder, I found that in trying to minimize my presence, I had again made myself more conspicuous. Through the new director's interpretation of my equipment and indeed me, as simply part of the "standard operating procedure" of the troupe, my presence at rehearsals became normalized and he took to using me as an audience member, for example, asking me for suggestions, or asking if I could hear them, or if they were "blocked" (located physically onstage) so that they could be seen from the audience. Almost immediately, I observed a reduction in the frequency of the creation of "researcher" and "observer" characters in their scenes, which I took to be evidence for both their growing comfort with me and the more natural use of me as "collaborative audience member" rather than silent observer.

I took this opportunity to reintroduce the question of my presence, this time addressing the request to troupe members individually via e-mail. Access had previously been obtained through the director, and there remained the possibility that some members may have felt compelled to participate owing to his status as the artistic director of the company. Further, they had first been asked for their permission collectively, and I thought it important to provide a venue for them to voice any concerns to me privately,

without pressure from the other group members. When they again granted me permission to record rehearsals, shows, and backstage, now that group members truly understood what they were getting into, I took their continued willingness to participate in the project as a mark of their interest in the project as well as the level of trust that we had together achieved.

Thus, I include only data collected after December 2005 for analysis in this project, believing these data to more closely reflect my having achieved something of an insider's point of view. As I have mentioned, these data include more than 70 hours of video and audio taped interactions leading up to, during, and after the six-week "run of shows" (as will be described below) performed by this troupe in March and April of 2006. Additionally, I include as data the field notes taken (while I was recording, and from classes that I have taken as well as taught), minutes from organizational meetings, e-mail correspondence (including weekly e-mails from the theater, and communications with community members), and promotional materials (including the company website, performance programs, advertisements, flyers, and news coverage of the troupe in local media). As I have described, these data are contextualized against more than two years of participant observation, which began exactly a year before recordings were collected, and which extends to this day. Data were transcribed following the transcription conventions in the appendix.

Beginning in Section 3.4.1 below, I describe the four main interactional contexts (onstage performances, rehearsals, interviews, and backstage time), considering them in

the order they will be treated in the dissertation. Note that this order of presentation also tracks a progression from public to private: performances in front of an audience being the most public, and time spent backstage as the most private.

3.4.1 Onstage performances

Improv performances are typically forty-five minutes long, and as described above, they begin with a suggestion taken from the audience. A small group of performers (called improvisers or players) get up on stage and create characters, give them dialogue, and place them into interactions together. During March and April of 2006, I recorded ten such performances given at Flashpoint Theater, comprising this troupe's Spring 2006 "run" of shows. In theater generally, a "run" is comprised of the performances of a given show (a production of *Macbeth* for example). Many improv companies do not tend to organize their shows around "runs" because they have their own dedicated theater space, and thereby put on shows throughout the year. However, WIT (as part of the arrangement with Flashpoint arts organization, mentioned above), shares their theater space with other arts organizations, and as such, organizes their performances in six to eight week chunks of time (runs), which typically involve use of a particular format.

Between the Fall 2005 and Spring 2006 runs, this troupe made a drastic change in format. While the Fall 2005 run used a format based on a variation of the Harold (an elaborate play-like format described in Section 3.2.4), by contrast, the format used for the Spring run had almost no prearranged structure, described to the audience as follows:

Example 5

1. The conversation one table over in a restaurant?
 2. How many times has that changed what you were talking about?
 3. You hear a song on the radio of a passing car.
 4. Someone flips past a commercial you recognize.
 5. Anything can be the inspiration for what happens next if you're only aware of the possibilities.
 6. Watch <troupe name> take this interplay of influence to another level.
 7. One line of overheard dialogue is the trigger for a series of tangential events,
 8. each one sparked by something simple in the scene before.
 9. As the string of stories grows, so do the surprises.
 10. Ideas resurface in unexpected ways.
 11. Patterns emerge and overlap until the whole thing, somehow, starts to make sense.
 12. Even though you can trace it all back to the beginning,
 13. you never know where it's all gonna end.
 14. It's amazing the things you pick up without even knowing it.
- (WIT performance program, June 24th 2006)⁵

Under this format, performances involve a series of interconnected ideas. Scenes transition from one to the next by following an interesting character, a strange pronunciation, a location, an emotion, an object, etc. from one scene to the next.

One example, taken from a show on March 31st 2006 involved a scene at a ballpark which transitioned (following the theme of sports) into a scene with a college sports recruiter negotiating with a young athlete. Wooing the young athlete to “U,” and convincing him to reject the offer from “State,” led ultimately to the following line of dialogue: “I think U is great.” This phrase created an opportunity for playing with the homophony between the pronoun “you” and the abbreviation “U” which also provided the genesis for the next scene – a scene between husband and wife which began with the husband saying “honey, I think you is great.” Use of this syntactic construction (non-

⁵ This description of the format is actually taken from a program made for the summer 2006 run of shows, but the same format was used during both runs.

standard subject verb concord) contributed to the scene by providing linguistic (and social) information about the character uttering it.

The freedom of the new format showcased individual performers' styles even more than the previous format had, and it was this shift from a very highly structured format to a more open one that called my attention to style. In fact, as I was constructing this project, I briefly entertained the idea of focusing each chapter on an individual performer. And while a more in-depth investigation of individual style will certainly be a direction for future research, ultimately, I decided that a collective comparison of their individual styles (as presented in Chapters 4 and 5) would lend insight to a consideration of group style (as explored in Chapter 6).

3.4.2 Rehearsals

Beginning in November of 2005, I attended this group's rehearsals, held in a classroom at a local arts school in the U Street area of Northwest Washington DC on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 – 10 pm. Although rehearsals continue year-round, there is an added performance focus on rehearsals during the period leading up to, during, and after a run. Ten video and audio recordings collected around the Spring run of shows (between January through April 2006) comprise the rehearsals for this data set.

Improvisers are frequently asked why there would be a need to rehearse if improv is not pre-planned. They answer by observing that at rehearsal, performers practice necessary improv skills including listening to one another, developing and growing the

ways in which they collaborate and communicate as a team. Rehearsals are led by the director (or occasionally by a group member), and typically begin with several warm-up games (which will be described in greater detail in Chapter 6). Once group members are “warm,” they move to drills and exercises selected to target the particular skill for the evening, for example, listening, repetition, creating environment, establishing relationships, honing the skills involved in character development, etc. After doing a variety of targeted exercises, performers typically spend the last hour of rehearsal doing one or two (or more) complete “run-throughs” of the performance format. All of the interactions analyzed in Chapter 4 as “rehearsals” are taken from the run-through portion of the evening.

During the “run-through” part of the rehearsal, there is a noticeable frame shift, marked by a lack of eye contact with the “audience” (those not currently in the scene, watching from the sides of the room), an unwillingness on the part of the director to interrupt with comments, and a number of other strategies to signal frame (cf. Tannen 1993). In this way, the run-through interactions are structured in much the same way that a show would be, with one crucial difference. Because performers and “audience” know each other so well, the topics raised at a rehearsal may be different than those raised at a performance. For example, players may feel more free to include potentially controversial social topics such as race and ethnicity through the performance of African American Vernacular English at a rehearsal.

3.4.3 Interviews

I began conducting interviews in December 2005, when performers had relatively more free time in their schedules following the Fall 2005 run of shows. Between runs, performers do not have performance commitments every Friday and Saturday night. However, because all troupe members work full time, and improv rehearsals and classes take up much of their time on evenings and weekends, many troupe members only had time to sit down with me on Wednesdays during the two free hours they had between the completion of work and the beginning of rehearsal. Interviews were conducted with troupe members, their director, the technical and administrative staff of WIT, members of the board of directors, members of other troupes, fans, and students in the WIT community. Interviews ranged from an hour to an hour and a half, and were conducted at DC-area coffee shops and restaurants.

Interviews were loosely structured around the format of a sociolinguistic interview (cf. Wolfram and Fasold 1997 [1974]), designed to elicit natural speech and narratives, but they were also designed to elicit specific ethnographic information about the community and about improv. Because I was particularly interested in these performers' notions of style in the general sense as "a way of doing something" (Hymes 1974), many of the questions asked directly about style (including improv as a style of theater, the long form style of improv, the style of play in DC, their style as a troupe, and their individual styles as performers). For reference, a list of the interview questions is included in the appendix. In each of the interviews (with the exception of follow-up

conversations with Juliette, pursuant to technical difficulties with her interview), the conversation closely followed this rubric.

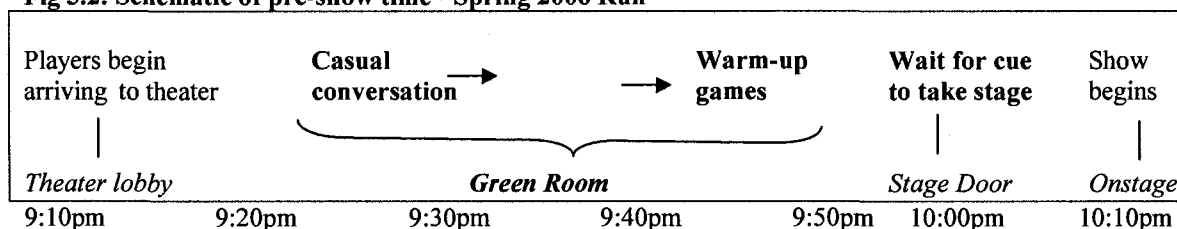
3.4.4 Backstage time

The last interactional context I consider in this project is backstage time, referring to the time group members spend together in the theater before and after their performance (in a section of the theater not accessible to the audience). I will begin by giving a sense for how community members spend their time together at Flashpoint Theater on the night of a show. Note that as the exact details of how they organize their time together vary slightly from run to run, I will base this on the Spring 2006 run.

On the evening of a performance, group members are expected to arrive at the theater approximately one hour before they will take the stage. This run's performances began at roughly 10:10pm, and as such, players arrived at approximately 9pm, chatting informally with each other and with audience members, friends, and family outside the theater entrance and in the theater lobby (which is also an art gallery). By approximately 9:20pm, performers had begun migrating down the hall and past the bathrooms into the "green room," area backstage, where they spend approximately 30 minutes together until roughly 10 minutes before show time. At this time, they move to the hallway directly behind the door to the theater to await their cue for taking the stage. Figure 3.2 below gives a schematic of this time, organized by location and activity. Note that the bolded

activities are those which occur in the physical space inaccessible to the public that performers would term “backstage.”

Fig 3.2: Schematic of pre-show time - Spring 2006 Run



Arriving into the green room, group members relax, catch up on the happenings of the week, laugh, tease one another, and eventually transition into playing warm-up games. As “hanging out” gradually transitions to “warming up,” conversations can quickly transform and develop into highly structured intertextual games involving multiple (and multiply embedded) frameshifts. As such, this time showcases one of the most salient aspects of this group’s interactional style: the playing of spontaneous intertextual games, which will be explored in Chapter 6 of this investigation

The time that performers spend together backstage is a critical interactional context for this analysis, given that aspects of their style emerge even in an interactional context which has few constraints. Additionally, I suggest that backstage time is of particular theoretical importance to this analysis, because, ironically it is this context that best illustrates performance. Remembering Bauman’s (1978) hallmark of performance as the “assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence,” we may observe that while performers are not physically onstage, that is not to say that they do not perform backstage. As is the case at rehearsals, fellow group

members serve as an audience backstage, and this audience may demand even more communicative competence than a typical audience. Fellow group members better understand the skills necessary for performing improv, and (as we will see in Chapter 6) may actively evaluate their own and one another's skills even as group members are at their most relaxed.

Before ending this chapter and turning to data analysis, I want to give one last bit of contextual information for this study, locating my work of improv against previous academic research which has been conducted to date, that of Amy Seham (1997, 2001) and R. Keith Sawyer (1997, 2003).

3.5. Previous academic work on improv

Sawyer (1997) identifies two main types of literature on improv, the "how to" type of improv book, written for the theater community, and books that use improv as psychotherapeutic technique. He observes that improv has not been studied by conversation researchers, nor has it been explored by social scientists generally (173). His own work (1997, 2003) is intended as contributing to this gap, as is that of Amy Seham (1997, 2001). They are the only researchers to date (of whom I am aware) who have researched improv as the subject of their dissertation work. While both evoke sociolinguistics, neither adopts the analytic perspective (combination of variation analysis, discourse analysis and ethnography) that I adopt in the present study. I describe their work briefly here to end this methodology chapter by underscoring my own

methodological perspective, and as a further illustration of how my perspective as a researcher shapes my findings, even given quite similar data.

Seham (1997, 2001) approaches improv from a theater studies perspective, drawing from interviews and oral histories collected with performers. Hers is an historical account of improv, exploring questions of gender, race and power. Tracing the origins of improv, she begins her work by explaining that Paul Sills and the other founders of the Compass Theater in Chicago in the 1950's had a great deal of idealism about the art form. Improvised art forms had been used throughout the 20th century by avant-garde artists as a rebellious rejection of "establishment" art and society, and improvisational theater was seen as a means to break free of the constraints of scripted theater and enable the performers to be truly creative, and even politically subversive. However, according to Seham, improv has since that time come to be a form that seldom challenges old ways of looking at things, frequently tapping into commonly held stereotypes. It should be noted that she bases a great deal of her observations and analysis on short form, and would no doubt have somewhat different results if her study included more long form.

Through improvisation, [sexist] representations come together...in narratives that appear natural, inevitable, and true, but are more likely to be drawn from archetype, stereotype and myth. In addition, in the pressure cooker of performance, players may be driven to reach for the most familiar, most popular references and are often rewarded with the laughter of recognition (Seham, 2001: xxi)

Seham suggests that improv is informed by a very white, male, middle class perspective. In her analysis, she identifies how power relationships reproduce themselves onstage focusing on limited (and often sexist) portrayals of women.

Seham suggests that one of the few devices available to women in improv is the ability to draw upon Bertold Brecht's theories of alienation (between performer and character / audience) to "stand aside from and comment on the difference between her *self* and the (often male-created) character she represents" (Seham 20). What Seham calls "alienation techniques," I explore in this analysis in terms of performers' awareness of their ability to manipulate the production format of talk (Goffman 1974).

Communicating differences between author, animator, principal, and figure speaking roles, performers may express distance from the characters they portray both onstage and off. Further, in Chapter 4, I consider to what extent the type of distancing that Seham suggests is actually afforded by the long form improv genre.

Ultimately, regardless of performers' ability to actually enact and communicate such footing shifts onstage, the practice of improv itself cultivates awareness of the production format of talk and the differences between author, animator, principal, and figure, which informs the way they interact offstage. Although our analyses ultimately take very different directions, Seham (as does Sawyer) identifies many of the same aspects of language (production format of talk, ability to articulate cultural truths) as being relevant to understanding the choices with language that group members make which come to define how they interact and who they are.

R. Keith Sawyer (2003) approaches improv with the aim of discovering the interactional mechanics of improvised interactions as a model for everyday conversational interaction (which is of course inherently improvised). His is a three year ethnographic study of the improv community in Chicago, drawing from 50 hours of videotaped performances, observations of classes, rehearsals, and interviews from 15 different improv troupes. I draw from Sawyer's extensive ethnographic observations in my analysis, and I share his view that "improvised dialogues can reveal features of discourse that are sometimes elusive in everyday conversation" (Sawyer 2003: 229).

Sawyer identifies performer awareness of frame as analytically relevant, which is a framework which also informs my discussion of improv style. Citing Erving Goffman as a primary influence on his work, Sawyer suggests that at the beginning of an improv scene, as with the encounters between strangers which Goffman used so productively (cf. Goffman 1967, 1963, 1959), very little is known in advance of the frame. Sawyer's research explores the ways that "speakers are creatively strategic in negotiating and defining the basic properties of the frame" (Sawyer 2004: 7). In this investigation, I also explore speaker strategies in negotiating and defining frame in the creation of spontaneous intertextual games (in Chapter 6) which I suggest is a highly salient aspect of their style.

Ultimately, however, Sawyer's aims are very different from my own. Intent in exploring the ways that players use dialogue to create a "temporary social reality," Sawyer's work is heavily influenced by theories of "collaborative emergence" drawn

from the natural sciences and currently operative in sociology. As an illustration of how collaborative emergence works in his analysis, consider that for Sawyer, participants in any interaction collaborate and together create an interactional context, what he terms *collaborative emergence*. As interaction proceeds, participants become both constrained and enabled by frames, which ultimately *affect* interaction in ways of which the participants themselves are unaware. This process he describes as “downward causation,” which motivates his assertion that frames should be treated as a higher level of analysis than interaction. For Sawyer, “we must consider the frame to be analytically distinct from any single turn of dialogue” (5). Extending this line of argumentation to say that “the frame is analytically independent of individuals and their dialogue” (5) he suggests that quantitative tabulations about cues like laughter (which he suggests signal awareness of frame on the part of the audience) are better indicators of frame than individual contributions to the frame. Based on these statistical tabulations, he then makes statistical predictions about participant’s behavior as it is influenced by interactional frames. His approach is a quantitative, macro-level view of the larger patternings of social systems as viewed from the outside, which differs considerably from my qualitative focus on individual contributions to interactions, and my use of ethnography to privilege community member’s perspectives.

In addition to differences in approach to the analysis of data, my conceptualization of what improv interactions *are* and what they *mean* is very different from that of Sawyer. For Sawyer, improv interactions are studied as a stripped-down

model of everyday interaction, which he suggests they seek to emulate. While for Sawyer, they allow us insight into ‘how’ interactions work in real life (1997), for my purposes, improv performances are themselves interesting as social events that are inherently performative (as indeed, all everyday interactions may be argued to be). I explore these performative contexts as merely another instance of situated language being used by a social group to accomplish specific interactional goals in context.

Although these researchers’ interest in improv underscores the emerging importance of improv as a cultural phenomenon, and their work reveals directions for possible future research and application, my own training as a sociolinguist and my own research interests necessarily make my approach to the analysis of improv data very different. As I have mentioned, I consider their work as a way to position my own academic interest in improv, and to provide further illustration of my methodological and analytical orientation.

Having now provided an explanation of my data and how they were collected, I will now turn to analysis. Chapter 4, which follows, is a consideration of these performers’ use of dialect performance in the more public of the contexts I have described, onstage performances, and “run-throughs” from rehearsals. The quantitative patterning of dialect performance will be understood by examining the performances themselves and by reference to meta-commentary about language taken from individual interviews. Many of the themes which have been discussed in the present chapter will become important, especially the distinction between the long form and short form

formats of improvisation. Performers' orientations to the locally salient social category of "long form performer" and how this differs from that of "short form performer" will be shown to be of particular relevance in understanding why dialect performance tends to be avoided.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIALECT PERFORMANCE AND THE FRAMING OF LONG FORM IMPROV

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze dialect performance (the self-conscious use of linguistic features to index culturally recognizable groups) in long form improvisational theater (improv). I approach dialect performance as a stylistic resource, operationalizing it as a *unit* of stylistic variation. Coding by character created, I compare its use onstage to the rehearsal setting, which reveals two tendencies: (1) general avoidance of dialect performance and (2) the more frequent use of dialect performance in the rehearsal context as compared to onstage. These findings motivated this chapter, and also the guiding research questions: 1) *what is it about dialect performance that would cause these performers to avoid it generally and 2) what is it about interactional context that impacts performers' choice to use (or avoid) dialect performance?*

Additionally, this chapter is intended as an illustration of how variationist, discourse analytic, and ethnographic approaches may be integrated in interpretation of the identificational value and impact of discourse-level features of linguistic structure, in this case dialect performance. Thus, I complement quantitative findings with contextualized qualitative analysis. Discourse analysis will be utilized in this chapter in three main ways (as outlined in Chapter 2): 1) by exploring dialect performance as a unit of variation, 2) by evoking the discourse analytic framework of framing to interpret the observed

patterning of dialect performance, and 3) by utilizing discourse analysis of metadiscursive commentary about dialect performance (taken from interviews with performers and from performances, as well as promotional materials) to explore performers' understanding and awareness of how they use language (including dialect performance and frame). Ethnographic participation with this community informed my analysis at every stage, including that engagement with the community revealed the relevance of dialect performance as its use in WIT differed greatly from the improv group under investigation in the pilot study. In the latter group, cultivating ability at dialect performance was addressed explicitly in classes, while it was largely avoided at WIT. Further, observation of the group in a range of interactional contexts enabled me to track dialect performance and to make sense of how its use (and avoidance) maps to locally salient identities, for example, that of long form performer or short form performer.

To interpret connections among dialect performance and social identity, I apply the discourse analytic *framework* of “framing,” or how participants make sense of what is going on in an interaction (Goffman 1974). Following Coupland (2004), framing provides a way to make sense of the impact that context has on use of language at three levels: socio-cultural, generic, and interpersonal. For example, the general avoidance of dialect performance can be explored at the *generic* level of framing as a way to distinguish long form performance from the more popularly known short form format. Further, given that dialect performance can “point up “social difference,” the more frequent occurrence of dialect performance in rehearsal (as compared to onstage) can be

understood at *socio-cultural* or *interpersonal* levels of frame as a desire to avoid having their intentions for evoking social difference misinterpreted.

Finally, discourse analysis provides access to moments of metadiscursive commentary (talk about talk) where the active negotiation of the social significance of dialect performance emerges. For example, while acknowledging that dialect performance is “exciting” for the performer and the audience, in Example 1 below (taken from her interview), Rachel gives reasons for avoidance, including that it is “a big risk.”

Example 1

1. Rachel: t- to one end, you know, we were kinda pushed away, like
2. “don’t do accents.”
3. “Cause if you’re doing it to be funny, you’re gonna mess it up and it’s hard,”
4. Anna: hmmm
5. Rachel: “and you have to pay a lo- that much more attention.”
6. And um,
7. and maybe that’s why when the accent comes out, it’s kind of an exciting moment
8. because it’s a big risk that you’re taking.

As will be explored both quantitatively and qualitatively throughout this chapter, a shared ideology of dispreference for dialect performance manifests itself most strongly in this group through avoidance onstage.

This chapter will be structured as follows: In section 4.2, I provide background on “dialect performance” and other relevant theoretical concepts including “dialect stylization” (Coupland 2001a), “crossing” (Rampton 1995), and “resembling without passing” as a cultural linguistic practice as it differs from “resembling and passing as” (Coupland 2004). Additionally, I evoke Goffman’s (1974) use of Bateson’s (1972) notion of “frame” as applied by Coupland (2004) to explore context at socio-cultural, generic, and interpersonal levels. In section 4.3, I introduce my data and quantitative

findings, including percentage data of dialect performance and the results of VARBRUL multivariate analysis. In section 4.4, I utilize discourse analysis of metadiscursive commentary (taken from interviews, performances, and promotional materials) to explore speaker awareness of the cultural significance of dialect performance as well as awareness of frame at all three levels (socio-cultural, generic, and interpersonal).

4.2 Background

In improvisational theater, as in many types of theatrical performance, speakers use dialect features of culturally familiar and meaningful styles to create and distinguish among recognizable characters. I intend “dialect performance” as referring to this process, and I have built my definition of this concept by reference to the related concepts “crossing” (to be discussed in Section 4.2.2 below) and “dialect stylization” as used by Coupland (2001a) to explore the language used by radio personalities in Wales. Following Coupland (2001a), who defines dialect performance as “the performance of non-current first person personas by phonological or related means” (345), for the purposes of this investigation, dialect performance will be defined as the self-conscious use of linguistic features to index culturally recognizable groups. While such indexing may be accomplished by use of phonological, morphosyntactic, lexical, and other features which evoke a “particular cultural identity or ideological position” (Schilling-Estes 1998); sometimes even a single phonological feature may be sufficient.

4.2.1 Dialect performance and dialect stylization

A related concept to dialect performance is “dialect stylization,” which is implicated in a broader process of stylization. According to Coupland (2004), stylization involves speaking “as if this were me,” “as if I owned this voice,” or “as if I endorsed what this voice says.” He finds stylized uses of language to be a particularly powerful tool for speakers in the postmodern climate who are increasingly aware of their own experiencing of language and culture. Although Coupland does not specifically address dialect *performance*, and how it differs conceptually from dialect stylization, I suggest that the distinction involves the degree of “knowingness” or attention called to the performance on the part of the speaker. Dialect stylization is marked by knowingness, defined by Coupland as the “*knowing* deployment of culturally familiar and meaningful styles and identities” but crucially, those “marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context” (345, emphasis mine). For my purposes, I consider “dialect performance” to be a broader category that can encompass instances of dialect stylization, although, given the overtly stylized and self-aware nature of improv performance, individual instances of “stylization” within these data would be very difficult to isolate.

Dialect performance may be understood as a culturally significant practice because it provides access to speaker’s awareness of relationships among languages and social groups. Because dialect performance exposes such cultural knowledge, it may invite close scrutiny on the performer, including motivations for introducing cultural

comparisons. Several aspects of the stylization process identified by Coupland (2001a) help to explain how this process of social comparison through language works. Firstly, observing that stylization instigates “processes of social comparison and reevaluation focused on the real and metaphorical identities of speakers and their strategies and goals” (350), he explains that dialect varieties are “particularly well configured for stylized performance” because they “generally constitute known repertoires with known socio-cultural and personal associations - such as high/low socio-economic status, urban/rural, sophisticated/unsophisticated, trustworthy/untrustworthy, dynamic/dull” (350).

Additionally, stylization requires an “enculturated audience able to read the semiotic value of a projected persona or genre” (350). Thus, in the improv context, if speakers create characters with “well-formed socio-cultural profiles and derived from known repertoires” (350), they do so making an assumption that their audience will be able to interpret the relevant cultural information being packaged and presented. For example, Chun (2004) in an analysis of mock Asian as used by the stand-up comedian Margaret Cho, finds that such performances “depend on the same ideologies of community membership and language practice that speakers depend on in their everyday contexts” (265). With improv, because performances are entirely made up as they go along, performers are their own writers and directors. Thus, such performances may be observed to be drawn from and comprised of snippets of performers’ memories, experiences, observations, and cultural knowledge, including awareness of and beliefs about language, including how it works and what it means. I suggest that improv

performances provide unique opportunities to observe the active and unfolding negotiation of social identity including questions of access: what identities, varieties, and pieces of social information are available, to whom, when, and why.

4.2.2 Crossing

My interpretation of the social consequences of dialect performance is influenced by Rampton's (1995) work on "crossing," defined in his work as "switching into languages that are not generally thought to belong to you" (280). In an interactional sociolinguistic study of multi-ethnic adolescent friendship groups in England, Rampton explores how Panjabi is used by young people of Anglo and Afro-Caribbean descent, how Creole is used by Anglos and Panjabis, and how stylized Asian English (SAE, a stylized variety used to project an uncomprehending character), is used by all three (4). He illustrates that crossing involves movement across boundaries (social and ethnic), arguing that it can serve as a means to express and negotiate social identity, and in particular, local understandings of social legitimacy and power.

Rampton analyzes crossing as a complex process with socio-political implications, illustrating that it can at the same time respect and transgress ethnic boundaries. Although he found that through crossing, speakers respond symbolically to power relationships (expressing either disdain or respect for social power), crucially, she observed speakers to display sensitivity to how such potentially charged social information gets evoked. He found this to be particularly true when in the presence of

speakers of the varieties being evoked, or “inheritors” in his terms. Cultural and linguistic sensitivity manifested itself in Rampton’s data in two ways:

(a) certain types of speaker avoided language crossing in the presence of certain kinds of interlocutor: members of ethnic outgroups did not usually take liberties with Creole and Asian English if there were inheritors on hand. (b) crossing occurred in moments, activities and relationships in which the hold of ordinary assumptions about social reality was loosened in some way. In consequence, crossing did not ultimately claim that the speaker was ‘really’ black or Asian, or that their relationship with the minority group that they linguistically invoked entailed an open unrestricted biculturalism (315-316).

Thus, while crossing can challenge ethnic fixity and division, Rampton suggests that speakers engage in this practice only with certain audiences and “where it could be safely understood that they weren’t making any claims to real, equal, or enduring membership of an ethnic out-group” (316).

The current study explores dialect performance in the improv context, a setting which would seem to avoid any such “real” or “enduring” claims of identity, for as Coupland (2004) notes, “a performance frame undermines direct claim to the inhabitation and ownership of social identities” (28). Performance thus involves *reference* or *mention* of social identities rather than *ownership* or straightforward *use* of a given language variety. For Coupland, this constitutes “resembling without passing,” rather than “resembling and passing as.” However, “resembling without passing” carries a particular responsibility, for if “resembling and passing as” works to obscure social differences, “resembling without passing” actually *highlights* social differences (28). Consequently, the move to perform a dialect within the performance context is a socially meaningful

move. It is an act that articulates awareness of social and cultural difference, and which can serve to open scrutiny of the speaker's motivation in introducing such culturally sensitive issues into an otherwise playful interaction. Such a move may carry serious social and interactional consequences for the speaker, especially onstage and in front of an unknown audience.

Social and interactional consequences of dialect performance will be explored in the current investigation in terms of framing, following Coupland's (2004) comparison of two very different interactional contexts in Wales: a pantomime performance and interactions among assistants at a travel agency. To illustrate his application of frame, I will focus on the pantomime (a burlesque type of theater) performance because it is the interactional context that more closely resembles improv performance.

4.2.3 Framing

Pantomimes, or "pantos" as they are popularly known in the United Kingdom, are popular entertainment around Christmas time. Despite their name, they are not mimed, but rather are a burlesque-style, audience interactive performance involving archetypal characters, predictable plot twists, and happy endings. The performance analyzed by Coupland is *Aladdin*, and he focuses his analysis on a character called "the Dame." Coupland finds that she evokes two local socially meaningful personae through socio-phonetic performance (a "local" identity based on Wales Valleys English, and a more "standard" identity, based on so-called "Received Pronunciation" or "RP"). He suggests

that the cultural meaning of the Dame's phonetic performance can best be understood by investigating the ways in which such performances are *framed*, drawing on Goffman's (1974) use of frame as ways of organizing human experience. To illustrate how framing works, I will first explore the origins of this concept, popularized by Erving Goffman.

For Goffman, frames help us define and interpret experience. They are the mechanisms by which we understand the situations in which we find ourselves and how we are able to make sense of the world. His own understanding and use of the term was influenced by Bateson (1955), who observed that a message can mean different things in different interactional contexts, based on observations he made of monkeys at the zoo. For example, Bateson noted that a bite could mean one thing while monkeys were playing that was not the same meaning that a bite carries in other interactional contexts (antagonistic behavior, for example). From such insights, Bateson concluded that "frame is involved in the evaluation of the messages it contains" (188).

Applying frame to the interpretation of Welsh pantomime performance, Coupland (2004) identifies three relevant levels: socio-cultural, generic, and interpersonal. The *social and cultural level of frame* includes where this event takes place, the linguistic varieties that are present, and the social relationships among these varieties and the people who speak them. In Coupland's study, this would involve the relationships among social and linguistic groups in Wales and the U.K, while in the present study, the relationships among social and linguistic groups in Washington DC, and within the United States more broadly. The *generic level of frame* involves concerns of genre,

including what type of performance this is, and how participants understand the “identificational consequences” of the genre. In the case of pantomime, Coupland notes that it engenders “the usual theatrical complexities of ownership” including whose voices are meant to be heard, is this just for fun or is it meant to be taken “seriously” (13). As we will discuss for improv as well, attribution of principalship (the person or role whose position and point of view is being expressed) is often quite difficult to determine, and may perhaps be left deliberately vague. Consequently, in an improv performance it may be hard to know who is speaking and how to interpret if this is “just for fun” or is meant to be heard as having more serious cultural implications. Finally, the last level of frame, the *interpersonal* level, includes relationships and interactional histories of the people engaged in interaction. In the present study, interpersonal framing becomes particularly relevant in the onstage performance context given that it is unlikely that performers are known personally by members of their audience.

However, before I explore framing at each of these three levels, I will first present the results of quantitative tabulations for use of dialect performance in the two contexts: rehearsal and onstage performance. I begin by outlining my coding decisions and the choice to use dialect performance as a unit of variation.

4.3 Quantitative findings

Quantitative tabulations come from 26 audio and video recorded performances (ranging in length from twenty to forty-five minutes) recorded from nine “shows” (performances

recorded onstage and in front of an audience in the theater setting) and eight “rehearsals” (run-throughs recorded in the rehearsal setting).¹² From these 26 performances, I identified a total of 1128 characters, 82 of which were created using dialect performance, yielding a percentage of 7% overall use of dialect performance. Occurrence vs. non-occurrence of dialect performance was the dependant variable, and additionally, I coded for two social factors: performance context (performances were coded both individually and then as either “rehearsal” or “onstage”), and individual speaker (each of the seven members of the group was considered individually).³

4.3.1 Dialect performance as a unit of sociolinguistic variation

As discussed in Chapter 2, traditional studies of stylistic variation involve observing the patterning of “variants” (different ways of saying the same thing). Coding proceeds as the analyst delimits the possible environments where the linguistic unit under analysis is possible. This process is called “defining the envelope of variation” whereby researchers determine where the variant in question may occur, or the number of *actual* occurrences of the variable out of the number of *possible* occurrences. While in everyday interaction it would be difficult to measure actual occurrences of dialect performance out of possible occurrences, the improv context provides a simple means of segmenting out speech,

¹ The rehearsal “run-through” is described in greater detail in Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.

² Because some rehearsals featured more than one “run-through” I was able to collect a total of 17 “performances” from 8 rehearsals.

³ A recurring character who reappeared multiple times over the course of a performance was counted only once, and I excluded from my tabulations any characters who did not speak. Additionally, I have chosen not to include use of falsetto or lowered pitch as constituting dialect performance in this analysis.

because every time a performer speaks, it is in the guise of a character. While in character, performers may chose to speak in their own native phonology, or they may chose to adopt phonological (and other linguistic) features of other culturally recognizable varieties. Thus, the improv context is particularly convenient for quantifying the use of dialect performance and I suggest that the choice of whether or not to perform an individual character through use of dialect performance may be understood as variants, or a choice among ways of “saying the same thing” given that each (speaking) character could either be rendered in the performer’s native phonology or given a recognizable dialect. As such, the improv context provides the analyst with the means to more easily delimit the envelope of variation than would be possible in the study of everyday conversational interaction.

Although presence vs. absence of dialect performance is a much broader unit of analysis than the morphosyntactic or phonological units typically considered in quantitative sociolinguistic analyses, studies such as Rampton (1995) have revealed that the navigation of multiple linguistic varieties serves strategic interactional purposes. I argue that multivariate statistical calculations can be brought to bear in understanding and interpreting the patterning of discourse-level features because dialect performance can be shown to be constrained by a variety of factors (in this case principally social features), a hallmark of variationist sociolinguistic research.⁴ As such, I argue that a speaker’s use of

⁴ Given the broad size of this linguistic unit, I was not able to easily discern what linguistic conditioning factors may be conditioning the variation, although a future study might consider factors like use of dialect performance in one scene as a potential conditioning factor for its use in subsequent scenes.

dialect performance comprises a type of inherent variability (within the broadened definition of variation outlined in Chapter 2).

As we will see in Section 4.3.3 below, and again in Chapter 5, the quantification of discourse features poses some considerable challenges to VARBRUL, the multivariate statistical analysis program most often used in variationist research, designed to capture the effects of various factors on the observed patterning of language. VARBRUL has been most productively used to capture phonological variation (c.f. Coupland 2007). Nevertheless, the patterning revealed by this program is illuminating of observable and systematic patterning of discourse-level features, and in this case, directed the focus of qualitative analyses. As more and more research is done within sociolinguistics considering relatively bigger units of language at different levels of linguistic structure (discourse and even non-verbal features), parallel development will be required regarding how best to accommodate these features in statistical modeling and research design. Such developments parallel discussions about the concept of the linguistic variable itself, dating back to Lavandera (1979), and continued by Coupland (2007), Schiffrin (2006), Schilling-Estes (2004), among many others. While it is well beyond the scope of the current investigation to resolve the question of the nature of the linguistic variable, it is hoped that the present investigation may at least contribute to this conversation.

4.3.2 Overall patterning

Figure 4.1 below presents percentage data reflecting the overall patterning of these data in the rehearsal as compared to the onstage context.

Table 4.1: Dialect Performance by Performance Context

Context	N	%
Rehearsal	55/556	9
Shows	27/572	4
TOTAL	82/1128	7

Patterning reveals that dialect performance tends to be largely avoided by these speakers, as reflected in 7% overall use of dialect performance. As such, this group's style might best be characterized by general avoidance of dialect performance. However, this is only part of the story. Although infrequent, dialect performance *does* occur, and then more than twice as frequently in the rehearsal setting (9% or 55 out of 556 characters), as compared to onstage (4% or 27 out of 573 characters).

Figure 4.2 below presents numerical and percentage data of use of dialect performance by performer, listed in decreasing order of frequency of use. The first column presents overall use, and the second and third compare rehearsal to onstage.

Figure 4.2: Percentage Dialect Performance by Performer (comparing Rehearsal context to onstage)

Performer	Gender (Age)	n Overall	%	n Rehearsals	%	n Onstage	%
Nunez	M (31)	27/186	14	18/103	17	9/83	10
Rachel	F (28)	17/155	10	13/82	15	4/73	5
Michael	M (24)	11/157	7	3/43	7	8/114	7
Myfanwy	F (32)	6/131	4	4/47	8	2/84	2
Josh	M (28)	10/217	4	8/128	6	2/89	2
Greg	M (27)	8/179	4	7/102	6	1/77	1
Juliette	F (25)	3/104	2	2/51	3	1/53	1

As may be seen, these performers (with the exception of Michael) exhibit a marked preference for use of dialect performance in the rehearsal setting (as contrasted with use onstage). For example, Nunez, the most frequent user among the group, created 17% of his characters using dialect performance (18 out of 103) in rehearsal as compared to 10% onstage (9 out of 83 characters). Rachel used dialect performance three times as frequently in rehearsal (15% as compared to 5%) and Greg displayed the most dramatic shift between the two contexts. While he almost never used dialect performance onstage (only once out of 77 characters), in rehearsal, he did so 6% of the time (7 out of 102 characters). Greg's use of dialect performance, specifically his use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) will be explored in Section 4.4.3.

As noted above, only Michael showed no difference in use of dialect performance between contexts, using 7% in each. Given the systematic patterning of the rest of the group, Michael's behavior begs further exploration, particularly as he is the only member of this troupe who does not identify racially as white (he identifies as Persian). Interpretation of Michael's linguistic behavior will be addressed in Section 4.4.1, as it requires a more nuanced exploration of the socio-cultural level of framing.

The broadly observed systematic patterning suggests that there is a shared understanding of linguistic norms for the two contexts. To explore the possible influences on this observed patterning and to establish that this is part of a broad and consistent pattern (and not the result of one or two outlying performances or performers), I now present my statistical tabulations about the patterning of dialect performance.

4.3.3 VARBRUL results

Table 4.3 below presents the results of the binomial one-level and step-up/step-down analyses considering dialect performance as the application value. Factor groups (and the factors within the factor groups) are listed in decreasing order of strength.

Table 4.3
Multivariate Analysis of the contribution of social factors to the probability of dialect performance

Total N	1128		
Input probability:	0.06		
Log Likelihood	-276.017		
Total Chi-square	3.4044		
Chi-Square per cell	0.2432		
<hr/>			
Individual Performer	Factor Weight	%	N
Nunez	.70	14	27/186
Rachel	.64	10	17/155
Michael	.57	7	11/156
Myfanwy	.44	4	6/131
Josh	.40	4	10/217
Greg	.39	4	8/179
Juliette	.30	2	3/104
<i>Range</i>	<i>40</i>		
Performance Context	Factor Weight	%	N
Rehearsal	.60	9	55/556
Show	.40	4	27/572
<i>Range</i>	<i>20</i>		

Recall that factor weights are presented as values ranging from 0 to 1, such that when a factor weight is greater than .5, it is to be interpreted as “favoring” the application value, and when less than .5, “disfavoring.” As may be seen above, both factor groups (individual performer and performance context) were selected as significant.

With the largest observed range (40) in use of dialect performance, “individual performer” is the factor group which most strongly conditions the application value.

Mirroring percentage data reported above, Nunez displays the strongest favoring of dialect performance (with a factor weight of .70), and Juliette the strongest disfavoring (with a factor weight of .30). Thus while overall avoidance is characteristic of this group's style, VARBRUL reveals that use of this feature characterizes performers' individual styles as well.

Additionally, multivariate analysis reveals that dialect performance is disfavored in the onstage context with a weight of .40, with the rehearsal setting favoring use of dialect performance with a weight of .60. While neither figure strongly favors or disfavors the application value, context is selected by VARBRUL as conditioning the observed variation, and as such, the difference between the contexts does merit further investigation. Qualitative analysis will provide further means for interpreting this patterning.

However, it should be noted that log likelihood, chi square, and chi square per cell figures presented above the chart (which provide measures of the goodness of fit between the model and the data) indicate that it is somewhat difficult to determine how well VARBRUL as a statistical model accounts for the observed patterning. First, the "log likelihood" figure of -276.017 does not indicate a great fit, because log likelihood figures closer to zero represent a better model than those further from zero (Tagliamonte 2006: 156). However, the Chi-square per cell figure of .2432 indicates that this VARBRUL model does account well for the observed patterning of the data. A chi-square per cell figure below 1.5 indicates a good fit (Bayley 2002: 127). Additionally, the total Chi-

square for this analysis is 3.4044, which is an acceptable value, and falls below the desired level as determined by the degrees of freedom in this model (calculated by subtracting the number of factor groups from the number of factors). Thus, this figure indicates that there is a low likelihood of interaction among factors, which is to say that these factors seem to capture the patterning of the actual data well, and that the statistical model employed by VARBRUL is a good model. As mentioned above, while the degree to which VARBRUL is best able to model discourse level variation is questionable, the observed patterning is indeed suggestive.

4.4 Qualitative analysis

The observed avoidance of dialect performance suggests that it is an identity practice whose power these performers recognize, but whose social consequences are understood to be risky. To support this assertion, I will draw from Coupland's (2004) application of framing to interpret the value and impact of linguistic features as they simultaneously operate at three distinct levels: the *socio-cultural* level, the *genre* level, and the *interpersonal* level. I draw from metadiscursive commentary about dialect performance (taken from interviews with performers and from performances, as well as promotional materials) which reveal performers' awareness of all three levels of frame. It bears mentioning that while they are considered separately in this discussion, these three levels overlap and interrelate in multiple ways. Any consideration of how social identificational boundaries can be challenged and played in this medium is dependant on *the socio-*

cultural level (the available social identities within the community), but the meaning that is made of dialect performance simultaneously implicates both *genre* (affordances of the long form genre) and relevant *audiences* (including their awareness of the affordances of the genre). While it becomes clear that none of these levels can operate in complete isolation, for ease of analysis, I will consider them individually in the sections which follow.

4.4.1 Socio-cultural framing

The socio-cultural level of framing involves the “prefabricated socio-political arrangements in a relevant community” (13), in other words, the social and linguistic groups that are present in this community and their relative power and social status. While the concept of “community” has long been complicated in sociolinguistics (as explored in Chapter 2) the present study will focus on political, linguistic, and geographic distinctions (considered at varying levels of scope) focusing on the United States broadly, with particular attention to the social and cultural context of Washington, DC. Certainly, many social identities are implicated given the size of the United States and the international, diverse, and transitional nature of Washington DC. Given this, let us consider which linguistic varieties actually do appear as part of performance among those which might be expected to appear.

The varieties performed in these data are presented in Figure 4.4 below, in decreasing order of observed frequency. In compiling these data, US varieties were

identified by the researcher and organized by dialect region based on categories outlined in the *Atlas of North American English* (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006). International varieties are organized into broad categories including “British” or “European Accented English.” The target variety (e.g. New York English, British English) was identified where possible, however, as noted by Bucholtz (2001), performers may sometimes simply choose a feature or two to “foreignize” their speech, indexing in some capacity that this speech is not their own (and one feature is often enough to accomplish this - e.g. r-lessness). In such cases where one specific target variety could not be identified, the performance was labeled as “other.”

Figure 4.4: Dialects Performed by Performance Context

REHEARSAL			ONSTAGE		
Variety	N	%	Variety	N	%
Southern US	21	38%	New York	5	19%
AAVE	7	13%	European Accented English	5	19%
British	7	13%	Southern US	4	15%
Northeast US	5	9%	Midwest US	3	11%
European- Accented English	3	6%	Northeast US	2	7%
Midwest US	2	4%	Texas	1	4%
California	2	4%	Other	7	26%
New York	2	4%			
Other	6	11%			
Total	55		Total	27	

While a range of identities are evoked onstage (including New York, Southern, Midwestern, Southeastern, and European-accented varieties of English) African American English (AAVE) is conspicuously absent. While salient to these performers (as the second most frequently performed variety in the rehearsal context), AAVE is entirely avoided onstage. Within this relatively small sample, the absence of certain

varieties in the show setting is no doubt topically influenced. For example, British varieties have appeared onstage in other runs I have observed this troupe perform. However, from ethnographic observations, I can verify that the absence of AAVE in the show setting is part of a broader and more consistent pattern.

Socio-cultural framing seems to be particularly implicated in the onstage avoidance of AAVE, given that DC is predominantly African American (according to the 2005 American Communities Survey conducted by the US Census Bureau, the percent of the total population in Washington, DC who are “Black or African American alone⁵” is 56%). A stigmatized variety of English within the United States, the relationships among AAVE and white “standard” varieties of English in the US is fraught with issues of power that symbolize a painful historical relationship between these groups. Further, as noted by Chun (2004), members of historically more powerful racial groups are viewed as having both the ability and possibly the motivation to reproduce and perpetuate their own higher social and linguistic position:

those in a higher position on the racial hierarchy – for example, whites – are seen as potentially having the power to reproduce unequal relations of power. This is the operative ideology that restricts white-on-non-white mocking in many public contexts, while non-white-on white mockery is often deemed as relatively more acceptable (278).

For a performance ensemble composed mainly of white, upper middle class speakers of “standard” varieties of American English, use of AAVE onstage may be viewed as perpetuating oppressive hierarchical ideologies about the status of AAVE, as will be

⁵ This number includes African Americans as well as recent immigrants from Africa.

explored in Example 2 below.

Taken from the interview with Ruthie, (who is not a member of the troupe under investigation, but a member of another of WIT's house troupes), Example 2 features Ruthie's explanation for avoidance of dialect performance onstage involving AAVE. She describes a black character, created through performance of AAVE, whom she is able to perform technically well, but who she avoids performing in front of an audience. In this interaction, I seek to explore why. Immediately prior to the interaction presented in Example 2, Ruthie had been telling me that accents in general are too "schticky" (gimmicky, contrived) for the long form format of improvisation. When she mentions her avoidance of this particular character, I follow up by asking her if this character is also too "schticky." Her answer articulates acute awareness of socio-cultural framing, which she calls "cultural context" (in line 2).

Example 2

1. Anna: And is it because of the schticky? Or is it because...
2. Ruthie: **No its because of the cultural context.**
3. I know who I am,
4. and I know what I believe
5. and I know what my prejudices are
6. but, people in the audience probably don't.
7. So there's a fine line, I think, with that.

In articulating her awareness of linguistic prejudice in the US, specifically as pertains to relationships among white varieties of English and AAVE, note Ruthie's repeated use of the pronoun "I" in lines 3-5 to navigate a position for herself among these ideologies. In the space of three lines, (3-5), Ruthie repeats the pronoun "I" 5 times. "I know who I am," "and I know what I believe," "and I know what my prejudices are," going on to

explain that her prejudices and beliefs do not involve oppressive ideologies about the status of AAVE, but that members of the audience “probably don’t” have access to this information. Her repeated use of “I” thus serves to construct a difference between Ruthie (whose ideologies are known) and broader society (whose opinions are unknowable), conceived locally as “people in the audience.” Unaware of her ideological background and experiences, audience members might not understand Ruthie’s motivation for introducing AAVE into a performance. Consequently, they might interpret her motivations for highlighting linguistic differences between AAVE and “standard” varieties through dialect performance as being motivated by cultural insensitivity.

By way of contrast, I will now consider performance of AAVE for Chris, the only African American member of the WIT community. As an African American, Chris’ use of AAVE is not interpreted as mockery. As observed by Chun (2004) the ability to use dialect performance by speakers of the variety under consideration is licensed by the extant presupposition that in-group members will not oppress their own community. In Example 3, Chris addresses this question in terms of “access,” or the topics that she as an African American can raise and the ways that she can raise them (including use of dialect performance), which her white troupe mates cannot. Note that Chris, like Ruthie, is not a member of the troupe under investigation, but another of WIT’s troupes.

Example 3

1. Chris: Being an African American,
2. That’s a card that I have in my back pocket I have disposal at all times.
3. And being a woman
4. Anna: mhmm
5. Chris: um

6. because there are things that I could as a woman and as a black person say,
7. and make fun of onstage,
8. that a lot of my cast members don't feel funny making fun of.
9. Because it's just like "ooh is do-" "can we do that?" "is that alright?" that sort of thing.

Chris' awareness of linguistic and social boundaries includes her own access as an African American woman to make fun of linguistic varieties like AAVE, and the unavailability of such varieties to her white troupe mates. She represents their shared awareness and uncertainty through constructed dialogue (Tannen 1989, to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5) in line 9 "can we do that?" and "is that alright?"

Returning now to an aspect of the quantitative patterning unexplained in the quantitative results section, recall that Michael (the only troupe member who does not identify racially as white) was the only performer whose use of dialect performance was the same in both the onstage and rehearsal contexts. As a visible member of an ethnic minority, Michael's ability to access linguistic varieties may be relatively less constrained, and his motivations for introducing linguistic differences less open to scrutiny. For this reason, it may not be as necessary for him to shift his linguistic behavior based on audience (i.e. from the rehearsal to the performance context). By contrast, his fellow performers are visibly white, and thus their relationships to power may be interpreted differently than Michael's. Although they understand their own linguistic performance to not be motivated by ideologies of repression or mockery, they also repeatedly express awareness (as we will explore) that inviting scrutiny on a socially stigmatized linguistic variety may easily be misconstrued as such.

Finally, while this discussion of (avoidance of) dialect performance has focused mainly on AAVE, many of the same issues of cultural insensitivity are raised when it comes to socially stigmatized regional and social varieties of American English as well. Southern varieties, for example, which feature prominently in the rehearsal context, and at 38% are in fact the most frequently performed, onstage occur less than half as frequently (15%). Further reasons for general avoidance of dialect performance will now be considered at the generic level of framing, given that the identity work which may be accomplished in long form may also be constrained by the lack of awareness of the audience regarding the affordances of long form improv. This lack of awareness may include, for example, that performers are not actually speaking as “themselves” onstage, and that often they intend their voice to be heard as speaking ironically. When such information can not be safely assumed as shared between performers and audience, this too may constrain use of dialect performance. These and other questions will be considered in the following section, which focuses on the *generic* level of framing.

4.4.2 Generic framing

Coupland’s second level of frame, *the generic framing of communicative events*, explores the “meaning parameters around talk in relation to what mode or genre of talk...is going on and relevant” (14). Recall from Chapter 3 that long form is not that popularly well known. As such, long form performers must often do explicit work to frame their performances and communicate the uniqueness of their style to their audience. This

section will consider long form as a genre of theatrical performance by contrasting it with short form improv and standup comedy, the two genres of comedic performance to which long form is most frequently compared. For example, Example 5 below (taken from the performance program, and written by Adam, the artistic director of WIT), presupposes an almost complete lack of awareness of long form on the part of the audience. This text presents information about their style of performance through a series of question and answer pairs, locating long form relative to *Whose Line is it Anyway?* (a well-known short form television program) and the Improv (a local venue for standup). An understanding of long form *is* achieved by means of constructing what it is *not* (not stand up and not short form)⁶.

Example 4

1. ***But where are the games?***
 2. *You're thinking of the TV show "Whose Line is it Anyway?"*
 3. *That's fun "short-form" improv; we do longform.*
 4. ***How do you rehearse improv?***
 5. *The same way you practice for a soccer game - learning skills*
 6. *and strengthening teamwork.*
 7. ***Why is there a comedy club called the Improv?***
 8. *Beats us. They're a great venue for stand-up.*
- <WIT performance program, November 11, 2005, italics in original>

Line 2 involves distancing long form performance from that of short-form, particularly the games typically performed in the short form format. In response to the presupposed question: "where are the games?" Adam gives the response: "you're thinking of the TV show '*Whose Line is it Anyway?*'" and continuing, "That's fun "short-form" improv; we do longform." Observe that there is no descriptive information actually given here about

⁶ However, given an audience entirely unfamiliar with long form, it is unclear as to whether an explanation such as this would effectively communicate distance from these other genres, or would instead suggest a connection among them.

long form, only that it is not “short-form,” it does not involve games, it is not merely “fun,” and it is not like the short form television program *Whose Line is it Anyway?* The next exchange (beginning in line 4) presupposes complete unfamiliarity with improv generally (of either format), by explaining why and how rehearsals would be necessary for improv performers. Finally, the last question and answer pair (beginning in line 8) expresses distance from The Improv, a theater in DC and a national comedy institution which is known for standup performances (not improv, despite its name). Notice that this statement “they’re a great venue for standup” does not logically entail that the Improv does not feature improv performances, but implies it, despite the fact that the author of this document knows very well that (at least in DC) there is some improv at The Improv.

I will now consider the affordances of the long form genre by considering how it actually does differ from these two (locally) salient touchstones. Considering first the genre differences between standup and long form, I will begin by observing that genre conventions of long form improv do not provide performers with the same means for expressing distance from their characters during performance as standup does. Such genre differences (as will be explored) may be understood as constraining performers’ ability to construct and convey cultural meaning. For example, in Chun’s (2004) analysis of the comedienne Margaret Cho’s use of Mock Asian during her performances, she identified aspects of the standup genre that enabled a reading of Cho’s use of dialect performance as not being racist. These include: (1) “the persona that [Cho] has

constructed as someone who is critical of racism,” and (2) “[Cho’s] overt claim that the texts are racist” (286). I will consider each of these in turn below.

First, Cho is able to express distance from racist ideologies she performs because she articulates them through a persona known to be critical of racism, a distancing which is not possible in the long form improv genre. For, while long form allows for the use of pre-established characters and personae, any given performance may feature twenty (or more) characters (many of whom will never be heard from or seen again). Thus, it would be very difficult for a performer to establish an interactional history with his/her audience in the guise of a particular character the same way that a standup comedian can (consequences of this will be explored in Section 4.3.3. to follow).

Additionally, drawing from Goffman’s (1981: 144) work on the production format of talk, we may observe that long form improv is marked by ambiguity of principalship. That is to say that while the animator (the person actually talking onstage) is not meant to be heard as speaking in her own voice (she is meant to be heard as speaking in character) she *is* the author (the person who “has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded”). Throughout performances, authorship is made obvious to members of the audience, even those unfamiliar with the artform, because it is explained repeatedly that everything is made up on the spot, in front of the audience’s eyes. However, there is potential ambiguity regarding attribution of principalship (the person who is “committed to what the words say,” “whose beliefs have been told”) in long form, owing precisely to the fact that

performers are their own authors (unlike in traditional theatrical performance, a play for example). Example 5 below, taken from the interview with Myfanwy speaks to the source of this ambiguity:

Example 5

<taken from the interview with Myfanwy>

1. Myfanwy: because no matter who what character
2. it always comes from somewhere within yourself

In a traditional theatrical performance, we know that the person animating the words is neither author nor principal because we know that there is a playwright. In standup comedy, by contrast, we suspect (and are encouraged to believe) that the speaker is in fact both. But with improv we just can't be sure. Because everything articulated is authored by the performer onstage in front of our eyes, we know that what is being said comes from some aspect of this person's experience, even when it is intended to be heard as being ironic.

Additionally, long form performers are unable to break frame to communicate distance from their characters including information about stance (Bakhtin 1986, Bucholtz forthcoming, Schiffrin 2006), which includes information about their orientation as principal towards that which they author and animate. As a result, performers may take pains to avoid animating certain ideologies so as to avoid appearing to be the principal of them. Thus, while improv provides a unique forum for tackling social and cultural issues (such as racism), ambiguity of principalship may contribute to a decision to avoid doing so.

The standup genre of performance affords performers the ability to directly

address their audience, including communicating a negative stance towards racist material directly. Chun (2004) for example, gives an instance of this from Margaret Cho, who narrated an encounter with a man who used Mock Asian to harass her in public. After animating the words of this man through use of dialect performance herself, she addressed the audience directly saying: “it was so fuckin’ racist” (282). Genre conventions of long form, however, do not allow for this type of distancing from your character or for addressing the audience as “yourself.” Once a long form performance has started, performers avoid actions that would be understood as “breaking character” or “breaking the fourth wall” (addressing the audience, making eye contact with audience, laughing, etc.). Once the audience suggestion has been taken, performers cannot and in fact are explicitly trained not to address their audience directly. Interestingly, as will be discussed in the interpersonal framing section to follow, it is precisely this type of genre convention that is more likely to be flouted at rehearsal. This seems to play a role in licensing the performance of dialects like AAVE in this context.

Turning to a consideration of how long form improv differs from short form, we may begin by observing that most performers of long form started out doing short form. Often, their preference for long form is understood in terms of their maturity and development as performers. In Example 6 below, Chris exemplifies how dialect performance is implicated in this evolution. Note that this excerpt is taken from the interview with Chris and Adam just after the comments presented in Example 3 above. Recall that while neither Chris nor Adam is in the troupe under investigation, both are

directors and performers within the company. Chris (who recall is the only African American member of the company) explains that she has come to understand dialect performance as something that belongs more to short form.

Example 6

<from the interview with Chris and Adam>

17. Chris: well, for me: it's just an **easy default**
to like play a ghetto girl or to do sort of like
18. **I mean when I first started out doing improv doing short form,**
19. The short form mentality isn't very cerebral it's very b- much like
20. "I have to get to that beat" "make the audience laugh" that sort of thing.
21. So I can't count how many times I came out as like you know, a slave,
22. Or came out and like you know,
23. went to a different water fountain and like really made the funny joke.
24. Because it's just it's funny t- you know.
25. And I think that's **so easy** to do for me?
26. That I'd stray away from that **not because I think its bad humor,**
27. but just because **I want to challenge myself** to explore things that are different.

Here Chris illustrates her awareness that "particular discursive frames posit specific affordances and constraints for interactants at specific moments" (Coupland, 2004: 13).

While she felt comfortable poking fun at slavery, segregation, and people from the ghetto in the short form format, she explains that such portrayals were understood uncomplicatedly in that genre as funny, as merely attempts to "make the audience laugh." Note in line 24, "her use of the discourse marker of involvement "you know" to achieve a shared understanding with her interlocutor: "because it's just funny, t- you know?" Thus, while her goal as a short form performer was simply to make the audience laugh (line 20), her goal as a long form performer is to challenge herself (and through her, the audience) to "explore things that are different" (line 27).

Although Chris does not comment directly on the affordances and constraints of the long form genre, she expresses her preference in long form to "stray away" from

using such “easy defaults” and easy humor.⁷ If short form is “easy” (line 25), long form “challenges” her. In line 19, stating that short form, is not “cerebral,” Chris implicates that long form must be. While she stops short of calling short form’s use of dialect performance and stereotypical caricatures “bad humor” (line 26), saying “not that I think its bad humor” she does says that she prefers something “different.” Ultimately, we are given to understand that performers distance themselves from short form through avoidance of practices such as dialect performance because long form seeks to avoid stereotyping and essentializing, practices which are ubiquitous in short form. Again, although all of the explicit identity work here is done around the short form format, it is in constructing and establishing a difference between the formats that identity work is accomplished in service of long form.

Before considering further examples, I want to just observe that avoidance of dialect performance is an ideology I witnessed in practice over the course of my ethnography in several ways. For example, several people spoke in interviews about WIT auditions where an auditioner began a scene using dialect performance, was asked to stop, and to start over “without an accent.” Additionally, as a student of improv who has come through both groups’ training programs, I can attest to the fact that I was actively encouraged to practice and develop my repertoire of accents in the classes offered in the short form format but openly *discouraged* from doing so in long form

⁷ While she does not mention dialect performance explicitly in the excerpt presented in Example 6, this passage was her response to a question about dialect performance. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that dialect performance is among the aspects of short form that Chris challenges herself to avoid.

classes. To explore the motivation behind this, Example 7 is taken from the interview with Rachel, occurring just before the excerpt presented in Example 1, where Rachel explained that they have been told to avoid dialect performance. Example 7 features my original question and the first part of her response, which includes an observation that some improvisers use dialect performance to “make fun of the accent.”

Example 7

<from the interview with Rachel>

1. Anna: But I get the feeling that like, I don't know if it's WIT or I don't know if it's,
2. there's something that is kinda charged about that.
3. Rachel: mhmm
4. Anna: doing an accent is kinda charged or loaded somehow.
5. Rachel: Oh yeah, big time.
6. Anna: can you explain that to me @@@
7. Rachel: Well yeah, I can explain.
8. Because a lot of times um, a lot of times improvisers will use accents to be funny,
9. you know, just make fun of the accent.
10. And people will laugh because “oh, you're talking different from me.”
11. You know like the old Homer Simpson,
12. “I'm laughing because that person sounds different from the way I sound.”

Observe in line 7 that Rachel interprets audience laughter as a knee-jerk response of recognition “oh, you're talking different from me,” an attitude that equates difference with cause for ridicule. Such a message is not what she aspires to convey as a performer, as signaled in the interview through negative orientation to such a reaction by aligning it with that of the uncouth and less-than-cerebral cartoon character Homer Simpson and by presenting it as constructed dialogue (identified by Clark and Gerrig 1990 as one way for a speaker to embed distance between their own voice) in line 12 “I'm laughing because that person sounds different from the way I sound.” Another way that Rachel signals her negative stance to this constructed dialogue is through use of “oh” (as will be explored in Chapter 5 to follow). Crucially, for Rachel, dialect performance is used by performers

who are willing to stoop to low forms of humor. It becomes clear that long form performers' understanding of the long form genre includes what dialect performance "means" in the long form context: if dialect performance in short form carries the meaning of being funny, in long form, it carries the meaning of *trying* to be funny.

Michael elaborates on this notion of *trying* to be funny through dialect performance in Example 8. For Michael, if people "shy away from" dialect performance in improv (line 10), they do so because "they probably think it is mocking" (line 11), and because no one in this group "wants to engage in that kind of humor" (line 20).

Example 8

<from the interview with Michael>

1. Anna: um cause one of the things that I was struck by was the use of like, accent,
2. performing an accent that's not your own
3. the use of like someone performing an accent that is not your own.
4. And I kinda noticed that at WIT that's not done as much
5. Michael <sneeze>
6. Anna: and you mentioned like WIT doctrine
7. I don't know if that's codified
8. Michael: Oh no, the emphasis, if on anything,
9. is on truth and character, um.
10. I guess yeah, accents usually, I think, I think, people shy away from it, especially because
11. they probably think its mocking. you know It's typical to do an accent that's **like a joke**,
12. you know?
13. Um, and usually when I have done an accent, it's been to **fulfill a joke** of some sort, you know?
14. Um, but yeah I don't think uh, I don't think I've seen much improv with accents.
15. probably not
16. Acce- I I know that when ever someone does like a, an accent
17. like an Italian accent or even like a Brooklyn accent,
18. it's to point that character out as being stereotypically Brooklyn or Italian or or whatever,
19. you know that character just doesn't really have anything beyond that aspect of them
20. so I think because **no one really wants to engage in that kind of humor**,
21. I think we don't usually try it very often.

For Michael, accent is used in improv⁸ solely for the purposes of pointing to a stereotype in service of fulfilling a joke, which he believes should be avoided when possible. Highlighting a social difference in long form is not simply engaged to “point that character out as being stereotypically Brooklyn or Italian or or whatever” (from Example 8, line 18) so that the audience may laugh at that difference, but as a more sophisticated type of social and cultural observation, as we will now explore. Together, Rachel and Michael’s metacommentary about dialect performance lend insight (again by negative example) into this group’s beliefs about what type of humor a long form performer should strive for. That is to say that while they describe at length what they avoid, they never explicitly state what it is that they are going for. They state that they avoid using dialect performance because they are going for something that is not ignorant (and by implication is smart), but not by making the funny thing the offensive thing.

4.4.3 The interpersonal framing of relevant communicative acts

Coupland’s last level of framing explores how speakers “dynamically structure the very local business of their talk and position themselves relative to each other in their relational histories, short- and long-term” (14). This level, the *interpersonal framing of relevant communicative acts* gets at the heart of the difference between the rehearsal and the onstage settings. Viewed at this level, onstage performances are interactions between

⁸ Michael constructs a difference over the course of his interview between “improv” and short form. It becomes clear that for him, the term “improv” has been semantically narrowed to mean only long form, reflecting his progression as a performer towards the long form format.

people (performers and audiences) who are largely unknown to one another. Rehearsals are in front of friends (and the occasional sociolinguistic researcher). One important result of the shared interactional histories and shared knowledge of genre conventions in the rehearsal setting includes that performers may feel more free to perform socially stigmatized varieties in the presence of people who understand some of the more broad social and cultural aims of the art form.

Example 9, taken from a rehearsal, features one of the few characters created by Greg through use of dialect performance, and the first character in this particular performance created through use of AAVE (many of the subsequent characters were created in response to Greg's initial character choice). This excerpt is taken from a scene in which Michael's character is standing at the backstage door to a theater, waiting to get an autograph while Greg's character insists that this performer does not give out autographs. In a later scene, presented in Example 10, Greg inhabits the same character to convince Josh's character (a young girl) also waiting for an autograph, that instead she should be asking him for *his* autograph, because he used to be famous.

Example 9

<from a rehearsal collected on January 25th, 2006 – the first occurrence of AAVE dialect performance>

1. Greg: oh we don't he don' give no autographs
2. Michael: what?
3. Josh: @@@@
4. Greg: he don' give no autographs never [r-less]
5. Michael: well, I'll just go to the next thing
6. Greg: no
7. group: @@@@
8. Michael: he'll just
9. Greg: don' matter where you go don' matter what you try to ask him to sign

Example 10

< from a rehearsal collected on January 25th, 2006 - recurrence of the character in a later scene >

1. Greg: because **my** [monophthong] autograph will fetch a fortune
2. Josh: why
3. are you are you so so famous like Frederick Douglas?
4. Greg: like Frederick Douglas!
5. I **ain't** freed **no** slaves outta **noplace**!
6. I **ain't** have no uprisings, I had an IPO
7. Josh: an IPO?
8. Greg: that's right
9. an initial public motherfuckin' offerin'

I have presented Examples 9 and 10 here to give a sense for the unfolding scene and also to give a sense of Greg's high level of ability at dialect performance. Observe that in performing this character, Greg alters his phonology to produce features of AAVE including reduction of consonant clusters for example, "don'" in lines 1, 4, and 9 from Example 9, and monophthongal [ay] in line 1, Example 10. Additionally, Greg makes use of morphological and syntactic features of AAVE throughout his performance including negative concord "don't give no autographs never" in Example 9, line 4: "ain't freed no slaves outta noplace" in Example 10 line 5. He also employs auxiliary "ain't" for didn't in Example 10, line 6. His performance encompasses several phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical aspects of AAVE, and may be said to be technically quite proficient.

Despite the fact that Greg creates and revisits this character several times over the course of the rehearsal, he ultimately (as will be illustrated in Example 11 below) evokes a "play within a play" strategy to later comment on this linguistic performance. Example 11 is taken from the scene immediately following the one seen in Example 10. Placing

himself as a member of the audience having just witnessed the scene in Example 10, through the voice of a character in this audience, Greg offers up meta-commentary on the dialect performance. His metacommentary features one perspective about how dialect performance reads to an audience, namely “stupid,” (line 1) “awful,” (line 2) and “offensive” (line 7).

Example 11

< from a rehearsal collected on January 25th, 2006 – Greg’s character is an audience member who witnessed the scene immediately prior>

1. Greg: this is the stupidest thing I’ve ever seen
2. now this is awful
3. an improv group that just tears a group
4. Josh: I’m, I’m,
5. Greg: just **tears a group of people**
6. **that they don’t even know anything about**
7. this is offensive
- <several lines omitted>
23. Greg: **it’d be one thing if they could be smart about it**
24. but rather than just **make the funny thing the offensive thing**
25. **I mean, that’s what really gets under my skin**
26. Michael: I know I agree with you I know I don’t like this show at all

Greg’s audience member character voices objection to the performance because it was not smart (line 23), characterizing it as a type of humor that relies on making the “offensive thing” the “funny thing” (line 24). Greg evokes the strategy of multiply embedding performance frames here to simultaneously articulate awareness *of* and distance *from* possible racist interpretations of his dialect performance.

While this metacommentary echoes an established group ideology as explored through analysis of interviews from Rachel and Michael, the director, in his comments following this run-through, calls attention to Greg’ use of strategy of multiply embedding frames (what they refer to as “being meta”) as something that they should avoid onstage.

His sanction speaks to my assertion (discussed above) that genre conventions in long form improv prevent performers from displaying distance from their characters. Thus while Greg can take advantage of a distancing strategy (from potentially racially insensitive interpretations of his performance of AAVE) at the rehearsal setting, performers have no such resource onstage. Thus, as we will explore in the following section, members of the improv community understand dialect performance to be a culturally significant practice. However, unfamiliarity with the genre on the part of the audience (combined with constraints which provide no means for the performer to communicate such crucial information to their audience), may result in general avoidance.

In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested that framing provides a means for understanding how language discursively constitutes, produces and reproduces cultural meaning in different contexts. This is based on Coupland's (2004) observation that "the identificational value and impact of linguistic features depend on which discursive frame is in place" (13). To explore this, I have explored frame at the socio-cultural, genre and interpersonal levels, comparing long form to other genres of theatrical performance. I have also considered the differing use of dialect performance between the onstage and rehearsal performance contexts.

Rehearsals were shown to differ from onstage performances in ways that were relevant to the interpersonal level of frame (given that they are performed for a known audience) and the generic level of frame (in that they allow performers to break frame to

offer metadiscursive commentary about performance of potentially “risky” varieties like AAVE). For example, when Greg made the choice to perform AAVE in rehearsal, he later used a strategy to offer metadiscursive commentary on it, articulating awareness of the appearance of that choice to his audience. Additionally, knowledge of relationships among linguistic varieties displayed performer awareness of the socio-cultural level of frame, because “borrowing linguistic resources to do identity work inevitably raises sensitive issues, particularly when speakers across racially-defined linguistic lines to do so” (Reyes 2005: 510).

Recalling that one of the aims of this dissertation is to illustrate the integration of variationist, discourse analytic, and ethnographic approaches, I want to highlight how this analysis of dialect performance at the socio-cultural level of frame is informed by both variation and ethnography. For example, metacommentary taken from interviews with both white and non-white performers articulated awareness that white performers cannot perform every linguistic and cultural identity of which they are aware (and technically able to perform). My interpretation of such insights is contextualized by the painstaking work of researchers in the tradition of variationist research describing the linguistic features which comprise varieties of American English, including AAVE (cf. Labov, Ash and Boberg 2006, Lippi-Green 1997, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006 and countless others). My research adds to such study of the varieties of American English an interactional component that explores how such varieties may be deployed (self-consciously) in interaction, and what such performance means to those who do so.

4.5 Discussion: Style and dialect performance

While I have shown that explanations for the more frequent appearance of dialect performance at the rehearsal setting manifest in intersecting influences at all three levels of framing, these have to do ultimately with the relationship of performers to their audience. Despite the fact that audience members are largely nonverbal during performances, improv performances may fundamentally be understood as an interaction between performers and their audience, because (as we have seen) the presence of an audience dramatically impacts the linguistic choices which performers make.⁹ Awareness of the audience has been explored in terms of displays of “double consciousness” or “a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others” (W.E.B. Du Bois 1903: 3). For example, in articulating awareness of the cultural significance of her performance, Ruthie in Example 2, gave a sense of the experience being reflected through the eyes of audience members who “probably don’t” know her beliefs and prejudices. Awareness of the audience is also reflected in Example 12 below, taken from the interview with Adam (who recall is WIT’s Artistic Director).

In Example 12, in response to my observation that there seems to be a greater potential for social commentary in improv (as compared to other types of theatrical performance), Adam calls improv a “live dialogue” between performer and audience, representing (through constructed dialogue) the responses he imagines to be cultivated in

⁹ Although analysis has focused on the linguistic choices of only one set of interlocutors (the performers), a future study would want to include interviews with members of the audience to complement these data and more fully understand both sides of this interaction.

the minds of the audience while watching an improv performance. Note that this excerpt is taken from the interview with Chris also presented in Examples 3 and 6 above.

Example 12

<from interview with Adam and Chris>

1. Anna: I see it like there's a potential in improv that isn't necessarily there
in s-
2. Other types of theater
3. Adam: well cause it's a live dialogue
4. Chris: mhmm
5. Adam: it's "oh, slavery is now in the show. Huh.
6. Chris: yeah
7. Adam: **What are they gonna do with that?"**
8. Chris: yeah
9. Adam: You know what I mean?
10. Chris: yeah
11. Adam: **The dialect thing**
12. Um
13. **It's kind of shorthand also for for referencing cultural experience**
14. Chris: mhmm
15. Adam: and that kind of thing like you know
16. "oh now suddenly like we're dealing with somebody who's poor"
17. "and [that other] character is speaking very aristocratically="
18. Chris: [mhmm] =yeah
19. Adam: so there's a class issue onstage
20. And we're playing with that."
21. Chris: yeah
22. Adam: **and that can all be communicated with simple dialect.**

In lines 16-20, Adam presents the audience member's grasp of the cultural significance of dialect performance as unfolding in three stages: 1) recognizing that dialect performance has been introduced (in line 16) "oh now suddenly like we're dealing with somebody who's poor, and [that other] character is speaking very aristocratically", 2) what this means (in line 19) "so there's a class issue onstage" and 3) why it has been introduced (in line 20) namely, to be playful "and we're playing with that." Instead of "poking fun" or going for a laugh based on essentialized stereotypes for an easy laugh, Adam believes

long form improv to be a tool for “referencing cultural experience” and challenging the audience to think about social issues including race and class.

Long form performers recognize improv as being capable of articulating cultural truths, including confronting audiences with their own difficulties in discussing issues of race. Adam does suggest that dialect performance is one way to accomplish this (as seen in line 22: “and that can all be communicated with simple dialect”). However, when it comes to tackling issues of race, it seems that this topic is most often accomplished without use of dialect performance (if the performer is white). Notice, however, that the social information which Adam portrays as being evoked through dialect performance is actually that of class, and not race. When he does imagine the topic of race to have been introduced (lines 5-7) he does not indicate that this was introduced through use of dialect performance, but merely that the *topic* of slavery had been introduced into the interaction: “oh, slavery is now in the show. Huh” followed by curiosity to see what will happen next “what are they going to do with that?” These examples of constructed dialogue do not include the three aspects of awareness on the part of the audience (what was evoked, how, and why) but instead only includes what was introduced, and a question about what will happen next. While this example is just one instance of metacommentary, Adam’s use of constructed dialogue does represent the linguistic behavior of participants.

Indeed, over the course of the ethnography I have witnessed more than one occasion in which a character would be created who was identified as being black, but was then performed with no corresponding shift in the (white) performer’s phonology.

Thus, the best interpretation of their use of dialect performance seems to be that it is best used to introduce topics like class (aristocratic/poor), but not issues of race. The choice *not* to utilize this identity potential onstage is informative about awareness of the potential significance of this linguistic and cultural practice, tempered by awareness of by whom and how this reading may be accessed. While performers believe long form to be capable of accomplishing cultural work which can include confronting an audience to recognize their own difficulties in talking about social and cultural issues (including race), difficulties at all three levels of discursive frame (perhaps most powerfully at the generic level of framing) render opening this topic through use of dialect performance problematic.

Because group members do not wish to participate in the stereotyping and essentializing of varieties that occurs in the short form format, they express distance between that style of performance and their own through avoidance of such practices. Consistently in metadiscursive commentary about dialect performance, this linguistic feature is pointed to as something to be avoided, as exemplified in comments taken from the interview with Rachel: “we were kinda told ‘don’t do accents,’” with Michael “they shy away from that type of humor,” and Chris “I’d stray away from that.” Avoidance of dialect performance thus serves a role in evoking distinctiveness from the rejected identity of short form performer. Crucially, the avoidance of dialect performance becomes meaningful only through evoking “distinctiveness” in use of this linguistic feature from that of short form performers (Irvine 2001).

4.6 Summary

If everyday linguistic performance affords opportunities for the playful negotiation of cultural meaning through use of dialect performance, improv performances expand on this potential in providing a (relatively) public space in which a variety of social consonances and dissonances may be playfully set up and discursively engaged with. These differences include linguistic, class, and ethnic differences, but seem to be evoked only when the level of enculturation of the audience includes awareness of the affordances of the genre (including attribution of speaker's voice and motivations for highlighting social difference). Dialect performance as a unit of variation has proven to be a useful tool for exploring awareness of framing at various levels, and illustrative of how framing shapes the linguistic negotiation of cultural meaning in interaction.

In addition to providing insight into the guiding research questions: 1) *what is it about dialect performance that would cause these performers to avoid it generally and 2) what is it about interactional context that impacts performers' choice to use (or avoid) dialect performance?* the combined quantitative and qualitative analysis has led to the insight that onstage, and in front of an unknown audience, the intentions of performers in highlighting social distance seem to be too easily misunderstood and dialect performance too easily misinterpreted.

Specifically, the quantitative, variationist approach to these data revealed use of dialect performance was conditioned by speakers as a reaction to changes in social settings. The overall patterning of dialect performance revealed (1) the general

avoidance of dialect performance by community members and (2) the avoidance of certain types of identity work onstage which appear to be available in the rehearsal context.

Qualitative analysis enabled me to connect these observations about patterning to macro-level processes including the significance of this linguistic feature. I view discourse analysis as having facilitated this connection in three ways: (1) by enabling me to consider dialect performance as a *unit* of variation, a relatively bigger unit of language, at a higher level of linguistic structure than is typically considered in studies of style, and (2) discourse analytic *frameworks* (in this case framing), which have provided a powerful means for interpreting the significance of the observed quantitative patterning. Finally, 3) by providing an analytical focus on interaction, discourse analysis allows the analyst to actively track style as a *process* to understand the active use of linguistic features as they are used in interaction to negotiate social meaning.

For example, analysis of metacommentary about dialect performance has provided explanations for the observed shift at three levels of awareness of the identificational value and impact of this linguistic feature. First, the observed avoidance of dialect performance onstage (particularly AAVE) was explored through *socio-cultural* awareness of salient linguistic varieties and rules for use (in the United States broadly and the specific cultural context of Washington, DC). More reasons for avoidance were considered at the *genre* level including that long form improv is a type of theatrical performance with which many audience members are wholly unfamiliar. One important

means for communicating genre differences is through avoidance of recognized practices of short form (the genre that is more widely known). Further, conventions of the improv genre (including the idea that long form performers are unable to address the audience directly, and the ambiguity of principalship) were explored as contributing to the potential misinterpretation of intentions for highlighting linguistic and social differences. Lastly, avoidance was explored in terms of the *interpersonal framing of relevant communicative acts* including the ability of an unfamiliar audience to interpret such performance when long form is framed in such a way that it is not just trying to be “silly.” Thus, avoidance of dialect performance generally (and AAVE specifically) in front of audiences whose level of enculturation as to the art form cannot be gauged seems to be a safer route to unproblematically framing their unique style of humor.

In the chapter which follows (Chapter 5), I will consider two additional discourse features (constructed dialogue and discourse markers) as units of stylistic variation. First, I will consider the quantitative patterning of these two features over the course of interviews conducted with group members. Then I will draw from a range of discourse frameworks (footing, stance, alignment, and positioning) to qualitatively explore how these features are implicated in identity construction. As I suggested in Chapter 2, Chapters 4 and 5 may be viewed together as examples of a *variation in discourse* approach to the integration of discourse and variation.

CHAPTER FIVE

OH-PREFACING IN CONSTRUCTED DIALOGUE:

IMPLICATIONS FOR POSITIONING, FOOTING, AND STANCE

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 explored style by considering dialect performance and then using framing to make sense of the observed patterning across performance contexts. This chapter captures the quantitative patterning of two additional discourse features: discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987) and constructed dialogue (Tannen 1989). Specifically, I examine the discourse marker *oh* when it occurs at the beginning of an instance of constructed dialogue, as in the following example, where Juliette talks about how little she actually knew about long form when she first started performing it.

Example 1

1. Juliette: like I understood the concept like
2. “**oh** we’re improvising a one act play!”
3. okay I get that
3. blah blah blah
4. but like I had no idea what like the actual what a Harold was
5. I’d never actually done it

Constructed dialogue such as “**oh** we’re improvising a one act play!” in line 2 above will be analyzed as an identity resource by which speakers stage aspects of their identities that they wish to make salient at specific interactional moments. Drawing from the interview context, I focus on how constructed dialogue is recruited to manage locally salient aspects of group members’ identities, including that of *long form* performer. Evoking Bakhtin’s (1986) notions of uni-directional and vari-directional double voicing, and

building out of functions of *oh* identified by Schiffrin (1987), recognition display/information receipt and subjective orientation, I suggest that *oh* works to realize the identity potential of constructed dialogue in one of two ways: 1) through *display* of information about improv or 2) through *evaluation* of information about improv to which the speaker takes a negative stance. In this investigation, I call these uses of *oh* with constructed dialogue Information *oh* and Evaluative *oh* respectively.

To explore the mechanics of how *oh* works with constructed dialogue, I make use of the discourse analytic frameworks “positioning,” “footing,” and “stance,” which will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.4. I will begin by illustrating that any instance of constructed dialogue involves a shift in *footing* (understood in this investigation as a shift in speaking role in Goffman’s production format of talk), and I will consider to what extent *oh* works to cue the listener to this shift. Next, I will explore the role of *oh* in signaling speaker *stance*, which I understand as speaker’s evaluative orientation towards the constructed dialogue. Finally, I consider how use of constructed dialogue *positions* the speaker (relative to the quoted material, to others in the interaction). I suggest that *oh* in this discourse slot is an important, and as yet unexplored, resource for *realizing* the identity potential of constructed dialogue.

The structure of this chapter will be as follows. In section 5.2, I define “constructed dialogue” and “discourse markers,” and also review the research which has been done on these features. I then briefly describe how I will apply the analytical frameworks “positioning,” “footing,” and “stance” in this analysis. In Section 5.3, I

present my quantitative findings, capturing the patterning of 406 instances of constructed dialogue collected from seven interviews with speakers. Turning then to more in-depth interactional and qualitative analysis in Section 5.4, I identify two uses of *oh* in this discourse slot, one which displays the receipt of information, and the other, an evaluative use which signals the speaker's negative stance towards the constructed dialogue. In both cases, I understand *oh* to be a resource for displaying, negotiating, and performing identity through constructed dialogue. In Section 5.5, I consider why interviews are an ideal place to observe this type of work, and in Section 5.6, I summarize my findings and provide a preview of how constructed dialogue may be viewed through the interpretive lens of intertextuality (a process of meaning-making through text) to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters (Chapters 6 and 7).

5.2 Background

Current variationist sociolinguistic research into quoted speech has focused almost exclusively on the role of quotative verbs including “like,” “go,” and “all.” Such research has indicated that massive shifts are currently in progress in the English quotative system (Buchstaller 2001, Singler 2001) and that the use of quotative verbs is implicated in the local construction of social identities, and questions of speaker style (Bucholtz 2004). However, such studies have largely neglected the role of linguistic material appearing at the beginning of the quotation as an identity resource.

Further, research on discourse markers has largely tended to ignore the beginning of an instance of constructed dialogue as a discourse slot. While *oh* has been noted to occur at the beginning of constructed dialogue (Holt 1996, Maeschler 2002), and it is recognized that *oh* can be at times the *only* signal that a speaker has shifted into another voice (Aijmer, 1987: 83), this observation, once made, has largely been left unanalyzed in previous research.¹ This oversight is striking given that *oh* has been shown to serve an important function in interaction, including managing information as well as speaker and hearer orientation to information (and towards each other) in interaction (Schiffrin 1987).

My research addresses this gap by considering the stylistic and identity functions of *oh* when it prefates quoted speech. I will suggest that such “oh-prefacing” serves both a structural and an interactional function.

5.2.1 Constructed dialogue

In the linguistics literature, there are many terms for the representation of speech and thought including “quotation” and “quotative speech” (the terms most frequently used within the variationist tradition of research), “direct reported speech” (Coulmas 1986), “direct discourse representation” (Fairclough 1992), “pseudoquotation” (Dubois, 1989), and “constructed dialogue” (Tannen 1989). Among these, I chose “constructed

¹ Maschler (2002) is the only study (of which I am aware) to analyze discourse marker prefaced constructed dialogue in her analysis of Israeli Hebrew. Maschler observes that discourse markers play an important role in multivocality or the “layering of voices” in interaction.

dialogue,” following Tannen who observed that even apparent direct quotation is “primarily the creation of the speaker rather than the party quoted” (99).

Tannen introduced the term “constructed dialogue” to linguistic researchers to emphasize that language can never be simply quoted or reported but instead is always creatively constructed by a current speaker in a current situation (105). For Tannen, even if the speaker does his/her best to present the words of another person exactly as they appeared on another occasion, once these words are uttered by a different speaker and in a different context, they cease to be “those of the speaker to whom they are attributed, having been appropriated by the speaker who is repeating them” (101). Tannen builds her understanding of constructed dialogue on Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of double voicing, and his now famous observation that:

our speech ...is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness’ varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate (89).

When an author voices a double-voiced utterance, an original meaning is heard as well as the meaning that the author is trying to add to it. Thus, double-voiced utterances bring with them a certain orientation, and speakers must choose *how* to use the evaluative tone brought by the original utterance, namely what *stance* to adopt. Two possibilities identified by Bakhtin which will become relevant to the present investigation are “uni-directional double-voicing” and “vari-directional double voicing.” While uni-directional double voicing involves using the words of others and “going along with them”, vari-

directional double voicing involves “a clash between the stance of the speaker and that of the voice being appropriated” (Bakhtin 1986, cited in Coupland 2007). Researchers have found that speakers have a range of linguistic features with which to communicate such a clash. I will briefly consider a few such studies before then illustrating how I understand *oh* to be functioning in this capacity.

Johnstone (1987) tracks tense alternation in the quotative strategy that speakers employ in narrations of encounters with figures of authority, noting that speakers often present the speech of an authority with a quotative verb in the historical present tense (e.g. *and he goes you been drinking?*) and the speech of the non -authority figure with a quotative verb in past tense (e.g. *and I said WELL....yeahhhh...I had a few beers this afternoon*). Johnstone found that such alternation between past and present tracked differences in authority, even when the speakers present themselves as challenging authority or as being more bold than they perhaps actually were in the actual encounter. Importantly, in linguistic alternations such as these, Johnstone notes that sometimes even a single shift (e.g. from past to present tense) may be sufficient for conveying the relevant identity information to the listener.

In a similar study, Hamilton (1998) identifies use of direct reported speech as a strategy for conveying negative stance. Evoking Clark and Gerrig (1990), in her analysis of narrative representations of encounters with authority figures (patients talking about interactions with doctors in postings to an online discussion list about bone marrow transplantation), Hamilton observes that directly reported speech (in contrast to indirectly

reported speech) does work to detach the narrator from the reported talk (792).

Hamilton's findings include that speakers often strategically presented the speech of their doctors directly (e.g. *the guy said "don't worry about it. See you in a year."*) and their own speech indirectly (e.g. *I told him to either give me more lidocane or get a real doctor to finish the procedure*), thereby allowing the doctors to incriminate and expose themselves in their own words, while at the same time allowing the speaker to maintain the appearance of neutrality and impartiality. Ultimately, she argues that this alternation serves to construct a locally salient identity for the poster, that of survivor (as opposed to victim).

These and other investigations into constructed dialogue (Ferrara and Bell 1995) have shown that *how* speech gets presented bears an interesting relationship to *what* gets presented. These researchers have also shown *why* this is interactionally important. However, recent inquiry from the variationist paradigm has tended to focus almost exclusively on *how* speech is presented, interpreting the *how* very narrowly, confining investigation almost exclusively to quantitative studies of quotative verbs (Buchstaller, 2001, 2006; Singler 2001; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy, 2005). While such inquiry has revealed the dramatic expansion of quotative *like*, a development that William Labov has called "one of the most striking and dramatic linguistic changes of the past three decades" (Labov 2000, p.c. cited in Cukor-Avila 2002: 21-22, as cited in Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004), the progress in understanding reported speech has been hindered by divorcing the

reported speech from the reporting context (Vološinov 1930: 119, cited in Romaine, 1991).

One notable exception is Bucholtz' (forthcoming) approach to the innovative quotative "all" which explores both what gets reported as well as the reporting context. She finds that use of quotative *all* to present the speech of another (e.g. *and these fools are all <sing song> "Let's go meet him."*) can serve as a signal to the listener that the speaker takes a negative *stance* (which she defines as affective orientation) to the constructed dialogue.

With this investigation, I suggest that *oh* may be added to this list of features that communicate information about stance towards constructed dialogue. I illustrate why discourse marker *oh* suggests itself as one way to address Vološinov's concern that we address the dynamic relationship between the speech *being* reported and the speech *doing* the reporting. Specifically, I argue that *oh* is one of a number of strategies by which speakers indicate to their listener how they are meant to make sense of these displaced voices presented through constructed dialogue in the "here and now" of conversational interaction. To understand how one discourse marker could accomplish this work, I will first consider how other researchers have built their analyses of *oh*.

5.2.2 Discourse markers

Discourse markers are "tiny words" like *oh*, *well*, *but*, *like*, and *um*, which may often go unnoticed by speakers and hearers, but which have been shown to do important work to

help structure and organize everyday conversational interaction. Schiffrin (1987) calls discourse markers “sequentially dependant elements which bracket units of talk” (31). In her foundational work on discourse markers Schiffrin (1987) begins with *oh* because this marker does not carry a lot of semantic meaning, and thus demands careful attention to *where* the marker occurs in discourse, or its “discourse slot.” To understand any discourse marker, the analyst must separate out the contribution made by the marker itself from the contribution made by “characteristics of the discourse slot in which the marker occurs” (Schiffrin, 1987: 73). This discourse slot in this analysis is the beginning of an instance of constructed dialogue, which I call “*oh*-prefacing” following Heritage (1998, 2002).

Oh has been called a “change of state token” (Heritage 1998). It enacts a moment of registration of a change in the state of knowledge of the person producing it, or as Aijmer (1987) describes it, gives “access to the mental processes going on in the speaker’s mind” (61). In everyday conversational interaction,” *oh* occurs as speakers shift their orientation to information” (Schiffrin 1987: 74), indicating for example that information is new or unexpected. In the following example, taken from the beginning of the interview, Josh tells me that he is from Columbus Ohio, which I had not known. My receipt of this new information is accompanied by use of *oh*:

Example 2

- | | |
|----------|---------------------------|
| 1. Josh: | um uh anyway um I uh |
| 2. | grew up in Columbus, Ohio |
| 3. Anna: | oh you’re kidding |

We may observe that in this example, *oh* works to draw attention to the fact that Josh's being from Columbus is new or unexpected.

In drawing participants' attention to how information is managed within the interaction, *oh* has been analyzed as drawing the attention of both speakers to the interaction itself, making evident a "very general and pervasive property of participation frameworks: the division of conversational labor between speaker and hearer" (Schiffrin 1987: 286). Thus, an *oh* can alert the listener to the focus of the speaker's attention which then in turn becomes a candidate for the hearer's attention.

Going forward with this analysis, we will consider how aspects of this "canonical" or core interactional function of *oh* operate when *oh* prefaces constructed dialogue (a discourse slot that has itself been shown (Clark and Gerrig 1990) to play a key role in displaying solidarity with the audience).

5.2.3 Positioning, footing, and stance

When using constructed dialogue, speakers shift from animating their own voice to that of a figure in a story world. Thus, following Tannen (1989), I will describe any shift into constructed dialogue as a "footing shift," because any instance of constructed dialogue involves a change in the "alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (Goffman 1981: 128). I suggest that *oh* accompanies such a footing shift at important moments for

displaying information about identity, specifically locally salient identity categories including long form improviser.

In this analysis, I make sense of “footing” as it is related to “positioning” and “stance” by reference to Schiffrin’s (2006) interpretation and application of these concepts. Footing, for Schiffrin, “deconstructs the speaker’s production format in relation to talk” (208). As explored above, this becomes relevant in the present exploration because any shift into constructed dialogue involves a footing shift into animating a figure in the story world. Positioning, a related concept, is argued by Schiffrin to “deconstruct speaker’s identity production in relation to what is said.” For the purposes of this investigation, positioning will be understood in terms of how speakers locate themselves relative to texts and interlocutors presented through constructed dialogue. Positioning is implicated in identity, and seems to be at the core of what constructed dialogue can do for a speaker. Speakers *position* themselves relative to constructed dialogue to communicate information about what they believe and therefore who they are. Specifically, when it comes to constructed dialogue, *stance* is one key way that positioning can be accomplished and the identity potential of constructed dialogue realized. Following Bucholtz (forthcoming), I consider *stance* in terms of *subjective* aspects of the speaker’s relationship to content, illustrating that *oh* is one of a number of strategies that speakers draw upon to convey information about their orientation to the information being authored.

To reiterate: positioning is key to understanding how constructed dialogue works as an identity resource but *footing* and *stance* (both of which I will show to be communicated by *oh*) help to *realize* it. To build this analysis, I will first consider the quantitative patterning of *oh* prefaced constructed dialogue.

5.3 Quantitative findings

The data analyzed in this chapter come from seven audio recorded interviews collected with each of the seven members of this troupe. Recall from Chapter 3 that interviews were all approximately an hour and a half in length, and were loosely structured around the format of a sociolinguistic interview, but modified to access locally salient identity categories by asking about community-specific understandings of style (in the sense of a “way of doing something”). Questions addressed improv as a style of theater, the long form style of improv, the style of play in DC, the style of play of the troupe under investigation, and the individual styles of performers. Much of the identity work in this interactional context is negotiated around the locally salient social identities of performer, instructor, director, audience member, etc, with particular attention to achieving a shared understanding of long form improv (and how it differs from short form).

To identify instances of constructed dialogue, I observed a distinction between “direct” and indirect” discourse representation (Clark and Gerrig 1990, Coulmas 1986, Tannen 1986). Hallmarks of direct discourse representation include a deictic shift and use of a quotative verb. While a shift into constructed dialogue does not always involve

either of these elements, there is almost always an “explicit boundary between the ‘voice’ of the person being reported and the voice of the reporter” (Fairclough 1992: 107).

Additionally, indirect discourse representation can often be easily identified by presence of the conjunction *that* (i.e. “he said **that** he had to go home, instead of he said ‘I have to go home’”). In other words, constructed dialogue was identified, following Clark and Gerrig (1990) as instances where speakers *demonstrate* what was said rather than describing it (direct as opposed to indirect reported speech). I do not include instances of indirect reported speech in my quantitative tabulations.

From the seven interviews, I collected a total of 406 examples of constructed dialogue, which is the data set for this investigation. For every example of constructed dialogue, I noted the presence or absence of a discourse marker in the first slot of constructed dialogue (the preface), coding also for one social factor (the speaker) and four linguistic features (the quotative used, whether the speaker was presenting his/her own voice or the voice of someone else, whether the constructed dialogue appeared to represent speech or thought, and finally, whether this was the first or subsequent use of constructed dialogue within each particular story world). Percentage data reveals that overall, discourse markers were used to preface constructed dialogue 41% of the time (168 tokens) or 8% of the entire data set of 406 tokens.² Of these, *oh* was the most

² The *oh* was determined to be “inside” the quote based on impressionistic observations about pause and intonational contours, and based on previous work, such as Raymond and Heritage (2006) who observe the production of *oh* within the same intonational contour as the comment or question that follows to be crucial to the “achievement” of a preface (702).

frequently used (33) discourse marker, followed by *well* (22), *ok* (16), and *hey* (11).³

VARBRUL, the multivariate statistical analysis program used to account for the patterning of linguistic data used in Chapter 4 was unable to account for the patterning of factors in this case. This determination was based on Singler's (2001) article: "Why you can't do a VARBURL study of quotatives and what such a study can show us."

According to this article, there is a major shift occurring in the quotative system in American English such that *say* and *go* make different linguistic claims than *like* and *all*. Singler suggests that there has been a "shift in domain of usage" such that with *like/all* "the spirit of what is reported has become more important than the letter" and that "when speakers use *like* or *all*, they are not even claiming that the speech in question ever actually occurred" (264). However, according to Singler, things work differently for *say/go*. In the case of these quotatives, in response to quoted speech, the listener may reasonably ask "and what did he say when you said that?" For the discourse analyst, such distinction is hardly a problem given that constructed dialogue entails an a priori assumption that what is being presented is a construction of the current speaker and can never be an accurate representation of what was spoken on another occasion. However, in quantitative statistical tabulations, such considerations pose the problem of interaction among factor groups.

³ Note that not any discourse marker can preface any instance of constructed dialogue. This investigation is simply a first step in determining where *oh* can and cannot occur (i.e. its "envelope of variation," see section 4.3.1., as well as where it is more or less likely to occur (i.e. the constraints on its occurrence). Future studies will need to consider the range of constraints (i.e. semantic and prosodic) conditioning the occurrence of discourse markers in this discourse slot.

Indeed one such problem concerns the traditional categories coded by researchers of constructed dialogue, in the form of categories like speech vs. thought. One of the most important findings about how quotative *like* has been changing over time involves its apparent shift from an introducer of thought to an introducer of speech (Ferrara and Bell, 1995; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy, 2004). While in the present study I wanted to look at the interaction between quotative verbs and quotative content, it became quickly evident to capture both with VARBRUL is difficult, given that a quotative verb like *say* is more likely to occur with speech than a quotative like *think*, for example. Thus there is an interaction between verb used and categories like speech vs. thought that makes statistical calculations using VARBURL problematic.⁴

Singler does not suggest, however, that quantitative analysis should not be attempted with quotative constructions. Quite the contrary; Singler insists that quantitative studies of quotative verbs are revealing, saying that “in many, but not all instances, the distribution of quotatives is so sharply delineated that the sophistication of a statistical program is unneeded, with raw frequencies alone being sufficient” (265). With percentage data, we may be able to observe what is interesting and relevant concerning quotatives. Thus, I present percentage data for the groups in which the numbers are illustrative, maintaining that ultimately the most interesting story seems to lie in the compelling ways that constructed dialogue is used as a linguistic resource in

⁴ This is in addition to concerns that any discourse analyst would feel in making such binary divisions as speech vs. thought, in instances of constructed dialogue, when it is instead the creative and strategic ways that speakers employ constructed dialogue in everyday interaction and for what identity-constructing purposes that matter and not whether this was “actually” said and by “whom.”

interaction (as will be revealed through discourse analysis in the Qualitative Analysis section to follow).

Quantitative analysis was undertaken to explore a specific aspect of how *oh* works with constructed dialogue, namely, to explore a possible connection between use of *oh* and choice among quotative verbs. Because *oh* has been observed to at times be the *only* indication that a speaker has shifted into another voice (Aijmer 1987: 83), the first hypothesis that I wanted to test about this construction was whether *oh* occurred most frequently with the zero quotative, assuming that *oh* might perhaps take over some of the function of the quotative verb.

I categorized tokens of quotative verbs as follows: no use of a quotative introducer (sometimes called “zero” or “null” quotative), use of *say*, use of some “other” quotative verb (e.g. *think*, *shout*, *yell* and *decide*), or use of *like*.⁵ Since “like” was by far the most frequently used quotative strategy, I made the decision to divide tokens of *like* further into three additional categories: the well-researched *be + like*, *like* with a different quotative verb (e.g. *think like*, *say like*) and finally, “Ø V + *like*” occurrences of *like* when there is no accompanying quotative verb (e.g. *it was always like a set schedule like “ok this run’s over now we have this many weeks”*). In making these decisions to consider *like* where it occurs alone, I suggest that it is functioning like a quotative, following Singler (2001) who suggests that such uses of *like* are “indeed quotative,” that they are “developing complementizer status” (262). Singler calls these uses of *like*

⁵ Although I originally coded for *think*, there were too few tokens (6), none of which occurred with *oh*.

“putative quotatives” and Romaine and Lange (1991) call such uses of *like* “focus markers,” introducing examples that the listener is invited to imagine are “possible things similar in form and content which could have been intended” (247). Previous research has not considered uses of *like* in these distinct ways, but the difference in patterning of these additional uses of *like* suggest that further research along these lines is warranted.

Table 5.1 presents the overall distribution for quotative introducers for the data set overall, and Table 5.2 the quotatives used with the subset of (33) *oh*-prefaced tokens.

Table 5.1: Percentage Use of Quotative Introducers for the entire data set (n=406)

	zero	<i>say</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>be + like</i>	<i>other V + like</i>	\emptyset V+ <i>like</i>
n	83	54	35	160	22	52
% use of this quot overall	20%	13%	9%	39%	5%	13%

Table 5.2: Percentage Use of Quotative Introducers for *oh*-prefaced tokens (n=33)

	zero	<i>say</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>be + like</i>	<i>other V + like</i>	\emptyset V+ <i>like</i>
n	5	1	2	11	9	5
% of set of <i>oh</i>-prefaced tokens	15%	3%	6%	33%	27%	15%

While *be + like* is (by far) the preferred quotative strategy in the data set overall, accounting for 39% of the data set (159/406 tokens), among the subset of *oh*-prefaced tokens, it is instead *be like* and *other V + like* that are the preferred quotative strategies (and not zero quotative as anticipated). Of the 33 instances of *oh* prefaced tokens, a vast majority (25 or 75%) occur with one of the three *like* quotatives, so it is decidedly not the case that *oh* prefacing is an alternative quotative strategy to use of a quotative verb.

Instead, these findings seem to suggest that instead of working as an *alternative* strategy for marking the shift into constructed dialogue, discourse marker *oh* works with quotatives (in particular, the *like* quotatives). But how? This question will be answered by looking more closely at the interactional contexts in which *oh* prefacing occurs.

One piece of quantitative patterning that does seem particularly suggestive is the use made by individual speakers of constructed dialogue and specifically *oh*-prefaced constructed dialogue. Percentage data is suggestive that an individual speaker's style may be characterized by the use that is made of both constructed dialogue and *oh*-prefacing, as presented in Table 5.3 below. Consider for example, that of Josh's 99 tokens, 13% are *oh*-prefaced, as compared to Greg, for whom *oh*-prefacing comprises only 1% of his total repertoire (although he does use constructed dialogue frequently).

Table 5.3: Percentage use of CD and of *oh*-prefaced CD by speaker

speaker	Josh M (28)	Myfanwy F (32)	Rachel F (28)	Juliette F (25)	Michael M (24)	Greg M (27)	Nunez M (31)
Total tokens of constructed dialogue	99	100	46	29	43	69	20
# <i>oh</i> - prefaced	13	10	4	2	2	1	1
% <i>oh</i> - prefaced	13%	10%	8%	7%	4%	1%	1%

As may be seen, while speakers like Josh and Myfanwy both use a great deal of both constructed dialogue and *oh*-prefaced constructed dialogue, speakers like Nunez use very little of either strategy in an interview of roughly the same length.

It should be noted that while all of the interviews were approximately the same length (an hour and a half), the recording equipment malfunctioned in the interview with Juliette, rendering more than half of the interview unintelligible⁶. Despite this, enough of the interview was useable so as to be able to discern a general pattern of Juliette's tendencies in use of constructed dialogue and *oh*-prefacing. For example, while it seems obvious that Juliette is a heavy user of constructed dialogue and might have ranked up with Myfanwy and Josh in terms of overall use, she does not display the percentage use of *oh*-prefacing that they do (only 7% of Juliette's total tokens are *oh*-prefaced, as compared to 13% for Josh and 10% for Myfanwy).

The differential use of *oh*-prefacing by speaker suggests itself as an interesting starting point for qualitative analysis. If speakers make different use of this strategy, why is this so? What can *oh* in this construction accomplish for speakers? What does it *mean* in this discourse slot? I explore these questions in the following section (Section 5.4), focusing almost exclusively on examples contributed by Josh, who as we have seen, distinguishes himself as being the most frequent user of constructed dialogue, and also as having the highest percentage use of *oh*-prefacing. I do not suggest that Josh's use of the feature is unique, simply that he exploits it the most productively, and that his use of *oh*-prefacing is illustrative of its broader potential use.

⁶ The interview with Juliette which was included in the calculations for this chapter was the second interview. As mentioned in the introduction, there was a third interview collected with her, however, this was conducted very late into the writing process and thus was not able to be included in quantitative tabulations.

5.4 Qualitative analysis

Within these data, I discovered two general uses of *oh* when used to preface constructed dialogue. I call these Information State *oh* and Evaluative *oh* respectively, following the functions of *oh* identified by Schiffrin of *oh* as recognition display/information receipt and *oh* as implicated in subjective orientation.⁷ Of these, Information *oh* is by far the more frequently occurring (22 out of 33) tokens. As I will illustrate, I take this *oh* to be the more basic use of the marker in this discourse slot both because it is observed to occur more frequently and because it is used in ways similar to the core use of the marker as identified in previous research (involved in the management of information, cf. Schiffrin 1987). I will discuss each use of *oh* in turn, identifying their different functions through analysis of examples used in the interviews. A list of all of the examples of *oh*-prefaced constructed dialogue is given in the appendix.

Before I begin, an important observation concerning this particular discourse slot is that in any instance of constructed dialogue, there are at least two levels of interaction simultaneously. First, there is the level of the interaction between the participants in the interview, but there are also the myriad interactions that the narrator may stage within the world of talk (the “story world”) over the course of the interview. As Goffman (1981) explains, there are two animators “the one who is physically animating the sounds that are heard, and an embedded animator, a figure in a statement who is present only in a

⁷ One difference between these two uses of *oh* is the intonational contour, which for the purposes of this analysis, I have observed only impressionistically, but acoustic measurements will be an important future step. Evaluative *oh* tends both to be longer in duration and to have a decidedly falling pitch contour that enables the reading of evaluation.

world that is being talked about, not in the world in which the current interaction is taking place” (149).

To refer to these two layers of interaction, I evoke Goffman’s production format of talk and the speaking roles of author animator, principal, and figure. For example, given an interview with Josh, when he uses constructed dialogue, he “animates” a “figure” (a character in the story world), and while it may be argued that he is consistently the “author” of what he presents (because in the interview, he has selected the sentiments being expressed), the question of who is the “principal” (the person whose position is established and whose beliefs are expressed by these words) may be somewhat unclear. In fact (as we will observe) Josh may choose to animate figures to which he as principal takes a negative stance. As Goffman reminds us, “the same individual can rapidly alter the social role in which he is active” (145). As I will show with this analysis, *oh* seems to play a role in helping the listener sort out precisely such information about the speaker.

5.4.1 *Oh* as marker of information management

As mentioned above, instances of *oh* involved in managing information comprise the vast majority of instances of *oh*-prefaced constructed dialogue in the data set (22 of 33 tokens). Example 3 features two instances of this use of *oh* as Josh talks about the extent to which he is aware of the audience when he is onstage performing. Here he presents two examples of his thoughts onstage, both of which are prefaced by *oh*.

Example 3

1. Josh: A, like “do I notice people in the audience?”⁸
2. like yes
3. I notice like “*oh* I know that guy” like “*oh* I like that girl” like whatever
4. but it’s not at least for like me personally
5. I’ve gotten to the point where I can like throw myself in the moment
6. and not
7. so I think about it maybe in the wings or maybe like for a second if I hear
8. someone’s laugh that I know
9. but I don’t
10. Anna: make that connection
11. Josh: for a second and but then it’s gone

Within the world of the story, *oh* displays the figure Josh’s receipt of new information (noticing people in the audience while he is onstage). He presents two such moments in quick succession, first as he notices a guy “*oh* I know that guy” and then as he notices a girl “*oh* I like that girl.” In both examples, *oh* occurs at the boundary between Josh animating his voice and animating a figure in the story world. I suggest that *oh* may play a role in helping the listener to sort out and identify these as separate moments of recognition. In the data set as a whole, *oh* does not preface every moment of recognition of new information, nor does it always occur when the animator jumps from figure to figure within the story. However, this example is a good illustration of how *oh* can serve as what Agha terms a cue to “reinforce the voicing contrast” (42).

We may note that the instances of constructed dialogue in Example 3 serve to illustrate Josh’s overall point as principal. At this stage in the interview, he is presenting

⁸ This first piece of constructed dialogue as part of Josh’s response is a revoicing of my original question to him. As may be seen, this revoicing provides an opportunity for the speaker to reposition himself with respect to the content of the question, and in this respect, as in others mentioned below, interviews, with their question-and-answer format, are better sites for displaying (and studying) identity work than is often assumed. While the identity work occasioned by revoicing questions would make for fruitful study, full investigation of this issue is beyond the scope of this study.

the identity of an experienced performer, one who is “in the moment” when he performs, someone who is not distracted by stimuli external to his scene, for as he says in line 5, “I’ve gotten to the point where I can like throw myself in the moment.” Thus, if he notices something like a person he knows in the audience, he thinks about it “for a second and but then it’s gone” as he describes in line 11. *Oh* works with constructed dialogue to illustrate this, for if Josh is trying to express that moments of audience recognition onstage would be brief, his use of constructed dialogue exemplifies this by *being* brief. *Oh* displays the moment of recognition, followed by a fleeting representation of his thoughts. This vivid illustration ultimately serves an identificational purpose, that of presenting Josh as an experienced and seasoned performer. Thus we may say that *oh* works at both levels of conversational interaction, marking the receipt of information within the world of the story and assisting in the display of this information at the level of the conversational interaction.

Example 4 below is Josh’s response to my request for information about his troupe mates’ individual styles as performers. He goes through members of the troupe individually, and when he comes to Myfanwy, he illustrates her style by presenting an imagined interaction between himself and Myfanwy onstage:

Example 4

1. Josh: she’s very savvy about like playing to a scenario
2. so like I come out and start this way like and she can think very quickly like
3. “oh, this would be a good way to play against that” you know like um

Again, *oh* accompanies a footing shift, the shift into animating the figure of Myfanwy. Here again, *oh* displays the figure Myfanwy's receipt of new information in the story world (the recognition of Josh's having come onstage and made a character choice). Josh gives this example to illustrate that Myfanwy responds very quickly, which Josh animates in line 3, "**oh**, this would be a good way to play against that." I suggest that *oh* is a particularly vivid way to convey the quickness of her response by establishing the moment of her recognition of new information. Thus, at the level of the interview interaction, *oh* again helps to display information about Myfanwy (in this case that she is a quick thinker).

Example 5 provides one last example of Information *oh*. In this example, Josh presents his dawning recognition of the depth of long form. As discussed in Chapter 3, most performers of long form start out as performers of short form, and many performers describe their growing appreciation for and understanding of long form as a "progression." Talking about his college troupe, Josh takes me through that process for him, telling me that his maturation as a performer was accompanied by this important realization that there is more to improv than just short form games. As in Example 3, *oh* accompanies the shift into animating the figure of an earlier version of himself.

Example 5

1. Josh: that's when I started to kind of understand like
2. "**oh**" like "that's really cool there's there's a lot"
3. Like "I kinda see how this could work
4. and there's a lot to this
5. and that's really interesting"
6. So it just kinda piqued my interest
7. and that
8. that's when we started to get more into long form

Josh illustrates individual aspects of his dawning realization through constructed dialogue in lines 2 through 5: “that’s really cool” “I kinda see how this could work,” “there’s a lot to this,” and “that’s really interesting.” Interestingly, this series of realizations⁹ are prefaced with *oh*.

Recalling that one of the goals of the interview (as understood by interviewees) is to make sure that I arrive at an understanding of long form improv, an important aspect of this understanding (which is often misunderstood) is an acknowledgement of the depth of this art form (in the eyes of practitioners). Animating this younger version of himself when he begins to realize this depth is crucial information, and *oh* marks this information as *new* to Josh at that time, but it is also a particularly vivid way of reiterating this important piece of information should I (as ethnographer) have failed to understand it over the course of my time with the group. Had I also fallen into the trap of overlooking or underestimating the art form, Josh presents an example of himself when he too underestimated it, suggesting its value by marking the moment that it “piqued” his interest. Thus, *oh* plays a role not only in making sure a shared awareness of long form is achieved, but also in accomplishing the relevant positioning for the speaker, assuring that identity information about Josh as a long form performer is conveyed.

⁹ Note that I have indicated a break in quotation marks several times, specifically when Josh uses what I am calling in this analysis Ø V +*like*. In many cases, single instances of constructed dialogue are presented in fragments, interrupted with quotative verbs, an *um*, filler *like*, or in many instances, discourse markers that index the hearer (*you know*, or *I mean*). For coding purposes, I considered examples such as these, where there is no deictic shift to be single instances of constructed dialogue.

In each of the previous examples, *oh* occurs as Josh displays important information about long form, including that a seasoned performer is “in the moment” (Example 3), that a good performer can quickly incorporate and react to new information (Example 4), and that long form improv has a great deal of depth (Example 5). While each of these pieces of information is crucial information for understanding long form, each also in turn accomplishes identity work for Josh as a performer of long form improv.

Additionally, Examples 3-5 also illustrate Josh’s linguistic competence regarding the functions and meanings of *oh*. That is to say that if Josh puts *oh* into the mouth of a figure he is animating (to convey the receipt of information), this reflects his own (if subconscious) knowledge of the interactional function of this discourse marker. Finally, these uses of *oh* with constructed dialogue also display speaker’s competent manipulation of multiple levels of interaction simultaneously. I suggest that this ability to manipulate multiple levels of interaction is another aspect of this community’s style cultivated through practice of improv (a style of theater that requires the performer to jump into and among characters without props or costumes). Just as dialect performance was analyzed in Chapter 4 as one of the ways these performers display communicative ability by jumping into and out of character, so too constructed dialogue displays competence at jumping into and out of figures in the story world.

To summarize, Information *oh* in instances of constructed dialogue has been shown to do important identificational work by displaying information (much in the same way that *oh* displays information in everyday interaction), but it has not been observed to

evaluate it, which will differ for the examples to follow. At both levels of interaction, *oh* provides a glimpse into the mental processes of the speaker, allowing the hearer to recognize (and interpret) moments of receipt of new information.

5.4.2 Evaluative uses of *oh*

To explore the mechanics of how Evaluative *oh* accomplishes identity work, I will begin by walking through an example taken from the interview with Myfanwy. In Example 6 below, two uses of *oh* help to convey information about Myfanwy's negative evaluation of the aggressively competitive environment among improv theaters in Chicago, given in response to my question about what it is like to be an improv performer in DC.

Example 6

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1. Myfanwy: | it's nice because it doesn't put a lot of pressure on you |
| 2. | and the bar is not very high @@@. |
| 3. | There's not like competition you know like in Chicago, |
| 4. | like people are just like |
| 5. | "Oh our theater is better than your theater" |
| 6. | "Oh I think the way you train people is stupid." |

To capture the attitude of DC performers, Myfanwy contrasts it against the voices of performers in Chicago who exemplify a more competitive attitude. Crucially, the voices of the performers from Chicago are prefaced with *oh*. However, as I will illustrate, these uses of *oh* function differently to the ones analyzed as Information display.

Example 7 features another example of Evaluative *oh*, taken from the interview with Josh addressing a common challenge for performers, that of overthinking while onstage (what improvisers call being "in your head"). Improvisers believe the best ideas come when you stop thinking and allow yourself to let go and "be in the moment."

Overthinking (and by extension thinking generally) is often talked about as something negative, understood as taking a performer “out of the moment,” preventing him or her from being truly engaged and present to partners in the scene. In Example 7, Josh navigates a position for himself relative to ideologies about “thinking” by describing a workshop that he took with Mick Napier, a famous improviser from Chicago (and the author of *Improvise*).

While Josh presents a few voices in this example, note the use of *oh* to cue his listener how to sort out and interpret them. Those to which he adopts a negative stance are prefaced with *oh*, while no discourse marker is used for those to which he takes a positive stance.

Example 7

1. Josh: one thing that he said was <teeth suck>
2. that I thought was really interesting was like
3. people say like “oh I wanna stop thinking” and you know
4. “I don’t wanna be in my head I wanna think out there”
5. and but I mean really if you stop thinking you’d be dead
6. it’s pretty hard to like stop thinking
7. so one thing I do is like
8. I like if I: accept the fact that I am going to be thinking
9. but I get myself thinking in like positive ways
10. so rather than thinking like “oh I’ve gotta be funny,
11. I’ve gotta make this scene funny,
12. I’ve gotta think of the right thing to say”
13. I’ll think like other things that’ll
14. you know like “[ø] you know what? I’m gonna I’m gonna start this scene happy”
15. or “I’m gonna walk into this scene leading with a certain body part”
16. Anna: mhmm
17. Josh: see where that takes me
18. Anna: right
19. Josh: or “I’m gonna just open my mouth and start making a vowel noise
20. and like see what word comes out”
21. you know stuff that kind of like throws you forward and into the moment you know

Because struggling with thinking tends to be more of a problem for younger, less experienced players, Josh, in presenting his thoughts about thinking (and in presenting his connection to Mick Napier), is able to do some identity work around being a seasoned performer.

Specifically, note that this example contains two instances of Evaluative *oh*. The first in line 3, prefaces a naïve or counterproductive way that some performers talk about thinking: “**oh**, I wanna stop thinking,” “I don’t wanna be in my head I wanna think out there.” In lines 5 and 6, Josh promptly displays that this wish is unrealistic if not impossible when he says “but really if you stop thinking you would be dead” and “it’s pretty hard to like stop thinking.” He goes on to argue that it is better to accept that you will be thinking and devote your concentration instead to thinking in positive ways. Importantly, in addition to stating his negatively evaluative stance explicitly, he also conveys this misalignment by prefacing the misconception with *oh*.

We see the evaluative use of *oh* most clearly in the latter half of this example, when Josh presents two voices side by side, one to which he (as principal) adopts a negative stance, and the other to which he takes a positive stance. In addition to cuing his stance overtly by saying “rather than thinking X I will think Y” he also uses *oh* to preface the wrong way to think: “**oh** I’ve gotta be funny, I’ve gotta make this scene funny, I’ve gotta think of the right thing to say” (lines 9-14), followed by examples (introduced without a discourse marker) of the right way to approach thinking, namely: “you know what? I’m gonna I’m gonna start this scene happy” and “I’m gonna walk into this scene

leading with a certain body part” and “I’m gonna just open my mouth and start making a vowel noise and like see what word comes out” (lines 14-20). Thus, Josh presents himself as a performer who has struggled with thinking but who has arrived at a new level of appreciation for thinking, a positive kind of thinking that advances a scene rather than making it more difficult. By helping to strategically convey negative stance to the “wrong” pieces of constructed dialogue, *oh* does work to navigate a position for Josh among these voices, constructing the identity of a seasoned performer. This, in turn, negotiates an alignment with me, leading to the achievement of a common understanding about the role of thinking in improv, and thus about improv itself.

To understand how *oh* could accomplish this, let us return to Heritage (1998) and Schifffrin’s (1987) analyses of *oh* in everyday conversational interaction. Both scholars have identified an evaluative function of *oh* building out of the canonical function, given that as speakers display their *awareness* to information, they also display their *orientation* to information. Thus, if *oh* is usually used to indicate a shift of attention, these researchers suggest that evaluative uses build on this to indicate a *marked* shift of attention. For Schifffrin, evaluative uses of *oh exploit* the “change of state meaning of *oh*” (100). In her words: “it is because *oh* makes accessible speaker / hearer assumptions about each other’s subjective orientations toward information, that it can display speaker / hearer alignments toward each other (100). When a speaker displays orientation to information, this speaker also displays orientation to their interlocutors, thus participating in a negotiation of alignment to their listener.

In examples where *oh* prefaces constructed dialogue, as well, *oh* conveys crucial information about how the speaker feels about the content of the constructed dialogue, in other words, information about speaker *stance*. Consider how in Example 8, to convey other important information about improv, Josh presents a misconception about improv through constructed dialogue prefaced with *oh*. At this point in the interview, I had been describing a piece that I had heard on National Public Radio with Alan Alda, who mentioned that his improv training had been invaluable in helping him face difficult situations in his life (for example dealing with a schizophrenic mother). While Josh seems to want to agree with this assessment of the value of improv, he points out that a statement like this would likely be misunderstood by someone who doesn't understand the art form. Hearing that improv prepares you for dealing with difficult situations in life, people might assume that this is owing to the practice of beginning shows with an "ask for," the audience suggestion that gets the show started. For Josh, the value of improv goes much deeper than this. He values improv because it cultivates teamwork, listening skills, and acceptance through collaboration, and because it is based on a philosophy of trust and support.

Example 8:

1. Anna: like "I could deal with this because I'm an improviser or I was trained as an improviser"
2. Josh: yeah um
3. I really want to hear like what he was talking about
4. but it it just uh
5. I think that's true
6. Josh: it's not like
7. it sounds kind of like stupid to say cause it sounds like you're saying like
8. "oh well I've learned
9. I know how to deal with situations that don't
10. that I am not expecting"

11. you know, that and “because I go on stage and I don’t
12. Anna: yeah
13. Josh: know what inspiration the audience is going to give me” or
14. it’s not that
15. it’s just more of like the philosophical underpinnings of improv
.....
22. the best improvisers are just like hyper-aware of like themselves
23. right?
24. interpersonal dynamics
25. and just rather than these people who are like trapped in their narrow thing of like
26. “get out of my fuckin’ way I’ve got to go to work”

Josh is negatively oriented to this way of underestimating the connection between life and improv because for him, the connection is much deeper, owing to the “philosophical underpinnings” of the art form, as he mentions in line 15.

Unlike the instances of Information *oh*, there is a difference in the above examples of Evaluative *oh* between voices at the different levels of interaction. While the figure in the story (the person who misunderstands improv) is committed to the proposition that improv is simply useful because “you never know what the audience is going to suggest,” Josh as author takes a negative stance to this way of underestimating improv. Evaluative *oh* conveys that there is a clash between the stance of the speaker and the voice being presented. Recalling Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of “double-voicing”, this original utterance brings with it a certain orientation. When Josh uses it for his own purposes, that original meaning is heard as well as the meaning that he is trying to add to it. The audience of such vari-directional double voicing, therefore, hears a version of the original utterance (which brings one point of view) *and* also hears the author’s evaluation of that utterance from a different point of view.

5.5 Discussion: *Oh* and identity in the interview

I have suggested that an important difference between Information *oh* and Evaluative *oh* is the distinctive way they function at different levels of interaction. To summarize my observations, Information *oh* displays the figure's receipt of information within the world of the story, but it also displays information at the level of the conversational interaction. These examples of constructed dialogue illustrate something important about this figure, about improv, or both, but crucially, these *ohs* do not appear to "mean" something different in the story world and at the level of the conversational interaction. The author does not express a strong evaluative stance towards the material presented. In other words, the double voicing is uni-directional.

By contrast, Evaluative *oh* is implicated in examples where the two voices have very different stances toward the material being quoted. Evaluative *oh* involves vari-directional double voicing. For each of the instances of evaluative *oh*-prefacing, *oh* occurs at a moment of the interview when the author defines his or her own way of understanding and practicing improv by animating the voices of those perceived to misunderstand improv (or to have a naïve understanding of the art form). In Example 6, this involved the overly competitive attitude of improvisers in Chicago. In Example 7, it was people trying to stop thinking or trying too hard to be funny, while in Example 8, it was that improv is useful only because it teaches performers to deal with unanticipated audience suggestions. To show who they are as performers, Josh and Myfanwy express negative stances towards these positions. Within the world of the story, however,

Evaluative *oh* appears to do something different. Inside the story world, the figure's orientation to this text does not appear to be overtly positive or negative. Rather, this *oh* seems to convey the figure's subjective orientation in the form of intensity. This speaker is "so committed to the truth of a proposition that future estimates of his or her character hinge on that truth" (Labov 1984 – cited by Schiffrin 1987: 95).

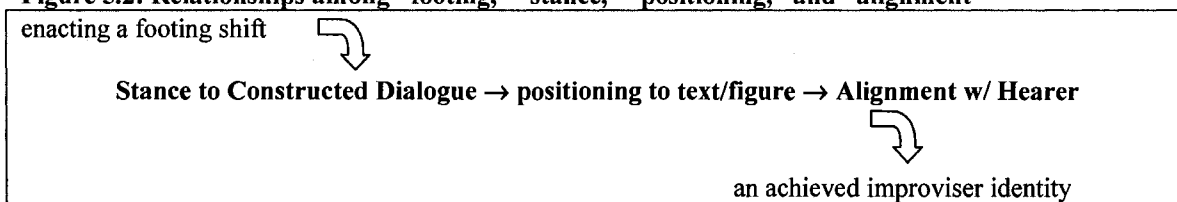
To explore this process, I have evoked the concept of "footing" which (as discussed in the background section of this chapter) is also related to "positioning" and "stance" (cf. Schiffrin 2006). The differences among these concepts have to do with the nature of the various relationships among speaker and texts being expressed. For example, when a speaker enacts a *footing shift* by animating a figure in the story world, this involves the relationship the speaker has to the talk in the terms of Goffman's (1981) production format of talk. Beyond the question of "who is speaking" is "how does the current speaker feel about what is being said?" Speakers make use of a variety of cues to convey such information, which will be understood in terms of *stance* in this investigation. Following Bucholtz (forthcoming), stance will be explored in terms of subjective aspects of the speaker's relationship to content, including how the speaker thinks and feels about the constructed dialogue. This conceptualization of stance¹⁰ expands on Schiffrin's (2006) treatment which addresses "the epistemic basis of the speaker/content relationship" (208), which might include claims that the speaker makes

¹⁰ My decision to understand stance by focusing more on speaker's *subjective* orientation to content (rather than epistemic) was motivated by the data themselves, and it is worth noting that the ways that *oh* works with constructed dialogue in terms of stance may be somewhat unique to this construction.

about how certain he or she is about the information, his/her rights to access it, how it came to be known, etc.

Stance in this analysis has been understood as part of a process of *positioning* (van Langenhove and Harré 1999), helping to locate the speaker relative to the material being presented for the purpose of conveying information about identity. Positioning is understood as a way in which people dynamically produce and explain everyday behavior (their own and that of others). Constructed dialogue is an important strategy for accomplishing such *positioning* or identity work. For example, achieving a shared orientation to the source text works to achieve alignment between the speaker and the hearer (Josh and I) involved in the interview interaction. Note that for the purposes of this investigation, I understand alignment to be a type of positioning, one that refers specifically to positioning between the speakers (whereas positioning can refer to relationships among texts, between speakers and texts, etc.). Figure 5.2 below presents a schematic of my understanding of this process:

Figure 5.2: Relationships among “footing,” “stance,” “positioning,” and “alignment”



Specifically, this investigation has illustrated that constructed dialogue may be productively explored to better understand the enterprise of constructing and managing identity for speaker design approaches to style. While *oh* is not the only strategy that

speakers have at their disposal for achieving these interactional goals (enacting a footing shift, facilitating hearer attribution of voice, and conveying information about stance), *oh*'s role in this construction is significant. While discourse marker prefacing has been all too frequently overlooked in both variationist and discourse analytic studies, as I have illustrated by means of this analysis, it plays an important role in the negotiation of identity in interaction.

Additionally, I wish to observe that the interview context is particularly interesting for the exploration of linguistic construction of identity, because in many ways, the entire interaction is organized around the negotiation of meaning and identity. Eckert (2000) has noted that interviewees bring certain expectations to the interview event and they also may have specific interactional goals. In the present investigation, interviews were specifically designed to elicit information about improv, and were presented in this way to interviewees. Much of the observed identity work in this interactional context is negotiated around locally salient social identities (performer, instructor, director, audience member, etc.), but with particular attention to achieving a shared understanding of the important differences between long form and short form. *Oh* was observed to occur at strategic moments where important information about identity was being communicated. Both Information *oh* and Evaluative *oh* were seen to be used either as illustrations of an important point or to position the speaker (against an important misconception, a naïve or counterproductive way of thinking, or an embodiment of something they would never say). In other words, *oh* accompanies a shift

into constructed dialogue when important information about improv is being displayed, at important identificational moments.

Heritage's (2002) work on *oh* has revealed that *oh* also plays an important role in negotiations among speakers for claims of "superior knowledge of and /or rights to assess the matter under discussion" (201). A future study of this construction will need to involve interactional contexts which are not so constrained with regard to the types of speaker/hearer alignments that are likely to occur. For example, in the context of a sociolinguistic interview, it is unlikely that an interviewer will challenge the interviewee's claims to knowledge or assert too strong a claim for the interviewer's own rights to assess the matter under discussion. Given that *oh* plays an important part in just this type of negotiation, it must also be studied in a context in which speakers and hearers have as wide a range of available alignments and positions as possible.

5.6 Summary

This investigation, by bringing together quantitative and qualitative insights on constructed dialogue, discourse markers, and quotative verbs has explored how *oh*-prefacing in instances of constructed dialogue may be explored for an understanding of the negotiation of identity in interaction. While only 8% of the constructed dialogue in the entire data set was shown to be *oh*-prefaced, this strategy was shown to have an important identificational function that was not easily observable in quantitative tabulations. As was the case for a strategic variation of tense observed by Johnstone, a

single use of *oh* may be sufficient to convey the relevant social information to the listener.

Through qualitative analysis, I illustrated how *oh* works with constructed dialogue to provide speakers with two means of constructing and negotiating identity in interaction: information display and evaluation. For both uses, *oh* was shown to work with constructed dialogue to facilitate hearer attribution of ownership of voice, and to interpret the meaning of the constructed dialogue at the level of conversational interaction.

Additionally, I have illustrated how use of *oh* in constructed dialogue provides access to speaker competence in using *oh*, which here includes the ability to not only maneuver two levels of conversational interaction, but to track different stances and communicate positioning at the different levels. This includes competence with both uni-directional and vari-directional double voicing and the ability to negotiate and employ footing shifts for identity purposes. I suggest that it is precisely this aspect of style that is cultivated by the practice of improv, and art form that demands facility with jumping into and out of characters largely using only language.

Recall that I began this exploration by considering whether use of *oh* in constructed dialogue might be quantifiable and analyzed as a stylistic device. Although numerical patterning revealed that speakers do make different use of these features (suggesting that future investigation is warranted), quantitative findings were somewhat inconclusive, suggesting that it is not so much the percentage use of this strategy, but the

strategic use of *oh* with constructed dialogue in interaction that is significant. The choice of whether or not to preface an instance of constructed dialogue with *oh* may seem to be a small one, but we must remember that any linguistic choice occurs at the expense of and in combination with many other possible choices. We have observed that *oh* often occurs at the beginning of constructed dialogue at moments in interaction where important information about identity is being displayed. Remembering, also, that “no single explanation of any discourse feature is sufficient” (Johnstone, 1987: 33) it is hoped that this research may add to variationist sociolinguistic research into quotatives by illustrating how units like discourse markers and constructed dialogue may be meaningfully incorporated. Crucially, this work is intended to reiterate the importance of considering the *content* of the quoted material as well as the *context* in studies of quotation. To achieve the fullest understanding of how constructed dialogue works as an identity practice, we must consider *how* information is presented, as well as *what* gets presented, *when*, and *why*.

In the last chapter we considered dialect performance as a unit. In this chapter, we have shown how constructed dialogue and discourse marker prefacing in instances of constructed dialogue also work as quantifiable units for the ongoing investigation of language in the construction and negotiation of identity. To the previous chapter’s exploration of the analytic concept of framing, we have added the analytical concepts “stance,” “footing,” and “positioning.” We have drawn from these concepts to show how discourse analytic concepts may enhance studies of style.

Chapter 6 (to follow) will consider Intertextuality, focusing on another very salient aspect of this group's style, the playing of intertextual games. After reviewing and applying this discourse analytic framework, Chapter 7 will consider how dialect performance and constructed dialogue may themselves be re-examined through the interpretive lens of intertextuality. Intertextuality will be examined as a process of evoking shared text and displaying shared orientation to that text for the purposes of fostering group rapport, ratifying group membership, and conveying group values (Norrick 1997). I suggest intertextuality as an analytical lens through which aspects of this group's style may be understood as part of a broader process of identity making through text.

CHAPTER SIX

SPONTANEOUS INTERTEXTUAL GAMES:
ENTEXTUALIZATION AS A STYLISTIC RESOURCE

6.1 Introduction

While Chapters 4 and 5 approached the integration of discourse and variation from a *discourse in variation* perspective (Schiffrin 2006) by capturing the systematic patterning of discourse-level features (among members and across different interactional contexts), this chapter adopts a *variation in discourse* perspective, considering aspects of this group's style that define them and distinguish them from other groups. Specifically, this chapter focuses on one very salient aspect of this group's style (as observed by non-members): the playing of what I will term for this discussion "spontaneous games." Among a group of improv performers, any conversation can suddenly, spontaneously, and at times almost imperceptibly, shift into the playing of a highly structured and elaborate group game based on what we will explore in this chapter as "prior texts" (Becker 1994). Identifying intertextuality (relationships among texts) as a central component of these games, I track the emergence of spontaneous games collected from sixteen interactions recorded backstage, focusing on the intertextual reshaping utilized to create and play them.

Adopting Becker's (1994) notion of prior text, which calls attention to the fact that everything anyone says has a history, I identify the different prior texts which are

evoked and the particular kinds of intertextual reshapings which occur as part of the playing of these games. Taking Becker's observation that "social groups seem to be bound primarily by a shared repertoire of prior texts" (165) as a starting point, I consider how these games develop valued improv skills, which, in addition to being an important aspect of group style, are important for being a fully participating member. I suggest that choices about *what* texts are reshaped and *how* they are used are key to the construction of game-frames and also for demonstrating community reaffirmation, community building, and member socialization. Further, I illustrate how the achievement of these games depends on a collaboratively negotiated frame shift and the collective negotiation of rules which I understand as illustrating the "how" or the process of intertextuality. By exploring these two aspects of intertextuality, this investigation helps us not only in understanding additional aspects of this improv group's style but additionally, contributes to the conceptualization of intertextuality including how it can be operationalized as a discourse feature.

6.1.1 An example

Many non-performers to whom I have spoken as part of this ethnography have told me that it can be difficult at times to follow interactions among improv performers, that they always seem to be "on" or that there are too many "inside jokes." Indeed, when I first observed this group backstage, I was aware that at times their conversations would become very hard to follow (as seen in my field notes in Example 1, Chapter 1). Of

course, as with any group, interactions involve enjoying shared access to a repertoire of prior texts. However, as I will illustrate, many interactions which appear to be “inside” jokes may instead be understood as the unfolding emergent spontaneous game.

I will give a quick example here to give a sense of what one of these spontaneous games looks like. Example 1 below was recorded backstage as group members were hanging out before a show early into their Spring 2006 run of performances. When Rachel reads aloud a quote from the performance program that she thinks is silly, group members decide to take turns passing the program around, playfully reading aloud more quotes they deem to be silly. When it came to Greg’s turn, he was handed the program, looked inside, and read aloud the following:

Example 1

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 1. | Greg: | <as if reading aloud from the program> “poop poop scoopedy doop” |
| 2. | Group: | @@@@@@@@ |
| 3. | Rachel: | I’d like you to show me where that was |
| 4. | Greg: | what? it’s totally in there! |
| 5. | | come on that’s totally in there! |
| 6. | | play the game! |

What struck me was hearing Greg tell Rachel to “play the game” in line 6. This comment struck me because I had not realized that a “game” had developed, and because it seemed to be a rather confrontational response to Rachel’s understandable request for verification of the validity of this prior text (like Rachel, I doubted very much that “poop poop scoopedy doop” was actually printed in the performance program). I was somewhat perplexed until I went back to transcribe and re-examine this interaction, finding that I had missed the group negotiation of a set of rules surrounding the reading of these performance program quotes. Consequently, I misunderstood that both Rachel’s

challenging of the veracity of the text and Greg's directive "play the game" were themselves game "moves" (these and other game components will be described in greater detail below). Because the unfolding intertextuality had eluded my attention, I was left out of the game (and consequently the group) entirely in this interaction.

I have included this example to give a sense of the subtlety surrounding these spontaneous games and how easy it can be to "miss the ball" interactionally. Moreover, I have sought to illustrate how membership in this group requires a developed ability to actively track and utilize intertextuality in interaction, which is a resource for reaffirming individual and community identity.

6.1.2 Structure of the chapter

I begin this chapter (Section 6.2) by discussing some important theoretical concepts and associated definitions including Goffman's (1961) observations about games, and my own interpretation of "intertextuality" for the purposes of this study. I then compare the spontaneous games which emerge to warm-up games, the "occasioned activity" (Goffman 1963) backstage, what group members should be doing backstage. In Section 6.3, I analyze three spontaneous games, considering for each how the shift into the game frame is accomplished (and signaled) and how the negotiation of the rules proceeds, with an eye to the relationship between these processes and intertextuality. I begin with a game featuring explicit cueing of the shift in frame, moving finally to games in which both the frameshift and negotiation of the game rules are accomplished less explicitly,

and which rely more on recognition of the unfolding process of intertextuality. As part of my analysis, I will consider *what* gets evoked as part of the playing of these games, (both prior texts that come from the local interaction and those which are external to it), and also explore *how* these texts are reshaped. Finally, in Section 6.4, I will consider *why* this is significant, suggesting that these games reveal shared prior texts and interactional skills (heightened listening, pattern recognition) that are highly valued and an important part of community building and community reaffirmation, in addition to serving a role in member socialization.

6.2 Background

Drawing on Goffman's (1961) work on the creation of game worlds, I suggest that the emergence of a spontaneous game depends upon two things: 1) a collaboratively negotiated frame shift and 2) the collective negotiation of the rules that stipulate *what* texts will be evoked and *how* they will be used. I will understand the first piece of this process (the frame shift) by exploring the mechanics of game frames, which will lay the foundation for the discussion of the *what* and *how* of intertextuality which I relate to Goffman's *realized resources* and *transformational rules*.

6.2.1 Goffman's work on games

Erving Goffman (1961) explores game worlds in order to advance his understanding of social interaction because for him, "games seem to display in a simple way the structure

of real life situations” (34). For Goffman, game worlds exist in the real world, but they are surrounded by a barrier which contains the game world while allowing for some properties from the real world to be selectively included. In other words, “games place a ‘frame’ around a spate of immediate events, determining the type of ‘sense’ that will be accorded everything within the frame” (20). Within the world of a game, three mechanisms work to maintain the frame: *rules of irrelevance*, *realized resources*, and *transformation rules*. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

In order to play a game, players need to know which aspects of the “real world” are relevant, and which should be ignored. The *rules of irrelevance* tell players which “irrelevant visible events will be disattended” (25). For instance, in a game of checkers, the material of the checker would be a detail which is understood to be unimportant, and a bottle top or a coin could be used to play the game just as easily as the “real” game pieces that came in the box. For the purposes of this investigation, in playing an intertextual game, the rules of irrelevance can include which aspects of language have been selected as significant, and which can be ignored. For example, recall that in Example 1, to play the game, it was irrelevant whether “poop poop scoopedy doop” was actually printed in the performance program; members have agreed for the purposes of playing the game to pretend that it was.

However, many of the events, roles, identities, locations, etc. which exist in the real world do make it into the world of the game. These are the *realized resources*, the real world resources and events that are used to create the world of the game. The ways

in which these resources get changed are then the *transformation rules*. For example, recall that in Example 1, performers were using the performance program (a physical object from the real world) as a realized resource. While they appeared to be reading out of it, they were not actually reading the text that was in front of them. Thus, the transformation rules included the spontaneous creation and apparent reading aloud of texts that would appear as if they were printed inside. Thus, to play this intertextual game, players achieved agreement as to what did and what didn't exist within the game world, what was to be transformed, and how. The success or failure of the game itself reveals how fully group members have come to share understanding of all of these aspects. If group members pay attention for the right aspects of language, the unfolding interaction itself serves as a roadmap to tell group members how to navigate intertextuality within the world of the game.

For the purposes of this investigation, I define a “game” as being characterized by a shift into a game frame (whether or not this be explicitly cued), consisting of at least one (transformational) rule beyond that of everyday conversational interaction. While it is not necessary that the frame shift and all the rules be recognized and understood by all group members, I will consider only games that involve at least two participants, who demonstrate recognition of the frameshift through implementation of the rules by contributing “moves” to the game.

Thus, one final aspect of Goffman's work on games relevant to this discussion is his observation that a “move” is the basic activity of a game. A move is not

communicated like a message, (or performed like a task), but rather, is something that is “made” or “taken.” Moves become relevant to the present discussion because the moves in the games under analysis are themselves instances of intertextuality, because they help the analyst in identifying what aspects of language are important, and because they work to both create and sustain the game frame.

Incidentally, while writing this chapter, I became aware of an example of a game happening right in front of me, which I include here briefly by way of illustrating that the potential for a game is ever present for those who are paying attention. Working on my laptop while waiting in an airport, I became distracted by a man and his young son making a bit of a clamor as they were rushing past me down the terminal. Looking up, I noticed that the father was striding with purpose and that his son was at the same time jumping and careening around. I leapt to the conclusion that the boy was simply being naughty, and was about to return back to my writing, when I noticed that a boy about the same age as the one careening by was watching in rapt attention, intently focused on *how* this boy was careening around. Looking back then more carefully, I noticed (for the first time) that the hallway was carpeted in alternating swatches of grey, black, and white carpet, and that the “careening” boy had constructed a set of rules for walking based on the color of carpet. These rules were (as best I could quickly discern them): when walking on black carpet, take small, rapid strides; when on grey carpet, take longer strides, as long as your legs will enable, and when you come to white carpet, jump!

Rather than merely being naughty, this boy seemed to indeed be trying to hurry to keep up with his father, but was constrained by adherence to his set of “carpet walking rules.”

I looked back to the boy at my gate who was now craning his neck so that he could continue watching the pair disappear down the carpeted terminal. When I saw him suddenly smile, I speculated that he too had grasped the set of rules, and I knew that the three of us (whether we all knew it or not) now shared the transformative rules for this spontaneous carpet walking game. While most people there at the airport had failed to notice that a game had ever occurred, much less how the different colored pieces of carpet could be used as realized resources, the “careening” boy had transformed these resources, reading the pattern as a set of rules for walking. Because the second boy was attuned to the possibility of the emergence of a game, he recognized the frameshift into “play,” and then had only to pay close attention to *what* resources would be transformed and *how* in order to grasp the rules.

For the improv group under investigation, in the same way that the second boy was (as indeed was I) rewarded for craning his neck in order to be able to extrapolate the “walking on carpet” transformation rules, when improv group members pay close attention to interaction, and recognize text that can be (or has been) extracted and transformed to be utilized as a constitutive game rule, they are rewarded by being able to engage and “play the game.” While language is of course available to each of us as a resource; what characterizes this group’s style is the way in which they are attuned to

using language as a creative interactional resource. The rest of this chapter is designed to uncover exactly which aspects of language group members are paying attention to.

6.2.2 Intertextuality

Intertextuality refers to the relationships among texts. Drawing from scholarship of the literary theorist M.M. Bakhtin and linguist Norman Fairclough (1992), for this investigation, I define intertextuality as a process of referring to, drawing upon, or reshaping earlier texts within the context of a later one, a process which changes all texts in the process. For the purposes of intertextual analysis, that which constitutes “text” may be broadly conceived, encompassing anything from actions, gestures, images, to written or spoken discourse taken from face-to-face interaction or transmitted via media television or movies. In this project, “texts” will be considered as written and spoken material that are bounded in some way, such that when they become embedded in some later text, they are identifiable and recoverable as to source.

My understanding of intertextuality is influenced by linguist A.L. Becker (1994), who explains that in “recontextualizing prior text,” we “shape old text to new contexts” to create new meanings (173). Additionally, my understanding of the term has particular focus on the *process* of intertextuality, built out of the work of Bauman and Briggs (1990) for whom intertextuality involves: *entextualization, decontextualization and recontextualization*. Under this model, for intertextuality to occur, some chunk of language must be made into a “text” or *entextualized*, which is often only recognizable as

having been rendered extractable once it has been removed from its interactional setting or DE-contextualized, and in turn RE-contextualized into another setting.

To illustrate the process of entextualization, I will give a recent example from my own life involving my use of the word “ostensibly.” After I used the word “ostensibly” several times over the course of one afternoon in conversation with classmates, one classmate, Laura, called attention to my use of this term as evidence of the fact that I was currently in “dissertation writing mode” and thus prone to using too many big words when I talk. Later that afternoon, at a restaurant with the same friends, when the topic of my recent absence from several social events came up, I used the word “ostensibly” to reference the shared understanding of my currently being in the dissertation writing stage (to humorous effect).

When Laura first called attention to my use of “ostensibly,” this stopped the flow of conversation momentarily, rendering that which had been a part of conversational interaction into an extractable “text.” “Ostensibly” became *entextualized*, and was something that could be *decontextualized* (removed from its current interactional context) and *recontextualized* (used again in a different context) for the purpose of indexing shared understanding about the dissertation writing process (as well as reaffirming community membership in a group of PhD students). As I have suggested, for intertextuality to be successful, the recontextualization must be in some way recoverable or recognizable as a recontextualization (entailing knowledge of when, where, or by whom the prior text was previously uttered). I call attention to this property of

intertextuality to isolate the indexing of shared social meaning as integral to the social functions of reaffirming community.

Improv performers are familiar with the process of intertextuality, as may be seen in this description of the task of an improviser written by Keith Johnstone, an important founding figure in the world of long form improv:

The improviser has to be like a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future. His story can take him anywhere, but he must still **'balance'** it and give it shape, by **remembering** incidents that have been **shelved** and **reincorporating** them. Very often an audience will applaud when earlier material is **brought back** into the story. They couldn't tell you why they applaud, but the reincorporation gives them pleasure (1979: 116).

For Johnstone, remembering, shelving, and reincorporating involve paying attention, noticing "incidents" (texts for our purposes) that can be used again later in the performance. Heightened awareness is important precisely for this reason, so that opportunities for reincorporation do not pass by. Over the course of the performance, then, the performer hangs on to "incidents," shelving them (remembering them), removing them from the original interactional context in which they were used (*decontextualizing* them), and looking for an opportunity to use them again (to *recontextualize* them). For improvisers, some of the funniest moments arise as the result of such skilled reincorporation of prior text, and this process is understood to be at the heart of what makes improv funny.

As an example, one particularly funny scene from a performance recorded in the Spring run involved a college recruiter from “State” attempting to convince a young athlete to accept his offer to come to play for his institution (this interaction was also described in Chapter 3). To “heighten” the scene, or to create dramatic tension, the performer playing the student athlete countered that he had received an offer from another school as well, calling attention to the first performer’s choice to name his character’s home institution “State,” by giving the second institution an equally generic-sounding name, that of “U.” Calling attention to “State” in this way, the second player simultaneously entextualized “State” and “U,” which provided fun opportunities for playing with the homonymy of the pronoun “you” and the abbreviation for university.

Thus, as the negotiation between the recruiter and the athlete unfolded, the athlete tried to put off the recruiter by saying “U is offering me a freshman start” (meaning that if he took U’s offer, he would not have to wait until he is a sophomore to participate with the team) to which the recruiter asked “who is?” to which the response was “U is.” As this line was spoken, there was a momentary pause, a fleeting smile, and a shared moment of recognition of the game they had discovered and the “texts” with which they could play going forward. All that performers had to do was create opportunities for recontextualizing “U” as many times as possible in ways that exploited the homonymy, resulting in a number of very funny lines including “U can’t give you what you need” and “we can provide you so much more than U can.” By paying attention to this

entextualization, players found a way to reincorporate these texts throughout the unfolding scene, much to the delight of the audience.

However, reincorporated material need not come from the current interaction. Indeed most of the intertextuality I observed to occur as part of performances involved references to media, including one very funny moment I came across during the transcription process which involved Michael walking onstage in silence, sitting down and miming turning on the television, when suddenly (and with concern in his voice), he turned to the other person onstage saying “do you think Carrie made a mistake by going back to Mr. Big?” (referring to the dramatic series finale of the popular US television show *Sex and the City*, in which the main character Carrie decided to go back to her on-again-off-again boyfriend, referred to in the show as Mr. Big). After this intertextual reference by Michael, the audience erupted into lengthy and helpless laughter, which depended on recognition of the prior text, and Michael’s unexpected reincorporation of this shared prior text that had been shelved for almost two years.

This display of Michael’s skill in incorporation was funny because of his character’s obvious emotional involvement with the television show *Sex and the City*. However, it was also funny because it seemingly provided a glimpse into the vast range of prior texts available to Michael for recontextualization at any given moment. Thus, recalling Bauman’s characterization of performance as “resting on an assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative virtuosity” (2004, 9), one such skill that improv performers are often called on to display in performance is an

ability to be intertextual on command. As I have been suggesting, this ability involves two facets of intertextuality: having access to a range of prior texts to evoke, and having skill at the process of recognizing opportunities for reincorporating. The spontaneous games that form the basis of this analysis require awareness of and facility with both.

6.2.3 Warm-up games

To analyze these spontaneous games, I will begin by contrasting them with warm-up games, another type of game that group members play backstage. Warm-up games are the “occasioned activity” (Goffman 1963) of backstage time, the activity that group members are “supposed” to be engaged in, as evidenced by the fact that this group always played at least one warm-up game before going onstage. I will focus on one of the group’s favorite warm-up games, *What are you Bringing?* suggesting that shared knowledge of the constitutive rules of such games beforehand greatly facilitates the shift into the game frame. I do so in order to illustrate how the collective negotiation of a shift in frame and spontaneous creation of constitutive rules in a spontaneous game may be understood as a considerable interactional achievement.

What are you Bringing? is a warm-up game that I observed this group to play very frequently. The game begins any time that one member of the group addresses the question “what are you bringing?” to any member of the group, which is understood to mean: *which of your improv skills will you be focusing on tonight to make our show successful?* The respondent answers by contributing a description of one aspect of

improvisation that they will focus on in the performance. Possible answers are drawn from the shared set of knowledge about the skills that are most important for performing improv well. For example, “listening” is widely understood to be an important skill, and almost every time that *What are you Bringing?* is played, at least one person will mention listening skills, for example “patient listening” (April 21st), “acute listening” (March 18th), and “lots of listening” (March 18th). Once one person has been asked, the game does not end until each person in the group has been asked and has contributed something to the interaction. Group members all recognize “what are you bringing?” as a trigger of the game frame, and for the duration of the game, members follow suit by engaging in the proscribed manner to bring the game to its conclusion.

However, in the case of spontaneous games, the shift into the game frame is more difficult to accomplish, owing partly to the fact that the constitutive rules are not pre-existing but are instead emergent in interaction and thus not always immediately recognizable as rules. The constitutive rules of spontaneous games are collaboratively and collectively created, emerging turn by turn as the interaction unfolds. The game will only come into existence if others pick up on the transformations and utilize the realized resources as established (or if they can change them and get the rest of the group to go along with the change as we will see). Focusing now on language, I will explore how shared heightened linguistic awareness leads to use of language (specifically entextualization) as a realizable resource in three spontaneous games.

6.3 Realized resources and transformational rules

In this section, I analyze three games (of twelve observed) taken from 16 recordings collected backstage, which I call *Change the Quote! OK, Mr. Questions*, and *I'll Send you the Link*. I will consider each of them in turn by exploring two aspects of intertextuality: 1) *what* texts are drawn upon (the realized resources / prior texts) and 2) *how* they are transformed (the transformational rules/ process of intertextuality).

Recalling that in order to accomplish a spontaneous game there must be both a frame shift as well as a collective negotiation of rules, I will begin by considering how the frame shift is accomplished and communicated, beginning with *Change the Quote!* in which the frame shift is cued explicitly, moving ultimately to *I'll Send you the Link* in which both the negotiation of the rules and the shift into the game frame are achieved less explicitly, relying instead on the use of realized resources (prior texts) and the application of transformational rules (the process which I analyze as intertextuality). Although each game will be described in much greater detail to follow, I will explain each briefly here. Additionally, the realized resources and transformational rules utilized in the playing of these games are summarized in Figure 6.1 below.

Change the Quote! (described earlier in the introduction to this chapter) is a game in which group members pass around the program and pretend to read aloud testimonials from students about WIT's training program (improv classes). However, the transformational rules of this game came to stipulate that quotes be invented, so what ends up being read aloud are a series of increasingly improbable testimonials.

OK, Mr. Questions, is a playful transformation of the warm up game *What are you Bringing?* drawing from the “rules of improv” as shared prior texts. In this game, players do the opposite of everything they have ever been taught about how to do improv well. The result is a thoroughly chaotic train wreck of an improvised interaction.

Finally, *I’ll Send you the Link* is a highly complex game that evolved out of a conversation about a video of a comedy sketch found on the internet. While the first contribution to the conversation was a description of an actual video, the subsequent contributions consist of increasingly improbable videos which group members promise to send around via e-mail.

Figure 6.1 below presents the interaction external realized resources (prior texts), transformational rules (process of intertextuality), and the result of applying the transformational rules as “game moves” characterizing these games.

Figure 6.1: Spontaneous Intertextual Games considered in this analysis

Game	<i>Change the Quote!</i>	<i>OK, Mr. Questions</i>	<i>I’ll send you the Link</i>
WHAT Realized Resources: Interaction external prior texts	performance program knowledge about WIT training program	<i>What are you Bringing?</i> game the “rules” of improv	Young Chuck Norris skit from SNL videos on the web
HOW Transformational Rules: Relationship between prior text(s) / recontextualization(s)	imaginary	opposite	imaginary
RESULT Game moves	imaginary quotes about WIT’s training program	opposite of “rules” = bad improv	imaginary web videos

While it would be impossible (and likely not of much analytical value) to identify *all* of the prior texts used as realized resources in the playing of these games, it is possible,

however, to isolate and explore the role of key prior texts involved in the creation of the transformational rules. Note that while the texts presented in the chart above may all be characterized as *external* to the present interaction, another important resource for group members are *texts* which have been entextualized from within it. As I proceed with this analysis of intertextuality, I will consider the role of both types of texts: interaction-external and interaction-internal.

6.3.1 The *Change the Quote* game

Change the Quote emerged after Rachel read aloud a quote from the performance program (a student endorsement of WIT's training program), complaining that the same quote had been in the program for too long and needed to be replaced with a new one. Although the game evolved into a rather complex set of rules, it began very simply with Josh suggesting that group members follow suit and read aloud quotes from the program that they thought needed to be changed. Observe in Example 2 below how Josh explicitly cues the shift into the game frame by explicitly stating this transformational rule (pass around and read aloud) of the realized resource (the program) in lines 12-14.

Example 2

- | | | |
|-----|---------|---|
| 1. | Rachel: | okay, can I just say I hate this quote? |
| 2. | | ok |
| 3. | | I think it's the dumbest quote I have ever seen |
| 4. | Greg: | what is it? |
| 5. | Josh: | read it |
| 6. | Rachel: | "this class helped me find a piece of myself I was not aware had been lost. |
| 7. | | Thank you" |
| 8. | Group: | @@@ |
| 9. | Rachel: | change the quote! |
| 10. | Greg: | yeah, it's pretty lame |

- 11. Rachel: I'm tired of this quote
- 12. Josh: let's pa- pass around the program and read
- 13. Group: @@
- 14. Josh: bad WIT quotes
- 15. Group: @@
- 16. Nunez: out of context

Thus far, the rules of the game are quite simple: the prior text is tangible, and the way it will be transformed quite obvious. There will be a very simple one-to-one relationship between prior text and its recontextualization. As the game progresses, however, this relationship between prior text and recontextualization shifts and new locally realized resources (prior texts entextualized from the interaction itself) get activated.

Because Rachel began the game, Josh (as the person to her right in the circle) is the next to go.¹ After Rachel hands the program to him, he reads aloud: "this class helped me realize that I am gay...Thank you WIT." Although he seems to be playing the game by finding a quote that speaks to the revelatory power of WIT's improv classes, and intertextually links this contribution to Rachel's (ending the quote with an expression of thanks to WIT), Josh's quote is nevertheless problematic in terms of the transformational rules as established. Group members know this quote to be fabricated (based on their shared knowledge of both what is actually in the performance program, and what is likely to appear there). For his violation of the transformational rules thus far negotiated, in Example 3 below, Greg and Nunez challenge Josh saying "that's not in there" and "show me where that is."

¹ So many improv activities happen by going clockwise around a circle that group members often sit or stand in a circle unconsciously and contribute to a conversation sequentially without realizing it.

Example 3

1. Josh: um <smack>
2. this class uhm
3. helped me realize that I'm gay
4. hhh
5. and I did not even know that I was
6. Greg: that's not in there
7. Josh: Thank you WIT
8. Nunez: show me
9. show me where that is
10. Greg: yeah and [I'm worried that] after that comment Josh made
11. Josh: [play the game]
12. Greg: that we're gonna have a lot of gay stuff in our show

Greg and Nunez' reactions, although playful, are mock challenges to Josh's use of realized resources and his application of the transformation rules. This metacommentary operates from outside the game frame, drawing attention to the way that Josh's contribution changes the relationship between the prior text and recontextualization. Additionally, in line 10, Greg worries aloud that Josh's contribution will now influence their subconscious minds, suggesting that their onstage performance will now involve the theme of homosexuality because of what he said. This particular playful way of thinking about the influence that backstage conversations have on onstage performances is a common trope for this group, and this formulation, "I'm worried that after X's comment about Y..." is taken from a conversation occurring only a few minutes earlier. Itself an intertextual reference, this phrase becomes transformed and utilized as a game move going forward.

Josh ends this sequence of frame-external metacommentary by contributing one final piece of (frame-external) metacommentary, in line 11 "play the game." By calling

attention to the game frame, his comment thus re-establishes it, propelling the game forward to the third contributor, Nunez. Recalling from Chapter 3 that there is special significance to the number three, referred to within improv circles as the “rule of three,” Nunez’ contribution to this emerging game may be understood as being of crucial significance. As this game unfolds, the third participant decides (by the form of his contribution), the nature of the transformational rules for this game going forward. Consider that Nunez can either choose to contribute something that he actually finds inside the program (and so follow the pattern established by Rachel), or, he can choose to invent something (thus cementing Josh’s transformational rule). Observe in Example 4 below that Nunez chooses the latter option by contributing something not actually in the program, “this class really helped me decide on a good haircut.”

Example 4

1. Nunez: this class really helped me decide on a good haircut
2. <yawn>
3. Juliette: show me
4. Nunez: what?
5. Juliette: show me
6. Nunez: play the game
7. Greg: that’s not in there
8. and I’m worried that we’re gonna have superficial comments all night through the show
9. Group: @@

Recalling that Josh’s contribution in Example 3 above had been received with legitimate challenges as to the validity of the source text quote from outside the game frame, consider now how repetition of these same challenges works differently in Example 4. In line 7, when Greg says “that’s not in there” and Juliette says “show me” in line 5, these

are now game moves, and not metacommentary. What had been a stretch of discourse has now become a text; it has been entextualized, and can now be decontextualized and recontextualized. As evidence of this transformation, players now disattend to the illocutionary force of the challenges within the game frame. Rather than being challenges or directives, the phrases “show me where that is” and “play the game” are now themselves game moves.

Looking back to Example 3, we might observe that part of the initial reaction to Josh’s contribution “that’s not in there,” seems to have been forgotten in this third contribution to the pattern. In strict observance of the pattern that had been established in Example 3, it would have fallen to Juliette as the next person in the circle to playfully challenge the validity of Nunez’ quote by saying “that’s not in there.” Instead she simply said “show me” which had been the second response to Josh’s contribution in Example 3, which thus constitutes a jump ahead in the game. However, instead of being lost, “that’s not in there” gets remembered and reintegrated by Greg, in line 7, when he contributes another locally entextualized resource. Saying “I’m worried that we’re gonna have superficial comments all night through the show,” he worries aloud that the introduction of this topic backstage increases the likelihood of its consequently finding its way into the show later.

Thus, we may observe that a number of interaction-internal prior texts have now been activated (entextualized). Players are now presented with the challenge of remembering “that’s not in there,” “show me;” and “play the game,” as well as the

expressed concern “I’m afraid now that X has talked about Y, the whole show is going to be about Y.” Having now identified these new texts, we can now skip ahead to the end of the game to see which of these new texts get maintained through the playing of the game.

After several participants had participated in the game by contributing game moves, it then came around to Greg’s turn to play, which I presented in the introduction to this chapter as Example 1. I reprint his contribution here as Example 5.

Example 5

1. Greg: “poop poop scooped doop”
2. Group: @@@@
3. Rachel: I’d like you to show me where that was
4. Greg: what? it’s totally in there!
5. come on that’s totally in there!
6. play the game!

As we can see, the active pieces of text which have endured to the end of the game were:

1) an external prior text in the form of an invented and humorous comment allegedly printed in the WIT program 2) a locally entextualized mock challenge to the validity of the prior text, as given by Rachel in line 3 “I’d like you to show me where that was” 3) a locally entextualized mock defense by the contributor as to the validity of their prior text , as seen in lines 4-5 above “what? it’s totally in there! come on that’s totally in there!’ and finally, 4) a locally entextualized injunction to play the game by the contributor of the quote, in this example “play the game!’ in line 6. Observe that the expressed mock concern about thematic influence (of conversation backstage to the onstage performance) has dropped out and/or been forgotten as a textual resource by the end of the game.

Before moving to the next game, let's review what we have discovered about the accomplishment of a game frame and use of realized resources (prior texts) and transformational rules (the *what* and *how* of intertextuality). First, we observed that this game began with an overt cuing of the game frame and an explicit description of the transformational rules by Josh "let's pass around the program and read bad WIT quotes." A change to the transformational rules was negotiated when Josh contributed a recontextualization which bore an imaginary relationship to the prior text, in this case, a fictional quote, which was met by a series of challenges by Josh's fellow players in the form of metacommentary outside the game frame. The next contributions maintained the "transformation" of the transformational rule by following suit and contributing texts that were increasingly ridiculous and patently false, and the metacommentary became entextualized and integrated into the game frame going forward as game moves.

Additionally, we have observed that there are two main types of text that may be used as resources: those external to the current interaction (in this case drawn from shared knowledge about their improv community including knowledge of what *is* printed in the performance program and what kinds of things likely *could* appear there) and those entextualized from within the current interaction (in this case, utterances that were at their original appearance actual challenges, but over the course of the emergence of the game, got transformed to lose their illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect as challenges

and directives).² As I proceed through this analysis, I will consider how each type of prior text (interaction external, and interaction internal) plays a role in community reaffirmation, community building, and member socialization.

I will now turn to a game in which the shift into the game frame is accomplished less explicitly. *OK, Mr. Questions* depends on players having tracked the unfolding interaction closely enough to know *which* prior texts are being playfully transformed and crucially *how* this is being done. Additionally, the prior texts in this game are all interaction external, allowing us to focus on the community-building work done by this type of prior text before turning to consideration of *I'll Send You the Link* which (like *Change the Quote!*) utilizes both interaction-external and interaction-internal texts.

6.3.2 The *OK Mr. Questions* game

The game that I am calling *OK, Mr. Questions* draws from an extensive set of prior texts involving group members' shared knowledge about the so-called "rules" of improv (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3). Given that *OK, Mr. Questions* involves a playful transformation of many of "the rules" (core principles of improv that are understood as facilitating improvised interaction), I will take a minute to review some of them briefly, beginning with "listening," which (as I mentioned in Section 6.2.3), is of

² I should mention that I maintain that locally entextualized resources are indeed examples of intertextuality and not INTRAtextuality (c.f. Hamilton 1996) because the prior text and the recontextualization occur in different interactional frames. When these texts were first uttered, the comments were observed to operate outside the game frame (as part of a negotiation of the transformational rules), but when these texts are utilized as game moves, they operate within the game frame, and thus are instances of intertextuality.

fundamental importance. As will be illustrated by the playing of this game, if you do not listen, you simply cannot improvise. Additionally, the concept of *yes-and* (willingness to both accept (*yes*) and build on or heighten (*and*) the offers made by other performers) also becomes relevant to this discussion, because the opposite of *yes-and* (denial), can make an unfolding interaction come to a grinding halt (as described in Chapter 3 with the “we don’t have any children” example). Finally, questions (not explicitly discussed thus far), are understood to be highly problematic in the context of an improv scene because they delay the creation of the reality within the world of the scene. From an interactional standpoint, consider how asking a question like “who are you?” actually forces the other person to come up with ideas for creating a character, a relationship, a location. By contrast, a statement like “Mom, that’s the last time I am letting you borrow my car” advances the scene by establishing a relationship and giving the other person something to react to and build on. The importance of listening, *yes-and*, and “no questions” are but a few of the rules of improv, but are enough to understand the playful transformation that follows over the course of *OK, Mr. Questions*.

OK, Mr. Questions emerged as a response to Greg’s having asked the group to speculate about how long they had until their show would start. The director had just come backstage to the Green Room to announce that the house (the main seating area within the theater) had been opened, meaning that audience members are now taking their seats in anticipation of the show. After the director leaves the Green Room, Greg asks the group “well, the house just opened what does that mean for when we go on?” to

which he receives the sarcastic, but playful answer “I don’t know Mr. Question,” from Josh, as may be seen in Example 6 below.

In line 5 of this example, Greg decides to interpret “I don’t know Mr. Questions” as an “offer,” an improv term for a game move, or a contribution to the creation of a game world. We see here that accepting this offer helps Greg launch into a game by creating the character of “Mr. Questions.” Drawing on group members’ shared understanding of questions as antithetical to improv, this particular character choice signals not only a frame shift, but a transformation rule involving violation of “the rules.”³

Example 6

1. Greg: well, the house just opened, what does that mean for when we go on?
2. Josh: I don’t know **Mr. Question**
3. Greg: man, if I only knew!
4. Josh: I don’t know **Mr. Questions**
5. Greg: **Mr. Questions** allright, I’ll inhabit that character tonight
6. Josh: @@@
7. that’ll be fun
8. Nunez: dibbs on denial
9. Juliette: @@@
10. Josh: I’m gonna play “not listening”
11. Juliette: oh I wanted that one
12. Nunez: **[fuck you we’re an alliance here]**
13. Josh: [well, what are you gonna play instead?]
14. Nunez: **[no you’re not, you’re gonna listen]**
15. Rachel: [I’m gonna play disagreement]
16. Nunez: nuh unh
17. no you’re not

In line 8, Nunez cements the shift into the game frame by himself claiming a character “denial,” then contributing game moves that sustain the game frame, inhabiting the character of denial expertly, denying not one but three people in the course of a few

³ Ironically, while the game will involve violating the core principles of improv, Greg’s initial reaction to Josh’s calling him “Mr. Questions” instead exemplifies the core principles of agreement and acceptance.

seconds of interaction in lines 12, 14, and 16. To Josh who says “I’m gonna play ‘not listening’” in line 10, Nunez denies by saying “no you’re not, you’re gonna listen.” To Juliette who says “oh, I wanted that one” in line 11, he says “fuck you, we’re an alliance here.” Finally he denies even Rachel’s assumption of the character “disagreement,” by responding “nuh unh, no you’re not!” Performers’ engagement with this game indexes their shared knowledge of the rules of improv as together they savor the act of systematically violating them.

Although the shift into the game frame is less explicitly cued than *Change the Quote!* (in this game no one actually says “let’s do the opposite of all of the improv rules”), the frame shift is nonetheless signaled rather overtly when Greg and Nunez (and subsequently Josh and Rachel) directly name the characters they will inhabit before they jump into the game frame to actually do so. Further, the specific character choices they make evoke the “rules of improv” as prior text, and the way they enact these characters (i.e. by violating the rules) signals an inverted relationship between recontextualizations (the game moves), and the prior texts (the rules). Game moves which instantiate this playful inversion work to sustain the transformational rules throughout the game.

Example 7 below illustrates how this particular game provides multiple opportunities for participants to glean the transformation rules if they did not catch them the first time. In lines 24-27 below, observe that Rachel seems to realize that Greg is “questions guy” only after he enacts three questions in a row. While her statement in line 29 “so you’re gonna be questions guy” displays recognition of the shift into the game

frame, it also reveals that she seems to have missed the moment in which this shift actually took place (line 5 in Example 6 when Greg first assumed the character).

Example 7

23. Rachel: you're my brother not my dad
24. Greg: **what are you doing?**
25. Josh: but you just said I was your Dad
26. Greg: **who are you?**
27. **why would you do that?**
28. Group: @@
29. Rachel: **so you're gonna be questions guy @@**
30. Greg: mhmm @@@
31. I won't insert any information
32. I'll force it out of you on the spot

When Rachel steps out of the game frame in line 29 to address Greg instead of his character saying "so you're gonna be questions guy?" Greg steps out of the game frame (and his character) to answer her. That he savors playing this character is evident in lines 30 - 32, "mmhmm, I won't insert any information. I'll force it out of you on the spot."

This meta-commentary about the character choice "Mr. Questions" serves as an additional opportunity for participants to glean information about *which* texts are being transformed and *how*, so as to be able to participate in the community- reaffirming activity of playing this game. Although all members have access to the rules of improv (the prior text that should tell them what character identities are possible), they need to have been tracking the interaction closely to see *that* these texts are being accessed, and *how* they are being transformed. Thus, successful engagement in this game indexes not only shared knowledge of prior text, but a shared level of ability at recognizing intertextual reshaping as it unfolds.

Because this particular game involves doing everything “wrong,” the fact that engaging in this way results in terrible confusion is actually illustrative of the effectiveness of the rules, which Greg uses here as a teaching tool. Calling attention to how the implementation of the transformational rules of *OK Mr. Questions* is a confusing train wreck of an improv scene, in lines 79 and 80 below, Greg steps outside the frame to address the group saying: “you guys, does anyone notice we’re in hell?” What makes this interaction particularly fun is that while Greg steps out of the game frame to make this comment, Nunez stays within the frame to play with it, saying “nun unh, we’re in a phone booth on the moon!”⁴

Example 8

- 72. Greg: what’s your favorite comic book?
- 73. what’s on the fifth page of your favorite book ever?
- 74. Nunez: Marvel logo
- 75. Rachel: nuh unh you don’t even read
- 76. Nunez: that’s why I like comic books
- 77. Rachel: you don’t have any eyes!
- 78. Josh: I I don’t listen
- 79. Greg: **you guys**
- 80. **does anyone realize we’re in hell?**
- 81. @@@@
- 82. Nunez: nuh unh we’re in a phone booth on the moon!

OK Mr. Questions proves to be successful for reaffirming community membership through violation of shared norms, because through breaking the rules, players get to see how essential they actually are. Thus, while such games are obviously highly enjoyable for group members, they do also seem to be important for cultivating beliefs as well. Despite the ongoing debate (as exemplified in Mick Napier’s book *Improvise*) in the

⁴ “Phone booth” and “moon” are themselves intertextual references and are among group members’ favorite “go-to” examples of denial, as explained to me by Myfanwy.

improv community about the effectiveness of “the rules,” *OK Mr. Questions* illustrates to this group just how essential many of these rules actually are.

As mentioned above, the interaction in Example 8 above is particularly entertaining because Nunez stays in the game frame to respond to Greg’s metacommentary uttered outside the frame (saying that they are in hell) by saying “nuh unh, we’re in a phone booth on the moon!” Thus, groups members’ playful use of texts extends to awareness of metacommentary, which Fairclough (1992) identifies as itself a type of intertextuality “where the text producer distinguishes several levels within her own text, and distances herself from some level of the text, treating the distanced level as if it were another, external text” (122). The ability to activate and manage multiple layers of intertextuality simultaneously are, as I argue, characteristic of the linguistic style of these performers. This facility with language is cultivated through the practice of improv, and (as we have explored here) also serves social and interactional functions.

Turning finally to the last game, *I’ll Send you the Link*, I will consider additional examples of the community-building function of both interaction-internal and interaction-external texts for this group.

6.3.3 The *I’ll Send you the Link* game

The most complex game of the three considered in this chapter, *I’ll Send You the Link* involves increasingly absurd examples of videos that one might find on the internet. I call this game complex for two main reasons. Firstly, there is almost no explicit cuing of

the frame shift and there is no direct naming of the transformational rules. Instead, the shift into the game frame relies solely on group members' recognition of use of intertextuality to signal the beginning of a game. Additionally, this game emerges in such a way that there is only one opportunity for group members to glean all of the information about *which* texts they will need to transform and *how* to engage.

Example 9 is taken from the conversation immediately preceding the emergence of *I'll Send you the Link*. As this interaction unfolds, group members are discussing an e-mail sent recently to the group by Myfanwy containing links to websites featuring jokes about Chuck Norris. This discussion of Chuck Norris reminds Josh of an online video called "Young Chuck Norris" from the comedy program Saturday Night Live (SNL).

Example 9

1. Josh: You've you've all seen the the SNL-
2. Myfanwy: -Chuck Norris
3. Josh: Young Chuck Norris-
4. Myfanwy: yeah
5. the video
6. Josh: thing right?
7. Myfanwy: uh huh
8. Nunez: yep
9. Josh: Oh my god
10. I was gonna I was gonna send you the link to it after that e-mail
11. but it's been taken down for copyright
12. reasons
13. I- I I -'ll find it and send it to you
14. I don't even want to try and describe it
15. [it's it's great]
16. Greg: [yeah?]
17. Michael: [so did you like it?]
18. or did you think
19. Josh: It's it's amazing, yeah
20. <to Myfanwy> didn't you think?
21. Myfanwy: I loved it

At this point, the interaction is still very much a conversation (and not a game). We can begin here by observing how closely tied Josh's contribution is to the interaction: Chuck Norris had just been mentioned, as had the idea of sending e-mails containing links to websites. Additionally, Josh explicitly ties his contribution textually to Myfanwy's contribution in line 10 saying: "I was gonna send you the link to it after that e-mail."

Josh's mention of the *Young Chuck Norris* video is an intertextual reference, drawing from group members' shared awareness of comedians and comedy programs (including SNL). As with other external prior texts we have considered, the "rules of improv" from the *OK Mr. Questions* game and the performance program from the *Change the Link* game, knowledge about other comedians is important to this improv group's identity. Observe, however, that in this case, Josh's use of this *Young Chuck Norris* text is somewhat problematic. He seems to have mentioned a text that few group members are familiar with, and further, fails to describe it sufficiently, leaving many members of the group unsure about how he actually feels about this text, as evidenced by Michael's question in lines 17 and 18, "so did you like it?" In failing to properly evoke the text, and failing to convey how he feels about it, Josh's contribution can be viewed as a problematic, if not a failed attempt at intertextuality. As we will see in Example 10 below, Greg entextualizes this gaffe, using it as a mechanism to begin a new game.

While Juliette and Nunez are explaining to Josh that they did not see the *Young Chuck Norris* video, Greg jumps into the interaction by describing a video about the Big Bang which he claims to have found on the internet (the link to which he promises to

send on to the group). However, something about his contribution alerts group members that a frame shift has occurred, and that his contribution is to be understood as referring back to (and entextualizing) Josh's discussion of the Young Chuck Norris video. Observe that in Example 10 below, Josh and Nunez begin laughing early into Greg's contribution and long before the rest of the group - as early as lines 29 and 30 - when Greg talks about how amazing the video was. Emphatic stress on the word "amazing," combined with the intertextual similarity of his contribution to Josh's (as well as the improbability of the existence of a video of the Big Bang) signals a playful transformation, a cue that Josh's contribution has been entextualized. Josh and Nunez signal through laughter their awareness of this entextualization and the subsequent shift into a game frame.

Example 10

22. Greg: Did you see the [the that uh computer graphic imitation of the-]
 23. Juliette: <to Josh> [I haven't seen it]
 24. Nunez: <to Josh> [I haven't seen it]
 25. Greg: like the beginning of man,
 26. starting with the big bang,
 27. like they figured out how to uh
 28. graphically depict the VERY beginnings of life
 29. And it's
 30. it's amazing but uh
 31. Josh, Nunez: @@@@ <Nunez laughingly points at Greg>
 32. Greg: uh I'll look for the link
 33. and send it I mean, I could tell you about it
 34. Nunez: <to Josh> [xxx]
 35. Michael: <to Greg> [are you joking or?]
 36. Greg: but it's like "wow" in your face
 37. Juliette: @
 38. Greg: And it's probably [better to just see it]

Several members of the group seem to be confused at this point, as evidenced by Michael's question to Greg "are you joking or?" in line 35. This confusion about whether or not a frame shift has occurred seems to be owing to the very subtle way in which it was accomplished. Observe that Greg's use of intertextuality is itself the only signal of the shift in frame (which also serves also the only cue to other members of the realized resources and transformational rules).

Further contributing to the complexity of this game is the fact that many of the prior texts come from the local interaction. To engage in this game requires that you have followed the interaction closely, paying careful attention to how Greg's contribution parallels the way that Josh linked his reference about the *Young Chuck Norris video* intertextually to Myfanwy's e-mail containing Chuck Norris jokes. If you missed this clue, Greg's display of strong affective alignment to the text by saying "it's like "wow" in your face" is an intertextual link again to Josh's Young Chuck Norris contribution in the form of uninterpretable enthusiasm for a vaguely described video. Finally, Greg links his contribution explicitly to Josh's by use of manifest intertextuality (Fairclough 1992) extracting Josh's prior text directly saying in lines 32 and 33, "uh I'll look for the link and send it," which refers back to Josh's "I was gonna I was gonna send you the link" (in Example 9, line 10).

By entextualizing Josh's contribution, Greg retroactively changed Josh's original description of the *Young Chuck Norris video* to be the first game move. Josh's description of this video and subsequent promise to forward the link (which had been

stretches of discourse) have both now been entextualized, made into extractable units. For those who are paying attention, a shift into the game frame has been accomplished and the transformational rules have been laid out: 1) Create an imaginary text about a video 2) display a strong affective alignment to this text, and 3) promise the group that you will send them a link to it.

Because Greg's Big Bang video is the second game move, it now moves to the next person in the circle, Michael, to contribute the third. Recalling the crucial status of the third contribution to a pattern for determining the actualization of these games, if Michael does not contribute a game move that both sustains the game frame and exemplifies an understanding of *what* texts are being transformed and *how*, this game will likely not be successful. In Example 11 below, Josh, believing Michael to have not noticed the frame shift, explicitly cues Michael in lines 39 and 41, whispering "he's setting a pattern." Interestingly, when Michael does engage, his contribution reveals a level of intertextual competence not reflected in his initial lack of performance. Although Michael had to be prompted, he does appear to know exactly *what* and *how* to contribute to this game, rightly identifying the texts identified by Greg through use of the locally entextualized promise to send the link to the group (received with laughter and clapping), then contributing a story about a video, further displaying awareness of the transformational rules by making his own contribution about a video that does not actually exist, and finally, displaying strong affective alignment towards it. Pay close attention for these three aspects of Michael's game contribution in Example 11.

Example 11

44. Josh: <whispering> that was a pattern
 45. Michael: what?
 46. Josh: <whispering> that was a pattern
 47. Michael: Oh, uh did you - **I should have sent you the link**
 48. Group: @@@@
 49. Greg: <clapping>
 50. Michael: **a video I have of the video itself getting made**
 51. Josh: <to Nunez> (inaudible)
 52. Greg: <whispering to Juliette> This is number three in the pattern
 53. Juliette: <whispering> Okay thanks
 54. Myfanwy: <little girl voice> I need to go pee
 55. Michael: anyway it 's just a video
 56. @
 57. you know and the video is like
 58. It's its own production
 59. So you're like "wow, I can't believe I'm watching this video get made"
 60. Greg: <whispering> this is an emerging xxx
 61. Michael: and it blows your mind talk about xxx
 62. **I'll send you the link**
 63. Group: @@@@

The applause in line 49 is particularly interesting, because applause is often a more coveted response than laughter in improv. Applause is understood to be a more highly sought response than laughter, because it indexes both appreciation of the skill of the player in addition to appreciation of the humor of the joke. While laughter indexes their enjoyment of this game, Greg's applause may be here understood as indexing an appreciation of Michael's intertextual accomplishment.

Within this last example, we again see how Greg steps out of the frame to draw attention to the unfolding process of intertextuality, offering metacommentary to Juliette (and anyone else who wants to listen) in line 52, "this is number three in the pattern."⁵

⁵ Greg is one of the most experienced performers in the group having been a performer in Chicago at a well-known improv theater company before moving to DC. In addition to being an established director within WIT, he has assumed a type of expert status within the organization for his knowledge and ability regarding pattern work.

Greg does this ostensibly to help Juliette in her development as a performer, but also to bring her into the interaction, as up until this point she had been completely silent. His efforts at inclusion do seem to be successful inasmuch as she immediately joins the interaction, as may be seen in Example 12 below:

Example 12

- 64. Juliette: <whispering> I'm not sure he did it right
- 65. Greg: <whispering> no, I think he's okay
- 66. Michael: <whispering> where was I supposed to go from the big bang
for Christ's sake!?!
@@
- 67. Group: @@
- 68. Josh: <whispering> I don't know but we're still in the scene just-
- 69. Michael: <whispering> went from one to a hundred
- 70. Group: @@
- 71. Michael: <whispering> Jesus Christ!
- 72. Greg: <whispering> Went from a hundred to one it's a big bang
- 73. it's the very beginning
- 74. Michael: <whispering> well 25 needs to be accounted for somewhere in there

Using stage whispers, Juliette, Greg, Michael, and Josh cue their commentary as operating outside the game frame, despite Josh's injunction to maintain the game frame in line 68 "I don't know, but we're still in the scene." Their meta-commentary refers to Michael's choice of third item to an emerging pattern, and reveals shared knowledge about the rule of three (an understanding that within an emerging pattern, the third contribution to the pattern should be the biggest, or at least bigger than the second, which in turn should have been bigger than the first). While Michael had attempted to make his contribution adhere to the "rule of three" by having his third contribution to the game be "heightened" relative to the previous contributions, his protest here alludes to the fact that he feels that he had been set an impossible task with regard to the "rule of three." After

all, what could be bigger than the Big Bang? When the group offers some good-natured ribbing about his choice, Michael responds by playfully questioning Greg's own choice of text, maintaining that Greg went from "one to a hundred," in the second game move, leaving nowhere for Michael to go in terms of heightening with the third.

6.4 Discussion: What intertextuality means and does

I would like to turn now from the *what* and *how* of intertextuality to consider what intertextuality *means* and what intertextuality *does* for this group. Recalling Becker's observation that "social groups seem to be bound primarily by a shared repertoire of prior texts" (165), some of the most important shared texts of this community (as we have explored) include improv knowledge and the work of other performers. In negotiating their impressions of these texts, group members discuss and develop their own beliefs, sensibilities and styles, a major part of how this group (or indeed any group) spends their time together and does "being a community."

Furthermore, in this analysis, I wish to suggest that while interaction external source texts are indeed important to community membership, intertextual ability itself (as occurs through entextualization of interaction internal texts) is also an integral resource for community membership. As Rachel explained in her interview to me, she is the happiest in improv when she can make an intertextual connection. When she feels like her intertextual skills are not all that they could be, she does not really enjoy performing.

Example 13

1. Rachel: You know, when, when I've, just suddenly, been able to do something like
2. I've been able to, to make a really...
3. I don't want to say a really good reference but I've just been able to play
4. off something that already occurred
5. play off something in a new way
6. that has just changed how, how I can do what I do.
7. that-So it's broadened my Improv experience.
8. And and it's not just on stage, you know,
9. I'll do it in in practice or I'll do it in a class,
10. or I'll just make a new connection.
11. And uh, and that's when I'm the happiest @@@
12. or the most excited, that's when I go home and I'm like, "Yeah Improv! woo"
13. Anna: "this is awesome"
14. Rachel: Yeah exactly and I'm not like, "man Improv wah..."

Rachel indicates here that intertextual ability for her is not only important onstage, but offstage as well "in practice and in class" (line 9). Comments such as these lead me to the conclusion that intertextuality may be understood to be not only part of the requisite skill set, but also a very important piece of how community members relate to one another. As we have seen, group members relish interacting in ways that reveal and further develop their intertextual abilities to such an extent that they will drill them even during an ordinary conversation.

But how does this work? Neal Norrick (1989), in one of the best known studies of intertextuality and humor, suggests that intertextual references work as invitations to demonstrate membership and solidarity by revealing shared texts, and making salient shared orientations to them.

To work at all, intertextual humor presupposes a performer and an audience with shared knowledge of some preexistent stretch of discourse. The performer demonstrates knowledge of this source in a successful telling and the audience demonstrates with laughter the ability to assess the appropriate stored item and to hook it up with the current discourse in a new way (120).

As I have highlighted throughout this chapter, for members of this group, the *process* of intertextuality has particular importance. Beyond accessing stored texts and making salient shared orientations to them, a great deal of *meaning* seems to come simply from utilizing their unique style of intertextuality, which includes (as we have seen) embedded understandings about the “rule of three,” a tendency to entextualize prior text from local interactions, and inverted or imaginary relationships between prior text and intertext. We saw several times that awareness of the unfolding process of intertextuality is so critical that performers will step out of the frame to make sure it is recognized. In so doing, they ensure that all members can engage. This not only develops a shared awareness of and orientation to texts, but it also serves to reinforce membership in the community.

Engagement in group games demands a very high level of intertextual ability, including the ability to manipulate several texts simultaneously. This is particularly evident in the *I’ll Send you the Link* game, which plays not only with imaginary prior texts, but also external texts which are given new local meanings (i.e. “I’ll send you the link”). A game like this would almost certainly be lost on the audience, and I will confess that it was lost on me when I first observed it. If interactions are “mosaics,” created by integrating and transforming bits of previous language experiences (Kristeva 1986), interactions such as the *I’ll Send you the Link* game reveal the positive interactional consequences for members of this group of being attuned to the mechanics of this process. However, this game also illustrated the negative consequences for these group members of not possessing this ability (several members were excluded from

group engagement when they did not follow the intertextual *what* and *how* of this game). For these performers, being able to be intertextual in playful interactions is one major aspect of who they are and how they do being a community.

But why should spontaneous games be the way that community gets developed? Example 15 below is taken from an interaction shortly after members finished playing *I'll Send you the Link*. Juliette asks about what they should be doing, which Josh interprets as a suggestion that they move to the occasioned activity of their backstage time, playing warm-up games. Greg challenges this, maintaining that what they have been doing is valuable and necessary, and that it has accomplished the functions of a warm-up game.

Example 15

- | | | |
|----|-----------|---|
| 1. | Juliette: | Should we be- |
| 2. | Josh: | no it just started |
| 3. | | we have like an hour |
| 4. | | Do you guys wanna warm up? |
| 5. | Greg: | <stage whisper> We are warming up Josh, |
| 6. | | don't you understand? |
| 7. | | We're enjoying each other's company! |

Greg's comment here is playful, but suggests that at least some of the social and interactional objectives recognized to be accomplished by the warm-up games can be and in fact are better accomplished by spontaneous games. At the point in the evening when Greg makes this comment, group members had been backstage nearly fifteen minutes, and they have had several conversations, two of which had shifted into conversational games. Spontaneous games may be observed to achieve community building by cultivating a level of comfort and trust among group members, and by actively challenging performers to listen and recognize patterns.

Due to the fact that long form does not typically involve pre-set games as part of its performance, players must be adept at recognizing patterns and creating games onstage out of an interaction. Listening and recognizing patterns to find a way into the game world may be understood as a superior way of developing improv skills. This contrasts with games with pre-ordained rules of interaction which facilitates easy and straightforward entry into the game world. Spontaneous games demand more facility with intertextuality and awareness of frame than warm-up games do, and thus are superior for developing these highly valued skills within this community.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have investigated one aspect of this group's style, the use of intertextuality to play spontaneous games. Exploring the games individually, I have considered two aspects of intertextuality, the *what* and the *how*, illustrating that to play these games, group members achieve agreement as to what aspects of language are important, as well as what texts will be reshaped and how. Additionally, I have illustrated that games require a shift into the performance frame, which is accomplished (and communicated) linguistically, often through use of intertextuality. An examination of the linguistic elements which characterize these shifts has shed light into this group's heightened awareness of language, including awareness of and ability to manipulate many levels of intertextual relationships simultaneously. In the Conclusions chapter which follows, I will consider how intertextual ability, like the aspects of style considered

in Chapters 4 and 5 (dialect performance and constructed dialogue), may be understood through the theoretical lens of intertextuality. In so doing, I contribute to work on intertextuality by considering some of the different types of intertextuality. Further, I contribute an additional discourse framework to the ongoing work on the exploration of discourse aspects of style.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary and overview

This work is intended as a continuation of two main trends in speaker design approaches to linguistic style: a focus on overtly performative contexts of language use, and increased integration of discourse analytic and ethnographic approaches (which entail a view of language as it is used creatively in the performance of identity). With the analysis outlined in the preceding chapters, I have suggested that such an approach to style provides a more satisfying means of establishing the links between “the architecture of socio cultural differences” and “social actors’ agentic initiatives” (Coupland 2004: 9). In other words, an integrated variationist, discourse and anthropological approach helps to understand not only the *strategic* nature of linguistic choices made with language, but the broader social *meanings* of these choices, particularly as implicated in the performance of identity.

In this chapter, I will consider the contributions made by this investigation with particular focus on the value of increased integration of discourse (units, frameworks, and analytical focus on interaction) in studies of stylistic variation. With each of the data analysis chapters in this dissertation, I selected discourse features to explore as units of style (i.e. dialect performance, discourse markers, constructed dialogue, and entextualization). Within the context of each chapter, I explored the patterning of these

units and considered how this patterning related to style - the choices that speakers make when using language which come to define how they interact and who they are. Further, I utilized discourse analytic frameworks (framing, footing, positioning, alignment, stance, and intertextuality) and conducted discourse analysis (focusing on metadiscursive commentary from speakers about their linguistic style). This analysis was initiated to link up micro-level patterning of linguistic features to more macro-level processes, including the negotiation of social identity in interaction. For example, in Chapter 5, the discourse marker *oh* was shown to play a role in conveying information about stance towards constructed dialogue as a means of actualizing the identity potential of this discourse feature. Revisiting the findings of each of these chapters now, I will view my previous analysis through the lens of intertextuality, considering first what this framework accomplishes for the present work, and secondly, how my analysis has exemplified broadening of the purview of style to include “conversational style” (Tannen 1989), “ways of speaking” (Hymes 1972), “style as distinctiveness” (Irvine 2001) and “interactional style” (Alim 2004).

Recall that in Chapter 2, I suggested that discourse analytic frameworks provide more compelling means than have been traditionally available to analysts of style for uncovering and interpreting the connections among language, social meaning, and social identity - in other words, for exploring style. I have considered discourse features such as constructed dialogue and discourse markers as units of variation, suggesting that units drawn from higher levels of linguistic structure contribute to the understanding of style

by furthering exploration of the linguistic resources that speakers have available to them. To illustrate how such a discourse approach to style broadens our understanding of the term, I will now review the findings of the three data analysis chapters through the lens of intertextuality, understood as a *process* of evoking shared text and displayed shared orientation to that text for the purposes of fostering group rapport, ratifying group membership, and conveying group values (Norrick 1997). I suggest intertextuality as an analytical lens through which aspects of this groups' style considered in the previous chapters may be understood as part of a broader process of identity making through text.

7.1.1 Dialect performance

Chapter 4 explored dialect performance (the self-conscious use of linguistic features to index culturally recognizable groups) to create characters in long form performance, comparing onstage and rehearsal contexts. Quantitative patterning revealed that while dialect performance occurs infrequently overall in long form improv, it occurs even less frequently onstage than in rehearsal. Utilizing Goffman's (1974) notion of framing (participant's sense of "what is going on in interaction") and following Coupland's (2004) application of this concept, I explored frame at three levels (socio-cultural, generic, and interpersonal) to understand performers' avoidance of culturally meaningful information evoked through dialect performance.

Dialect performance, an aspect of style that would likely not have been considered in more narrow approaches to style, revealed itself to be a potent resource for

understanding the active construction of the identity of a long form performer and the rejection of the identity of a short form performer.

Viewed under an intertextual perspective, the choice to avoid performing AAVE onstage and in front of an unknown audience may be understood in terms of speaker awareness of intertextuality as a process of creating identity by evoking shared source texts and then displaying orientation to them. As explored through metadiscursive commentary about dialect performance, these performers are aware of the relationships among dialect features and the identities and ideological positions they evoke. For example, dialect performance is understood as allowing a speaker to (re) produce (often unquestioned) cultural stereotypes, observations and beliefs about language. However genre constraints of long form performance are acknowledged as preventing the performer from effectively communicating their orientation to such texts. Thus, dialect performance as an identity practice may be avoided entirely onstage and in front of an unknown audience owing to the inability to fully display orientation to the evoked text.

Additionally, viewing dialect performance as intertextuality provides new insight into “style as distinctiveness,” recalling from Chapter 2 the expanded definition of variation “characteristics of a particular group’s way of speaking” which “differ from that of other groups” (Coupland 2007: 6). Under this perspective, texts that are ubiquitous in one format (short form) are avoided in another in service of the creation of the identity of a long form performer. Additionally, the many possible unwanted beliefs and associations that may be evoked through dialect performance (and the implications these

carry for identity), lead to avoidance of dialect performance (particularly of varieties like AAVE) when the audience does not have access to shared texts such as the type of cultural dialogue envisioned by creators (and many practitioners) of long form.

7.1.2 Discourse markers and constructed dialogue

Chapter 5 considered how the discourse marker *oh* works to realize constructed dialogue (Tannen 1989) as an identity resource. I identified two uses of *oh* when used to preface constructed dialogue, which build upon the functions of *oh* in everyday interaction, and which exemplify Bakhtin's (1986) concepts of uni-directional and vari-directional double voicing (the stances that a speaker can take towards repeated utterances). When viewed through an intertextual lens, the analysis that I proposed of *oh* as a tool for *realizing* the identity potential of constructed dialogue again speaks to performer awareness of the identity potential of intertextuality. In this case, constructed dialogue was interpreted as a particular type of "text," and *oh* was revealed to be a very powerful tool for communicating speaker orientation to this text for the purposes of creating identity. Together, text and orientation to text were shown to be crucial for communicating information about identity.

As I have illustrated, researchers of style have begun to investigate the patterning of discourse features such as discourse markers (Alim 2004, Schiffrin 1987), high rising terminal intonation (Britain 1992), referring terms and repairs (Schiffrin 2006), among many others (see discussion in Chapter 2). However, few studies consider how such

features work together as stylistic resources, as I do in the present investigation. Given the definition of style that I propose with this work, the choices that speakers make when using language which come to define how they interact and who they are, it makes sense to explore the multiple levels at which language operates. A return to the broad view of style first proposed by Hymes' "ways of speaking," and away from the most unilateral conceptualization of style as sameness at some "underlying level of language structure" (Schiffrin 2006: 10) enables richer understanding of the range of linguistic resources that speakers have available to them in navigating a social position.

7.1.3 Intertextual games and entextualization

Chapter 6 explored the *process* of intertextuality, specifically *entextualization* in the creation of spontaneous intertextual games. As part of my analysis of this highly salient aspect of improv performers' style, I explored how spontaneous games depend on and develop improv skills (including heightened listening, pattern recognition, and awareness of intertextuality). I related these skills to the three components of intertextuality identified by Bauman and Briggs (1990) *entextualization* (creating texts), *de-contextualization* (rendering them extractable), and *recontextualization* (reincorporating them somewhere else). Further, finding the cultivation of intertextual skills to be an important part of the socialization of newer members into the group, I considered how performers' ability to actively track and utilize intertextuality in interaction colors their style. However, I perhaps neglected to highlight how these games also work to cultivate

a repertoire of prior texts (also very important for the performance of an improviser's identity) including the work of other comedians, TV shows, films, websites, etc. To this range of prior texts, these games contribute and expand group members' repertoires to include immediately local texts coming out of the unfolding interaction. Finally, these spontaneous intertextual games serve to not only cultivate group members' extensive set of source texts, but also their ability to access exactly this type of material that will be demanded of them in performance.

As I have suggested, adopting an intertextual perspective enables the units which have been explored in this analysis to themselves be viewed as *texts* ranging in scope and scale. From culturally meaningful phonetic details of pronunciation (dialect performance), to the strategic use of the voices of others (constructed dialogue) as a means of positioning the self, to use of a currently unfolding interaction itself as text (entextualization) all of these show how texts may be used in the construction and negotiation of identity. Discourse analysts have identified many important social functions of the recognition and reincorporation of source text including that of symbolizing and reinforcing group membership and identity (Gordon 2003, Becker 1994). Similarly, Norrick (1989) understands intertextuality as an "invitation to demonstrate membership and solidarity" (120).

If dialect performance, constructed dialogue, and entextualization may be understood as texts, and if intertextual references are a means for revealing these texts and negotiating shared *orientation* to them, this group's manner of deploying such "texts"

reveals information about who they are and what types of identities they are attempting to actively achieve through language. Group members do not use the “text” of dialect performance onstage because they are not performers of short form, and because they don’t wish their awareness of the phonetic details of language to be misconstrued as cultural insensitivity. *Oh* is used to make sure that the “texts” presented through constructed dialogue effectively achieve a nuanced sense of these performers’ identities (as improvisers) against a range of presented identities and voices. Finally, the range of source texts evoked through intertextual repetition employed in intertextual games reflect a range of knowledge about the work of other comedians, a wide awareness of knowledge pertaining to TV, music, films, world events, and pop culture. They also reflect a high level of metadiscursive awareness, including how interactions themselves are themselves texts which may be entextualized and re-deployed in order to produce and reaffirm identities as performers. Such insight may be understood to be implicated with style, broadly conceived.

Recalling Coupland’s (2007) definition of style as “ways of speaking – how speakers use the resource of language variation to make meaning in social encounters” (quote from back cover) I have focused on performative uses of language among a community who are themselves very aware of “text” (and its role in creating and maintaining community). This view of style through the lens of intertextuality is just one illustration of how I view discourse analysis and variation analysis as having the potential

to be mutually informative, and but one example of how they may be used together fruitfully to expand the richness of analysis.

7.2 Contribution

Drawing from variationist, discourse analytic and anthropological perspectives on style, one of the main contributions of this work is to investigate how these perspectives may productively be combined to enrich our understanding of the manner in which language functions in interaction as an identity resource. This extends the work of such researchers as Coupland (2004, 2007), Kiesling (1998), Schilling-Estes (1998 2004) who explore the role of discourse in understanding language variation.

Specifically, I hope to have shown that discourse features (like the more frequently studied phonological and morphosyntactic features) may be shown to be actively used by speakers to construct, negotiate, and perform social identity. Thus, the first contribution of this work is to illustrate how units other than those typically understood as sociolinguistic variables may be quantified and analyzed as units of linguistic variation.

Further, I have made use of discourse analytic frameworks including framing (participant's sense of what is going on in interaction), stance (speaker's evaluative or orientation to what is said), footing (analyzed in this investigation as a shift in speaking role in Goffman's production format of talk), intertextuality (the relationships among texts), and positioning (how speakers locate themselves relative to texts and interlocutors

for the purposes of identity construction). I have also explored the links between patterning of linguistic features and their broader social meanings. I have suggested that these frameworks provide a more compelling means (than traditional variationist models) for observing the negotiation of identity as constructed and performed in interaction. They also provide a more satisfying way of contextualizing quantitative patterning to forge connections between the micro-level patterning of linguistic features and both micro-and macro-level social meanings.

If discourse analysis itself enhances our understanding of the identificational value and impact of linguistic features actively used by speakers in interaction, this is because (as I have illustrated), discourse analytic units allow us to capture the patterning of language at levels of linguistic structure previously underexplored in studies of stylistic variation, and because discourse analysis itself allows for contextualization of this observed patterning by tracking how the negotiation of meaning is accomplished in interaction. Importantly, I am not suggesting that discourse analysis should be understood as an *alternative* methodology to traditional quantitative variationist approaches. Rather, I am interested precisely in the *integration* of these approaches because I believe them to be mutually informative.

If, as Schilling-Estes (2002) explains, speakers “use their speech to help shape and re-shape the external situation (whether the immediate interactional context or wider societal forces), as well as their interpersonal relationships and, crucially, their personal identities” (378), discourse analysis provides a compelling means for actually tracking

this navigation as it occurs in interaction. Further, it entails a perspective on identity as inherently dynamic. Additionally, the term “style” carries with it (as reviewed in Chapter 2) relationships to concepts including *register* and *variety*, which as we have explored in this chapter, are also related to processes such as intertextuality and *entextualization*. Current anthropological work on *entextualization* and *enregisterment* (Bauman 2004, Agha 2005) continue to provide new ways of thinking about the role that language style plays in social life, including its involvement in language change. It is through the integration of such insights that theoretical connections are recognized between research in variation and discourse, enriching and advancing the ways that both understand how language and identity work.

7.2.1 Style

I have intended this work to contribute specifically to a growing interest within sociolinguistics to integrate discourse and variation, as evidenced in professional conferences, including the 2006 national variationist conference, *New Ways of Analyzing Variation* (NWAV 35) which featured four sessions (of forty) organized around discourse analytic concerns. It is hoped that the present investigation speaks as well to the growing interest among sociolinguists to utilize ethnography in studies of style as a guide to the identification of community-internal social categories, and discover linguistic features that are salient to group members.

Further, I have hoped to invite scrutiny on some of the methodological assumptions made in traditional variationist studies of style. According to Coupland, the boundaries around what constitutes “style” in variationist research have been drawn so tightly because the goals of variationist inquiry have traditionally been set too narrowly. While the goal of inquiry in this tradition is that of understanding language systems and how they vary, the goals of stylistic inquiry can (and as I hope to have illustrated, *should*) be set much more broadly. When a variationist’s main concern is that of detecting change over time, she may focus almost exclusively on units and a method of organization that “isn’t visible to, nor directly relevant to, people engaged in speaking or listening” (6). Discourse brings the analytical focus to the level of interaction, and can illuminate and underscore speakers’ agentive uses of language (even those which are deliberate and self-conscious). Such analysis provides tools for understanding social action and interaction *through* language, which can expand the ultimate goals of linguistic inquiry. It is hoped that the present investigation has illustrated some specific ways that that integration of discourse analytic and anthropological perspectives enabled a broadening of the purview of style to enrich our understanding of the many ways that social identity is negotiated through language.

Finally, while the present investigation has focused on ways that variation research can benefit from discourse analytic insight, the reverse is equally true (cf. Schiffrin 2006). It is my own background and training in variation that has informed my perspective and suggested the directionality that I undertake (integrating discourse into

variation). However, as many researchers (from within both perspectives) have suggested, each approach stands to benefit from the insights and approach of the other.

7.2.2 Performance

Additionally, this analysis contributes insight about a community (theater performers) and a genre of theatrical performance (long form improv) which have not been systematically studied by sociolinguists. Further, this investigation considers aspects of style in a community of performers who are themselves very aware of their own uses of language and the ways in which language can be used to create social meaning. I have considered the relationships among performative and non-performative contexts of language use, including for example, how aspects of linguistic style cultivated by the practice of long form improvisational theater appear in group interactions offstage, coloring and informing linguistic style. Additionally, I hope to have shown how analysis of speakers' metacommentary about their linguistic usage yields valuable insight into speakers' awareness of language and hence is also informative for studies of style.

This work is thus intended as a contribution to the exploration of performative contexts of language use as a place to observe speakers' dynamic and creative use of language to construct and perform (facets of) identity (Schilling-Estes 2004). While anthropologists have long seen the value of studying the rich social significance and cultural meanings of performative uses of language, there has been less attention devoted to language use, as sociolinguists are only recently coming to recognize the value of

exploring such contexts of language use, as noted most notably by Coupland (2004), and Schilling-Estes (1998).

By focusing on the use made of language by speakers who understand that language itself is an active and creative production through which speakers can create and display personal, interpersonal, and group identities, this investigation has been designed to contribute to an increased interest in overtly performative contexts of language use. Specifically, it is hoped that the present work has suggested some important ways that *performative contexts of language* use are particularly valuable sites for attempting the integration of variation and discourse and thus furthering stylistic inquiry.

Ultimately, I hope to have shown how a discourse analytic approach allows the analyst to *observe* the process of meaning-making as it unfolds in interaction. I have suggested that an understanding of discourse enables the analyst to access the patterning of language within a variety of levels of linguistic structure. This provides insight into the range of linguistic resources (drawn from multiple levels of linguistic structure) speakers have available to them, and provides a view of how language functions as a resource that speakers use agentively and creatively in interaction to construct, negotiate, and perform identity.

APPENDIX ONE

INTERVIEW MODULE FOR INTERVIEWS ABOUT IMPROV

Introduction:

I want to just begin today by asking a few questions about you and your background, kind of to get a sense for your life and how improv fits in, so feel free to make any connections to improv as we go along...

You:

Where are you from?

What brought you to improv / what is your improv background? (classes, troupes, etc)

What kind of a commitment is it currently?

What role does it serve? (social, professional, creative, emotional outlet)

Improv:

What is your favorite thing about improv?

What makes improv unique as an artform?

How do you find inspiration for characters, scenes, interactions?

Are you aware of drawing things from your life onstage into scenes?

Are you aware of bringing things from improv into everyday life?

<Troupe>

What in your opinion makes <troupe name> unique?

How is your troupe different from other troupes in WIT, other troupes in general?

Is being in DC a factor?

The good:

What are the best ways to be funny? (in general and for you specifically)

e.g. callbacks, repetition, finding a game, representing the truth?

What are the funniest things that you have seen onstage?

Favorite performance you have ever been a part of

Who is your favorite performer / What is it about their style?

The bad and the ugly:

The most challenging / the worst part of improv....

Worst performance you have ever seen / ever been a part of?

Are there things that you have to work on?

Are you ever aware of “overthinking” or being “in your head”?

Audience:

What role does the audience play in an improv performance?

What is an ideal audience for you?

What do you think of “the rules of improv?” What role do you think they play?

The rule of three? callbacks? the “beat” of a scene..

Group mind - what do you think it is?

What role do you think training has - who was your favorite teacher or your worst teacher and why?

My project:

Has having me observing made your performances different in any way?

Do you think that language plays an important role in improv and if so what?

Any questions that you thought I was going to ask but didn't....

APPENDIX TWO

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

These are the transcription conventions that I follow in transcribing my data.

xxx	inaudible, undecipherable
carriage return	each new line represents an intonation unit
-	a dash indicates a truncated word
?	a question mark indicates rising intonation
.	a period indicates a falling, final intonation
,	a comma indicates a continuing intonation
...	dots indicate silence
:	a colon indicates an elongated vowel
TALK	caps indicate emphatic stress
@	a pulse of laughter
<manner>	angle brackets enclose descriptions of the manner in which an utterance is spoken, high pitched, laughing,
talk-	
- talk	lined up dashes indicate latching onto the speech of another, the continuance of speech without a pause
talk [talk] [talk]	square brackets enclose simultaneous talk

APPENDIX THREE

OH TOKENS

Information oh

#	Spkr	Token	
1	Josh	I started to kind of understand like “oh like that’s really cool”	learning about long form
2	Josh	well, I think like for a second there in the moment I like ” I thought you know like “oh that’s interesting”	realizing connection to character
3	Josh	I was kinda conscious as I’m doing it like “oh this is kind of near to real life”	realizing character close to life
4	Josh	it felt like “oh my friend’s back there he knows exactly what’s going on”	Greg in audience
5	Josh	I notice like “oh I know that guy”	noticing people in audience
6		like “oh I like that girl” whatever	
7	Josh	we had thought like “oh well if we’re doing auditions	auditioning
8	Josh	she can think very quickly like “oh this would be a good way to play against that”	Myfanwy’s quick reactions in a scene
9	Josh	it’s more of a premise-based thing where you walk on with an idea of like at least how to start the scene so at least we know like “oh, we’re calling back Greg’s character and this is kind of where we are”	starting a scene
10	Rachel	And people will laugh because “oh, you’re talking different from me.”	using an accent onstage
11	Rachel	And maybe somebody will be like, “Oh wow, this could be a really great moral play.	trying to control audience interpretation.
12	Rachel	Or um, as in Mid Western you’re like “Oh, hot dish” and “garbage”	performing a Midwestern accent
13	Nunez	It’s not just saying “You’re doing this with other people.” “Oh, ok.”	being a team player
14	Myfanwy	and then she says “Oh I’m sorry, I forgot to tell them everything is alright. Just give me a moment”	Pet Psychic
15	Myfanwy	and somebody told me “oh I hear this Washington Improv Theater has classes	learning about WIT
16	Myfanwy	I mean it’s like, there’s those things you always knew, but to have it put into such stark terms it’s like “Oh, now everything makes sense.”	improv teaches what you already know
17	Myfanwy	Whereas like if you were in like a town that was known for that it would be like “oh well, we know this option is there. That’s something that we’re gonna go do.”	in DC people don’t know about improv

18	Juliette	I'm like "oh I moved all over the place" but um	Juliette moved alot
19	Juliette	like I understood the concept like "oh we're improvising a one act play!"	long form improv
20	Michael	so I was like "oh my stop, I gotta go" an I left, leaving him alone with Ben. [Laugh]	dialogue from a scene
21	Michael	and they're like "oh we got you!" and then they shot the wife in the head,	dialogue from a scene
22	Greg	and like "oh that's great I just got a dog and I live up the street,	dialogue from a scene

Evaluative oh

#	Speaker	Token	
1	Josh	people say like "oh I wanna stop thinking" "I don't wanna be in my head I wanna think out there"	thinking in improv
2	Josh	rather than thinking like "oh I've gotta be funny", I've gotta make this scene funny,	thinking in improv
3	Josh	I didn't want to do anything like the standard thing "oh" like "I'm a hippie legalize pot ha ha ha "	decision in a scene
4	Josh	it sounds like you're saying like "oh well I've learned I know how to deal with situations	improv teaching you to deal with difficulty
5	Rachel	trying to make a big ol' joke about "oh look at me, I'm over reacting to my fish's death,	genuine emotions
6	Myfanwy	"oh Justin" (echoing Anna Justin @UCB)	another performer
7	Myfanwy	in Chicago, like people are just like "Oh our theater is better than your theater" "Oh I think the way you train people is stupid	Chicago improvisers
8			
9	Myfanwy	yeah she was like "oh that was a good job being a rock	audience response
10	Myfanwy	so I was like "oh did you like the lovely bones	dialogue from a scene
11	Myfanwy	I don't want to stand in front of a camera like a retard after that it was fine and then of course the Starblazers incident it was like "oh great!"	being caught singing on my taperecorder

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