Interracial conflict as a source of feature borrowing

The adoption of a phonological feature through dialect contact is often correlated with a speaker's positive affiliation towards speakers of the source dialect (Cutler 1999; though see also Milroy and Milroy 1985) as well as to the social characteristics that are indexed by that dialect (Eckert 2008, Silverstein 2003). In this paper, I present evidence of phonological transfer in a somewhat surprising context: the adoption of (TH)-fronting by white speakers who exhibit overtly hostile attitudes towards African Americans. (TH)-fronting, or the production of /θ/ as /f/, is a feature of Philadelphian African American English (AAE) but not a feature of white Philadelphian English. Following the indexicality framework of Silverstein (2003) and Eckert (2008), I argue that this transfer occurred because the feature itself is unspecified for raciolinguistic identity and has instead become a more salient index of *street* or *hegemonic masculine* identity (Anderson 1999, Connell 1995).

A closer look at the ethnographic details of this study reveals an evident path for borrowing in this hostile situation. Donegal Street is part of a low-income neighborhood characterized by block-specific racial segregation and decades-long racial tension between the white residents and African American residents (Newall, 2005). For the white male participants of this study, interracial conflict is particularly centered around control of the neighborhood public park, as articulated by "Patrick" in (1). For the participants in this study, Durand Park holds both economic and identity value. Economically, it serves as a desirable locus for drug trade. Personally, it is this park that many participants identify as being "from", despite actually living several blocks away. In this paper, I argue that the interracial conflict between the street-oriented white male speakers in this study and their street-oriented black neighbors, particularly over control of Durand Park, provided both the path to borrowing (TH)-fronting as well as an enforcement of increased racial animus. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the affiliation of (TH)-fronting as a marker of *street* or *hegemonic masculinity* results in a pattern of borrowing that excludes participants who have not been afforded hegemonic masculinity by community members: neither the female participants nor the one gay participant exhibit fronting, while each straight male exhibits some level of adoption.

844 tokens of (TH) from 13 participants were coded auditorily for realization of (TH). Participants' orientation toward a *street* identity and their attitude towards speakers of the source dialect were also collected; these scores were operationalized on the basis of self-reported engagement in street-oriented activities (Table 1) and interview responses to questions regarding race relations (Table 2). Results are depicted in Figure 1, which depicts the rates of (TH)-fronting according to the street orientation (along the facets) and racial animus (color) scores. The clear correlation between racial animus, street orientation, and increased adoption of (TH)-fronting suggests that inter-group conflict provides the source of both phonological transfer as well as racial animus itself for these white male participants. I argue here that this transfer of dialect features occurs because, rather than in spite of, inter-group conflict.

Activities: Drug dealing, drug purchasing, stolen goods trade, turf disputes, overt opposition to authority (i.e., police), positive orientation to fighting	
Activities Reported	**Street Activity Score**
0-2	Low
3-4	Medium
5-6	High

Table 1: Street orientation score, based on activities mentioned in interviews and field notes

Racial Animus Score	**Example**
Overtly opposed racism (1)	"My daughter brought that [picture] home for me. It says 'the shame of American democracy', and it has the police lynching a black guy." - Barbara, 51
No mention of race (2)	--
Non-aggressive racial animus (3)	"When they jump your little brothers, jump you, ruin the neighborhood […], what are you gonna do? - Kevin, 13
Racially-based sympathetic violence (4)	"Back in the day, a n----- couldn't walk down Donegal Street without getting smacked in the face with a glass bottle." - Flip, 20

Table 2: Racial animus score
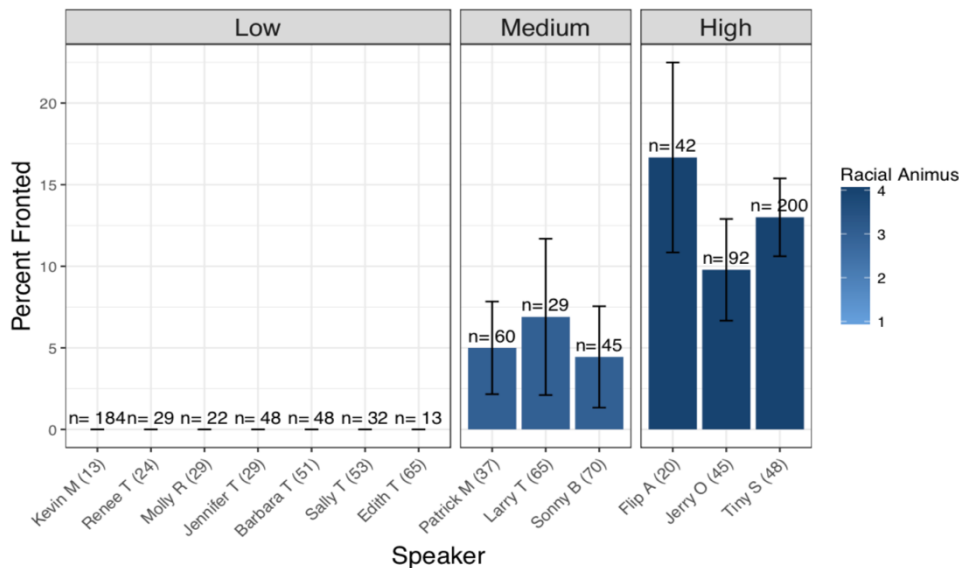
Figure 1: Rates of (TH)-fronting, grouped by street activity score. Bars depict standard error.

(1) Durand Park […]
   the projects are right on the other side
   So that's kinda like the borderline
   so that's where the projects and th- this neighborhood, where they would meet
   and they would fight and there would be race wars. […]
   Like I – I grew up throwing bottles and fightin with blacks all my life.

Anderson, E. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, violence, and the moral life of the inner city*. W. W. Norton and Company. **Connell, R.W. 1995**. *Masculinities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. **Cutler, C. 1999.** Yorkville Crossing: White Teens, Hip Hop, and African American English. Journal of Sociolinguistics 3(4):428—442. **Eckert, P. 2008.** Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12(4): 453--476. **Milroy, J. and L. Milroy. 1985.** Linguistic change, social network and speaker innovation. *Journal of Linguistics* 21, 339--384. **Newall, M. 2005.** A Prayer for Grays Ferry. Philadelphia City Paper. **Silverstein, M. 2003.** Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language & Communication* 23: 193--229.