

Social constructivist perspectives on stylistic variation are increasingly focusing on speakers' creative and strategic uses of language as a means for performing, creating, negotiating, and projecting identity in interaction. (Coupland 2001a,b; Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes 1998, 2002) and selfconscious speech, even overtly performative speech has come to be viewed as an important locus for exploring how speakers accomplish these specific situational goals. While anthropologists have long seen the value of studying the cultural aspects of performances, there has been little attention devoted to language use, as sociolinguistics has only come value such "inauthentic uses" of language relatively recently. This investigation contributes to the ongoing study of stylistic variation by exploring ways in which the concepts of stylization, framing, and intertextuality may be utilized in conjunction with quantitative variationist methodologies to investigate performative uses of language in accomplishing identity work and negotiating cultural meaning.

I explore the language use practices of a community of performers of long form improvisational theater (improv), a type of theatrical performance that is unscripted, playful, and creative. Improv is a rare type of performance that allows real-time insight and access to individual and group experiencing of culture, providing a public space in which social consonances and dissonances may be playfully set up and discursively engaged with, if only temporarily and in a fragmented way. I consider a range of discourse features cultivated in the practicing of this type of theater, including intertextuality, framing, and stylization. The ways in which such features are deployed contribute to a unique linguistic style for performers, both inside and outside the performance frame. I explore links between interactions inside and outside the performance frame, including interviews, rehearsals, performances, and interactions backstage both before and after performances.

I consider differences in framing of these settings, and how participants' sense of what is going on in each interaction (Goffman 1974) impacts how linguistic features are utilized and how they constrain the type of identity work that can be accomplished. Frame analysis may be particularly useful in the developing conceptualization of a continuum of performance (Preston and Rowe, 2004), given that "particular discursive frames posit specific affordances and constraints for interactants at specific moments of their involvement, foregrounding certain types of identity work that can be done" (Coupland 2004: 13). Improv players' unique style including a heightened awareness of language seems to be particularly valuable in the exploration of how language is used locally by individuals in interactions to accomplish meaning.

I contextualize this analysis against a tabulation of performances in which I observe and quantify the use of stylization in the construction of characters collected across months of observation and many hundreds of different characters performed. If framing of a performance may be the means by which cultural significance is communicated, I wish to observe the range of performers' use language to stage, negotiate and interact with a variety of texts and linguistic varieties across a range of performances.

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