ABSTRACT

FORREST, JON ROBERT. A Firm-Specific Analysis of Southern US English and Workplace Processes. (Under the direction of Dr. Robin Dodsworth and Dr. Steve McDonald).

Sociological treatments of work and workplaces increasingly acknowledge the importance of cultural processes in reproducing inequality at work, and the incorporation of linguistic analysis into examinations of the workplace offers an implementable solution to the problem of cultural measurement. Simultaneously, sociolinguists have long argued that work is both an important indicator of socioeconomic class and correlate of class-stratified linguistic variables, and it is often analyzed as representing a unique stylistic context. In both cases, work constitutes an important cultural and linguistic arena, as workers must negotiate expectations for how to look, act, and speak while on the job, and negative evaluations by customers or superiors can result in material consequences for the employee. To connect the structural processes of workplace organization to culturally-associated sociolinguistic variation, this study examines the stylistic differences of white Southern speakers at a technology firm in a variety of social contexts.

To examine the relationship between work and language in detail, recorded data was collected from participants while they were performing their job duties, as well as when they were interacting with family and friends. After they finished recordings, sociolinguistic interviews were conducted with each participant to talk about the details of their jobs, as well as discuss the perceptions they had surrounding Southern linguistic features and their treatment. Results of both quantitative and qualitative analyses reveal a complex relationship between firm structure, linguistic performance, and social evaluation. Regression models show a correlation between job skills and features of the Southern Vowel Shift, a prominent feature of the “Southern accent” for workers at the firm. Those who held jobs with higher interpersonal skill
requirements (sales, customer service) or analytical skill requirements (critical thinking) showed fewer elements of the Southern Vowel Shift while on the job. In contrast, those who had higher managerial skill requirements (leadership, coordination) had more Southern features. When assessed at the individual level, some workers shifted their speech to suit the needs of their job, with employees in customer-oriented positions showing more dynamic stylistic differences than others at the firm. The linguistic differences between recording contexts were especially wide for younger women, who also expressed the greatest ambivalence about the treatment of Southern accents, both on the job and more generally. Finally, qualitative analysis of interviews showed conflicting reports about the evaluation and treatment of Southern accents. All interviewees reported that Southern accents were negatively evaluated in a general sense, through stereotypes of lack of education or low intelligence. However, most employees also argued that Southern Tech did not have these same biases within the company, due to its foundation and roots in the South, suggesting the importance of local linguistic marketplace norms in the treatment of dialects at work.

Overall, these results have important ramifications for the understanding of the connection between jobs, workplaces, and language variation. The nuanced connection between organizational position, job skills, and SVS features highlights the need for deeper treatments of the connection between work and linguistic performance. Workers spoke of the importance of organizational culture and practices creating a comfortable environment to use Southern linguistic features, further suggesting that firm-level practices may play a role in conditioning stylistic variation within those arenas. These findings also illustrate the extra labor undertaken by workers who speak non-Standard dialects within the workplace to accommodate to more mainstream norms. Not only do these individuals face possible consequences for the speech
while on the job, they must expend extra effort to maintain stylistic control over stigmatized features.
A Firm-Specific Analysis of Southern US English and Workplace Processes

by
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DEDICATION

To Abby, who has far more patience than she acknowledges.
BIOGRAPHY

Jon Forrest grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina, and began attending North Carolina State University in 2006, blissfully unaware that he would be spending the next twelve years at the same university. He received his BA in World Literature with a minor in Japanese in 2011, and his MA in Sociolinguistics in 2013. In the fall of 2018 he joined the Department of Linguistics at Indiana University at Bloomington as a Visiting Assistant Professor.
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Of all the parts of this dissertation, the acknowledgements may be the most difficult for me to write, not because I can’t think of what to say, but because I have so many people to thank that I’m afraid I’ll leave something out. From my first semester in the Linguistics program at NCSU, it’s been the most welcoming and supportive place I could possibly imagine. That’s not a statement I make lightly; as I move to the other side of the academic table, I realize even more how much effort it takes on the part of faculty to create and maintain an environment like NC State’s. It’s a further testament to NC State’s program that I came to graduate school with nearly no linguistic training and came out of it a linguist—no small feat.

I have been blessed to have Robin Dodsworth as an advisor and mentor throughout my graduate education, and without her generosity with her time (and data!), I wouldn’t be where I am today. She has the ability to push me to bigger and better research questions, as well as an uncanny knack for taking the jumbled mess that is my thought process and helping me polish it into clear, focused ideas. Her assistance through my presentations, papers, and ultimately, dissertation, made it possible for me to accomplish as much as I have throughout graduate school. I remember many a discussion within our cohort about how fantastic Robin was as a teacher, researcher, and mentor, and that we all dreamed of being just like that when we graduated. Here’s to hoping.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. ix
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................ x

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1
  Theoretical Framing ....................................................................................................... 2
    Southern Dialect and Worker Fit .............................................................................. 2
    Sociolinguistic Approaches to Occupation and the Promise of Sociological Perspectives ............................................................... 7
    Sociological Theory and Firm Organization ......................................................... 10

Empirical Work ................................................................................................................ 17
  The Role of Language in the Perception of Skill and Job Suitability ......................... 17
  Style-Shifting and Stigmatized Southern Linguistic Variables .................................. 21
  Southern Dialects and Linguistic Discrimination at Work ........................................ 23

Summary ............................................................................................................................ 25

CHAPTER 2: DATA AND METHODS ........................................................................ 29
  Southern Tech .............................................................................................................. 29
    Data Collection ........................................................................................................ 36
      Study Protocol ..................................................................................................... 36
      Gaining Access and Recruiting Participants ....................................................... 40
    Analysis .................................................................................................................... 44
      Quantitative Phonetic Analysis ........................................................................... 44
      Survey Data ......................................................................................................... 47
      Qualitative Coding ............................................................................................... 48
      Looking Forward .................................................................................................. 49

CHAPTER 3: JOB SKILLS AND STYLE SHIFTING AT SOUTHERN TECH ......... 51
  Introduction .................................................................................................................. 51
    Literature Review .................................................................................................... 52
      Job Skills and Labor Market Structure ................................................................ 52
      Sociolinguistic, Occupation, and Job Tasks ......................................................... 55
      Skill Clusters and Hypotheses ............................................................................. 57
    Data and Methods .................................................................................................... 59
    Results ..................................................................................................................... 63
      Skill Metric Performance ...................................................................................... 63
      Vowel-Specific Results ....................................................................................... 64
      Mid Front Vowels ................................................................................................. 66
      High Front Vowels ............................................................................................... 69
      TRAP .................................................................................................................... 74
      PRIZE .................................................................................................................. 75
    Discussion ................................................................................................................. 76

CHAPTER 4: STYLISTIC EMBEDDEDNESS AND THE SOUTHERN VOWEL SHIFT .................................................................................................................. 82
  Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 84
    Sociolinguistic Approaches to Style ...................................................................... 84
    Inhabited Institutions and the Culture of Organizations ....................................... 89
    Formal Organizations versus Communities of Practice ...................................... 91
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Speaker Demographics</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Survey Data Summary Statistics</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>O*NET Data Summary Statistics</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Speaker Characteristics</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Effects of Skill in Best Regression Models for More/Less Southern Shift</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Communities of Practice vs. Formal Organizations</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Levels of Analysis within Stylistic Embeddedness</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>SVS Stylistic Difference by Speaker</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>Speaker Demographics and Pseudonyms</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Vowel Movement in the SVS for Analyzed Vowels ........................................... 45
Figure 3.1 Vowel Positions in the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) ............................................. 67
Figure 3.2 Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for FACE ..................................... 68
Figure 3.3 Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for DRESS .................................. 69
Figure 3.4 Vowel Measurements for Speaker Tec001 by Context ........................................ 71
Figure 3.5 Vowel Duration by Context .................................................................................. 72
Figure 3.6 Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for FLEECE ............................... 73
Figure 3.7 Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for KIT ....................................... 74
Figure 3.8 Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for TRAP .................................... 75
Figure 3.9 Main Effects of Skill for PRIZE .......................................................................... 76
Figure 3.10 Cluster Analysis of Job Skills ............................................................................ 80
Figure 4.1 Language Style as Audience Design (Bell 1984) ................................................. 86
Figure 4.2 Executive Organizational Chart for Southern Tech .............................................. 93
Figure 4.3 Example Speakers for SVS Positioning ............................................................... 108
Figure 4.4 Cluster Analysis of SVS Metrics from Sociolinguistic Interviews ..................... 109
Figure 4.5 Mid Vowel Euclidean Distance by Stylistic Context ....................................... 112
Figure 4.6 PRIZE Glide Diagonal by Stylistic Context ....................................................... 113
Figure 4.7 PRIZE and Mid Vowel Stylistic Differences ...................................................... 115
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sociology has acknowledged the importance of culture in the creation and maintenance of social stratification, dating back to foundational theorists (Goffman 1959; Simmel, Frisby, and Featherstone 1997). These early conceptions had a profound influence on Bourdieu, who solidified the study of culture in sociology with the coining of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and habitus (Bourdieu 1984), helping to marry traditional sociological study of outcomes with analysis of culture. Though these conceptions helped to unify the study of culture in sociology into a single construct, the difficulty of determining what counts as culture has made concrete implementations of these theories difficult for those who conduct empirical work. Economic sociology in particular has shown some reluctance towards including culture in its analyses for this reason, as a catchall definition of “culture” runs the risk of defining social actors solely by their adherence to vague socio-cultural norms (Granovetter 1985; Wrong 1961). Such a conception creates the further problem of obscuring the social structure that influences culture, often resulting in condemnation of a culture rather than the social conditions that create it. This phenomenon is evidenced from popular discourses surrounding race and poverty, where racially-identified cultures, rather than social structures, receive blame in public policy discussions (Rainwater, Yancey, and Moynihan 1967). The danger of culture-blaming requires deft navigation by sociologists in order to discuss cultural issues tactfully while still exposing structural mechanisms (Anderson 2000; Wilson 1978, 1987, 2009). To avoid the pitfalls of the culture vs. structure debate—and to steer away from the implications of over-socialization—any empirical analysis of culture from an economic sociological perspective needs specificity in its measurement. To narrow the broad definition of “culture” down to a measurable concept, I focus on the symbolic capital of language (Bourdieu 1991), using sociolinguistic frameworks for
analyzing language variation (Eckert 1989a; Labov 1972b, 2001a; Wolfram 1969) as a way to concretely implement culture within a sociological analysis.

Though Bourdieu (1991) identifies the symbolic importance of prestigious language forms at a theoretical level, sociolinguistics systematizes the specific features of language that make up prestigious (or non-prestigious) varieties. A dialect like that of the United States South can be characterized by a specific set of features surrounding pronunciation, word choice, and other structural aspects of language (Bailey 1997; Thomas 2001), which can be quantitatively measured using sociolinguistic methods. Furthermore, research in this field has found associations between traditional social categories and specific social dialects (Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Labov 2001; Wolfram 1969) and acknowledged the role of language in the replication of class structures (Eckert 1989a, 2000). Despite these findings, sociolinguistics only tenuously connects language to broader social processes, especially when dealing with work, occupations, and other issues within the sociological realm (Coupland 1980; Labov 2001). The lack of broader sociological connections in sociolinguistics, especially where workplaces are concerned, demonstrates how both fields can reinforce the other’s shortcomings. Sociological studies of work and the economy can provide the theoretical and empirical framework missing from studies of work and occupations in sociolinguistics. Likewise, sociolinguistics offers a clear, measurable way to detect culture in sociological analysis through the incorporation of language variation.

This dissertation blends the fields of sociology and sociolinguistics, investigating the role that Southern dialects play within a technology firm in urban Raleigh, North Carolina. Traditionally, the Southern dialect faces cultural stigma (Goffman 1963; Niedzielski and Preston 2003), with its speakers being perceived as lazy or uneducated (Campbell-Kibler 2007) when
using Southern-associated linguistic features. However, within urban areas in the South the traditional dialect features are retreating (Dodsworth 2013; Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Fridland 2003; Prichard 2010; Thomas 1997), coinciding with the rapid growth of Southern cities due to migration from other parts of the United States (Frey 1995; Wolfram and Reaser 2014). The driving force behind the population growth in the Raleigh area is largely due to the growth of firms in the technology industry, bringing a great deal of high-wage jobs to the area, along with speakers of non-Southern dialects. As the traditional Southern dialect has lost currency within the local linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu 1991), socioeconomic divides have appeared within the community in terms of the persistence of Southern features (Dodsworth 2013). Narrowing the level of analysis to a single firm will allow for deeper analysis of the organizational processes at work, connecting the aggregate socioeconomic patterns with the economic sociological issues within the workplace. This dissertation addresses three major questions: 1) What Southern features pattern with job skills? 2) How do workers style-shift (manipulate their linguistic features) on the job to avoid stigma? 3) What linguistic discrimination do workers face at work, and how do they negotiate it?

With the renewed focus in economic sociology on the importance of cultural processes (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014; Rivera 2012; Roscigno and Wilson 2014), this assessment of the role of Southern dialects within a firm will add a crucial piece to our understanding of how organizational cultures operate to affect employment opportunities. I will begin with both an overview of the role of Southern dialect features in cultural “fit” for workers and the history of sociolinguistic approaches to occupation, in order to position the study relative to both fields. Next, I will present the theoretical underpinnings for the study design, drawing on grand sociological theory and economic sociological work on relational inequalities to explain the
focus on firm-internal linguistic differences. Lastly, I will explain the specific linguistic features analyzed in this dissertation and cover the literature in sociology and sociolinguistics relevant to the three major empirical questions.

**Theoretical Framing**

*Southern Dialect and Worker Fit*

The concept of “worker fit,” or the typing of certain jobs for workers possessing specific social characteristics, has seen a resurgence in tandem with the increasing calls for stronger integration of culture into economic sociology (Lamont et al. 2014; Rivera 2011, 2012; Zelizer 2012). Earlier investigations of the importance of perceived fit focused primarily on issues of gender and race, identifying social mechanisms that perpetuate inequality ranging from network effects (Elliott and Smith 2004; Ridgeway 1997) to the gender typing of job-related personality characteristics (Gorman 2005). Within organizations, jobs that are seen to possess neutral or male characteristics tend to be typed for men (Gorman 2005; Ridgeway 1997, 2001), and overall, women receive lower-paid job opportunities compared to men. Since actors tend to compare their opportunities to others in their social networks—and networks are highly homophilous on salient social characteristics (Ibarra 1992; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001)—women compare their opportunities to those of other women (Major 1989), resulting in the acceptance of limited opportunities and the perpetuation of gender-labeling for jobs. Black workers experience direct discrimination when trying to access positions of power within the workplace (Elliott and Smith 2004), and, like women, they face discriminatory typing. Managers tend to nominate blacks as having a lesser work ethic more than any other racial group (Kirschenman and Neckerman 2001). In Kirschenman and Neckerman’s study specifically, managers showed reluctance to hire blacks because they did not “fit” into the company, citing personality
characteristics and interactional style as the driving factors for that choice. Managers, in general, perceive black men to be particularly lacking in these “soft skills” (e.g. work ethic, interpersonal skills, etc.) (Moss and Tilly 1996), leading to racial bias in hiring when looking for these traits.

The current revitalization of the study of culture in economic sociology has broadened the focus of the field from major social characteristics (i.e. race/class/gender) to cultural issues outside of the traditional axes of inequality. Theories of relational inequality (Roscigno and Wilson 2014; Tilly 1999; Zelizer 2012) and the integration of social cognition borrowed from psychology (Dimaggio and Markus 2010; Vaisey 2009) have bolstered conceptions of how culture affects both macro- and micro-level social and economic processes. At a more theoretical level, cultural processes can be seen as an accompaniment to traditional structural processes of inequality (Lamont et al. 2014), creating hierarchical systems of valuation (Lamont 2012). Cultural practices like styles of dress, artistic preferences, or manner of speech that have in themselves no intrinsic value are subjected to hierarchical evaluation based on group preferences. The individual judgements and interactions within these culture systems create institutionalized patterns within organizations (Ridgeway 2011), thereby cementing within social structure the attitudes and beliefs that constitute cultural evaluation. These organizational patterns vary from place to place, resulting in unique patterns of culturally-based social inequality that develop embedded within organizations. Within high-wage firms where educational credentials tend to be nearly identical between job applicants, interviewers rely on a sense of cultural fit between themselves and the interviewee (Rivera 2011, 2012). What counts as a cultural match changes from firm to firm, reflecting the importance of cultural embeddedness within organizations (Zelizer 2002).
Like the personality traits that comprise soft skills or applicants’ extracurricular activities, language can serve as a matching mechanism and a signal of worker fit. However, in contrast to the notorious difficulty in measuring soft skills (Heckman and Kautz 2012), sociolinguistic measurement of language variation has consistent, quantifiable patterns within social groups. Linguistic features from regional dialects like New York, Philadelphia, or Southern English (Labov 1972b, 2001a) to ethnic dialects like African-American or Latina/o English (Mendoza-Denton 2014; Wolfram 1969) show systematic variation, and the measurement of these features illustrates a speaker’s deviance from the reigning prestigious variety in a given society. For example, in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), speakers have the option to delete forms of the verb “to be” in certain situations (e.g. “He thirsty” instead of “He’s thirsty”), and speakers with a higher rate of verb absence can be described as deviating more strongly from the prescriptive Standard English. Similarly, pronunciation features can have substantial deviations from mainstream Standard English, and these dialect-specific pronunciations can cue negative social evaluations, especially those features associated with Southern English. Listeners tend to rate Southern pronunciations of the vowels in BAIT and BOAT as less educated than corresponding Northern tokens (Fridland, Bartlett, and Kreuz 2005), and individuals tend to rate Southern states as having speech that is significantly less correct than other regions of the United States (Fridland and Bartlett 2006a). In short, these systematic variations have strong subconscious associations, resulting in a similar typing process to the connection made by managers between soft skills and race or gendered personality characteristics and jobs. Just as managers dodge the perceptions of direct discrimination by pointing to cultural or personality factors like interactional style or perceived motivation, linguistic discrimination can sidestep direct accusations of discrimination with a reference to cultural fit.
Sociolinguistic Approaches to Occupation and the Promise of Sociological Perspectives

Sociolinguistic scholarship has made class a primary concern since the foundation of the field (Dodsworth 2009; Labov 1966, 1972b; Trudgill 1974; Wolfram 1969), focusing on how language variation correlates with differences in socioeconomic position. The results drawn from class-driven analysis of variation form the foundation of key theories of linguistic stratification, including Labov’s (2001) argument that the middle of the class hierarchy tends to lead in linguistic innovations, which he terms the curvilinear principle. These community-internal changes operate below the level of consciousness, and they diffuse from the central classes throughout the speech community over time. In contrast, changes from above the level of consciousness tend to originate in the upper-middle social classes (Labov 2001) and diffuse to adjacent social groups.

Sociolinguistic variables that are stable (i.e. not changing in social markedness overt time) tend to show a distinction between working-class and middle class speakers, where the stigmatized form occurs at higher rates among the working class (Labov 2001; Trudgill 1972; Wolfram 1969). Oftentimes when changes from above or below fully complete within the community¹, they show a similar pattern to other stable variables (Labov 2001). Other work following this paradigm finds similar social class correlates for these types of sociolinguistic variables (Baranowski 2008; Hazen 2008), reinforcing the importance of class when investigating sociolinguistic variation.

The definition of class has been a point of contention within the field since its inception (Ash 2013), with a number of social factors (e.g. occupation, education, income) often used to

¹ Sociolinguistic changes from above and below both show age-graded effects, where the youngest speakers in a community are leading language change. When these changes reach completion, we no longer see the same divide between older and younger speakers.
construct a broader class index. Central to the construction of sociolinguistic class metrics is occupation, which Labov (2001) argues to be the most important social determinant of class stratification, greater than either educational attainment or income. To codify occupation for inclusion into a class index, the early work done by Labov in Philadelphia uses an occupational typology drawn from census data, with an assigned status scale intended to match a given occupation’s social prestige (Duncan 1961). This scale is intended to reflect the perceived prestige of these jobs by others, and it shows a relatively high correlation with survey response results. Though updated versions of this metric (Nakao and Treas 1992) have been implemented to take into account changes in the United States economic structure (Labov 2001), there has been a recent push towards a deeper recognition of the importance of local practices when dealing with class (Eckert 2000). This approach hearkens back to the linguistic marketplace perspective (Sankoff and Laberge 1978), which used sociolinguists’ perceived necessity of standard language to categorize occupations in the Montreal area. In an effort to move beyond purely economic distinctions when assigning social position to occupations, eight judges familiar with Montreal socioeconomic structure ranked speakers in Montreal based on life history data, assessing their need for standard language in their day-to-day lives. The index generated from these ratings showed a strong correlation with three sociolinguistic variables in Montreal French (Sankoff and Laberge 1978), providing support for this type of index. Similar methods of occupational rating have been utilized on an infrequent basis (Horvath 1985), but current research in sociolinguistics has tended towards a more ethnographically-driven approach to dissecting the problem of occupation. To this end, many recent studies use ethnographic data gleaned from fieldwork and an awareness of the local socioeconomic conditions to inform
occupational typology (Baranowski 2008; Hazen 2011), thereby allowing for the unique
sociohistorical context of different regions to inform their analyses.

However, some researchers have called into question these method of assessing
occupational status and prestige, advocating instead for alternative theoretical perspectives.
Rickford (1986) argues for an implementation of conflict models of class drawn from
sociological theory to discuss the social stratification of language. He finds a sharp divide in
Guyana between the Estate and Non-Estate Classes in terms of their linguistic practices,
attributable to the differential access to material resources and social mobility between the two
groups. Some researchers have pushed for a supplanting or augmenting of class with network-
driven measures drawn from sociological theories (Milroy 1980; Milroy and Milroy 1992) to
more accurately reflect the importance of peers in the patterning of linguistic variation. So far,
sociolinguistic work implementing network measures has used relatively coarse measurements of
friendship (Cheshire et al. 2008; Fridland 2003), but initial results using more detailed analytic
techniques have shown promising results for modeling variation (Dodsworth 2014). Further
calls have been made to integrate sociological theory more strongly into sociolinguistic inquiry
(Ash 2013; Dodsworth 2009; Mallinson and Dodsworth 2009), but with few clear
implementations (Dodsworth 2008; Kirkham 2015).

As stated earlier, occupation shows some of the strongest correlations with linguistic
variation either independently or as a component of composite class indices (Labov 2001).
However, the mechanisms by which these correlations arise remain little understood in
sociolinguistics. One reason is that studies of sociolinguistic variation traditionally, and for good
reason, focus on speech communities rather than individual workplaces; as a result, occupational
categories tend to be broadly defined and include speakers from a wide variety of workplaces in
disparate industries. Studies of work and occupations in sociology, however, tend to narrow the focus to single firms, allowing for a deeper exploration of the role the institution of work has on the social and cultural differences between people in different jobs. Therefore, just as language variation offers sociology an easily measurable concept to break down the effects of culture in labor market outcomes, economic sociology and sociological methods can provide sociolinguistics with a much more robust understanding of the social process underlying the fundamental social patterning found in empirical work.

Sociological Theory and Firm Organization

To begin a sociologically-driven inquiry into language variation first requires an overview of the grand theory underpinning current empirical work in sociology. For our purposes, it makes the most sense to begin with the work of Max Weber, since many of his ideas inform the traditional conceptions of occupation within sociolinguistics. Weber (1946), when discussing class as a general concept, makes a fundamental distinction between two intertwined ideas: class and status. Class, in Weber’s view, constitutes the material resources available to an individual at any given time; in sociolinguistic terms, Weber’s notion of class would be reflected in the inclusion of income into models of variation. Status, on the other hand, reflects the social prestige of an individual or occupation, rather than raw material resources. Sociolinguistic studies relying on measures of occupational prestige, whether they come from national metrics (Labov 1972b, 2001a), third-party raters (Horvath 1985; Sankoff and Laberge 1978), or ethnographic data (Baranowski 2008; Hazen 2008) fall more closely in line with status than they do with class.

Weber (1978) extends further beyond class and status, dealing with intergroup relations and how they construct class and status boundaries—a crucial concept for the analysis of
language variation. He introduces the notion of social closure, whereby individuals in a group police membership in order to maintain control over material resources. Through social closure, social groups monopolize resources and opportunities, which can range from material goods (e.g. money, trade commodities) to opportunities (e.g. jobs, school admissions). Social closure can be enforced formally, as with the credentialing process of higher degrees for certain occupations, or informally, through attributes like race, gender, etc. The competition over scarce resources created by group division becomes reminiscent of the class struggles described by Marx and Engels (1848), where these divisions become drivers of increasing social inequality. Importantly for sociolinguistic purposes, Weber notes that any characteristic can be seized upon to create social boundaries and closure, and these characteristics can become nearly impermeable barriers for outsiders to overcome (e.g. race).

Language, too, plays a critical role in the maintenance of bounded social relations and the reproduction of inequality, and an integration of Weber’s ideas with Bourdieu’s (1984, 1991) more explicit discussion of the social functions of language provides a framework for better understanding both theorists’ relevance to sociolinguistics. Bourdieu (1984, 1990) introduces the idea of cultural capital, a term denoting sets of culturally-marked behaviors and practices that are differentially valued within the social marketplace. He explicitly identifies language as a key component of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991), coining the idea of a linguistic marketplace in which certain languages or dialects garner more social prestige than others. Though Bourdieu’s conception of the linguistic marketplace rests on the universality of standard language ideology—an implicit assumption reflected in some sociolinguistic work that deals with prestige and marketplace theories (Sankoff and Laberge 1978; Trudgill 1972)—it may be more accurate to say that a number of marketplaces exist, each with a different value system. Indeed, we see
this assumption reflected in the move to communities of practice (Eckert 2000; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999), a perspective with its eye on the unique construction of prestige inherent to social groups. Marrying this idea with Weber’s theory of social closure, we would expect to see alternative linguistic marketplaces arise when a group becomes large and organized enough to maintain control of social and material resources, thereby using language as a key to access these assets. Rather than conceiving of the linguistic marketplace as purely a macro-level phenomenon of nation-states, regions and cities, it may be more productive to shift our focus to the operations of meso-level organizations like individual workplaces, where the opportunity for hoarding material benefits exists.

More recent sociological theories of social reproduction and meso-level processes focus on the role of firms in producing society-wide inequalities. Theoretical exploration of the durability of categorical inequality (Tilly 1999) centers on the part played by firms in maintaining and reinforcing these social divides. Job division within a single workplace utilizes existing social inequalities, like gender, to reify the categorical typing of jobs; within medical practices, for example, doctors tend to be men while nurses tend to be women. In addition to reserving the highest wage and prestige jobs for men, this system provides superficial evidence that gender differences must exist, since they play such a prominent role in the organization of the workplace. The interconnectivity between broad social inequalities and firm organization lies central to the construction of categorical inequalities, and it therefore plays a crucial role in the hoarding of opportunities and resources by social groups (Weber 1978). Incorporating the idea of the linguistic marketplace into this perspective, firms adapt their inequality structures to reflect their position within local culture and network dynamics (Tilly 1999). In short, a firm located in the rural Southern United States may use a very different schema for organizing jobs.
than one located in New York or San Francisco, and this schema would extend into the linguistic divisions among their employees. The value system for a firm-internal linguistic marketplace would remain sensitive to local features and would be used as a building block for conceptualizing a value system for dialects within a city or region.

Further theoretical work dealing with organizational culture follows Tilly’s (1999) ideas surrounding categorical inequality and the structure of firms. In an attempt to bridge micro-, meso-, and macro-level analyses, the symbolic power perspective (Hallett 2003) utilizes theories of symbolic practice (Bourdieu 1984; Swidler 1986) to ascertain how organizational culture is shaped by its participants. Rather than Tilly’s (1999) historical analysis approach, which more strongly connects meso- and macro-level processes through its focus on nations and societies, symbolic power builds upwards from individual, micro-level interactions. Drawing heavily on both Bourdieu (1984) and Goffman (1959), this framework emphasizes the role of individuals within an organization who have symbolic power, allowing them to shape the culture and practices of the organization. This process can occur either consciously or unconsciously, and it does not require the individual to be cognizant of their own organizational influence. Another way to conceive of organizational cultures is as inequality regimes (Acker 2006), where inequality systems develop differently depending on the organization and perspectives of the firm. Even with an egalitarian purpose in mind, firms still develop persistent organizational inequalities (Acker 2006), though the specific form changes depending on the type of firm involved.

The idea of organizational culture and relational inequality has recently gained a great deal of prominence in the sociology of work and occupations, and empirical studies testing these theoretical hypotheses (Acker 2006; Hallett 2003; Tilly 1999) have found promising results.
Initial tests with Tilly’s (1999) framework (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2010, 2012; Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 2009) show relational processes above and beyond the contribution of traditional categorical exclusion on the basis of race, gender, and other axes of inequality. Wage disparities attributable to gender composition of jobs vary dramatically between Australia and the U.S. due to historical differences in the organization of work (Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 2009), lending credence to the proposed relationship between society-wide processes and organizational makeup. At the individual level, workers with higher status are able to obtain higher wages than lower-status individuals when controlling for other social variables, even within the same job (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2010). Especially relevant for linguists, native command of English correlates with firm-internal wage inequality, net of any ethnic or racial differences (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2010). A similar difference in gender-driven wage inequality exists between the U.S. and Japan (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012), again attributable to organizational structure and operation. These conclusions suggest that workplaces are not homogeneous across national economies, questioning the suitability of measures drawn from national occupational structures. Evidence drawn from interviews and ethnographic observation provides additional evidence for the importance of firm culture, as interviewers tend to hire workers for high-wage positions when they are perceived to “fit” culturally with the organization (Rivera 2012). Since most interviewees for positions had similar qualifications, the interviewers relied on perceived cultural similarities, such as hobbies, interests, and extra-curricular activities, to make a judgement on who to hire. With positive results found in these contexts, more calls have been made for research following a relational model (Roscigno and Wilson 2014) that takes into account cultural processes (Lamont et al.
2014) and the role of micro-level interactions (Tomaskovic-Devey 2014) in generating relational inequality.

Given the current trend focusing on meso-level processes within organizations in the sociology of work, it stands to reason to use a similar approach to solve the problems sociolinguistics has with occupational stratification. Currently-employed occupational metrics tend to be coarse-grained (Dodsworth and Kohn 2012), non-specific to local economies (Labov 2001; Nakao and Treas 1992), or vague about the process by which occupations gain meaning in the local linguistic marketplace (Baranowski 2008). By using a single firm as the population for sampling, we can bridge the gap between the stylistically-driven micro-level of linguistic variation (Eckert 2000, 2008) and the macro-level patterns seen within speech communities (Baranowski 2008; Labov 2001) through a mapping of the firm-internal linguistic marketplace and an acknowledgement of the role these organizations play in shaping social categorization. Though some sociolinguistic work has noted significant differences in linguistic performance for speakers working at globally-oriented firms versus locally-oriented firms (Zhang 2005), linguistic variation has not been concretely connected to organizationally-driven processes. Treating language as a sociological phenomenon—at least from a theoretical perspective—provides a toolbox full of new perspectives that more clearly address the process by which language and social categories become intertwined. Reframing how we treat occupation in sociolinguistics will allow new insights, yielding a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the social processes that correlate with linguistic variation.

Similarly, the employment of sociolinguistic methods for analyzing language variation will contribute to the burgeoning study of culture in economic sociology, providing a strong empirical framework for the analysis of language as a contributing factor to social inequalities.
Since sociolinguistics has a wide body of literature covering the internal and social aspects of language variation, we avoid vague, all-encompassing cultural terminology, as suggested by Granovetter (1985) and others (Wrong 1961). The introduction of language variation into sociological analysis of inequalities yields a tool for measuring an aspect of culture that plays a role in nearly any form of social interaction, and it allows us to dissect a piece of the micro-level interactions that are theorized to form meso- and macro-level patterns of inequality (Acker 2006; Goffman 1959; Ridgeway 2011). Furthermore, examining the patterning of inequality as it relates to Southern dialect features will illustrate how cultural processes differ from other forms of social and structural inequality (Lamont et al. 2014). The work on race (Elliott and Smith 2004; Tilly 1999) and gender (Gorman 2005; Ridgeway 1997) shows how these categories operate to hoard opportunities for certain social groups, but the addition of a linguistic element shows whether the cultural dimension shows similarities to these other dimensions of inequality. Ultimately, this study should yield an empirically implementable cultural measure that stands to deepen our understanding of how culture and structure work together within organizations.

In examining the relationship between labor market outcomes and linguistic variation, I have three major questions:

- Are sociolinguistic features of Southern dialects associated with lower perceived skill requirements for a job, especially lower perceived soft skills?
- How do individuals style shift in different social situations (on the job/with friends/sociolinguistic interview), and what does their behavior tell us about stigmatized linguistic variables? Do speakers tend to avoid more stereotypical Southern features in certain situations, but leave less marked features relatively unchanged?
• Do individuals perceive discrimination against Southern dialects (or other stigmatized dialects) within the firm, and do they feel as if language matters when they perform certain jobs?

Having discussed the theoretical background for the study, I will now cover the literature informing more specific research questions, paying special attention to the additional insight gained by marrying economic sociology’s focus on workplaces and labor market outcomes with sociolinguistic methods.

**Empirical Work**

*The Role of Language in the Perception of Skill and Job Suitability*

Where Labov (1972, 2001) and others (Baranowski 2008; Horvath 1985; Macaulay 1976; Trudgill 1974) attempt to take jobs and group them together into relatively similar clusters, the sociology of work has moved from typology (Duncan 1961) into exploration of the social demands and rewards of specific forms of labor (e.g. emotional labor, managerial labor). In response to the changing structure of the economy and the growth of financial and service sector employment (Lorence 1991; Tomaskovic-Devey and Lin 2011; Wright and Dwyer 2003), much of the focus in recent literature has moved away from pure typology to analysis of the social conditions that underlie different types of work. For example, interactive service work (Leidner 1993), a term encompassing low-level sales positions, secretarial work, and fast-food, constitutes a large portion of the low-wage service sector jobs that have replaced traditional blue-collar manufacturing work. These jobs are characterized by a high level of interpersonal interaction, but these interactions are highly scripted and routinized, like a typical cashier/customer exchange. Another growing sector of the service economy is care work (Dwyer 2013; England 2005), or jobs where the emotional or physical well-being of the
customer supersedes any monetary gain; examples of this sort of work would be nurses, lower-grade teachers, and flight attendants. These jobs require a high degree of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983), and they tend to be associated with women. In the case of both care and interactive service work, a penalty is imposed because of the devaluing of interpersonal labor (England 1992), an element that creates a fundamental link between language and job tasks.

The fast-growing service sector of the economy requires a competency in interpersonal interaction, termed “soft skills” in the sociological literature, and language plays a prominent role in employers’ assessment of a worker’s perceived competency in this realm. Much of the discussion of soft skills has centered on the growing perception of soft skills as a requirement for service labor and the consequent discrimination against black men applying for these jobs (Kirschenman and Neckerman 2001; Moss and Tilly 1996; Terrell and Terrell 1983), due to a perception that black men have less competency in interaction. Employers explicitly use dialect as an example of lack of interpersonal skills (Kirschenman and Neckerman 2001), citing features of African American Vernacular English as unsuitable for the workplace. Experimental work addressing cognitive bias on the basis of accent (Segrest Purkiss et al. 2006) confirms the ethnographic evidence, showing that individuals are significantly less likely to hire a job applicant for a managerial position if presented with a Latino English speakers versus a Standard English Speaker. This condemnation of non-standard English extends beyond ethnically- and racially-marked dialects to regional features, as well. When a given speaker’s interview segment contains higher frequencies of the –in variant of (ING) (as in walkin’ for walking), listeners judge the speaker less suitable for a newscaster job (Labov et al. 2011). In a study of sales calls between purchasers and suppliers, participants reported more satisfaction with the sales interaction if the salesperson used a prestigious dialect (Mai and Hoffmann 2011) rather than a
stigmatized regional dialect. Within experimental settings, individuals are more likely to economically compete with speakers of regional dialects, due to discriminatory judgements and perceived lack of cognitive capability for those speakers (Heblich, Lameli, and Riener 2015). However, in both of these cases, these judgements operate in reverse when a speaker’s dialect aligns with a listener’s dialect. Participants reported more satisfaction with sales calls if the salesperson spoke the same dialect as the participant (Mai and Hoffmann 2011), and listeners were more likely to economically cooperate with a speaker of their regional dialect (Heblich et al. 2015). The mediating factor of shared dialect underscores the importance of categorical inequalities (Tilly 1999) and social closure (Weber 1978) when discussing the evaluation of linguistic features—what may be an asset in one organization or region may be a hindrance in another.

With the service sector supplanting blue-collar industries, sociolinguistic typologies of occupation (Labov 2001) require an overhaul; instead, emphasis should be placed on the way language might affect perceived competency or suitability for a job. To this end, I will focus on how the component skills that underlie jobs correlate with linguistic variation. The sociological literature suggests a substantial correlation between language and soft skills, so I will explore the connection between linguistic features and the necessary soft skills for a given speaker’s job. In addition, I will include measures for both management skills, which show similar associations with language (Segrest Purkiss et al. 2006), and hard skills (proficiency with technology, machinery, etc.) to determine whether Southern features may correlate positively on one dimension and negatively on another. The importance of organizational culture for this question must be stressed, since firms will likely have different skill associations for Southern features
depending on firm-internal linguistic marketplace forces (Bourdieu 1991; Hallett 2003) and categorical inequality regimes (Acker 2006; Tilly 1999).

One of the most prominent components of Southern dialects is the Southern Vowel Shift, or SVS. The SVS is a well-studied system (Bailey 1997; Labov 1994; Thomas 1997) of vowel movement over time, with documented features from the dawn of sociolinguistic study (Bailey 1997; Sledd 1966). The SVS involves movement in all of the front vowels, with the triggering point of the change proposed to be the monophthongization of the PRIZE vowel before voiced consonants (Labov 1994), meaning that the word “time” would be pronounced closer to “tahm”. The change in the vowel of PRIZE likely occurred first historically, and the change in this vowel subsequently altered the pronunciations of the vowels in FACE, DRESS, KIT, and FLEECE (Wells 1982) for Southerners as well. These changes took time to complete, however, and not every vowel entirely shifted by the mid-20th century, when Southern features began to decline in some areas. The last vowels to change in the SVS were those in FLEECE and KIT, so some areas, especially those in the Upper South, do not show a full completion of this stage (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2005; Thomas 2001).

Though the SVS still has a strong association with the South, the urban South has evidenced a general retreat from Southern features, including those phonological features implicated in the shift. Recent sociolinguistic work in Texas (Koops 2010; Koops, Gentry, and Pantos 2008; Thomas 1997), Georgia (Prichard 2010), Tennessee (Fridland and Bartlett 2006), and North Carolina (Dodsworth 2013; Dodsworth and Kohn 2012) all documents a retreat of

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2 Monophthongization of /ai/ triggers movement in the five front vowels, with TRAP raising, the nuclei of DRESS and KIT raising and fronting, and the nuclei of FACE and FLEECE moving downward and inward.

3 The shift is proposed (Labov 1994) to have occurred in this order: 1) PRIZE monophthongizes (either categorically or before voiced consonants and codas) 2) the nuclei of the tense/lax FACE/DRESS pair shift 3) the FLEECE/KIT nuclei shift.
younger urban Southerners from Southern-shifted vowels. Consistently within these communities, the youngest speakers show little to no Southern-shifting in the front vowels (Fridland 2012; Prichard 2010), with some moderating effect of social class (Dodsworth 2013). Working-class speakers in these areas tend to retain a greater degree of Southern features at all ages, regardless of the specific city under study (Dodsworth 2013; Fridland and Bartlett 2006; Thomas 1997).

*Style-Shifting and Stigmatized Southern Linguistic Variables*

Though dialect features tend to remain relatively static after adolescence (Labov 1989), speakers still have the capability to modify their speech based on social situation, a process termed “style shifting”. When style shifting, speakers manipulate variables that have some degree of social salience, either positive or negative, in an effort to avoid stigma (Goffman 1959, 1963) or to receive positive social evaluation. Depending on theoretical perspective, speakers style shift due to either social situation (Labov 1972b, 2001a), perceived audience for an utterance (Bell 1984), or the desire to project a specific social or ethnic identity (Benor 2010; Schilling-Estes 1998). Current empirical work tends to focus on the dynamic construction of identity by speakers, noting how speakers manipulate features associated with gay identity (Podesva 2007, 2011a, 2011b), education (Eckert 2008), global orientation (Zhang 2005), and region (Campbell-Kibler 2007, 2008). Key to these investigations is the notion of indexicality (Silverstein 2003), or the social saliency and associations of sociolinguistic variables, building on Labov’s (1972b) earlier description of conscious and unconscious features. Silverstein (2003) makes a distinction between first-order indexicality (features that merely demarcate a social group) and second-order or higher indexicality, which are linguistic variables available for speakers to use in the construction and negotiation of identity. Eckert (2008) conceives of
socially-indexed variables as existing within an indexical field where speakers utilize a multitude of sociolinguistic variables in tandem to construct an identity, and each variable can index a number of identities depending on context. For example, /t/ release\(^4\) can indicate articulateness or education, and when co-occurring with other variables, constructs a gay identity, British identity, or a nerd girl identity. The overarching point of the indexical field is the importance of multiple socially salient features when looking at style shifting and the construction of identity.

Despite the wealth of work on style within sociolinguistics, relatively little research has explicitly compared linguistic behavior at work to casual social situations or interview settings. In some cases, speakers move towards a non-regional, Standard English set of linguistic features when in the workplace, both in the vowel space (Podesva 2011b) and in intonation (Podesva 2011a). A study of a travel agent in Cardiff (Coupland 1980), however, found that style-shifting is not simply a move towards standard features as a product of being in the workplace; the agent manipulated sociolinguistic features depending on whom she was talking to in the office or on the phone. In the same vein, radio hosts have been found to manipulate their speech in an effort to align with the dialect of perceived listeners (Coupland 2001). This body of research suggests that the focus when studying the workplace should be about the interactional needs of the speaker at work, rather than thinking of the social situation of “work”. Social psychological research supports this idea, arguing that “expressive habitus” (Bourdieu 1990; Schwalbe and Shay 2014), the set of cultural practices embedded within an individual, can be either a help or a hindrance depending on the interactional setting. Within the workplace, the linguistic needs are

\(^4\) In sociolinguistics, /t/ release means the articulation of the /t/ sound with measurable burst of sound at the end of articulation. In Standard American English, for example, /t/ is always released at the beginning of words (“time”) but it is only variably released at the end (“left”).
conditioned by the symbolic power structure of the organization (Hallett 2003), so an acceptable “work identity” would vary worker to worker, job to job.

In gathering data from workers in different stylistic situations, this study aims to better our understanding of how speakers stylistically adapt their use of sociolinguistic variables to fit the needs of their interactional situation. Most sociolinguistic studies have used only one to three (Coupland 1980; Podesva 2011a, 2011b) individuals as case studies for style shifting, but gathering data for more speakers in similar situations allows us to make some generalizations beyond what small-sample studies can achieve. With stylistic data, we can assess what indexical features (Eckert 2008; Siverstein 2003) speakers manipulate when attempting to avoid stigma in workplace or interview situations versus casual situations. These data will reveal, for example, whether speakers avoid stereotyped features of the South (Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson 2006) while leaving lesser-marked features relatively unchanged. Furthermore, a large speaker sample allows for an investigation into the interspeaker differences in stylistic adaptation at work, even when the same context and features would be involved.

*Southern Dialects and Linguistic Discrimination at Work*

The sociolinguistic literature addresses social class correlations with linguistic variation, but it touches on explicit discriminatory processes far less often, especially with regard to the workplace. Lippi-Green’s (1997) discussion of linguistic discrimination and prejudice is one of the few texts explicitly analyzing workplace discrimination, approaching the issue through the judicial system. She presents a few court cases as case studies in linguistic discrimination, where individuals are denied employment because employers think they cannot properly communicate on the job. Outside of the workplace, individuals with non-Standard dialects face stigma (Goffman 1963) and stereotyping (Niedzielski and Preston 2003) due to their accent. University
students who speak of a variety of Appalachian English are less likely to speak in class (Dunstan and Jaeger 2015), and they voice concern over being taken seriously as a scholar or in the workplace. Discourse surrounding African American English treats the variety and its speakers negatively (Alim and Smitherman 2012), often using language as an avenue for racial attack. Folk linguistic studies (Niedzielski and Preston 2003) find negative attitudes towards non-standard dialects (regional and ethnic) at the national level. Non-Standard regional dialects are consistently rated as less correct, and oftentimes less pleasant, than dialects closer to Standard English (Niedzielski and Preston 2003), and speakers of stigmatized dialects show awareness of these negative evaluations.

Approached from the other direction, sociological work on workplace discrimination—both linguistic and otherwise—shows the dramatic impact implicit biases can have on individuals’ outcomes. When presented with sound clips of potential interviewees, employment recruiters rate both Appalachian English and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) features as unintelligent (Atkins 1993), illustrating the role that language can play in workplace outcomes. AAVE features correlate with lower overall wages net of other social controls (Grogger 2011), and listeners rate AAVE speakers as lower status and less attractive than black speakers with dialects with more Standard English features (Rodriguez, Cargile, and Rich 2004). Regional accents face a similar stigma of lack of intelligence (Rakić, Steffens, and Mummendey 2011), pointing to the boundary maintenance (Weber 1978) and categorical exclusion (Tilly 1999) practices we would expect to underlie the structure of organizations. When facing discrimination and symbolic exclusion from the dominant group, disadvantaged individuals face challenges in accessing social capital resources (Jackall 1989; McDonald 2011; Simon and Warner 1992), and have a higher likelihood of experiencing workplace bullying (Hodson,
Roscigno, and Lopez 2006; Roscigno, Lopez, and Hodson 2009). These social and psychological obstacles can create a negative self-evaluation (Della Fave 1980, 1986) and further the reproduction of inequality in society as a whole (Schwalbe et al. 2000; Schwalbe and Shay 2014). Integrating sociolinguistic work on linguistic discrimination with the broader body of sociological discrimination literature allows for language-specific processes to be put in a broader social context. By eliciting linguistic meta-commentary (Niedzielski and Preston 2003) on workers’ perceptions of their own dialect and the consequences of non-Standard varieties in the workplace, this study can elucidate how individuals perceive and experience linguistic discrimination and devalued identities.

Summary

The three studies contained within this project elaborate the connection between language—and, by proxy, culture—and workplace processes. Previous sociolinguistic research makes connections between language and both work (Coupland 1980; Podesva 2011b) and social inequality (Baugh 2000; Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh 1999), but not an integrated perspective uniting an understanding of work as a social institution with the sociocultural implications of language. Conversely, despite a widespread awareness of the importance of cultural processes in the reproduction of inequality (Bourdieu 1984; Dimaggio and Markus 2010; Lamont et al. 2014; Lareau 2015; Roscigno and Wilson 2014), clear empirical implementations of culture in sociological empirical analyses remain rare. This project aims to fill in the gap between these two perspectives, filling in the missing link between sociolinguistic and sociological understandings of language, culture, and the workplace.
To accomplish this goal, I collected field recording data and interview data from 17 employees of Southern Tech\textsuperscript{5}, a technology firm in the greater Raleigh, NC, area from 2016 to 2017. The breath of data collected from these speakers allows for a holistic analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, that examines individuals’ connections to social institutions such as the workplace. Chapter two of this dissertation presents the methods for data collection and analysis, as well as a description of the company where the study was conducted. I further describe the acoustic methods used for vowel measurement and speaker normalization, as well as the metrics used to assess degrees of the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS). For the qualitative data, I describe the grounded theory framework (Charmaz 2014) I used to identify emergent themes in participant interviews.

In chapter three, I examine the correlations between skills required for different employees and features of the Southern Vowel Shift. Linguistic marketplace approaches to sociolinguistic variation (Sankoff and Laberge 1978) base job typology on the need for standard varieties while at work, but the categorization process relies on subjective ratings. To make a classification system that addresses similar issues while providing replicability, I draw from the literature in sociology surrounding job skills. Likewise, the correlation between these skills and linguistic features serves to illuminate the cultural processes that affect individuals’ eventual job position as well as their self-presentation while on the job. I find that employees in positions that require high degrees of analytical and interpersonal skill have fewer Southern features than those in lower-skilled positions, but the effect operates in reverse for managerial skill, where more highly-skilled jobs in this dimension show a correlation with more Southern features. These main effects interact with recording context such that workers with more skill-demanding jobs

\textsuperscript{5} A pseudonym that reflects both the firm’s origins and its main industry focus
became either less Southern (analytical, interpersonal) or more Southern (managerial) at work than in non-work contexts.

Chapter four takes an integrated qualitative and quantitative approach to style shifting at work, proposing a new theoretical framework for analysis that I term stylistic embeddedness. This approach takes middle-range sociological theories concerned with the interface between individuals and workplace organizations (Acker 2006; Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Tilly 1999) and connects them to social-psychological ideas of self-presentation (Goffman 1959; Stryker 1980) and linguistic stylization (Bell 1984; Eckert 2008; Labov 1972b; Schilling-Estes 1998). To situate the pressures, both formal and informal, that condition employees’ self-presentation at work, I relate their perceptions of Southern Tech’s culture and its linguistic expectations for them as workers. I find that individuals are sensitive to multiple structural forces in crafting their self-presentation, from organizational position to company culture. While many individuals show minimal differences between stylistic settings, those employees with customer-facing jobs show dynamic stylization at work. Moreover, younger women tend to show more stylistic differences between settings, regardless of position. I relate these findings to the connection between language, work, and style, arguing for clearer social-structural analyses to shed light on the mechanism connecting sociolinguistic features to social and organizational position.

The focus of the fifth chapter narrows to the social-psychological consequences of speaking a stigmatized dialect for individual employees, highlighting the extra labor undertaken by speakers with a Southern accent. I frame individuals’ perceptions of the treatment of Southern accents within broader discussions of stigma management (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001), arguing that the Southern identity associated with Southern sociolinguistic features constitutes a stigmatized identity. Drawing from the emergent themes in the data, I describe the
different strategies undertaken by employees to manage their accent while on the job.

Intersections with gender also appear within workers’ experiences, where men have more opportunity to situationally draw on the positive traits of Southern identity, while women face negative evaluations in all situations.

The final chapter discusses the implications of these findings for both sociology and sociolinguistics. Sociologically, this project provides a measurement of cultural processes that can be readily employed in other situations, and it highlights the importance of language for employee experiences. Language acts as a cultural proxy for reproducing existing inequalities at work (e.g. gender, class), but it also acts as a sorting mechanism for specific jobs. Workers without the necessary linguistic resources to craft an appropriate self-presentation stand to lose out on opportunities within an organization or the labor market more broadly.

Sociolinguistically, the project elaborates the mechanism underlying the relationship between work, style, and language variation and change. The stylistic variation of speakers emphasizes the inherent dynamism of the individual, as well as the importance of interfacing structural social analyses with identity-driven understandings of language.
CHAPTER 2: DATA AND METHODS

This study analyzes participant-recorded and sociolinguistic interview data collected from June 2016 to November 2017 from twenty-one employees at Southern Tech, a technology firm in the greater Raleigh, NC, area. I focused data collection to a single firm to control for the differences in organizational practices and cultures (Roscigno and Wilson 2014) that might affect linguistic behavior at work. Since speakers ultimately deploy linguistic features in interaction, the cultural scripts and conditions drawn from the organization play a pivotal role in conditioning behavior (Hallett 2003; Hallett and Ventresca 2006). From a practical standpoint, corpus sociolinguistic studies that implement metrics of occupation still find substantial variation from speaker to speaker within the same occupational coding (Baranowski 2007; Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Forrest and Dodsworth 2016; Labov 1972b), suggesting a missing link in the class-based conditioning of linguistic variation. Narrowing the focus to a lower level of analysis (i.e. the firm, instead of industry or occupation), provides a better understanding of the process that connects linguistic variation with work.

Southern Tech

I selected Southern Tech as a research site for its prominence in the Raleigh community as well as its role in the technology industry. Southern Tech sponsors a number of public outreach projects in the area, as well as recruiting heavily locally. Consequently, they have a very visible presence in Raleigh, and residents are familiar with the company. Since its foundation in the 1970s, it has been a cornerstone of the technology industry that has become central to Raleigh’s economy. The founder and CEO of Southern Tech is himself a native Southerner, and he maintains a strong presence in both the mythologized conceptions of the corporation and its day-to-day operations. The company has grown dramatically in the decades
since its foundation, moving from a local enterprise to a multinational corporation, with locations on multiple continents and employees around the world. The location in the Raleigh area employs more than 5,000 workers, and it represents a large portion of Southern Tech’s overall employment.

Jobs at Southern Tech are widely considered to be very good jobs. The company itself has received numerous awards for its amenities and workplace culture, and it routinely makes lists of “best places to work”. Though the salaries tend to be slightly lower than those of workers at other local tech companies, the company subsidizes a great deal of features for its employees, from cafeterias to recreational facilities to onsite healthcare and childcare. These amenities are not merely symbolic, either—most employees mentioned using the gyms, hiking trails, or healthcare services at some point. Southern Tech also supports employee intramural sports teams and outdoor excursions (e.g. hiking, camping) to support overall health and wellness for its workers. In terms of labor practices, they offer a shorter than average work week for all employees, as well as unlimited sick time. Many interviewees told me that the company actively encourages its employees to use the wellness facilities and sick leave, and managers respected employees’ shortened work schedules. Only one participant said she worked any extra hours above her stated time per week, and she emphasized that her manager discouraged her from working any extra time. Southern Tech also makes efforts to retain existing staff through a highly structured internal labor market that allows worker mobility to different departments, projects, or teams. Most of the participants I interviewed had changed jobs or teams within the company at least once, and many of them had moved a number of times. For employees, this system provided an outlet to prevent burnout or an escape route from an uncooperative manager. Managers were strongly encouraged by corporate higher-ups to allow workers to move if they so
desired, and most received strong recommendations from former managers on their leaving. Because of all these practices, the turnover rate for workers at Southern Tech is much lower than the national average, with reported numbers ranging from 3-7% in a given year.

The firm styles itself after the university model in its outlook and organization. Southern Tech emphasizes research and development in its mission statement, and a large portion of firm revenue funnels back into research. The company argues that this focus on innovation stems from the postgraduate model of expanding knowledge, and the investments made into research are much higher than national averages for technology firms. Perhaps the most salient aspect of the university model is the organizational structure of the company. Overall, Southern Tech has a relatively flat hierarchy. There are very few middle management positions, and most of the department heads report directly to the CEO. My participants corroborated this flat structure, and most employees reported to a manager who oversaw a number of work teams, rather than having a direct supervisor within the team. There were “team leaders” in these cases, but the job position was not explicitly coded as managerial. To emphasize the independence and autonomy evidenced by the organizational structure, each employee at Southern Tech is provided with their own private office, no matter their seniority. Southern Tech argues that the team-oriented nature of work and the independence given to individual workers stems from the university organization of professors’ labor. I noted, however, that the lack of intense managerial oversight and gift of private offices only applied to white-collar workers at the firm. Even the most junior white collar employee at the time of data collection had her own office, but the workers in food service and warehouse labor did not receive these perks. They still had access to the broad suite of benefits offered by Southern Tech, making them much better jobs than comparable positions at other firms, but it was clear that their positions did not afford them quite the same level of
treatment. Positions outside of the white collar realm, I later learned, are a minority at Southern Tech proper. Some of the more visible non-white collar workers, like the receptionists at building entry points or the food service workers, were actually contracted from outside organizations. Since these workers were not technically Southern Tech employees, they did not have access to the full range of benefits provided on-site, nor did they get the extensive retirement and healthcare support that the firm provides its full employees. I never got a clear answer as to which wellness facilities the contracted workers could access, and, in fact, the workers themselves seemed unsure.

The discourse and culture surrounding the company and its organization further emphasized the university connections that Southern Tech wanted to evoke. Both official corporate statements and the employees themselves referred to the Raleigh location as the Southern Tech “campus,” and I was told this term was used as a conscious reference to a university. For the organizational seniority system, the titles mirrored those given to professors at different career stages. In fact, Southern Tech even has a little-used “Distinguished” title that applied to employees who had been at the company for an especially long period. The company’s dress code, while present, was very relaxed compared to that of many large corporations. As an example, I did many interviews during the North Carolina summers, which are simultaneously very hot and very humid, and when I would go to any of the major buildings, I would always see at least a few employees wearing shorts. Some of the interviewees brought up the casual styles of dress as emblematic of a more relaxed culture “like a college campus”.

The dress code reflected a more general casual atmosphere that Southern Tech tried to promote. Many employees told me that the culture at Southern Tech was unique in its slower pace and relaxed nature. The language that many used to describe the company evoked a picture
of a suburban neighborhood, where people greeted each other in the hallways and generally got along well. The emphasis on individual offices for employees reinforced this feeling as you walked down the hallways. Some doors stood open, some closed, some cracked.

Overall, some employees seemed far more active in their “neighborhoods” than others. I regularly saw people walk down the hall to drop by their “neighbor’s” office to chat or talk about a problem. However, other employees preferred to do most of their communication via email or instant messenger, and they usually did not leave their offices to talk to other workers. Despite the general collegiality among employees, deeper friendships seemed rare between employees. As part of the interviews, I asked participants about people they saw outside of work, and a number of them had difficulty providing any names. Those few who had established friendship groups often had met the friends at other jobs or through leisure activities, and the group had become coworkers at Southern Tech afterwards.

In addition to the company narrative of a university atmosphere, many at Southern Tech discussed the importance of private ownership in the creation of their unique company culture. Southern Tech’s company stock is not currently publicly traded, and the CEO retains the lion’s share of the stake in the company. Because of this situation, the CEO remains able to influence the daily activities of the business in a very direct way. Employees emphasize his commitment to a positive, relaxed environment as a major factor in shaping Southern Tech’s amenities, and the CEO himself has stated his commitment to work-life balance in many public forums. Without shareholder pressure, the narrative goes, the CEO does not have to answer to the short-term needs of any investors, giving him the freedom to organize the business in the way he sees fit. The organizational structure lends some support to this narrative, as the CEO has most department heads report directly to him rather than other executive staff. Beyond the structure of
the company, many attributed the relaxed, non-competitive culture to the CEO’s actions. Without a highly hierarchical managerial structure, they felt that they were given much more free reign in the ways they could conduct their work lives. Many employees reported that they felt far more secure in their jobs if they made mistakes, and they did not feel as though they needed to ingratiate themselves to management simply to keep their jobs. Southern Tech has also had a long history of growth since its foundation, allowing them to avoid any large layoffs, deepening this feeling of security.

Most employees praised the casual atmosphere, but it was not without its occasional pitfalls. The most common criticism I heard from employees was the general speed at which work was done compared to other jobs. Whether their reaction was positive or negative, most white-collar workers told me that Southern Tech kept a relatively slow pace overall, without the intense, rushed feeling of smaller tech startups. For some workers, this culture was frustrating, and they felt that they would work intensely, but others on their team or in their department might drag their feet. Those who wanted to move a little faster sometimes found both individual workers and the company itself standing in their way, which produced some resentment. Overwhelmingly, the divide in opinion over company culture existed between younger and older employees. Only a few employees wanted things to move faster, but they were all younger workers with relatively short tenures at Southern Tech at time of interview. Those who had been at the company for longer (~10 years or more) were very positive about their work/life balance. This age gap resulted in some difficulties for younger workers with new ideas, who said it could be difficult to change the way things were done at Southern Tech. With so little turnover, many employees had been at the company for decades, making it difficult for newer hires to adjust in some cases. As one employee said, “you either leave quick or you stay here forever”.

34
The structure of campus itself reflected the relaxed culture of the company. Being a technology company that conducts proprietary research and houses sensitive data, some measure of security was required for protection. At the entrance to the campus stood a small gatehouse, set up to check in registered visitors to the company. After visiting the company a number of times, I realized that the gates were never closed, and security never actually stopped any drivers. The only time I ever saw the gate shut was outside of normal operating hours, reflecting Southern Tech’s generally easygoing culture. If anything, the closure of the gate meant that employees should go home, not stay inside the boundary.

Buildings on campus were mostly located on a main road that ran straight into the heart of the company. Though large portions of the land were left wooded, providing walking trails between buildings and around the grounds, the landscaping was always pristine. The grass visible from the main roads was neatly trimmed, and fresh pine straw surrounded the planted trees. The gently sloped hills and relatively new construction reminded me of driving through neighborhoods in the Southern suburbs, and that image fit squarely into Southern Tech’s cultivated presentation. Each building in Southern Tech was labeled according to its construction sequence, and upon driving deeper into the campus, I encountered newer and newer buildings. No matter its age, each building had a large parking lot for employees and a sign out front that indicated the departments housed in that building. Some larger departments, like research and development, had multiple locations, but most were contained within a single unit. Due to this division, employees in different departments rarely interacted with one another face to face. They stayed highly connected through company email and instant messaging services, but these communications stayed digital. Since Southern Tech’s campus occupied a large area (~900 acres), moving between buildings was relatively difficult without some kind of
mechanical or motor transport. Many employees would walk to the cafeteria for lunch, but those who worked in less central locations drove instead.

The buildings themselves all had a similar interior structure, in which the front door opened into a lobby with a receptionist waiting to greet either employees or visitors. The lobbies in older buildings tended to be smaller and more functional, but the more recent builds had large, open spaces with seating, art, and water features. Unlike the gatehouse at the front of the company, where the barrier seemed more symbolic than functional, the receptionists made sure to check employee ID badges or register visitors to the campus. When beginning the study, I was able to gain a permanent listing as a registered visitor, but I was not able to get an ID badge of my own. To meet participants for lunch, equipment orientation, or interviews, I had to wait in the lobby until a contact employee escorted me into the building. Some buildings had further security measures, and on at least one occasion, I had to be escorted to a wing of a cloud computing building using an employee keycard. In this way, Southern Tech was able to maintain its welcoming, friendly atmosphere while still maintaining the security measures required for a business in the technology industry.

**Data Collection**

*Study Protocol*

Each participant was required to complete a series of tasks: first, self-recordings at work and with friends or family, then a sociolinguistic interview, and finally, completion of a survey addressing job tasks. For the self-recording portion, I asked participants to wear a microphone and record themselves while doing normal job activities for a minimum of one hour, as well as recording themselves interacting with friends, family, or coworkers in a casual setting for a minimum of one hour. I encouraged them to wear the microphone for as long as possible, but I
provided the sixty-minute minimum knowing that most individuals would balk at such a long recording time. Though sixty minutes of work activity or casual interaction can vary in terms of actual speech data on the part of the participant, I felt that this time period would provide enough tokens for stylistic comparison. Before beginning self-recording, I met with each participant personally to provide them the recording equipment, teach them how to use it, and answer any questions that they might have. I used an adapted version of the protocol developed by Van Hofwegen (2017) for participant self-recording. Since the participants were wholly responsible for data collection in this phase, I gathered all the equipment into a packet with the following contents:

- Olympus WS-823 Digital Voice Recorder with 32 GB Micro SD Card, pocket-sized
- Audio Technica AT8531 Lavalier Microphone
- AT8531 Power Pack
- XLR to 3.5 mm cable for Power Pack to Recorder connection, 10ft.
- Package of Rycote Undercovers, for skin attachment and microphone cover
- 4 AA Batteries (Power Pack backup)
- 4 AAA Batteries (Recorder backup)
- Instructional Booklet for putting on equipment and working recorder
- Full IRB Consent Form for the study
- Study Description for Conversation Participants

The recorders were set to record 44.1khz PCM audio, and I checked and confirmed recording, volume, and storage settings before every equipment handoff. I also replaced the batteries in the

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6 The instructional booklet and study description for conversation participants are provided in the appendix. The wearable recording setup and the design of the instruction booklet owe an incredible debt to Janneke Van Hofwegen’s (2017) dissertation work, and her methods proved invaluable in making this study possible.
power pack and the recorder before these meetings. When meeting participants, I demonstrated how to connect the pieces of recording equipment together, as well as how to attach the microphone to their person. The wearable recording design I used requires participants to attach the microphone underneath their normal clothes, which allows for a consistent recording volume for the speaker and ideal placement to capture as much acoustic data as possible. The instructional booklet contained very detailed instructions about the recording setup, complete with example pictures. To address privacy issues, participants were required to inform any conversation partners that they were wearing a recorder, and the Study Description document gave participants an official document with my contact information to provide to concerned interlocutors. Despite all these precautions, some participants attempted to record data and failed, or their equipment lost power during recording. After the first one or two participants completed the study, I devoted a portion of the equipment drop-off to recording and playback practice to help prevent more mishaps, and I encouraged participants to record sample audio before trying to gather their field data. I also found that talking through the volunteer’s schedule for the following week helped to identify potential recording times, and working through these possibilities together decreased participant attrition and shortened turnaround time.

After participants reported that they had recorded the required data, I worked with them to set up a time to conduct a sociolinguistic interview. The interviews were semi-structured, and they covered many of the same topics as traditional sociolinguistic interviews, including life history, education, and parental background. Since the emphasis of this data collection was work and the workplace, I spent more time focusing on participants’ previous and current jobs. I gathered a full job history for each participant, ending with their current employment at Southern

7 A full interview schedule is provided in the appendix.
Tech. I asked how they had obtained their current job, what their tasks were on a day-to-day basis, and where they saw themselves in the future at the company. These questions captured individual job differences and provided a backdrop for the self-recordings, since participants often situated their recordings within their average work. At the end of the interview, I asked participants about their perceptions of how Southern accents were treated within the workplace. Especially for this portion of the interview, I tried to pursue any narrative threads that emerged from the conversation, since many participants had a difficult time discussing accents and outcomes in concrete terms.

Upon completion of the interview, I asked participants to complete a short survey to gather demographic information and data concerning job tasks. Some participants completed the survey with the assistance of the researcher, but due to time constraints, some participants had to complete the survey at a later date. These latter individuals were given a survey link and password, and they completed the survey remotely. The job task portion of the survey contained eighteen questions addressing skills required for participants’ jobs, structured to measure important skill differences in labor market outcomes (Deming 2017; Heckman and Kautz 2012; Liu and Grusky 2013; Wyant, Manzoni, and McDonald 2018). Questions were clustered into three groups: analytical skill, interpersonal skill, and managerial skill, with six questions for each cluster. The remainder of the survey covered demographic information, including year of birth, past towns of residence, tenure and job title at Southern Tech, and current remuneration from Southern Tech.

Gaining Access and Recruiting Participants

8 Full survey included in the appendix
Initial contact with Southern Tech was made with the assistance of colleagues at North Carolina State University. The linguistics faculty in particular conduct a number of public outreach programs in North Carolina, and over the course of these projects, some faculty had become acquainted with representatives at Southern Tech. Through these connections, I was able to arrange a meeting with executive representation from Southern Tech, and they permitted me nearly unfettered access to the employees and recording settings. Since the study covered a relatively long term (i.e. more than a year), the executives seemed unconcerned with the recording of confidential information such as product release dates, and they knew that this information was not the focus of my study.

I began recruitment by releasing a video and article through Southern Tech’s internal newsletter to gather participants. To explain the study while not biasing the speakers before self-recording, the materials suggested that I was interested in how people talked in different social situations, with no specific details about linguistic features or expectations. In tandem with these avenues, I used contacts gathered through friends and colleagues to help spread the word at Southern Tech itself. The initial wave of recruitment produced only a handful of participants, and these contacts did not snowball into more connections. After a few months, one contact informed me of an employee-run message board for Southern Tech, and they offered to post our study to the forum with an endorsement for our project, which led to a much greater influx of volunteers. Along with faculty colleagues, I was also able to do a presentation on language in North Carolina at Southern Tech as an enrichment lecture for employees, and we were subsequently able to recruit more participants afterwards.

To make expectations as clear as possible and to establish a level of trust between myself and the volunteers, I contacted them multiple times to discuss study guidelines. Usually I began
with an email outlining the study parameters and participation requirements, and I suggested we talk on the phone to discuss any questions the volunteer might have about the study. If they agreed to participate at that point, we scheduled a time to meet on Southern Tech’s campus to meet for thirty minutes to an hour to go over self-recording protocols and equipment operation. I tried to schedule these interviews around lunchtime, hoping to get more time to talk with participants about their questions and general perceptions of Southern Tech. Many participants invited me to lunch at one of the on-site cafeterias for these meetings, and these lunches provided valuable insight into the company from employees’ perspectives. I took notes after these meetings and after exit interviews, and this information helped to focus the questions about Southern Tech and Southern accents to gather better data during interviews.

In total, I had approximately forty participants express interest in volunteering for the study, and twenty-one completed all of the activities, for a completion rate of approximately fifty percent. Attrition occurred for a variety of reasons, ranging from participants’ difficulties in collecting self-recording data to questions of legal discoverability. In some cases, I did not have enough time or recording equipment to get to the participant quickly, and the volunteer simply lost interest. Volunteers from the legal department had an especially difficult time finding work tasks to record, to the point that no employees from legal completed the study. The timelines for participant completion varied widely from person to person. When I discussed study expectations, I encouraged them to finish the self-recordings at work and with family or friends in one week or so, but I emphasized that finishing the recordings was far more important than staying within the timeline. If they did not finish in that timeframe, I sent a gentle email reminder every three to four weeks thereafter. Most participants finished self-recording within two to four weeks, but some had more difficulty, taking up to six months in one case.
I restricted recruitment to Southern natives, which I defined as individuals who had spent at least their formative years (5-18) in the South. Due to Southern Tech’s location and its recruitment effort within the state, the vast majority of participants were North Carolina natives, with only two participants spending any substantial time outside the state during childhood. In total, twenty-one people completed the data collection protocol, and seventeen were fully analyzed for the following studies. Table 2.1 shows the demographic information and pseudonyms for all speakers in the sample. Specific hometowns are provided when large enough to prevent identification of the speaker.
### Table 2.1: Speaker Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tec001</td>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Senior Software Developer</td>
<td>Asheville, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec002</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Research Statistician Developer</td>
<td>Small Town in NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec003</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Principal Architect Cloud</td>
<td>Small Town in NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec004</td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior Applications Developer</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec005</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Principal QA Engineer</td>
<td>Small Town in NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec007</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Principal Business Operations Specialist</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec008</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Digital Asset Librarian</td>
<td>Small Town in NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec009</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec010</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior Technical Writer</td>
<td>Small Town in NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec011</td>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior Account Executive</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec012</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Principal Technical Writer</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec013</td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Senior Technical Editor</td>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec014</td>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Designer/Artist</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec015</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Associate HR Business Partner</td>
<td>Small Town in NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec016</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>External Communications Specialist</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec018</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Customer Account Executive</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tec019</td>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Senior Certification Developer</td>
<td>Raleigh, NC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The sample contains a wide range of jobs within the firm, and it provides a fairly representative picture of the composition of Southern Tech. Unfortunately, no participants had an explicitly managerial position, and despite repeated attempts to encourage managerial employees to participate in the study, none ever volunteered. All of the employees in the sample are white, and all but one in the total dataset are white. I did not make special efforts to gather a racially diverse sample, but neither did I restrict the study to only white Southern speakers. Due to the difficulties in performing sociolinguistic analysis between different ethnic groups (Fought 2002; Labov 1972a, 2001a; Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1968), achieving a racially saturated sample would be extremely difficult. Since speakers from different ethnic backgrounds would most likely be dealing with different social meanings and linguistic resources, I would need to gather a substantial sample (10 speakers at an absolute minimum) from each group to conduct aggregate analyses. A study of that scope was unfeasible, so I focus on white Southern speakers for these investigations. Likewise, there is a substantial skew for gender, with thirteen women to four men. I made a concerted effort to recruit and retain any men who showed a willingness to volunteer, but there were far fewer men who expressed any interest.

Analysis

My analysis uses both quantitative and qualitative techniques. For the quantitative portion of the study, I use sociophonetic techniques of measurement and analysis (Thomas 2010) to assess features of the Southern Vowel Shift. The qualitative portion implements a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014), identifying emergent themes from participant interviews.

Quantitative Phonetic Analysis

The quantitative analysis for this study focuses on vowels implicated in the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS), specifically on the vowels FLEECE, KIT, FACE, DRESS, TRAP, and
PRIZE. Figure 2.1 presents a diagram showing the movement of each vowel within the SVS system.

![Southern Vowel Shift Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.1: Vowel Movement in the SVS for Analyzed Vowels**

Within the front vowel system, the nuclei of FLEECE and FACE lower and retract, and the nuclei of KIT and DRESS raise and front. All four of these vowels attain a diphthongal quality, with vowel glides for these four vowels approaching the canonical Standard English vowel positions (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2005). TRAP raises and fronts, governed by complex internal conditioning (Dodsworth 2016), and PRIZE experiences glide shortening in pre-vocalic and coda positions (Labov 1994). Due to the dynamic movement of these vowels, there are a number of ways to assess their position in the vowel space. For some vowels, I use Lobanov-normalized F2 minus Lobanov-normalized F1 (Z2 – Z1) in order to capture frontness and height simultaneously (Labov, Rosenfelder, and Fruehwald 2013). I also implement Euclidean distance between vowel pairs (Kendall and Fridland 2012) depending on the question at hand.

The SVS as a system is not static, and different regions or different speakers can show some features of the shift, but not others (Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Fridland 2012; Prichard 2010). This statement is especially true for the high front vowel pair (FLEECE and KIT), which
shows little or no shifting in many regions in the US South (Labov et al. 2005). The SVS is also disappearing within communities, with younger speakers showing a reversal of the shift over time (Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Prichard 2010). Consequently, the corpus from Southern Tech contains speakers with varying degrees of the SVS, from those with almost fully-completed shifts to those with little to no evidence of the SVS at all. Though these speakers do not make up a “speech community” in the traditional sense (Labov 1966, 2001a), they all share in their experiences with features of Southern US Englishes, whether or not they possess them. The questions this study aims to answer are about social pressure and evaluation rather than linguistic internal constraints. The issue at hand is the social perceptions of features of the SVS, their treatment within the workplace, and the resultant stylistic behavior and job sorting that occurs. When evaluated on the job, speakers are not questioned about their town of origin; they are judged on the presence or absence of stigmatized features. Their relationship to their local speech community (i.e. the other members of their town or other local social organizing force) is not nearly as important as their positioning within the immediate social and cultural space of the firm and its expectations. Since the focus of these analyses is on social outcomes rather than the structural forces of variation, the state of the SVS in different communities presents very little of a methodological issue.

All of the recordings, both from participant-recorded contexts and from the interview context, were transcribed and force-aligned (Mielke 2016). Vowel data for primary stressed tokens of the five front vowels (FLEECE, KIT, FACE, DRESS, TRAP) and the PRIZE/PRICE vowel was automatically extracted and measured (Mielke and Wilbanks 2018), and all vowels under study were checked and manually remeasured if found to be in error. Vowels with short durations (< .06 seconds) were excluded, as were tokens in pre- or post- nasal (/m/, /n/, /ŋ/) or
liquid (/l/, /r/) environments. Lexical exclusions were made for words that do not have consistent realizations with a stressed vowel (e.g. “he”, “she”, “I”, etc.). To account for individual differences in vowel spaces, tokens of the LOT vowel were also extracted and used in Lobanov (1971) normalization by speaker.

Coding for stylistic setting was limited to codes for “work,” “casual,” or “interview”. Though speakers can and do vary between interlocutors or topics within the same setting (Coupland 1980; Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994), these codes are intended to capture a general trend in linguistic behavior between social contexts. The focus of this study is the interface between individuals and their structural context, rather than individual variation itself. The data drawn from each speaker intentionally represents a sample of their interactions within settings that have very different structural and institutional expectations (cf. Chapter 1), thus providing a picture of how individuals respond to these expectations. Since participants sometimes wore their recording equipment for long periods of time and changed conversation partners on occasion, portions of each recording were labeled as “casual” or “work” depending on their content. For example, one participant has a work meeting, then goes to have lunch with friends, without turning off the recorder. To account for this change, the labeling of the tokens in the recording switches from “work” to “casual” once she begins speaking with her friends.

Survey Data

The job task data from the post-interview surveys were gathered, cleaned, and calculated into three indices for each speaker in the study. Each Likert-scale question had five possible options, so each question was rated from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) depending on participant response. All six questions for each skill cluster (analytical, interpersonal, managerial) were then added together to create an index for each cluster. Each speaker’s formal job title was also
reported in this survey, and those titles were used to create speaker demographic tables. The remainder of the survey data was not used in the following studies. Much of the information contained in the survey was also covered in the sociolinguistic interview, and the collection of these data was included as a safeguard to make sure important information like hometown or job tenure at Southern Tech was recorded.

**Qualitative Coding**

I took a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014) to coding qualitative data, and I focused on issues of language—the attitudes towards language, the emotions surrounding it, and the behavioral responses to linguistic censure. The coded data came exclusively from the sociolinguistic interviews, but all my experiences with Southern Tech informed the evolution of the topics I discussed and approaches I took to eliciting participants’ thoughts. I realized very quickly after beginning the project that Southern Tech’s culture played a prominent role in employees’ understanding of how Southern accents were evaluated at work. Consequently, I let participants’ discussions of their workplace culture inform later interview questions about language, encouraging them to explore differences in linguistic treatment across firms, jobs, or industries to pinpoint what made the situation at Southern Tech unique. Not all of these insights came directly from the interviews; many of my informal meetings, such as lunches or drop-offs, resulted in discussions of Southern Tech’s culture or workplace practices that likely would not have been captured on record.

Especially for the portion of the interview dealing with Southern accents and stereotypes, my social position played an important part in co-constructing the narratives about language Southernness. Being white, male, and from a large Southern city myself, I was able to connect to the participants in their discussion of what it meant to be Southern. If they talked
about negative Southern stereotypes, I could identify with them; if they talked about accent
differences with extended family, I could relate. If a participant shared a story about their
experience with language, I would usually respond with one of my own drawn from my own
history or that of my family or friends to build solidarity.

As the interviews were transcribed by research assistants, I coded them for emergent
themes using NVivo, starting with broad open codes and gradually combining and narrowing the
focus. Themes focused on the negotiation of individuals with their own linguistic identities and
positions within the fabric of social space. Most interviewees had not spent a great deal of time
thinking about their linguistic position, so the discussion of accents became a process of self-
discovery. Oppositions emerged between positive evaluations of Southern identities and
individuals but negative evaluations of a Southern accent and its social connotations, which
participants struggled with throughout the interview.

Looking Forward

The three empirical investigations in this study explore the connection between Southern
dialects, the workplace, and individual stylistic variation. Previous sociological work highlights
the importance of culture in conditioning individual behavior within organizations (Hallett 2003;
Roscigno and Wilson 2014), and sociolinguistic work illustrates the ways in which individuals
deploy linguistic features in interaction to achieve identity-driven goals (Eckert 2008; Schilling-
Estes 1998). To clarify how culture connects to individual and organizational behavior, this
study analyzes how language relates to job skills, organizational processes, and social-
psychological processes of stigma and identity management. It further addresses the structural
motivations of stylistic variation for individual speakers, placing linguistic choices within
institutional context. Each chapter represents a different aspect of the social processes at play.
Chapter three takes the broadest view, assessing the correlation between job skills and features of the SVS, providing insight into cultural factors affecting labor market structures as well as the process underlying community-level linguistic variation with respect to occupation. The fourth chapter narrows to the interface of the individual and the organization, illuminating the nuanced, dialectical relationship between workers’ linguistic performance and organizational culture and position. Finally, the fifth chapter focuses on the individuals themselves, addressing the social-psychological stresses and negotiation processes that occur when adapting language to suit a job. In total, these three chapters afford linguistic variation a place within discussions of work and organizations, as well as clarifying the role of workplace structure in conditioning style.
CHAPTER 3: JOB SKILLS AND STYLE SHIFTING AT SOUTHERN TECH

Introduction

Foundational work makes a connection between language and social structure, especially for occupational outcomes. Goffman posits that those “with good grooming and correct accent” are brought in as receptionists, “where they can present a front for an organization as well as themselves” (1959:47). This connection proposes that something specific about jobs, or at least types of labor, requires special consideration of linguistic self-presentation. Sociolinguistic work on style shifting, drawing inspiration from Goffman’s theories, shows that individuals do manipulate linguistic features between speech settings (Bell 1984; Eckert 2008; Labov 2001, 2001a; Schilling-Estes 1998), but this work focuses less on social structure and more on the changes in the linguistic system itself. What little sociolinguistic research exists scrutinizing language variation at work treats the workplace in a very general fashion, with little attention to differences in worker skills and activities (Coupland 1980; Podesva 2007, 2011a). To understand the meaning of having a “correct accent” for a job requires both a rigorous examination of the structure of an individual’s linguistic system and a clear idea of the social structure surrounding work, occupations, and organizations. Drawing on sociolinguistic and sociological work, I use the strengths of both fields to provide a more complete analysis of how language operates at work.

The goal of this investigation is to combine sociological approaches to skill and the structure of the labor market with theories of sociolinguistic stratification and style. First, I discuss the implementation of skill metrics in empirical work concerning worker pay and socioeconomic inequality, focusing on important dimensions of skill and their measurement. I then position skill with relation to current sociolinguistic conceptions of class and occupation,
illustrating the new insights that skill can provide. Implementing these ideas empirically, I correlate measures of skill drawn from both survey data and the O*NET database with speakers’ use of Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) features in different conversational contexts, demonstrating how speakers dynamically respond to the tasks and stylistic requirements of their job. Finally, using cluster analysis techniques, I use skill metrics to group jobs together to show how sociological techniques can provide a more nuanced understanding of what jobs and occupations might mean for sociolinguistic and sociological research moving forward.

**Literature Review**

*Job Skills and Labor Market Structure*

In the past few decades, in the United States and globally, systems of production and labor have dramatically restructured, transforming the types of jobs available and the ways in which people work. The specific origin of these changes has been variably pinpointed as post-industrial transition (Block 1990), the rise of computer technology (Krueger 1993), or the emergence of a “creative economy” (Florida 2002). In most cases, whatever the pinpointed origin, all theories suggest that a shift in employer demand for job skills plays a large role in broader labor market changes. In part, this argument hearkens back to human capital theories developed within economics, in which workers accumulate skills over the lifespan, and these accumulated skills in turn explain wage differences between occupations (Becker 1993a). The application of this idea to the changing structure of the labor market suggests that either a skill gap or skill mismatch exists between workers and job requirements, resulting in difficulties in matching workers into jobs (Cappelli 2015). Economic research examines this skill gap, but at best the skills in question are loosely defined, and sometimes they remain completely unexamined (Autor 2014; Autor, Levy, and Murnane 2003). Within this literature, two major
groupings of skill receive the most attention: analytical/cognitive skills such as technical knowledge and problem solving ability and “soft skills” such as leadership, communication, or customer service.

Between the two general types of skill addressed in the literature, analytical and cognitive skills receive more sustained attention. Early sociological implementations of skill focused especially on cognitive skills, loosely defined as “problem solving ability” (Carbonaro 2007, 2005), though precise implementations vary from case to case (Farkas et al. 1997; Grodsky and Pager 2001; Kilbourne et al. 1994). The emphasis on cognitive skills reflects the possible technological origins of changes in the job structure, though these metrics can capture educational differences as well. More recent investigations of the connections between job skills and social inequality broaden the conception from “cognitive skills” to “analytical skills” (Liu and Grusky 2013), hoping to capture the element of creativity required by many current occupations (Florida 2002). They find a slight increase in the current demand for these analytical skills compared to the 1980s, which they attribute to institutional shifts in the structure of the labor market. In addition to the increased demand for analytical skills—and the consequent increase in jobs that require them—they also note an expectation for greater social skills on the part of workers, a finding echoed in other recent literature (Bacolod and Blum 2010; Black and Spitz-Oener 2010).

With the rising awareness of social skills as important to skills gaps and resultant social inequality, sociologists have introduced more concrete measurements as a companion to those examining cognitive or analytical skills. Recognition of non-technical skills as important factors for employer hiring decisions has a long history, especially in the context of interactional components of racial inequality (Moss and Tilly 1996). Sometimes termed “soft skills,” these
skills can range from communicative factors like self-expression or negotiation to personality traits like punctuality or diligence (Heckman and Kautz 2012; Moss and Tilly 1996). Because of the breadth of this definition, the metrics used from study to study can vary widely (Farkas et al. 1997; Grodsky and Pager 2001; Liu and Grusky 2013), though these works usually draw from national occupational databases for their indices. As more research uncovers the importance of social skills for understanding occupational differences and wage inequality (Deming 2017), sociologists seek more specificity in defining and measuring social skills (Wyant, Manzoni, and McDonald 2018). For example, Wyant et al. (2018) use principal-components factor analysis on job task data drawn from O*NET, identifying clusters of latent social skill dimensions that correspond to general domains such as coordination, sales, emotion, and communication.

Importantly, skill must be conveyed to employers, coworkers, or clients, allowing for cultural factors and biases to affect judgements. Prior job experience, for example, can communicate some of these skills, but individual evaluation still plays a prominent role in interviews or for workers on the job. Since these evaluations unfold in interactions with potential or current employees, language, as a multifaceted element of interaction, can serve as a way for one to examine these cultural factors. In that respect, it is important to include linguistic analysis in any discussion of skill, since the phonetic and syntactic features of language convey information apart from the semantic message. Listener judgments of a speaker’s dialect are sensitive to sociolinguistic information, even when experimentally controlling for all other factors (Campbell-Kibler 2008; Fridland and Bartlett 2006a). Therefore, an employer’s judgement of a job candidate’s fit is influenced not only by the candidate’s work experience and skill, but also by the candidate’s linguistic characteristics. Sociolinguistic data, therefore, is an important element in the evaluation of the “skills gap” and the cultural factors that may affect it.
Sociolinguistics, Occupation, and Job Tasks

From the outset, sociolinguistics as a field has maintained a deep interest in the role of occupations in linguistic variation and change. Foundational studies in New York City (Labov 1972b) and Norwich, England (Trudgill 1974) use hierarchical occupational typologies as a way of representing social class differences within their respective communities, finding substantial social class differences in the use of sociolinguistic variables like post-vocalic /r/. In general, when a sociolinguistic variable carries social stigma, like saying “motha” instead of “mother”, higher-SES speakers tend to avoid using that feature and lower-SES speakers might either not avoid it or even embrace it as a symbol of group belonging or personal characteristic such as toughness. Though occupation is at the heart of these studies, the implementations of occupation use fixed measures of status (Blau and Duncan 1967) that represent a point before the major labor market shifts of the late 20th century. Furthermore, the goal of these studies is to examine linguistic variation, not social structure, so the implications of language use for social outcomes remain somewhat undertheorized.

More recent discussions of the broad relationship between language and work have taken market-based (Sankoff and Laberge 1978) or identity-based (Eckert 1989a; Zhang 2005) approaches. Presaging Bourdieu’s theory of linguistic capital and marketplaces (Bourdieu 1991), market-based approaches to sociolinguistic variation argue for locally-created valuation systems for language, where some occupations require more “standard” dialects than others (Horvath 1985; Sankoff and Laberge 1978). Conversely, identity-based approaches to language and work emphasize the speaker’s role in creating an identity appropriate for the workplace, and these identities differ depending on occupation. Though not explicitly about work, Eckert’s (1989, 2000) ethnographic study of a Detroit-area high school connects students’ linguistic
performances with their eventual job prospects, illuminating a portion of the process involved in creating community-level patterns. In both of these cases, however, the object under investigation is a speaker’s general linguistic system, rather than their specific linguistic behavior at work. Using sociolinguistic interviews like those conducted in these studies, we can generalize to some degree about a given speaker’s linguistic behavior in other situations, but we lack clear empirical descriptions.

Some case studies have attempted to address this gap with regard to on-the-job language use, examining how speakers vary between different social situations. Coupland’s (1980) early study of a travel agent provides some insight into the wide stylistic range speakers can exhibit during workplace interaction. Casual interactions with coworkers showed substantial differences from work-related phone calls, suggesting that the speaker was dynamically adjusting her speech to the needs of her job. The same style-shifting is exhibited by professional workers (Podesva 2007, 2011a) and radio announcers (Coupland 2001). In all of these cases, linguists contextualize speakers’ “work language” only by the fact that it occurs at work, not by the demands or job tasks required by a workplace.

Uniting the sociological work on job skills with stylistic work in sociolinguistics offers a unique opportunity to address lingering questions on both fronts. As sociologists endeavor to understand what constitutes different aspects of social skills, a linguistic analysis can help to clarify the role of language in job interactions. Using workplace recordings further illustrates the ways in which speakers linguistically enact these social skills in real time. Similarly, the implementation of job skills as a comparison metric between occupations allows for a flexible, interpretable, and replicable measure to discuss work in sociolinguistics. As discussed in chapter one, traditional methods of occupational measurement (Labov 1972b, 2001a) have difficulty
addressing changes in the economic structure or local differences in occupational status, which can be solved through the use of continuous indices of skill.

**Skill Clusters and Hypotheses**

This study analyzes three distinct clusters of job skills: managerial, interactional, and analytical. These categories represent an attempt to capture clusters of skills identified in previous literature (Farkas et al. 1997; Liu and Grusky 2013; Wyant et al. 2018). Managerial and interpersonal skills represent clusters similar to those identified by Wyant et al. (2018). Managerial skill captures the degree to which a job requires coordination tasks (building teams, training others) and team tasks (working with a team, leading). Interactional skills capture the importance of sales (external customer interaction, negotiation) and communication (oral expression, speaking) for a given job. Though emotional skill, or care work, has a long history of discussion in the sociological literature on skills and labor market structure (Dwyer 2013; England 2005; Hochschild 1983), measurement of this cluster was excluded due to the job structure of the firm under investigation. The firm does have a handful of jobs that would include a substantial emotional component (e.g. health care, child care), but workers in these jobs could not participate due to ethical concerns of recording in those environments. Finally, analytical skill represents the combined cognitive and creative component of jobs identified by Liu and Grusky (2013) (facing novel problems, creative solutions).

For each skill cluster, we would predict that higher skill requirements correlate with less Southern vowel pronunciations, but the theoretical reasoning is different for each cluster. Workers in jobs with a greater need for analytical skill are likely to use fewer Southern features due to both the class associations of analytical skill and the social perceptions of competence connected to Southern speech. A wealth of literature finds class divisions in sociolinguistic
production in which upper-SES individuals tend to use more “Standard” and less stigmatized features in their speech (Eckert 1989a, 2000; Labov 1972b, 2001a; Wolfram 1969), and in the US South currently, higher-SES speakers lead the change away from the SVS (Baranowski 2008, 2007; Dodsworth 2013; Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Forrest 2015; Prichard 2010). Analytical skill, with its emphasis on cognition, has a strong connection to education and licensure, which in turn connect to upper class habitus. Therefore, speakers in analytically focused jobs may consequently be those of higher SES levels, resulting in fewer Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) features. In tandem with stratification effects, the general perception of Southern dialects as slow or uneducated (Campbell-Kibler 2008; Fridland, Bartlett, and Kreuz 2005; Niedzielski and Preston 2003) runs contra to the expectations of a worker in a highly-skilled analytical position. Southerners consequently have an even stronger motivation to distance themselves from traditional Southern features.

Jobs with a high degree of interactional skill required for day-to-day tasks should also show a lesser degree of the SVS due to the perceptions of Southern dialects, but this effect should be even stronger when the participant is on the job. A substantial component of interactional skill is working with those outside of the company, where the stakes may be much higher in terms of linguistic prejudice (Coupland 1980). For this particular dataset, much of the interactional work done with those outside of the company is with clients over the phone who are located all over the United States, making sociolinguistic judgments an even more critical part of job success. Since phone conversations are disembodied, listeners must reconstruct the social identity of the speaker solely through linguistic cues, thus creating a form of aesthetic labor for the speaker (Mears 2014; Sheane 2012; Williams and Connell 2010). Speakers in these contexts
must then linguistically embody the company image and present themselves as professional workers.

Lastly, managerial skill should negatively correlate with linguistic features of the SVS due to the social expectations associated with powerful organizational positions. Individuals in positions of power must express and embody that power in a way that solidifies their position. Language, as a component of expressive habitus (Schwalbe and Shay 2014), plays an important role in embodying the proper social characteristics for a position, and since Southern dialects reflect a devalued status, their use by a manager would be incongruous. Likewise, lack of SVS shifting reflects a higher class background, which follows the expectations for the social background of a manager. Workers in jobs with high managerial skill requirements should be even more likely to avoid Southern features while interacting at work due to these concerns.

In sum, all three groups of job skills should correlate negatively with features of the SVS, with interactional and managerial skill showing an even lower degree of the SVS during workplace interaction.

**Data and Methods**

The linguistic data for this analysis comes from 17 workers at Southern Tech, drawn from both self-recordings and sociolinguistic interviews. Vowels implicated in the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS), including the five front vowels /i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, and /æ/, as well as the diphthong /aɪ/, were measured and normalized (Lobanov 1971). The position of the five front vowels was calculated as normalized vowel diagonal (Labov, Rosenfelder, and Fruehwald 1971)

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9 These correspond to the vowels in FLEECE, KIT, FACE, DRESS, TRAP, and PRIZE, respectively. Since every individual’s vocal tract is different, vowel normalization allows for comparison across speakers.

10 Vowel diagonal represents a vowel’s position within the front part of the mouth, articulatorily speaking. The differences in tongue position captured by vowel diagonal are what make the vowel in DRESS sound different from the vowel in FACE, for example.
2013) at vowel nucleus, defined as 25% vowel duration. The position of the /au/ diphthong was calculated as normalized vowel diagonal at 75% vowel duration, and pre-voiceless tokens of /au/ were excluded from analysis due to these tokens being diphthongal for all speakers in the sample\(^{11}\) (Dinkin and Dodsworth 2017; Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2005).

Skill level with respect to each of the three types of skill (analytical, interactional, managerial) was measured in two separate ways. First, participants were given a survey after their completion of the sociolinguistic interview with Likert scale questions relating to day-to-day job tasks that fell under the three broad skill headings. Second, at the end of the survey, participants were asked to report their job title, and this title was used to collect skill data from the O*NET database reflective of their current occupation. The survey metric offers a measurement of skill that captures any firm-specific differences between jobs, since each individual creates a unique data point. On the other hand, the O*NET database allows for comparability to previous studies (Liu and Grusky 2013; Wyant et al. 2018). Means, standard deviations and ranges for the survey data and the O*NET data are shown in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, respectively. Internal consistency metrics for the survey data were calculated using Cronbach’s Alpha for all three skill groups: Analytical (.79), Interactional (.61), and Managerial (.83). Possible raw values for individual responses range from 0-24 for the survey data and 1-5 for the O*NET data. When implemented in statistical models, both O*NET and survey metrics were centered on the mean and z-scored.

\(^{11}\) In most Southern Englishes, the vowel in PRIZE sounds like “prahz”, but the vowel in PRICE sounds more like its realization in Standard American English. The exclusions narrow the focus to only the “Southern-sounding” vowel.
Table 3.1: Survey Data Summary Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: O*NET Data Summary Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both metrics show a relatively narrow distribution in skill requirements between jobs compared to variation seen at a national level, though this result may stem in large part from the examination of one firm as opposed to the entire occupational structure. Especially within the technology industry, occupations at the extreme ends of some of these skill dimensions may be unlikely. For example, jobs with low analytical skill requirements are rare within the technology sector, and the heavy focus on research and development makes highly interactional jobs somewhat less common. Surprisingly, however, participants have relatively high scores for interactional skill for both the survey and O*NET metrics. Because Southern Tech is a relatively large firm, it contains a number of jobs and departments not normally associated with technology directly. Table 3.3 contains demographic and job information for each speaker.
### Table 3.3: Speaker Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tec001</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Senior Software Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec002</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Research Statistician Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec003</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>Principal Architect Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec004</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>Senior Applications Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec005</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Principal QA Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec007</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Principal Business Operations Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec008</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Digital Asset Librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec009</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec010</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>Senior Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec011</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>man</td>
<td>Senior Account Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec012</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Principal Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec013</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Senior Technical Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec014</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Designer/Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec015</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Associate HR Business Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec016</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>External Communications Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec018</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Customer Account Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tec019</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>woman</td>
<td>Senior Certification Developer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the participants hold jobs expected within a technology firm (e.g. software developer, technical writer), but other jobs, like cashier or designer, are more unexpected. In all, the wide range represented in the sample allows a sociolinguistic analysis of the firm in a broader sense, rather than just one or two occupations within it. I address two major hypotheses:

1. Higher skill requirements will negatively correlate with SVS features for all three skill clusters, as negative connotations of Southern accents run contra to perceptions of high skill

2. Interactional and managerial skill have highly performative components, so these skills will interact with stylistic context, such that workers in these positions will show even less SVS shifting while at work in order to symbolically indicate their skill
To determine how skills correlate with linguistic performance, a series of linear mixed-effects models were run, with vowel measurement as the dependent variable. Models were run for each vowel individually, as each vowel shows different movement within the vowel space as a result of the SVS (Labov et al. 2005). Each model set was constructed stepwise, with the addition of more factors and interactions at each step, and models were selected with modified AIC as the fit criterion. The primary goal of modeling was to test the effect of skill itself, but testing interactive effects between skill and context can illustrate how speakers actively shift their linguistic features for the job, as suggested by Hypothesis 2. Consequently, higher-order interactive effects between speech context and job skill were tested after the addition of job skill main effects. Model construction proceeded as follows:

**Step 1**: Internal Linguistic Factors

**Step 2**: Social Factors (Gender, Birthyear)

**Step 3**: Recording Context (work/casual/interview)

**Step 4**: Skill Metrics (either survey or O*NET)

**Step 5**: Interactions between Skill and Context

In the testing series, both survey metrics and O*NET metrics were applied in separate models as measures of skill, and the metrics were assessed for best fit. Birth year and all measurements of skill were centered and scaled for all models.

**Results**

*Skill Metric Performance*

Model selection testing for all vowels showed a better fit for survey skill measurements rather than O*NET statistics. While this result may initially seem surprising given the wide body of literature that utilizes O*NET, this study represents something of a unique case among
other studies. Perhaps the most important factor that motivates the better performance of the survey is the level of analysis; the survey measures job-level characteristics, while O*NET measures occupation-level characteristics. With a large sample size and much wider array of occupations, previous implementations of O*NET metrics (Liu and Grusky 2013; Wyant et al. 2018) met with success, but with a sample of only 17 speakers from one firm, O*NET statistics will not exhibit the same degree of variation. For example, four speakers within the current study are classified as “Software Developer, Applications” under O*NET, giving them identical skill measurements, but survey results show skill differences from individual to individual. Much of this variation stems from length of job experience and tenure at the firm, as some participants had “Senior” or “Principal” programmer designations while others did not. These higher-level job titles entailed a greater degree of managerial work in the form of mentoring or team coordination, despite not being defined as managerial-track. Sociolinguistic case studies of style shifting at work (Coupland 1980; Podesva 2011a, 2011b) further emphasize the importance of micro-level phenomena like conversation interlocutor or specific job tasks for linguistic variation, making individually-sourced data a more accurate measure for language features specifically. O*NET measurements, therefore, reduced the relative variation within the dataset and provide a less adequate fit to the data than the survey metrics. Since these measures performed better in all models, I report only the results for models that included the survey metrics, not those including O*NET statistics.

**Vowel-Specific Results**

After model selection, all vowels show main effects for skill, and many show interactions with stylistic context. The direction of each effect is shown in Table 3.4, where “more” means the effect operates in the direction of the SVS (effectively, more Southern-sounding) and “less”
means the effect operates opposite the direction of the SVS. Interactions with job skills are only reported if the addition of an interaction improved the best-fitting model. The three columns in Table 3.4 labeled for skill clusters (Analytical, Interactional, Managerial) address Hypothesis 1, or the main effect of skills on the degree of Southern features. The last three columns represent interactive effects between stylistic context (interview, work, casual) and the skill clusters, related to the predictions of Hypothesis 2. Essentially, these interactions assess whether the skill requirements of jobs have a differential effect on SVS features depending on a given conversational context.

Table 3.4: Effects of Skill in Best Regression Models for More/Less Southern Shift

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowel</th>
<th>Analytical</th>
<th>Interactional</th>
<th>Managerial</th>
<th>A * Style</th>
<th>I * Style</th>
<th>M * Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FLEECE</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIT</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>More</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACE</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRESS</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAP</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIZE</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>More</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the effects are consistent within themselves, save for the KIT vowel—analytical and interactional skill show a significant negative correlation with the SVS, and managerial skill shows a significant positive correlation with the SVS. The direction of analytical and interactional skill follow theoretical expectations, but managerial skill runs opposite the expected direction. This effect may be explained in part by the positions of organizational power that speakers in these jobs hold. Though lower use of SVS features in these jobs may initially seem appropriate for their social position, these speakers may have less need to indicate their status culturally or symbolically since social structure provides them direct power. Speakers in jobs with a substantial managerial component may find themselves in a less precarious position.
within the organization, and they can consequently “get away with” stigmatized Southern features in a way that other workers cannot.

Interaction effects between stylistic context and skills, though not present for every vowel in the study, pattern in the same direction as their main effects. In other words, when on the job, the effects of skill are compounded beyond the effects seen in casual contexts. Speakers in higher-skilled analytical and interactional positions use even less Southern pronunciations, and those in higher-skilled managerial positions use more Southern pronunciations. A main effect of skill in this regression means the speaker is less Southern in every speech context, which in urban Southern communities, often means higher-SES individuals (Dodsworth and Benton 2017; Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Forrest 2015). The stylistic interactions show how speakers adapt their speech to the needs of their work, beyond baseline norms, pointing towards issues of habitus and self-presentation (Bourdieu 1991; Goffman 1959; Schwalbe and Shay 2014).

In order to examine the results of these regressions more closely, I provide visualization and discussion of individual vowels, grouped according to similar behavior. First, I examine the mid front vowels FACE and DRESS, move to the high vowels FLEECE and KIT, and finally discuss TRAP and PRIZE individually.

*Mid Front Vowels*

The first group of vowels that pattern together is the high front vowels FACE and DRESS. Due to structural mechanisms that connect these vowels, their movement reflects underlying linguistic factors relating to vowel positions during the SVS. The tables and figure reduce vowel position to a Southern/non-Southern dichotomy for ease of discussion, but each vowel moves in a unique way. FACE and DRESS exchange positions within the SVS, as shown
in Figure 3.1. DRESS raises and fronts to the FACE vowel’s canonical location in Standard American English, and vice versa.

![Southern Vowel Shift Diagram](image)

**Figure 3.1: Vowel Positions in the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS)**

With regards to the social factors affecting vowel variation, FACE and DRESS are the two vowels most likely to show substantial differences between individuals, since their movement occurs at an earlier stage in the overall shift of the system (Labov et al. 2005). Most Southern communities have already undergone SVS shifting for the mid vowels as well (Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Labov et al. 2005; Thomas 2001), meaning that a wide spectrum of variation should be observable between speakers and between contexts.

The best model for FACE contains context interactions for each skill cluster, and the resulting slopes are displayed in Figure 3.2. Treating the casual context as a stylistic baseline for speakers, the results follow hypothesized expectations for the analytical and interactional skill groups. Speakers with jobs that require low skill needs in these groups show little difference between their casual recordings and those at work.
At the other end of the skill spectrum, the work context becomes increasingly less Southern, eventually reaching a point highly distinct from the casual context. These results reflect both the selection processes for getting these jobs and the stylistic needs while on the job. Jobs higher in analytical skill have a higher, less Southern baseline for the casual context, meaning that the speakers in these jobs are less Southern than their peers, regardless of context. The less Southern stylistic range may imply that speakers in these positions experience some sort of selection process, either on the part of firms or self-selection on the part of individuals, based on analytical skill needs. A less pronounced effect on linguistic baseline also appears for interactional jobs. Both skill groups show significantly less Southern pronunciations of the FACE vowel at work, suggesting that speakers avoid SVS-shifted vowels, possibly due to social stigma. The managerial group operates in the opposite direction, with a slight but significant interaction between casual and other contexts. Though opposite the predicted direction, the managerial group may reflect a reduced need to claim the symbolic power of Standard English when possessing the structural power provided by organizational position. The decreased stylistic range also supports this hypothesis, in that speakers inhabit a less liminal social space, and thus have a reduced need to adapt their speech, at least with respect to FACE.
The results for DRESS, presented in Figure 3.3, show some effects of vowel dispersion in tandem with SVS modification. The shape of the interaction for analytical skill presents a puzzle, in that the effects present a clear case for neither hyperarticulation nor avoidance of the SVS.

![Figure 3.3: Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for DRESS](image)

The flat trajectory of the casual context is not problematic in itself, but we would expect this context to remain the most Southern for all speakers if avoidance of the SVS were the issue. In a hyperarticulation framework, the interview context should be the “most Southern” due to positioning, but the direction of the effect of skill runs opposite expectations for interpretation as well. The interactive result is robust in the model, but it eludes a clear explanation. The effect of interactional skill, however, follows expectations for avoidance of the SVS.

**High Front Vowels**

While the hypotheses predict the same results for all vowels implicated in the SVS, the high front vowels exhibit a different pattern. Part of this difference stems from the timing of FLEECE and KIT’s movement within the SVS from a historical perspective, which results in the high front showing the least amount of Southern shifting within a community. In the process of the Southern Vowel Shift, FLEECE and KIT are the last vowels to move, meaning that many
Southern speech communities have only partial shifting at most for these vowels (Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Labov et al. 2005). Within the dataset, only two speakers (tec003 and tec014) exhibit what could be termed a truly “Southern-shifted” high front pair in any stylistic context.

In measurement terms, a lower FLEECE vowel and a higher KIT vowel reflect a “more Southern pronunciation”. The problem with this simplification in the case of the high front vowels is speakers’ manipulation of the overall vowel envelope in tandem with modification of Southern shifting. When trying to speak especially clearly—when speaking to small children or non-native speakers, for example—speakers can disperse their vowel space (Krause and Braida 2003; Smiljanić and Bradlow 2005; Uther, Knoll, and Burnham 2007) to allow for easier vowel discrimination by listeners. This dispersal affects the high front vowels by causing both of them to move into a higher, fronter position relative to casual speech. FLEECE and KIT, existing at the relative periphery of the vowel space, show more movement in these hyper-clear contexts than other vowels. For FLEECE, hyperarticulation moves the vowel nucleus away from its canonical Southern pronunciation, and for KIT, towards the Southern pronunciation. Therefore, there are two factors motivating these vowels’ positional difference across the three contexts, one due to hyperarticulation and one due to avoidance of the SVS.

Figure 3.4 illustrates the dispersal process on the high front vowels for a single speaker, with TRAP and THOUGHT included as reference points. FLEECE and KIT, represented in purple and blue, exhibit a movement towards the periphery of the vowel space most dramatically in the interview condition. Their movement creates a more expanded vowel space in general, allowing for more distinction between vowel classes compared with the other conditions. This speaker provides an especially clear example of the stylization of hyper-clear speech in her realization of one FLEECE token in the casual context that appears in the far upper-left corner.
Figure 3.4: Vowel Measurements for Speaker Tec001 by Context

This particular token comes from the FLEECE vowel in the word “pizza” when the speaker was imitating a child, and she produces the token at the absolute edge of her vowel space to emphasize the childishness of the speech. This token bears more resemblance to the cluster of FLEECE tokens from the interview than the rest of her casual tokens, providing evidence that these differences stem from stylization rather than idiosyncrasies in recording setup or microphone placement.

Another possible explanation outside of stylized clarity of speech that may create the differences observed for FLEECE and KIT is undershoot, in which speakers fail to fully reach an intended vowel’s “target” pronunciation during rapid speech (Lindblom 1963; Thomas 2010). Undershoot interacts with vowel duration, with shorter vowels more prone to undershoot due to the operation of the articulatory mechanism and other language-internal factors (Thomas 2010). If the variation between contexts in the high front vowels relates purely to undershoot, then clear durational differences should appear, in which longer durations are more frequent in the contexts with more peripheral vowels. Figure 3.5 shows a density plot of duration by context, and no clear difference between the contexts seems evident. To further assess this possibility, an
interaction between duration and context was added to statistical models and tested for fit, but there was no model improvement.

![Figure 3.5: Vowel Duration by Context](image)

Despite the complication of hyperarticulation as a component of variation in the high front vowels, we can still interpret skill effects as they relate to elements of the Southern Vowel Shift. The interactive effects for FLEECE are displayed in Figure 3.6, with faceting for each skill cluster and color-coding for context. Significant interactive effects exist between each skill cluster and speech context. Both analytical and interactive skill show a highly positive correlation with vowel position in work contexts, corresponding to vowels that are both less Southern and more hyperarticulated. Given the substantial effect size of the interview context
for FLEECE (coef = .975), these differences are more likely due to hyperarticulation than to movement away from Southern speech norms.

![Figure 3.6: Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for FLEECE](image)

For jobs requiring greater analytical and interactional skill, the greater predicted linguistic distinction observed between the casual and other contexts may suggest speakers perceive an increased need for speech clarity and vowel distinctiveness while speaking in these positions, due to professional or interactive expectations. The reversed effect for managerial skill might initially suggest a more Southern norm for workers in highly-skilled managerial positions, but the positive slope in casual contexts suggests presents some problems for this interpretation. If we consider tokens in the casual condition to be a lower limit of vernacularity, the closeness of all three contexts for managerial jobs shows a decreased stylistic range, rather than an avoidance of Southern speech.

The same difficulty arises in the interpretation of skill differences in KIT, displayed in Figure 3.7. Here, norms for articulateness (i.e. vowel dispersion) and norms for the SVS run in opposite directions. What appears to be movement towards Southern norms for high-skill workers in analytical and interactional positions is actually a movement towards hyperarticulation of the KIT vowel. The low position of KIT in the interview context for all
speakers provides further evidence in support of this interpretation, as speakers would be least likely to use Southern features in this context.

Managerial skill shows no significant interactions, but it does have a main effect away from Southern and away from articulate norms. Overall, the high front vowels present an interpretive challenge in that speakers have a competing pressure for vowel clarity along with symbolic Southern meanings. The high front pair also tend to show the least amount of Southern shifting within a community. In the process of the Southern Vowel Shift, FLEECE and KIT are the last vowels to move, meaning that many Southern speech communities have only partial shifting at most for these vowels (Dodsworth and Kohn 2012; Labov et al. 2005).

**TRAP**

The TRAP vowel bears separate analysis due to its association with a new vowel shift occurring in the United States centered in California termed either the “California Vowel Shift” or the “Third Vowel Shift” (Kennedy and Grama 2012). In this shift, TRAP lowers and backs, a movement that also runs opposite to the raising and fronting found in the SVS. Movement away from the SVS can also indicate movement *towards* this new linguistic norm for TRAP. The
results in Figure 3.8 show that skill and context both discourage the SVS and encourage use of the incoming variant for some speakers.

Figure 3.8: Interactive Effects between Context and Skill for TRAP

The results for the analytical skill group follow expectations; workers in higher-skilled jobs avoid the raising of TRAP associated with the SVS. The interactive effects for interactional skill show movement away from SVS norms towards canonical TRAP for American English, and speakers in high-interactional jobs produce a comparatively low variant of TRAP. This variant has associations with the valley girl stereotype, or it may alternately indicate professional personas (D’Onofrio 2015; Kennedy and Grama 2012), so speakers may draw on this feature to indicate their suitability for a professional job. Finally, managerial skill shows an effect in the opposite direction, and speakers in managerial jobs show little stylistic difference across contexts.

PRIZE

Lastly, we move to the PRIZE diphthong, a strongly salient indicator of Southern identity. In Southern English varieties, the PRIZE vowel becomes more monophthongal, making the vowel in “tide” sound more like “tahd”. The model results for PRIZE show no interaction effects, but all skill clusters have significant main effects displayed in Figure 3.9.
The effects resemble those for other vowels in the study, but the theoretical interpretation for PRIZE is clearer. For white speakers, pronouncing PRIZE as a monophthong only has true social implications for the SVS (at least in the time and place this study was conducted), so any movement represents movement towards or away from these norms. Therefore, the change in realization of PRIZE for high-skill interactional and analytical jobs represents a movement away from Southern norms on the whole, though no interaction with speech context reached significance. Conversely, managers use a more Southern variant of PRIZE overall, again without an interactive effect for context.

**Discussion**

The results presented here show significant correlations between vowels implicated in the Southern Vowel Shift and job skill clusters, with high analytical and interactional skill jobs moving away from the SVS and high managerial skill jobs moving towards it. From a sociological perspective, these results a possible motivation for selection into certain job clusters as well as a form of cultural capital required for workers in some job sectors. In terms of selection process, the movement away from SVS features for workers in interactional and analytical jobs across all contexts implies either self-selection or firm sorting into certain
occupational groups. If either one of these pressures operates on eventual job outcomes, they will reproduce social inequality due to the strong class associations of vernacular features. Since highly-skilled occupations, especially in the analytical sector, present increased material rewards for workers (Liu and Grusky 2013), selecting against Southern features effectively locks out workers from lower-SES backgrounds. If language does indeed operate in this way to reward or penalize certain workers, we can examine linguistic differences as a cultural pathway to inequality (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014) hitherto unexplored in sociological research. Since individuals are socialized into dialect systems that remain relatively static after adolescence (Labov 1989), language represents an aspect of habitus (Bourdieu 1984; Schwalbe and Shay 2014) that is extraordinarily difficult for individuals to either identify or change. Ultimately, this finding problematizes the description of rising inequality as an issue of skill mismatch, instead suggesting that differential rewards to cultural and linguistic background play a role in job suitability.

The interactive effect of speech context with skill illustrates that speakers in certain positions must undertake extra linguistic labor while on the job to manage their self-presentation. This expectation for workers to “sound right” while at work falls under the umbrella of aesthetic labor in a broad sense (Mears 2014; Williams and Connell 2010), but the literature in this domain tends to focus on hospitality and retail rather than professional labor. When revisiting the components of interactive skill, however, the importance of this skill cluster for work speech does bear some resemblance to other instances of aesthetic labor. When making calls to customers, managing client accounts, or giving information for PR releases to news organizations, the worker needs to embody the company, since they are acting as “the company face” in that moment. Requiring a specific linguistic stylization at work not only creates extra
labor for the worker, it also precludes individuals without the necessary linguistic resources from being able to fulfill the requirements of the job. Speakers dynamically create styles and identity (Eckert 2008), but these styles can only be crafted with linguistic resources available to an individual, which must be acquired through interaction (Dodsworth and Benton 2017; Eckert 1989a, 2000). If speakers do not have the right contacts to access these linguistic resources, they have little opportunity to perform the labor required.

The positive correlation between higher managerial skill and features of the SVS is surprising, but it suggests directions for future organizational research. The use of Southern features by speakers in these positions, despite their negative connotations, suggests different symbolic needs for these speakers due to their position within the organization. Part of the reason managers can use more SVS features at work may be due to the organizational culture of the firm (Hallett 2003; Swidler 1986), as sounding Southern may not have ramifications for company position. When asked about Southern features at work, many speakers espoused this position, responding that sounding Southern would not matter because Southern Tech “is a Southern company”. Another possible explanation for the correlations with managerial skill is that hierarchical position trumps symbolic displays of social affiliation. In other words, with the weight of the company supporting one’s authority, the privileged position of managers affords them more leeway for the use of stigmatized dialect features. This idea receives more support from the overall reduction in between-context variation for managerial workers, a pattern that may derive from a lesser need to monitor self-presentation when possessing privileged organizational status.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this analysis deepens our understanding of the stylistic range of the individual, as well as how jobs and workplaces condition linguistic
variation. The high degree of variability between recording contexts illustrates how dynamic
individuals’ linguistic production can be when compared to interview settings. Recent analyses
utilizing self-recordings have found similar variability due to ethnicity and relationship to the
audience members (Sharma 2017) and speaker identity choices (Van Hofwegen 2017). To these
social drivers of stylistic variation I would add institutional context, given the results of this
study. The movement away from (or towards, in the case of managers) the SVS at work
certainly derives from speakers’ self-presentation or audience effects at a micro level, but the
context of work dictates the identities speakers can inhabit or the interactions they may have
while on the job. For example, the cashier analyzed in this study has different identity needs and
different conversation partners than a programmer, but ultimately these differences derive from
the social and institutional structures that govern the work and interaction that workers must
undertake. Consequently, speakers must remain sociolinguistically sensitive to the norms of
their workplace as much as their self-presentation.

The implementation of job skills presented here provides a new framework for thinking
about occupation in sociolinguistics. Skills show strong correlations with features of the SVS,
even in a small sample, and they show variation in a set of jobs that would mostly be coded
“white collar” under traditional frameworks. The strength of using a metric like skill for job-
level or occupational-level analysis is that it marries top-down theoretical validity with bottom-
up approaches to understanding meso-level workplace or community processes. The skill
metrics derived from the survey data and implemented in the statistical models in this paper
provide evidence of the value of this type of approach. To illustrate the alternative perspective
on jobs provided by a skill-based approach, Figure 3.10 presents the results of a cluster analysis
of the survey skill data. Jobs are clustered using the DIANA algorithm, which begins with a
single cluster of observations, splitting them into progressively smaller clusters.

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**Figure 3.10: Cluster Analysis of Job Skills**

The algorithm creates a spectrum of interactional skill from left to right, where groups farther to the left have low scores for interactional skill and those on the right have high scores. The jobs on the left (programming, librarian, IT) have little need for interaction, but high analytical skills. Contrastively the far right jobs (cashier, PR) have very high interactional skill, but lower analytical skill. Clusters in the middle, especially those with principal-level workers, have higher managerial skills than non-principal jobs. Using a cluster analysis of skills gives sociolinguists a way to see what jobs are similar in their requirements, separate from purely class-based understandings. The shop worker, for example, patterns closely to technical writers, and the cashier shares a skillset with the PR worker.

In the broader context of the study of Southern Tech, this analysis provides the widest scope, looking at every speaker simultaneously and positioning them with relation to job
requirements and firm organization. The results show that skills have job-level linguistic correlates that largely follow theoretical predictions and provide a replicable method for examining jobs and occupations in sociolinguistics. Future sociolinguistic studies building on this framework can more rigorously examine how individuals linguistically style themselves at work, as well as how speakers respond to institutional conditions. For sociological investigations, this analysis highlights the role of language in interaction and cultural presentation at work, as well as its intersection with job skills and organizational position. In this way, language can provide a window into cultural processes that affect organizational behavior and individual outcomes.
CHAPTER 4: STYLISTIC EMBEDDEDNESS AND THE SOUTHERN VOWEL SHIFT

The findings in Chapter 2 demonstrate that workers, depending on the skill-based components of their jobs, differently manage their self-presentation while at work. The strongest argument for this claim comes from the stylistic data, showing that job skills affect work language differently than language in other settings. This finding on its own is significant, but the nature of sociolinguistic style and its connection to identity and the self (Eckert 2008; Siverstein 2003) motivates a more detailed look at how individuals stylistically navigate their social world. Where the previous chapter focused on work, jobs, and the labor market, this chapter places the idea of style and individual stylistic presentation at the center of theorization and analysis. Since stylistic moves rely heavily on the structural pressures and identity characteristics of the individual, to truly examine style requires a narrower focus than the aggregate analysis presented in the previous chapter. To provide the nuance required for this type of examination, this chapter treats the structure and the agency of the individual in tandem, illuminating the complex motivations behind stylistic variation.

The tension between structure and agency in both sociology and sociolinguistics is longstanding, and despite theoretical efforts from both traditions (Bourdieu 1990; Eckert 2000; Giddens 1979) they remain unresolved. Part of the difficulty lies in navigating the two extremes of analysis: on the one side, the social world appears completely deterministic (Parsons 1937); on the other, individuals make choices independent of any conditioning force (Becker 1993b). Sociologically, the problem is most clearly characterized through the persistence of many social institutions over time, yet individuals within these contexts often do not follow the scripts for how they should behave. The same can be said for sociolinguistic analysis of stylistic variation. Early, structurally-focused theories treat style shifting as a stimulus-response mechanism; the
formality conditions or conversation participants in a given interaction consequently result in
different rates of linguistic variables (Bell 1984; Labov 1972b). Speaker- and agency-centered
interpretations of style and variation (Eckert 2008; Schilling-Estes 1998) run the risk of under-
socialization, and the constraints of social structure fade into the background, obscuring the
pressures they place on speakers. Neither approach to style unifies both the structural and
agentive forces that condition variation.

To narrow the analytical focus and provide a more unified theory of style, I examine
language as it is used within a workplace. The workplace provides a reasonable starting point
for an integrated analysis of structure and agency, since it has a rich tradition of both institutional
(DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Granovetter 1985) and ethnographic study (Burawoy 1979; Jackall
1989; Kanter 1993). In addition to empirical work, organizational theory emphasizing integrated
analysis (Acker 2006; Hallett 2003; Hallett and Ventresca 2006) gives direction for beginning a
sociolinguistic analysis within a workplace. While sociolinguists rarely analyze language
variation at work outside of the discursive tradition (Coupland 1980; Holmes and Stubbe 2015;
Podesva 2011b), they do provide insight into the construction of linguistic meaning (Eckert
2008; Siverstein 2003) and the ways that individuals stylize their speech (Bell 1984; Labov
1972b; Schilling-Estes 1998). Placing style within the organizational context stands to
illuminate both sides of the social coin, as interactions within the confines of a workplace
represent the intersection of actors with their structural surroundings. Examining language at
these intersections can show the ways in which both structure and agency play a role in
workplace interaction.

The goal of this analysis is to supplement the broader investigations of skill in the
previous chapter with a deeper investigation of individual stylistic patterns. To do so, I propose
a new theoretical framework I term “stylistic embeddedness,” which captures the dialectal relationship between linguistic actors and the structural forces of institutions, combining sociolinguistic approaches to style with sociological understandings of actors within inhabited institutions. First, I discuss the history of sociolinguistic approaches to style, focusing on the reasons for stylistic variation between speech contexts. I then contextualize style within a workplace setting, applying the inhabited institutions framework (Hallett and Ventresca 2006) to linguistic variation to provide the foundation for understanding actors’ linguistic behavior within formal organizations. I implement this framework with data drawn from speakers at Southern Tech, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Interviews with each speaker provide the symbolic context of the institution and organization as experienced by the individual, demonstrating the tensions between extra-local and local structural forces. I then examine speakers individually, grouping them according to their linguistic behavior and situating their stylistic moves within organizational context and category membership. Finally, I return to a holistic view of how speakers’ stylistic variation reflects the conflicts between social-structural forces and actors’ agency within them, discussing future applications of the theory of stylistic embeddedness to sociolinguistics.

Literature Review

Sociolinguistic Approaches to Style

Early approaches to style shifting in sociolinguistics emphasized the role of formality and attention to speech. Labov (1972b), during his work in New York City, identified a series of styles, ranging from the most vernacular (causal speech) to the most standard (word lists or minimal pairs). These situations, he argued, represented a stylistic range from most casual to most careful; the more careful a speaker during speech, the fewer vernacular features would
emerge. He demonstrated this phenomenon with example speakers, tracking their production of socially salient variables such as postvocalic /r/ in different settings, finding that speakers adjust their rates of use depending on the setting. From a theoretical perspective, this model of style shifting proposes that in these “more formal” situations such as reading, speakers pay more attention to their speech, and they consequently remove certain vernacular features. Social category membership plays a role in the attention to speech model as well, with speakers in liminal social positions (women, lower-middle class speakers) showing more dynamic adjustment of their speech across stylistic contexts (Labov 1972b, 2001a). The goal of the attention to speech framework was ultimately to gather the most naturalistic—in other words, the most vernacular—speech from sociolinguistic data practices, thus capturing the “authentic dialect” of the speaker. Though this theoretical perspective followed empirical findings, the reasoning behind speakers’ linguistic shifts remained mostly mechanistic. When presented with more formal speech contexts, individuals remove non-standard features, mirroring a stimulus-response pattern one might see in the biological sciences. Despite these issues with Labov’s original proposition, examining the degree that speakers pay attention to speech still has merit, and with more nuanced cognitive research paradigms (Sharma 2018), we have a much better idea of what constitutes “attention” on the part of a speaker. However, stylistic theories moved from attention to speech and formality to conceptions that more accurately reflected the nuances of social life.

As a response to the limits of Labov’s attention to speech model, Bell (1984) proposed a new perspective he termed “audience design,” in which speakers’ linguistic behavior reflects their audience, both direct and indirect. Rather than treating formality or general social context as the important variable between settings, audience design foregrounds the listeners in an
interaction. At a party for example, a speaker may directly address one listener in a group, but there may be two or three others, for whom the speaker still caters their linguistic performance. Beyond that are other partygoers that the speaker knows may be listening, but they are not in the direct audience of the performance. Bell (1984) conceptualizes these different audience members as having increasing orders of importance to the speaker in terms of their linguistic behavior, though all have some degree of effect. Figure 4.1 presents a diagram of the increasingly distant spheres of possible audience members, with listeners farther from the speaker having less strength in conditioning a speaker’s language in interaction.

**Figure 4.1: Language Style as Audience Design (Bell 1984)**

The audience design framework addresses issues outside of formality that affect linguistic performance, specifically acknowledging that other actors and their social characteristics have a strong effect on a speakers’ use of sociolinguistic variables. Especially for certain contexts such as mass media (Coupland 2001; Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991), this theory of style allows for a deeper understanding of linguistic differences between interactions.
that have the same level of formality. However, even within audience design, the speaker’s role in interaction is more reactive than proactive. Speakers respond to formality (Labov 1972b) or audiences (Bell 1984), but they do not make choices in a primarily agentive sense.

The lack of speaker control present in previous models of style motivated the formulation of the speaker design approach to style (Schilling-Estes 1998), where the speaker’s desires and motivations play a central role in linguistic performance. Analyzing a single speaker in a case study, Schilling-Estes notes that the speaker adopts a number of different styles with respect to Ocracoke English, even when the social context and audience members remain the same. At certain times during a sociolinguistic interview, the speaker uses an exaggerated vernacular register, but in others he switches to a far more standard register, which cannot be explained under either attention-to-speech frameworks or audience design. Schilling-Estes argues that we should instead conceive of speakers as agents in constructing a performance identity for themselves, drawing back to Goffman’s (1959) early dramaturgical models. When the Ocracoke speaker wants to be perceived as a representative of the traditional community, he may switch to a more vernacular style, even mid-conversation. The speaker design shifts the reasoning for variation from the contextual to the individual, and it grants the individual a much greater degree of choice in terms of linguistic production.

The transition in style research from speaker-external to speaker-internal factors reflects a broader shift in sociolinguistics towards the micro-level study of identity and social meaning central to third-wave variationist study (Eckert 2012). Eckert’s (Eckert 1989a, 2000) research on the adolescent construction of identity in a Detroit-area high school exemplifies this approach. The students she examines at Belten High use varying degrees of the incoming Northern Cities Shift (NCS) vernacular dialect depending on their social affiliation: either with the jocks, middle-
class groups orienting positively towards school, or the burnouts, usually working-class groups 
who oriented away from the school. Burnouts tended to use more vernacular features, and those 
burnouts who had the strongest “burnout identity” used the most strongly shifted variants. The 
NCS in Eckert’s study exhibits indexical meanings of group membership and social affect 
(Eckert 2008; Siverstein 2003), whereby individuals can signal both that they are a “burnout” 
and that they are “tough” simultaneously. The myriad connotations attached to individual 
features have led to more theorizations of style and social meaning as locally-grounded 
phenomenon, attached to very specific local identities (Podesva 2011a, 2011b; Zhang 2005). 
The sheer breadth of variability in individual styling is captured through the idea of “bricolage,” 
or the conception of a linguistic performance forming a holistic unit that is both comprised of 
and more than the meanings of its constituent parts (Eckert 2008). Through bricolage, the use of 
released /t/\textsuperscript{12} can signal identities as varied as “valley girl,” “gay man,” or “orthodox Jewish” 
(Benor 2001, 2010; Eckert 2008). Since these meanings can vary so widely, their connection to 
broader social categories and identities is dialectical: members of cohesive social groups use 
linguistic features to signal their identities, and linguistic features become associated with 
identities through their use by social groups.

It is from this dialectical relationship between sociolinguistic variation and social 
meaning that we can connect identity-based research with earlier theories of style in 
sociolinguistics, as well as to sociological theories of work, organizations, and interaction. The 
third wave approach rightly locates the construction of meaning within individuals and 
interactions, but sociolinguistic actors perform with a restricted set of choices (i.e. linguistic

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\textsuperscript{12} /t/ release is the use of a /t/ with a measurable burst after the stop, like the /t/ in “time”. This is variable in most 
English dialects at the ends of words. For example, the /t/ in the word “lost” can be produced either as a released /t/ 
or as other unreleased forms.
resources) and a given set of interactional rules. To return to Goffman, the actors in any interaction have roles they must fill and scripts they have been given; while it may be up to the actors how to play the role, there are limits on what constitutes an allowable performance. To that point, second-wave conceptions of style and identity in sociolinguistics (Bell 1984; Mallinson and Dodsworth 2009; Sankoff and Laberge 1978) acknowledge the structure that surrounds interaction, and a blending of this awareness with a third-wave conception of identity can produce a clearer picture of the give and take between structure and identity. However, sociolinguistic understandings of social structure tend to be undertheorized, resulting in methods-driven implementations of social categories like class, race, and gender that only tenuously connect to the theoretical constructs that they represent (Ash 2013; Dodsworth 2009). The description of previous sociolinguistic approaches to occupation in Chapter 1 demonstrates the variability in approaches to what social class—and its consequent measurement—even mean in the analysis of linguistic variation, resulting in myriad approaches and definitions. To provide better structural support for a thorough analysis of culture and structure in tandem, I move to the theory of inhabited institutions (Hallett, Shulman, and Fine 2009; Hallett and Ventresca 2006) from organizational sociology.

_Inhabited Institutions and the Culture of Organizations_

Inhabited institutionalism and related theories arose partly in response to new institutionalist perspectives and the perceived decoupling of organizations and interaction (Hallett and Ventresca 2006). With the advent of new institutionalism, organizational sociology began to focus more on the structure and dynamics of organizations, rather than constituent members or interactions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Fligstein 1999; Scully and Segal 2002). The macro-level lens on organizational processes bore great fruit for the understanding of cross-
organization structures (Han 1994) and network relations (Uzzi 1996, 1997), for example. The focus on structure, however, left little room for individual interaction and agency within organizational analysis (Fligstein 1999). Rather than treating institutions as constructed by actions and actors, some institutional analyses can view institutions merely as structures or roles that only require individuals insofar as they must be enacted (Scully and Segal 2002). This perspective removes both interaction and agency from organizational processes, leading to an oversocialized conception of the individual (Wrong 1961) with respect to social institutions.

The inhabited institutions framework (Hallett and Ventresca 2006) endeavors to bridge interaction and structure through meso-level analysis, fusing the scope of new institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Powell and DiMaggio 2012) with symbolic interactionism (Goffman 1959; Simmel 1950). Building on interactional approaches that acknowledge structural constraints more concretely (Stryker 2008, 1980), this framework places organizational processes within the context of individual interaction and agency. As Hallett and Ventresca put it:

…though institutional logics carry meaning, it is also true that meaning arises through social interaction. These interactions are the beating heart of institutions. Institutions are not inert containers of meaning; rather they are “inhabited” by people and their doings (2006:215)

In short, institutions do not simply require actors to carry out structural roles; the roles themselves are defined and revised by actors through interaction. The social scripts and ways of doing endemic to any organization both constrain and are created by individuals themselves. Investigations implementing this approach can thus solve the “paradox of embeddedness” within organizations (Bechky 2011; Delbridge and Edwards 2013), resolving the tension between structure and agency in the interpretation of actors’ behavior.
Treating institutions as both individual and structural strengthens understandings of organization-level features like cultures. The cultures developed by organizations arise from the ritualization of informal interactions and practices, which in turn come to give a workplace individual character or personality (Geertz 1973; Hallett 2003). These cultures and informal practices can then be formalized into structural differences, in turn reproducing macro-level inequalities along race, class, gender, and other social axes (Tilly 1999). Consequently, the lived experience of workers within a given organization exists at the interface of structural forces and actor-level relationships, permeating every interaction. Status attribution within the workplace becomes a process Roscigno and Wilson summarize as “both organizationally defined based on institutional positioning and more broadly diffused and enacted via culturally proscribed and pertinent status categories such as gender and race/ethnicity” (2014:221). The resultant patterns of interaction combine cognitive factors that reflect social status (Ridgeway 2001, 1997; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999), with institutional structures creating specific patterns of inequality for each organization (Acker 2006). To navigate these complex landscapes, individuals draw on cultural toolkits (Swidler 1986) that include linguistic features, which can challenge or reify status characteristics. In short, inequality within organizations (and especially workplaces) reflects both cultural and structural forces, and language plays a critical role in the enacting and remaking of institutional scripts.

Formal Organizations versus Communities of Practice

The language describing the relationship between individuals and organizations bears a great deal of similarity to that used in discussions of communities of practice within sociolinguistics (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999; Wenger 2011, 1999), and the features of formal organizations do share some overlap with communities of
practice. Most importantly, the dialectical relationship between interaction and practice lies central to understandings of both. Within both communities of practice and formal organizations, members (re)negotiate practices and shared meanings through face-to-face interaction. They further share a connection to dominant social institutions, with which they engage in a dialectical relationship, defining social categories as they are influenced by them. In sociolinguistics, the connection to macro-level categories has been most clearly demonstrated with gendered linguistic practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999; Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999), but all broad social categories are theorized to exhibit this pattern. Lastly, both communities of practice and formal organizations arise around a shared goal, endeavor, or interest, and its members all share in this organizing factor. For communities of practice, this interest can be as varied as leisure activities, learning a skill, or professional development. Formal organizations tend to cover a narrower range of activities, such as volunteering, economic action, or religious practice, but they have a great deal of overlap.

Where these two constructs differ is in their relationship to structural inequalities and the instantiation of power within the group. According to Eckert and Wenger, the community of practice framework does not require “the existence of a structure that confers power according to position” (2005:582). Using data from Belten High (Eckert 1989a, 2000), they give an example of a group with hierarchical structure (the jocks) and one without (the burnouts) to illustrate that communities of practice do not necessarily conflate power with structural position. Formal organizations, however, explicitly associate power with position and by their very nature are hierarchical. The structure of an organizational chart clearly reflects the power dynamics built into organizations, and Figure 4.2 contains an example from Southern Tech. Vertical position indicates relative hierarchy within the organization, and the arrows indicate the reporting chain.
As an example, the Technology VP reports directly to the COO, who reports directly to the CEO. Relationships of this sort lie central to the operation of organizations, and the explicit power structure they create conditions interaction.

Figure 4.2: Executive Organizational Chart for Southern Tech

Any interaction between the COO and one of the reporting VPs is by definition a power asymmetry, whatever specific symbolic strategies happen to be used in interaction. Structural authority changes both the reading of a performance and the types of performances that are judged as acceptable. Unlike in communities of practice, a speaker’s stylistic performance within an organization cannot be divorced from their structural position, and interactions are often imbalanced with respect to power.

Beyond the power that comes from structural position, formal organizations have clear criteria for boundaries between positions and group membership. In a workplace, for example, jobs have clear titles, and these titles encode tasks, responsibilities, and future organizational moves. The division between occupations implies promotional hierarchies, as well as reflecting wage differences that reflect broader social inequalities (England et al. 1988; Kilbourne et al. 1994). Membership, too, is clearly delineated: an individual is an employee or they are not an
employee; a certified professional or not a certified professional\textsuperscript{13}. No corollary exists in organizational membership to the peripheral members of a community of practice (Eckert and Wenger 2005; Wenger 1999). Along these lines, the boundaries demarcating membership or position within organizations are relatively impermeable when compared to the more flexible boundaries of communities of practice. Entering or exiting a firm is usually an arduous process, and changing jobs within a firm represents an only slightly less daunting task.

Within both communities of practice and formal organizations, actors deploy symbolic resources and negotiate social meaning, but key differences between the two create very different backdrops for this negotiation. For comparison, a summary of the features of the two concepts appears in Table 4.1. Despite the shared features of purpose and social resources, a number of important differences arise between the two, like hierarchical structure and power. Ultimately, the structural differences between communities of practice and formal organizations necessitate a new approach for examining stylistic variation within a workplace context. To place language variation and style within social-structural context, I take a stylistic embeddedness approach to individuals’ linguistic behavior at work.

**Table 4.1: Communities of Practice vs. Formal Organizations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Communities of Practice</th>
<th>Formal Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Shared activity or goal</td>
<td>Shared activity or goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>Usually informal and diffuse</td>
<td>Formalized, centralized, and codified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>Negotiated through interaction</td>
<td>Granted by structural/institutional position and renegotiated through interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hierarchy</strong></td>
<td>Possible, but not necessary</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership</strong></td>
<td>Defined by shared practice and knowledge, identity-based</td>
<td>Formalized membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Resources</strong></td>
<td>Shared and negotiated meanings</td>
<td>Shared and negotiated meanings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{13} Depending on the analysis, temporary or contracted workers may be considered to be in a liminal membership space. Legally at least, they are considered either employees (i.e. members of the organization) or not.
Stylistic Embeddedness in Inhabited Institutions

At work, style is struggle. Actors negotiate their relationship to each other within the organization and simultaneously locate themselves within broader institutional hierarchies of race, class, gender, etc. To ground this idea in stylistic terms, listeners hold performances accountable not only to the speaker’s job or position (should a manager talk like that?) but to their social status (should a woman talk like that?). From an organizational standpoint, each position has value, status, and cultural expectations ascribed to it, but these do not stand separated from the institutional inequalities that they reflect. As Roscigno and Wilson describe the construction of status at the workplace:

…the presumed worth and leverage of actors (e.g. a manager, an employee, employees, etc.) is relationally determined relative to perceptions of value—perceptions that vary systematically as a function of organizationally (e.g. manager, sales representative, etc.) and broader, culturally proscribed, status hierarchies (race/ethnicity, gender, etc.). (2014:221)

In other words, taking an embeddedness approach to style and structure means focusing on social outcomes, social positions, and institutions as much as linguistic variation itself. To understand style, we need to understand the structures that individuals navigate linguistically.

Where earlier approaches to style focus on features of interaction (attention to speech, audience design) or identity (speaker design), stylistic embeddedness foregrounds power and unequal relations in the deployment of sociolinguistic variables. The emphasis on power in interaction is not new to sociolinguistics more generally, as discursive frameworks (van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2013, 2001) and empirical studies implementing them (Holmes and Stubbe 2015) have long acknowledged its importance. Discussions of power are rarer in variationist approaches to style, however, and the apparent lack of a theoretical conception of power and social structure in variationism has garnered criticism both current (Bell 2017) and past (Davies
Responses to criticisms of the community of practice framework (Eckert and Wenger 2005) rightly argue that power exists within these groups, but Davies’s critique is not unfounded, only misdirected. In using as her test case the adolescent groups at Belten High, groups that do not exist solely under the purview of an organization, the loose structure of the jocks and burnouts obfuscates institutional power. If we redirect our focus to organizations, themselves emanations of institutions, we can more clearly examine the role of power in the stylistic deployment of variation.

Taking a stylistic embeddedness approach also means acknowledging the consequences of sociolinguistic variation in addition to its identity-based possibilities. If a listener negatively evaluates a sociolinguistic variable deployed in interaction, it can damage the performance of the speaker, possibly costing the speaker material or symbolic resources. Language can cost speakers jobs (Mears 2014; Williams and Connell 2010), lose them housing access (Massey and Lundy 2001; Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh 1999) or create social psychological trauma (Gluszek and Dovidio 2010; Goffman 1963). The markedness of sociolinguistic variables often reflects existing axes of structural inequality, meaning that denial of resources on linguistic grounds reproduces these inequalities. These interactions that close doors for some individuals result in opportunity hoarding by dominant groups (Tilly 1999), furthering categorical inequality. When interfacing with institutions, the identities performed by speakers can constitute risk as well as reward.

Even though structural considerations play a central role in this type of analysis, symbolic interactionism and third-wave variationist approaches to meaning are just as important to understanding the connection of the individual to the whole. Without the interactive component, the ground-level relationships that construct organizational practices would be lost.
A feature whose use shows a correlation with a social group does not imply an indexical meaning for that social group (Siverstein 2003); the use and deployment of that feature in interaction reveals these meanings. For example, though the Southern Vowel Shift appears in the speech of white speakers who spent their formative years in the US South, a Southern-shifted /e/ vowel only has social meaning if: 1) it is deployed in interaction and 2) a listener interprets that phonetic difference as a socially salient symbol. Understanding the mutual construction of both extra-local (i.e. structural) and local meanings of variation requires perspectives from both ends of the spectrum. In the linguistic realm, third-wave approaches to the making of social meaning can constitute the symbolic interactions and narratives of inhabited institutionalism (Hallett 2010; Hallett et al. 2009; Hallett and Ventresca 2006). Individuals’ linguistic behavior instantiates these social meanings within a local arena, creating a symbolic vocabulary unique to an organization which individuals use to craft styles.

Since the interface of local and extra-local meaning is the crux of the approach, stylistic embeddedness suggests an empirical focus at the meso-level of analysis. However, any study from this perspective requires an awareness of mechanisms at all levels, from micro to macro. Table 4.2 presents an overview of structures, discourses, and outcomes at each level.
Table 4.2: Levels of Analysis within Stylistic Embeddedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical Level</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Discourses</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideological and Institutional</td>
<td>Race, Class, Gender, Region, Work, School</td>
<td>Professionalism, Articulateness</td>
<td>Language ideology, Structural inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Macro)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Organizational morphology, Social networks</td>
<td>“This is how we treat customers”, “This is a</td>
<td>Organizational cultures, Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Meso)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Southern company”, Myths and narratives</td>
<td>regimes, Material resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Sociolinguistic variation and meaning</td>
<td>“You don’t sound very smart”, “How’d you get</td>
<td>Social psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Micro)</td>
<td></td>
<td>this job sounding like that?”</td>
<td>damage, Identity, Habitus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individuals experience effects from the structures at each tier, and the meanings constructed by these individuals permeate both upwards and downwards from their social position. For example, a speaker’s stylistic performance is raced/classed/gendered by their organizational position, and the performance subsequently affects the broader structures of race, class, and gender both within the organization and in a broader social sense. These mechanisms all operate simultaneously, and they all affect the lived experience of the actor as a constrained stylistic agent within the social world.

To illustrate how stylistic embeddedness operates as a framework, I apply it to data drawn from workers at Southern Tech, emphasizing the interconnectivity between organizational position and linguistic performance. The goal of this implementation is to demonstrate how stylistic embeddedness provides a new perspective on the motivations and constraints of style. Southern Tech represents an excellent test case in this regard. The data are drawn from a known population of white Southern speakers, contain multiple stylistic contexts, and capture the interface between the individual and larger social structures. The in-depth information regarding the organization, as well as the wealth of production data for each speaker, allows for the
necessary level of detail to dissect structural and agentive interaction. Using Southern Tech as an example application, I show how stylistic embeddedness allows for new insights into linguistic style and how it can be implemented more widely in linguistic analysis.

**Symbolic Interaction and Context**

The linguistic data comes from 17 employees of Southern Tech, drawn from both self-recordings and interviews. Data are coded according to social context as work, casual, or interview. Though the types of interaction captured for both the work and casual settings vary from speaker to speaker, each participant was instructed to capture a representative sample of their speech as much as possible. For the work context, I encouraged participants to record what was normal for them, whether that was meetings with coworkers, customer interactions, or phone conversations. For the casual context, I suggested that speakers record something unrelated to work, with either friends or family. Consequently, the types of conversation and the interlocutors in these conversations vary from speaker to speaker, but they capture the point under study—essentially, how does this person interact while filling their role at work? To supplement the self-recordings, I include qualitative data gathered from sociolinguistic interviews to provide insight into participants’ understanding of Southernness and sociolinguistic meaning. During the interview, I explicitly asked participants about their accents, the general perception of Southern accents, and the consequences of sounding Southern on the job. Their responses provide the symbolic foundation for interpreting the stylistic data, and I will first discuss their perceptions of Southernness before moving to linguistic performance.

**Being Southern at Southern Tech**

If we are to take a holistic approach to the construction of meaning within an organization, we must first understand what linguistic symbols mean in interaction. For this
case, I make a distinction between “being Southern” and “being Southern at Southern Tech” as interpreted by the employees examined here. The former implies engagement with macro-level language ideologies and portrayals of Southern accents, and the narratives of the employees reflect this broadness of scope. The latter implies what Southernness means in organizational context, as experienced through organizational cultural norms and personal interactions, reflecting meso- and micro-level phenomena. During the debriefing interview after self-recording, I asked participants a series of questions about Southern accents, focusing on their perception, treatment, and relevance within and outside of Southern Tech.

**Being Southern**

To open the discussion, I asked about how Southern accents were treated or portrayed in general. Participant responses converged on a common negative narrative.

**Interviewer:** How do you think Southern accents are treated?

**Tec012 (56, W, Principal Technical Writer):** Oh, like you’re less intelligent than you are. Two people exactly the same and everything, the one with the Southern accent would be viewed as less intelligent than the other one.

**Tec015 (22, W, Associate Human Resources):** Unfortunately, a lot of times being told…being told that you sound Southern isn't necessarily a positive thing, you know. A lot of people that maybe aren't originally from the South, too, kind of view like the Southern accent as not being educated.

**Tec003 (59, M, Principal Programmer):** I think sometimes people think you’re not very bright because of it.

Overwhelmingly, the responses dealt with intelligence or education. Their perceptions follow the findings from previous research on language attitudes (Campbell-Kibler 2008; Carmichael 2018; Fridland and Bartlett 2006a; Niedzielski and Preston 2003), with general perceptions of lack of education or lack of intelligence on the part of Southern speakers. These responses were universal across participants, and they show an awareness of possible negative connotations of sounding Southern.
Understanding the social and cultural implications is one aspect of Southernness, but speakers also connect “sounding Southern” with concrete sociolinguistic features, including those of the SVS. As we discussed accentedness, jobs, and the South, many speakers would try to tell me what they mean with examples. These examples spanned all linguistic levels. Some examples referenced lexical choices:

**Tec014 (60, W, Design Shop):** What you put on your head when it's cold—a toboggan. “Oh well no a toboggan is a sled”. Well it's that too, but you don't call this a hat, it's a toboggan you know, a hat is like a baseball hat or a cowboy hat or something.

**Tec016 (34, W, Public Relations):** Well, I mean y'all, I say y'all of course, um, like every Southerner does.

Moreover, despite the more abstracted meanings of phonological features, many participants used these as examples as well. Speakers discussed monophthongization of PRIZE/PRICE, Southern-shifting of the DRESS vowel, and the FEEL/FILL merger:

**Tec005 (39, W, Principal Quality Assurance):** When [my mother] went to [college], you know they made her take classes to sort of beat the Southern accent out of her…she was there in the 60s you know, and they were trying to get out the light bright white [lat] [haat] [wat] out of her voice.

**Tec014 (60, W, Design Shop):** He always said red is not a two syllable word, I said it is, it's red [æəd]. And he says no it's not, “R E D”, and I said no it's “R E D,” and he said well that's red [æəd]. No, no, it’s red [æəd], you know.

**Tec005 (39, W, Principal Quality Assurance):** When I was growing up Chapel Hill was always Chapel Heel, and I will say Chapel Heel ::laughter:: every once in a while.

These examples illustrate that the participants from Southern Tech can connect the meanings of Southernness as a cultural construct to particular sociolinguistic features. In so doing, they exhibit awareness of a symbolic dictionary, within which certain phonological variants have Southern meanings. In looking at features of the SVS in their stylistic production, we can feel
confident that they are aware of the social connotations of the deployment of these features, at least as they connect to macro-level ideological constructs.

**Southernness at Southern Tech**

A full picture of the structural and cultural determinants of workers’ behavior requires an understanding of being Southern specifically at this firm, as well. To address the differences in social evaluation and meaning of Southern features at the organizational level, I asked participants to elaborate on the treatment of Southern accents. We discussed whether Southern accents mattered specifically at Southern Tech and whether Southern accents would matter for their job in particular. These responses narrow the focus to organizational culture and the effects of organizational position, through the discussion of job-specific interactions with accentedness.

When discussing the organization in general, the specific history and culture of the firm came to the forefront. Since the company itself was founded in the South and has maintained a main location there, many speakers suggested that it retained a positive—or at least neutral—orientation to Southern speech:

**Interviewer:** Do you think having an accent matters for your job?

**Tec012 (56, W, Principal Technical Writer):** Because the company is [in the South], no I don't think so, no

**Tec001 (36, W, Senior Programmer):** I feel like here, because it’s a company that was started in [the South], that maybe there’s a little more acceptance of [Southern accents]. So at this particular company, I don't think it would be that big of a deal um specifically about a Southern accent.

**Tec015 (22, W, Associate Human Resources):** Because Southern Tech is a local company and because we are still very heavy on emphasizing local talent, you know, I think that it’s less [of a problem to have a Southern accent].

Most speakers, if they spoke about company-specific practices, felt that Southern Tech’s ties to the South provided some protection from stigma relating to Southern accents. Only a single
participant (tec008, W, Librarian) felt that her Southern accent might face more negative feedback at Southern Tech compared to other companies, but her prior work experience had been in smaller towns and state government. These places, she argued, were more Southern than Southern Tech, so she felt more vulnerable. Most speakers had the opposite experience, coming from less locally-oriented firms and eventually finding work at Southern Tech.

Part of this feeling of a “Southern company” seemed to proceed from the symbolic power and practices (Bourdieu 1991; Hallett 2003) of the CEO, himself originally from the South. The CEO founded the company, and he has maintained private ownership of Southern Tech throughout its growth and success. He has taken an active interest in the day-to-day workings of the company, and many of the participants had seen or interacted with him a number of times. During these interactions, his Southern cultural habitus was very much apparent, and the CEO’s visibility as a Southerner with power and status was a strong narrative within the company:

**Tec018 (27, W, Sales):** I mean [the CEO] has a Southern accent right, if you listen to him talk you can very clearly tell he's from the South. So I think that that permeates as far as hiring attitudes and those sorts of things.

**Tec015 (22, W, Associate Human Resources):** I mean [the CEO] himself has a pretty thick accent you know, so I think it's less you know of a big deal here.

**Tec019 (52, W, Principal Developer):** You know [the CEO’s] got a Southern accent, I mean I don't know if you've ever seen him interviewed and everything but you- you can tell he's from [the South]…I don't think he apologizes for it ::laughter::.

The CEO’s performance of “unapologetic Southernness” could, in theory, be damaging, but his overwhelmingly positive perception at the company results in the employees imbuing him with legitimacy (Hallett 2003). His consequent symbolic power allows him to create an organizational culture that, at least nominally, does not disadvantage a Southern habitus. In fact,
the character of the company culture at Southern Tech reflects other aspects of Southernness.

Terms such as “relaxed” or “casual” came up often when discussing Southern Tech’s culture:

_Tec005 (39, W, Principal Quality Assurance)_: I was used to go, go, go, go, and code, just coming in and all of a sudden it was very slow um, and it took me a little while to get used to that. I still am not really used to it um cause I still like to move faster than most things move I think.

_Tec011 (53, M, Principal Sales)_: It's truly a work-life environment, right? If you've got something in your life, you need to take care of it, there's nobody that's micromanaging you and saying you can't do it, you're gonna be fired if you end up- you know if [you] leave to take- go take your kid to the doctor, you know something like that.

Not coincidentally, the features of Southern Tech’s company culture bear a great deal in common with the connotations of Southern accents (Fridland and Bartlett 2006a; Niedzielski and Preston 2003). The CEO’s Southern accent seems to play a part in a larger Southern cultural context of the company that extends beyond linguistic features.

Organizational Position and Southernness

A final important component to understand the structural and organizational context for speakers at Southern Tech is the association of particular jobs or positions with Southern features. To explore these factors, I asked participants whether Southern accents would matter for some jobs over others. Responses converged on customer-facing jobs in general and sales jobs in particular:

_Tec001 (36, W, Senior Programmer)_: Possibly in the more customer-facing jobs…or maybe even upper level management. Um maybe it's my own prejudice ::laughter:: but um I don't know. I just- In my mind when I hear someone with more of a neutral accent it makes them seem more um I don't know, like they can be taken more seriously or something, and…when I say that it sounds ridiculous but maybe in my subconscious that's what I'm thinking.

_Tec007 (49, W, Principal Business Operations)_: I think it does for …anybody who interacts with our customers, I think they would. But internally as far as the IT folks, they don't know, they don't care, and they don't usually talk to outside people so they don't really care.
Tec019 (52, W, Senior Developer): Maybe a sales position, a higher up sales position or something like that, or if you were gonna be, you know like if there was something going on at [Southern Tech], and they needed a spokesperson to come out and talk.

Though many participants chose sales as an organization position where Southern accents might be harmful, upon elaboration, their reasoning for this choice suggested that they were actually identifying jobs where impression management played a key role (Goffman 1959). Usually they articulated this feeling as a requirement of “dealing with customers” or “working externally,” but the occasional references to high-level management positions or those visible outside of the company point to more than just customer focus. Jobs like these entail more than aesthetic labor (Mears 2014; Sheane 2012; Williams and Connell 2010), since the commodification of presentation is not always the goal. As much as anything, they seem to focus more on the management of interpersonal relations, either in a personal or public relations sense. Employees who occupied these positions confirmed the importance of language in their interactions:

Tec011 (53, M, Principal Sales): When um in front of a client, I almost think about what I'm saying before I say it, so this whole thing goes through your mind about what this next sentence is gonna be. Like right now, I'm looking at you, I'm getting ready to say something in my mind and the words are coming out of my mouth. So in a client situation I'm going through that whole process, and I'm trying to enunciate correctly, I'm trying to you know put the…correct ending to a word, um not leave off you know the ending of a word.

The sales employee’s description of his client interactions highlights the cognitive burden placed on individuals in these positions. Working through the possible things to say as well as the ways to say them takes a tremendous amount of invisible labor on the part of the employee.

Contextualizing the Individual within the Institution

The findings drawn from participant interviews show institutional forces working from above as well as organizational forces that both reify and contradict institutional norms. Speakers acknowledge broader language ideologies that stigmatize Southern speech, but they
suggest that within the confines of Southern Tech, those institutional forces are suspended. Due to the culture of the organization, they feel that Southernness does not face the same negative reactions that it might elsewhere. However, even within the organization, participants pointed out that those in positions that require extensive management of self-presentation may face more prejudicial linguistic judgements. Looming behind all of these issues is categorical inequality—the role of class and gender, the invisibility of race—conditioning the interpretation of actors’ performances. Social category membership plays a critical role in social psychological processes that affect workers’ experiences and outcomes (Ridgeway 2001, 2011) and in the conditioning of relational processes within the workplace (Roscigno and Wilson 2014; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). These forces create a dialectical relationship with organizational structure (Acker 2006; Tilly 1999), reproducing categorical inequalities. Though unacknowledged directly in the interviews, attributes such as gender or class fundamentally shape how individuals experience their linguistic world. Class, gender, and race play a role in both the linguistic resources available to a speaker (Dodsworth and Benton 2017; Labov 1972b, 1972a), and their consequent deployment (Eckert 1989b; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Sharma 2017). To summarize, the symbolic narrative is rife with contradictions, exceptions, and conflict, as evidenced by the different perceptions and forces at work:

1. Southern Tech’s culture does not penalize Southernness, partly due to the CEO and his symbolic power
2. Some positions within the organization (sales, front-facing) may not be afforded the same protection from linguistic stigma
3. Southern dialects, in general, face negative stereotypes
4. Race, class, and gender constrain social power, position, and linguistic performance
Given these complex forces, I provide a few hypotheses about how they interact, as evidenced by workers’ stylistic behavior with regards to the SVS.

- The culture at Southern Tech moderates the general negative perception of Southern accents, meaning that in general, individuals do not need to avoid Southern features at work to a substantial degree
- Front-facing workers, not afforded the same cultural protections as those who interact only internally, will show more SVS avoidance on the job
- Women will show more avoidance of the SVS than men when in comparable positions

I turn now to the stylistic data, adding linguistic production to the perceived narratives surrounding Southern language at Southern Tech.

**Quantitative Analysis and Stylistic Performance**

*Measurement and Methodology*

To assess style between settings quantitatively, I focus on features of the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) as they are realized between speech settings. Due to the clarity of speech effects outlined in chapter 3, characterizing vowel positions as “Southern” or “not Southern” proves difficult using traditional metrics such as vowel diagonal (Labov et al. 2013b). To overcome this issue, I use Euclidean distance measures for the high and mid front vowel pairs (Kendall and Fridland 2012) to measure overlap between vowel nuclei. For significantly Southern-shifted speakers, the nuclei of the FLEECE/KIT and FACE/DRESS pairs can partly or fully overlap. Figure 4.3 illustrates the effects of the SVS on relative nucleus position for two speakers from the Southern Tech corpus in their interview condition. Tec001 (on the left) shows little qualitative or quantitative evidence of the SVS, and her high and mid vowel pairs both remain
quite distinct. Tec003, on the other hand, has the most substantial Southern Vowel Shift in the corpus, and the nuclei of both KIT/FLEECE and FACE/DRESS almost completely overlap.

![Figure 4.3: Example Speakers for SVS Positioning](image)

After normalization, I calculated means for these vowel pairs at nucleus (25% duration) for both Z1 and Z2, separated by speech context (work/casual/interview). For the high and mid vowel pairs, I calculated Euclidean distance between the vowel means, resulting in every speaker having a Euclidean distance measure unique to each vowel pair and speech context. Since TRAP and PRIZE operate independently within the SVS, I continue to use vowel diagonal as a metric for these two vowels at nucleus and glide, respectively. To make the vowel diagonals comparable with the aggregate Euclidean distance measures, I calculated mean diagonals for TRAP and PRIZE by context. Using means for each vowel class precludes rigorous statistical analysis of the quantitative measures, but regression analyses for TRAP and PRIZE at the token level will be provided when relevant.

**Speaker Diversity in Degree of the Southern Vowel Shift**

Since speakers range in age from 22 to 65 and spent their formative years in areas ranging from rural to metropolitan, they show a wide degree of variation in the extent to which
they exhibit the SVS. To illustrate this variability, Figure 4.4 shows a cluster analysis of speakers’ SVS measures drawn solely from the interview data, grouping them according to their degree of shift. The clustering is limited to the interview data to provide comparability to other studies of the SVS and eliminate stylistic variation as a grouping factor.

![Cluster Analysis of SVS Metrics from Sociolinguistic Interviews](image)

**Figure 4.4: Cluster Analysis of SVS Metrics from Sociolinguistic Interviews**

Speakers on the far left of the chart are less Southern-shifted overall, and those on the right show strong degrees of the SVS. The cluster on the farthest left represents speakers who qualitatively did not sound Southern during their interviews; they show no clear features of the SVS for any vowel included in the analysis. Conversely, the two speakers in the cluster on the far right show substantial shifting for TRAP, PRIZE, and the mid vowels, and they are also the only two speakers to show any evidence of the SVS in the high front vowels (ED = .31, .88). The speakers in the middle show some combination of SVS features of varying degrees. Since only two speakers exhibit any shifting of FLEECE and KIT, I exclude these vowels from the quantitative analysis. I also exclude the TRAP due to the many social meanings associated with
movement of TRAP. TRAP raising occurs in both the SVS and the Northern Cities Shift (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2005), meaning that a raised TRAP vowel on its own does not necessarily indicate a Southern linguistic presentation\textsuperscript{14}. To complicate the matter further, a prominent feature of the California Vowel Shift is the lowering and backing of TRAP (Podesva 2011b), meaning that shifts away from a Southern TRAP may just as likely be movement towards a California TRAP. Impressionistically, some of the younger speakers do deploy a backed variant, meaning that “raising” between settings may simply mean removing backed variants, rather than adopting Southern ones. Analyzing TRAP would require a much more detailed individual analysis for each speaker, making any meso-level conclusions difficult if not impossible. After exclusions, the vowels I use to assess the SVS are FACE, DRESS, and PRIZE.

Quantitative Results

For the three Southern features under investigation (mid vowel Euclidean Distance, PRIZE diagonal, and TRAP diagonal) I will first discuss them separately to understand how they operate on an individual level. Since self-presentation at work focuses on the natural stylistic presentation of the individual, I use only data and measurements drawn from participants’ casual and work self-recordings. After looking at each feature individually, I will contextualize them as a unit that operates to convey a Southern habitus, relating them back to the stylistic embeddedness of individuals within organizations and institutions.

I start with variation in the mid vowels FACE and DRESS, since they tend to exhibit a great deal of variation within Southern regions (Labov et al. 2008). To show stylistic variation in these vowels, Figure 4.5 presents Euclidean Distance measures for each speaker, with

\textsuperscript{14} The trajectories for TRAP in the NCS versus the SVS are distinct both socially and acoustically, but isolating those differences from nucleus measurements presents analytical challenges.
measurements from casual settings represented on the x-axis and those from work settings on the y-axis. Speakers are shaded according to stylistic variation, with lighter shades representing shifts away from Southern at work and darker shades representing shifts towards Southern at work. The two lines in the figure mark a Euclidean Distance of .9, a conservative cutoff for “sounding Southern” (Kendall and Fridland 2012), meaning that speakers with ED measures above .9 would likely not have pronunciations that are read as Southern by a listener. Consequently, the lines create quadrants of speakers by their “types” of style shifting with respect to the mid vowels. Those speakers in the “Never Southern” quadrant have non-SVS realizations of the mid vowels at work and in casual settings. Only three speakers fit this description, meaning that the majority of speakers show signs of the SVS for FACE and DRESS in at least one recording setting. Conversely, the majority of the speakers always sound Southern with respect to the mid vowels, occupying the bottom left quadrant. Even within the cluster of speakers who sound Southern in both contexts, however, a relatively wide degree of variation (-.31 to .24 difference in ED) exists, highlighting the dynamism of some speakers concerning these variables. Most interesting are those speakers in the top left or bottom right, who show substantial variation between contexts.
The PR Specialist and Programmer in the top left sound unequivocally Southern in their casual recordings, but at work they show no trace of the SVS for FACE or DRESS. The degree to which they change their vowel positions is substantial (ED = .55, .76), showing a dynamic stylistic range. Only one speaker sounds Southern only at work, and she works as a cashier at Southern Tech, a job with very different demands for self-presentation than the largely professional workforce in the tech industry.

The PRIZE glide also shows a substantial amount of stylistic variation between contexts. Figure 4.6 presents speakers’ diagonal measurements by context, with lighter shading indicating shifts away from Southern norms. The diagonal line on the graph represents where speakers would reside if they had no difference between contexts; thus, those below the line show more Southern PRIZE vowels at work, and vice versa. Unlike the mid vowel pair, there is no clear
metric for when PRIZE “becomes Southern”, so we must rely only on the difference in glide length between the two settings.

Figure 4.6: PRIZE Glide Diagonal by Stylistic Context

Most speakers show a shift away from Southern norms for PRIZE while at work, but they do so to varying degrees. Importantly, not every speaker who showed movement away from Southern norms for the mid vowels also shows movement for PRIZE. Some speakers shift for both (Sales, PR Specialist, HR Specialist), but others (Librarian, Business Operations) show substantial shifts away from Southern norms for PRIZE alone. The separation of patterns for different aspects of the SVS suggests that, while interconnected, not every Southern feature must be deployed or avoided simultaneously. Only four speakers of the seventeen in the sample (Cashier, Shop Worker, Editor, and Principal QA Engineer) show shorter glides while at work. The rarity of glide shortening may connect back to the stigmatization of monophthongization in
the popular consciousness that the speakers themselves referenced in interviews. PRIZE monophthongization is an enregistered and highly socially salient variable (Johnstone et al. 2006; Siverstein 2003), that may be difficult for speakers to deploy and retain positive evaluation.

In looking at self-presentation at work, we are truly interested in features as they are produced in concert, as performances are read holistically. Each speaker at Southern Tech negotiates multiple pressures and meanings surrounding Southern linguistic features, some stemming from extra-local institutional forces, others arising from within the company itself. As a review of the different narratives and structures, starting with organizational norms and working to macro-level forces:

1. Southern Tech’s culture does not penalize Southernness, partly due to the CEO and his symbolic power
2. Some positions within the organization (sales, front-facing) may not be afforded the same protection from linguistic stigma
3. Southern dialects, in general, face negative stereotypes
4. Race, class, and gender constrain social power, position, and linguistic performance

Some of these forces are clearly at odds with one another, especially in the tension between Southern Tech’s culture and broader institutional forces. Still others, like social category membership, are vague in their connection to micro-level interactions. Evaluating the connections between performance and structural forces can help resolve these conflicts and present a more complete picture of stylistic variation.

To relate these forces to the SVS features most clearly connected with Southernness, Figure 4.7 displays the degree of shifting of both the mid vowels (x-axis) and PRIZE (y-axis)
between work and casual contexts. In both cases, a positive value represents a movement away from Southern vowel realizations. The vertical and horizontal lines mark the zero line for both metrics, and they further divide speakers into stylistic clusters. At the extremes are speakers in the top right, who stylize away from Southern norms at work with both features, and the bottom left, who stylize towards Southern norms with both features.

Figure 4.7: PRIZE and Mid Vowel Stylistic Differences

Perhaps the most basic question to address with the data is whether speakers at Southern Tech do indeed feel comfortable in using Southern features at work. Overall, 10 speakers use a more Southern variant of either the mid vowels or the PRIZE vowel at work, which might initially suggest that Southernness is indeed protected within the organization. However, that leaves 8 speakers who move away from both Southern features, and some of them decrease their usage to an extreme degree. If the organizational culture were the only factor affecting speakers’ linguistic choices, we would expect to see few—if any—speakers decreasing their use of
Southern features at work, and those we do see should only show marginal movement. However, half the dataset shifts away from Southern norms while on the job, at least to some degree. The role of organizational norms appears to be, at most, a piece of the larger linguistic puzzle at Southern Tech, despite the assurances about the firm’s culture.

Reframing analysis to include organizational power and position helps to fill in some of the gaps in understanding variation in the SVS, beginning with organizational hierarchy. Though the sample does not include any speakers who were on what they termed “the managerial track,” a hierarchy exists within non-managers as well. Individuals higher in the job hierarchy have power over those below them, and they are required to do light managerial duties such as leading teams or mentoring other workers. Within Southern Tech, the “Principal” title is given to those at the top of this worker hierarchy, and four speakers occupy this position. Their linguistic behavior shows less variation than that of employees in less senior positions, and in fact trends towards higher use of Southern features at work. The Principal QA Engineer, for example, uses a substantially more monophthongal PRIZE vowel at work than in her casual recordings. Drawing back to theories of organizational culture and symbolic power (Hallett 2003), these workers connect to the positive connotations of a Southern habitus at Southern Tech that stem from the CEO’s practices. The CEO performs leadership with Southern linguistic norms, and the Principals can thus draw on these symbolic practices as a legitimation of power. Furthermore, these particular workers have a substantially Southern-shifted baseline to start; even a lack of movement at work constitutes a Southern linguistic performance.

The second organizational component that informs linguistic behavior is the job itself: its interactional requirements and general expectations. Participants suggested that front-facing jobs such as sales might have different expectations, and within the sample, three speakers (Principal
Sales, Sales, and PR Specialist) primarily interact with individuals outside the firm itself. Of these, the two non-principal workers show very strong shifts away from the SVS while at work, supporting participants’ perceptions. The stylistic performance of these workers on the job highlights the interface of local and extra-local forces at play when speakers construct a linguistic performance. Those individuals in front-facing positions expose themselves to broader institutional ideologies surrounding Southern dialects, which are largely negative, giving them a strong motivation to avoid those features while at work. The only front-facing worker who maintains Southern features on the job (Principal Sales) has a more senior organizational position, affording him power outside of symbolic resources.

Most of the participants’ discussion of specific jobs surrounded professional occupations where Southern accents might hurt, but the stylistic results also point to jobs where Southern accents might help. Specifically, the cashier shows substantially more Southern shifting while on the job for both the mid vowels and PRIZE, the only speaker to do so. At first this result may be surprising, but considering the expectations of interaction for cashiers, the use of Southern features makes a great deal of sense. The friendly and easygoing connotations of Southerness (Niedzielski and Preston 2003) can help grease the wheels of the highly scripted performances of interactive service work (Leidner 1993). Consequently, having a Southern accent may make it easier to complete a cashier’s task without any frustration or problems arising (Forrest and Dodsworth 2016).

Finally, social category membership plays a critical role in the stylistic performances, intersecting with both organizational position and job. Gender figures most prominently in the stylistic data, since the sample is homogeneous with respect to race and difficult to compare in terms of class background. Within the sample, women do the majority of the stylistic work. To
provide a rough approximation of stylistic difference between contexts, Table 4.3 shows speakers’ Euclidean distance$^{15}$ from the origin (0,0) in Figure 4.7, along with their demographic information.

Table 4.3: SVS Stylistic Difference by Speaker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Stylistic Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PR Specialist</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Specialist</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmer2</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Operations</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prin. QA Engineer</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>0.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech Writer</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>0.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Worker</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prin. Tech Writer</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmer1</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prin. Sales</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>0.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prin. Programmer</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of stylistic dynamism, women far outstrip men, though the sample is unbalanced for gender. A large gap exists between the Business Operations employee (ED = .388) and the Cashier (ED = .616), and all of the speakers above this break point are women. In contrast, the most substantially shifted man is only ninth overall within the corpus. Sociolinguists have posited that women draw on the symbolic capital of language when they lack access to structural power (Eckert 1989b), and these results support that interpretation.

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$^{15}$ Mid vowel Euclidean distance and PRIZE diagonal are not truly in the same scale or units, but their range is very similar for these speakers (approximately -.3 to .8). I would not argue that this strategy is an effective metric for “Southernness” in a general sense, but it represents the speakers’ stylistic range well in this case.
Furthermore, if women exist within a liminal structural space within the organization, they can draw on linguistic resources to solidify their position. Returning to the two speakers from the sales department, the man who has a principal position shows nearly no difference in the SVS between contexts, but the woman in a lower sales position shows substantial shifting. The stylistic differences occur for the junior saleswoman even though she shows the least Southern vowels in the corpus in her casual setting. The same gendered dynamic occurs between the men and women in principal positions. Though none of the principals are the most dynamic stylistically, the two men show the lowest values within the sample, and the Principal QA Engineer exhibits variance in her realization of PRIZE. The important conclusion when examining gender is its interaction with structural and cultural features of the organization beyond the effects of gender alone. The principal salesman shows nearly no variation between recording settings, which we can attribute to his organizational position, the symbolic power of Southernness within the organization, and his gender, all working in concert. The effects of these forces become especially evident at liminal spaces, where factors such as gender and organizational morphology run against one another. A woman may occupy a position of organizational power, but still must negotiate gendered expectations of interaction.

Conclusions

Crucially, no one narrative tells the full stylistic story. If we return to the question of organizational culture, the unique culture of Southernness at Southern Tech likely matters, but how much it matters depends on a number of other simultaneous factors, like organizational position or job requirements. The extent to which culture protects Southern speech is difficult to truly ascertain without a comparison dataset from another firm, as well. Participants suggested that a company with a more competitive culture would create an interactional context where
something like dialect could affect worker treatment, but with only speakers from Southern Tech, it is impossible to know for sure. At the very least, they perceive that Southern Tech remains a Southern company, and they perpetuate that narrative, at least on the surface.

Participants’ perceptions of front-facing jobs and Southern features does seem to bear out in the stylistic data, with those speakers in junior sales and PR jobs exhibiting substantial moves away from the SVS at work. Finally, social category membership interacts with all factors, as women and men behave very differently when occupying similar organizational positions.

While the specific linguistic situation at Southern Tech is interesting in itself, this case provides a template for examining style as it is embedded within structural context. Each level of analysis (micro, meso, macro) informs the others, and it provides a clear picture of the complex forces that shape linguistic behavior. Simultaneous awareness of the structural conditions of organizations and institutions and the symbolic negotiations of individuals illuminates the dialectical connections between structure and culture at the level of interaction. Though not an explicit implementation of an intersectional framework (Collins 2002; Crenshaw 1989; Levon 2015), stylistic embeddedness foregrounds the importance of power in interaction—the power of organizational position, the power of institutional inequalities, and the power of symbolic interaction. This emphasis helps to understand the process by which people reproduce institutions, and at the linguistic level, how speakers create larger linguistic patterns. Acknowledging social power and position explains not only how gendered patterns arise in the workplace, but also how patterns arise within gendered groups.

A stylistic embeddedness perspective further emphasizes the strengths already present in the process of sociolinguistic data collection and study design. Since recorded data must come from interviews or other recorded interactions, linguists can collect quantitative or qualitative
data along with the narrative understanding of interactive context provided by speakers themselves. Connected with structural data drawn from the census, firm records, or government agencies, we can develop a powerful, multifaceted image of the linguistic landscape. Sociolinguistic inquiry consequently lends itself very well to meso-level analyses, capturing the interface between interactions and institutions. Being rooted in the symbolic interactionist tradition (Coupland, Sarangi, and Candlin 2014; Goffman 1959), sociolinguistics has never lost recognition for the importance of interaction in understanding social relations.

While this case study application of stylistic embeddedness occurs within a workplace, in theory the examination of the interaction between the individual and structure can happen in other institutions as well. Firms represent an ideal proving ground, since individuals spend so much time interacting with within their confines, they have a strong role in conditioning the flow of material resources, and they have persistent institutional structure. Other types of formal organizations would provide similar insight into the interface of structure and agency, like professional societies, educational institutions, or volunteer organizations. For educational institutions, current and past research provides a great deal of insight into their role in sociolinguistic variation (Chun 2001; Eckert 1989a, 2000; Kirkham 2015). Taking a stylistic embeddedness approach to variation in a high school, for example, may supplement existing understandings through a clearer recognition of the institutional context, connecting students’ affiliative identity more strongly with structural concerns like class tracking, faculty/student interactions, and the material and symbolic rewards provided by administration to certain student groups over others.

From a sociological standpoint, studies like this one can clearly implement theoretical lenses like inhabited institutionalism (Hallett et al. 2009; Hallett and Ventresca 2006) to connect
structure and agency within organizations. Workers’ understanding of the linguistic interaction order within the firm informs their perceptions of broader workplace practices and cultures. Inhabited institutionalism helps to clarify the connection between the perception of Southern Tech as a Southern company and the personality attributes and interactional styles of a Southern habitus. When actors, especially those with symbolic power, can determine practices for the company, workers adapt to and reproduce those practices, making Southern Tech “easygoing” and “comfortable”. These personality traits in turn affect structural issues such as managerial hierarchy and practices or inter-firm negotiations, thus reflecting the everyday interactions of the workers themselves. The sociolinguistic data adds a dimension of cultural habitus on the part of the individual (Bourdieu 1991) to the interaction order as well. Features of the SVS are the signs given off in interaction, over which speakers have partial, but not complete, control. The symbolic connections between linguistic features and identities feed back into these broader structures.

Ultimately, these results make clear that we cannot divorce stylistic performance from social structure, just as we cannot separate language from identity. Style represents an engagement with and negotiation of the linguistic interaction order, and these stylistic performances are always contextualized by structural factors. The individual makes choices about the identity they wish to present and the meanings they intend to convey with language (Eckert 2008; Podesva 2011b), but these choices never occur in a social vacuum. Even ground-level linguistic meanings are created by actors that are raced, classed, and gendered, inhabiting social positions at particular historical moments. As great as our strides have been in recognizing the speaker as a linguistic agent (Eckert 2008; Schilling-Estes 1998), we must
remember that these agents’ choices have consequences that challenge or maintain social inequality.
CHAPTER 5: PERCEPTIONS OF LINGUISTIC STIGMA AT WORK

Many sociological subdisciplines have begun to incorporate analyses of culture more fully into the understanding of social processes and social reproduction. The connections made in grand theory (Bourdieu 1984) have been implemented in smaller-scale analyses (Mears 2014; Patterson 2014; Williams and Connell 2010), highlighting the role of culture in social life. The “cultural processes” of the social world (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014) have been connected to structures of inequality within the family (Lareau 2011), the workplace (Rivera 2012), educational institutions (Lareau 2015), and even the academy itself (Rivera 2017). In examining the “missing connections” in the analysis of social reproduction, Lamont et al. (2014) identify specific meso-level processes that serve as mediators between micro-level cognitive frames (Ridgeway 2011) and macro-level patterns of stratification (Massey 2007; Massey and Denton 1993). Of critical importance to these cultural processes are markers of individual identity, including traits as varied as “race, ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, citizenship, sexual orientation,” among many others (Lamont et al. 2014:587).

In categorizing cultural processes, Lamont et al. (2014) highlight two important overarching themes that bridge these analytical realms: rationalization and identification. Rationalization processes reify and standardize the social structure, making manufactured social space seem normal and natural. Identification processes, on the other hand, use cultural difference to draw the boundary lines between different social groups, with these boundaries subsequently being used in manufacturing inequality locally (Tilly 1999). Within identification, further sub-processes are identified, including stigmatization (Goffman 1963), or the negative stereotyping and discrimination against certain identity categories. Applying this process to language, speakers of certain languages or dialects can face disadvantage simply due to their
speech, in terms of both housing access (Massey and Lundy 2001; Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh 1999) and job hiring and evaluation (Kirschenman and Neckerman 2001; Moss and Tilly 1996). The stigmatization of language, then, results in lack of access to material resources, reinforcing inequality.

To show how language, a cultural emanation, operates as both medium and mechanism for reproducing inequality, I focus on the perceptions of Southern dialects and their consequences at Southern Tech, adding a social-psychological component to the other analyses in this study. If our goal is connecting culture to structure, the workplace offers a perfect arena for this examination. First, workplaces—and individual firms—play an outsized role in the maintenance of material inequalities (Acker 2006; Ridgeway 2011; Tilly 1999). As organizations, firms create structural distinctions between actors in different roles, attaching both unequal status and unequal material rewards to job positions. Second, any stigmatization and discrimination based on language can have immediate material consequences at work. The cognitive processes relating to identity categories can affect employers’ evaluations of workers (Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2006; Ridgeway 1997), resulting in lack of opportunity or mobility, or worse, job loss.

In this chapter, I present qualitative data concerning participants’ understanding of dialects and accents—how they determine if they have an accent, how these accents are valued, and how these valuations affect their experiences personally and professionally. To begin, I discuss Bourdieu’s (1984, 1986) theory of habitus and recent dramaturgical extensions (Schwalbe and Shay 2014), positioning language as both a conscious and unconscious component of interaction. I connect features of cultural habitus to micro-level understandings of identity through a discussion of stigma (Goffman 1963) and the sociolinguistic connotations of
dialects. In presenting the findings, I identify participants’ relational identification of the linguistic self and the careful management of linguistic stigma. I then examine how stigmatized speakers manage their self-presentation at work, emphasizing the extra emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) and possible material consequences placed on those with Southern accents. These processes further intersect with gender, creating unique challenges for women with non-Standard dialects in the workplace. I conclude by connecting these findings to cultural processes of identification, showing how the stigmatization of language serves to replicate existing social relations.

**Literature Review**

*Language as Cultural Resource*

Culture is a key factor in reproducing existing social inequalities, but the theoretical and methodological implementation of culture in the maintenance of social inequality proves problematic. To shed light on this issue, Bourdieu (1984) developed the concept of habitus to capture the accumulated cultural knowledge of individuals—ways of doing, speaking, and thinking. Habitus is inculcated over the course of a lifetime, and it results from a lifetime of minor experiences and habits that form the individual. The habitus, Bourdieu argues, reproduces the class structure through its association with particular social categories and valuation within a larger sociocultural system. Within this model, cultural practices are inextricably linked to valuation systems, allowing the system to perpetuate itself. A similarly practice-oriented approach views culture as a toolkit (Swidler 1986) from which individuals construct strategies of action and interaction. The metaphor of a toolkit emphasizes culture as a set of resources acquired by the individual over the lifetime, and, while the combinations of these tools may be extensive, some practices are not possible without the correct tools. The “culture as toolkit”
approach has been applied to organizational research and the ways individuals navigate institutions (Blackler 1995; Scott and Meyer 1994), helping to illuminate the cultural factors that reproduce inequality.

Examining language as an aspect of culture requires further theorization, as language acts as both the medium and the message within interaction. To account for this process, Bourdieu (1991) conceptualizes the linguistic marketplace, an arena where languages, dialects, and accents are given differential symbolic value. The linguistic marketplace reflects existing social relations, in that groups who speak highly valued languages or dialects have greater structural power, thereby providing another avenue to maintain inequality. The concept of expressive habitus (Schwalbe and Shay 2014) extends language to the level of the interaction, reintegrating dramaturgical elements (Goffman 1959) with cultural theory. Where habitus generally refers to cultural practices like dress, movement, or language, expressive habitus captures the distinction between the “what” and the “how” of linguistic interaction. A speaker may communicate an idea with language, but the way they communicate in terms of accent or dialect gives additional information. Expressive habitus connects to the distinction between signs given and signs given off during interaction (Goffman 1959), capturing the implicit social information gleaned from the reading of a linguistic performance.

Schwalbe and Shay characterize the speech habits of expressive habitus as “not normally under conscious control” (2014:171), but sociolinguistic research on style shows that speakers can deploy linguistic features strategically in interaction. Drawing from their linguistic resources, speakers use “bricolage” to construct social identities with constellations of features, where each feature has specific indexical meanings (Eckert 2008; Siverstein 2003). Not every speaker has access to every possible linguistic feature or the capability of controlling ones they
do possess; however, the linguistic behavior of speakers within this frame is—at least partially—conscious, with speakers manipulating features for social import (Schilling-Estes 1998). With these clusters of features, individuals can construct personae, or cultural constructs that possess social and personality characteristics (D’Onofrio 2015, 2018; Eckert 2008; Podesva 2011a; Zhang 2005), affecting the resultant evaluation of their performance by listeners or observers. These personae are themselves raced, classed, and gendered, with studies examining constructs like “Valley Girl,” “Business Professional,” or “Yuppie”. Consequently, personae tie into structural relations, and the linguistic resources used to indicate them connect by proxy to social category membership.

Language as Identity

Language can act as a form of cultural capital on the part of individuals (Bourdieu 1991), but it also ties deeply to individuals’ sense of identity and self. Identities emerge through linguistic practice (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), and they tie into social narratives and structures within local social space. Thus, the personae signaled by language represent identity moves on the part of the speaker, reflecting their alignment with larger social groups. For example, white students within schools can align with a “nerd identity” through hyperstandard speech and an avoidance of vernacular features (Bucholtz 1999, 2001). Linguistic performance can construct identity through alignment with social category membership (Chun 2001; Kirkham 2015), both through the cultural medium of personae and through direct linkage at the local level.

These linguistic identities, then, can suffer stigmatization, as with other social identities (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001). Stigmatization results in difficulties for the individual who bears that identity, affecting their interactions with others. Individuals must then manage the stigma during performances, either through compensation or by hiding the stigmatized
identity in some fashion. Individuals stigmatized for reasons as varied as mental illness (Herman 1993), sexual identity (Orne 2013, 2011), or homelessness (Roschelle and Kaufman 2004) can engage in “passing” behaviors to avoid dealing with stigma in interaction. By passing, individuals can avoid any recognition of their stigmatized identity by interlocutors, but the degree to which passing is an option depends on the visibility of the source of the stigma. The more visible the mark of stigma, the more difficult it is to successfully hide the mark. Individuals consequently engage in compensatory identity strategies, through proactive strategies like redefining the stigmatized label (Park 2002) or reactive strategies such as disassociation with stereotypes (Ezzell 2009). These strategies can be undertaken collectively or in interaction (Link and Phelan 2001; Schwalbe and Shay 2014), and they serve to mediate the perceived and material damages of stigma.

In terms of language, managing a stigmatized dialect varies based on the variety itself and the amount by which it deviates from an unmarked variety. Depending on the features used by a speaker and their level of social enregisterment (Johnstone et al. 2006; Siverstein 2003), a given individual, even when speaking a dialect associated with a particular social identity, may not be “read” as that identity. In phonetic terms, the degree to which a speaker’s vowel target differs from mainstream norms results in a stronger categorization of the speaker’s identity (Carmichael 2018; D’Onofrio 2018; Fridland and Bartlett 2006a). For example, when vowel quality of TRAP is manipulated to move closer to LOT, ratings of the speaker as a “Valley Girl” increase, and the smaller the distance between the vowel classes, the higher the resultant rating (D’Onofrio 2018). The same phenomenon occurs when measuring personality traits associated with identities, for which stronger deviations from mainstream white American English norms show stronger trait associations (Fridland and Bartlett 2006a).
Since the identification of linguistic difference operates on a continuum, the stigmatization of language is also a matter of degree. Speakers possessing few features of a stigmatized dialect may be capable of “passing” to some degree, but those with more substantial differences may find them more difficult to hide. Furthermore, not all features are under cognitive control of the speaker, due to social salience (Schilling-Estes 1998; Siverstein 2003) or individual differences in stylistic control (Sharma 2018). Choosing to “pass” as a Standard English speaker may be out of the reach of some speakers or undesirable to them, requiring different compensatory strategies for stigma. Another cognitive component unique to language is the inability of speakers to hear their own accents when speaking, resulting in self-reports of having “no dialect” or being “normal” (Benson 2003; Niedzielski and Preston 2003). Until speakers are made aware of their own dialect features by others, they may never know that their speech is distinctive.

Language, therefore, offers a clear opportunity to study the process of stigmatization and its relationship to broader inequality structures. The unique nature of language as both cognitive and cultural sometimes allows it to pass beneath conscious notice, making it an invisible factor in the reproduction of inequality. Its ubiquity and necessity for interaction, however, make it a crucial object for study. The case study of workers at Southern Tech illuminates the ways in which individuals negotiate stigmatized language on the job, as well as the role of stigmatization as a cultural process affecting interaction and organization. Individuals’ perceptions of language and its consequences play an important role in understanding the holistic picture of Southernness at Southern Tech. While the production data presented in Chapters 3 and 4 show what linguistic features speakers actually use, the qualitative data presented in this chapter illuminate why they stylistically shift their speech as well as the feelings surrounding these changes.
Methods

The data for this study draws from the sample of speakers at Southern Tech, encompassing 17 individuals total. The interviews analyzed in this study cover 4 men and 13 women, all white, who occupy a variety of positions within the firm. All speakers but one spent their formative years (5-18) in North Carolina, and a majority of them are from the Raleigh metro area, where this Southern Tech branch is located. Table 5.1 provides a summary of speakers’ demographic backgrounds and pseudonyms.

Table 5.1: Speaker Demographics and Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Senior Software Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Research Statistician Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Principal Architect Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior Applications Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Principal QA Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Principal Business Operations Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Digital Asset Librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior Account Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Principal Technical Writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Senior Technical Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Designer/Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Associate HR Business Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>External Communications Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Customer Account Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Senior Certification Developer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since all speakers in the data spent their childhood and adolescence in the US South, they all have dialects that reflect those of their age cohort and hometown (Labov 1989). Consequently, most of my participants sounded Southern to my ears, and those that did not have a noticeable accent tended to be younger. Whether or not the speakers produced a Southern accent, they all
had experience with Southern dialects while growing up. The interviews themselves lasted from 45-90 minutes, with the average being just over 60 minutes.

The discursive discussions of dialect come predominantly from the interview portion of the study, where I asked participants explicitly about language attitudes. During the interview, after a traditional sociolinguistic interview protocol covering life history and work history, I steered the interview to metalinguistic commentary, asking the participants if they felt as if they had an accent. If they did or did not, I asked them how they knew that information. On the surface, the question was straightforward, but participants had a great deal of difficulty discussing their own language. The first few interviews I conducted were learning experiences, and I had to elaborate the interview protocol. Some of my first interviewees who, to my ear, had very Southern accents, insisted that they had no accent at all. I guided subsequent interviews towards more concrete experiences, such as travelling outside the US South, which proved more effective in prompting more self-reflection. When participants provided experiences where their accent became apparent, I probed for more specifics in terms of linguistic features, emotions, and discursive moves. The resultant discussions of accents and stereotypes led to longer explorations on the part of the participants, providing more insight into how they experienced language in their everyday lives.

The initial goal of the study was to focus on accents within the technology industry, but it soon became apparent that the culture of Southern Tech created a unique experience of being Southern at work. The qualitative data presented in the second empirical chapter outlines many of these themes, emphasizing the “Southern culture” at Southern Tech and the importance of that culture in conditioning workers’ experiences—or at least their perceptions of those experiences. As the importance of firm culture became more apparent, I began asking about cultural
differences between firms when covering participants’ job history. We discussed previous jobs and reasons for leaving, and when we arrived at their current job, I asked if there was any cultural adjustment period when moving from a previous job to Southern Tech. Many participants brought up the stark differences in Southern Tech’s culture in comparison to previous firms, and these company-wide factors formed a common explanatory narrative when they spoke about language on the job.

Qualitative data from the interviews were coded using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2014), identifying emergent themes. The qualitative coding exclusively covers the semi-structured exit interviews with participants, but I also discuss vowel differences and discursive topics that arose in the self-recordings. I focused on participants’ understanding of how their language affected them, especially while they were at work, but I also examined their attitudes towards language and dialect more generally.

**Language and Stigma**

*Locating the Linguistic Self: “I Have a Great Friend Who Is Very Twangy”*

As discussed in the methods section, perhaps the most difficult part of the data collection process was finding an effective way to discuss dialects or accents with participants. The recruitment materials for the project termed this study a “language study,” and many of the participants mentioned their curiosity about dialects as a motivating factor for wanting to sign up. However, despite this bias in the sample selection, most of them still found it very difficult to talk about language in a concrete way. Dialect difference remains a “taken for granted” aspect of social interaction, and individuals do not view it with the careful and critical lens that they may use for more prominent social features like race, gender, or sexuality. In fact, language has
been termed the “last backdoor for discrimination” (Lippi-Green 1997:8) in that it represents a social feature still treated as a personal deficit.

Most of the people I interviewed had a difficult time placing themselves within the sociolinguistic fabric of the community, at least at first. Some had clearly not thought much about their accentedness or lack thereof before participating in the project. As part of the self-recording protocol, I asked them to play recordings that they had gathered to confirm that they had been recorded properly, and the voice they heard sometimes surprised them. Nancy commented that she listened to a few recordings and her dialect “seem[ed] a little stronger maybe than [she] would think”. Many participants evaluated their own voice as Southern on record even after mentioning that people told them they had no accent at all. Susan, after telling me her Southern accent did not come up often in conversation, noted that she had “heard recordings of [herself]” and that there was “a little bit of Southern twang”. Jason called it an “oh my gosh” moment the first time he heard his voice on a recording, since it never sounded Southern to himself when he talked.

Jason’s moment of self-discovery was a common thread in many of the interviews, and it was usually uncovered through interaction. Many people described a moment that they suddenly became aware that their speech, rather than simply being a vehicle for their ideas, carried social baggage of its own that connected to place, identity, and perceived social characteristics. This interaction tended to occur through educational institutions, often at the postsecondary level. Susan recounted one experience in college in which she wanted to go into television broadcasting, but a professor brought up her accent as an issue:

You know when I first started my career when I thought I really wanted to go into television, one of the professors at [my college] did tell me that I needed to probably work a little bit on toning down the twanginess in my, you know, in my accent, but that he thought that I read really well from a teleprompter, and that I
was good at it, you know. And he said you should pursue it, and if you decide to
do more on camera you should try to work on getting your accent a little bit more
of what he called Midwestern, as in no accent.

Coming to graduate school was a similar experience for Mary, who left a job at a courthouse in a
rural North Carolina county. She “felt very self-conscious” because of her accent, thinking that
it was “very countryfied” compared to the other individuals she was around. Emily said her
accent did not really come up at all until she started getting into business classes in her junior
year, but by then she “was learning to kind of turn the accent off”. Sometimes these narratives
would emerge as a response to how accents mattered at work, but oftentimes they were
uncovered over the course of a longer discussion with the interviewee about accents and dialects,
not produced as automatic responses.

To locate themselves as sociolinguistic individuals, all of the participants employed some
kind of comparative case as a contrast. If a speaker thought they had an accent, they might talk
about friends or family members who did have accents to position themselves as “less Southern”.
Jessica, who described herself as not really having an accent, added that while in school “one girl
had kind of a little bit of a drawl because she was raised in Charleston,” but the Southern accent
was odd, not the norm. When talking about accentedness on the job, Taylor brought up a
coworker:

We did have people who were—like one was from Louisiana, and like he was
really from Louisiana. And like some of our customers have a hard time
understanding him, so like some of us would have to be like, “um, you know, he-
he’s asking you if you want this” or…like we weren’t trying to talk over him, it’s
just he would not realize they’re not getting it.

Other stories were more cursory, mentioning other states or cities. Susan told me that she
occasionally visited South Carolina for family reasons, saying, “the people have a lovely accent,
but I don’t have one, not really”. The self-positioning strategy for many unaccented speakers
seemed more a way to describe themselves than to distance themselves, as was the case for Jessica and Taylor, for example. Their stories emerged when trying to describe where the line was between “accent” and “no accent”, in their experience. They had not received the treatment their examples had, so they knew that their accent was not as socially salient. Others, like Susan, used these comparisons as a means of reinforcing their unaccented status. In cases like hers, not having a Southern accent seemed an important part of the participant’s identification, and they brought up other, more accented individuals to cement that position.

Even if the speaker self-identified as having an accent, they usually brought up an even more Southern comparison speaker, or they would describe an experience that positioned their accent relative to others. For example, when asked about her accent, Nancy responded that she did not have one, but her “husband has more of one”. Because of how he sounded, people did not notice any accent on her part. When talking about the treatment of her accent, Melissa brought up a friend who also had a Southern accent:

I don’t have a twang necessarily, so I don’t sound, you know— I have a great friend who is very twangy, he sounds uneducated, but he’s one of the smartest men I know. He’s… in textiles at NC State, the research lab… so I know that I don’t have a heavy enough accent to make me sound like I haven’t been educated.

In positioning her accent as “less twangy” than her friend in textiles, Melissa locates herself in linguistic space and distances herself from the negative connotations of Southern dialects, as outlined in chapter 4. The stereotype of Southerners as uneducated can have work ramifications, especially in the professional realm, so Melissa’s comparison can claim her Southernness while minimizing possible negative consequences.

Some of the speakers with the most vernacular Southern dialects brought up comparisons simply to normalize their accent. Richard, a man in cloud computing, and Denise, a woman in the design warehouse, have the most fully shifted features of the Southern Vowel Shift, and they
both employed this strategy. As I was wrapping up my interview with Richard, he revisited an earlier question about how his accent might affect people’s evaluation of him. He told me that “everybody kind of has an accent, you know,” and I responded that I agreed with him. He elaborated that his sister “and her husband, they’re both fairly successful people…[they’ve] got my accent—my sister sounds just like me, all my friends sound a lot like me.” Denise brought up that people may stop her and ask her where she is from when she travels, but she takes it in stride. Rather than giving an example of a more pronounced accent, she told me “I’m from here…grew up here, and that’s just the way I am”. In Richard and Denise’s case, rather than mentioning someone who had a more pronounced accent, they brought up other members of their community. These examples had the effect of directing any negative stereotypes away from the self, suggesting that they were not unique in how they spoke. Especially in light of Richard’s claim that his examples were “successful people,” these comparisons seemed to be set up as a preemptive deflection of criticism. Locating their accent within a community grounds their speech in a real social and physical space and provides some measure of protection from negative evaluation.

*(De)valuing Accents: “My Sister Doesn’t Have It as Bad”*

One factor that became clear when examining participants’ strategies in understanding their accent was the innate valuation of dialects or accents as negative features. The very language that was used to describe Southern accents—“bad”, “thick”, “uneducated”, “hick”—had intense negative connotations. The terminology and discursive patterns surrounding our discussions of dialect made it clear that participants saw accents, especially Southern accents, as a mark of stigma (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001; Schwalbe and Shay 2014). In the process of self-exploration, these terms of valuation would often emerge as a way of situating
accents with relation to one another. Jason described the experience of hearing himself on a recording, saying “you just go ‘Oh yeah, that’s horrible. Yes, Southern accent’”. Telling me about her own accent, Denise noted that “her sister doesn’t have it as bad” as she does. When Emily discussed her mother’s Southern accent, which she told me was stronger than hers, she mentioned that her mother had been made to take elocution classes in college. Surprised, I asked when her mother had attended college. She responded, “she was there in the sixties…I’ve often wondered how bad did she sound before that”. Though we both agreed that taking classes to remove an accent was an oppressive practice, Emily’s thoughts about her mother’s “bad” accent highlight how deeply this negative view permeates individuals’ perceptions. She may not agree with the forced removal of accents, but they still represent a problem, a flaw to be concealed.

Sometimes evaluation came from outside the self, making speakers aware of the stigma of their own dialect. The narratives about awareness of one’s own dialect often came intertwined with a negative interaction. When asked if he had an accent, Richard responded flatly, “I’ve been told I don’t pronounce stuff very well”. Though usually longer than Richard’s response, many of the participants described similar experiences, where someone’s negative reaction told them that their accent was socially undesirable. For example, during a camping trip with work friends, Karen talked with her boyfriend on the phone while everyone was setting up equipment at the campsite. After hanging up, one of her friends noted that her “accent really reverts” when she talked on the phone. Summarizing the Southern quality of her accent, “I guess I have…a strong one,” she suggested. For those individuals with accents that were especially salient, they could scarcely escape reminders that their speech did not line up with expected social norms.

When using a speech-to-text system, Richard told me:

We’ve got…an interpreter that, um, will send you a text message if somebody calls you, and they say you need to leave…a message. “Hey I need…to meet you
at building such and such under such and such time,” whatever. The message—it will translate it into text. Mine seems to be more mangled than most, I’ll say that, and I gotta believe that means that I have a—I don’t know if that means I’ve got more of an accent or I don’t pronounce very well, I don’t know which one that means.

Of all the participants, Richard provided the most stories of confronting the stigma of his accent, and he often introspected about his dialect, as in the quote above. He seemed to struggle to resolve the tension between the conviction that how he spoke should not be a problem and the frequent reminders of his stigmatized linguistic status.

Managing Stigmatized Identity: “It’s Actually Hard to Say a Word without an Accent”

The interviewees implicitly recognized accented status as a social stigma, and they consequently undertook strategies to mitigate the consequences of this stigma. I identified a number of strategies used by my interviewees, including passing (Goffman 1963) or alternative identity construction (Lamont et al. 2014; Lamont and Mizrachi 2012). However, the response to stigma is largely dictated by the degree of accentedness on the part of the speaker, as some speakers have fewer options available to them. For the speakers with the least identifiably Southern accents, they need to do nothing at all, as others do not even attach the stigmatized label to them in the first place. Some speakers who sound partially Southern may attempt to hide their accent depending on who their interlocutor may be at the time. Finally, those with the most vernacular Southern accents do not have the linguistic resources available to them to mask their stigmatized social identity. Therefore, they tended towards redefinition of the Southern label, claiming it as a positive trait rather than a stigmatized one.

Many of the youngest interviewees had minimal features of the traditional Southern dialect due to its recent recession in many parts of the Southern United States (Dodsworth 2013; Fridland 2003; Prichard 2010), and they consequently had little, if any, stigma to manage. For
many of them, having a Southern accent in conversation was more about curiosity than consequence. Sarah, who exhibited the lowest degree of SVS features in the study, when asked if she had an accent, replied, “I feel like it depends on who I’m around, I feel like I have a very mirroring…style”. She added that when she worked with people from New Jersey, they told her that she “did not have any accent” while she was there. When around her relatives, Taylor felt that she might have an accent, but usually she was told that she has a “Northern” accent. Even when traveling, people would ask Taylor “Are you from the Midwest?” due to the lack of perceptible accent. For these speakers, accents were things they could “put on” temporarily, removing them after an interaction. The deep cultural connection of habitus did not appear in our discussions of their speech, and they did not connect their speech strongly with Southern identity.

Speakers with moderate degrees of Southern features, however, engage in complex stigma management strategies of passing or distancing. Mary, a woman who works as a librarian at Southern Tech, talked about her anxiety upon moving to graduate school from a rural area in North Carolina, recounting her attempts at passing as a non-Southern speaker:

So yeah, I felt really bad when I was in graduate school because at that time I’d- I’d moved up from [small town] and I’d worked in the courthouse, and everybody in the courthouse is from [rural county] and out in the country, and they’re all from farms. And so when I- when I started graduate school I felt very, very self-conscious because I knew that my accent was very, very countryfied, and so…I think I tried to make it more cityfied so that I wouldn’t stand out as much, and people wouldn’t think I was stupid. Because you know the portrayal of…somebody with a Southern accent and especially a Southern country accent is that you’re stupid and so- so I’m really aware of that.

Many people had a difficult time talking about their own accent or how their accent affected social interaction, but Mary’s answer was quick and direct. It was clear that she had spent a great deal of time thinking about how to manage her speech, so I asked her how successful her
attempts to remove her accent had been. She replied that “sometimes it’s actually hard to say a word without an accent,” but she felt that she was at least moderately successful. Her perception was that she did not “have as much of an accent” as she did when she was working in the courthouse. Mary’s story was typical of individuals who attempted to “pass” as unaccented; they generally felt they were only partially successful. As we saw in the data from chapter 4, speakers can be very dynamic in their linguistic styling, but the majority of individuals still possess noticeable traits of the SVS during their interviews, despite any modifications they may have made since childhood. Very few people, it seems, can completely pass as non-stigmatized speakers.

Many of the speakers with moderate Southern accents tended to distance themselves from the stigma associated with Southernness by using more negative example speakers. In the structure of the interview, I began by asking if the interviewee thought they had an accent. Oftentimes, speakers who acknowledged they did indeed have an accent would follow this admission with a comparison. Jason, a man in IT, described the Southern accent he heard on his recordings as “horrible”, yet immediately afterwards, he talked about his wife:

I don’t think [my accent] is that pronounced amongst the people I’m around…I’m not sure—my wife’s is so pronounced, um, I sometimes wonder if she’s taken seriously. Because she can come across as so, so country and you’re like—you know, she’s really smart, she has a college degree just like you, and she doesn’t use a sophisticated vocabulary…she just doesn’t.

At this point, we had just talked about possible consequences for having a Southern accent, and Jason mentioned that people might treat someone as uneducated or incompetent because of the accent. Despite his acknowledgment of his Southern accent, the discussion of consequences shifted immediately to his wife. Many speakers showed reluctance to apply social consequences to themselves, and they would use another person to talk about what they might face. “A friend”
might be teased for their accent or be perceived by others as slow and uneducated, and the interviewee would express concern about that person. In this way, the speakers had an avenue to talk about the consequences of their mark without confronting it directly.

Finally, speakers with the most salient Southern features engaged in strategies of acceptance and identity redefinition to mitigate the consequences of stigma. Denise, a woman in the design shop, has a noticeable Southern accent, one of the most vernacular in terms of SVS metrics. When someone brings up her speech, she tells them “we do have Southern language down here in Raleigh, North Carolina, you know,” and she tries to “make a joke of it”. I asked her why she responded this way instead of trying to avoid a Southern accent, and she responded:

Well, see, I’ve never really—I mean I knew I had an accent…and you know for years now people, you know, they make fun of you or whatever, you know, and I make fun back at them and stuff…so I just don’t know. I’ve always been this way, so…I’ll probably just be the same old Denise [if I changed my accent]…just not quite an [overwhelming] accent.

Denise’s statement simultaneously accepts the label as part of her identity and deflects some of the criticism that might come from possessing a Southern accent. Rather than try to hide it, which she admits would probably never work, she changes the discourse, making all accents objects for humor. As an explanation, she told me, “if you can’t laugh at yourself, then who you gonna laugh at”. Through humor, Denise can take control of the discussion and mitigate the threat of negative evaluation by others.

Naturalizing Linguistic Discrimination: “It’s Just What People Do”

Since all the participants seemed keenly aware of the stigmatized nature of Southern accents, I probed further into their perceptions of why these negative judgements occurred. I expected pushback against linguistic discrimination, especially on the part of those interviewees who had Southern accents themselves, but I was surprised at the acceptance of the practice.
Most people seemed to consider social judgements based solely on language a simple fact of life. When I asked Karen, a woman in technical writing, about the treatment of Southern accents, she quickly responded, “oh, like you’re less intelligent than you are”. She went on to add, however, that “if you have a very heavy New York accent they’re gonna form an opinion based on that too, it’s just what people do”. Especially since Karen had just talked about the unfairness of linguistic judgements against accents like hers, I did not expect her naturalization of the practice. Emily, a junior HR employee, expressed a similar sentiment, telling me, “It kind of stinks a little bit, you know, it’s like you have to kind of hide- hide a part of you, but you know, what- what can you do. I guess that’s just the culture”. An important thread that ran throughout these normalization narratives was the location of language prejudice in a nebulous “cultural” sphere that existed outside of concrete individuals. Discrimination was rationalized as something out of immediate reach and unassailable by any individual action.

Some participants did recognize that linguistic prejudice of this sort was unjust, but usually they had difficulty pinpointing its cause or how to solve it at a structural level. After talking about the general treatment of Southern accents, Robert, a man in technical writing, discussed his recognition of his own biases:

There are some people here who have very strong, mainly Southern accents. There have been times where I’ve caught myself thinking like, “Wow they've got a really thick Southern accent,” you know. I think- I think there’s kind of a built in bias, like you think, “Well is that person really qualified” ::laughter::. But you quickly realize that, you know, that person's like the smartest person in the room ::laughter::. And like, you know, “Boy, you know, where did that thought come from?” ::laughter::. …I mean I- I guess it's natural, because we're programmed, uh, I believe by, you know Hollywood and other influences I guess…if you want the, uh, the stupid person, then he's got to have the Southern accent right?

Robert’s willingness to discuss his own struggles with linguistic prejudice show a recognition of the problem that it poses, but he still falls into a discourse of naturalization. He acknowledges
the cultural role of media in shaping linguistic bias (Lippi-Green 1997), but has difficulty challenging this programming. The awareness Robert shows here is greater than most of the participants, but even he has trouble fully escaping the stereotypes that are perpetuated surrounding accents.

The behavior of the participants with regard to their and others’ accents makes clear that speaking a non-Standard dialect of English can result in stigma. The very language that interviewees used to describe accents implied a value system where accents were a liability, not a simple cultural difference marker. Consequently, speakers who possessed socially salient levels of Southern accent engaged in strategies of passing (DeJordy 2008; Goffman 1963), group disidentification (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002), or identity reconstruction (Lamont et al. 2014; Lamont and Mizrachi 2012) through humor to manage their stigma. Even for speakers who claimed to have a Southern accent, rarely did individuals fully claim the stigmatized Southern identity, suggesting substantial threat to their identities in the adoption of this label. Given interviewees’ assurances presented in the previous chapter that Southern Tech was a safe place for Southern accents, we might expect far more self-acceptance of Southern identity on their part. However, it seems that their simultaneous awareness of Southern stereotypes presents a far greater threat than they may initially acknowledge. Only the most vernacular speakers fully accepted their identity as Southern dialect speakers, and even then, they struggled with their emotions surrounding their speech. Richard, the man in cloud computing who had the most substantial SVS features, vacillated between self-acceptance and self-deprecation:

Again, I talk to so many people I don’t think [my accent] matters that much, um, with so many different accents. I think a lot of people think that I’m not very smart, and I don’t exactly- I don’t know if it’s just the accent or my pronunciation of the accent. I don’t think my grammar’s very good either, um, and I think that’s more an engineering thing than anything.
Richard’s assessment of his speech showed the social psychological struggle most clearly, but most interviewees who acknowledged their accentedness exhibited a similar process. Interviewees were torn between pride in their cultural heritage and social shame, resulting in a great deal of emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) on an everyday basis to manage their stigmatized identity.

Linguistic Stigmatization at Work

Evaluating Accents on the Job: “I Kinda Question Their Intelligence”

Since accentedness presents clear challenges for individuals to negotiate in interaction, I asked interviewees how Southern accents might affect their jobs, or the jobs of others. When thinking about their own positions, interviewees overwhelmingly responded that an accent would not matter for their job, even after outlining all the prejudices against Southern speakers. Linda, an editor, told me, “I think a lot of people still perceive a Southern accent as an indication of stupidity, unfortunately, so I’m thinking that could make a difference somewhere, but it’s never made any difference for me, because again, I don’t have an accent”. She hoped it “wouldn’t make a difference in terms of advancement, but it might make a difference in terms of how people perceive you”. The disconnect Linda observes between individual perceptions and structural disadvantage was common, and most of my interviewees with perceptible Southern accents expressed reluctance in arguing that accents would ever truly matter for job evaluation or promotion. Gary, a man in sales, argued a similar point: “I can see how having, you know, a certain accent could be, you know…maybe not detrimental, but…you know, I’m sure there’s a little bit of, uh, play, if you will, depending on what job role you’re in”.

The responses from those with no noticeable accent, however, had strong structural implications for workplace treatment. Jessica, a woman in software development, suggested that
“if it was a really thick accent it might have an effect [on how people treat you]”. I asked her why that might be, and she responded:

Maybe it’s my own prejudice ::laughter::, but um, I don’t know. Just in my mind, when I hear someone with more of a neutral accent it makes them seem more, um, I don’t know. Like they can be taken more seriously or something, and in in my- when I say that it sounds ridiculous, but maybe in my subconscious that’s what I’m thinking.

Sarah, a woman in sales, was even more direct:

I do think that especially in the South with Southern accents, you know, it affects what people view of your competence. And I think just, for example, in technical support, right, if people called in and got somebody who spoke really Southern, had a really thick Southern accent, um, you know there's definitely potential that they would view them as less competent even if they have all the knowledge. Um I think in today's world, like I said, because so much is done via the phone…it really does make a big difference for almost every role.

Both Jessica and Sarah suggest that the underlying view of lacking competence might affect someone’s evaluation on the job, and the language they used suggested that they might negatively evaluate someone themselves for their accent. Amanda, a woman in external communications, elaborated her feelings about accents, perceptions, and jobs most clearly:

I don’t know if it matters to people in general, I mean I don’t know if even it matters in my job to be quite honest. It matters to me. And it matters to me in other peoples’ jobs too, I mean this is gonna sound horrible, but I do, when someone has a really strong accent, I kinda question their intelligence. I know that’s horrible to say, but like if they have a really strong Southern accent I automatically think, “Hmm…why are you talking like that?” I know that’s horrible to say, I feel horrible to even say it, but like it does make me judge them a little bit. So I don’t know if others feel that way, or if that’s like a general consensus among people, but me personally, I feel like a Southern accent does kind of impede your ability to sound super smart. I do- I do think that. Unfortunately, um, unless, you know, you’re saying things that are very intelligent with a Southern accent…then it can be kind of endearing maybe. So if I had a researcher or a statistician that was saying things that were very smart, like things that I perceived as being very smart ::laughter::, and things that I have no idea about, but they had a Southern accent, I’d be cool with that. But if it’s just like someone talking about something that I know about like same level of ::laughter:: intelligence on something, and they have a very strong Southern accent, I guess I would maybe judge them a little bit. Or kinda be like, “Is that
necessary?" like ::laughter:: to have that strong of an accent. I don’t- I don’t know, it’s horrible.

Amanda’s discussion of her own perception of Southern accents is deeply intertwined with her expectations for herself. She begins by saying how important it is for her to speak without an accent, and she requires that from others, as well. Despite her acknowledgements that this prejudice may be unique to her, Jessica, Sarah, and many of the other interviewees expressed similar notions, and in most cases, they had the feeling that their bias was personal. As with personal experiences of linguistic discrimination, very few interviewees acknowledged a broader structural nature to negative evaluations of accents within the workplace. An exception to this trend was Emily, who told me that she sometimes had a Southern accent, but she was concerned about it at work. She had an experience at her old job that informed her how Southern accents were generally treated:

I had, actually, a manager at my old company that said, “You know, you could try to work on your accent because you don’t really sound educated,” and so…that’s a tough way to learn. And it’s kind of a slap in the face, too, because I’ve grown up with some of the most intelligent people.

From this and other interactions within the workplace, Emily learned quickly that having a Southern accent might be detrimental not only to her evaluation on an individual level, but also to her ability to get jobs.

Southern Accents at Work: “The Last Thing I Want to Say is ‘What Y’all Doing?’”

Many interviewees told me that they took great pains to modify their speech on the job to avoid negative perceptions during workplace interactions. Many participants expressed a desire to “be taken seriously” or “avoid casual speech”. Gary, a man in sales, told me that if he’s in Charlotte, a large metro area nearby, that his “slang voice will hopefully never surface”.

Melissa, a woman in QA Engineering, spoke of her speech at work in a similar way, saying, “When I’m in a professional situation, I know my voice gets deeper, my diction’s better—I don’t
know what happens, it just happens”. Emily reinforced the conception that Southern accents were not ideal for a work environment:

> When I, you know, am in like a business setting like when I'm in a setting with, you know, some of the leaders in the company, the last thing I want to do is say like, “Well y'all, what y'all doing around here?”, you know? So yeah I definitely do hear myself changing [the way I talk].

Part of the reasoning behind eliminating Southern accent at work connected to the perception of accents in general—and Southern accents in particular—as being casual and colloquial. Being Southern did not reflect the required “formal” norms of the workplace, and Southern accents are indeed perceived as friendlier than most other United States dialects (Campbell-Kibler 2008; Niedzielski and Preston 2003).

For most of the interviewees who admitted to modifying their speech on the job, their motivation stemmed from a personal desire to sound more appropriate for work, not from worries about company treatment. In fact, they often suggested that Southern Tech, as a company founded in the South, was a far more accepting place for Southern accents. Melissa said that Southern accents “wouldn’t matter around here. They know what they’re coming to, they know they’re in the South, they know they’re in [the Raleigh area], so I don’t think any jobs around here [a Southern accent] would matter”. Jessica echoed this sentiment, telling me that the company “was started in [the South], maybe there’s a little more acceptance of that, so at this particular company I don’t think [a Southern accent] would be that big of a deal”. The findings in chapter 4 suggest that this perception does not influence linguistic behavior as much as they claim, but the perception of Southern Tech as a “Southern place” was very common among the employees in general. When I contacted the firm to begin the study, I was told something very similar by the executives who gave consent on behalf of the company. In the meeting, I said that the project focused on Southern accents in particular, and I received a quick response about how
many people Southern Tech recruits locally, from both the Raleigh area and North Carolina more generally. During my initial meetings with participants to discuss equipment protocols, I would hear the same story, with many people saying that they worked with other North Carolinians directly in workgroups or teams.

Part of the understanding of Southern Tech as “Southern” came from comparison to other firms and their cultures. Being at a tech firm in the Raleigh area, many of the interviewees used IBM as a point of comparison, since IBM maintains a large presence in the area. Many of my interviewees had actually worked for IBM in the past, and they contrasted Southern Tech with their experiences there. Karen, a woman in technical writing, said that “working at IBM here would be very different than working at Southern Tech here…IBM has changed so much over the years, it’s gotten very—almost lethally competitive it seems, so [having an accent] might make a difference”. Barbara, a woman in business operations, had experience with IBM previously, and she similarly characterized that company as very competitive as compared to Southern Tech:

I think Southern Tech in particular is much better about it because…the other companies were much more of a melting pot, and much more um, dog eat dog world kind of- kind of way of working, and- and if you were perceived in any way inferior they would exploit it to use it against you. So if you were perceived as a, you know, Southern noneducated person, then it would definitely impact your career at that company and where you go—whether you get management or not, or how you were affected as an employee. Here, you know, it's taken me this long to realize that…here it's definitely not that way.

Both Karen and Barbara’s experiences point to high levels of competition or exploitation as key factors for increasing discrimination based on dialect. They argue that Southern Tech does not have a competitive atmosphere, and the low level of employee turnover (in the single digits per year, according to the company statistics) supports their perceptions. One interviewee, however, told me that she felt more pressure to change her speech at Southern Tech than at her other jobs.
Mary told me that her former job at the state library made her feel more comfortable:

    So I didn't feel this way when I worked for the state library, uh, even though my manager was from Ohio. And I think even- well actually, yeah there were quite a few people. I mean one guy was from Alaska and- and uh someone else was from I think Washington state, but- but mostly people were from North Carolina…so it was sort of like they were in our territory.

The key phrase to understanding Mary’s experience, as well as those of the other interviewees, is being “in our territory”. For Mary, her time at Southern Tech felt less linguistically comfortable since her previous work placed her in rural areas and state government institutions, which she felt were very Southern and local in their orientation. Most participants, however, had spent time in large corporations or tech startups, which had far less of a Southern culture than Southern Tech, in their estimation. Employees’ understanding of the workplace culture, then, takes on a highly relational cast. In the same way that individuals have to place themselves linguistically with respect to others, workers’ understanding of the linguistic culture of workplaces situates those firms within a relative linguistic space. For most of the interviewees, Southern Tech was far more of a “Southern space” than their previous employment.

As with the data concerning treatment of accents in general, interviewees’ perceptions of the treatment of non-Standard English dialects at work showed many contradictions. Many interviewees assured me that accents would not matter for their job, but earlier had told me that other people thought Southern accents sounded uneducated. Others told me that Southern Tech provided a safe space for Southern accents, but then they proceeded to explain how they judge others during workplace interaction. Almost all the interviewees seemed unwilling to both admit that Southern accents were socially undesirable for workers and that this social valuation system affected them personally. Only two people, Mary and Emily, acknowledged that they had been on the receiving end of linguistic discrimination and that their experience made them question how people evaluated them at work. Overall, language seems to operate as a relatively invisible
cultural process within the workplace, but it does affect day-to-day interactions and broader organizational practices. Despite interviewees’ assurances that negative linguistic evaluations would not affect hiring attitudes, cultural factors play an outsized role in processes like hiring (Rakić, Steffens, and Mummendey 2011; Rivera 2012, 2017), meaning that stereotyping based on language likely does have structural consequences for these speakers. Taken together with the stylistic results in chapter 4, even if individuals do not say they worry about their speech, they certainly act as if they do.

The Intersection of Gender in Impression Management

Men’s Situational Southernness: “I’ve Heard That It’s Endearing”

Finally, gender intersected with workplace expectations and behavior with regard to language. A theme that emerged among men in my sample was the deployment of Southern habitus through language as a positive attribute in some situations, even within the workplace. Jason, in IT, told me that his Southern accent can be useful in more informal workplace interactions, but during meetings, he tries to tone down Southern features. With his Southern accent, he can be “the guy that laughs and jokes with you,” but if he pitches an idea in a meeting, he tries to “sit up and talk” and tell others “this is a serious conversation about how we want to do something going forward, and I need you guys to listen”. Even in interactions with customers outside the “Southern space” of Southern Tech, men found some benefits to their accent. Gary, in sales, told me that his Southern accent helped to build client relationships:

I don’t know if I’ve ever thought about it, but I’ll say this, that, um, my job is all about relationships. And at times I think there have certainly been moments when I talk a little more relaxed, and I’ve heard that it’s endearing. And so they feel-my clients feel comfortable, um, in engaging in conversations, whether it’s personal conversation or professional conversation, you know, if I’m trying to sell them, you know, a hundred thousand dollar deal. …When I’m talking more relaxed with somebody and my- maybe my true voice, um comes out, um I’m more believable, and I think that’s translated into the success I’ve had in this job.
Here Gary suggests that Southern accents can “grease the wheels” of interaction, and he can
draw on a more personable, casual persona to bond with his clients. For men, Southern features
can sometimes act as a cultural resource at work (Bourdieu 1991, 1986), a form of cultural
capital that they can display to reap social and material benefits. Perhaps most importantly,
Gary’s display of Southernness with his customers does not damage their overall perception of
him as a competent worker, nor does it seem to result in the negative stereotyping that many
interviewees described for Southern accents.

Even men who did not draw on their Southern accents at work took a unique approach to
managing any possible negative stereotypes that spoke to their gendered social position.
Richard, in particular, brought up his strategy for dealing with others who made fun of his
accent: “It doesn’t bother me, and again, I’m so close to retirement I’m definitely not gonna try
to change it [at work]”. He noted that he had experienced some teasing at other jobs for how he
spoke, but he maintained his accent in spite of any possible social reprisal. I asked if his accent
would matter more for other jobs, and Richard said that he would not be good in the sales group
because he didn’t “look right for a sales guy” or “talk right for a sales guy”. But, he was quick to
amend, he “would not be trying to pursue those jobs”. As we wrapped up the interview, he
returned to the discussion of changing his accent at work:

I probably have a bad attitude, you know, I really don’t care that much, because I-
I think I do my job well, so I don’t think it’s anything they can really say to me.
I’m not trying to move up, so even if it did hold me back, I’m gonna retire in two
to five years anyway, so what can they do to me, you know?

Richard’s refusal to modify his self-presentation and his consequent disengagement from
problematic career paths represents a common reaction for those faced with the consequences of
stigma (Link and Phelan 2001). The fact that he did not feel social pressure to change, however,
was unique to the men in this sample.
Women at Work: “I Make a Pretty Concerted Effort to Not Have an Accent”

The women in the sample generally reported that they felt much more pressure to change how they spoke at work, stemming from both workplace criticism and personal desire. Interviewees often argued that having no accent, or at least not a stigmatized accent, was more professional. Taylor, a cashier, said that she had no accent, but if she did have one for a professional-level job, that “the perception would be different, like ‘Oh, that’s less professional’”. Amanda told me that she tried to remove her accent as much as she could, “for the sake of being as professional as possible” at her job. Denise, the designer in the warehouse, suggested that she might take extra steps to remove her accent if she was in a different position within the company. For her job, since she was in the warehouse, her accent did not make a difference, but if she had a more executive position she “would probably go more to a communication class” to remove her accent. Emily, younger woman in HR, elaborated on the complex pressures she negotiated with her accent at work:

I really think that having the accent and especially being young, there’s already like a stigma— you know, like a stigma about being around being young and not necessarily knowing as much as everyone else. So I think adding in the accent, it kind of gives people a sense of education level, whether or not that’s correct.

She further noted that it might even matter her industry, as “pharmaceuticals…is just a lot more professional probably than some of the technology”. In general, women expressed much more anxiety related to their work presentation than men did. Women also made a much more concrete connection to ideologies surrounding professionalism (Evetts 2003), as opposed to acknowledging perceptions of education level alone.

For some speakers, the ideologies that required unaccentedness had been internalized, to the point where they felt their motivation to lose the Southern accent came from personal desire rather than external pressure. Amanda explained:
People have told me [I have an accent]. But I make a pretty concerted effort to not have an accent at work, like to not let too much of a Southern twang come out. So I- I wouldn’t say that I’m like always thinking about it, but I do, I’m cognizant to not be too Southern, if you will :laughter:. But I- I think that it definitely comes out here and there, so.

Many women acknowledged that Southern speech at work was expected to be free from vernacular features of any sort, but the external pressure transformed into a great deal of self-monitoring. Melissa, a woman in QA Engineering, explained that she tried to take all the “mispronunciations” out of her speech, but with her friends there was a “forgiveness factor,” so she did not have to pay as much attention. In these cases, however, the implication was that constant monitoring of speech occurred.

*Navigating Gendered Stereotypes: “Aw, Little Southerner; Oh, Stupid Southerner”*

Men, if they acknowledged any consequences for their accent, located them in assessments of their competence or education, but women experienced an alternate, sexualized stereotype, as well. Amanda explained the two possible assessments of women’s Southern accents:

If you’re calling journalists up in New York I think the perception that they might have is “Oh, stupid Southerner”. You- I don’t know, I don’t know why I think that, but I—or maybe they’d think it was cute, maybe they’d be like, “Aw, little Southerner!”

Taylor, the cashier, said she heard something similar: “My coworker who is from up North [said] that we all sound either really cute when we start talking Southern…or it sounds dumb”. The description of Southern women as “cute” intersects with the expectations of femininity, marginalizing women in a different—but equally disadvantageous—way. The two possible identities Southern women can inhabit present a similar double bind to those seen in previous analyses of gender in the workplace (Kanter 1993), where women are penalized for both masculine- and feminine-coded presentations. Never are Southern women taken seriously; they
are either marginalized as cute or marginalized as uneducated. Melissa described the difference gender can make in the reading of a Southern accent:

You know, not to put a sexual bias on it but you know, a lot of people like that Southern woman accent, you know. It’s soothing, it’s very sweet, uh, so I think that probably gets more leeway than maybe a male Southern accent depending on what you’re saying or how you’re communicating.

Though she argues that women might get more leeway, the words she describes this type of presentation (“soothing”, “sweet”) are coded along the lines of traditional femininity. In contrast, she felt her voice at work tended to be “deeper” than her “sing songy” voice with friends, implying that the feminine-coded Southern presentation may not be helpful in a workplace, despite her comments here.

Even outside the workplace, women found that their Southern accents were used by others to leverage power in interactive situations. In many cases, women’s accents were seen as an excuse to approach and comment. Jason, when talking about his wife, told me that “people would stop her in the grocery stores in Florida just to hear her talk”. Linda, in technical editing, told me that while she was doing an internship in Iowa, a woman at the store asked her where she was from. After responding that she was from North Carolina, the worker told her “you have such a lovely accent!” Karen, in technical writing, recounted a story where she was “at a trade show one time and some dude said he just wanted to record my voice”. Only women told me stories of being approached by others and asked to perform their dialect, and these interactions serve to reinforce extant gender relations. As Melissa put it, when on a work trip, “I noticed that people spent more time paying attention to my accent than they did paying attention to me and what I was saying”.

155
Conclusion

As is clear from the interviewees’ experiences, vernacular dialects, and Southern dialects in particular, operate as a form of social stigma in interaction. Individuals engage in stigma management strategies such as passing or distancing in an attempt to manage their identity, depending on the available linguistic resources of the speaker. On the job, interviewees’ responses show that they both participate in and suffer from linguistic prejudice, depending on their position and context. Even those individuals with noticeable accents participate in the collective Standard language ideology, expressing negative reactions to professionals with accents while internalizing their own accent as a personal flaw. Finally, gender intersects with individuals’ linguistic experiences, and women have more difficulty accessing any possible benefits from deploying Southern linguistic features. Women’s liminal position in the workplace (Ridgeway 1997, 2001) results in stronger cultural challenges in the form of negative linguistic evaluations.

These results have two major implications, the first for the social psychological well-being of individuals and the second for structural inequality relating to work and organizations. The worry surrounding proper linguistic behavior, especially at work, implies a strong emotional labor component (Hochschild 1983), with individuals expending a great deal of energy on linguistic self-regulation. The suppression of Southern accents presents further difficulties for speakers, since it entails the denial of a critical part of the self. Interviewees sometimes expressed frustration for having to hide their “true selves” at work, and suggested they only deployed their Southern accents in relaxed settings. As with many other studies examining gender and emotional labor (Dwyer 2013; England 2005; Guy and Newman 2004), women feel much more pressure to perform the extra labor of linguistic self-monitoring than men. Women
bear the brunt of criticism for their language, and they must conduct careful management of their presentations to navigate the landscape.

The second major implication for this study is the relationship between the linguistic stigmatization process and the institutional structures of work. The connection between professionalism and unaccentedness suggests a cultural process of exclusion that may operate in the evaluation of individuals for professional jobs. Especially given participants’ suggestions that some jobs may present more challenges for those with accents than others, workplace inequality regimes (Acker 2006) likely reflect this cultural sorting process. Vernacular dialects often reflect membership in groups already facing disadvantage (Eckert 1989b; Labov 1972b; Wolfram 1969), so language can operate as an invisible factor to reinforce structural exclusion. In this way, organizations reflect a sorting of dialects that reproduces a cultural valuation system, as well as differential access to material resources (Tilly 1999).

Finally, more research should examine the ways in which language operates as a cultural process reproducing existing structural inequalities. For example, do interviewers’ evaluations of sociolinguistic features affect the likelihood of a candidate’s employment success? Are candidates streamed into different jobs based on the social category associations of these dialects? Do linguistic features affect teacher evaluation of student behavior? In addition, studies in different regions or different industries may illuminate the local variations on the process of linguistic stigmatization. The inclusion of non-white dialects can also help to bring a stronger intersectional lens to this problem, since language has been shown to be an avenue for racial discrimination (Massey and Lundy 2001; Purnell et al. 1999). In every case, sociolinguistic study offers a linkage between the cultural and structural, filling the missing link in social reproduction (Lamont et al. 2014).
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study addresses the relationship between linguistic variation and individual behavior within a workplace, from both a sociological and a sociolinguistic perspective. Culture plays a prominent role in the replication of existing social relations (Bourdieu 1984). Despite calls to integrate culture more concretely into analyses of social stratification and inequality (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014; Massey et al. 2014) or workplace processes (Roscigno and Wilson 2014), specific, measurable metrics for culture are few and far between. The results presented here show promise for the implementation of linguistic variation as a measurable feature of culture that can be readily integrated into sociological analyses. Sociolinguistically, this study helps researchers to better understand the process by which occupation—and by extension, social class as a general theoretical construct—affects linguistic behavior. Sociolinguists have long understood the importance of occupation for linguistic variation generally (Labov 1972b; Sankoff and Laberge 1978) and stylistic variation in particular (Coupland 1980; Podesva 2011b). However, work has not been the subject of rigorous linguistic and structural analysis as have schools (Chun 2001; Eckert 1989a, 2000; Kirkham 2015), leaving the relationship between workplace structures and linguistic behavior opaque. This study helps to fill that gap, opening the door for deeper investigations of how workplace structures affect language variation and change.

In the first chapter, I introduce the problem of integrating culture and linguistic behavior into sociological analysis, and I offer analysis of workers at a single firm as a solution to this issue. Workplaces offer a fruitful opportunity to analyze linguistic variation in tandem with social structure, since they are a primary force in the reproduction of social inequalities (Acker 2006; Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey 2016; Roscigno and Wilson 2014; Tilly 1999;
Recent research on organizations and culture emphasizes the differences between firms in their informal practices, which consequently affect their structure and interaction order (Hallett 2003; Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Tomaskovic-Devey 2014). The complex connection between the individual and the organizational suggests the need for research on a single firm to elucidate the cultural mechanisms at play. Sociolinguistic research makes strong arguments for language being a feature of culture (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), and it acknowledges the correlation between class stratification and linguistic features. However, theoretical conceptions of class and occupation are often nebulous and inconsistent (Ash 2013; Dodsworth 2009), and mechanisms connecting class and language remain rare. Mixed-methods ethnographic work surrounding linguistic variation at schools (Chun 2001; Eckert 1989a, 2000; Kirkham 2015) provides a roadmap for connecting social process to linguistic variation, and from there to broader social inequalities. In this fashion, sociology and sociolinguistics reinforce one another, with each tradition filling gaps in the other. I argue that a unified study of language at work, supported with the theoretical infrastructure of workplace processes and inequality and the methods of sociolinguistic analysis, can shed light on the relationship between culture and structure in a promising new way.

Chapter two outlined the particular context of Southern Tech as a firm, the data collection techniques and resulting sample, and the methods for data analysis. I described the unique culture of Southern Tech that conditions employees’ perceptions of the value of Southern accents at work. I detailed the self-recording protocol for the seventeen participants under analysis, as well as the design of the interviews and surveys. Lastly, I covered the methods, both quantitative and qualitative, that I used to analyze the resulting recorded and survey data.
The third chapter examined the correlation between features of the Southern Vowel Shift and job skills. I applied current approaches to skill returns in the current labor market structure (Liu and Grusky 2013; Wyant, Manzoni, and McDonald 2018), finding that analytical and interpersonal skill negative correlated with the SVS, while managerial skill correlated positively. For many vowels of the SVS, these relationships with skill interacted with stylistic context, with workers in higher-skilled jobs showing even less-Southern pronunciations while on the job. These results pointed to a cultural pathway to inequality in labor market processes (Lamont et al. 2014), in which workers without the appropriate cultural capital may not be matched into jobs. This finding contributes to the broader literature surrounding culture, skills, and jobs, providing a concrete, measurable link between perceptions of soft skills (Kirschenman and Neckerman 2001; Moss and Tilly 1996) and ultimate job position. The flat effects of skill on degree of SVS imply sorting before hiring, and the stylistic interaction shows that workers must undertake extra aesthetic labor (Williams and Connell 2010) to carefully manage their work self-presentations.

Chapter four delved deeper into the connection between individual behavior and organizational processes, investigating style shifting by individual workers while on the job. To illuminate the reasons for stylistic difference between social settings, I employed a framework for analysis I term “stylistic embeddedness,” drawn from organizational theories connecting institutional processes with individual-level symbolic interactionism (Hallett 2010; Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Stryker 1980). This theoretical perspective emphasized the dialectical relationship between individual action and organizational structure and function, especially within the workplace, and it foregrounded the material consequences of linguistic action. The workers at Southern Tech showed stylistic variation in FACE, DRESS, and PRIZE that reflects both their organizational position (e.g. job responsibilities, seniority) and their social category.
membership (e.g. gender). Their behavior further illustrated their embeddedness within Southern Tech’s work culture, in which Southern features have situational benefits for some workers. I framed these findings in the sociolinguistic literature surrounding style, identity, and meaning, presenting stylistic variation at work as a struggle for material and symbolic resources.

In the fifth chapter, I focused even more closely on individuals, presenting participants’ social-psychological negotiations of emotions and self-presentation surrounding linguistic identity and behavior. Using a grounded theory approach, I showed that individuals view features of a white Southern US dialect as a stigma to be managed (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001; Schwalbe and Shay 2014), with different compensatory strategies (passing, redefinition) employed depending on the degree of Southern features for the individual. Participants displayed an awareness of negative Southern stereotypes (Campbell-Kibler 2008; Carmichael 2018; Lide 2014; Niedzielski and Preston 2003), but they simultaneously harbored their own prejudices against Southern dialects, especially when used by other workers. Despite arguments that Southern Tech represented a space in which Southernness would not be penalized, I found that many participants took great pains to avoid sounding Southern on the job, due to its connotations of unprofessionalism and lack of education. I argued that these beliefs and behaviors provide the motivation for the stylistic variation seen in the two previous chapters, pressuring speakers to move away from SVS features at work.

**Implications**

These findings have implications for the placement of language within the sociological literature surrounding culture, work, and organizations. Overall, this study shows that language can act as a measurable construct for the inclusion of culture into sociological analyses. Culture has been called a “missing link” in analyses of stratification processes and social reproduction
(Lamont et al. 2014; Lareau 2015), and variationist methodologies (Eckert 2000; Labov 1972b, 2001b) combined with sociological theory and methods (Acker 2006; Bourdieu 1991; Charmaz 2014; Hallett 2003; Tilly 1999) can help to fill this gap. Since language has strong connections to identity and cultural background (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) and it plays a critical role in any interaction, it provides a window into the role of culture in organizational structure and function, as well as culture’s role in stratification processes more generally.

The stylistic behavior of workers, as well as the observed relationship between language and job skills, suggests that language may operate as a cultural mechanism to match workers into particular jobs due to either self-selection or employer bias. The data from this sample cannot provide full insight into social process on its own, but the multilevel investigation shown here highlights the influence of language at multiple interfaces between employees and firms. The findings drawn from the aggregate analysis of workers at Southern Tech reveal a structured pattern with regards to job skills and features of the SVS, where higher interpersonal and analytical skill correlate with reduced Southern features. Like other aggregate examinations of language and the labor market (Forrest and Dodsworth 2016), whether employees are hired based in part on linguistic features or self-sort into occupations based on other social or cultural factors is unclear, but the stratification pattern appears robust. The stylistic data reveals further evidence of the importance of language in the execution of job tasks, since employees deploy linguistic features differently depending on their job requirements and social position. Finally, though they have some difficulty in articulating the effects of language, participants perceive negative social (and possibly material) ramifications in response to using Southern linguistic features. Most reported that they attempted to avoid them at work, and some suggested they avoided them altogether so that they could make a better impression on others. In short,
language operates at multiple levels—it reflects workers’ positions, they use it differently when performing their jobs, and they perceive that it has importance for social evaluation. Further triangulation is required to identify the precise mechanisms at work, but this study provides strong evidence that language can be a fruitful way to examine the interface between culture and workplace processes.

Though race-associated vernaculars (Kirschenman and Neckerman 2001; Massey and Lundy 2001; Moss and Tilly 1996; Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh 1999) and dialects associated with non-native speakers (Gluszek and Dovidio 2010; Lippi-Green 1997; Rakić et al. 2011a) have received the lion’s share of sociological attention, this study shows that other social vernaculars have structural and social-psychological consequences for their speakers. The white Southerners in this study certainly experience benefits based on their racial position, but language operates as a unique intersection (Crenshaw 1989) that affects lived experience. The universal awareness of negative Southern stereotypes and the frequency of traumatic experiences due to a participant’s dialect show that speaking a vernacular, of any type, can result in social disadvantage. Whether the idea of “Southernness” connects to broader social categories like class, however, remains somewhat unclear. Participants make a strong connection between education and Southern dialect, following previous findings (Campbell-Kibler 2008; Lide 2014; Niedzielski and Preston 2003), but these exist for individuals from all class strata.

From an organizational perspective, these results show that sociolinguistic features may play a role in creating the social structure of a firm and illustrating one’s organizational position to other workers. A common thread that emerged in participant interviews was the importance of certain “front-facing” workers to possess the correct linguistic features to perform these tasks, especially those in sales, customer service, or higher management. Workers in these positions
did indeed show stylistic manipulation of salient SVS features while performing their jobs, regardless of their linguistic baseline. From a structural perspective, the perceived importance of language for certain occupations may reflect an organizing feature for firm-specific inequality regimes (Acker 2006). Having desirable linguistic features can separate jobs within the firm, resulting in exclusionary structural barriers for those with vernacular dialects. At an individual level, the importance of a managed self-presentation for these front-facing jobs results in greater emotional and aesthetic labor (Hochschild 1983; Mears 2014; Williams and Connell 2010) for workers in these positions. The stylistic dynamism required to inhabit these roles presents an extra challenge for workers, and that challenge goes relatively unacknowledged.

These findings also have ramifications for sociolinguistic theory, especially for researchers’ understanding the connection of social class and occupation to linguistic variation and change. Foundational sociolinguistic studies (Labov 1966, 1972b; Wolfram 1969) find a pattern of class stratification in use of sociolinguistic variables, but the reasoning for these differences and the process that creates them received little systematic attention. The employment of sociological theories concerning work, organizations, and inequality helps to illuminate possible reasons for class stratification in sociolinguistics, with the connection between individual and structural analyses playing a key role. Where early sociolinguistic work highlighted correlations, these data illuminate process, demonstrating through on-the-job field recordings that participants’ perceptions of socially stigmatized features motivate stylistic moves at work. These stylizations in turn create an aggregate pattern, as evidenced by the skill effects found in Chapter 3 and their higher-level interactions with speech context. Most importantly, a unified interpretation can only occur when considering the full context of the speaker, from individual background to job requirements to firm culture. Case studies of language at work
show how important the workplace can be in conditioning variation (Coupland 1980; Podesva 2011b, 2011a), but this study also highlights how firms, both in culture and structure, condition variation at both an aggregate and individual level. The importance of Southern Tech in the minds of the participants shows that occupationally-driven research in sociolinguistics may want to shift focus from the community to the workplace to elucidate the processes underlying stratification. I would further argue that this study sheds light on why class matters in the first place for linguistic variation, in that it represents the struggle over material resources. Linguistic variation and stylistic differences attributable to class ultimately constitute symbolic reminders of material access (Rickford 1986; Weber 1946). The reason this study’s deeper examination of a workplace illuminates class is that at work, the central role of remuneration, benefits, and status are impossible to escape, linguistically or otherwise.

The dynamic stylistic differences seen in the workers at Southern Tech have consequences for our understanding of the constraints on style, as well as the motivations for individual stylistic choices. Third-wave conceptions of style emphasize the individual’s role in crafting sociolinguistic meaning creatively (Eckert 2012, 2008), employing and creating indexical meaning (Siverstein 2003). Though not the focus of this study, the workers at Southern Tech make agentive choices in their use of SVS features. When presented with social situations at their jobs, they decide how to present themselves, and they choose which features to use (or not to use) when negotiating their self-presentations. However, the results in Chapter 4 emphasize the importance of social structure in conditioning, restricting, and giving meaning to these choices. A host of linguistic possibilities are open to speakers when they interact, but their choices have consequences, and those consequences are based on structural positions. For example, a woman newly hired at a firm faces far different restrictions than a man with twenty
years’ tenure, and the indexical meanings that they can and do create in these environments are read with respect to the scripts of the firm. In this respect, we can think of local meanings and social structures as providing an architectural context, within which speakers can define themselves as supportive or antagonistic, and in either case, their actions remake their surroundings. The emphasis placed on local structure in the understanding of style draws back to second-wave studies (Eckert 1989a, 2000), but it is a second-wave approach that has learned from the advances of the third wave, one that realizes that structure and agency must be analyzed in tandem.

The outcomes of this study also show that more holistic forms of inquiry can help linguists to better understand mechanisms and processes that create patterns of variation. Sociolinguistics sometimes emphasizes empirical findings and research methods over a priori theoretical inquiry, especially with regard to social class (Ash 2013), but the multilevel analysis conducted here shows the importance of theory and theory-building. The perceptions of individuals at the firm guide the directions of the research questions, and they engage in a give-and-take relationship with the analyses conducted. Macro- or meso-level patterns that may be impossible to interpret on the surface can be illuminated with the individual component, and vice versa. Many of the keystone studies in sociolinguistics (Eckert 1989a, 2000; Labov 1963) employ this method of inquiry, and they maintain relevance in that they shed light on process in a way that many other studies do not. The weakness of quantitative variationist studies is their tenuous connection to lived experience, but the reliance of sociolinguistics on recorded data in this case can be turned into a strength. Individuals’ perceptions are biased, limited, and necessarily incomplete, but they fill the gaps left by researchers’ own limited perspectives. Not all work needs to address all aspects or levels of language variation at once as these studies do,
but they show that more time spent on triangulation of process will bear great fruit for the field. In this respect, looking at the interfaces between different theoretical constructs—where the individual meets social structure, where two communities come into contact, the liminal spaces between social identities—can provide a more complete and generalizable picture of how language plays a role in the social world.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, this study has implications for social policy. Most clearly, the anxiety felt by workers about their language, as well as their fear of social and material consequences for their speech, shows that clear protections need to be put in place to protect against linguistic discrimination. This call is not a new one, as many linguistic scholars (Alim and Smitherman 2012; Lippi-Green 1997; Purnell et al. 1999) have noted that language tends to receive little attention in terms of policy, and it tends to act as an accepted way to discriminate on the basis of race, class, gender, or other inequalities. However, the clarity with which this study highlights the particular perils faced by workers with non-Standard dialects shows the importance of placing formal structures as a protective measure. Language, by virtue of its invisibility in everyday interaction, can serve to reproduce inequality, and should fall under any other non-discrimination ordinance.

Worker’s experiences at Southern Tech also show the importance of informal cultures of interaction and evaluation in both protecting workers materially (e.g. hiring) and emotionally. Cultures within firms are much more difficult to address concretely when compared to formal policy, but the safety that many speakers felt at Southern Tech argues that formal structures need to be married with more informal workplace practices. Management within companies has the power to set the tone for the ways employees interact and evaluate each other culturally, and they can foster an environment that recognizes and celebrates cultural deficiency. Even the very act
of addressing language as a cultural factor rather than one that comes from “education” or “intelligence” can help to demystify linguistic differences and create a fair playing field for workers. Ultimately, the employees themselves enact this sort of informal culture, but the organizations create the environment in which it occurs, meaning that they can take the lead in changing culture.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Though the data presented in this study can address many social and sociolinguistic issues, it also has some limitations. First, the sample provided within these empirical analyses limits the generalizability of the conclusions. For the sample drawn from Southern Tech, women volunteered much more often than men, so making strong conclusions for men’s behavior at work is somewhat tenuous. Even more important is the hidden factor of race in all of these analyses. I try to make clear that these studies are only fully generalizable to the behavior of white speakers, not all speakers of vernaculars. Some speakers of color did participate in the study, both partially and fully, and the experiences they described—sometimes informally in meetings with me, sometimes on record—make it very clear that the intersection of race makes linguistic experience more salient in everyday interactions. Where the white speakers often had difficulty discussing how language might affect them, speakers of color were quick to respond with their thoughts about the matter. Essentially, this study does not capture all the intersections of language and the social world, but it attempts to capture a few, including social class, gender, and organizational position. Future work examining stylistic variation and the workplace can fill in these gaps with a more diverse sample in terms of gender or race, making clear how generalizable these findings are across social groups.
Another major limitation of the study is its analysis of a single firm. The narrowing of focus to Southern Tech allowed for an in-depth examination of culture, structure, and individual behavior, but it is difficult to say how unusual Southern Tech may be in these respects. When beginning the study, I was not aware of the degree to which Southern Tech was embedded in local culture and institutions, and this unique aspect of the firm likely changed how speakers behaved stylistically. Without a comparison case to throw these behaviors in relief, we cannot make any strong conclusions about the specifics, however. Future studies of other firms or other dialects can help to provide a better vantage point, allowing for greater generalizability.

From a linguistic perspective, the features under examination (i.e. vowels implicated in the SVS) and their measurement may play a limiting factor in explicating the variation at work. The SVS has saliency locally, as evidenced by participants’ discussions of the features, but there is no guarantee grammatical features associated with the South (e.g. completive done, -ing vs. -in) would operate the same way. A future study could include a different set of features to determine how speakers treat them in tandem with the SVS to respond to structural constraints. For the measurement of the SVS specifically, all of the metrics employed, such as Euclidean distance or vowel diagonal, use single point measures of $F_1$ and $F_2$ to describe vowel position. As more sociophonetic methods move towards vowel dynamics, especially with a vowel system as dynamic as the SVS (Farrington, Kendall, and Fridland 2018; Risdal and Kohn 2014), different results may emerge when the entire duration of the vowel is considered. As these methods continue to be refined and advanced, future research can expand on the results presented here.
The Broader Sociological and Sociolinguistic Picture

Language is inherently social, and the social world rests on linguistic interactions. Since language plays such a fundamental role in the communication of ideas and the structure of social norms, it stands to reason that the fields of sociolinguistics and sociology should be simultaneously employed to examine the social life of language. The wide body of work on workplaces and organizations in the maintenance of inequality in sociology (Acker 2006; Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Tilly 1999) and the lack of same in sociolinguistics highlights the need for communication between the two fields. Sociolinguistics lacks the long theoretical tradition that sociology has established for analyzing the social world, yet sociology has no clear way of measuring linguistic difference beyond the discursive. Since work is such a pervasive organizing force in the social world, this study provides an ideal entry point for the beginning of a discourse between sociology and sociolinguistics.

Sociological analyses of the role of cultural knowledge in the navigation of the social world, when combined with linguistic approaches, can further this communication. Work on the culturally-based interactive strategies within families of different race and class backgrounds (Lareau 2011) offer an opportunity to integrate more rigorous linguistic analysis into the understanding of culture and family as an institution. Cultural knowledge also aids in the navigation of institutions like higher education (Lareau 2015), suggesting that sociolinguistic resources and the knowledge of their proper deployment could be analyzed within the context of first-generation college students, for example. Institutional analyses that connect individuals to schools in sociology (Bettie 2014; MacLeod 1987) bear a great deal of similarity to some ethnographic work in sociolinguistics (Eckert 1989a, 2000), but they add recognition of power and social structure. Sociolinguistic analyses in these realms may look at sociolinguistic features
and their deployment in teacher-student interactions, or how the school tracks students who speak vernacular dialects differently than those who speak more standard varieties.

The stylistic differences in the use of the SVS between jobs and broader skill groups show that language reflects social position within organizations, just as it does in broader class strata (Labov 1972b, 2001b). Workers responded to their social category membership and job requirements stylistically, suggesting a cultural aspect of identity management that workers undertake as an extra form of labor. They further interact with organizational structure and culture, perceiving some linguistic behaviors as acceptable within Southern Tech itself, but not outside of it. The understanding individuals have of Southern Tech’s culture affects who they think is an acceptable linguistic inhabitant of different firm positions. Coupled with the quantitative differences in style, these findings suggest a cultural factor in the organization of the firm. The positive results showing language as a measurable cultural factor allow for the investigation of social inequalities in different arenas, such as the educational system, in which a great deal of sociolinguistic research has already been conducted (Chun 2001; Eckert 1989a, 2000; Kirkham 2015).

Sociological and sociolinguistic research should continue in a similar vein, broadening this blending of fields from a single study to a continuing discourse. The study fills a critical niche in itself, but it raises many more questions with regard to the connection of social processes and language. While the SVS has saliency within this and other communities, would we see the same patterns for other dialects? For novel changes arising below the level of consciousness? How do race, class, and gender intersect in conditioning stylistic variation within the workplace, and how do these factors vary regionally? All of these questions are critical to illuminating the intersection between the social and the linguistic, and with the
strengths of both sociology and sociolinguistics, they lie within the realm of possible inquiry. Future research integrating both perspectives stands to benefit not only the research literature, but the lives of the individuals through resulting social advocacy.
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Appendix A: Best Models for Job Skill by Vowel

**Best model for FLEECE**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th>Vowel Diagonal at Nucleus (25%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following Labial</td>
<td>-0.091 (0.073)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Pause</td>
<td>-0.149* (0.078)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Velar</td>
<td>-0.206** (0.089)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Vowel</td>
<td>-0.045 (0.093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceding Labial</td>
<td>0.158*** (0.059)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceding Pause</td>
<td>0.299*** (0.086)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preceding Velar</td>
<td>0.556*** (0.106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceding Vowel</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration (logged)</td>
<td>0.400*** (0.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>0.091 (0.108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthyear (scaled)</td>
<td>0.067 (0.047)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>1.108*** (0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>0.607*** (0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Managerial</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Interview</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Work</td>
<td>0.353*** (0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview:Interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview:Analytical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work:Analytical</td>
<td>0.487*** (0.045)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>3.130*** (0.154)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
**Best model for KIT**

**Dependent variable:**

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<th>(3)</th>
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<td>0.115** (0.058)</td>
<td>0.138** (0.058)</td>
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<td>0.054 (0.053)</td>
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<td>0.512*** (0.116)</td>
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<td>0.129* (0.067)</td>
<td>0.130* (0.066)</td>
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<td>-0.090*** (0.033)</td>
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<td>0.528*** (0.026)</td>
<td>0.518*** (0.027)</td>
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<td>0.277*** (0.029)</td>
<td>0.267*** (0.029)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>0.050 (0.037)</td>
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*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
### Best model for FACE

**Dependent variable:**

Vowel Diagonal at Nucleus (25%)

<table>
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<td>-0.669*** (0.078)</td>
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<td>-0.480*** (0.175)</td>
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<td>0.093 (0.061)</td>
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<td>0.265*** (0.024)</td>
<td>0.227*** (0.025)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>0.285*** (0.089)</td>
<td>0.057 (0.096)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>-0.239*** (0.080)</td>
<td>-0.139* (0.083)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Interview</td>
<td>0.122*** (0.031)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Work</td>
<td>0.099*** (0.031)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview:Interactional</td>
<td>0.211*** (0.046)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work:Interactional</td>
<td>0.335*** (0.047)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview:Managerial</td>
<td>0.179*** (0.040)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work:Managerial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work:Analytical</td>
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<td>-7,460.900</td>
<td>-7,406.003</td>
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<td>14,965.800</td>
<td>14,872.010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bayesian Inf. Crit.</td>
<td>15,101.910</td>
<td>15,116.270</td>
<td>15,077.190</td>
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**Note:** *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
**Best model for DRESS**

*Dependent variable:*

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<td>-0.109* (0.057)</td>
<td>-0.111* (0.057)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.199 (0.208)</td>
<td>-0.212 (0.208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Velar</td>
<td>-0.201*** (0.058)</td>
<td>-0.201*** (0.058)</td>
<td>-0.208*** (0.058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceding Labial</td>
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<td>-0.334*** (0.055)</td>
<td>-0.336*** (0.055)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.388*** (0.065)</td>
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<td>0.584*** (0.084)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.072 (0.161)</td>
<td>-0.057 (0.161)</td>
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<td>0.050 (0.050)</td>
<td>0.054 (0.051)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.103 (0.098)</td>
<td>0.105 (0.105)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birthyear (scaled)</td>
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<td>-0.175*** (0.051)</td>
<td>-0.141** (0.059)</td>
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<td>0.276*** (0.024)</td>
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<td>0.096*** (0.024)</td>
<td>0.111*** (0.024)</td>
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<td>Analytical</td>
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<td>-0.012 (0.076)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>-0.129* (0.067)</td>
<td>-0.127* (0.072)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
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<td>0.071 (0.064)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Interview</td>
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<td>-0.097*** (0.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Work</td>
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<td>0.056* (0.029)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview:Analytical</td>
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<td>-0.121*** (0.030)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work:Analytical</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-0.118*** (0.031)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-0.183 (0.168)</td>
<td>-0.213 (0.162)</td>
<td>-0.199 (0.169)</td>
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<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-4,762.869</td>
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<td>Bayesian Inf. Crit.</td>
<td>9,679.022</td>
<td>9,701.294</td>
<td>9,668.177</td>
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*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
### Best model for TRAP

**Dependent variable:**

Vowel Diagonal at Nucleus (25%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.302*** (0.067)</td>
<td>-0.306*** (0.067)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.320 (0.215)</td>
<td>0.293 (0.216)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following Velar</td>
<td>-0.446*** (0.063)</td>
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<td>-0.456*** (0.063)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following Vowel</td>
<td>1.081* (0.571)</td>
<td>1.093* (0.571)</td>
<td>0.943* (0.569)</td>
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<td>Preceding Labial</td>
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<td>-0.566*** (0.071)</td>
<td>-0.569*** (0.071)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preceding Pause</td>
<td>-0.218*** (0.073)</td>
<td>-0.222*** (0.073)</td>
<td>-0.213*** (0.073)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-0.440*** (0.076)</td>
<td>-0.432*** (0.076)</td>
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<td>Preceding Vowel</td>
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<td>-0.109 (0.244)</td>
<td>-0.124 (0.243)</td>
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<td>-0.138** (0.058)</td>
<td>-0.138** (0.058)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>-0.104 (0.074)</td>
<td>-0.055 (0.054)</td>
<td>-0.040 (0.055)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Birthyear (scaled)</td>
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<td>-0.179*** (0.028)</td>
<td>-0.225*** (0.033)</td>
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<td>0.155*** (0.021)</td>
<td>0.169*** (0.021)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>-0.031 (0.024)</td>
<td>-0.032 (0.024)</td>
<td>-0.023 (0.024)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
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<td>-0.070* (0.039)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>0.044 (0.034)</td>
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<td>Birthyear:Interview</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview:Interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work:Interactional</td>
<td>-0.158*** (0.033)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview:Managerial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work:Managerial</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-0.940*** (0.172)</td>
<td>-0.997*** (0.170)</td>
<td>-0.998*** (0.172)</td>
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</table>

**Observations:** 8,344

Log Likelihood: -9,423.073, -9,418.046, -9,376.375

Akaike Inf. Crit.: 18,884.150, 18,880.090, 18,808.750

Bayesian Inf. Crit.: 19,017.700, 19,034.740, 19,005.570

**Note:** *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
## Best model for PRIZE

**Dependent variable:**

Vowel Diagonal at Glide (75%)

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<td>-0.312* (0.167)</td>
<td>-0.306* (0.167)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.211* (0.123)</td>
<td>0.211* (0.123)</td>
<td>0.227* (0.123)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following Vowel</td>
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<td>-0.0004 (0.130)</td>
<td>0.022 (0.130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-0.022 (0.116)</td>
<td>-0.027 (0.116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.093 (0.169)</td>
<td>0.073 (0.169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceding Velar</td>
<td>0.406*** (0.137)</td>
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<td>0.413*** (0.137)</td>
</tr>
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<td>-0.132 (0.508)</td>
<td>-0.220 (0.508)</td>
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<td>0.300*** (0.085)</td>
<td>0.298*** (0.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>0.354 (0.228)</td>
<td>0.231 (0.190)</td>
<td>0.244 (0.199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthyear (scaled)</td>
<td>0.295*** (0.101)</td>
<td>0.309*** (0.101)</td>
<td>0.198* (0.109)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.501*** (0.046)</td>
<td>0.503*** (0.046)</td>
<td>0.503*** (0.046)</td>
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<td>0.157*** (0.050)</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>-0.263** (0.116)</td>
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<td>-0.271** (0.121)</td>
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<td>0.190*** (0.045)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birthyear:Work</td>
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<td>0.054 (0.048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-1.123*** (0.315)</td>
<td>-1.002*** (0.297)</td>
<td>-1.002*** (0.303)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observations**

2,703

**Log Likelihood**

-3,541.975

**Akaike Inf. Crit.**

7,119.949

**Bayesian Inf. Crit.**

7,226.188

*Note:*

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01*
Appendix B: Interview Schedule for Sociolinguistic Interviews

Preliminaries
[Record interviewee name, interview time, date, and location]
[Interview overview; informed consent discussion and documentation]

Demographic Information
- What year were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- What schools did you go to?
- Did you attend college?
- If so, what was your degree?

Job History
What jobs have you held in the past?
For each job:
- What was your job title?
- What were your responsibilities?
- How long did you work there?
- Why did you leave?

Employment at [Southern Tech]
- When did you start working at [Southern Tech]?
- Did you start in the same position as you have now?
  - If not, can you tell me about the jobs you had before?
For each position at [Southern Tech]:
- What was your job title?
- What were your responsibilities?
- How long did you work there?

Current Employment
- How did you get hired for your current job?
- Can you walk me through a typical day at your job?
- What do you like the most about your job?
- Where do you see yourself in the future?

Network Contacts
For the next few questions, I’ll ask you to name specific people as responses
- Who do you work with most closely on a day-to-day basis?
  - What is this person’s job? (for each contact)
  - Do you know what city this person is from? (for each contact)
- Who are very good friends of yours, people whom you see socially outside of work?
  - What is this person’s job? (for each contact)
  - Do you know what city this person is from? (for each contact)
- Who would you identify as your direct superior(s) at [Southern Tech]?
o What is this person’s job? (for each contact)
o Do you know what city this person is from? (for each contact)

• Outside of your department, with whom do you discuss work-related issues?
o What is this person’s job? (for each contact)
o What department is this person in? (for each contact)
o Do you know what city this person is from? (for each contact)

Self-Recording Debriefing and Language Differences

• Did you feel like you were talking or acting differently while wearing the recorder?
• How do you feel like you spoke differently for the two different recording situations?
• Do you feel like you have an accent?
  o If not, has anyone ever told you that you did?
• Do you feel like you sometimes change how you talk depending on who you’re talking to?
• How do you think having an accent would matter for your job?
  o Would it matter for other jobs here?
• Specifically, how do you think Southern accents are treated?
• Is there anything I haven’t asked about that you think is important?
Appendix C: Booklet of Self-Recoding Instructions

Dressing for Recording

Tops:
- Wear tops with collars that do not interfere with the microphone. Scoop neck or v-neck t-shirts should be ok.
- Avoid shirts with buttons that might rub against the microphone.
- Tops can be form fitting but not so tight that the shirt fabric is constantly touching the microphone.
- Tops can be loose, but not so loose that they are constantly brushing against the microphone.
- The best fabric is soft cotton. Try to avoid rustle-y fabrics like artificial fabrics or cotton dress shirts.
- It’s most comfortable if the tops are long enough to comfortably (and not tight) cover your waist band area.

Bottoms:
- Pants or shorts with firm waistbands (i.e., not elastic) are best.
- Pants or shorts with side pockets are best.
- Skinny jeans/pants are a bit uncomfortable with the recorder in your pocket.
Preparing the microphone and the recording device

Microphone:

- Make sure the microphone switch is in the middle position (see photo).
- When the recorder settings are confirmed, and the microphone is comfortably placed on your chest, plug the small microphone cord into the “MIC” hold on the recorder (right-hand side).
Recorder (These settings should be good, but in case there are problems!):

1. **Turn on the recorder.** The power button is on the side. Push it down.
   a. **Select battery type:** Select Ni-MH. Click “OK.”
   b. **Ensure SD card is being used:**
      i. Click on “Menu”
      ii. Scroll down to “Device Menu” (wrench icon)
      iii. Click the right arrow to select “Memory select.” Press “OK.”
      iv. Scroll down to select “microSD card.” Press “OK.”
   c. **Double-check recording settings (MAKE NO CHANGES, just check):**
      i. **Check Recording level – set to “Manual”** Press “Menu.” Scroll down to “Rec Menu.” Click right to select “Rec Level.” Double-check that it is set to “Manual.” Then click “Menu” to return back.
      ii. **Check Recording mode – set to PCM 44.1kHz.** Press “Menu.” Scroll down to “Rec Menu.” Click right to select “Rec Mode.” Double-check that it is set to “PCM 44.1 kHz.” Then click “Menu” to return back.
      iii. **Check Low Cut Filter - set to “ON”**. Press “Menu.” Scroll down to “Rec Menu.” Click right to select “Low Cut Filter.” Double-check that it is set to “ON.” Then click “Menu” to return back.
Attaching the Microphone to your body

Sticking the microphone to your chest:
Make sure that the placement is about 6 inches directly below your mouth, and will be safely covered by your shirt collar.

1. Taking care not to touch the adhesive with your fingers, attach a Rycote sticker in the center of your chest
2. Attach a Velcro square to the Rycote sticker.
3. Attach the microphone such that the top of the mic is two-thirds the way up the Rycote sticker.
4. Take a felt Rycote undercover and cover the top of the microphone, attaching the cover to the underlying Velcro and adhesive.

The microphone cord:
1. Tuck an extra loop of the cord inside your bra (if applicable) for a bit of give (if the cord gets tugged, it will make a noise in the recording).
2. Bring the cord under your shirt (or put your shirt on over it), so it remains safely inside your clothing.
3. Tuck the extra loops of the cord inside your pants, giving yourself extra room for the cord to give.

The microphone power box:
1. Attach the microphone power box to the right or left side of your waistband, comfortably under a shirt if possible. It should be close enough to your side pocket that the little cord will reach the recorder in your pocket.
Operating the recorder

1. Once the microphone is securely affixed to your chest, the long cord is tucked away, and the short cord is plugged into the recorder, you’re ready to start recording!
   a. Press the red “REC” button. Double-check that the numbers are moving, and that you see a recording symbol (a black circle).
   b. Push the side power not up to “HOLD”. Now you’re good to go!

2. To pause the recorder (i.e., going to the bathroom and absolutely private conversations, etc.)
   a. Switch off the “HOLD” button. (Do NOT press the STOP button, as that will stop the recording entirely. You will notice that it is paused, because there will be a pause symbol: 

   b. Put the device back on “HOLD” and proceed with your private moment.
   c. To resume the recorder, take the device off of “HOLD” and press the “REC” button again. You should see the recording icon again (the circle) and the numbers should be moving again.
   d. Put the recorder back on “HOLD” and place it back in your pocket.

3. To stop the recorder at the end of the day
   a. Switch the recorder off of “HOLD.” Press “STOP.” You’re done!

If you accidentally “STOP” the recording during the day, don’t worry. You can press “REC” again and start the recorder again without losing data. There will just be two recording files instead of one on the disk.
Appendix D: Verbal Consent Instructions

I am participating in a research study for North Carolina State University. As part of this study, I am wearing a digital recorder and microphone to record spoken interactions, including this one. Since your voice would appear on this recording, I will record this interaction only if you give your consent. This recording will be used for academic research, and may be shared with other researchers, as well as published in academic writings or exhibited in academic conferences. Your voice will not be used as data, and your voice will be anonymized when processing the recording. You are under no obligation to consent to this, and you can withdraw your consent at any time. You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact Jon Forrest at [phone number] or [email].
If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NC State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to speak to someone independent of this research project at (919)-515-2444.
Appendix E: Job Skills and Demographics Survey

Job Tasks Survey

Start of Block: Likert Instructions Block

For the following block of questions, please answer when considering what your tasks are in an average day at work.

End of Block: Likert Instructions Block

Start of Block: Skills Block

Q1 I frequently need to coordinate groups or individuals as part of my job.

- [ ] Strongly disagree (1)
- [ ] Disagree (2)
- [ ] Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- [ ] Agree (6)
- [ ] Strongly Agree (4)
Q4 My tasks have me working with things more often than with people.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q5 Giving presentations is an important part of my job.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q6 I tend to work individually on my day-to-day tasks.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q7 I rarely need to direct the activities of others.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q8 I am often required to negotiate compromises between people.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q9 My job does not require a great deal of technical expertise.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly Agree (5)
Q10 Extensive experience in the field is very important for my work.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q11 People rarely come to me with questions about their work.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q12 A large portion of my workday is spent interacting with others.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q13 My job requires me to solve complex problems.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q14 I did not need much prior knowledge of the field to do my job.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q15 My tasks often require me to perform a leadership or management role.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q16 Listening to others is an important skill for my job.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Q17 It is important for me to be able to communicate effectively with others.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)
Q18 I needed substantial educational preparation or licensure to be hired for my job.

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

Q19 I am often faced with novel problems when doing my job.

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neither agree nor disagree (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)
Q20 A big part of my job is giving advice or instruction to others.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

End of Block: Skills Block

Start of Block: Demographic Instructions

Q26 For the following demographic questions, please answer to the best of your ability.

End of Block: Demographic Instructions

Start of Block: Demographics Block

Q22 What year were you born?

________________________________________________________________
Q23 Please list all cities you lived in until age 18. Start with the city in which you were born, then list subsequent moves, keeping them in chronological order. List only cities in which you spent at least a year.

For example:
Charlotte, NC
10
Raleigh, NC
8

☐ City 1 (1) ________________________________________________

☐ Years Lived in City 1 (2) __________________________________

☐ City 2 (3) ________________________________________________

☐ Years Lived in City 2 (4) __________________________________

☐ City 3 (5) ________________________________________________

☐ Years Lived in City 3 (6) __________________________________

☐ City 4 (7) ________________________________________________

☐ Years Lived in City 4 (8) __________________________________

☐ City 5 (9) ________________________________________________

☐ Years Lived in City 5 (10) __________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Q24 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- Some college (3)
- 2 year degree (4)
- 4 year degree (5)
- Professional degree (6)
- Doctorate (7)

Q25 What is your current job title at [Southern Tech]?

__________________________________________________________

Q26 How many years have you been employed at [Southern Tech] (rounding to the nearest full year)?

__________________________________________________________

Q27 How much income did you receive in the last fiscal year from your job at [Southern Tech]? If you are unsure of the exact amount, estimate as closely as possible.

__________________________________________________________

End of Block: Demographics Block