REASSEMBLING ETHNICITY:

STYLISTIC VARIATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH PROSODY

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

By

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Washington, D.C.
July 16, 2012
REASSEMBLING ETHNICITY:

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the social meaning of prosodic rhythm (using the Pairwise Variability Index, or PVI) and falsetto phonation in African American English (AAE), and how these paralinguistic features vary within the speech of an individual. Although prosody is viewed as a salient factor of African American English (Spears 1988, Wolfram and Thomas 2002), sociolinguists remain to address how individuals use rhythm and falsetto as discourse strategies in specific moments of interaction to project personal identities and create positions in relation to sociocultural opportunities and constraints.

In the present study, I address how sociolinguistic variation can benefit from being integrated with positioning theory and stance theory, by investigating prosodic features used by ‘Michael,’ a fourteen year old African American male from Washington, D.C. ‘Michael’ is a vivid storyteller, and the interview centers on topics involving the social issues with which he and his peers are faced in inner-city D.C., including teenage pregnancy, violence, police confrontations, and death (cf. Schilling-Estes 2007). I focus on how prosodic rhythm is used in constructed dialogue to recontextualize previous utterances in current narratives for the purpose of paralinguistic mimicry (Mitchell-Kernan 1972, Tannen 2007). Stylistic shifts in prosodic rhythm are
measured using PVI to determine how Michael’s speech fluctuates between more and less syllable-timed vs. stress-timed. Falsetto is investigated in various discursive positionings, and for this purpose falsetto is measured in terms of maximum f0 (Hz), f0 range (Hz), and duration of falsetto (ms).

The analysis shows that Michael, in general, uses prosodic style-shifts to be expressive. However, a more fine-grained analysis demonstrates that a stylistic shift in rhythm for Michael is a stance taking strategy that occurs in oppositional alignment with authoritative figures (such as police officers). In addition, the most extreme instances of falsetto in terms of maximum f0, f0 range, and duration of falsetto voice index indignation towards antagonists in narratives told by Michael and, by extension, in Michael’s real social world. The current study seeks to contribute to the understanding of African American English prosody by uncovering some of its social meanings, as revealed in intra-speaker variation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to all who have helped and inspired me during my time at Georgetown University and during the analysis and writing stages of this dissertation. First of all, I would like to thank Christine Mallinson and especially Carissa Froyum Roise for kindly sharing the data with me. Thanks to Carissa for her inspiring study of at-risk African American teenagers in Washington, D.C. I am also indebted to Michael for sharing his life and stories with me.

This project would never have been possible without my professors at Georgetown. I cannot stop singing the praises of my brilliant dissertation advisor, mentor, and friend Natalie Schilling. Thank you for your guidance and for constantly pushing me to think harder about what I write. I will never be able to repay you for all the time and energy you have invested in me. Thank you!

I am also grateful to my dissertation committee: Deborah Schiffrin, Heidi E. Hamilton, and Robert J. Podesva. They are all superior intellectual beings and genuinely nice people. I am proud to have been a student of yours. I also owe a great thank you to Ron Scollon for his inspiration, and to Erin Esch, Lissy March, and Manela Diez for great administrative support.

Allbritten, Randy Althaus, Rebecca Rubin Damari, Rebecca Sachs, Sakiko Kajino, Sydney Edlund, and Zhaleh Feizollahi.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and encouragement from my parents, Hanne and Carl, and my brother Jacob and his family. I also received great moral support from Martin Andersen, Jacob Larsen, Ole Hørning, and Sharon Millar.

Last but certainly not least, none of this would have been possible without the love and support from my wife Nanna and our children Ella and Tobias. Nanna, you have been incredibly patient, encouraging, and supportive throughout this whole process. Nothing is more important to me than my family, and therefore I dedicate this dissertation to them.
To Ella, Tobias, and Nanna with love
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CHAPTER 1. REASSEMBLING ETHNICITY

Stylistic Variation in African American English Prosody

1.1 Introduction

Since Labov’s groundbreaking study of diphthong centralization on Martha’s Vineyard in the 1960s, the study of sociolinguistic variation and change has always been faced with the pressing question of the individual’s relation to the group. Despite advances in this area, the field still lacks full understanding of how and why individuals make the linguistic choices they do in daily face-to-face interaction. In studies of African American English (AAE), most scholars have studied larger speech communities at the expense of giving attention to the individual, including, crucially, how the individual constructs social meaning through linguistic variation. Even though some aspects of African American English have been studied “ad nauseam” (Winford 2000:409), other areas such as prosody in AAE remain poorly understood, even though scholars have argued that this area constitutes a particular salient aspect of the dialect (Thomas 2007, Wolfram and Thomas 2002). Further, despite the fact that AAE is arguably the most studied dialect of English in the world, we still know relatively little about how the individual employs prosodic variables in specific moments of interaction to project and shape ethnic identity.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate prosody in African American English (AAE) and how prosodic features of this dialect are used as resources for constructing and negotiating social meaning. In particular, the aim is to investigate how and why paralinguistic features are used as resources for the construction of social meaning and identity based on fluid changes in
positionings, stances, and alignment in unfolding interaction. Such a focus places this study in line with current third wave, stylistic approaches to language variation. More specifically, this study will be carried out within an interdisciplinary nexus of discourse analysis and sociolinguistic variation, with a specific focus on intra-speaker variation. As such, the aim is to integrate two fields (variation and discourse analysis) that have often been viewed as standing in stark contrast to each other. Very few studies have used discourse analysis to explain variationist data, and integration of discourse analytical approaches into the variationist paradigm is rare. The benefit from integrating these theoretical approaches to the study of language variation is an intricate understanding of AAE as a situated speech practice that is subject to variation based on factors such as interactional changes in stances, positioning, and alignment.

The two theoretical approaches used in this dissertation to identify important interactional changes are stance theory (Du Bois 2007) and positioning theory (Harré and Langenhove 1999a). Stance is understood as a type of linguistic social action that focuses on alignment between interactants, and specifically how alignment is constructed linguistically. Alignment is a measure of the relative agreement between interactants based on how they mutually evaluate objects, people, or ideas. Thus, when interactants in turn evaluate the same thing (e.g., another person), they either converge or diverge (show agreement or disagreement) in alignment depending on how they orient themselves towards evaluated objects, people, or ideas. The evaluations are constructed by (and evidenced in) the specific linguistic choices they make. Positioning theory is similar to stance theory but it focuses on a different aspect of the relationship between interactants. Positioning theory is
a dynamic alternative to the more static concepts of ‘role,’ in which rights to talk are based on the relative power embedded in the social role (e.g., power and thus the right to talk is embedded in a teacher’s role, whereas a student’s role is associated with less power). Alignment between interactants is implied in positioning theory, since positions are relational (e.g., powerful vs. powerless), but positioning theory is more developed philosophically with respect to how people with two different social roles may potentially align with each other, whereas the theory is underdeveloped in terms of how alignment is achieved linguistically. Stance on the other hand is more developed with regards to how alignment is achieved linguistically, based on how interactants orient themselves towards objects, people, or ideas. Social role, relative power, and rights to talk are implied in stance theory, but the focus is more on alignment and how alignment is constructed through specific linguistic choices. I claim that the variationist paradigm can benefit from using these established frameworks to enhance the perspectives of what motivates an individual to make stylistic choices and display identity. Positioning theory and stance theory are discussed and illustrated in chapters 2, 4, and 5. In chapter 2, I also argue why I have chosen two different frameworks to be integrated into the variationist paradigm.

While the focus on AAE is in line with existing variationist approaches to AAE, this study departs from large-scale survey studies (first wave) in its focus on how the individual constructs social meaning in interaction (third wave), rather than focusing on the mere correlation of linguistic features and predefined social categories such as ethnicity, class, and gender (first wave). As such, my goal is to contribute to a current reassembling of the larger

---

1 The major three waves of research in sociolinguistic variation are discussed in the theoretical framework chapter.
identity category *African American*, by demonstrating that social meanings are not only group associational, but they are also constructed by individuals in specific moments of interaction, and hence the global and the local work in unison. By focusing on a case study, the aim of this dissertation is to add knowledge to how the ethnic category *African American* has been assembled in the past with an overwhelming focus on the aggregate patterning of variables and their group associational meanings. To reassemble the ethnic category, we need more studies of the local to understand how language works at the group level, but crucially how language may change based on individual agentive choices in social interaction. Before delving further into the current study, my intended contribution to the field of sociolinguistics may be summed up as follows:

1. **Analytical focus**: African American English prosodic features as situated and fluid linguistic practices. The focus is on how linguistic variation is used as a resource to create meaning in the social world. Hence, the focus is placed on *social meaning*.

2. **Method**: An integrated *third wave* approach using quantitative and qualitative techniques to investigate *how* and *why* particular prosodic features of AAE occur in specific stances, positionings and interactional moments.

3. **Location**: African American English in Washington, D.C. My goal is to contribute to revive the interest in the study of AAE in Washington, D.C. and build on the foundation that was initiated by the groundbreaking studies of Fasold (1972) and Loman (1967, 1975).

The data for this dissertation comes from the speech of ‘Michael,’ a fourteen year old African American male from Washington, D.C. The data is a one-hour interview, which was conducted as part of a larger sociological

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2 ‘Michael’ is a pseudonym. Throughout the rest of the dissertation, I will write the name Michael without quotation marks.
study (Froyum Roise 2004) of at-risk youth in Washington, D.C. The current case study is situated against the backdrop of numerous survey studies of AAE, as well as a growing body of AAE research in Washington, D.C., and therefore Michael’s speech will not be viewed in a social and linguistic vacuum. Because of their longstanding focus on large-scale studies (including studies of AAE), variationists still knows relatively little about the underlying principles that motivate style shifts, including shifts within interviews, and especially from an interactional perspective. Consequently, one of the intentions behind the integration of discourse analysis and sociolinguistic variation is to contribute to the further formulation of general variationist principles by showing how variables become meaningful and pattern based on specific interactional moments. As such, the present study sheds light on some of the general assumptions about the individual’s relation to the speech community.

The current study investigates the social meanings of falsetto phonation and prosodic rhythm (using the Pairwise Variability Index) in African American English, and how these prosodic features vary within the speech of a single individual. Falsetto speech has traditionally been linked to African American men3, whereas rhythm is claimed to be a linguistic resource of AAE that contributes to the construction of AAE verbal strategies, such as marking (mimicry through the use of constructed dialogue for the purpose of mocking a person). However, our understanding of these variables is limited – especially in terms of the multiple layers of group associational and interactional meanings that are embedded in these variables. I argue in this dissertation that the study of sociolinguistic variation can benefit from being

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3 In recent studies, falsetto phonation has been linked to other social groups, which I address in chapters 3 and 4.
integrated with theories of discourse analysis\textsuperscript{4} that will not only enhance our understanding of the complex meanings of particular linguistic variables, but focusing on the individual in a case study approach will also bring insights to general principles of sociolinguistic variation. The focus on stylistic variation, which in my case includes the intersection of a quantitative approach to investigating suprasegmental features with positioning theory/stance theory (to identify interactional moments), will be used to unpack the identity category \textit{African American}. My claim is that stylistic variation in AAE can be explained based on these interactional moments. In addition, I argue that the variationist paradigm will benefit from moving the focus to the dynamic interactional ties between people rather than focusing only on correlations of variables and predetermined demographic categories. To investigate my claim, the study of falsetto phonation is guided by the following research questions:

1. How often does falsetto occur and how is it distributed in the interview?
2. What are the social meanings of falsetto based on how it is used in the discourse context?

The study of prosodic rhythm is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference in rhythm (PVI) between constructed dialogue within narratives and non-dialogue narrative discourse?
2. Does rhythm in a narrative depend on speaker alignment?
3. What are the social meanings of rhythmic style shifts in narratives?

As a preview to the analysis, the study demonstrates that Michael in general uses prosodic style-shifts to be expressive. However, a detailed analysis of rhythm in interaction demonstrates that a stylistic shift in rhythm for Michael is a stance-taking strategy that occurs in oppositional alignment with

\textsuperscript{4} Falsetto speech is investigated with positioning theory (Harré and Langenhove 1999a), and prosodic rhythm is investigated with stance theory (Du Bois 2007).
authoritative figures (such as police officers), and that falsetto can be a way of showing indignation towards antagonists either in face-to-face interaction or in the story world. Consequently, I demonstrate that falsetto and rhythmic style shifts have a core expressive meaning, but the most expressive cases are associated with indignant stances and oppositional positioning in interaction, and hence the meaning becomes more specified in particular moments of discourse. The linguistic style that emerges from a skillful manipulation of paralinguistic features creates an ideological link between Michael and the sociocultural challenges he faces in the urban landscape. As such, Michael’s linguistic production demonstrates how his life at the local level of interaction is connected to global societal challenges found in African American neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. specifically and in U.S. inner cities generally. These challenges include poor career opportunities, poverty, crime, and discrimination caused by a history of racism and residential segregation (see, e.g., Labov 2008, 2010). Before I continue with the current study, it is important to situate the case study within the history and scholarly tradition of studies on African American English, which is the topic of the following sections.

1.2 History and Definitions of African American English

AAE holds a special place in sociolinguistic literature, since AAE was and still is one of the most stigmatized varieties of English spoken in the U.S. Since African Americans historically have been viewed as belonging to a subordinate social group, the linguistic variety (or varieties) spoken by this group has as an extension also been viewed as being subordinate or plainly
‘bad English.’

AAE’s subordinate position was highlighted during the Oakland controversy in 1996, in which a (misunderstood) school board recognized the need to teach AAE (called Ebonics at that time) as a way to acquire a more ‘standard’ variety of American English (Wardhaugh 2002:346). Sociolinguists have always recognized AAE as a legitimate variety of English with its own internal linguistic structure. In fact, much of the impetus behind initiating sociolinguistic studies of AAE was due to social concerns involving issues such as dialect discrimination.

AAE has traditionally been studied from synchronic and diachronic perspectives. While there is an overwhelming consensus in the field regarding the current (synchronic) linguistic structure of AAE, there is great disagreement concerning its origin (diachronic), which Winford (2000:409) argues has been studied “ad nauseam.” The two most prominent views of AAE’s historical development are the dialectologist or Anglicist view (e.g., Kurath 1949, McDavid and McDavid 1951), in which AAE is viewed as an English dialect, compared to a creolist position, arguing that AAE developed from a creole originating from West African languages (see, e.g., Rickford 1999, and Rickford and Rickford 2000 for a discussion). Current investigations involve whether or not African American English is converging with or diverging from European American English – that is, are the dialects becoming more similar or more distinct? Although inquiry into the origin of AAE is interesting in and of itself, this dissertation takes a synchronic

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5 When a language variety linked to a socially subordinate group is viewed as being linguistically deficient rather than a neutral case of language variation, it is referred to as the principle of linguistic subordination (Lippi-Green 1997).

6 Obviously, there are earlier cases, in which AAE has been in the national spotlight, such as in the case of the famous ‘Ann Arbor Decision’ in 1979. In this case, parents of children attending Martin Luther King School in Ann Arbor, MI sued the school board for not recognizing AAE as a legitimate variety of English that differs from the ‘standard’ variety to such a degree that the children had been denied an equal opportunity for learning how to read. A federal court favored the parents’ point of view.
approach to the study of AAE, focusing more on the current social meanings of AAE variation rather than issues of language variation as it relates to language change.

The two most common terms used today in the variationist paradigm to refer to the dialect spoken by Americans of African descent primarily are *African American English* and *African American Vernacular English*. I use the somewhat broad term *African American English* (AAE) throughout this dissertation. The term refers to the systematic and rule-governed variety of American English, most often spoken by people of African descent in North America – i.e. people who are socialized culturally and linguistically in North America in communities in which the dialect is spoken (see, e.g., Morgan 1998)⁷. This definition is highly practice oriented and favors a social constructionist view in which ethnicity is viewed as something people *do* through social interaction with various cultural tools, such as language, and not as something people *are* (Fought 2006). As such, genetics or phenotype (i.e., the clustering of physical features, such as skin color) does not determine whether or not a person speaks AAE. Further, I see no logical distinction between the terms *race* and *ethnicity*. Traditional definitions have attributed race to physical features, whereas ethnicity has referred to cultural phenomena (Bobo 2001). While there often is a correlation between phenotype and AAE in the U.S., scientists have not been able to find any convincing biological differences between so-called races (Zelinsky 2001), which have led scientists (this author included) to believe that the distinction must be humanly created – i.e. as a social construction. Until scientists, if ever, find a meaningful distinction, I assume no distinction between race and ethnicity.

⁷ Note that ‘descent’ is not a requirement for speaking African American English, since a person can be socialized culturally and linguistically to speak AAE without being of African descent.
and I will use a term such as ‘ethnoracial’ (Modan 2007) to recognize the blurry distinction. Making no distinction between the terms is not the same as saying that skin color is unimportant in the social world. In fact, in-group/out-group ideology is often formed based on group perceptions of phenotypes.

I write AAE without a hyphen (i.e. African American English and not African-American English) to give more weight to the African aspect, although I by no means will classify AAE as a separate language as other scholars have done in the past (see, e.g., Mufwene 2001). Giving more credence to the African heritage should be understood as a recognition of the historical influences of African culture on the development of the dialect. The origin of AAE is constantly being debated, and I favor a term that is open to scholarly advances in this area of AAE studies.

In line with Spears (1998) and Morgan (1998), I will use the term African American English and view it as encompassing several varieties of Standard African American English (SAAE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE), thus recognizing that AAE comprises a variety of styles. Whereas previous definitions would place AAE on a continuum ranging from formal to informal, I will demonstrate that AAE is a multilayered variety that varies along a number of dimensions in various interactional moments and according to various types of alignments between interactants, arguing that stylistic variation in AAE is not easily explained based simply on level of formality. Previous scholars have noted that SAAE displays many features that approximate standard varieties of European American English, while differing mainly in the prosodic system. The most vernacular varieties, in turn, contain many of the phonological and
morphosyntactic features that have been linked to African American ethnicity in the variationist paradigm. Although this dissertation focuses on the speech of an inner city adolescent male, I still prefer the term African American English, thus avoiding ‘vernacular,’ since the individual studied in this dissertation, Michael, displays significant intra-speaker variation and surely has many varieties of AAE depending on the domain of use and local interactional goals. When I do state that Michael uses vernacular speech, he uses many phonological and morphosyntactic features associated with African American ethnicity.

AAE has never been easy to define, nor has it been easy to agree on a label for the language variety(ies) in question, since a conglomeration of linguistic and social factors have determined the choice of terminology. Green (2002:5) argues that the “label has often been related to the social climate,” and summarizes a list of names that have been used to refer to AAE in the past, such as:

- Negro Dialect
- Nonstandard Negro English
- Negro English
- American Negro Speech
- Black communications
- Black dialect
- Black folk speech
- Black street speech
- Black English
- Black English Vernacular
- Black Vernacular English
- Afro American English
- African American English
- African American Language
- African American Vernacular English

To this list, we can add the most common term used in public domains, *Ebonics*, and Alim’s (2004) *Black American English* to mention just a few. With regards to the social climate, the naming of AAE has been highlighted during public controversy for scholars and non-scholars alike, in which case ideology tends to shape people’s orientation towards AAE. For instance, terms such as *Ebonics, African American Language, and African Language Systems* have been linked with Afrocentrist convictions (e.g., Smith 1997), arguing that AAE is
derived solely from West African languages, whereas terms such as Black English and African American Vernacular English are sometimes seen as more “Eurocentric” (Smith 1997), attributing English as the primary language of origin. However, many linguists, such as Rickford (1999:xxii) find no orientation bias in the term African American Vernacular English and consider both Anglicist and Creolist influences on the development of the dialect.

While linguists have also followed the social climate when defining AAE and moved away from terms that today would signal overt racism (e.g., Negro English), linguistic concerns have included how broad or narrow the definition of AAE should be (Lippi-Green 1997). For example, Labov’s (1972) Black English Vernacular has mainly been associated with street language of inner city adolescent males, although Labov intended the term to be quite broad and include varieties of AAE extending from the creole Gullah spoken off the coast of South Carolina to “the most formal and accomplished literary style” (Labov 1972:xiii), although it is unclear what he means by accomplished literary style, as many accomplished literary styles rely on AAE. Smitherman (1997) uses the term U.S. Ebonics (USEB) in a similar way to Labov, as she includes vernacular varieties and Gullah, but not Caribbean or African creoles.

While scholars have grappled with defining and labeling AAE, an equally important aspect is how the users view their language variety. For example, Alim (2004) uses the term Black American English, since most community members in his study refer to themselves as Black and not African American. The American aspect in Black American signals the U.S. context (in Alim’s 2004 study, the U.S. context was California) and a recognition of
multiple ethnic groups entailed in the term Black. Mufwene (2001) argues that most speakers of Gullah would classify themselves as speakers of English, whereas many linguists would classify Gullah as a creole more so than a dialect of English. Yet, other scholars (e.g., Williams 1997) view Gullah as a dialect of English and Black English and Ebonics as accents, although most modern day linguists would argue that AAE varies from an unmarked American English standard in other linguistic areas than pronunciation. In short, there is a difference between how the general public, linguists, and speakers classify AAE.

Finally, there is also a generational gap in the perception of AAE varieties. Rickford (1992:190) argues that “black teenagers are less assimilationist,” while insisting on acting and speaking a certain way that often deviates from a perceived normative behavior of the white middle-class. Standing in contrast are older generations “affected by the demands of the workplace,” favoring a more standard variety, especially in professional settings. Accordingly, the non-assimilationist members of the younger generation may favor a more vernacular definition of AAE, where older assimilationists would lean towards an English definition.

It is evident that many factors play a role in defining African American English, including ideological, geographical, social, linguistic, and generational, while attending to in-group and out-group concerns. Most linguists have focused on the narrow definition of AAE, involving lower socioeconomic classes and basic structural deviations from EAE. The most common term today is arguably African American Vernacular English, but I will use another common term African American English or AAE throughout this dissertation for the reasons provided above. One issue is defining and
naming the variety; another concern involves the current status of the variety, which is the topic of the next section.

1.3 The Current Status of African American English

AAE is the most studied dialect of American English, at least since the 1960s, but sociolinguists have continually approached the study of AAE in similar ways, as the study of AAE has almost become synonymous with traditional variationist studies (first wave). For the current purpose, I address what we do know about AAE in order to highlight some of the issues that remain underexamined.

1.3.1. African American Homogeneity in Sociolinguistics

When it comes to African American communities, there are many varieties of AAE based on region (Wolfram and Thomas 2002), gender (Morgan 2003) and socioeconomic status (Wolfram 1969, Wolfram and Fasold 1974), but most traditional studies focused on vernaculars spoken by inner city youths (see, e.g., Labov 1972) – an urban tradition that seems to have carried over into more current studies of the language of hip hop (Alim 2002) and issues of crossing (e.g., Bucholtz 1999, 2011, Cutler 1999). This urban tradition has been crucial in the quest to highlight AAE as a legitimate, structured variety of American English based on aggregate patterns of variation. While Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) rightly point out the striking similarities in AAE varieties across geographical and social boundaries, most studies of AAE in the past have viewed linguistic features associated with AAE as direct indicators of the social category African American, without paying much attention to variation within the speech of a single individual. Accordingly,
the goal in this dissertation is to investigate intra-speaker variation with the basic assumption that *African American* is something people *do* through interaction and not something people *are* (see, e.g., Fought 2006). In the words of Winford (2000:410-411):

> In general, narrowness of focus has resulted in a poor understanding of how choices of language within the African American community function both as markers of group identity and group values and as communicative strategies to be manipulated for transactional ends in conversation.

This dissertation will take this argument as a starting point and depart from the often replicated notion that sociolinguistic variables associated with African American ethnicity index group membership directly. In fact, recent studies of falsetto speech (Podesva 2007, Podesva and Lee 2010) suggest that variables, including variables of AAE, are multifaceted rather than indexing a single entity. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004), previous studies on language and identity were criticized for linking variables directly to abstract demographic categories, since the same linguistic features were found in connection with more than one social category. For example, released /t/ has been linked to nerd girls in Northern California (Bucholtz 1996), Orthodox Jews (Benor 2002), and gay speech (Podesva et al. 2002). However, drawing upon the work of Silverstein (1976, 2003) and Ochs (1992), I adopt the view that linguistic features directly index or link to the interactional context rather than to demographic category. For example, the aforementioned nerd girls hyperarticulated /t/ to directly index precision and an intellectual linguistic style; in turn, this style may index a nerd category indirectly. Accordingly, the

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8 Originally, an index was conceived as the relationship between a sign and a referent (Pierce 1931-58). In the variationist paradigm, scholars have primarily argued that high usage levels of a variant (e.g., rlessness) (the sign) would indicate an inherent relationship between the sign and group membership (the referent). As such, they argued that there was a direct relationship between variants and membership in the social groups with which they are associated.
link between form and function is indirect, and linguistic features index (or point to) interactional stances and positions, where the features will gain meaning. As an extension, the meaning that is created by the employment of variables in interactional stances may point to larger identity categories such as African American. From such a point of view, the notion of orders of indexicality (i.e. both direct and indirect) allows for multiple links between features and identities. The crucial issue is to investigate where the variables occur in interactional stances, and what other stylistic features they co-occur with.

1.3.2. Methodological Homogeneity in Studies of AAE

Recent advances in social constructionist perspectives such as Schilling-Estes’ (2004a) integration of variation methods and discourse analysis have proven sociolinguistic variables (in fact variables associated with African American group membership) to be sensitive to topic of conversation (see also Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994), and in turn that changes in topic often induces style shifts. In addition, Podesva (2007) showed in a case study of a single speaker (Heath) how the stylistic use of falsetto phonation varied greatly according to the social situation and the speakers with which he interacted. In short, current research shows that variables vary according to situation, topic, and single conversational turns⁹, which demonstrates that much remains to be learned about intra-speaker variation and in particular AAE. As a consequence, I integrate stylistic variation and discourse analysis to address some of the issues that Winford (2000:411) identifies as the biggest gaps in AAE studies: 1. Everyday interactions; 2. Situated language use; 3.

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⁹ Additional factors will be discussed in chapters two and three.
Conversational norms; 4. Communicative strategies; and 5. Genres of talk. In connection with Winford’s list, I would argue that one of the major areas that remain underexamined is the area of prosody and intonation, and how these features may contribute to the verbal strategies Winford mention, such as loud-talking and marking to mention a few. Accordingly, this dissertation investigates underexplored areas of AAE.

1.3.3. Potential Suprasegmental Resources in African American English

The current status of AAE’s linguistic structure is not as controversial as its origin. Among the most important findings, scholars have found that AAE diverges from other dialects of American English, especially European American English, in a number of systematic ways. While it is not instructive to list all the features here, some of the most important phonological and morphosyntactic AAE features include /l/ vocalization; monophthongization of the /ay/ diphthong; r-lessness in post-vocalic environments; absence of plural-, possessive-, and third person present singular –s; zero copula; and habitual be (see, e.g., Green 2002, Rickford 1999, Rickford and Rickford 2000 for an overview of features). Despite the many studies of AAE, the grammatical system of AAE tends to be underexamined according to Winford (2000). He argues, “many components of AAVE grammar, such as habitual be, perfect done, and remote perfect BEEN, not to mention most features of sentence structure, remain relatively untouched by variationist analysis” (Winford 2000:410).

To Winford’s list, I would add the poorly understood area of AAE suprasegmental features and how suprasegmental features may contribute to the construction of African American verbal strategies. Since the primary
focus in this dissertation is on prosodic features of AAE, I shall mention some previous findings here that will lay the ground for which linguistic features the field would benefit from studying in specific interactional moments.

Tarone (1973) noted in the early 1970s that suprasegmental features of AAE, including intonation and prosody, are just as characteristic of the dialect as phonological and morphosyntactic features. Many researchers have pointed to a perceptual intonation divergence between SAE and AAE. Rickford carried out a perception study in the early 1970s (see Rickford and Rickford 2000:102), in which respondents were asked to identify a speaker’s ethnicity, African American or European American, based on spoken language samples. Ethnicity was identified correctly in 86% of all cases. The respondents used words such as “inflection,” “variation in pitch and rhythm,” “intonation,” and “tone” to identify African Americans. Differences in pitch range from this study were confirmed acoustically in Rickford (1977). Further, Foreman (2000) suggests also that intonation plays a role in ethnic identification, while Thomas and Reaser (2004) in a newer study also imply that voice quality may contribute to the identification of AAE. In sum, research has demonstrated that there is a perceptual difference between Standard American English and African American English, and that perceptions seem to be based on cues that go beyond segmental and morphosyntactic features.

Many African Americans do use so-called standard grammar and pronunciation. Yet, Wolfram and Fasold (1974) argue that intonation cues may be the deciding factor that gives away the ethnicity of some standard sounding African Americans. This variety of AAE is called Black Standard

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10 See Thomas and Reaser (2004) for a comprehensive overview of perception studies involving AAE.
11 Sometimes referred to as European American English.
English or Standard African American English (e.g., Spears 1988, 1998; Smitherman 2000), a variety of AAE in which speakers use standard grammar, primarily in professional domains, but still sound ‘Black.’ The divergence from SAE is attributed to intonation patterns and voice quality rather than segmental phonology, and Spears (1988) argues that non-morphosyntactic features, including intonation, rank higher as linguistic cues in perception tests. As such, it is striking that AAE suprasegmental features in general remain such a relatively under-examined line of inquiry, since intonation and voice quality appear to be highly salient factors in the perception of AAE. On the other hand, equipment for carrying out reliable acoustic analyses has not been available to most researchers until recently, and the scalar, continuous nature of prosody has not been a primary concern for variationists interested in the study of segmental phonological variables. However, since prosody is widely recognized as a salient aspect of AAE (Wolfram and Thomas 2002, Thomas 2007), scholars are increasingly shifting the focus to include prosodic concerns in addition to variation at the segmental level.

Despite the aforementioned gaps in the sociolinguistic literature, some studies have addressed the issue of AAE intonation. The major differences between African American and European American suprasegmental features include:

(1) Differences in stress patterns and rhythm: Varieties of AAE tend of have more primary stresses and continuing shifts between high and low pitches, caused by a higher frequency of primary stresses (Loman 1967, 1975; Tarone 1973). In addition, speakers of AAE show more pitch accents on the first syllable in a sentence (Thomas 1999), and

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12 As such, Spears argues that linguistic features are placed in a hierarchy of perceptual saliency.
13 Generally speaking, the English language tends to have one primary stress, or a syllable that carries the highest pitch (tonic syllable), in a single intonational phrase (see, e.g., Ladefoged 2001:100). AAE appears to have more of such primary stresses, or tonic syllables, in general compared to European American English. That is, AAE often has more than one primary stress in an intonational phrase.
front shifting of stress in two-syllable words such as police and Detroit has been noted by Baugh (1983), Wolfram and Fasold (1974), and Smitherman (1977), and in three-syllable words by Green (1990), i.e. protector is pronounced PROtector. African Americans and European Americans used to have distinct rhythmic patterns, although the dialects are currently converging (Thomas and Carter 2006). In addition, the verbal strategy marking (using constructed dialogue to mock a person) may be performed with paralinguistic signals, such as changes in rhythm and pitch (Mitchell-Kernan 1972).

(2) Greater pitch range: African American English has a greater pitch range in addition to the shifting stress patterns (Mitchell-Kernan 1972, Tarone 1973, Loman 1975, Jun, S. and C. Foreman 1996, Feagin 1997, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). The high pitches often shift into falsetto, especially for men (Johnson 1971, Loman 1975, Alim 2004, Schilling-Estes 2004b, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Mitchell-Kernan (1972) argues that the high pitch is used in ‘loud-talking’ (i.e. when an utterance in an interaction between two people is intended for a third party), which suggest that the increased pitch level is used in a particular style or register, or for a specific discourse function. Finally, European Americans tend to show a greater fall in pitch throughout the course of a sentence (Thomas 1999).

(3) Lower fundamental frequency: African American males have a lower fundamental frequency when using modal voice (Hollien and Malcik 1962, Wheat and Hudson 1988, Walton and Orlikoff 1994). Accordingly, the low modal voice and the high pitches, including falsetto, contribute to the overall greater pitch ranges.

(4) Variation in question formations: African American English differs from European American English in some question formations: AAE has more level tones at the end of yes/no questions (Green 1990, Foreman 1999), while wh-questions in AAE tend to have falling intonation due to a high pitch accent on the initial wh-word (Loman 1967, 1975). In wh-questions, yes/no questions, and simple declaratives, African Americans exhibit greater variation in boundary tones (Jun and Foreman 1996). Finally, African Americans often rely on rising intonation instead of subject/verb inversion in question formations (Rickford and Rickford 2000). Rickford and Rickford recognize that many SAE speakers also rely on intonation in colloquial contexts. While the non-inverted question may have its origin in AAE, it is widely used in SAE today.

(5) Dependent clauses without if can be marked with non-final intonation patterns as in “You able to do it, just do it” for “If you’re able to do it, just do it” (Tarone 1972, 1973).

From this overview of the current state of AAE research, it is evident that a study of African American intra-speaker variation could fill some gaps in the
sociolinguistic literature and shed light on these more general group findings. In addition, Washington D.C. as a community is also an underexamined area in sociolinguistics, and my proposed in-depth case study of a single individual may contribute to the growing body of AAE research in the city. Washington, D.C. as a community is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

1.4 The Need for Stylistic Research in African American English

The overarching goals of the present study are thus to study the suprasegmental features that may participate in constructing the identity category African American and to augment the longstanding focus on social groups and categories in the variationist paradigm with close-up examination of individuals and their linguistic usages (Johnstone 1996, 2000). I will also of necessity include analysis of segmental features, to paint a fuller picture of the constellation of features that are used to construct styles and identities by speakers of AAE. We need more studies that connect the local with the global in studies of AAE. The traditional focus in the variationist paradigm has been on how variables take on group associational meanings based on the quantitative patterning of variants, but scholars taking a third wave approach (e.g., Eckert 2005), including this study, have put the focus on the individual to explain how dialects change based on ideological choices made in face-to-face interaction. The intention of this study is not to disregard large-scale studies by any means. On the contrary, the goal is to offer insights into individual stylistic choices and show that linguistic meanings are not always group associational but are also co-constructed between interactants in social interaction. As such, this study should be viewed as a complement to survey studies, focusing on local linguistic usages between interactants in order to
contribute to our understanding of why variants display the group-based patterns observed in large-scale studies. In short, the goal is to demonstrate how individual and ideologically motivated stylistic choices may be connected to group styles or motivate language change in a speech community.

The study of intra-speaker variation has proven to be a highly successful theoretical approach to studying the shaping and negotiation of local identities across contexts. The focus on stylistic variation, which in my case includes the intersection of a quantitative approach to investigate suprasegmental features and positioning theory/stance theory (to identify interactional moments), will be used to unfold the identity category African American. Accordingly, I intend to connect quantitative techniques from sociolinguistic variation with the practice approach to social interaction. Variation and discourse have often been viewed as standing in stark contrast to each other (e.g., Labovian vs. Hymesian sociolinguistics), but I will adopt Coupland’s (2007:8) view that “there is no inherent clash between ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ levels of variation analysis.” Thus, my research agenda belongs to the “dialect in discourse” area of inquiry (Coupland 2007:9), and Eckert (2005) has also argued that the three waves of sociolinguistic variation are interconnected and not easily separable, which I address in the theoretical chapter (chapter 2). In fact, I would argue that approaching linguistic and social phenomena from multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives (e.g., by combining qualitative and quantitative techniques) provides the researcher with additional tools for understanding linguistic variation and the social meaning conveyed in face-to-face interaction.
Based on the standpoint above, I will approach the identity category African American from a social constructionist point of view and base my research within the emerging focus on language and identity, in which identity is not only constructed in relation to larger demographic categories, but it is also more subtly displayed in local and “ethnographically specific cultural positions” in addition to “temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005:592). Several theories and frameworks about the ‘self’ have been developed to account for how the individual displays identity in interaction – among these, the frameworks mentioned earlier, positioning theory (Harré and van Langenhove 1999), and stance theory (Du Bois 2007). These approaches are discussed in detail in chapter 2 and operationalized in chapters 4 and 5.

1.5 Michael and the Case Study
The data used in this dissertation is a sociological interview with Michael, a fourteen-year-old African American from Washington, D.C. The interview was conducted in 2003 as part of a sociological study of African American participants in a summer day camp called Emmaus for at-risk youth in Washington, D.C. (Froyum Roise 2004). The larger study consisted of participant observation of 65 preadolescents and adolescents and 20 interviews (11 girls and 9 boys), and Michael was one of the nine boys interviewed in the study. The purpose of the study was to investigate how the youth coped with substandard living conditions and daily challenges in Washington, D.C. that are found especially in the Ward 7 and 8 areas of the city. These areas have extremely high unemployment rates (in fact, some of the highest rates in the U.S.) and are in general faced with extreme poverty.
and crime. In the interview with Michael, some of the substandard living conditions and challenges he talks about include fighting, run-ins with law enforcement, and risky sexual behavior. He reports that he lives with his mother and grandmother, and his father is in jail.

The reason for using the data from the sociological study instead of a traditional sociolinguistic study is the fact that, although the interview is seemingly more controlled by the interviewer than a sociolinguistic interview, Michael is a highly agentive individual who often takes control of the interaction nonetheless. In other words, although the interviewer in this case (a European American female graduate student) persistently seeks answers to a set list of questions and attempts to control topics, Michael often goes off on tangents to talk about topics of concern to him even though the interviewer tries to make him stay on certain topics. In addition, he is one of the most eager storytellers from the study. Often, he takes topic control to tell narratives about fighting, run-ins with law enforcement, going to prison, and dating (Schilling-Estes 2006). As such, the data for this study deviates slightly from canonical sociolinguistic studies. The interviews in the sociological study of which Michael’s interview is part of are on the surface much more structured and interviewer-controlled than a typical sociolinguistic interview, since the interviewer is interested in obtaining specific information more so than eliciting narratives and so-called vernacular speech by making the participant feel comfortable. However, Michael often takes topic control and holds the floor to tell stories, and such agentive behavior is an ideal site for investigating the fluid construction of identity (Eckert 2000). Further, as I argue in the analysis chapters, chapter 4 and 5, the interviewer’s questioning technique and persistence in attempting to obtain certain types of information
actually serve to bring out particularly oppositional stances from Michael, which is evident in his speech. These oppositional stances occur in certain moments in the interview when the interviewer assigns certain values to Michael’s character, which Michael opposes. As such, the interview technique that is designed to elicit specific responses rather than making the participant feel comfortable as in canonical sociolinguistic interviews brings out certain attitudes and as a result linguistic features that one would not expect to find in an interview with an obvious community outsider such as Michael’s interviewer. In addition, Michael displays great intraspeaker variation in his use of prosodic features that have been linked to African American ethnicity. These features include falsetto phonation and variation in rhythm – the two variables studied in this dissertation.

A further reason for using data from Froyum Roise’s sociological study is that gathering data in Southeast Washington, D.C. poses great challenges to community outsiders (and even insiders), since this area of Washington, D.C. has a history of residential segregation and poverty that unfortunately has made the area a place with a flourishing informal economy, in which the streets are filled with drugs and violent crimes\(^\text{14}\). Accordingly, I am lucky to have the opportunity to work on data provided by a fourteen-year-old adolescent from the Ward 7 and 8 areas of Washington, D.C. who is willing to share personal stories of the challenges he faces in the urban landscape on a daily bases. While the urban tradition in AAE has revealed great insights into impoverished and crime ridden areas in the U.S., there is a long way to go before society can overcome the struggles created by a history of residential segregation and institutional racism. I hope this study will inspire researchers.

\(^{14}\) In chapter 3, I return to a discussion of the sociocultural challenges found in Southeast Washington, D.C. and especially in Ward 7 and 8 where the participants from the sociological study come from.
to conduct large-scale studies of Southeast Washington, D.C. and will prepare them for what to expect in this part of the city. This dissertation tells the story of endangered people (Labov 2008, 2010) in Washington, D.C., while shedding light on how language can be used as a stylistic resource for resisting a life of sociocultural constraints.

1.6 Outline of Chapters
Chapter 1 has identified some of the major gaps in the study of African American English prosody, and chapter 2 is concerned with developing the general theoretical framework for integrating sociolinguistic variation and discourse analysis. The discourse analytical frameworks are positioning theory and stance theory. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research design and methods, including a general description of Michael, his background in Washington, D.C., and the interactional setting from which his narratives and responses are extracted. Chapter 4 addresses the distribution and social meaning of falsetto phonation, in which specific moments of interactional positionings will be correlated with instances of falsetto speech. The social meanings will be inferred from the interview discourse. Chapter 5 is an analysis of prosodic rhythm in AAE using the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI) as a measure for finding rhythmic style shifts between stress-timed and syllable-timed speech. The social meanings of rhythmic shifts are proposed. Chapter 6 is the conclusion, which sums up the study and potential insights, while suggesting further directions in the study of African American English prosody.
1.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 has set the general stage for the study, and how the rest of the dissertation is structured. Most previous studies on AAE have focused on larger speech communities, without paying much attention to how the individual either reproduces or departs from larger community patterns of variation. Scholars have mostly focused on diachronic concerns related to the origins of AAE and whether or not AAE and EAE are currently converging or diverging from previous stages. The current study investigates prosodic features and how one individual, Michael, uses features of AAE to accomplish specific interactional goals in unfolding interaction. The focus is placed on the social meanings of variables at the local level with an eye to providing insights about how these local linguistic choices inform our understanding of large-scale patterns of variation, as well as motivations for linguistic change. Finally, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the field of sociolinguistics and the study of AAE by focusing on the social meanings of AAE prosodic features and variation within one individual in an attempt to reassemble the often taken for granted identity category African American.
2.1 Introduction

The current chapter presents the overall theoretical framework for the dissertation, which is an integration of methods in sociolinguistic variation and discourse analysis. As such, this dissertation takes a third wave approach, focusing on stylistic variation and discourse analysis as undertaken from the perspective of positioning theory and stance theory. Such a theoretical fusion is useful for analyzing how variables are used in interaction and how these usages come to index\textsuperscript{15} enduring meanings associated with stances, character traits, and social groups. The goal is thus to switch the focus from a somewhat essentialist view on linguistic variation, in which social actors are seen as displaying linguistic variation based on membership in predefined demographic categories, to a constructionist focus in which people use linguistic variables to shape and re-shape identity categories in unfolding social interaction. In short, the assumption is that linguistic variation becomes meaningful based on what people do and not because of what people are.

The chapter starts by situating the field of sociolinguistics within debates in the social sciences concerning the primacy of structure vs. agency in human behavior, since sociolinguistic variation is naturally influenced by opposing views within this debate. The chapter then switches the focus to the historical development of variationist studies and how researchers have linked linguistic form to social meaning. The chapter is concluded by proposing a framework for how sociolinguistic variation and discourse

\footnote{\textsuperscript{15} The notion of indexicality is discussed later in this chapter.}
analysis may be fused, thus situating this study within so-called third wave approaches to language variation.

2.2 Structure vs. Agency in Social Theory

All theories in the social sciences are preoccupied with theorizing about individual actors’ capacity to act (agency) in a world filled with preexisting social structures (structure). Agency commonly refers to micro-level, individual social actors’ “freedom to manipulate a flexible system of identities” (Kroskrity 2001), in which language may be used as a form of social action to construct dynamic categories of identity. Ahearn (2001:112) defines agency as the “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act,” and thus captures the heart of the agency-structure debate: Do individuals have the capacity to act freely, or will their actions always be mediated and constituted by macro-level social structures (e.g., class, gender, religion, and ethnicity)?

In fact, the dichotomy captures major differences in how European and North American scholars traditionally have theorized about political/ideological and ontological issues regarding the social world. Understanding the various scholarly traditions is essential for understanding how agency is understood and conceptualized in sociolinguistics, including the interplay between language and identity.

Traditional social theory (e.g., the Frankfurt School – Marx and Engels 1848/1948, Weber 1904, Adorno and Hockheimer 1944/1947, Habermas 1970) tend to downplay agency, reducing social theory to a dialectic between social classes and groups. What matters is how the struggles between groups work in a dialectic to produce ideology, and group formation is taken for granted as

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16 Ritzer and Goodman (2004:508-509) argue that even though scholars often use agency-structure and micro-macro interchangeably, these concepts do not necessarily refer to the same thing. However, I will not discuss the proposed differences here.
social actors with similar work concerns (e.g., carpenters) are treated as a unified group without conflicting interests. As such, the struggle between employer (e.g., a construction company) and employees (carpenters) have primary concern. From another extreme, we can contrast the Frankfurt School’s focus on structure with an American social perspective that heavily focuses on the individual’s actions and agency. For example, the Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism of Mead (e.g., 1934), Blumer (1955/1969) and Goffman (e.g., 1959) view the individual’s creative capacities as being major components for shaping social interaction. The dynamic patterns of interaction make up groups, which eventually make up societies (see Goodman and Ritzer, 2004:351-352).

Agency in sociolinguistic and identity studies should be viewed within these extreme poles and ontological assumptions. Previous studies in the variationist paradigm have focused heavily on static social structures, but many current sociolinguistic studies of language and identity tend to favor the agency approach (e.g., Eckert 1998, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995). Accordingly, identity is an emergent product, created with various linguistic resources that index different social meanings depending on the interactional context (see Bucholtz and Hall 2004 ‘The Emergence Principle’ and ‘Indexicality Principle’). To take a specific linguistic example, several studies have argued that agency may emerge in language as interlocutors switch from passive to active voice (e.g., Ahearn 2001; Norris 2005).

Although current variationist studies often place a good deal of focus on the individual, the field started with a focus on large-scale studies for the purpose of extracting variables for quantitative analysis, while locating

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17 Today there are several social and linguistic theories that try to integrate agency and structure, including Eckert’s (2005) “third wave” approach upon which this dissertation is grounded, Latour’s (2005) Actor-Network Theory, and Scollon’s (2001) Mediated Discourse Analysis.
societal structure in class stratification. Again, though, more recent perspectives see the social as a type of social construction (e.g., Schilling-Estes 2004), which is accomplished through social interaction. Before I continue with a review of how the field of sociolinguistic variation has been theorized, the next section addresses some of the main assumptions behind social constructionism - the viewpoint on which this dissertation is grounded.

2.3 Social Constructionism

The current study takes an anti-essentialist perspective arguing that the social world is constructed through the symbolic resources available to social actors, in which language is the major constructive force. In studies undertaken from a social constructionist perspective, questions of structure vs. agency have also been approached from different perspectives – namely, from macro and micro approaches to social constructionism. Macro social constructionism is similar to approaches to discourse analysis that focus on “discourse with a capital ‘D’” – that is, on the pervasive nature and profound impact of publicly circulating discourse or discourses (e.g., Foucault 1972, 1976, 1980) on reproducing societal ideologies. As such, capital “D” discourse and macro social constructionism are often concerned with highlighting inequality in society, and thus share some similarities with the Frankfurt school of thought when viewing societal struggles as a dialectic between social groups (e.g., employer vs. employee). Macro social constructionism mostly refrains from theorizing about the individual, and is thus very similar to the structure end of the structure/agency debate. In other words, “the person can be conceptualized only as the outcome of discursive and societal structures” (Burr 2003:23), leaving the individual with no inherent ability to change
society. In addition, how the individual is connected to different societal groups, and how groups are formed in the first place are questions that are taken for granted from a macro perspective. From my perspective, any social theory should have a component dealing with group formation in order to avoid making unfounded assumptions regarding the social world, which is one of the major problems with traditional variationist studies, often now termed ‘first wave’ studies (see section 2.4 below for more detail).

Micro social constructionism focuses more on locally defined practices, where the social world is considered to be created on a daily basis between people in conversation. Power is seen as “an effect of discourse, an effect of being able to ‘warrant voice’ (Gergen, 1989) in interaction” (Burr 2003:21). As such, social structures and power only have an impact on individuals to the degree with which social actors give voice to these forces in interaction. I view both of the discourse analytical frameworks used in this dissertation, positioning theory and stance theory, as types of micro social constructionism, although positioning theory attempts to integrate both micro and macro perspectives, which I discuss shortly. However, before I turn to that discussion, the upcoming sections address how variationist sociolinguistics has been theorized as a field, which will pave the way for my discussion of the integrated approach. I discuss three waves of sociolinguistic variation separately, but conclude the section by arguing that the three waves are interconnected and not easily separable.
2.4 Three Waves in Sociolinguistic variation

Eckert (2005) has very influentially conceptualized the development of variation analysis as a series of three phrases, or three waves. According to Eckert, first wave studies, initiated by Labov (1966), aim to develop large scale variation studies in speech communities based on the correlation of linguistic variables and predetermined social categories, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Linguistic variants are viewed as indexing social categories directly. In other words, variants' primary social meanings are based on their correlation with groups who use them. While the direct linking of variant meaning to broad sociological categories (ethnicity, gender, class etc.) proved successful in some communities, other researchers found that the group associational connections established between social groups and linguistic features do not translate easily to all communities – especially more locally defined communities (Eckert 2005). These findings spawned the second wave of variation studies.

Second wave of variation studies employ ethnographic methods in which special attention is paid to locally salient variables over a longer period of time. Social categories are not predefined as in first wave studies, but are discovered through ethnographic field work. In other words, social groupings are based in locally defined communities of practice, and essentially, one cannot determine which social categories best explain linguistic variation without extensive ethnographic fieldwork. As such, variants index locally salient categories, since issues such as class, power relations, and social stratification vary from community to community. Eckert’s (1989, 2000) groundbreaking study epitomizes this type of research, in which she investigated social practice among high school students in a suburban Detroit
neighborhood in relation to the Northern Cities Vowel shift\textsuperscript{18}. Eckert’s fieldwork revealed three locally salient categories: The jocks, the burnouts, and the in-betweens. These categories constitute friendship networks grounded in similar cultural practices, beliefs, and social orientations, and the boundaries are much more fluid (as exemplified, for example, by the in-betweens) than those between the predefined groups of first wave studies. In Eckert’s study, the jocks and the burnouts orient differently toward different facets of the local culture. The jocks orient toward the local high school and as such participate in middle class, corporate culture where concerns and interests include a competitive hierarchical order, sports, networks outside the local area, and aspirations to move away from the area to attend college. The burnouts, in stark contrast, orient away from the (middle class) high school culture and instead favor working class, egalitarian ideologies in addition to a sense of loyalty for the local area and Detroit. The local school is viewed as an expansion of parental control, and by extension corporate control. The burnouts are also occupied by the local music scene and substance abuse. These ideological differences are maintained symbolically in numerous ways through clothing style, hairstyle, orientation towards the local area, and most importantly, through language. The burnouts, mark their urban affiliation through their greater participation than the jocks in the Northern Cities Vowel Shift, which is most entrenched in urban areas. Eckert’s study is a landmark in showing how social stratification and language variation are based in locally defined communities of practice, which sets it apart from first wave variation studies. Third wave studies are an extension of the second wave’s use of ethnographic focus.

\textsuperscript{18} A rotation of the mid and low vowels.
As mentioned, the third and most recent wave springs out of the ethnographic tradition and has yet an even more specific focus. In this most recent wave, also called the stylistic perspective (see Eckert 2005), variables are viewed as “indexing stances, activities, characteristics” (Eckert 2005:30), and variables may have multiple meanings that can be performed and negotiated in social interaction. Podesva’s (2007) case study of style and falsetto speech represents this wave. Podesva found that falsetto speech used by ‘Heath’ a gay medical professional, varied greatly in terms of maximum f0, f0 range, and f0 duration depending on the interactional setting. The most extreme uses of falsetto occurred at a barbeque with personal friends, in which Heath used falsetto to construct a diva persona, compared to a phone conversation with his father and a conversation with a patient. In this study, as in other third wave studies, linguistic variables have shown to index interactional stances. Accordingly, first wave studies view variables as indexing predetermined group membership (class, gender, ethnicity); second wave studies view variables as indexing locally based categories (jocks, burnouts), and third wave studies view variables as indexing stances based on specific interactional turns. As such, third wave studies do not link variables directly to group membership, but link meaning to intermediate persona constructions (and hence are sometimes referred to as ‘speaker design’ based studies; e.g. Schilling 2013) that may or may not be part of a larger identity category. I return to the persona concept later in this chapter.

It is evident that each wave brings its own set of goals and theoretical assumptions, whether one is more inclined to study speech communities, social networks, communities of practice, or stylistic case studies. Whereas findings from case studies cannot necessarily be generalized to entire
communities\textsuperscript{19}, new advances in intra-speaker variation (see, e.g., Podesva 2007) seriously question the way first wave studies have linked variables and their social meaning to larger identity categories without also considering how variants are used by individuals in unfolding interaction. I will argue that our knowledge of AAE and the social world portrayed through AAE studies will be greatly enhanced through case studies that examine how variables can convey multiple layers of social meaning in order to connect the local construction of identity to aggregate patterns of community and societal variation. As such, the field can benefit from a so-called speaker design approach to language variation. As is evident from the above discussion, however, the field has not always viewed individual stylistic variation as a primary concern. In addition, scholars have debated the nature of stylistic variation and whether or not style shifts are grounded primarily in proactive or reactive concerns. In the following section, I address how the field has viewed stylistic variation and why more studies of speaker design are needed.

2.5 Intra-speaker variation

The approach I am taking to this study is to investigate how a speech style varies within one individual – also referred to as intra-speaker variation. The three waves of variation studies can roughly be correlated with three approaches to style in the variationist paradigm (Soukup 2010). In this section, I first discuss the three approaches to stylistic variation. I then conclude the section by arguing why the three waves of variation and

\textsuperscript{19}I argue in chapter 3 why it may be inappropriate to study style quantitatively and why case studies are essential for advancing studies of style.
accompanying approaches to style are all interconnected, and how the local
and the global work in unison.

The study of speech styles has traditionally been approached from
Speaker Design. The first approach concerning attention paid to speech can be
linked to first wave studies. Labov (1972b) viewed style as a continuum
ranging from casual speech (unguarded, relaxed speech) to careful speech
(guarded speech for formal situations) based on the attention individuals pay
to their speech. In other words, stylistic variation was viewed as conditioned
primarily by how self-conscious a person was when speaking. In casual and
more relaxed situations, people would show more vernacular speech
associated with the lower classes, whereas guarded speech in formal
situations would reveal patterns associated with upper classes. As such, the
attention to speech approach to style is based on the beliefs that (1) Speakers
alter their speech according to how much attention they pay to their speech;
(2) The attention paid to speech depends on the speakers’ perceived level of
the formality of the speech situation. Labov distinguishes between dialect and
style (see, e.g., Moore 2004), in which dialect is the particular language variety
found within a speech community (e.g., New York City). In turn, dialects
shows linguistic and social stratification based on predetermined stylistic
contexts. These contexts vary from casual speech at the most informal end of
the continuum to the reading of minimal pairs at the most formal, self-
conscious end of the continuum. Figure 2.1 below (from Labov 1972b)
illustrates stylistic variation in (r) (i.e. full vs. reduced/deleted non-prevocalic
/r/) by social class and speech style, in Labov’s classic study of the Lower

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20 Often, storytelling in an interview. A classical Labovian example includes narrative responses to the
“danger of death” question, in which it is held that participants will be informal, using the so-called
vernacular, since the danger of dying is an emotional topic.
East Side of New York City (1966). The graph indicates that as we move from styles considered to be less self-conscious to more self-conscious styles, speakers in all social class groups will show increasing levels of /r/ pronunciation, since /r/ is the prestige variant associated with higher social class groups. At the other end of the continuum, contexts considered to be informal/unselfconscious favor an r-less production of the variant. In other words, under the attention to speech model for stylistic variation, speakers are held to be the most self-conscious in formal situations and produce more standard language, whereas speakers in informal situations are more unselfconscious and thus more vernacular.

Figure 2.1. Style and class stratification of (r) in New York

First wave studies were extraordinarily successful in highlighting the regularity with which all dialects pattern. Two ways of saying the same thing were not mere ‘free variation,’ a view held by Structuralist and generativist linguists. However, the attention to speech model has received criticism for its

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unidimensional approach to stylistic variation (e.g., Schilling-Estes 2004c). However, Labov never intended his approach to account for all stylistic phenomena (Labov 2001:87), and style was not a concern in and of itself. It was merely a way to locate the so-called vernacular as well as a full range of (more formal) styles in the sociolinguistic interview (see Labov 1966).

The second approach to style, Audience Design, was developed by Bell (1984), and later revised (see, e.g., Bell 2001). This approach takes the position that stylistic shifts happen in response to an audience and not because of attention paid to speech. Bell’s framework functions on two dimensions: the responsive dimension in which speakers accommodate to the audience, and the initiative dimension in which a speaker can initiate a style shift but still holds non-present audience members, or referees, in mind. Initially, Bell focused mainly on the responsive dimension, but he later modified his approach to more fully incorporate the second dimension. One criticism (or counterevidence) of Bell’s early approach comes from studies that show that styles can be creative, and do not have to be mirrored on the style of an imagined audience (see, e.g., Schilling-Estes 1998).

The third approach involves speaker design. As studies continued to show creativity in linguistic variation, the focus shifted to speaker agency and the dynamic negotiation of identity between the speaker and his/her audience (see, e.g., Coupland 1980). The analyses are often viewed within extensive ethnographic work to find out why speakers shift styles “rather than simply which choices correlate with which situations” (Schilling-Estes 2004:389). Thus, language and society are viewed as “co-constitutive: the language features are not mere reflections of static identity, as defined by
one’s positions in an existent social order…but rather are resources speakers use to shape and re-shape social structures” (Schilling-Estes 2004:389).

Looking at this tradition of stylistic inquiry, it appears that the study of style has come full circle, just as has variation analysis more generally – either one portrays agency or responds to social constraints (or both). In fact, Coupland (2001:185) somewhat jokingly says that “a theory of style would be a theory of everything.” Consequently, it is difficult to theorize about speech styles, but it is hard to dispute that a deeper understanding of large-scale inter-speaker variation should be facilitated by an investigation of individual stylistic choices in unfolding discourse. The context and discourse patterns are thus essential in understanding how larger identity categories may be constructed. Coupland (2001:198-199) sums up this point as he maintains,

It is in relation to group norms that stylistic variation becomes meaningful; it is through individual stylistic choices that group norms are produced and reproduced. Dialect style as persona presumes that style variation will be inherently multidimensional.

Therefore, we need both quantitative and qualitative approaches to language variation. Crucially, without more in-depth case studies of individuals, it will be almost impossible to understand which factors in daily interaction actually motivate change at the community level. Further, if styles are not investigated in social interaction, the multidimensional meaning potential for variables may also disappear in aggregate group patterns once the variables have been extracted from the naturalistic conversational setting. However, if researchers take as a starting point that the interactional moment is equally important as aggregate community patterns for understanding language variation and change, then we are faced with the challenge of determining what these
interactional moments actually consist of. I argue in this dissertation that positioning theory (Harré and Langenhove 1999a) and stance theory (Du Bois 2007) can serve as invaluable resources for understanding how identities are constructed in social interaction.

The emphasis in third wave studies has turned to the individual, and while this focus is an essential addition to the variationist toolkit, researchers should keep in mind that society is not only constructed from the bottom up but also from the top down. As the attention in third wave studies seems to have shifted towards agency in the constructing of identity, including ethnic identities, a lot of research still demonstrates that people rely on multiple meanings to create identity, including group associational meanings. In this connection, Barrett (1995) demonstrates that African American Drag Queens (AADQs), while creating a unique identity, draw upon linguistic variants with pre-existing group associational meanings, including variants associated with (the stereotypical speech of) white women, gay men, and African Americans. The combination of the three stereotypical speech styles creates a unique identity, but it is in essence assembled with pre-existing global meanings. Recall that third wave studies focus on how variables create stances, activities, and characteristics, and they take interactional meaning as the ontological starting point for the creation of linguistic meaning and move away from the group associational meaning that held primacy in first and to some degree second wave studies. Whether or not the genesis of social meaning should be attributed to speech communities, local group patterns, or interactional contexts we do know that variant meaning can be associated with all of these various types of meanings. For example, Eckert’s study of jocks and burnouts correlated local cultural practices with the Northern Cities
Vowel Shift, but the vowel shift was discovered by using first wave methods. Hence, as research moves in the direction of the interactional moment, we would do well to heed Schilling’s concern (2013):

It is easy to get caught up in the interactional moment and forget that as much as we may want to celebrate speaker agentivity and creativity, we are all bound by structures and norms, and we cannot create meaningful styles out of nothing. We must draw on pre-existing associations between linguistic usages and social meanings, both interactional and group associational. On an even broader scale, interactional stances and identity categories are implicated in social orders and ideologies about social order, so that when a person performs a working class identity, they are situating themselves within an entire socioeconomic hierarchy, and very often reinforcing this hierarchy, even if elements of their linguistic performance sometimes work to resist or undermine it. Similarly, performing a fairly traditional male or female identity implicates us in a longstanding and deep-seated hegemonic gender order, complete with its ingrained inequities.

Accordingly, the social world is assembled in a multitude of ways, and scholars are faced with seemingly opposite yet related concerns. As stylistic research in the third wave progresses, it should be kept in mind that creativity and agency are bound together with pre-established social structures and linguistic meanings. In addition, as we move towards speaker design and focus on speaker initiative, we still must bear in mind that all of us are part of social groups in which our behavior would be evaluated as socially marked if we never adhered to or accommodated to our audience, and thus relied on responsive measures of interaction. As such, the three waves of sociolinguistic variation are interconnected as the social world is simultaneously assembled from aggregate patterns, more locally defined group patterns, and day-to-day social interaction.

In the current study, I recognize this challenge of linking the local level of interaction to more global social meanings by investigating Michael’s
speech against the backdrop of aggregate group patterns in Washington, D.C., while linking his interactional display of identity to other studies and communities in the U.S. Michael’s location in the social landscape and how his linguistic patterns can be placed against the backdrop of other speakers will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. How variables are linked to individuals and groups falls under the purview of indexicality and social meaning, which is the topic of the next section.

2.6 The Linking of Form and Meaning

The field of sociolinguistic variation has gone through several theoretical waves, as discussed above, and the way that specific linguistic variables have been considered to index social meanings has also changed over time. While current third wave studies (Eckert 2001, 2005; Zhang 2001, 2005; Moore 2004) are focused on how speakers make ideological linguistic choices to project certain aspects of identity, traditional first wave studies were more interested in how variables and speech communities change over time. As such, the field started with a diachronic approach to larger communities, but has gradually shifted towards a synchronic focus on social meaning.

Labov’s focus has always been on investigating language change, and in his early work, he put forth the notion that variants fall into three categories: indicators, markers, and stereotypes, based on how aware a community is of a given variable and its variants. Labov created these categories to help explain how language changes progress through a community. An indicator refers to a variable that has social variation, but the speakers using this variable are unaware of the social patterning. Markers are

22 An index signals the relationship between a sign and a referent (Pierce 1931-58). For instance, a linguistic feature can point to or index a social group.
similar to indicators, but show “consistent stylistic and social stratification” (Labov 1994:78), which demonstrates that there is some community awareness of the social patterning. Finally, Labov operates with the stereotype, which is a variable that receives conscious recognition in the speech community. An incoming variant in a speech community may or may not go through all these stages, but according to Labov, they always start as indicators.

Silverstein (2003) formulated a theoretical framework based on what he calls the indexical order. This framework also involves levels of awareness and whether variants take on group associational, interactional, and/or ideological meanings, although from a quite different perspective. Silverstein operates with first, second, and third order indexes. A first order index indexes membership in a group directly (i.e. group associational meaning). Second order indexical meaning is meaning linked to stances and character traits (see also Ochs 1992), and when a second order index becomes associated with yet another layer of ideological meaning it becomes a third order index.

To illustrate these indexes, in Pittsburgh the monophthongization of the /aw/ diphthong has been associated with three types of indexicality. As a first order index, monophthongal /aw/ was not assigned any meaning in the community, although a significant correlation could be made between the variable and for example working class men. However, once the monophthong became subject to community wide associations of “correctness and class” (Johnstone 2007), monophthongal /aw/ became a second-order index. Finally, monophthongal /aw/ received yet another ideological association of “locality,” thus transforming monophthongal /aw/ into a third order index (Johnstone 2007:20), which enables the fixed phrase “dahntahn”
(downtown) to be associated with Pittsburgh at a national level. In addition, Eberhardt (2009a, 2009b) argues that /aw/ monophthongization may even be linked with whiteness, which leads African Americans in Pittsburgh to favor a diphthongal pronunciation, as a result of monophthongal /aw/’s third order status.

The notion of indexicality is a major part of third wave studies, and these studies are focused on second order indexicality (i.e. stances and character traits). The reason for the move towards interactional meaning instead of group associational meaning (i.e. first order indexicality) is due to advances in the field of, for instance, language and identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) argue that previous first wave studies are problematic because they link variables directly to global and perhaps more abstract demographic categories (e.g., race, gender), when the same linguistic features have been found in connection with several social groups. For example, released /t/ has been linked to nerd girls in Northern California (Bucholtz 1996), Orthodox Jews (Benor 2002), and gay speech (Podesva et al. 2002), which problematizes the notion of the first order index. The way to solve this issue was to elevate the status of second order indexicality and argue that variables index an interactional context rather than the group directly (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). For example, the aforementioned nerd girls hyperarticulated /t/ which indexed preciseness and an intellectual linguistic style, which in turn indexed the nerd girl category indirectly. Accordingly, the link between form and function was indirect, as it indexes (or points to) interactional stances and positions that in turn may index social groups. Where meanings such as
preciseness come from is difficult to determine if interactional stances are viewed as the only ontological source for social meaning\textsuperscript{23}.

Eckert (2008) offers a solution to this issue and tries to incorporate global meanings, although she gives primacy to interactional meaning. By building on Silverstein’s framework and the notion of indexicality, Eckert argues that variables form an indexical field, in which several meanings are associated with a particular variable, and these meanings are constantly subject to reinterpretation. Eckert (2008:464) defines an indexical field as, “a constellation of meanings that are ideologically linked,” but the activation of a specific meaning depends on the specific context in which it is used. As such, Eckert voices ideology at the individual level as the main reasons behind language variation, although aggregate patterns from survey studies also reflect the ideological landscape but in a more static way. Eckert argues (2008:472) that “all change unfolds in the course of day-to-day exchange, and that exchange involves constant local reinterpretation and repositioning.”

To illustrate the concept of the indexical field, Eckert draws upon the experimental work of Campbell-Kibler (2007a, 2007b) to demonstrate how meanings may be linked ideologically in an indexical field. Campbell-Kibler studied the (ING) variable (i.e. velar vs. alveolar variant forms), based on how informants (college students) classified the meaning of the variants in a matched guise study. Campbell-Kibler (2007a) found that informants associated the velar variant with education, intelligence, and articulateness, and the alveolar (Campbell-Kibler 2007b) with being casual or relaxed. Eckert argues that the velar form is perceived as a full form and as an extension as being effortful, whereas the alveolar is perceived as the opposite - as a reduced

\textsuperscript{23} I return to this issue shortly.
form and therefore lazy. These meanings are represented in the indexical field for (ING) in Figure 2.2. The black words represent the meanings associated with the velar variant, and the gray words represent the meanings associated with the alveolar variant.

**Figure 2.2.** Indexical field of (ING) (based on Campbell-Kibler 2007a, 2007b). Black = meanings for the velar variant, gray = meanings for the apical variant (adopted from Eckert 2008:466)

The indexical field represents a constellation of related core meanings that speakers can exploit to signal, for instance, education or articulateness. This core meaning can then become specified in local interactional settings to index specific meanings (i.e. become specified). For example, the same variant can be evaluated positively or negatively by an interactant and signal either laziness or being easygoing depending on who activates and who interprets the meaning.

In addition, the interpretation also depends on global (perhaps stereotypical) meanings and expectations assigned to the person using the variation. For instance, Campbell-Kibler’s studies also demonstrate that
informants expected to hear the alveolar variant if they perceived a speaker to be an uneducated U.S. southerner. In turn they expected to hear the velar variant with an educated northerner. Negative evaluations of a speaker happened in cases in which variants were used by a speaker one would typically not associate that particular feature with. For example, a speaker perceived as Southern who used the unexpected velar variant (ING) would be evaluated as *pretentious* and *insincere*. This research demonstrates not only the relevance of the specific local context to activate a particular variant meaning, but it also shows how ingrained some global meanings are in people’s minds (e.g., linking “full forms” to education). Hence, the local and the global work in unison in the construction of identity in daily interaction.

As such, Eckert recognizes the influence of global meanings, but strongly emphasizes the agentive nature of language:

Variables have indexical fields rather than fixed meanings because speakers use variables not simply to reflect or reassert their particular pre-ordained place on the social map but to make ideological moves. The use of a variable is not simply an invocation of a pre-existing indexical value but an indexical claim which may either invoke a pre-existing value or stake a claim to a new value (Eckert 2008:464).

Eckert departs from first wave studies when stating that the meaning of a variable is constantly subject to reinterpretation, and may be linked to multiple interactional stances, situations, and eventually larger demographic categories. While Eckert puts a strong emphasis on the social and ideological motivation for linguistic variation, and the constant potential for reinterpretation of variables, she is not arguing against structured variation in communities. Variables can become meaningful through speakers’ drawing upon pre-existing, group associational ideological meanings or their creating
emergent meanings in local interaction. However, the indexical fields approach focuses heavily on individual agency in daily interaction and argues that face-to-face conversations are essentially where variables get their social interpretations and reinterpretations and that local interactions are therefore at the heart of linguistic and societal change. More work is needed to develop the indexical field approach, and it remains to be determined if, for instance, all phonological variables have core and related ideological meanings, which is a controversial yet exciting idea.

Building on Eckert’s notion of the indexical field, a crucial aspect of any theory that focuses on interactional meaning must be to identify the interactional context that should be drawn into the analysis. As I am also interested in social meaning that emerges from interactional moments, I will adopt the notion of second order indexicality and some aspects of the indexical fields approach. I do this, since the field of AAE studies is in need of an enhanced understanding of individual variation as complementary data to survey studies in order to understand motivations behind language variation in African American English. However, while I encourage more studies of interactional meaning for the reasons just provide, my claim to third wave studies should not be understood as a choice at the expense of community studies. All three waves of sociolinguistic variation offer complementary insights into the study of AAE, but we need more third wave studies of AAE.

In order to meet the goal of investigating variables in the interactional context, this dissertation integrates discourse analytical approaches to identify important interactional moments by using positioning theory and stance theory. Such a theoretical fusion is beneficial for analyzing how variants are used in interaction, which in turn adds to our understanding of how they
help shape larger identity categories, such as African American. Both discourse frameworks are concerned with how interactants create intersubjectivity (i.e., the psychological relationship between two interactants) in the social world, but the frameworks highlight different aspects of this relationship in addition to how they locate individual actors in society. I have chosen to use two different frameworks, since I focus on two different variables that have been linked with different aspects of African American English. As we will see in the analysis chapters, Michael’s stylistic choices depend greatly on interactional moments – moments that can be identified with said theories. The following sections address how and why I see a fruitful marriage between sociolinguistic variation and discourse analysis. I begin with positioning theory and stance theory and then argue why I have included two different yet similar discourse frameworks to study Michael’s falsetto speech and prosodic rhythm.

2.7 Positioning Theory
Positioning theory (Harré and Langenhove 1999a, 1999b) is a more philosophically developed framework (i.e. in terms of social theory) than stance theory (Du Bois 2007), since it tries to integrate both micro and macro perspectives from social theory. Although I view positioning theory as a type of micro social constructionism that focuses on how the world is constructed through face-to-face interaction, the framework still recognizes that institutional power and larger culturally circulating discourses have an influence on the constructing moment in social interaction, and thus it recognizes the importance of preexisting social structures in the construction of individual and group identities. The micro constructionist perspective
should be contrasted with a macro perspective that also sees language as socially constructed, but sees it as being derived from social structures, which are to be viewed as the main constructionist forces in society (see, e.g., Foucault 1972, 1976, 1979). From the perspective of positioning theory, social actors are made up of available discourses, but are at the same time manipulators of discourse, which can bring about social change (i.e. agency). The philosophical strength of positioning theory in my view is the integration of micro/macro perspectives that view these parameters as false opposites. As such, structure and agency are co-constructed in interaction, and the division of structure and agency is a synthetic social construction made by scientists.

Positioning theory is a social constructionist perspective that seeks to create a more dynamic alternative to the concept ‘role’ (e.g., a static, non-discursive concept) based on the fluid and ever-changing negotiation of identities in interaction. Harré and Langenhove (1999:1b) define positioning theory as the “study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting.” The ever-shifting patterns refer to the fluid interactional process by which interactants position and reposition each other with respect to a storyline (i.e. a mutually recognizable discursive practice; see below for more detail), while assigning rights to talk based on the relative power embedded in the social role. As such, positions are relational, since not all people have the same institutional or culturally given rights to talk. The rights and/or duties to talk are created through publically circulating capital ‘D’ discourses, but these rights and duties can be contested in face-to-face interaction. For example, a teacher (the person in power) has the right to control the interaction in a classroom full of
students (the persons in a powerless position). However, even though a person has been granted a position of power by societal institutions or the discursive practice associated with institutions, people in a powerless situation have the ability to challenge the existing structure by repositioning social roles (e.g., students can challenge a teacher’s position of power and thus the speech acts used to exercise that power). Consequently, positioning theory is a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role, since role in positioning theory is viewed as discursive practice (i.e., roles are discursive not cognitive).

The core ideas in positioning theory can be illustrated with the “mutually determining triad” (Langenhove and Harré 1999a:17) of positions, acts/action (including speech acts), and storylines. Figure 2.3 illustrates this triad. Note that acts/action is written as “the social force of” in the triad to focus on the action aspect:

![Mutually determining triad](image)

Figure 2.3. Mutually determining triad
(adopted from van Langenhove and Harré 1999a:18)

In the mutually determining triad, social interaction creates an emergent storyline where interactants take up or are assigned a position, which is a constellation of rights and duties that are located in a societal moral order. Storylines can refer to recognizable discursive practices (e.g., a teacher is located within a teacher storyline in a classroom), but storylines can also be
indeterminate and hence negotiable in a conversation. When storylines are recognizable, they often convey information about community norms. In turn, a position is a claim to a right within a storyline. For example, a judge can convict a felon, but an average citizen cannot, and the judge has been granted the right to do so based on societal moral orders (or ideologies).

Positions are available and become meaningful when they are recognized as part of a social praxis or a storyline. Because positions are a claim for certain rights, they can be turned into a social action, and when interactants recognize this action as something meaningful within a storyline, the action becomes an act. At the same time, positions set the boundaries for possible acts in a conversation. For example, due to the clustering of rights that make up a teacher’s position, the teacher can perform certain acts (including speech acts) in a classroom, such as giving praise or a reprimand. In turn, when the teacher habitually performs certain acts, the positions granted in a teacher’s role are simultaneously constructed, and hence positions and acts are mutually constitutive. For example, because a teacher has been granted a position of power, she can give a reprimand or praise a student. In turn, when the teacher habitually gives a reprimand (or praise), her position in power is constructed simultaneously. The acts or actions (including speech acts) become meaningful when they are seen as part of a clustering of recurring positions and acts that reoccur in social praxis or a storyline. Positions are constantly negotiated in relation to how interactants locate themselves in a mutually constructed storyline, either by taking initiative to voice a personal point of view or by responding to another interactant.

Langenhove and Harré (1999a) distinguish between first and second order positioning; a first order position refers to an initial conversational
position in a storyline, but when this position is challenged by another interactant, the position becomes a second order position. Second order positionings, or repositionings, are particular important for the analysis of falsetto phonation in chapter 4, as we will see that the mutually constructed storyline changes when positions are challenged. I would claim that repositioning is the locus of where structure and identity are mutually constructed in positioning theory: Storylines are connected to institutional discourses (e.g., a teacher storyline, a lawyer storyline), since storylines are constructed by habitual occurrences of positions taken up by people who claim and take up given social roles. However, these storylines can be contested and repositioned with pertinent speech acts and hence reconfigure the social landscape. However, to determine the power embedded in a social role, we also need to identify who has the right to talk and who talks when. One of the main components of positioning theory is to identify who has the initiative in a conversation, which correlates with the longstanding initiative concern in style research (audience vs. speaker design). Positioning theory operates with performative positioning and accountive positioning (see Harré and Langenhove 1999a:24), which is similar to initiative and responsive dimensions of style (or proactive and reactive). Performative positioning can be subdivided into deliberate self-positioning (e.g., when projecting personal identity and point of view) and deliberate positioning of others (e.g., when positioning others, either present or absent in the conversation). Accountive positioning can be subdivided into forced self-positioning (e.g., when responding to a positioning of the self carried out by another person) and forced positioning of others (when responding to a positioning of others either absent or present).
Self-positioning is often carried out with the use of the first person singular ‘I’. Forced self-positioning is best characterized in terms of degree of force (not just simple presence of force), with the degree of force depending greatly on what is being discussed. For example, any type of question forces the other interactant into a forced positioning – either a forced self-positioning or a forced positioning of others, since a person is forced to answer when somebody asks a question. The forced aspect can be mild (e.g., How are you?) or severe (e.g., when a person in a position of institutional power, for instance a lawyer in a criminal trial, asks a person to account for whereabouts at the time the crime occurred). In any case, a question always creates a type of forced positioning.

Combining the quantitative methods from sociolinguistic variation with a qualitative discourse analysis based on positioning theory will allow me to investigate how and why features of AAE are used in specific interactional moments based on how the interactants locate themselves with respect to each other in stretches of discourse. In addition, the initiative/responsive components of positioning theory will also give insights into the relative distribution of power including the ability to contest or reposition how Michael and the interviewer take up and assign positions in relation to each other. In table 2.1 below, I provide some examples of how I operationalize positioning theory in this dissertation. Each example will be analyzed in greater detail in chapter 4, when I demonstrate how I have operationalized positioning theory and integrated it with the variationist paradigm. Table 2.1 uses interactional moments in Michael’s interview in which falsetto occurs to illustrate each type of positioning just mentioned. By incorporating positioning theory into the study of language variation, the
theoretical fusion allows me to investigate, systematically, the social meaning of linguistic variables in naturalistic speech. Further, it is precisely this mapping of linguistic feature to positioning type that will allow me to investigate linguistic features of AAE in specific interactional moments, and as a result infer social meanings. Note that bold italics indicate the parts of the utterances in falsetto voice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performative Positioning (Deliberate)</th>
<th>Accountive Positioning (Forced)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example 1: Michael accused of getting a girl pregnant</td>
<td>Example 2: Talking about prison (juvenile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Michael: “I’m pregnant with Michael’s baby. And then I called her this morning and I was like, “Why did you say that?” And she was like, “I didn’t say that.” And then my grandma was on the phone and she was like, “You called this house last night and said you pregnant.” She was like, “Oh, I was just playing.” And I- I was</td>
<td>(1) Interviewer: What’s that? I’m not familiar with OCC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Interviewer: So she’s not pregnant?</td>
<td>(2) Michael: I don’t know. I just found out about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Michael: And I was- I wasn’t scared cause I was like, “I ain’t had sex with the girl.”</td>
<td>(3) Interviewer: What is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Michael: It’s this program. I gotta go for six months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Interviewer: Like a residential program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) Michael: I don’t know what it is!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate positioning of others (N=5):</td>
<td>Forced positioning of others (N=14):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 3: Michael getting into fight (positioning antagonist)</td>
<td>Example 4: Michael positioning family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Michael: And that’s when, he went home and got a knife. And I was like, if they try to jump him, I was gonna help him. I’m not gonna let him go out like that, cause they said they was gonna jump him so. The boy that shot me, he heard me say, he was like, “You gonna help him? I thought you was with us.” I was like, “No, I ain’t gonna let him go out like that.” That’s when he uh shot me, so we started fighting.</td>
<td>(1) Interviewer: Okay, and what- what would you say is- you like the least about your family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Michael: The nagging. Like e- every time I do something little. Like this weekend, I had to go to Oak Hill. But they dropped my charges because they knew, they could find out it wasn’t me and my friend. They- they wanted us to yeah, like, yeah. If we ever think about doing something like that, they said, “Don’t do it! They gonna sit us in this program,” and this OCC program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Examples of positioning types
Note that the four examples provided in Table 2.1 demonstrate the four dimensions involved in a given position: the self vs. other aspect and the performative vs. accountive dimensions. Finally, it should be mentioned that Langenhove and Harré (1999b) argue that positioning theory is more of an approach than a catch-all theoretical framework designed to predict the outcome of any given social interaction. The reason for this argument is the inherent social constructionist assumption that the individual is made up not of one but multiple positions and thus storylines (i.e. the perspective will change from speaker to speaker). Such an approach to analyzing speech has strengths and weaknesses. The strength lies in the flexibility given to the analyst operationalizing positioning theory, identities are constantly shaped and re-shaped in face-to-face interaction, in which an interactant can take on a temporary position rather than being assigned to a static role in a social relationship. On the other hand, we also know that interactants draw upon pre-existing meanings (including positions) and follow given storylines and in that respect positioning theory does make claims about what can be expected in a conversation based on the mutually determining triad. A specific application of positioning theory is demonstrated in chapter 4, where I also explain how positioning theory can be used to analyze discursive practices and variables in specific moments of interaction. For now, it is time to turn to the second discourse framework, stance theory, which I use to analyze prosodic rhythm in chapter 5.

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24 Note that Harré and Langenhove (1999a, 1999b) primarily use invented conversations and examples and never develop a full interactional approach and method for analyzing naturalistic data. Operationalizing positioning theory is up to the analyst.
2.8 Stance Theory

The second discourse framework used in this dissertation is stance theory developed by Du Bois (2007). Stance may be defined as a type of linguistic social action that aligns interactants with respect to objects, people, and ideas. Alignment here is understood “as the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers” (Du Bois 2007:162). Accordingly, the calibration signals relative agreement between two interactants, and this agreement is scalar as people are always in agreement or disagreement or somewhere in between. Relative agreement, or scalar alignment, involves convergent, divergent, or ambiguous alignment between interactants. Whether or not one can truly determine neutral or ambiguous alignment in the social world is debatable, since interactants usually locate themselves along convergent or divergent poles, and one may argue that two interactants who do not diverge, converge by default. However, from the perspective of the analyst, some cases of alignment may be difficult to categorize as being either convergent or divergent, since relative agreement is difficult to establish in all conversations. In addition, the discourse may not provide enough information about what the interactants take a stance towards (i.e., usually a common stance object, such as material things, people, and ideas), which also makes it difficult to determine alignment. For such ambiguous cases in which a stance object is missing, ambiguous alignment is a useful concept. I provide examples of the three types of alignment in chapter 5 in the section where stance theory is operationalized.

From a language standpoint, stance or stancetaking involves linguistic ways in which interactants create and signal relationships with other
interactants, discursively constructed personae, or objects and ideas. I view ‘persona’ as an intermediate identity category that emerges in specific moments of interaction in which an individual wishes to project a certain aspect of his/her identity. As such, a social actor has multiple personae, and the persona that emerges in a particular moment in discourse is determined by which part of the actor’s identity he/she wants to project. In turn, a social actor can also create and even perform a discursively constructed persona, for instance, through the use of constructed dialogue. A persona emerges linguistically via a clustering of linguistic features (see, e.g., Eckert 2001).

Du Bois (2007), in his most formal layout of stance theory, argues that three components especially are important in a stance act: evaluation, positioning, and alignment, and these three aspects of stancetaking occur simultaneously. Stancetaking is thus a tri-act that can be illustrated with the sentence, “I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you” from the view of the stancetaker (Du Bois 2007:163). Figure 2.4 is a formal representation of Du Bois’ stance triangle, which represents the components involved in taking a stance.

![Stance Triangle](image)

**Figure 2.4.** The Stance Triangle (Du Bois 2007:163)
As mentioned, Du Bois (2007) argues that when an interactant, that is, subject 1, takes a stance, several acts happen simultaneously to create an intersubjective relationship between two interactants. In the phrase just mentioned, “I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you,” the first person pronoun I represents subject 1 in the triangle, which is the person taking a stance. The you represents subject 2 or the prior stancetaker who is engaged in a conversation with subject 1. To take a stance, the stancetaker evaluates an object, and here evaluation refers to “the process whereby a stancetaker orients to an object of stance and characterizes it as having some specific quality or value” (2007:143). In a linguistic sense, evaluation of an object is carried out through the use of a stance predicate, which is usually a verb or an adjective (e.g. I like coffee).

When the stancetaker evaluates an object, a simultaneous act of positioning occurs. Du Bois (2007:143) defines positioning as “the act of situating a social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value.” I understand Du Bois’ positioning as being similar to Harré and Langenhove’s (1999b) positioning, in which interactants can claim and assign rights to talk based on the relative power embedded in the social role. Invoking sociocultural value through positioning must then refer to a social order in which interactants can claim and be assigned positions, since positions are relational (e.g., powerful vs. powerless). When speakers take up a position, they can either take an affective stance (I am happy), signaling an emotional state, or on an epistemic stance (I know), signaling a knowledge state. Evaluation and positioning happens simultaneously and comprise a stance taken by the stancetaker. When two
interactants orient themselves towards the same stance object through evaluations and positionings, they display relative agreement or alignment.

To give a preview of how I use stance theory to analyze alignment in chapter 5, I make use of what I call an alignment diagram (inspired by Du Bois 2007) to show how Michael orients himself towards social characters in the narratives he tells. I illustrate the alignment diagram below. In this dissertation, I expand on the scope of stance theory to focus on represented contexts to include cases of constructed dialogue in which Michael represents the voices of characters in the narratives he tells. Du Bois’ framework is primarily engaged with the interactional context and not represented contexts, but I would argue that stance theory is equally useful for represented contexts, which I demonstrate below. One way an interactant can represent the voice of a character is to use constructed dialogue, which may be defined as “the recontextualization of words in a current discourse” (Tannen 2007:17). I argue later in this chapter that constructed dialogue may be used in a particular AAE verbal strategy, marking, but for now, I illustrate how I apply Du Bois’ framework to include represented contexts.

Consider the narrative in Extract 2.1 and the alignment diagram in Table 2.2, in which Michael performs the speech of a police officer. One of the recurring topics in the interview is Michael’s storytelling of run-ins with law enforcement, where Michael takes a divergent stance towards the police in the story world. This example is also analyzed in greater detail in chapter 5, but is introduced here to give the reader an idea of what to expect and to illustrate how stance theory is operationalized to include constructed dialogue:

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25 I address why I focus on represented contexts later in this chapter.
26 Narratives and transcription conventions are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.
Extract 2.1

1 Michael: I[a:] don’t[øc] like [d]the pólice.
2 Like [d]the mar[ø]shals,
3 they- they WILL hit you.
4 Downtown at the mar[ø]shals,
5 they’ll hit you.
6 if you do something,
7 like to- like do something BAD,
8 curse them out or something.
9 That’s[øc] why I don’t like ‘em the pólice [d]the:re.
10 Just come to you for no reason.
11 Like if you walk in a neighbor[ø]hood,
12 where you don’t live at,
13 they come at you with[c#ø] like,
15 It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø] where[ø] we [Øc] going[n]!
16 We didn’t do nothing[mn] so why is[gen2] you,
17 asking[met] where we going?
18 So we was[gen] like,
19 it look[V] like we suspicious,
20 we look[V] suspicious,

The constructed dialogue occurs in line 14 and Michael shows divergent alignment with the police (i.e. the constructed characters) in line 15, where he evaluates the constructed dialogue. The alignment is presented in Table 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 1</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 2</th>
<th>Positions/ Evaluates</th>
<th>Stance Object</th>
<th>Aligns (divergent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>{we}</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>[Øc] going</td>
<td>where</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>{you}</td>
<td>[Øc] going</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>{It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø]}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2. An alignment diagram showing divergent alignment

In the diagram, seven components are present: the line number of the extract, stance subject 1 (speaker), stance subject 2 (addressee), evaluations/positionings (as indicated by the verb of the clause), stance object, and type of alignment created (i.e. divergent, convergent, ambiguous). Note that I expand
the category of “evaluates/positions” to included verbal elements that do not have to be affective (like) or epistemic (know) as discussed in the tri-act, since those types of verbs are not required to analyze alignment, as demonstrated by the analysis below.

The two stance subjects in line 14 and 15 are Michael and the police. If we take a closer look at the performed sentence (14), “Where [Øc] you at? Where [Øc] you going?” it is evident that Michael shows divergent alignment with the statement and as an extension the police based on the counterstance in line 15 “It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø] where[ø] we [Øc] going[n]!” The stance object in 14 is the interrogative pronoun “where,” which is evaluated with a deleted copula plus the present progressive “going,” thus positioning the stance subject 2 “you” in relation to the object. The implied stance subject 1 is the police officers, which can be deduced from the previous discourse (“they”) in 13 “they come at you with[c#ø] like,” and earlier references to the police. This divergence is highlighted in (15), when Michael counters the police officers’ stance act (14) with a counter stance. In (15), the evaluation and the stance object are echoed through a parallel syntactic structure, but now stance subject 1 is changed to reflect Michael and his friend’s point of view, making the implied stance subject 2 the police “{you}.” The evaluation and the stance object are repeated with “[Øc] going” and “where,” but the parallelism is contrasted with the expanded structure “It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø],” which negates the previous stance act set forth by the police, and thus highlights divergence in alignment.

This dissertation uses two different frameworks for two different variables, and I explain in the following section, why positioning theory
appears to be relevant for studying falsetto phonation and stance theory for
the study of prosodic rhythm in constructed dialogue.

2.9 Positioning Theory, Stance Theory, and African American English
The reason for choosing two frameworks to study two prosodic variables of
AAE, falsetto phonation and prosodic rhythm, lies in the fact that the two
frameworks focus on different aspects of intersubjectivity that appear to fit
the findings from previous studies of the variables. I provide a detailed
review of falsetto speech in AAE and prosodic rhythm in the respective
analysis chapters, but I also provide a brief summary here to set the stage for
why I find positioning theory appropriate for falsetto speech and stance
theory useful for prosodic rhythm. It is possible that stance theory could be
used to study falsetto phonation and in turn positioning theory could be used
to investigate prosodic rhythm, but previous research on AAE prosody and
verbal strategies informed my decision to pair theoretical frameworks with
specific variables as part of the research design.

Falsetto speech has been argued to be a salient aspect of AAE’s
prosodic system, and it has been analyzed in some of the most
groundbreaking studies of AAE prosody. Tarone (1973) argues that falsetto
speech is used to create a dramatic effect in the discourse and as a form of
protest. For example, in one case a man takes a position, in which he protests
the idea of supporting a woman financially, while using falsetto speech to
take this position on the issue. Loman (1967, 1975) found something similar as
he argues that falsetto is used in a spirited conversation among African
American men in Washington, D.C., but also that falsetto was used to take up
an indignant position in a conversation and signal sudden commitment.
Alim (2004) shows that falsetto phonation emerges in specific turns in conversations to protest, challenge, complain, or to convey disbelief over a specific issue.

Recall that positioning theory is a social constructionist perspective, which aims to not only integrate micro and macro perspectives on the social world, but also create a dynamic alternative to the concept ‘role.’ The dynamic role emerges in interaction based on how people locate themselves and others with respect to a hierarchical order of social positions. The positioning grants people the right to talk based on the power embedded in the social role, but people in a powerless position also have the opportunity to challenge the existing structure by repositioning the social roles in a co-constructed storyline. Since previous studies have demonstrated that falsetto appears to be used to create dramatic effects and crucially to protest, challenge, complain or show disbelief, I chose positioning theory to investigate falsetto speech, since it focuses on how people are positioned but also that they can reposition their social roles and thus protest and challenge. Accordingly, positioning theory appeared to be a highly relevant analytical tool for investigating falsetto phonation, since previous studies show that falsetto is used to take up positions and challenge positions.

The other variable I investigate is prosodic rhythm. Prosodic rhythm has been argued to be a salient part in the construction of the African American verbal strategy marking (Mitchell-Kernan 1972), which can be defined as the use of constructed dialogue for the purpose of mocking someone. Drawing on Bakhtin’s (1984) framework of uni-directional and vari-directional double voicing, constructed dialogue can be used to either converge or diverge with the constructed speech, and thus with the speaker
whose voice is being recontextualized in a current stretch of discourse. Uni-directional double-voicing refers to the performance of another voice, in which the performer aligns positively with the performed speech, whereas vari-directional double voicing is used to take a negative stance towards the voice being performed. Hence, marking is a form of vari-directional double voicing, since marking is not only a performance of a person’s speech, but the marker simultaneously evaluates the person negatively. Rhythm has been argued to be a part of such marking.

Based on previous studies, rhythm in AAE is used for identity work in African American verbal strategies and in constructed dialogue. In addition, the constructed dialogue is used to signal alignment – either convergent or divergent alignment – with the person whose speech is being constructed and evaluated (i.e. the stance object). Stance theory focuses precisely on the scalar alignment between interactants. As mentioned, stance or stancetaking involves linguistic ways for interactants to create and signal relationships with other interactants, discursively constructed personae, objects and ideas. When using constructed dialogue to voice another person either absent or present in the discourse, the constructed dialogue also creates and signals a relationship with the discursively constructed characters or personae. A persona in constructed dialogue emerges linguistically via a clustering of linguistic features but also through the alignment formed between the marker and the marked subject. In addition, one of stance theory’s major components is evaluation, and marking is essentially a way of evaluating a discursively constructed character through quotation. Consequently, since marking is a way of evaluating and showing alignment with narrative characters, and
stance theory is preoccupied with analyzing such alignment between subjects, stance theory was chosen to analyze prosodic rhythm.

2.10 Towards an Integrated Approach to Analyzing Style

Current third wave studies take second order indexical meanings to be primary in the variationist paradigm. From such a point of view, variables can be linked to multiple interactional stances, situations, and eventually larger demographic categories. I argued that variables have multiple ontological sources and become meaningful by drawing upon pre-existing, group associational ideological meanings (e.g., from capital ‘D’ discourses), but meanings can also emerge in local interaction. However, very few third wave studies in the variationist paradigm develop a solid idea of what social interaction actually is, and what is meant by carrying out an interactional analysis to show how variables can become meaningful in important moment of discoursal interaction. From my point of view, this is exactly where positioning theory and stance theory can contribute with solid interactional theory to the variationist paradigm. Positioning theory and stance theory are both concerned with how identities are constructed at the local level of interaction, although they focus on different aspects. Whereas positioning theory aims to create a dynamic alternative to role and theorizes about how interactants take up and are assigned positions in the storyline, stance theory focuses more on the alignment created between these roles in face-to-face interaction. However, both theories say something highly relevant about how speakers locate themselves in interaction to signal relationships with each other and their relative positions in the social world. In addition, positioning theory has a developed social theoretical component in its integration of
micro and macro forms of social constructionism as well as power
distributions in society, which correlated very well with first order indexical,
or group associational, meanings, which I deem of equal importance to
interactional meanings despite the interactional focus in this dissertation.
Further, Eckert (2008) also argues that variants have indexical fields in which
related meanings can be deployed to reinforce existing social structures or be
manipulated agentively to restructure the social landscape and make claims
to new meanings depending on factors such as alignment (i.e. relative
agreement) between interactants and the overall style in which the variable is
embedded. In this connection, stance theory is a strong interactional
framework for analyzing alignment between speakers, although it is a bit
underdeveloped when it comes to account for the interplay of structure and
agency or how local levels of interaction are connected to global discourses.
Stance theory does have a component of intertextuality, in which an
interactant can draw upon previous discourses and show relationships with
other texts including capital ‘D’ discourses, which connects stance to the
indexical field, although some work is needed in this area. In sum, third
wave studies and the indexical fields approach are concerned with speaker
design, but are underdeveloped in terms of how to handle interactional
analyses. Accordingly, an integration of positioning theory and stance theory
with a third wave focus on indexicality can not only further the stylistic turn
in sociolinguistic variation but also an additional interactional turn.

2.11 Chapter Summary
This chapter presented the overall theoretical frameworks used in this
dissertation, which is an integration of the third wave approach to stylistic
variation with positioning theory and stance theory. The chapter discussed some major concerns in social and linguistic theory such as the longstanding debates about structure vs. agency and proactive vs. reactive dimensions of style. In addition, the chapter also argued why both pre-existing global meanings and locally constructed interactional meanings are related and equally important concepts in theorizing about sociolinguistic variation, although the current study focuses on interactional meaning primarily. The chapter also made the case for how and why variationist theory can benefit from being integrated with discourse analysis. For the current dissertation, I argued why positioning theory may be useful for studying falsetto speech and stance theory for prosodic rhythm in constructed dialogue. The two theoretical approaches focus on different interactional aspects that appear to be related to specific features of AAE. Positioning theory is a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of ‘role,’ and rights to talk are based on the relative power embedded in the social role. Micro and macro social constructionist concerns link local and global meanings, which correlate well with pre-existing and local meanings in variation studies. Alignment between interactants is implied in positioning theory, but the approach focuses more on how people with two different social roles take up positions in relation to each other, whereas the theory is underdeveloped in terms of how alignment is achieved linguistically. Stance on the other hand is strong in this area and shows how linguistic analysis can indicate alignment between interactants based on how interactants orient themselves towards objects, people, or ideas. The theoretical framework is in place for analyzing features of African American English in specific moments of interaction. The respective theories are applied in the respective analysis chapters. The following chapter, chapter
3, constitutes an overview of the study, and it presents the social and linguistic contexts that are used as backdrops to analyze and understand Michael’s social situation and his speech.
CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Overview of Study

3.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to give an overview of the research design and methods used in this dissertation. The chapter will continue to set the stage for how African American English, and as an extension ethnoracial categorizations, can be analyzed in a complementary way to first and second wave studies in the variationist paradigm. The chapter begins with a description of the study followed by a short overview of the variables chosen: falsetto phonation and prosodic rhythm. This section is followed by a section on narratives and African American verbal strategies, including the strategy marking, which is important for the analysis of prosodic rhythm. The chapter is concluded by a description and discussion of Michael (the participant in this study), the study he was a part of, the interactional setting for the interview, and the area of Washington, D.C. he comes from.

3.2 Voice Quality, Rhythm, and Intonation in African American English

As mentioned in the introduction, research on intonation in AAE has shown major differences between AAE and European American varieties such as different stress patterns (e.g., Pólice vs. políce; Baugh 1983, Wolfram and Fasold 1974, Smitherman 1977, Green 1990); greater pitch range (Tarone 1973, Loman 1975, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006); lower f0 for males in modal voice (Wheat and Hudson 1988, Walton and Orlikoff 1994); and different intonational contours on questions (e.g., level tones at the end of yes/no questions, falling tones at the end of wh-questions (Green 1990, Foreman
The current study focuses on two previously underexamined areas in African American English prosody – namely falsetto phonation and prosodic rhythm (also called syllable timing).

Falsetto speech is the rapid vibration of the vocal folds, causing a high pitch or fundamental frequency (f0), and the phonation type has been linked to African American men (Wolfram and Thomas 2002, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2004). Since previous studies on AAE intonation have found AAE to have a greater pitch range than EAE, falsetto at the highest frequencies appears to be an important aspect of the dialect. In this study, following Podesva (2007), falsetto speech is measured in terms of maximum f0, f0 range, and duration measured in milliseconds. The social meanings of falsetto are then proposed based on the indexical meanings created from a co-occurrence of the variable with particular interactional positionings.

The second variable investigated is prosodic rhythm, in particular, syllable timing, using the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI) (Low and Grabe 1995). Rhythm is another poorly understood area of AAE prosody, although it is argued to be a highly salient factor of the dialect (Spears 1998, Rickford and Rickford 2000, Alim 2004). In this dissertation, rhythm is investigated in relation to the degree with which Michael displays rhythmic style shifts in interaction from stress-timed to syllable-timed speech and vice versa. In stress-timed speech, the distance between each syllable is claimed to be identical compared to syllable-timed speech in which each syllable supposedly has the same length, although some disagreements regarding the definition exist (see, e.g., Thomas and Carter 2006), which I discuss in chapter 4.

Falsetto has also been linked to specific interactional stances and gay identity (Podesva 2007) and recently to African American women (Podesva and Lee 2010), suggesting that this phonation type has multiple and complex social group associational and interactional meanings.
Rhythm is analyzed in cases of constructed dialogue in relation to the African American verbal strategy *marking*, in which quotation is used for the purpose of mocking a person either present or absent in the moment of interaction. Such mocking has been suggested to be carried out with stylistic shifts in rhythm (Mitchell-Kernan 1972), but it has never been investigated in detail. Longer literature reviews and methods are presented in the respective analysis chapters, chapters four and five, to integrate the specific literature gaps with the methods and the results. The intention is to make the presentation of the research more coherent to the reader.

3.3 Narratives and African American Verbal Strategies

Michael’s falsetto speech and style shifts in prosodic rhythm primarily occur in narratives. All cases of falsetto in the interview are analyzed, and in some cases falsetto occurs in immediate responses to the interviewer’s questions and in other cases it occurs in narratives as part of a longer story. Prosodic rhythm is investigated in constructed dialogue, which was always found as being part of a narrative. In this dissertation, I understand narratives based on Labov’s updated definition of a narrative (1997), which is based on the canonical model developed by Labov and Waletsky (1967) and Labov (1972). I choose this framework, since the original model was developed based on the storytelling of inner city African Americans. Labov’s updated definition of a narrative is, “a narrative of personal experience is a report of a sequence of events that have entered into the biography of the speaker by a sequence of clauses that corresponds to the original event” (1997:393). In this dissertation, two clauses that show a sequence of events are enough for the definition of a narrative. In Labov’s updated framework, it is also implied that the narrative
includes a turning point (i.e. a dramatic event that changes the story) in the narrative action. I adopt this updated definition, since it includes the components of personal experience, a turning point or complication, and event sequencing, which most narrative scholars agree are essential components for the definition of a narrative (see, e.g., De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012).

The updated definition is slightly different from Labov’s early framework, in which a narrative was defined as “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred” (Labov 1972:360). Labov changed the original definition, since the focus on syntactic units (clauses) made it difficult to discern different kinds of narratives based on the model’s rigid reliance on temporal junctures. In the updated definition (Labov 1997), the focus is placed much more on the functional aspects of personal experience compared to the original model. As mentioned, I adopt the updated definition here, since the narrative structure was developed based on African American storytelling in the inner city, and since Labov’s model is widely recognized for having the components of a narrative definition that most narrative scholars agree upon. As De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012:34) argue:

Labov’s narrative structure encapsulates the definitional criteria of narrative on which analysts tend to converge...(a) the presence of a change-of-state or disruption of balance (cf. complication, turning point, peripeteia, trouble) and (b) chronological ordering or more generally event sequencing.
I view narrative as a functional speech event that includes personal experience, a turning point or complication, and event sequencing as being major parts of a narrative.

To revisit the Labovian framework (1972), the most elaborate narratives include the components: abstract\textsuperscript{28}, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. The orientation gives background descriptions about (who, where, when, why, how), which leads up to the complicating action, in which the question ‘what happened?’ is usually answered (i.e. the turning point in the narrative). After the complicating action, the action is dismissed by a resolution. The point of the story is conveyed through evaluations, and the coda completes the narrative by bringing the past to the present. Evaluations can occur in any section of the narrative. Most of the narratives analyzed in this study included the components orientation, complicating action or at least some indication of ‘what happened,’ while having a chronological sequencing of events. Figure 3.1 illustrates the structure for the Labovian narrative:

\begin{figure}[h]
    \centering
    \includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{narrative_structure.png}
    \caption{Narrative Structure (adopted from Labov 1972)}
    \end{figure}

\textsuperscript{28} A narrative may or may not have an abstract (i.e., a summary introducing the narrative).
I choose to use Labov’s model, although it has received criticism on various fronts, for instance due to its reliance on monologic storytelling that neglects the hearers’ participation in constructing the narrative. Labov’s model focuses on the narrator, without giving much thought to listeners and the role they may play in constructing the narrative. For example, some narrative scholars (e.g., Schiffrin 2006, De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012) and social constructionists (Burr 2003) would argue that storytelling is a co-constructed event in which the interactional context (e.g., setting, listeners) and other interactional aspects (e.g., prior discourse) are essential factors that may have an influence on the production of the narrative. As such, the Labovian model focuses primarily on the person telling the story, while disregarding the potential co-constructing influences from listeners. However, while the Labovian model is highly monologic in nature, most of the narratives he studied in African American interviews (Labov 1972) were highly performed and monologic speech events and not co-constructed ones. In the interview with Michael, the data source for this dissertation, many of the narratives are also highly monologic in nature. Even though the interviewer in many cases tries to influence the storytelling, Michael takes topic control and tells personal stories that show little co-constructed influences, and in that respect Labov’s model is appropriate for analyzing Michael’s narratives. Further, I see no inherent clash between a social constructionist point of view and Labov’s (1997) updated definition of a narrative, in which the focus has shifted to the narrator’s personal experience and away from a mechanic, syntactic definition.

Other criticism of Labov’s model arise with the overreliance on structure to characterize a narrative rather than relying on a functional
description, which often causes coding problems when the analyst has to assign syntactic structures to functional aspects (e.g., evaluation) of the narrative model. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012:32) argue that “some of the coding problems that stem from the application of a model which tries to combine a formal, syntactic characterization of narrative units with a functional definition of story constituents become immediately apparent.” In addition, coding is often ambiguous as narrative clauses can function to not only drive the action forward to but also to evaluate sequences and events at the same time.

Despite criticisms of Labov’s initial conceptualizations of a narrative, the model also has distinct strengths as outlined above: scholars agree that the model has the most essential parts of a narrative (event sequencing, complicating action), and the model was developed based on narratives told by inner city African Americans. The focus in this dissertation is on a young African American in Washington, D.C., who is an eager storyteller, and hence the model is fitting for analyzing his narratives. To provide an example of a narrative from the interview with Michael, consider Extract 3.1 below. In this narrative, Michael tells a story about getting in to a fight, because a boy shot him with a pellet gun. Michael tells the story to give the interviewer an idea of how the police bother him in his own neighborhood:
Extract 3.1: Michael’s Fight Narrative

1 Michael: No when I’m there they— they bother me too.
2 Interviewer: In your own neighborhood they do?
3 Michael: Cause one day I was fighting.
4 It was self-defense.
5 Some boy shot me with uh a pellet gun,
6 in my leg right here.
7 And I got MA:D!,
8 and I HIT him.
9 And I put a bruise on his head.
10 He was a BIG guy.
11 And I tell him,
12 "Don't shoot me with this,
13 and I'm gonna HIT you."
14 And he shot me then I hit him.
15 Then went home.
16 The police came to my house,
17 and asked me why I hit him.
18 I said, "Because he SHOT me."

Michael starts with the abstract in line 1, when he summarizes his main point by stating that the police bother him when he is in his own neighborhood. Michael then starts the orientation in line 3 and gives background description of why the police bother him, “Cause one day I was fighting.” In line 4 he evaluates why he was fighting, and claims it was due to self-defense. The complicating action occurs in lines 5-6, when a boy shoots Michael with a pellet gun. Michael evaluates the complicating action with emphatic phonology in 7, “And I got MA:D” with a long vowel and emphatic stress on “MA:D.” The narrative action picks up speed in 8-9 when Michael hits the boy and puts a bruise on his head. In line 10, Michael suspends the narrative action with an evaluation of his antagonist, “He was a BIG guy.” In lines 11-13, Michael introduces the complicating action one more time, but this time with constructed dialogue, introduced by the quotatives ‘tell’ (“And I tell him”), “Don’t shoot me with this and I’m gonna hit you.” The constructed dialogue (or direct quote) serves to recontextualize a past utterance in a
current story and increase the immediacy of a past experience to draw in the listener to the story (Hymes 1977, Schiffrin 1981, Tannen 2007). Line 14 is the complicating action where the antagonist shoots Michael and Michael hits him back. The action is suspended in 15 when Michael goes home and thus introduces the resolution to the story. The main point of the story occurs in 16-18 when Michael talks to the police and makes a point about why they bother him in his own neighborhood. The police ask Michael why he hit the other boy, and Michael answers by reconstructing his own speech saying, “Because he SHOT me” in line 18. The emphatic stress on “SHOT” highlights that Michael thinks he is the victim because he has to strike back in self-defense. The antagonist was the aggressor, and Michael had to put a “bruise on his head” to defend himself. While this narrative does not have a classic coda, in which the past is brought back to the present (the narrative ends with Michael talking to the police in the storyworld), it does have the important aspects of Labov’s (1997) updated narrative definition: personal experience, a turning point or complication, and event sequencing, which is why I chose this definition despite the limitations of the Labovian narrative.

At this point, we have seen examples of Michael’s storytelling and how I apply the Labovian framework to analyze narratives. Before I move on to give a background description of the sociocultural context for the interview with Michael, I turn to a short discussion of other African American verbal strategies in addition to storytelling, and how prosody may be related to these strategies – especially marking.
3.4 Prosody and African American Verbal Strategies

Labov’s (1972) groundbreaking work on narratives and narrative structure simultaneously paved the way for the study of African American verbal strategies. A central aspect of African American English lies in the narrative skills found in many African American verbal traditions, and these verbal skills require not only a mastery of AAE phonology and morphosyntactic features, but also a command of prosodic features. Some of the better known verbal strategies include signifying (“the verbal art of insult,” Smitherman 1977), playing the dozens (also an art of insult but it is a more severe or personal type of insult than signifying, Smitherman 1977), loud-talking (high volume talk indented for a third party, Mitchell-Kernan 1972), and marking. Marking is a type of constructed dialogue used for the purpose of mocking a person (Mitchell-Kernan 1972). The verbal strategies are often associated with expressive language with a certain flow and rhythm that relies on the prosodic features just as much as the most studied features of AAE in sociolinguistic variation (i.e. phonological and especially morphosyntactic features). The most important verbal strategy for the current study is marking, since I investigate whether or not Michael’s rhythmic shifts in constructed dialogue may be cases of marking. Mitchel-Kernan (1972:176) defines marking as:

A common black narrative tactic in the folk tale genre and in accounts of actual events is the individuation of characters through the use of direct quotation. When in addition, in reproducing the words of individual actors, a narrator affects the voice and mannerisms of the speakers, he is using the style referred to as marking (clearly related to the standard English ‘mocking’). Marking is essentially a mode of characterization. The marker attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said, in order to offer implicit comment on the speaker’s background, personality, or intent.
Marking is thus carried out using constructed dialogue to perform the speech of a person either present or absent in the discourse. However, marking is not any type of performance speech, and may best be understood in terms of Bakhtin’s (1984) notions of uni-directional and vari-directional double voicing. Uni-directional double-voicing refers to the performance of another voice, in which the speaker aligns positively with the performed speech. Vari-directional double voicing in contrast happens when a speaker, for instance, uses constructed dialogue to take a negative stance towards the voice being performed. Accordingly, marking should be viewed as a type of vari-directional double voicing, since the marker “attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said” for the purpose of mocking someone (i.e. to align negatively with the performed voice). Marking is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4 in relation to rhythm and constructed dialogue. For the current chapter, I now present the larger sociocultural context in which the interview with Michael took place, as I turn to a discussion of Washington, D.C. where Michael grew up.

3.5 Washington, D.C.

Michael is from the U.S. capital, Washington, D.C. More specifically, he comes from the Ward 7 and 8 areas of the city (Froyum Roise 2004), which are predominantly African American areas of Southeast Washington, D.C.29 Modan (2007) argues that Washington, D.C. is composed of two cities: Washington which refers to the larger metropolitan area including Virginia and Maryland suburbs, and D.C. which is the city of locals, mostly consisting of African Americans. Residents of ‘Washington’ are city dwellers engaged in

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29 Washington, D.C. is divided into four quadrants: Northwest (NW), Northeast (NE), Southwest (SW), and Southeast (SE).
politics or people who are in the national spotlight. The metropolitan area has one of the highest median incomes per household in the U.S. D.C. stands in stark contrast to Washington – not only in the ethnic composition, but especially in terms of standard of living and level of education. About 600,000 people live in D.C. proper, within eight wards, and Modan (2007) reports that 37% of all adults read at a third grade level, and more than 20% live below the poverty line. African American residents are disproportionately represented in these statistics, as most African American neighborhoods in D.C. constitute some of the poorest areas in the U.S.

In the Ward 7 and 8 areas of D.C., which are located in the Southeast quadrant of D.C., single parent homes and/or extended families are very common just like many other urban African American neighborhoods in the U.S. (Labov 2008, 2010). Michael grew up in the most poverty stricken area of D.C., which is predominantly African American: Ward 7 and 8 consist of 97% and 94% African Americans respectively, and these areas have the lowest high school graduation rates in the city (64% and 61%)\(^{30}\). In Ward 7, 12% of the population has a college degree compared to 8% in Ward 8. In Ward 7, 25% of the residents are below the level of poverty, and Ward 8 exhibits an alarming 36%. The mean household income in Ward 7 and 8 is $30,500 and $25,000 per year, which can be compared to the wealthiest Ward in D.C. ($71,900). Last but not least, the unemployment rate of all people over 16 is as high as 36.4%. (Froyum Roise 2004, D.C. Health Profile, U.S. Census Bureau). Figure 3.2 illustrates a map of Washington, D.C. and the area of the city where Michael was raised. Accordingly, when Michael talks about opposition in the

\(^{30}\) The statistics are from 2003 when the data was collected.
neighborhood, the statistics here verify the daily social challenges faced in this section of the city, which I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter.

**Figure 3.2.** Map of Washington, D.C. showing the location of Ward 7 and 8

The situation in Southeast Washington, D.C. is unfortunately not unique to the U.S. The history of slavery and long-standing negative attitudes towards African Americans in the U.S. and as an extension African American
English have led to not only discrimination but also segregation, which has continued after the big migration to the North from southern plantations (Bailey 1993). The continuing segregation in many urban areas despite anti-discrimination and anti-segregation laws has kept many African Americans in urban communities from having access to proper education and employment. Labov (2008, 2010) argues that extreme poverty in African American neighborhoods creates a vicious cycle that leads to reading failure in schools and thus unemployment. Many African Americans in Ward 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C. are caught in this vicious cycle as illustrated with pertinent statistics presented above. Figure 3.3 below shows the alarming situation found in many African American neighborhoods in U.S. inner cities:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 3.3.** Model of the development of African American Vernacular English in the framework of residential segregation (adopted from Labov 2010:21)

Labov (2008, 2010) argues that a history of discrimination and segregation has lead to extreme poverty in African American neighborhoods. The primary cause of poverty is unemployment, and recent reports show that
unemployment rates for young African American men without a high school diploma are as high as 72% (Labov 2010). Unemployment and underemployment due to lack of proper education removes the economic base for African American families. No access to the official or so-called “formal” economy leads to participation in the “informal” and illegal economy (e.g., selling drugs, robbery) in which people participate in street culture to get money (Labov 2010:21). Participation in the illegal economy leads to incarceration for males primarily, which in turn removes males from contributing to the economic base of the family, leaving many African American women as the only head of a household with limited financial resources. Such extreme poverty leads to institutionalized racism, since schools in poverty-stricken areas are often underfunded and understaffed, which inevitably leads to inadequate instruction and as a direct result reading failure. In turn, reading failure creates unemployment thus reinforcing the vicious cycle (Labov 2010:21).

A similar situation is found in Washington, D.C., and most of the participants in the summer day camp (called Emmaus) that Michael participated in have experienced extreme poverty in their upbringing in addition to all the parts of the model presented in Figure 3.3 that stems from discrimination, societal segregation, and poverty. Froyum Roise (2004) reports that many of the children came hungry to camp and with dirty clothing. Accordingly, when Michael talks about opposition in the neighborhood, the information provided in this chapter verifies the daily social challenges that he and others face in the Southeast section of Washington, D.C. In the following section, I will continue to discuss the challenges Michael has faced in his life, by telling about the sociological study he was a part of.
3.6 Michael and the Sociological Study

Michael is the participant whose speech is analyzed in this study. He is a fourteen-year-old African American male from Washington, D.C., and he was part of a summer program called Emmaus for at-risk youth in Washington, D.C. The interview with Michael came from a larger sociological study of African American pre-adolescents and adolescents (Froyum Roise 2004) aged 12-17. The author of the study, Carissa Froyum Roise, conducted all interviews for the study, including the one with Michael. The focus of the study centered in general on how the youth cope with substandard living conditions and daily challenges in Washington, D.C. (especially in the Ward 7 and 8 areas of Southeast Washington, D.C.). Although the study addresses general living conditions, most of the focus is placed on adolescent perspectives on gender roles and attitudes towards sexual orientation, such as inner city ideologies on masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, and heterosexism.

The study was carried out by the means of participant observation of 65 boys and girls for a period of seven weeks (Monday through Thursday, 8:30 am - 3:30 pm). In addition to the ethnographic observations, 20 interviews (11 interviews with girls and 9 interviews with boys) were included in the final analysis. The author of the study was a counselor at the program prior to doing the study, and got to know the participants well before and during the data collection period. The type of inner city concerns the participants were subject to on a daily basis involved “fights, drug culture…sexual abuse, rape, prostitution, risky sex, drug use, overworked parents, foster care, poor schooling, violence on the streets, parenthood, HIV

31 Except for one European American girl.
infection, and death” (Froyum Roise 2004:5). The camp participants received education in the morning, such as HIV education, and engaged in recreational activities in the afternoon, such as playing basketball.

While collecting the data during the seven weeks, Froyum Roise engaged in various activities with the teens. These involved informal chatter before the beginning of camp days, participation in group activities, and attending field trips with the teens. She argues that “in all situations, I tried to align myself with the teens by joining them in their activities, engaging them in conversation, and playing with them when possible” (Froyum Roise 2004:17). The alignment also involved rapport building through “humor and playfulness, the ways that the teens seem to communicate most comfortably with each other” (2004:22). As such, it appears that she attempted to approximate the teens’ ways of interacting with each other as a way for her to establish rapport. Being around the teens on a daily basis and building rapport with humor and playfulness appear to have had a positive effect on some of the interviews in terms of the participants’ willingness to share information and insights that are otherwise hard to elicit unless the interviewer is an accepted and validated member of the community. On the other hand, the obvious demographic differences between the interviewer and the teens have undoubtedly also had an effect on the teens’ willingness to share information: The interviewer was white, grew up in Minnesota; had obtained higher education; and was presumably in her 20s when collecting the data. In addition, she was something of an authority figure in the sense that she was a counselor at the camp. Further, she spoke quite standard American English (with some features of Northern Cities English) and sometimes used rather elevated diction; for example, her interview
questionnaire included words unfamiliar to the teens such as “sibling.” All of these factors almost certainly influenced the data (and conclusions) of the study, although it is not always easy to discern in what ways. Froyum Roise (2004:23) argues that she sometimes could take advantage of the differences between herself and the camp participants, but at other times these differences led the interviews in a different and unexpected direction:

While my difference from the teenagers sometimes opened up conversations or became the basis for playful joking, it also directed conversations in ways I did not expect. It was at these times that our racial and class differences were most evident, and my whiteness and education themselves directly influenced our interactions.

In a couple of situations especially, the social and linguistic differences were highlighted through the use of specific in-group terms that the teens would use without the interviewer understanding these terms. For example, kirking out meant loosing control while “yelling, screaming, or becoming violent,” whereas joning was a way to tease someone (Froyum Roise 2004:5). The social distance was evidenced in a couple of interviews in which the teens responded to her questions using “what I would describe as an informative, ‘let-me-tell-you-how-it-is’ tone throughout their interviews. The tones were not agitated but showed definite recognition that I was an outsider” (2004:23). These examples demonstrate some of the recurring challenges that an outsider faces when attempting to enter an urban community with contrasting phenotypes, educational backgrounds, socioeconomic positions, and language varieties.

Field notes were recorded and transcribed each day, and eventually the study came to focus on certain topics initiated by the author during the interviews – especially topics involving gender ideology (e.g., responsibility
for housework and childcare). The author argues that she used a semi-structured interview in which she had a set list of questions for the participants, but certain tangents were allowed if a teen introduced a sensitive topic, such as sexuality. The set list of questions involved “family background, what constitutes family, gender ideology, thoughts about what it means to be a boy or girl, friendship, typical dates, [and] dating experiences” (Froyum Roise 2004:21). Sexual experience and orientation was only talked about when a teen introduced the topic. Other sensitive topics included incarceration and death. Although the author argues that the interviews were semi-structured, the interview with Michael was rather topic controlled as the interviewer repeatedly tried to elicit specific information on the topics listed above, although Michael habitually tried to steer the interview in a direction of topics of concern to him (e.g., fighting). At any rate, the interviewer attempted to maintain much more control than a canonical sociolinguistic interview – a point I return to shortly.

The teens at the camp are in general described as being average teens from a poor African American neighborhood in D.C.: they are neither the best students, athletes, or musicians nor the worst criminals, but they are under daily influence of poverty and criminal activities and are thus considered to be at risk. Froyum Roise (2004:21) describes the teens as “fairly average students, sometimes involved in mischievous activities, sometimes involved in minor crimes, often with un-nurtured talents.” The adolescents’ caretakers have enough resources to enroll the teens in a summer program to keep them away from street activities, and the teens attend school on a regular basis. Froyum Roise (2004) reports that only 55% of the teens live with their biological mothers, and 45% live with both a male and a female.
The study shows that in the absence of cultural and economic capital (i.e. highly limited access to education and thus economic and social mobility), the teens rely on their bodies to create notions of respect and self-esteem and as an extension power (i.e. the ability to exercise control). Froyum Roise (2004) argues that the boys in the study are unable to exercise control, or power in the traditional sense, based on limited access to education, economic resources, and larger societal institutions. The boys have instead substituted traditional resources of control with a reliance on the body for the construction of a particular type of masculinity. As Froyum Roise (2004:190) writes, “boys have compensated by relying on their bodies as instruments of power and control. In doing so, boys maintain their dominance and girls’ subordination. They gain access to power in interpersonal relationships.” Power in relationships is claimed through hyper physicality, including the use of violence, and sexual promiscuity. However, Froyum Roise also argues that not all of the boys would adopt such masculinity and rely on the constant willingness to fight, sexual prowess and potency as described in the literature involving inner city African American males (see, e.g., Anderson 1999, Majors and Billson 1992, and Canada 1998). She maintains (2004:30):

“my experiences with young men and boys as an employee at Emmaus showed me that many boys’ lives are complex and confusing. Few boys actively resist masculinity, while many struggle to fit into street culture as they grow up. Some did not have the resources or social clout to practice masculinity, however, and others act like little boys.

Accordingly, the societal master narrative that often categorizes inner-city African American men as being hyper physical, sexual beings is problematized in this study, although the teens are all influenced by inner-city masculinities on a regular basis (e.g., violence).
Similarly, most of the girls in the study rely on the body to attract the attention of boys by “emphasizing their sex appeal, making themselves sexually available to boys, and fulfilling boys’ demands” (Froyum Roise 2004:190) due to restricted chances of social mobility and career opportunities. Finally, the study shows that most of the participants accept only heterosexuality, while creating excessive homophobic stances towards any person who may deviate from a perceived normative sexual orientation. The reliance on the body and ideologies of heterosexism allows the teens to cope with a life of sociocultural constraints, although relying in the body as a tool of power often drives the teens towards criminal activity and risky sexual behavior.

3.7 The Interactional Setting and Topics

The interviews in the ethnographic study are claimed to be semi-structured, in which the interviewer was interested in eliciting data on a set list of questions, although some tangents were allowed. As mentioned, the teens clearly know the interviewer, but the somewhat formal setting with a tape recorder and the social distance between the interviewer and the teens may have had an effect on how involved some of the teens were in the topics discussed. The linguistic differences may also have had an effect, since the interviewer speaks a quite standard variety of European American English with certain regional features from the Minnesota area (including Northern Cities vowel pronunciations and monophthongal productions of tense vowels characteristic of the region; e.g. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). The interviewer also admits that the teens use vocabulary that she does not
understand, but in general she tries to develop rapport by using humor and being playful.

Because the teens were not always as interested in the interviewer’s topics as she wished, the interviewer sometimes lost topic control. In the interview with Michael, she often attempts to regain topic control, as Michael continuously shifts the topic, and she tries to reinitiate a topic several times (e.g., “okay, okay, go back to...,” “back to the dating stuff,” “kinda going back to the family stuff”). I would argue that the interview with Michael is particularly useful for investigating speaker agency and identity, since Michael constantly attempts to gain topic control from the interviewer who is equally interested in gaining topic control to steer the interview in the direction of the questions she wants to ask for her sociological study. Breaking away from such control highlights agency, I would argue. In many instances, there is a clash between the interviewer’s questioning technique and Michael’s willingness to cooperate. Michael appears to be less controlling in the beginning of the interview - most likely because it takes a while for him to get comfortable with the interview setting, the personal questions, the tape recorder, and the one-on-one interview setting, but it does not take long before he starts to depart from the questions to steer the interview in a different direction towards topics he wants to talk about. After a while in the interview, he begins to play with the tape recorder (probably because he is bored), and the interviewer has to tell him to stop interfering with the recording equipment.
3.8 Motivation for Choosing the Case Study

This dissertation favors a case-study approach as the main method. The objective is to address stylistic variation in the construction and negotiation of African American identity, adopting a third wave focus on social meaning. In this particular case, social meaning is investigated through an integration of the variationist quantitative paradigm and discourse analysis.

The motivation for choosing the case-study is the fact that newer studies of style have demonstrated that ethnoracial identities can be constructed at the local level and that ethnic identity categories are much more fluid than perceived in traditional variationist studies, in which ethnic groups and linguistic features are paired based on statistical tendencies. In particular, a study such as Schilling-Estes (2004) demonstrates how a speaker of AAE can negotiate his African American identity based on salient AAE variables in unfolding interaction – sometimes converging linguistically with an interlocutor with a different ethnic identity and sometimes diverging based on, for instance, the topic of conversation. Further, Coupland (2007) makes the point that the quantitative paradigm has been unsuccessful in investigating social meaning at the level of the individual, partly due to the methodology adopted in the survey studies. In Coupland’s own words (2007:5):

Variationist sociolinguistics has worked with a limited idea of social context – and styling is precisely the contextualization of social styles. The survey designs of variationist research, which have been remarkably successful in revealing broad patterns of linguistic diversity and change, have not encouraged us to understand what people meaningfully achieve through linguistic variation. Variationist sociolinguistics has produced impressive descriptions of social styles, but without affording much priority to contextual styling.
Coupland chooses the word *styling* as a dynamic alternative to *style* in survey studies in order to put emphasis on intra-speaker variation as an ever-changing process rather than a product. In other words, it is precisely the contextualization of linguistic features that enables the researcher to develop an understanding of the social meaning encoded in variables through styling. Studies from such a perspective call for a full investigation of the context in which linguistic features are embedded, which essentially is an argument for the validity of case studies. Case studies allow for a dynamic view of language in context compared to survey studies, in which variables are extracted from the interactional context. However, in order to investigate the individual in relation to the group, large-scale studies are also needed as a solid backdrop against which the intraspeaker approaches can be compared and contrasted, since people also draw upon group associational meanings, sometimes stereotypical meanings, when shifting styles and shaping identities, even highly creative, non-traditional types of identities. For example, Barrett (1995) demonstrates that African American Drag Queens (AADQs) draw upon linguistic resources associated with stereotypical speech of white women, gay men, and African Americans to construct a novel AADQ identity.

Traditional variationist methods have been successful in investigating variation at the community level, but after the linguistic tokens are tabulated and abstracted away from their natural conversational settings, they tend to lose the contextual meaning and pragmatic function that is used to maintain, shape, and reshape social identities at the local level of social practice – practices that eventually construct identities at the interpersonal level, the community level, and by extension the global level in which identity
categories such as gender, race, and ethnicity are constructed. In such studies, an understanding of the fluid construction of ethnoracial identity is also lost.

It is evident that first wave methods have taken social categories such as class, gender, and ethnicity for granted, and while these categories still exist as societal conceptualizations and organizing forces, the meaning and formation of these groups have changed in the late-modern era (cf. Giddens 2002, Coupland 2007). As such, many scholars are abandoning the idea that these larger identity categories are formed in an identical manner throughout society, and also that power relations are identical across communities (see, e.g., Eckert 2000, 2005). When adopting this point of view, it is essential to focus on localized linguistic practices and how they become meaningful in social interaction through case studies of individuals. Whereas case studies may lack generalizability and community based statistical significance, their findings do add to our knowledge of general principles, since they give us an understanding of “what people meaningfully achieve through linguistic variation” (Coupland 2007:5). Case studies reveal information about localized linguistic practices that is often lost in survey studies and in addition enrich survey studies through providing the rich contextual details that help us understand why people demonstrate the patterns of linguistic variability revealed in large-scale studies. Indeed, as noted above, case studies and survey studies, far from being antithetical to one another, serve as invaluable complements.

The current case study is situated against the backdrop of numerous survey studies of AAE, as well as a growing body of AAE research in Washington, D.C., and as such Michael’s speech is by no means studied in a vacuum, which I demonstrate below. In studies of AAE (and especially large
scale studies) we still know relatively little about the underlying principles that motivate style shifts in interviews – especially when it comes of interactional concerns. Accordingly, one of the intentions behind this case study based on its integration of discourse analysis and sociolinguistic variation is to bring knowledge to general variationist principles by showing how variables become meaningful and pattern according to specific moments of interaction, which may shed light on some of the general assumptions about the sociolinguistic interview.

Schilling-Estes (1998:55) portrays the following argument for the value and insights gained from case studies:

Such insights would be obscured if the speaker under study had been grouped with a number of other speakers according to such catch-all categories as socio-economic class, gender, or ethnicity – rather than being viewed as an individual whose identity is dynamic and is constituted far more subtly than as the intersection of a number of demographic classifications.

Therefore, I employ a third wave method to explore the subtleties of African American identity, and for such an approach it is more appropriate to focus on the case study (as set against the backdrop of large scale studies), since the case study allows the researcher to contextualize linguistic features in intermediate stances and positionings.

I have multiple reasons for choosing to investigate a single speaker – and Michael specifically. First of all, the literature on AAE is vast (most studied dialect of English), and these previous findings provide a solid backdrop for which Michael’s speech can be compared, contrasted, and interpreted. Accordingly, this study should not be viewed as a study unrelated to previous studies on AAE in the variationist paradigm, but as an
alternative way of looking at data from the inner city. Second, Michael has already been established to have many of the previously studied features of AAE in his own speech in terms of segmental and suprasegmental features (Schilling and Jamsu 2010, Schilling-Estes 2006, Nielsen 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Schilling and Jamsu (2010) conducted a study of real time and apparent time distributions of r-lessness and /ay/ monophthongization in AAE in Washington, D.C., and Michael was a part of this study. The data came from three different Washington, D.C. corpora: Four African American teenagers recorded in 1968 (Fasold 1972), four middle-aged speakers from Georgetown University’s Language and Communication in Washington, D.C. (LCDC) corpus (recorded from 2006-2009 and so of approximately the same age cohort as the teens recorded in 1968), and four teenagers (DC Teen) born in the 1990s and recorded in 2003 by Carissa Froyum Roise. Michael was part of the DC Teen group. 1156 tokens were coded impressionistically for internal linguistic factors, and the three corpora were coded as extralinguistic factors. The internal linguistic factors for /ay/ was phonological environment (voiced, voiceless, and word-final), and /r/ was coded for type of r (unstressed syllabic r, stressed r with preceding back vowel, stressed r with preceding front vowel, and stressed syllabic r). Finally, another factor group in the coding of /r/ was segment following /r/ (vowel, consonant, and pause). The results for the two variables are presented in Figure 3.4 below:
**Figure 3.4.** /ay/ monophthongization and r-lessness in Washington, D.C. based on three corpora (adopted from Schilling and Jamsu 2010)

*Figure 3.4 demonstrates that /ay/ is highly monophthongal in D.C. when the following linguistic environment is voiced and when in word-final position. In voiceless environments, /ay/ is overwhelmingly pronounced as a diphthong. Considering corpus as an extralinguistic factor, the DC teenagers show more monophthongization (0.657) than the LCDC (0.428) and Fasold (0.392) data. Figure 3.5 below shows also that the DC teens have a great increase in monophthongal pronunciation of /ay/ in voiceless environments (31%) compared to the LCDC (9%) and Fasold (4%) data. Overall the DC teens show an increase in /ay/ monophthongization in all three environments (voiced, voiceless, word-final).* 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Following Context</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Apps/Total</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRIZE</td>
<td>124/169</td>
<td>0.713</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRY</td>
<td>161/216</td>
<td>0.696</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRICE</td>
<td>22/160</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC Teen</td>
<td>136/196</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCDC</td>
<td>87/172</td>
<td>0.428</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FASOLD</td>
<td>84/117</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Input 0.554
Log likelihood = -274.332
Significance = 0.000
N = 545

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Apps/Total</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of r</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear unstressed</td>
<td>123/233</td>
<td>0.624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed back</td>
<td>85/172</td>
<td>0.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressed front</td>
<td>33/99</td>
<td>0.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabic</td>
<td>26/107</td>
<td>0.263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Following context</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Apps/Total</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pause</td>
<td>46/76</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonant</td>
<td>189/424</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vowel</td>
<td>32/111</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Input 0.430
Log likelihood = -395.227
Significance = 0.000
N = 611
For r-lessness (see Figure 3.4), only linguistic factors turned out to be significant, in which unstressed /r/ (0.624) and stressed /r/ with a preceding back vowel (0.611) favor r-lessness, whereas stressed /r/ with a preceding front vowel (0.448) and syllabic /r/ (0.263) disfavor r-lessness. The conclusion of the study states that the two linguistic features are being maintained and are even increasing in D.C. when comparing the DC teens with the older generations of African Americans. The proposed reasons for these patterns, based on a more detailed analysis of one of the DC teens, are (Schilling and Jamsu 2010:10):

r-lessness and /ay/ glide reduction (including its spread to pre-voiceless contexts) are important to AAVE speakers in a variety of communities as markers of affiliation with and stance toward African American ethnicity and its many facets and components, including, among many others, shared Southern historical roots, and strong in-group ties.

The accelerated changes in these variables could be a reflection of Milroy’s (1980) findings that residents in dense social networks resist linguistic
influences from outside groups and instead favor language change from within the community. In Philadelphia, Labov (2010:18) has shown that:

within the core group of Blacks, linguistic change has accelerated, in both the tense/mood/aspect system and the morphosyntactic reflections of grammatical categories. Dense and multiplex networks are of course a concomitant of residential segregation.

Something similar could be at play in the Schilling and Jamsu (2010) study, since the D.C. teens are from the Ward 7 and 8 areas of the city in which residential segregation is predominant with 97% and 94% African American residents respectively. These areas form dense and multiplex networks, which is evident from Schilling and Jamsu’s conclusion that r-lessness and /ay/ glide reduction are flourishing due to “shared Southern historical roots, and strong in-group ties,” making these variables a strong indicator of African American group membership. As mentioned, Michael was one of the four DC teens, demonstrating that /ay/ monophthongization and r-lessness are central features of his dialect – features that are associated with African American group membership and ethnic identity in Washington, D.C.

In addition to the Schilling and Jamsu (2010) study, when taking Michael’s upbringing into consideration it also establishes him as a likely speaker of AAE. Michael grew up in the Ward 7 (97% African American) and 8 (94% African American) areas of Southeast Washington, D.C. – areas that are predominantly African American (Froyum Roise 2004), and while we need more studies of these areas of Washington, D.C., there is a general consensus amongst sociolinguists that AAE is spoken in these areas of the city. By extension, I would argue that Michael is a speaker of one of the AAE varieties spoken in this area based on the Schilling and Jamsu (2010),
Schilling-Estes (2006), and Nielsen (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) studies. Accordingly, the interview with Michael should not be viewed in a vacuum. Contrarily, there is an abundance of sociolinguistic data on AAE in general and a growing body of data on AAE in Washington, D.C. that can be used as a backdrop for comparing and contrasting Michael’s speech presented in this dissertation, which is an additional justification the case study approach.

Another reason for using the preexisting data from the sociological study and favoring a case study over a survey approach unfortunately represents a reality that most residents of Washington, D.C. and linguistic field researchers cannot deny: Southeast D.C. is in a situation of residential segregation as characterized by Labov (2008, 2010). Southeast D.C has a high unemployment rate – in fact, one of the highest in the country. It is a very poor area, and due to a flourishing informal economy, the area is crime ridden with a high number of homicides. When the data for this study was gathered in 2003, 248 homicides were registered in Washington, D.C. by the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, and most of the homicides took place in African American neighborhoods with a high number in Ward 7 and 8. Homicides in D.C. for the past 20 years peaked in 1993 with 454 homicides, but for the past ten years the number has dropped steadily to 108 in 2011. Nonetheless, homicides in Southeast are unfortunately just one aspect of crime statistics. When the data was gathered in 2003, other crime statistics for Washington, D.C. were as follows: Forcible Rape (273), Robbery (3,863), Aggravated Assault (4,482), Burglary (4,670), Larceny/Theft (17,362), Stolen Auto (9,549), and Arson (126). Homicides in Ward 7 and 8 alone were 124 in

2003, which is extremely high considering that only about 140,000 people in total live in these two areas\textsuperscript{34}. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 report crime statistics for Ward 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C. during 2002 and 2003:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Type</th>
<th>Number of Crimes that Occurred Between</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/1/2002 to 12/31/2002</td>
<td>01/01/2003 to 12/31/2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>1194</td>
<td>1103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Abuse</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery Excluding Gun</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery With Gun</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault Dangerous Weapon (ADW) Excluding Gun</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault Dangerous Weapon (ADW) Gun</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Violent Crime</td>
<td>1194</td>
<td>1103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft E/Auto</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen Auto</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Property Crime</td>
<td>3514</td>
<td>4384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Crime</td>
<td>4668</td>
<td>5487</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.1. Crime in Washington, D.C. Ward 7 during 2002 and 2003**\textsuperscript{35}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Type</th>
<th>Number of Crimes that Occurred Between</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/1/2002 to 12/31/2002</td>
<td>01/01/2003 to 12/31/2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Abuse</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery Excluding Gun</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery With Gun</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault Dangerous Weapon (ADW) Excluding Gun</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault Dangerous Weapon (ADW) Gun</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Violent Crime</td>
<td>1523</td>
<td>1451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft E/Auto</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen Auto</td>
<td>1104</td>
<td>1104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Property Crime</td>
<td>2734</td>
<td>2734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Crime</td>
<td>4185</td>
<td>4185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.2. Crimes in Washington, D.C. Ward 8 during 2002 and 2003**\textsuperscript{36}

It is evident based on the available crime statistics from Ward 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C. that insiders to these communities are faced with grave challenges, challenges which are compounded exponentially when a

\textsuperscript{34} Statistics retrieved from The Office of Planning in Washington, D.C.: http://planning.dc.gov/DC/Planning/DC+Data+and+Maps/DC+Data+Tables/Data+by+Geography/Wards


community outsider wishes to enter these particular communities. In addition, the dense and multiplex networks that have formed over the years in Southeast D.C., accentuated by a history of racial segregation and institutional racism, make it difficult for any outsider regardless of demographic background to enter the community, which is additional justification for why the data from the Froyum Roise (2004) study is of extra importance to researchers. The summer camp took place outside of Ward 7 and 8, and the teens just happened to come from these communities that are extremely difficult to enter. To provide some additional evidence of the dangers an outsider may experience when entering the community, a fellow student of mine, a female European American graduate student from Georgetown University, once decided to familiarize herself with Ward 8 to get to know this part of the city better due to interests in neighborhood studies. When spotted in the neighborhood, the African American owner of a liquor store ran into the street, pulled the student into the store, called a taxi and said, “You have to get outta here! Right Now!” The storeowner feared for the student’s life and made sure she left the neighborhood immediately. Large-scale surveys are extremely difficult to conduct in Southeast Washington, D.C., and they demand careful planning and personal connections in the area. While the current study focuses on intraspeaker variation, I hope future studies will encompass a large-scale investigation of linguistic variation in Southeast, Washington, D.C. I hope this study can be used as inspiration for what to expect in terms of social and linguistic considerations when entering the community in addition to how researchers can plan and carry out such a study.
It is time to reassemble the identity category *African American* by investigating ethnic identity and its linguistic construction as multilayered. In fact, Bucholtz and Hall (2005:586) have argued that “identity does not emerge at a single analytic level—whether vowel quality, turn shape, code choice, or ideological structure – but operates at multiple levels simultaneously.” Accordingly, the case study and a stylistic approach is much more useful for analyzing multiple levels simultaneously rather than analyzing correlations between variants on one level of variation (usually segmental phonological or morphosyntactic) and group membership, as was usually the case in the survey studies. The linguistic case study will complement first and second wave studies on AAE.

### 3.9 The Semi-Structured Interview

The data for this dissertation was collected as part of a sociological study of participants at an at-risk youth summer camp in Washington, D.C. As such, the data collection process was slightly different from the canonical sociolinguistic interview\(^\text{37}\) as Labov (1972, 1984), and Wolfram and Fasold (1974) envisioned it. In this section, I discuss some of the characteristics of the sociolinguistic interview and the type of data it has been considered to yield, and then compare the sociolinguistic interview to the semi-structured interview used in this study. Since I conduct a sociolinguistic analysis of the data elicited from the semi-structured interview, the two interview techniques and resulting language data should be compared and contrasted. Part of this discussion also involves motivation and argumentation for why the semi-

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\(^{37}\) Note that I make a distinction between the *sociolinguistic interview* and the *semi-structured interview* in this section. The interviewer calls her interview technique ”semi-structured,” and while the sociolinguistic interview is sometimes referred to as semi-structured as well, the interview with Michael is much more structured than a traditional sociolinguistic interview.
structured interview works particularly well for eliciting the prosodic variables investigated in this dissertation.

The sociolinguistic interview was designed to elicit casual speech, more so than eliciting specific responses to a set list of questions. Casual speech was theorized to surface in situations in which a speaker is emotionally involved compared to more formal situations. The idea is that the more emotionally involved speakers are, the less they will pay attention to their linguistic productions. For example, in involved narratives, speakers are focused on creating an emotive response to a past event through narrative telling. The classic example would be a response to Labov’s (1972a) ‘danger of death’ question, in which participants are asked to tell, and hence re-live, a situation in which they were in danger of dying. In contrast to this emotionally involved speech style, the traditional Labovian view holds that the more attention speakers pay to their speech the more self-conscious they will be, which will result in a speech variety that is closer to so-called standard (or a perceived standard) ways of speaking. More formal speech styles are elicited from, for instance, the pronunciation of word pairs in isolation, according to Labov (1972b).

Milroy and Gordon (2003:65) argue that the sociolinguistic field worker can do at least two actions to elicit even more casual speech: “(1) attempt to influence the content of the interview; and (2) [make] modifications to the dynamics of one-on-one interviewing.” Influencing the content of the interview in a direction in which the participant becomes emotionally involved has proven to depend on more localized cultural norms rather than, e.g., ‘the danger of death’ question that does not yield emotional responses and involved narratives in every community. Other techniques to influence
the dynamics of the interview have been utilized by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1996) and Schilling-Estes (1999) in which interviews were conducted with pairs of interviewers, which also helped break down the one-on-one dynamic closely associated with more formal interview situations. Whether or not the best way to elicit casual speech is in one-on-one or group settings, the overarching goal of the sociolinguistic interview is to elicit speech that is as close to a casual conversation as possible, using questions that are supposed to matter to the participants’ everyday lives. Accordingly, gaining access to the community of study before collecting data is essential for asking the right questions.

The data in the current study is interesting, since the data gathering technique does not follow established sociolinguistic norms. The whole point of the study in which Michael was a part of (Froyum Roise 2004) was to study how adolescents from poor neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. cope with a life of sociocultural constraints. The interviewer never had the elicitation of casual speech as a goal in and of itself, but focused more on collecting responses to a set list of questions. For example, Extract 3.2 below illustrates that the interviewer does not discontinue a certain line of questioning even though Michael refrains from cooperating with her and appears to avoid the question altogether. In the example, Michael is asked if he has a job:
It is clear from Michael’s discourse in this example that he tries to avoid answering the interviewer’s question. The first time he responds to the question in line 2, he does not provide enough information to fully answer the question. The interviewer is clearly not interested in a yes/no answer, but wants specific information about the nature of Michael’s job. In fact, the interviewer asks the same question three times in 1, 3, and 5, which illustrates her persistence in trying to elicit specific answers to questions. Michael also avoids the question in 6, as he replies that he makes money from his job rather than telling what he actually does. Finally, he reveals that his job consists of cutting grass for elderly people in the neighborhood, which is not a cool job in his world. The interviewer’s questioning technique is hardly designed to induce Michael to talk at length and deviates from a traditional sociolinguistic interview - at least at first glance.

While Froyum Roise’s ‘semi-structured’ interview deviates from the canonical sociolinguistic interview in several ways, it also has certain advantages from a data-gathering standpoint. The sociolinguistic interview has been criticized for actually being less natural than a traditional interview, since interviewees expect interviews to be formal and well-prepared with a set agenda (Wolfson 1976, Schilling forthcoming). Wolfson argues that
interviewees are not familiar with the sociolinguistic interview as a speech genre. Many people are familiar with interviews, but they are uncomfortable with a conversational interview in which the interviewer may appear to have a hidden agenda, since the interviewe is not familiar with the genre (see also Schilling-Estes 2007). The interview with Michael constitutes a set list of questions that all the participants in the study were asked, and the interviewer’s underlying intentions seems straightforward to the participants. The interview with Michael involves questions about, for instance, family, dating, and gender ideologies. Most of these questions seem to be relevant for Michael’s everyday life, although the direct nature of some of the questions (e.g., questions about sex and using protection) causes avoidance rather than direct answers. Nonetheless, the questions appear to have relevance for Michael’s life, which is evident in the longer narratives that Michael tells in response to many of the topics the interviewer raises.

The interview with Michael shows in a similar way that even though the interviewer appears to control the interview with questions and topic control, Michael often displays agentive behavior and goes off on tangents to tell elaborate narratives of events that create emotional involvement, such as when he reports about fighting. Accordingly, the interview with Michael is an ideal site for investigating the fluid construction of identity, and the data will show that Michael’s speech varies greatly depending on specific moments of interaction. As such, his speech is formed by contextual and interactional factors in the co-construction of his identity. As I will argue, the specific moments of interaction represent the locus of identity construction more so than a preconceived idea that Michael happens to belong to a monolithic African American group.
Finally, the interview with Michael demonstrates that the semi-structured interview works well as a source of data collection – and in some respects even more so than the sociolinguistic interview – and that Michael (and people in general) are very agentive in displaying and creating identity in interview interaction, since even in interviews in which the interviewer attempts to exert control, interviewees can still exercise a great deal of control and talk about what they want to talk about, not just what the interviewer wants them to talk about. Michael is a perfect example of an individual who has no problem taking control of the interaction to talk about topics that are of concern to him, while displaying and highlighting particular aspects of his identity.

3.10 The Interview and Topics

The purpose of this section is to provide a general overview of some of the topics discussed in the interview with Michael, and to give an idea of some of the answers he provides to the interviewer’s questions. As mentioned, the interview with Michael is centered on a variety of topics, including family, prison, fighting, police, marriage, gender ideologies, sex, and dating. Most of the topics are introduced by the interviewer, whereas others are introduced by Michael. For instance, the interviewer is concerned with the family structure surrounding Michael to find out what his general living situation is and whether or not he lives with his biological parents. Other topics, such as fighting, are introduced by Michael, as he appears eager to tell about fights in which he has been involved in his neighborhood. The topics below are presented as they occur in chronological order in the interview. In chapter 4, falsetto phonation is investigated quantitatively based on the influence on
topic (i.e. does falsetto speech cluster in certain topics), so the examples below should provide the reader with an idea of what was discussed in each topic. Topics were easy to determine in some cases, since a specific question from the interviewer would elicit a direct answer to the question (e.g., who should bear financial responsibility in a relationship). Other topics were not as easy to determine, since they emerged in the interview discourse. For example, the topic of fighting was often a result of Michael steering the interview in a direction where he could tell his fight stories, but he often had to change the topic to do so. However, after doing narrative and discourse analyses of the stretches of speech in which falsetto occurred, the topic was determined. The remainder of this section gives some specific examples of the topics discussed in the interview and Michael’s stances towards these topics. The purpose in this section is to give the reader an idea of the content of the interview.

On the topic of family, the interviewer asks questions such as: who do you live with? Tell me about your parents? What does your grandparents do? Michael reports that he lives with his grandparents, and he has been living with them for a while. He has two brothers and a sister, who live with his mother in Virginia. Michael reports that he used to live with his mother, and he has been told he can live with her again when he turns fifteen. Michael’s father is in jail, and Michael does not appear to have a close relationship with his father. It is clear from the interview that Michael is reluctant to share exact information about his father as illustrated in Extract 3.3:
Extract 3.3

Interviewer: And what about your dad? Is he still in jail?
Michael: Uh huh.
Interviewer: He is. Do you know when he’s getting out? No.
Michael: But I get to visit him sometimes.
Interviewer: That’s what I was gonna say. Where’s he at?
Interviewer: He’s in D.C. Okay, so how often do you go and see him then?
Michael: Not often but so-so.
Interviewer: What does so-so mean?
Michael: Like..often..like
Interviewer: Once a week, once a month, once a year? Every other year?
Michael: Once, once, like once a week, yeah.
Interviewer: Once a week?
Michael: Once every other week.

In this extract, the interviewer is rather persistent in getting precise information, and she is not satisfied with Michael’s vague answer “so-so.” The interviewer asks for clarification and Michael once again is vague and answers “like...often..like.” The two vague answers make the interviewer elaborate on her question, “Once a week, once a month, once a year? Every other year?” and Michael answers “once a week” and later changes it to “once every other week.” This extract epitomizes the interviewers questioning technique in the semi-structured interview when Michael refrains from giving precise answers to questions about sensitive topics: She keeps asking questions until she gets the answer she wants or until Michael takes a rather indignant stance towards the interviewer’s questions.

On the topic of prison, Michael not only talks about his father but also about his own experience with juvenile detention. During one particular episode, Michael and his friend were put in a cell, accused of stealing a car. Michael reports the following in Extract 3.4:
Extract 3.4

Michael: And then once we got in the cell, they told us we was suspects in the neighborhood. But then when they found...’cause uh somebody tried- they said somebody tried to steal somebody’s car and they called the police. They took our fingerprints and took the fingerprints off the car. And we was in Oak Hill for the night but woke up and went to court. Found out it wasn’t our fingerprints. They said it wasn’t ours and they let us- they dropped all charges and then let us go.

Interviewer: So did they ever figure out who it actually was?
Michael: Uh uh, they just said it wasn’t out fingerprints. They scanned them, and they ink-print them. Our fingerprints.

Froyum Roise (2004:24) writes that Michael bragged about the incident to another boy, because he had fooled the police. Michael says he stole the car but wiped off his fingerprints. Froyum Roise notes that she does not know if the story is true or if Michael is just bragging to his friend as part of a boasting culture. Nonetheless, Michael talks about juvenile detention in several cases during the interview.

Fighting is a big topic during the interview. The interviewer usually does not introduce the topic of fighting, but Michael often steers the interview in this direction, since he wants to tell fight stories. Extract 3.5 illustrates how Michael takes topic control and turns the conversation into a fight story. The interviewer has just asked if the police bother Michael in his own neighborhood, and Michael immediately tells a narrative about fighting. The interviewer originally asked about what Michael likes the least about his family, and Michael turns that question into stories about run-ins with the police and fighting:
Michael: No when I’m there they- they bother me too. Cause one day I was fighting.

Interviewer: In your own neighborhood they do?
Michael: It was self-defense. Somebody shot me with a pellet gun in my leg right here, and I got mad and I hit him. And I put a bruise on his head. He was a big guy. And I tell him, “Don’t shoot me with this and I’m gonna hit ya.” And he shot me then I hit him, then went home. The police came to my house and asked me why I hit him. I said, ”Because he shot me.”

Interviewer: So why would he shoot at you?
Michael: Now, cause. These two boys was fighting, right?
Interviewer: Uh huh.
Michael: Cause he- cause they shot him, my friend Dejan with uh, with uh pellet gun in the stomach.
Interviewer: Uh huh.
Michael: And that’s when, he went home and got a knife. And I was like, if they try to jump him, I was gonna help him. I’m not gonna let him go out like that, cause they said they was gonna jump him so. The boy that shot me, he heard me say it, he asked he was like, ”You gonna help him? I thought you was with us.” I was like, ”No, I ain’t gonna let him go out like that.” That’s when he uh shot me, so we started fighting.

It is evident from the extracts that Michael willingly offers a fight story to the question about why the police bother him. Michael starts the story with “Cause one day I was fighting.” The interviewer follows up with “In your own neighborhood they do?” to which Michael responds “It was self-defense,” showing that he continues to tell his story and disregards the interviewer’s follow up question. The narratives about fighting are told several times during the interview, and in another instance Michael talks about going to juvenile detention, because he broke a boy’s hand. Accordingly, using the body as an instrument of power is a common theme throughout the interview – especially in terms of claiming power through fighting.

Related to the topic of fighting is the topic of police, which Michael introduces to the conversation. Michael reports during the interview that he
has had many run-ins with the police – in certain cases because he has been a suspect of a crime and in other cases the run-ins happen for no apparent reason according to Michael. He argues that he is subject to police discrimination on a regular basis, and that the police have struck him on several occasions. In Extract 3.6, Michael talks about what his general feeling is towards the police. The interviewer’s question in Extract 3.6 is a follow up question. Michael has introduced the topic of police earlier in the conversation:

**Extract 3.6**

*Interviewer:* So what is your general feeling about the police?

*Michael:* I don’t like the police. Like the marshals, they- they will hit you. Downtown, the marshals, they’ll hit you if you do something, like do something, like to- like do bad curse them out or something. That’s why I don’t like the police there. Just come to you for no reason. Like if you walking in a neighborhood where you don’t live at, they come up to you, “Where you at? Where you going?” It don’t matter where we going! We didn’t do nothing so why you asking where we going? So we was like- it look like we suspicious. We look suspicious walking in the neighborhood.

The extract illustrates Michael’s general attitude towards the police, and that police violence is something he sees and experiences often in his neighborhood.

In terms of *relationships*, the interviewer asks Michael questions about the distribution of responsibilities in a relationship. For example, the interviewer is interested in finding out where the source of income should come from as part of the financial base of the family. In one case, the interviewer asks about who should support the family financially, which is presented in Extract 3.7:
Extract 3.7

Interviewer: Uh huh. And who- what about uhm financially supporting the family? Who’s job do you think that is?
Michael: Mine. Like, like the man in the house should support his family. Like if you have a wife.
Interviewer: Uh huh.
Michael: But you ain't got no kids and your wife's not working and if you do have a wife and kids, you gotta have a job that can support all of us, all of you. Like, like my brother, like say I'm a basketball player, I could support I could support them. But if I'm like a construction worker or something, yeah I could still support them but I would like put them first. I put them first and I put myself last.

Michael reports that the financial foundation of the family should be the man’s responsibility, “the man in the house should support his family.”

Michael contrasts life as a construction worker with life as a basketball player – two professions with different salaries. If he chooses life as a construction worker, he would have to put his family first, which would not be the case as a basketball player with a high salary. Michael sees the father role as someone who provides financially. In a different part of the interview, Michael talks about his mother’s new boyfriend who Michael sees as a father figure, because “Yeah he- he- he gives me stuff, so he buys me stuff, so I take him as- as a fa- father figure.”

On the topic of gender ideologies, Michael displays attitudes of heterosexism (i.e. the idea that opposite sex relationships are superior). He views homosexuality as deviant sexual behavior from the norm, and opposes the idea that people can be born gay. In Extract 3.8, Michael displays his views on homosexuality:
Extract 3.8

*Interviewer:* So are people uhm born gay?
*Micahel:* No.

*Interviewer:* They are not born gay?
*Micahel:* They choose to be gay.

*Interviewer:* They do- okay, so what makes somebody choose to be gay?
*Micahel:* They can't be born gay. No- Nobody's born gay. But some people I think are because they didn't grow up, they brought up like with a little sensitive voice. Like if it's a boy, they brought up like a little girly voice. So they choose, they're like "Because of the little girly voice, I'm gonna be gay."

Michael views homosexuality as a choice, and equates gayness with being a girl, “Because of the little girly voice, I’m gonna be gay.” Most of the teens in the study are heterosexual and view homosexuality as an anomaly. However, Froyum Roise (2004:183) also states, “homosexuality is something that most teenagers tolerate as an act of individualism and choice,” and Michael also states that “you can't like judge somebody if they gay or something, you can't judge them and say, ‘You not supposed to be gay’ if that's the way they at.” In sum, Michael sees homosexuality as an anomaly, but tolerates it since he is not allowed to judge a person’s individual choices.

The topic of sex is also discussed in the interview. The interviewer wants to find out when a relationship develops into having sex, and she is also interested in teenage concerns regarding sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy. Froyum Roise (2004) writes that most of the teens were not worried about STDs, including HIV/AIDS, or pregnancy when asked directly. Michael voices no concern for STDs and claims that he can tell whether not a person has AIDS. HIV/AIDS rates in Washington, D.C. are so high that they are considered an epidemic by the World Health Organization, and African Americans from Wards 5, 6, 7, and 8 are disproportionately
affected\textsuperscript{38}. Extract 3.9 demonstrates Michael’s lack of concern for STDs and HIV/AIDS:

\textbf{Extract 3.9}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Interviewer:} So were you, in that case were you worried about an STD or HIV or anything like that? Not really. What about-  
\textbf{Michael:} No, she was clean though. She was- she was a virgin and all that.  
\textbf{Interviewer:} How do you know that?  
\textbf{Michael:} She told me, and she said she was a virgin.  
\textbf{Interviewer:} So what do you mean by clean?  
\textbf{Michael:} She was clean, she didn’t look like she had AIDS or nothing like that. Her parents didn't look like they had AIDS or nothing. 'Cause people that have AIDS they get all skinny and look terrible, but her parents looked like they clean, healthy people.  
\textbf{Interviewer:} So when somebody has AIDS or HIV could- can you tell by looking at them?  
\textbf{Michael:} Yeah.  
\textbf{Interviewer:} You can tell by looking at them? Because they are thinner?  
\textbf{Michael:} They thinner and they look, got bumps on their face, but she had a nice smooth face, she was clean. But some people don't look like that. They keep themselves up, they might have AIDS, but they keep themselves up. But she- she ain’t gonna lie to me. She ain’t lying to me, she, she tell me straight up, "I ain't got AIDS."
\end{quote}

Michael’s alarming response about being able to tell if a person is “clean” or not is unfortunately typical of the teens, according to Froyum Roise (2004).

Finally, the topic of dating is also discussed in the interview. Froyum Roise (2004) wanted to discuss this topic with the teens, because Anderson (1999) has claimed that African American relationships and dating in the inner city can be characterized as a game. Males and females have opposite goals: Females are interested in long term relationships, whereas boys are interested in having as many female sexual partners as possible. Females tend to have an overly romantic view of relationships and use sex to create a bond

with a man, which males often take advantage of to have sex (Anderson 1999, Froyum Roise 2004). In the interview with Michael, the interviewer asks questions about who pays on a date, how many girlfriends Michael has had, and whether or not it is okay to date more than one person at the time. Michael’s sees protecting a girl as one of his responsibilities in a relationship, and to protect he must always be willing to fight. Extract 3.10 illustrates how Michael once got into a fight at a party, because he had to protect his girlfriend. Unfortunately, the fight backfired and the girlfriend ends up breaking up with Michael:

Extract 3.10

*Interviewer:* So back at the party, what was the guy doing that upset you so much?

*Micheal:* He kept grabbing her. And then I was like, and my man was like, "Look dog, he curried your girl." First I thought- he looked like they was playing but then she started getting serious and started pulling from him like "stop!" So I ran over there and started hitting him. And that's when his friend started jumping in. I was like, "What y'all gonna do?" And then that's when she got mad. 'Cause I got her friends that go to her school and all that. She was like, "These are my friends that go to my school." I was like, "So I don't care- he ain't got no right to touch you." Uhm, he was caught touching her and just kept grabbing her and all that. So I got angry. She was like, you shouldn't have. And then we left. And she- she walked over to the side and started talking to me. She was like, "Why you do that?" She was like- she wanted me to leave. And I was like, "Why? He was touching you and all that." She was like, "So, he was like- we was just playing." I was like, "He didn't look like he was playing, he was like." Yeah, she was like maybe we should be friends for a while.

The topics discussed in the interviews with the 20 teenagers from the sociological study are similar to the ones Michael discusses in his interview. Just like many of the other teens, Michael’s interview responses (and Froyum Roise’s ethnographic observations) indicate that he relies on his body as a source of power and as a means of control to gain respect. He does not appear
to be overly concerned about STDs and pregnancy, and he presents a heterosexist view of the world. Unfortunately, the reliance on the body due to limited access to formal resources of power (i.e., education) often leads to self-destructive behavior, which includes the reliance on violence to solve disputes and risky sexual behavior when dealing with the challenges the teens face in the urban landscape. Michael is subject to all of the risks found in an inner city informal economy: he sold drugs at a young age; he steals (according to himself); he uses violence to protect and gain respect, and he is involved in risky sexual behavior. In addition to using his body to cope with challenges, Michael also relies on his verbal skills and linguistic performances to resist a life of sociocultural constraints, which will become evident in the analysis chapters. Before turning to the first analysis chapter on falsetto phonation, the rest of this chapter presents transcription conventions used for the interactional analyses in chapters four and five.

3.11 Transcription Conventions
The AAE features noted and analyzed in Michael’s speech can be found in Appendix A. However, these features will be listed below in Table 3.3 to prepare the reader for the analyses and the detailed transcripts in the analysis chapters. Note that the table has been divided into three sections with phonological features of AAE, grammatical features of AAE, and transcription conventions used to create transcripts for discourse analysis. As such, the phonological and grammatical features represent traditional features of AAE studied in sociolinguistic variation. The transcription symbols show how they are represented in the detailed extracts from the interview found in the analysis chapters. All of the features of AAE are
illustrated with specific examples from the transcript and thus from Michael’s speech. Finally, Table 3.3 shows reference to studies that have linked these variables to African American ethnicity. The terminology for phonological and grammatical features are primarily inspired by Rickford (1999), and the transcription conventions for discourse analysis are based on Schiffrin (1987, 2006) and Tannen (1989).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonological Features of AAE</th>
<th>Transcription Symbols</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronounced r (r-1) in post-vocalic environments</td>
<td>[r]</td>
<td>Car[r], mor[r]ning</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monophthongal /ay/</td>
<td>[a:]</td>
<td>Pie[a:], I[a:]</td>
<td>Rickford (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopping of interdental fricative eth -&gt; /d/</td>
<td>[d]</td>
<td>[d]that</td>
<td>Rickford (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alveolar stops /d/ realized as glottal stop</td>
<td>[?]</td>
<td>did[?]n't</td>
<td>Fasold and Wolfram (1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falsetto speech</td>
<td>Bold</td>
<td>“I ain’t had sex with the girl.”</td>
<td>Alim (2004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical Features of AAE: Syntax and morphology</th>
<th>Transcription Symbols</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copula Deletion</td>
<td>[Øc] (capital Ø)</td>
<td>she [Øc] pregnant</td>
<td>Labov (1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization of was/were</td>
<td>[gen]</td>
<td>you was[gen] with us</td>
<td>Wolfram (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization of is/are</td>
<td>[gen2]</td>
<td>why is[gen2] you asking</td>
<td>Wolfram (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of ain’t for negation</td>
<td>ain’t</td>
<td>I ain’t gonna let him go out like that</td>
<td>Rickford (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of verb stem as past tense or preterite form</td>
<td>[V]</td>
<td>They say[stem] it wasn’t ours and,</td>
<td>Wolfram (1993:12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Negation</td>
<td>[mn]</td>
<td>We didn’t do nothing[mn]</td>
<td>Labov (1972)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcription Conventions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transcription Symbols</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short pause</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>they found out it wasn’t..me and my friend[øc].</td>
<td>Schiffirin (1987, 2006) Tannen (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cause one day I was fighting.</td>
<td>Schiffirin (1987, 2006) Tannen (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlapping speech</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>So she’s not preg[nant? [I[a:] was-</td>
<td>Schiffirin (1987, 2006) Tannen (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At right of line indicates segment to be continued after another’s turn; at left of line indicates continuation of prior segment after another’s turn</td>
<td>=</td>
<td>[I was MAD[c#o]=</td>
<td>Schiffirin (1987, 2006) Tannen (1989)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.3.** Transcription Conventions

### 3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research design and methods used in this dissertation, but focused primarily on developing the social and interactional context in which Michael and his interview responses are embedded. The chapter provided a background description of Washington,
D.C. and especially the Ward 7 and 8 areas of the city, located in the Southeast quadrant, where Michael grew up. These areas suffer from a vicious cycle of poverty and failure in education, causing an informal economy and high crime rates due to poor career opportunities. The chapter also gave a background description of the summer program and the study Michael participated in during 2003. The study of 65 participants and 20 interviews (Froyum Roise 2004) was conducted to see how pre-adolescents and adolescents from poverty stricken areas of Washington, D.C. rely on the body as a tool of power to cope with a life of sociocultural constraints. Michael highlights his ability to use his body to gain respect through his ability to fight and stand up against antagonists in his life, as well as to engage in heterosexual activity and to protect and provide for girls in heterosexual relationships. Finally, the chapter also established Michael as a speaker of AAE whose linguistic production is highly comparable to large-scale studies in the city (e.g., Fasold 1972, Schilling and Jamsu 2010), which constituted part of the justification for studying a single speaker. More importantly, the case study was argued to be important for variation studies taking a third wave approach, since it offers insights that are complementary to survey studies. The next chapter presents the results on falsetto phonation as a stylistic resource.
CHAPTER 4. FALSETTO SPEECH IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

The Stylistic Use of Falsetto Speech

4.1 Falsetto Speech

The current chapter investigates falsetto speech in African American English. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, several studies have addressed intonation differences between African Americans and European Americans (Loman 1967, 1975; Tarone 1973; Wolfram and Thomas 2002) including differences in fundamental frequency (Walton and Orlikoff 1994). Nonetheless, very little work has been conducted on falsetto, which may be defined as the rapid vibration of the vocal folds in which the fundamental frequency, or f0, ranges from 240 Hz to 634 Hz for men compared to a modal f0 of around 100 Hz (Podesva 2007). In particular, intraspeaker variation in falsetto remains underexamined but promises to be a rich site for the further exploration of how speakers of African American English (AAE) use stylistic resources to shape meanings and identities.

In the present chapter, I address the aforementioned gap by investigating Michael’s falsetto speech during the one-hour sociological interview (Froyum Roise 2004). I focus on the quantitative patterning of falsetto, while inferring the social meanings of falsetto from the interview discourse, using positioning theory (Harré and Langenhove 1999a, 1999b) to analyze each instance of falsetto. In the interview, Michael’s falsetto speech occurs in 45 intonational phrases out of 1680 intonational phrases. Each instance of falsetto is coded in terms of maximum f0, f0 range, and duration of falsetto measured in milliseconds.

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39 The definition of an intonational phrase is discussed later in this chapter.
The analysis reveals that falsetto seems to have several related pragmatic functions, including stances of frustration, anger and indignation, as well as general expressiveness. The analysis shows also that the falsetto speech used to convey indignation clusters with other morphosyntactic and phonological AAE features, such as double negatives, r-lessness, stopping of interdental fricatives, and monophthongization of diphthongs (cf. Labov 1972a, Green 2002), in the expression of outrage against the hardships and social injustices that are pervasive in many U.S. inner city minority communities. However, before I present the results from the analysis, it is time to turn to previous studies of voice quality as well as previous findings on falsetto speech in AAE.

4.2 Voice Quality, Falsetto, and Social Meaning

Until recently, very few studies have addressed voice quality in general and in sociolinguistic variation in particular. I take voice quality to mean “the extragrammatical suprasegmental properties of speech” (Podesva 2007:478), where falsetto phonation is one particularly salient type of voice quality\(^{40}\). In falsetto speech, the vocal folds are “adducted tightly and stretched lengthwise” (Podesva 2007:479) causing a very high tension of the vocal folds which results in a high fundamental frequency\(^{41}\). Michael’s modal voice, in contrast to falsetto, was established to be 145 Hz\(^{42}\), which is expected for a male of his age, as an average f0 for an adult male is around 100 Hz (Podesva 2007). As mentioned, previous studies have found falsetto in the range of 240 Hz to 634 Hz for men, and Michael even produces falsetto above 700 Hz, demonstrating

\(^{40}\) Other types of voice quality are creaky voice and breathy voice.
\(^{41}\) See Laver (1980) for a detailed description of falsetto.
\(^{42}\) The modal voice was established by taking the average of 20 intonation phrases that were deemed to be of an unmarked phonation type.
a drastic f0 contrast between Michael’s modal voice and his falsetto register. Such frequencies are perceptually salient, since pitch ranges that vary significantly from the modal voice are add odds with normative male behavior, making it stand out perceptually, and making it probable that such a feature is used to accomplish specific interactional goals in a conversation.

Although the field is experiencing an increased interest in the study of voice quality (see, e.g., Mendoza-Denton 2007, Chun and Podesva 2010, and Lopez 2010), the study of falsetto phonation is underexamined, and the social meanings of falsetto remain to be addressed in the study of AAE. The most obvious reason for this shortcoming is due to, until recently, the lack of proper technological means for investigating voice quality. The proper technological means and software for acoustical analysis have simply not been available to researchers. In addition, the traditional Labovian notion of the sociolinguistic variable as composed of categorical variants has also been problematized in recent sociophonetic advances in the field, thus giving room for continuous speech phenomena, while accepting the scalar nature of linguistic variables, such as falsetto (rather than relying on binary variables, such as r-1 and r-0). Nonetheless, several studies have addressed the nature of falsetto speech and the social meaning of this prosodic feature, which I turn to now.

The study by Podesva (2007) is the source from which this chapter has been influenced the most, especially in terms of methodology. Podesva set out to study the social meanings of falsetto phonation, and how it is used to create a discursive persona, and by extension how the persona may be part of the social construction of a gay identity. The main interactant for the study was Heath, an openly gay, white medical student, who exhibits substantial cross-
situational variation in his production of falsetto phonation, depending on whether or not he is in a professional situation with patients, talking on the phone with his father, or with friends at a barbeque. Podesva used recordings from these three different settings, and measured Heath’s falsetto phonation in syntactic units in terms of maximum f0 levels (measured in Hz), duration of falsetto (measured in milliseconds, ms), and range of falsetto (measured in Hz). Podesva also measured duration of creaky voice and rate of f0 change, but only the falsetto measurements will be discussed here.

The results reveal that Heath uses falsetto the most at the barbeque and less with his father and with patients. Figure 4.1 presents the results for Podesva (2007), and it is particularly noteworthy that the duration of falsetto was significantly longer during the barbeque (406ms) compared to the other settings, though the falsetto was also higher on average (366 Hz) and had a greater range at the barbeque (239 Hz).

![Figure 4.1. Mean falsetto duration, maximum f0, and f0 range across situations (adopted from Podesva 2007:487)](image)

Podesva argues that the social meaning of Heath’s falsetto phonation can be inferred from the interview discourse, and that the general meaning is *expressiveness*, which is in line with previous studies. That is, falsetto appears to be used to convey expressiveness across different communities and

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interactional settings. For example, Goodwin et al. (2002) argue that Latina girls use falsetto to be expressive while playing games, and the falsetto is primarily used in oppositional stances. Heath’s most extreme use of falsetto is a stylistic resource that surfaces as he constructs a flamboyant diva persona – a persona that is most often projected amongst friends in informal settings, such as a barbeque. Podesva argues also that the general core meaning expressiveness is a particular type of underspecified meaning, almost to the point where the meaning is so general that it becomes meaningless. Nonetheless, Podesva demonstrates that underspecified meanings may crystalize into more specific social meanings when a variant, such as falsetto, is employed in specific contexts and specific moments of interaction. In this particular study, extreme cases of falsetto at the barbeque index a certain gay persona – a diva persona – as Heath projects a particular type of gay identity amongst friends, which stands in stark contrast to more formal settings. Accordingly, Podesva’s study is not only important as it exemplifies a more scalar, or continuous, nature of phonetic variation, but also because the social meaning that emerges from the employment of variables indexes stances and positions in the interview discourse. Such contextual employment may participate in the construction of larger demographic categories involving, for instance, sexuality, class, gender, and ethnicity. The theorizing found in this study departs from the classical variationist notion of demographic categories, and Podesva shows how falsetto speech constructs a specific type and more fluid type of identity. Podesva never explains what he means by discourse and context, though I agree with his position that variables become meaningful in the natural discourse context. Falsetto has also been studied as
a feature of African American English, which is the topic of the following
section.

4.3 Falsetto Phonation in African American English

As mentioned previously, Tarone (1973) noted in the early 1970s that
suprasegmental features of AAE, including intonation and prosody, are just
as characteristic of the dialect as phonological and morphosyntactic features.
However, several decades later, AAE intonation and prosody are still poorly
understood (e.g., Wolfram and Thomas 2002). Research on intonation in AAE
has shown major differences between AAE and European American varieties
such as the following: different stress patterns (e.g., Pólice vs. police; Baugh
1983, Wolfram and Fasold 1974, Smitherman 1977, Green 1990); greater pitch
range (Tarone 1973, Loman 1975, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006); lower f0
for males in modal voice (Wheat and Hudson 1988, Walton and Orlikoff
1994); different intonational contours on questions (e.g., level tones at the end
of yes/no questions, falling tones at the end of wh-questions (Green 1990,
Foreman 1999; Loman 1967, 1975). Falsetto speech is related to these findings,
as it undoubtedly contributes to the greater pitch range found in the dialect.

Falsetto is often described as a salient part of AAE intonation, and
popular notions in the academic literature have held that African American
men use falsetto more than women (see, e.g., Wolfram and Schilling-Estes
2006, Thomas and Reaser 2004, Wolfram and Thomas 2002). However, a
recent study by Podesva and Lee (2010) of falsetto in Washington, D.C. shows
that African American women use falsetto more than men, and that falsetto is
used in disalignment between speakers. While it has become somewhat of a
consensus among scholars that falsetto is used more by African American
men, the field has had a tendency to rely on the same landmark studies conducted by Tarone (1973) and Loman (1967, 1975), and it turns out that our knowledge of falsetto is based on highly limited data. Accordingly, I now turn to the landmark studies by Tarone (1973) and Loman (1967/1975) to elucidate the primary studies underlying our general understanding of falsetto in AAE.

Tarone (1973) investigated spontaneous speech from two adolescent peer groups in Seattle, WA, in which she focused primarily on final intonation contours. Tarone made two recordings: One in a black community with seven adolescents aged sixteen to twenty (four males and three females), and one recording in a white community, using eight white adolescents aged sixteen to twenty-four (four males and four females). Her goal was to elicit vernacular Black English and white English for comparisons. In addition, she recorded two styles of AAE – vernacular Black English and formal Black English – from two different settings, using a 32-year-old native speaker of AAE from Saint Louis. In one setting, the 32-year-old participated in an informal discussion at a community center with the black adolescent group, and in the second setting he participated in a formal interview. Thus, Tarone focused on three types of data: Black vernacular English, white vernacular English, and formal Black English. The terminal contours elicited in the speech samples were grouped based on phrase types. According to Tarone, the two adolescent groups participated in “street culture” which is characterized by “extralegal values” (p. 31). Where the black group’s discussions were heated due to “verbal competition,” the white group’s discussions were more topic oriented.

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43 Tarone does not define what she means by phrase types, but I assume she refers to sentence types such as yes/no questions and conditional sentences, since some of the findings involve these sentence types.
Tarone found four differences between European American English (EAE) and African American English. The major characteristics of the AAE speakers were: (1) AAE speakers have a wider pitch range; they also exhibit higher pitch levels (compared to EAE and formal black English), and often shift into a falsetto register. (2) The AAE speakers had more level and rising final pitch contours, which were found on all sentence types in informal situations. (3) The speakers of AAE had more falling final pitch contours on yes/no questions in formal and ‘threatening situations,’ compared to level and rising final contours in informal and familiar situations. (4) The AAE speakers used non-final contours without if when marking dependent clauses in some but not all conditional sentences. In terms of falsetto, Tarone (1973:32) argues that it occurred frequently, and that speakers shifted into “a falsetto register when the speaker created a dramatic effect in his argument by building up suspense or by establishing the strength of his own feelings about the issue at hand.” For example, one speaker uses falsetto to protest the idea of supporting a woman financially. Tarone states further, following Johnson (1971), that falsetto is found at the “game” level of intonation to create group solidarity in the black street community. Tarone (1973:33) defines “game” as the level of intonation “used to establish rapport and group feeling in the black street community.” It is somewhat ambiguous what Tarone means by this definition, since it is difficult to determine which level of intonation is used to establish rapport and in turn how rapport is established with intonation. Finally, Tarone claims that the wide pitch range and falsetto register may communicate excitement and speaker involvement to the African American community, while a white police officer may understand the same intonation patterns as uncooperative and even hostile. These cross-
cultural differences in language use may lead to discrimination, Tarone argues.

The other landmark study of AAE intonation and falsetto is that of Loman (1975) based on Loman (1967). Loman focused primarily on the intonation patterns produced by 10-year-olds in a low-income area of the central part of North West (NW) Washington, D.C. While most of the data comes from children, Loman also included data from adult-adult conversations and parent-child conversations. Yet, in some cases, a white research assistant interviewed the children. Loman points to the methodological inconsistencies himself, as he argues that children are less agentive in conversations with adults and with the white research assistant, which in turn may restrict the range of syntactic patterns in the data (i.e. commands, questions, and direct addresses). In other words, the African American dialect is taken out of its natural day-to-day conversational setting. Nevertheless, Loman (1975:242) found the following patterns in his study, based on four different levels of pitch – /4/ extra high, /3/ high, /2/ central, and /1/ low: (1) AAE intonation utilized by children in Washington, D.C. has a high number of primary stresses. (2) AAE intonation is characterized by a “musical rhythm” due to a “constant and marked shift” between the high and central pitch levels, /3/ and /2/, which in turn correlates with the fluctuation of primary and weaker stress patterns. (3) Pitch level /4/ is often pronounced in the falsetto register by African American men to convey excitement. (4) Wh-question words often have high pitches, causing a tendency for falling intonation patterns in wh-questions. The same falling pattern was found in imperative constructions.
Turning to the specific case of falsetto, Loman bases his conclusion in (3) on the following observations (1975:233):

It is an interesting feature in the speech behavior of the Negro men [sic], that pitch level /4/ is typically pronounced in the falsetto register. This is how pitch level /4/ is expressed in AJ’s utterances, and more examples can be found in the utterances of his brother, HJ, in conversation 9. This phenomenon can also be heard whenever there is a group of Negro [sic] men talking spiritedly at the street corner.

The spirited talk at the street corner could be similar to Tarone’s (1973) and Johnson’s (1971) observations concerning the “game” frame and the social construction of group solidarity, even though the phrase “talking spiritedly” is somewhat ambiguous, as it could either denote convergent or divergent alignment between interactants. However, it seems to indicate solidarity and unselfconscious speech, in light of Loman’s (1975:232) observation that a low frequency of pitch level /4/ (in falsetto) indicates a “somewhat stiff and formal atmosphere.” On the other hand, Loman notes also that an utterance with pitch level /4/ is used as a “(slightly indignant) correction” (his parentheses) of a previous comment, which expresses a “sudden commitment in the conversation” (1975:232). Accordingly, it appears that falsetto is used for multiple interactional purposes, even though Loman’s overarching conclusion is that falsetto is used to show excitement rather than indignation, in-group solidarity instead of out-group discordance.

A more recent study by Alim (2004) deserves considerable attention, since it is the most important study in terms of the social meaning and the interactional usage of falsetto: all examples of falsetto are presented in Alim (2004) in the interactional context and illustrated with specific examples, though he only analyses two of the examples of falsetto. Alim conducted an ethnographic study of the working class suburb of Sunnyside, California.
Alim, a teacher, researcher, and community member wanted to study style shifting used by African American students at Haven High School. The study considered both aggregate patterns of variation of both phonological and morphosyntactic features and variables such as falsetto speech as used in unfolding interaction. As such, Alim considered both the internal linguistic constraints on AAE variation and the more fluid construction of identity and how variables interact with social categories such as race and gender. The participants in the study consisted of four ‘Sunnysidaz’ (two boys and two girls) – all 17-year-old African American high school students who participated in Alim’s Hip Hop class, which he taught at Haven High. The four participants Amira, Billal, Careem, and Kijana were all engaged in Hip Hop and R&B music, and they all knew each other well. Bilal and Careem live together although they are not related. However, they are “brothas from a different mutha,” (p. 31) arguing that the close relationship makes them feel like biological brothers. They live together since Bilal lost his parents during childhood. Amira and Kijana are described to be best friends, and they spend every day together and engage in activities such as studying at school, hang out at the local teenage dance club, and braid hair. The four participants were chosen as they constitute a small “tight-knit, peer-group speech community” (p. 32). Among other techniques, Alim used what he called a *semistructured* conversation, in which the participants were given the topics before the recording and then encouraged to share their opinions on the topic during the recording session. The students were told that they would not be participating in an interview but rather a conversation, and the researcher did not participate in all conversations. As such, the data was very naturalistic, as

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44 In other cases throughout the book, Alim includes data from other people. For instance, he provides data from a barbershop.
evidenced, for example, by frequent back-channeling, rapid turn-taking, and overlaps (p. 25). In other cases, Alim would participate in the conversations with the teens. Five sociolinguistic variables were studied for aggregate patterns: copula absence, third person singular absence, invariant be, possessive –s absence, and plural –s absence. In addition, Alim focused on features associated with what he called an interactional style, among these features falsetto phonation and the discourse marker ‘okay.’ While the aggregate patterns show an intricate relationship between race, gender, and orientation towards Hip Hop culture, the focus in this chapter is on the falsetto speech found in Alim’s study, which I turn to now. Note that in addition to the data from the eight students, Alim considered his own falsetto uses and their social meanings, as well as data from several other people, including data from interaction in a barbershop.

Alim (2004:70-71) notes what he calls Black American Falsetto in eight phrases in his data⁴⁵, though he switches the name Black American Falsetto to African American Falsetto in three cases (pg. 23, 24, and 119). However, I think this is an unintentional mistake, since he deliberately uses Black American to “consciously disambiguate ‘Blackness,’ that is, to recognize the multiplicity of ethnicities within Black peoples,” (Alim 2004:2). In other words, American is used to describe the study taking place in a U.S. context, whereas Black is used to broaden the notion of ethnicity and allow for multiple cultural influences on black heritage. In addition, community members in this particular study prefer the term black, which motivated Alim’s choice of words in the first place (Alim 2004:2). Consequently, the use of the term African American

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⁴⁵ The eight phrases are found in different stretches of discourse and from different speakers.
falsetto appears to be a mistake and I will consider these cases of Black American Falsetto.

Table 4.1 below shows all the eight examples of falsetto in the conversational context, and what the topic of the conversation was when the falsetto was uttered. The falsetto phonation is illustrated in italics and boldface (both are mine). The page numbers next to the example heading represent references to the page number in Alim (2004), from where the examples have been extracted. The speakers in the transcript are R=Alim, B=Bilal, A=Amira, C=Careem, and K=Kijana. It is evident that only three people use falsetto. Alim uses falsetto five times and is represented with either ‘R’ or as the pronoun I in the examples. Careem uses falsetto twice, and an African American male, described only as a brotha, uses falsetto in a barbershop in example 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 1 (pg. 23)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td>How some people want musicians to mix sinful acts with religious messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black American Falsetto</strong></td>
<td>C: [laughter] How are you gonna like take a song about hoes, and just, [African American falsetto] <em>I mean, and put in Jesus?</em>! B: That’s what really upsets me… C: But like, I’m like, one, that’s not creative. You lazy! B: [laughter] C: And two, [African American falsetto] don’t talk—that’s what you listening to?! B: [laughter] You try to talk about this, an make people think that you it…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Example 2 (pg. 24)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td>How some people want musicians to mix sinful acts with religious messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black American Falsetto</strong></td>
<td>C: [laughter] How are you gonna like take a song about hoes, and just, [African American falsetto] <em>I mean, and put in Jesus?</em>! B: That’s what really upsets me… C: But like, I’m like, one, that’s not creative. You lazy! B: [laughter] C: And two, [African American falsetto] don’t talk—that’s what you listening to?! B: [laughter] You try to talk about this, an make people think that you it…</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example 3 (pg. 69)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td>Talking about going to Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black</strong></td>
<td>B: [suck-teeth] If you got a basketball scholarship to play in Africa—FUCK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.1. Eight instances of Black American Falsetto in Alim (2004)

As mentioned, Alim (2004:70-71) notes what he calls Black American Falsetto in eight phrases in his data, although he only analyses two instances.
in more detail (which he himself produces). In the first phrase, falsetto is used as an *interrogative challenger* (Example 3) in “Why don’t you wanna go?” as a response to *Bilal* saying “FUCK THAT!” about going to Africa. In the second case, falsetto is used as a *declarative emphasizer* (Example 4) in “It’s AIDS here, too!” as a response to *Bilal* saying that he does not want to have sex in Africa because of AIDS. The falsetto response emphasizes the opposition to *Bilal’s* ridiculous argument, since there are high AIDS rates in the U.S. as well. The falsetto is used in a discursive *battlin* mode, in which *Bilal’s* point of view is being contested, and he “has to defend or substantiate his anti-Africa position” (Alim 2004:70). The battlin mode is a verbal strategy that simultaneously co-constructs opposition and solidarity, or in Alim’s words (2004:73), battlin is simultaneously *competitive* and *communal*. I would assume that this battlin mode is similar to Tarone’s (1973) “verbal competition,” which also appear to be competitive and communal although she never uses those exact terms.

While Alim only analyses two examples of falsetto in greater detail, looking at all the cases of falsetto in the study sheds light on how falsetto is used in the discourse context. It is evident from these examples that all cases of falsetto appear to be used in a discursive battlin mode due to the competitive, though friendly, nature of the conversations. Examples 1 and 2 demonstrate a certain type of protest towards the double standard that some musicians display, when mixing messages about sinful acts, such as glorifying prostitution ("hoes"), while aligning with religious messages ("put in Jesus"). Examples 3 and 4 represent the analyzed cases including the interrogative challenger and the declarative emphasizer, which also include a challenge or protest of anti-Africa attitudes. In Example 5, falsetto is used as a
complaint towards the drama women may cause in a relationship (“And then it ain’t gon BE NO MO DRAMA”) as a reference to bombing “Osama’s mama,” causing the barbershop to break into laughter. In Example 6, falsetto is used to challenge an interactant, triggered by disbelief (“Get the hell outta here?!”), whereas Example 7 protests white people’s (stereotypical) behavioral patterns (“Why do they do that?!). Example 8 challenges the need for dorms in the neighborhood (“Why y’all need dorms for?!).

I agree with Alim’s analysis of the two cases of Black American falsetto, in which he uses a grammatical/functional description (interrogative challenger and declarative emphaser) of the phrases in which falsetto occurs. However, the descriptions remain at the sentence level. If we consider all eight examples of falsetto, and look at the positioning and alignment taken up in the extracts, then a different analysis emerges: Black American falsetto is used in divergent or oppositional alignment between interactants. Falsetto phonation emerges in specific turns in the conversations, in which one interactant either protests, challenges, complains, or is in disbelief over a specific issue. Note also that Alim uses the word emphaser in one of his analyzed examples, which suggests, additionally, that falsetto is used to be emphatic or expressive in oppositional alignment between interactants, which is in line with Goodwin et al.’s (2002) analysis of Latina girls, Podesva’s (2007) study of Heath, and the general notion of the expressive nature of falsetto.

Finally, Podesva and Lee (2010) found that falsetto speech is used more by African American women than African American men and European Americans (men and women) in Washington, D.C. The study consisted of 32 speakers, of which 16 were African American (eight women and eight men) and 16 were European American (eight women and eight men). The study
found that for falsetto speech there was a significant gender and race interaction, as falsetto speech primarily is a feature used by African American women. Figure 4.2 below illustrates the finding from Podesva and Lee (2010):

It is evident from Figure 4.2 that African American women use falsetto phonation in almost two percent of all intonation phrases, and for the other speakers, falsetto is used in less than 0.5 percent of all intonation phrases. In addition, the study found that falsetto is primarily used at the beginning of intonational phrases and that 17 of the most highly falsetto utterance were used to negatively evaluate issues of gentrification and racism. The reason for these negative evaluations (cf. chapter 3) are most likely due to Washington, D.C.’s longstanding history of residential segregation and interpersonal and institutional racism, and therefore it is not surprising that racism was
evaluated negatively. Gentrification⁴⁶ is a relatively new problem in the city, and it is currently changing some African American neighborhoods throughout the city, displacing long time (low-income) residents. Gentrification is currently changing the ethnoracial composition of, for instance, the area south of the Capitol⁴⁷ and the Shaw neighborhood in Northwest D.C.

The insights from previous studies into the nature of AAE intonation in general and falsetto in particular are invaluable to the understanding of suprasegmental linguistic features. Especially the Podesva and Lee (2010) study has expanded our understanding of falsetto speech with respect to the intersection of race and gender. However, more studies are needed to uncover the multiple layers of meaning embedded in this variable. It is probable that falsetto speech has been observed more than it has been reported in academic studies, but the existing research leaves several gaps. First, the generalized and unquestioned contention that African American men use more falsetto than women should be investigated further, especially in light of Podesva and Lee’s (2010) compelling findings to the contrary for certain D.C. African Americans. Second, conclusions regarding the form and function of falsetto tend to be overgeneralized – falsetto is used as a verbal game or to show excitement, despite ambiguous evidence in the Loman study, where falsetto was also used to convey indignation. Third, a number of studies of AAE intonation focus only on how intonation patterns co-occur with structural aspects of language, such as declarative sentences and wh-questions, without paying any attention to what is being accomplished in the

⁴⁶ Gentrification is the influx of middle-class residents to a neighborhood, which causes displacement of low-income residents due to, for instance, increased rent and increased housing mortgages.
⁴⁷ The gentrification in this area began after the new baseball stadium was constructed, where the Washington Nationals play their home games.
discourse, and how it is being accomplished. Based on previous studies, falsetto seems to be distributed according to conversational domain and discourse function, which is in line with Tarone’s (1973:35) observation that intonation is “extremely sensitive” to “social situation,” and Alim’s observation about falsetto in a discursive *battlin* mode.

AAE intonation and voice quality is indeed poorly understood. It is my goal in the remaining parts of the chapter to address the existing gap, by focusing on falsetto in an in-depth linguistic case study of Michael from Washington, D.C. I use a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, examining frequency and distribution of the occurrence of falsetto as well as how it is used in unfolding discourse. As such, I am not only investigating whether or not falsetto is sensitive to speech genre (e.g., the “game” level, following Tarone), but also whether or not it is sensitive to speaker positioning and the local interactional goals that are constantly negotiated in unfolding social interactions.

In sum, how often falsetto occurs and what it means in its conversational setting remain to be addressed, which is the goal of this chapter. The chapter will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How often does falsetto occur and how is it distributed in the interview?  
2. What is the social meaning of falsetto based on how it is used in the discourse context?

However, before I move on to the methods section, a few words regarding the distribution of variables in the interview are necessary in order to elucidate how topic may induce style shifts, which pertains to research question 1.
4.4 Style and the Role of Topic in the Sociolinguistic Case-Study

The motivation for choosing the sociolinguistic case-study is to investigate falsetto speech as a naturalistic linguistic phenomenon that is sensitive to style shifting in social interaction. As mentioned, early variation studies focused on community-wide patterns of stylistic variation, with an eye toward locating ‘vernacular’, ‘unselfconscious’ speech (e.g., Labov 1966). Increasingly, researchers have turned to examining not only how variation patterns according to speech style but also how and why speakers use stylistic resources in unfolding discourse (e.g., Podesva 2007). In addition, researchers increasingly have turned away from ‘responsive’ views in which style shifts are seen as reactions to shifts in situations to examining more closely the many cases in which speakers ‘initiate’ situational, relational and identificational changes through stylistic variation (Bell 1984). Traditional approaches to style, such as Labov’s attention to speech approach, have been successful in investigating variation at the community level, but once the linguistic tokens are tabulated and abstracted away from their conversational settings, it becomes difficult or impossible to gain meaningful insight into the contextual meanings and pragmatic functions that are used to maintain, shape, and reshape social identities at the local level of social practice. Therefore, major insights can be gained by focusing specifically on localized linguistic practices and how they become meaningful in social interaction. For such a purpose, the linguistic case study is more appropriate than the large-scale survey studies. I will argue in this chapter that Michael’s style shifts in falsetto depends primarily on the specific positions that are constructed between Michael and the interviewer.
Recent advances in social constructionist perspectives, such as Schilling-Estes’ (2004a) successful integration of variation methods and discourse analysis, have shown sociolinguistic variables to be sensitive to such matters as audience (Bell 1984), topic of conversation (Bell 1984, Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994, 1999), stance toward topics and interlocutors, and how interlocutors conceive of or frame the discoursal interaction. For example, the Podesva (2007) study reviewed earlier epitomizes how a single speaker’s stylistic use of falsetto phonation varied greatly according to interactional situation and conceived frame of interaction. From an interactional point of view, style shifts may be conditioned by social situation (Podesva 2007), topic of conversation (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994, 1999; Schilling-Estes 2004a), and as I will argue, positions in unfolding discourse. Before I turn to the method section, a more detailed review of Schilling-Estes (2004) and Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994, 1999) is necessary, since these studies are essential not only in terms of exemplifying a social constructionist perspective as applied to variation studies, but also since they both address style shifts in the study of African American English based on changes in topic and speakers’ relationships toward their topics and toward their fellow interlocutors.

Starting with the Rickford and McNair-Knox studies (1994, 1999), Rickford and McNair-Knox set out to study multiple issues in relation to style, such as addressee and topic induced style shifts. A major part of the study intended to test several of Bell’s (1984) hypotheses regarding audience design, and topic influenced style shifts were only one part of the study. Rickford and McNair-Knox investigated several AAE variables produced by “Foxy Boston,” an African American female from East Palo Alto in California.

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48 The 1999 study is a continuation of the 1994 study of Foxy Boston.
whose vernacular speech was collected through sociolinguistic interviews from she was 13 until she turned 18. Rickford and McNair-Knox studied copula deletion, third person singular –s absence, plural –s absence, and possessive –s absence – all core features of the AAE morphosyntactic system. With regards to topic, Rickford and McNair-Knox confirmed Bell’s (1984) hypothesis that topic change can induce style shifts. In this case, Foxy shifted into a more vernacular style (e.g. with more copula deletion and higher levels of invariant be) in topics associated with family and friends, such as “wives as slamming partners,” whereas topics such as “school, college, and career plans” favored more standard speech (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1999:141).

The style used to discuss career plans instituted a more emotionally detached style, whereas the wives and slamming partners topic leaned towards a much more involved style with higher usage levels of, for instance, direct quotes. In other words the less vernacular style was more similar to information presentation, whereas the informal styles was closer to the storytelling genre.

The social constructionist study by Schilling-Estes (2004a) is significant in demonstrating that identity is a fluid and constantly changing performance that is shaped and contested in unfolding interaction through multiple layers of linguistic resources. In addition, the study represents one of very few studies that successfully integrates an interactional sociolinguistic focus on local negotiations of identity and incorporates it with traditional approaches to sociolinguistic variation – two fields that traditionally have been standing in stark contrast to each other.

The linguistic case-study of Alex and Lou is centered in Robeson County, North Carolina, which is a tri-ethnic county consisting of European Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans (Lumbee). The study
involves a sociolinguistic interview between an interviewee, a Lumbee whose pseudonym is Lou, a university student; and an African American interviewer named “Alex,” a graduate student at the same university. The two males are good friends and know each other from the university’s dormitory, and the interview is described as more of a casual conversation than either a formal interview or an informal sociolinguistic interview. Schilling-Estes investigated six different features that all have regional associations with southeastern North Carolina, and also ethnic associations (AAVE and Lumbee). The six features investigated were: 1. Post-vocalic r-lessness, 2. Monophthongal /ay/, 3. Third person singular –s absence, 4. Copula deletion, 5. Habitual be, and 6. Non-standard regularization patterns for past tense be (Schilling-Estes 2004a:170). All of these features have global (U.S.) and local (Robeson County) associations with AAVE. Alex shows usage of all the morphosyntactic features, whereas Lou has very few of these features in his speech, though these variables were not examined in detail in the study. Post-vocalic r-lessness and monophthongal /ay/, on the other hand, were examined in great detail for both interactants in all topics covered during the interview. I will only focus on r-lessness here. Topics covered were: Race relations in Robeson County (twice), Civil War (twice), current politics, Lou’s family, friends at the university, Southern race relations, and global race relations. Figure 4.3 below illustrates the patterning of r-lessness and monophthongal /ay/ across the interview topics (adopted from Schilling-Estes 2004a:173-174).
As expected, Alex uses higher levels of AAVE features compared to Lou, who is more in line with the Robeson County Lumbee with lower levels of r-0 and /ay/. However, when looking at the topics in greater detail, it is evident that Lou and Alex align differently, and thus show greater linguistic distance, in the production of r-lessness in topics that involve race relations, historically and in the current Robeson County context, compared to topics concerning family and friends. Schilling-Estes argues that the distance may be caused by perceptions of ethnolinguistic affiliation, at which point each interactant identifies more closely with the local ethnic community to which they belong, compared to topics of friendship where convergent alignment is highlighted and reflected through similar phonological patterns. Interestingly, too, topic alone is not the sole determinant of linguistic convergence vs. divergence, since in the final topical section on race relations, the two are not widely divergent but rather quite convergent. Schilling-Estes argues that, most likely, this is because here the two discuss race relations on a much more global scale and maintain a level of distance from the topic of ethnic differences that they

![Figure 4.3. Usage levels for r-lessness across the interview (adopted from Schilling-Estes 2004a:173)](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lou</th>
<th>Alex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race relations in RC</td>
<td>15/29</td>
<td>13/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil War</td>
<td>8/13</td>
<td>1/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current politics</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>12/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lou’s family</td>
<td>4/14</td>
<td>6/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends at the university</td>
<td>15/28</td>
<td>34/69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race relations in RC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil War</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern race relations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global race relations</td>
<td>19/34</td>
<td>15/27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the most part, usage levels are typical, in that Alex shows higher levels of the features associated with AAVE, while Lou shows lower usage levels for the two...
cannot not uphold when talking about race relations on a more local level. Further, the study shows also that variables (and by extension the construction of identities) are multifaceted, and that interactants can employ variables to signal either ethnic distance or highlight interpersonal relationships based on which interpersonal positions the interactants deem most appropriate in the specific unfolding moment in the conversation.

Based on the Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994, 1999) and Schilling-Estes (2004a) studies as well as other studies concerned with the influence of topic and stance/orientation toward topic, interlocutors and social groups on style shifts (e.g., Coupland 1980, Bell 1984, 2001; Labov 2001), the current study investigates the quantitative patterns (i.e. number of instances) of falsetto in relation to topic in order to see if topic has a significant influence on Michael’s falsetto phonation. In addition, I analyze falsetto speech in particular interactional moments, in terms of maximum f0, f0 range, and falsetto duration, a method from Podesva (2007) that I have replicated partly in this study. Hence, my quantitative analysis of Michael’s falsetto involves a distributional analysis of falsetto according to discourse topic, while the qualitative analysis focuses on Michael’s use of falsetto in unfolding discourse. Finally, I infer the meaning of falsetto based on its occurrence in specific moments of interaction and with specific positionings, but before I turn to the analysis, I lay out the methods used in more detail.

4.5 Methods
As mentioned above, my purpose is twofold here: 1. To investigate the frequency of falsetto and how it is distributed in the interview; 2. To infer the social meanings of falsetto from the discourse context. In order to determine
the frequency and distribution of Michael’s falsetto speech, I divided the hour long interview into intonational phrases. How this segmentation was done is addressed below. When an intonational phrase with falsetto was identified, spectrograms, waveforms, and pitch tracks were generated for closer acoustic analyses. All cases of falsetto phonation were coded impressionistically. Most utterances can be articulated with a high f0 without containing falsetto phonation. Obviously, extremely high f0 levels can only be articulated with falsetto, but in this particular study, there are several instances of high f0 phrases that do not contain falsetto. Therefore, the coding must be done perceptually, since autocorrelation methods are not reliable. Podesva (2007:484) argues, following Colton and Hollien (1973), “the physiological state characterizing a given phonation type gives rise to various acoustic combinations of f0s, spectra, and intensities. It is in these non-straightforward combinations, they argue, that perceptual differences arise.” I used the acoustic analysis software PRAAT (version 5.1.30; Boersma and Weenink 2010). However, PRAAT is unable to identify these perceptual differences, thus making it necessary to code falsetto impressionistically. Further, in naturalistic data, influences from breathy speech, whispery speech, and background noise can have distorting influences on an interactant’s pitch track in PRAAT. For example, pitch-halving and pitch-doubling can show up on a pitch track as rapid and almost vertical increases or decreases in pitch depending on whether or not the autocorrelation program has mistakenly identified two pitch periods for a single pitch period (pitch-halving) or only half a period for a whole pitch period (pitch-doubling) (Thomas 2011:37). To overcome problems of pitch-halving and pitch-doubling, I set the pitch settings manually by comparing the acoustic signal (perceptually) with the f0
contour on a pitch track. For example, if Michael used extremely high pitch contours in the interview that gave a percept of a frequency that was significantly higher than his modal voice at 145 Hz, then the pitch range was increased to capture the pitch. In addition, I looked for sudden increases and decreases in pitch, since they often indicate an incorrect pitch setting (see, e.g., Thomas 2011). In the remainder of this dissertation, the reader should keep in mind that the pitch settings have been configured to achieve optimal visual display of the pitch contours. As such, the pitch settings are not standardized for all pitch tracks, since the pitch range has been determined on a case-by-case basis to enhance the visual display of the pitch contour. Therefore, the reader is advised to look at the pitch settings for each pitch track on the y-axis to get a better impression of the exact f0 levels and pitch contours. However, the maximum pitch is usually reported in the written text in addition to the visual display.

I defined an intonational phrase from a functional perspective (but also based on prosodic structure) for the purpose of creating transcripts for naturalistic speech for further discourse analysis. As such, I followed Du Bois et al. (1993:47) and their definition as “a stretch of speech uttered under a single coherent intonation contour,” which is similar to other functional definitions (Chafe 1993, Gumperz 1993, and Schiffrin 2006). However, to meet the definition of an intonational phrase, several components had to be fulfilled. Each intonational phrase had to have a tonic syllable, a syllable with increased pitch and stress, and a rising or falling contour that would show “transitional continuity” (Du Bois et al. 1993:52) to signal either completion or continuation (i.e. a pause, which indicates an IP boundary [see below] but nonetheless signals that more would come to finish the turn) for the purpose
of determining turn structure. This would often happen with a prolonged final syllable in addition to the rising or falling pitch contour. Second of all, an intonation phrase had to be completed with an audible pause, and all pauses including filled pauses were not counted as part of the intonational phrase. Discourse markers, such as yeah and okay along with vocatives (Michael) would also count as intonation phrases. Obviously, larger units or longer continuous phrases such as yes/no questions (e.g., similar to Jun’s (2005) IP or Intonation Phrase) would also count as a single intonation phrase if the speech was continuous. The functional definition with some prosodic structural requirements was adopted to account for the naturalistic data, which is filled with disfluency. All disfluencies including false starts and imperceptible language were discarded from the analysis and would not count as an intonational phrase. An alternative way of segmenting the interview could have been to rely on syntactic units, but the high number of fragments and disfluencies found in a face-to-face conversation makes it difficult to make segmentations based on syntax alone.

The entire interview was divided into topics of conversation, to see if the falsetto speech would appear more in certain topics, following Rickford and McNair-Knox’s (1994) and Schilling-Estes’ (2004a) findings that shifts in topic often corresponds with style shifts. As mentioned in chapter 3, the interview with Michael is centered on a variety of topics, including the ones discussed in chapter 3, such as family, prison, fighting, police, marriage, gender ideologies, sex, and dating. Falsetto speech occurred in each one of these topics. Other topics were discussed, but here I include only topics in which falsetto occurred.

49 Similar to Jun’s (2005) concept of the intermediate phrase (ip) in which boundaries are also marked after discourse markers (well, okay), before conjunctions (and, but), and vocatives (Michael)
Most of the topics were introduced by the interviewer, as she had a set list of questions that she wanted Michael to talk about. Especially the topics involving family, dating, and gender ideologies were introduced by the interviewer, since these areas were directly contributing to the content of her study. Other topics were introduced by Michael - especially the topics involving fighting and run-ins with law enforcement. The topics were relatively straightforward to determine in some cases, since a specific question from the interviewer would elicit a direct answer to the question, and when Michael stayed on topic, the task of determining topic was straightforward. Other topics were more difficult to determine, since they emerged in the interview discourse, and I had to go back in the interview to see if the topic was introduced by the interviewer or Michael. For instance, the topic of fighting was often a result of Michael steering the interview in a direction where he could tell his fight stories, but he often had to change the topic to do so. However, I was able to determine topic and topic boundaries by locating the instance of falsetto and the co-text (i.e. the immediate environment at the phrase level) and the larger context to find out who introduced the topic of conversation. Often, when Michael introduced a topic it was to tell a story, and I did a discourse analysis of the narrative to see what the main point of the story was and then determined the topic from this analysis. For instance, the topic of fighting would be determined based on narrative analysis of a fight story, which was exemplified in chapter 3. In short, topic was eventually based on a functional approach, but Labov’s narrative framework would also aid in this process.

For the second part, inferring the meanings of falsetto, the acoustical speech analysis software PRAAT was used to analyze each instance of falsetto
in terms of max f0 (Hz), range of f0 (Hz), and duration (ms) of the falsetto, following Podesva (2007). These measurements were then correlated with specific moments of interaction using positioning theory.

Figure 4.4 below illustrates an example of Michael’s use of falsetto, exemplified by the phrase *I ain’t never been charged with nothing*. Figure 4.4 illustrates the entire pitch track in the phrase *I ain’t never been charged with nothing*, and the falsetto speech occurs on *ain’t never* as shown by the duration label. The x-axis shows time in seconds, and the y-axis shows pitch range measured in Hz. As mentioned, I established Michael’s modal voice to be 145 Hz, which is expected for his age. Table 4.2 below illustrates the acoustic measure and the method of calculation for each instance of falsetto speech. The maximum f0 was measured at the highest point in the pitch track, that is, where the highest pitch measured in Hz occurred. The range was calculated over the entire intonational phrase with falsetto by subtracting f0 minimum from f0 maximum. The duration of falsetto was calculated by subtracting the time from the beginning of the falsetto with the time at the end of the falsetto, and only voiced segments were included in the analysis. For example, voiceless obstruents ending a syllable which contained falsetto would not count towards duration of falsetto. Duration was measured in milliseconds (ms). Figure 4.4 illustrates the points of interest in Michael’s pitch track, and it is also a graphic representation of the degree to which falsetto sticks out perceptually when used in discourse. In this specific example, the maximum f0 on the falsetto *ain’t never* is 373 Hz.
To investigate the social meanings of falsetto, the three acoustic measurements, max f0 (Hz), range of f0 (Hz), and duration (ms) of falsetto, were investigated in specific moments of interaction using positioning theory. T-tests were conducted to determine significance for these three measurements in relation to positioning types. However, before I turn to the interactional analysis of falsetto and investigate the interactional context to determine social meanings, I present the results from the first research question regarding the quantitative distribution of falsetto.

### 4.6 The Quantitative Distribution of Falsetto

Turning to the first research question concerning the frequency and distribution of falsetto speech, falsetto occurred in 45 out of 1680 intonation
phrases. In other words, 2.68% of all intonation phrases contained falsetto. This number is fairly high considering the perceptual nature of the falsetto variable. Eckert (1987) argues that some variables contribute more to the construction of a social identity than others, and Podesva (2007) argues that falsetto is such a variable due to its perceptual salience.

Table 4.3 below shows the overall patterns of falsetto and also how Michael’s falsetto was distributed based on the topics discussed in chapter 3. In Table 4.3, the topics are presented from left to right in accordance with the chronology in the interview (that is, family was discussed before prison, prison before fighting etc.). While the falsetto speech occurred frequently, topic did not turn out to be a significant factor affecting the distribution ($\chi^2 = 10.208$, df = 7, $p \leq 0.177$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Prison</th>
<th>Fighting</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Dating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Falsetto IP (N)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total IP (N)</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falsetto (%)</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.3.** Frequency of intonational phrases (IP) with falsetto according to topic

Figure 4.5 is a graphic representation of the numbers in table 4.3, showing the percentage of IPs with falsetto out of all IPs per topic. While the trajectory of falsetto seems to peak in the topics of police (5.13%), marriage (5.97%), and gender (4.86%), the distribution was not significant ($\chi^2 = 10.208$, df = 7, $p \leq 0.177$) although the peak could indicate that Michael was getting more comfortable in the interview as it generally took him a little while to show emotional involvement.
Throughout the interview, Michael is highly involved in the topic of fighting as he often steers the interview in this direction, while breaking away from the interviewer’s agenda. However, falsetto occurred only in 1.19% of all intonation phrases under the topic of fighting and as such the topic itself did not appear to have an effect on occurrence of falsetto. In addition, the topic of police (5.13%) is also a case in which he demonstrates high emotional involvement and in this case the percentage was much higher than, for example, fighting. Although there are some fluctuations in the occurrence of falsetto throughout the interview, one reason why the distribution was not significant could be that all topics are personal to Michael or they evoke some kind of emotive response. For example, the topics of family, fighting, marriage, gender ideology, sex, and dating are all topics that pertain to activities related to his life as a teenager. ‘Prison’ and ‘police’ could potentially be more formal topics (i.e. contact with societal institutions) to which Michael would distance himself and show less involvement, but when

Figure 4.5. Distribution of falsetto in percent according to topic
($\chi^2 = 10.208, df = 7, p \leq 0.177$)
looking at the topics in detail, it becomes evident that Michael is highly emotionally involved in these topics as he often conveys feelings of frustration and anger towards the societal constraints imposed by these institutions. None of the topics in which falsetto occurred involved topics in which Michael potentially would show little involvement (i.e. get bored) such as school or career plans. It appears that other factors than topic alone are at play to explain the significance of falsetto. In the following section, I turn to the interactional investigation of falsetto speech. The remainder of the chapter begins with a demonstration of how positioning theory was operationalized to investigate specific moments of interaction. This section is followed by a presentation of research question 2, and the remainder of the chapter is an interactional analysis of the social meanings of falsetto using Goffman’s (1981) notion of conversational moves and Eckert’s (2008) concept of indexical fields.

4.7 Operationalizing Positioning Theory
In order to examine the meaning of the falsetto speech, and thus the second research question, I used the discourse analytical framework called positioning theory, “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting.” (Harré and Langenhove 1999b:1) to analyze the discursive acts taking place when the various instances of falsetto occur. The positions are then correlated with the acoustic analysis of falsetto in terms of max f0, f0 range, and falsetto duration. Recall from chapter 2 that positions are relational (e.g., a person in power can discursively position someone else as powerless), and one of the main components of positioning theory is to identify who has the initiative in a conversation, either through performative positioning or accountive positioning.
(see Harré and Langenhove 1999a:24), which is similar to sociolinguistic approaches to style involving proactive and reactive dimensions of style. Performative positioning can be subdivided into deliberate self-positioning (e.g., when projecting personal identity and point of view) and deliberate positioning of others (e.g., when positioning others, either present or absent in the conversation). Accountive positioning can be subdivided into forced self-positioning (e.g., when responding to a positioning of the self carried out by another person) and forced positioning of others (when responding to a positioning of others either absent or present).

All instances of Michael’s falsetto speech occurred in one of the four different types of positionings. Table 4.4 below (also presented in chapter 2) is an overview of all the dimensions of positioning theory in relation to the performative and accountive dimensions, as well as self-positioning and other-positioning. By adopting an entire discourse framework and integrating it with variationist methods, I highlight what part of the interactional context is relevant in a given interaction, thus avoiding a vague theorizing about the context. My intended goal is to make a true fusion of the traditional variationist focus, which centers on the quantitative patterning of linguistic variables, and the discourse analytical approach, which takes the contextual employment of linguistic features in social interaction as the starting point of analysis. In other words, I aim to explain quantitative patterns of variation though principled investigation of the interactional context. In addition, another advantageous return on the theoretical fusion is a highly consistent and methodologically reliable analysis apparatus. Table 4.4 illustrates how I operationalized positioning theory and analyzed Michael’s instances of falsetto phonation as part of a position taken towards a topic or an interactant.
Boldface type marks the discursive act, or positioning, in which the falsetto speech occurred. Each example will be analyzed in greater detail in the section below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performative Positioning (Deliberate)</th>
<th>Accountive Positioning (Forced)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deliberate self-positioning (N=11):</strong></td>
<td><strong>Forced self-positioning (N=15):</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 1: Michael accused of getting a girl pregnant</td>
<td>Example 2: Talking about prison (juvenile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Michael: “I’m pregnant with Michael’s baby. And then I called her this morning and I was like, ‘Why did you say that?’ And she was like, ‘I didn’t say that.’ And then my grandma was on the phone and she was like, ‘You called this house last night and said you pregnant.’ She was like; ‘Oh, I was just playing.’ And I- I was</td>
<td>(1) Interviewer: What’s that? I’m not familiar with OCC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Interviewer: So she’s not pregnant?</td>
<td>(2) Michael: I don’t know. I just found out about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Michael: And I was- I wasn’t scared cause I was like, “I ain’t had sex with the girl.”</td>
<td>(3) Interviewer: What is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Michael: It’s this program. I gotta go for six months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Interviewer: Like a residential program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) Michael: I don’t know what it is!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deliberate positioning of others (N=5):</strong></td>
<td><strong>Forced positioning of others (N=14):</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example 3: Michael getting into fight (positioning antagonist)</td>
<td>Example 4: Michael positioning family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Michael: And that’s when, he went home and got a knife. And I was like, if they try to jump him, I was gonna help him. I’m not gonna let him go out like that, cause they said they was gonna jump him so. The boy that shot me, he heard me say, he was like, “You gonna help him? I thought you was with us.” I was like, “No, I ain’t gonna let him go out like that.” That’s when he uh shot me, so we started fighting.</td>
<td>(1) Interviewer: Okay, and what- what would you say is- you like the least about your family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Michael: The nagging. Like e- every time I do something little. Like this weekend, I had to go to Oak Hill. But they dropped my charges because they knew, they could find out it wasn’t me and my friend. They- they wanted us to yeah, like, yeah. If we ever think about doing something like that, they said, “Don’t do it! They gonna sit us in this program,” and this OCC program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.4.** Examples of positioning types
4.7.1 Performative Positioning: Deliberate Self-Positioning

Deliberate self-positioning is a type of positioning that happens when a person wants to display or project a certain part of his/her identity by stressing one’s agency or “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112) by expressing personal point of view, or by expressing agency through the telling of narratives (Harré and Langenhove 1999a). Extract 4.1 illustrates an example of falsetto speech (line 15) in deliberate self-positioning, in which Michael demonstrates agentive behavior through the telling of a narrative and through topic control. Consider the following extract, which involves a narrative told by Michael. In this extract, Michael talks about being accused of getting a girl pregnant:

Extract 4.1

1 Michael: "I'm pregnant with Michael's baby."
2 And [d]then I called her [d]this mor[ø]ning[n] and I was like, "Why you say [d]that?"
3 And she was like, "[a:] did[?]n't say THAT."
4 And then my grandma was on the phone and she was like, "You called this house last night and says you- she- she [Øc] pregnant."
5 She was like, "Oh, I was just PLAYing[n]"
6 And I[a:-] I[a:] was-
7 **Interviewer:** So she's not preg[nant?]
8 Michael: [I[a:] was- I[a:] wasn't scar[ø]ed 'cause I was like,
9 15 "I aint had sex with the girl.

In the first line, Michael uses constructed dialogue in the narrative as a way of double voicing (Bakhtin 1984) the quoted girl who accuses Michael of getting her pregnant. In lines 2 and 3, Michael challenges the girl and positions her as being untruthful. The girl challenges Michael, exemplified through emphatic phonology in 5, "'[a:] did[?]n't say THAT'" to convey this
challenge. Michael’s grandmother comes to his rescue in 6-8, in which he once more uses constructed dialogue to perform the speech of his grandmother challenging the girl, “You called this house last night...” Lines 9 and 10 is a response from the girl, saying that the accusation was meant to create a humorous effect (playing), and Michael uses the discourse marker ‘Oh’ to introduce the constructed dialogue, "Oh, I was just PLAYing[n]". ‘Oh’ has been argued to signal a change in footing (Goffman 1981), and Michael uses it to connote a negative orientation towards the girl’s belief system, by using the girl’s discourse, while simultaneously orienting towards it negatively (Bakhtin 1984, Trester 2009). The interviewer jumps in with a question in 12, but Michael does not answer her question, “So she’s not pregn[nant]?” , as he continues with an internal evaluation in 14 “cause I was like,” introducing the falsetto phrase in a deliberate self-positioning.

The positioning is a self-positioning, made evident by the first person pronoun ‘I,’ and it is also deliberate, since Michael is not forced to answer the interviewer’s question – or at least he ignores the question until he has finished his story, stressing the point that he did not get the girl pregnant. Such agentive behavior is used to project a certain aspect of his identity. Accordingly, the deliberate aspect refers to Michael’s positioning vis-à-vis the interviewer and not the girl in the storyworld. Figure 4.6 below illustrates the falsetto speech on ‘I ain’t,’ as it occurs in an intonational phrase in the discursive act of deliberate self-positioning. Note also that Michael is highly vernacular in Extract 4.1, as he has many features of AAE throughout the narrative, such as stopping of interdental fricatives in 2 and 3, r-lessness in 2 and 13, monophthongal /ay/ in 5, 11, and 13, copula deletion in 8, and the
velar nasal pronounced as alveolar nasal in 2 and 10. Accordingly, Michael uses AAE to project his own identity and shape the conversation.

Figure 4.6. Falsetto speech in deliberate self-positioning (max f0 = 456 HZ)

4.7.2 Performative Positioning: Deliberate Positioning of Others

The second type of performative positioning is deliberate positioning of others, which is a positioning type that can be used to position people either present or absent in the situation. When the person is absent, the positioning may be interpreted as gossip (Harré and Langenhove 1999a). Frequently, when one deliberately positions another person, the speaker concurrently positions the self in relation to the other person, thus making a type of double positioning. Extract 4.2 represents falsetto speech in deliberate positioning of others, and the positioning is done through storytelling, which is structured as a classical Labovian (1972a) fight narrative. Michael talks about getting into a fight, trying to protect a friend, because the antagonist in the storyworld shoots Michael with a pellet gun. The extract starts with a series of orientations in lines 1 and 2 where the antagonist goes home to get a knife to retaliate for previous events. After the antagonist returns and after a few verbal altercations, a fight breaks out:
Extract 4.2

1  Michael:  And that'[øc]s when he went[øc] home,
2     and got a knife.
3         And[øc] I was like,
4     if they try to jump him,
5     I[a:] was gonna help him.
6     I ain’t gonna let him go OUT li[a:]ke [d]that,
7 cause they said they was gonna jump him so.
8     [d]The boy [d]that shot me,
9     he HEARD me say it,
10    and I asked him he was like,
11 “You gonna help him?
12    I thought you was[gen] with[t] us.”
13    I was like,
14 “No, I ain’t gonna let him go out like that.”
15  *That’s[øc] when he uh SHOT me,*
16    so we star[ø]ted fighting.

The orientation in 1 and 2 is followed by a series of evaluation clauses (3-7), introduced by an embedded evaluation taking the form of an internal dialogue, “And[øc] I was like.” The evaluation serves to position Michael as a person with honor and good intentions of saving his friend from getting jumped, which becomes evident in line 6, “I ain’t gonna let him go OUT li[a:]ke [d]that,” pronounced with emphatic phonology on “OUT,” as well as monophthongal /ay/ and stopping of an interdental fricative in “[d]that.” As such, Michael’s speech is rather vernacular in an important evaluation in the narrative. In addition, the evaluation suspends the narrative action momentarily, which contributes to heightened suspense when the action continues in 8-9, when Michael introduces the antagonist in the story “[d]The boy [d]that shot me.” Here, Michael deliberately positions the antagonist in an unfavorable light, since the antagonist is the one that shot Michael.

After introducing the antagonist, Michael continues with a series of evaluation clauses that lead into the complicating action and the resolution. The evaluations in 10-14 is a series of embedded evaluations in the form of
constructed dialogue and internal monologue. The antagonist confronts Michael in 11-12, “You gonna help him? I thought you was[gen] with[t] us.” Note the vernacular regularization pattern for past tense *be* (you was[gen]) and the stopping of interdental fricative (with[t]) that Michael uses to perform the quote. In lines 13 and 14 “I was like, ‘No, I ain’t gonna let him go out like that,’” Michael uses a type of embedded evaluation, in which he “quote[s] himself as addressing someone else” (Labov 1972a:372), while distancing himself morally from the antagonist. Line 14 is also a repetition of line 6, “I ain’t gonna let him go OUT li[a:]ke [d]that,” which was introduced earlier in the narrative and thus intensifies the action when it is repeated in line 14, leading in to the complicating action. Line 15 is the complicating action when Michael gets shot “That’s[øc] when he uh SHOT me,” and Michael uses emphatic phonology and falsetto speech on “shot” to convey expressiveness in the event. The resolution in line 16 does not resolve the conflict, but it tells the listener what finally happened: they started fighting.

The positioning is a deliberate positioning of others, since Michael initiates the topic of fighting to demonstrate how the police in the neighborhood may treat him unfairly, even when he has acted in self-defense as in this case. The antagonist is deliberately positioned as the aggressor so that Michael simultaneously can position himself as an innocent victim – hence a type of double positioning. Michael uses falsetto speech to convey the deliberate positioning of others, which is demonstrated in Figure 4.7. The falsetto speech is used in the word “shot” and has a max f0 of 442 Hz.
4.7.3 Accountive Positioning: Forced Self-Positioning

Forced self-positioning is similar to deliberate self-positioning, but the participation structure in unfolding discourse is different, since the initiative dimension belongs not to the self but to the other interactant. This is similar to the responsive models of style developed in sociolinguistics (e.g., Bell 1984, 2001). The forced aspect refers to the fact that the self is forced to take a position in the conversation, since another interactant demands self-positioning, usually through question/answer adjacency pairs. As mentioned by (Harré and Langenhove 1999a), the forced aspect can be mild as in a simple question for self-report, “How are you?”, or the forced aspect can be rather severe as when institutions of power force the self-positioning. For example, the legal system can ask people to account for personal behavior in court cases, which is a rather firm demand for self-positioning. Extract 4.3 provides an example of falsetto speech in a forced self-positioning. In this example, the interviewer asks Michael to explain his involvement with the OCC program, which is a type of program involved with juvenile detention:
The interviewer asks in line 1 about what the OCC program is, and Michael responds in 2 and 3 that he does not know what the program is, since he just found out about it. Michael also downplays the question with the adverb ‘just’ in “I[a:] just[øc] found out about it.” The interviewer is not satisfied with this response and keeps asking about OCC in line 4. In 5 and 6, Michael adds that he has to go for six months, but does not add any specific information about the program, thus avoiding the question altogether, while signaling with the vague response that he does not want to talk about this particular topic. Nonetheless, the interviewer keeps asking in 7, “Like a residential program?”, which forces Michael to self-position in a rather forced manner. Michael responds with falsetto speech and emphatic stress on “WHAT IT,” and takes a rather indignant stance towards the interviewer’s persistent line of questioning on a sensitive issue. Note the repetition or structural parallelism in line 2 “I[a:] don't[øc] know” and line 8, “I don't[øc] know WHAT IT is!” Tannen (1987) calls this particular cohesive tie a repetition with an additional expansion of the repetition, which table 4.5 illustrates.
Table 4.5. Repetition with additional expansion of repetition

The repetition or expanded structural parallelism echoes Michael’s avoidance move in 2 and creates a cohesive self-positioning that allows him to highlight his annoyance with the line of questioning. The phrase takes on extra expressive force due to the emphatic stress pattern and falsetto speech on “WHAT IT”; in addition, the expansion of the structural parallelism highlights the indignant stance conveyed in the falsetto phrase. Accordingly, the positioning is a forced self-positioning, because the initiative lies with the interviewer until Michael has had enough and repositions the line of questioning. Figure 4.8 illustrates falsetto speech in forced self-positioning, and the max f0 is 477 Hz in this particular intonation phrase.

![Figure 4.8. Falsetto speech in forced self-positioning (max f0 = 477 HZ)](image-url)
4.7.4 Accountive Positioning: Forced Positioning of Others

The final type of positioning is forced positioning of others, which is also a type of accountive positioning. The initiative lies with the person asking the question or holding the floor, and the self is in milder or more severe forms forced to position someone either absent or present in the conversation due to the question. Therefore, forced positioning of others is similar to deliberate positioning of others, as they differ only in the performative/accountive dimension. Extract 4.4 illustrates falsetto speech in forced positioning of others. Michael is asked what he likes the least about his family. He responds, with falsetto speech, “The NAGging,” in line 4, and this response elicits a longer narrative about what his family may nag about:

Extract 4.4

1  Interviewer:  Okay and..what- what would you say is- you like the least
2  about your family?
3  Michael:  The NAGging.
4  Like...e- every ti[a:]me I do something little.
5  Like... thi- this weekend[œc],
6  I had to go to Oak Hill[voc].
7  But...they dropped my char[œ]ges,
8  because they knew,
9  they found out it wasn't..me and my friend[œc].
10  They- [d]they wanted us to yeah..like..
11  If ever- we ever[œ] think about doing[n] something like
12  [d]that,
13  They- [d]they said “Don't[œc] DO it!” [d]They gonna sit us
14  in this PROgram.
15  And[œc] this OCC program.

Michael’s story illustrates that his family nags him about going to Oak Hill, which is a juvenile detention center in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. From Michael’s point of view, going to juvenile detention but having the

---

50 The one being asked a question is not forced per se to answer the question, but the first pair part creates a situation in which the next sequential move is heard as a response to the first pair part (even if the interlocutor does not answer). See, e.g., Schegloff (1968)
charges dropped constitutes “something little” (line 4), which is not worth nagging about. Michael develops the narrative and highlights what he did not like about the Oak Hill (l-vocalization) experience, and uses constructed dialogue to perform the threat of more permanent detention in the OCC program. While Michael only states that ‘they’ are going to put him and his friend in the program, “They- [d] they said “Don’t[œ] DO it!” [d] They gonna sit us in this PROgram” (lines 13-14), it is most likely that ‘they’ are official government authorities or a prosecutor rather than Michael’s family. Accordingly, the initial response to the question about what Michael likes the least about his family, elicits a narrative about an unpleasant experience with juvenile detention and the court system. Such an emotive response explains the expressive initial falsetto phrase “The NAGging” in line 3. The position is forced, since Michael responds to a question, and the ‘other’ aspect involves the positioning of certain family members. Figure 4.9 below illustrates the falsetto phonation in forced positioning of others, and the max f0 is 372 Hz.

![Figure 4.9. Falsetto speech in forced positioning of others (max f0 = 372 HZ)](image)

Having demonstrated how positioning theory was operationalized, I now turn to a more detailed interactional analysis of Michael’s falsetto. First, I
present the results for the co-occurrence of falsetto and interview positionings, and then I provide a detailed interactional analysis of Michael’s falsetto speech based on Goffman’s (1981) conversational moves (i.e. a functional analysis). Finally, I broaden the perspective of Michael’s falsetto phonation to involve Eckert’s notion of indexical fields to link Michael’s falsetto to more global meanings of falsetto.

4.8 Falsetto Speech as a Linguistic Strategy of Indignation

Throughout the interview, falsetto speech occurred 45 times out of 1680 intonational phrases. Falsetto occurred more in accountive positioning compared to performative positioning with forced self-positioning (N=15) and forced positioning of others (N=14) accounting for 29 of the 45 cases. Deliberate self-positioning had falsetto in 11 intonation phrases (N=11) and deliberate positioning of others had only five cases (N=5). It is not surprising that the most cases occurred in an accountive situation considering the sociological interview, in which the interviewer aims to elicit answers to a set list of questions, thus forcing Michael to respond to the forced aspect. However, the fact that falsetto occurred in 11 deliberate self positionings is an indicator that Michael displays quite a bit of agentive behavior, since he often takes topic control and goes off on tangents to tell narratives about events that are meaningful to him.

The co-occurrence of positioning type and falsetto maximum f0, f0 range, and falsetto duration presents a striking pattern, since forced self-positioning overall is the most significant positioning type in which falsetto speech occurs. Table 4.6 shows that Michael’s maximum falsetto was significantly higher, had a greater range, and was longer when he was forced
to self-position (though not significant when comparing forced self-positioning with forced positioning of others and deliberate positioning of others). Table 4.6 shows the pertinent statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Falsetto Max f0 (Hz)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>t stat</th>
<th>st dev</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Deliberate self-positioning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>1.710</td>
<td>2.552</td>
<td>77.91</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Forced positioning of others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>1.703</td>
<td>3.388</td>
<td>77.91</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Deliberate positioning of others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>1.734</td>
<td>2.628</td>
<td>77.91</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Falsetto f0 Range (Hz)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>t stat</th>
<th>st dev</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Deliberate self-positioning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>1.710</td>
<td>1.981</td>
<td>94.25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Forced positioning of others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1.703</td>
<td>3.216</td>
<td>94.25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Deliberate positioning of others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1.734</td>
<td>2.321</td>
<td>94.25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Falsetto Duration (ms)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>t stat</th>
<th>st dev</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Deliberate self-positioning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>1.710</td>
<td>1.905</td>
<td>127.32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Forced positioning of others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>1.703</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>127.32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced self-positioning vs. Deliberate positioning of others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1.734</td>
<td>0.651</td>
<td>127.32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6. Results of falsetto speech in terms of max f0, f0 range, and duration. (Note: * = significant at p < 0.05)

Figures 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12 illustrate the mean scores for max f0 (Hz), f0 range (Hz), and falsetto duration (ms).

![Figure 4.10. Falsetto maximum f0 (Hz) across positioning types](image-url)
It is evident that the most extreme cases of falsetto appear in the discursive act of forced self-positioning. In these cases, the interviewer has the initiative, and Michael is forced to respond to her questions and positionings of him. While a speaker is often forced to present and defend a certain point of view when being forced to self-position, the same speaker has the ability to engage in an act of repositioning the self. Interestingly, in 10 of the 15 cases of forced self-positioning, Michael immediately rejects how he is being positioned by the interviewer and repositions himself in the interview.
Based on the rather dramatic repositionings in the interview, I divided the most extreme positioning type, forced self-positioning, into two different categories *forced self-positioning* (FSP) and *forced self-positioning + repositioning*, which I refer to here as *oppositional repositioning* (OR). Figure 4.13 illustrates that the falsetto Michael uses is even more extreme when his forced self-positioning is followed by or completed with a repositioning of the interviewers’ persistence for information or inappropriate line of questioning.

![Bar chart](chart.png)

**Figure 4.13.** Falsetto speech: oppositional repositioning (OR) vs. forced self-positioning (FSP)

While the examples of oppositional repositioning shows a co-occurrence of falsetto speech with Michael’s indignant stance towards the interviewer’s questions, it is difficult to assign social meanings to falsetto speech. Some of the main challenges include the fact that falsetto is a continuous variable, and in this case the meaning also appears to be continuous. In addition, there is no direct link between linguistic variables and social meaning. On the other hand, it would not be very satisfying to say that Michael’s falsetto speech is meaningless, when considering how perceptually salient his falsetto is throughout the interview. I will argue that Michael’s 45 cases of falsetto
speech are used to convey expressiveness in general, which is in line with most research on falsetto (see Podesva 2007), but the falsetto becomes specified to convey indignation in the most extreme cases in terms of max f0, f0 range, and duration. The most extreme cases are found when Michael repositions personal attributes assigned to him by the interviewer and when she positions him wrongly in the interview. Strikingly, most of the times Michael uses falsetto happens in oppositional alignment between him and the interviewer. In some cases the opposition is mild, and in the most extreme cases, the opposition is severe. Table 4.7 presents the 10 cases of falsetto, which I argue are used to express indignation. The bold words represent the intonation phrase with falsetto:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse Context</th>
<th>Michael’s Falsetto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Asked persistently about what kind of job he has.</td>
<td>I make money!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Asked if he used a condom.</td>
<td>I don’t know. She gave it to me, I don’t know. I don’t know what it is!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Asked repeatedly about the prison he was sent to.</td>
<td>I ain’t never been charged with nothing!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Asked if he has ever been charged.</td>
<td>I was mad! Cause I didn’t do nothing. No, not revenge! It’s like, I’m just saying...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Asked about impressions of prison.</td>
<td>Who knows?!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Asked if he wants revenge if treated poorly by his girlfriend.</td>
<td>Like, uhm, I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Asked why he says he takes care of himself financially.</td>
<td>I don’t know. That’s it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Asked how he would feel if we woke up one day as a girl.</td>
<td>I don’t know. I’m just saying...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Asked persistently to label people who cheat or date more than one person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10) Asked about when kissing develops into having sex in a relationship.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7. Falsetto as indignation

When looking closer at the falsetto phrases and the discourse contexts presented in Table 4.7, the social meaning of falsetto speech starts to emerge due to the overall cohesion based on the habitual occurrence of falsetto in the discursive act oppositional repositioning. All of these examples clearly
demonstrate that Michael is not willing to cooperate with the interviewer when he is being forced to tell how he earns his money, about being charged with a crime, his experience in prison, whether or not he used a condom when he had sex with a girl, and so on. Further support for the argument that high f₀, wide f₀ range, and long falsetto duration could index indignation may be found in the sentence structure that oppositional repositioning favors. In most of the 10 examples above, the first person, singular pronoun “I” is used, and it is more likely that one would express anger, frustration, and outrage in the first person rather than in the second or third person. While the repositioning is carried out in different ways in the examples presented in Table 4.7, they are all similar when examining the larger discourse context, which is the main point in this chapter: falsetto speech is best understood as being part of a larger discursive act (oppositional repositioning), rather than being described grammatically, in isolation, at the sentence level (e.g., interrogative challenger). When considering the entire interactional setting, it quickly becomes evident that falsetto phonation is used in oppositional alignment between interactants, and that the most extreme cases of falsetto is used as an oppositional repositioning (forced self-positioning followed by a repositioning). Indignation in the ten examples above is conveyed in different, yet similar ways.

As Figure 4.14 illustrates, the oppositional repositioning can be carried out based on different conversational moves (Goffman 1981), that is, a functional rather than structural adaptation to the conversation, in which the overall functions matter more than the structural aspects. For example, a move can be completed with one or several adjacency pairs (Johnstone 2008). In this particular case, the moves are based on interviewer initiated attempts

51 He eventually reports that he cuts grass for elderly people in the neighborhood.
to elicit responses to personal questions, thus forcing Michael into a forced-self positioning situation. However, Michael repositions the interviewer’s comments with different conversational moves – either as an avoidance strategy, as a direct response (or retaliation) to the interviewer’s personal questions, and as a response to sociocultural constraints found in the storyworld of the various narratives that he tells. Each of the different moves presented in Figure 4.14 will be analyzed in more detail below to accentuate the point that the moves are different at the surface level, but all similar in the way they convey indignation in the larger discursive act of oppositional repositioning.

Figure 4.14. The discursive construction of indignation through oppositional repositioning

As mentioned, Michael’s falsetto is produced as three different discursive moves, which I have termed avoidance, retaliation, and sociocultural constraints. Extract 4.5 demonstrates the most common move, avoidance, which is found in example 1-3 and 7-10 in Table 4.7. In the avoidance example analyzed in extract 4.5, Michael is asked persistently
about what kind of job he has, and it is evident that he tries to avoid answering this question, but the interviewer keeps asking until Michael shows indignation expressed by falsetto phonation. In other words, the avoidance strategy does not work, and Michael needs falsetto to reposition himself in the conversation.

Extract 4.5: Avoidance

1 Interviewer: Do you work?
2 Michael: Hm, yeah, I[a:] got a job.
3 Interviewer: What do you do?
4 Michael: Huh?
5 Interviewer: What do you do?
6 Michael: I[a:] make money!
7 Like...you know like..go out,
8 I cut somebody[o’s] grass,
9 for somebody that old.
10 Interviewer: Okay.

It is evident from this example that Michael avoids telling the interviewer what kind of work he actually does, and the fact that the interviewer asks the question three times in 1, 3, and 5 accentuates Michael’s initial avoidance strategy. In addition, Michael’s answer in 2 is a clear violation of Grice’s (1989/1975) maxims of quantity and relevance, as the question in 1 demands either a longer answer or a more specific answer. However, Michael does not offer an adequate answer in 2, and he refuses to answer the question in 3 exemplified by ‘Huh?’ in 4. It is possible that he did not hear the question, but considering his exclamation in 6, in which he completely refuses to cooperate with the interviewer’s persistent questioning, it is more likely that he tries to avoid the question. Finally, Michael explodes in 6, since helping his grandfather to cut grass, is not a cool thing to do in his world. Figure 4.15 below tracks Michael’s pitch in the intonational phrase:
Michael’s f0 is 191 Hz on ‘I[a:]’, and the utterance reaches its peak on the stressed syllable of ‘money’ with an f0 of 661 Hz. The frequency then drops to 143 Hz on the second syllable of ‘money.’ This rapid change in frequency and range shows a change in footing and positioning caused by the unfinished question/answer adjacency pair (Levinson 1983), which completes the avoidance move. The question/answer sequence is completed when Michael finally answers the question in 6 after several hedges in “Like…you know like..go out”. Accordingly, Michael uses falsetto speech in oppositional alignment to reposition the interviewer’s questions, before he unwillingly reveals that he cuts grass to earn his money.

Falsetto can also be used to complete an adjacency pair, by taking an immediate stance towards the interviewer’s question, which is exemplified in the retaliation move illustrated in Extract 4.6. Michael talks about getting arrested unjustly, and what happens to him in prison following the arrest. Michael’s falsetto appears as a response to a follow up question about getting charged in court:
Extract 4.6: Retaliation

1 Michael: And [d] then once we got in the cell[voc],
2 they told us,
3 we was[gen] suspects,
4 in the neighbor[ø]hood.
5 But [d] then when they found...’cause uh somebody tried-
6 [d] they said somebody tried to steal somebody[ø’s] CAR[ø],
7 and they called the police.
8 And uh- they took our[ø] finger[ø]prints,
9 and took the finger[ø]prints off the CAR[ø].
10 And we was[gen] Oak Hill[voc] for a NIGHT,  
11 came- but woke up and went to cour[ø]t.
12 Found out it wasn’t our finger[ø]prints.
13 They say[V] it wasn’t our[ø]s and,
14 they let- they dropped all char[ø]ges and let us go.
15 Interviewer: So did they ever figure out who it actually was?
16 Michael: Uh uh, they just said it wasn’t out fingerprints.
17 They scanned [d] them,
18 and they ink-print ‘em.
20 Interviewer: Has that ever happened before that you’ve been charged
21 with something?
22 Michael: I[a:] ain’t never[r] been char[ø]ged with[t] noth[t]ing[ø].
23 I ain’t never[r] been in jail.
24 It’s terrible down [d]there.

Michael is clearly emotionally involved when telling about his experience in jail (1-14, 16-19), and Schilling-Estes (2006) argues that Michael is particularly involved in issues pertaining to his “oppressive sociocultural surroundings,” such as going to jail and being charged unjustly. Further, Michael is highly vernacular in the extract, which is evident by the high levels of r-lessness, stopping on interdental fricatives, absence of possessive –s marking (6), and the use of a verb stem to denote past tense (13). In line 20, Michael is asked if he has ever been charged with something, and he immediately repositions the interviewer’s question with a retaliation move, constructed through a structural parallelism. Table 4.8 (inspired by Du Bois 2007) below illustrates how Michael uses falsetto and other linguistic features
to reposition himself in the interview, and in this case with a rather indignant tone:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Repositioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
<td>Has that ever happened before 've been charged with something?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael:</td>
<td>I ain't never been charged with nothing.</td>
<td>(Oppositional)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8. The stylistic use of oppositional repositioning

The example in table 4.8 shows how the interviewer positions Michael as someone who may have been charged with something, and Michael immediately resonates her request through a structural parallelism in which words are repeated. However, instead of acknowledging her evaluation “been charged,” he negates it with a double negative “ain’t never” containing falsetto, while repositioning the object “something” with “nothing.” Thus, the alignment between the interviewer and Michael is oppositional, and his repositioning is doubly emphasized by the follow up statement “I ain’t never been in jail.” In addition, Michael evaluates the interviewer’s question by using the negative comparator ain’t never by placing the event against what “might have happened, but which did not” (Labov 1972a:381). Labov argues also that comparators often co-occur with other elements of evaluation, which is the case in line 24 when Michael evaluates “It’s terrible down there” to complete the narrative.

In addition to the falsetto voice, there is also a great clustering of AAE features in his oppositional repositioning. First of all, the triple negation with “ain’t never…nothing” is a common syntactic AAE construction (Green 2002, Rickford 1999). “Never” and “charged” are r-less, “with” and “nothing” are pronounced with a stop, the velar nasal is turned alveolar and syllabic, and
the diphthong in “I” is monophthongal. In sum, Michael is not only using falsetto to reposition, but his style also clusters with many features that have been identified as ethnic markers of AAE (see, e.g., Rickford 1999, Wolfram and Thomas 2002). Figure 4.16 illustrates Michael’s use of falsetto on “ain’t never” with a max f0 of 372 Hz.

![Figure 4.16. Falsetto used as a retaliation move](image)

In sum, the falsetto phonation connotes indignation and dissatisfaction with the prison experience, which is conveyed through an immediate oppositional repositioning as part of a retaliation move.

The last example of how falsetto may be used to express indignation is found in discursive moves against sociocultural constraints. This particular move deviates from the retaliation move in that Michael does not directly negate the interviewer’s positioning, but uses an emotive response to how he felt at a given time in a past event. In other words, Michael is responding to the question from a point of view in the storyworld and not directly to the interviewer in the life world. To illustrate this point, Extract 4.7 describes a situation in which Michael is talking about getting locked up for the night after being arrested. Michael positions himself as an innocent victim, and he is clearly dissatisfied with the injustice he experienced, which may, once again,
have been caused by his oppressive sociocultural surroundings. He uses expressive phonology and falsetto to convey his emotions:

**Extract 4.7: Sociocultural Constraints**

1  *Michael:* They wake us up all early.
2  Make us eat this nasty food.
3  It’s not nasty. But it’s okay.
4  It’s really- it’s okay.
5  *Interviewer:* Uh huh.
6  *Michael:* I was hungry, I had to eat.
8  *Interviewer:* Yeah, cause [you were-
9  *Michael:* [Had no CHOICE.]
10 *Interviewer:* Uh huh. So were there any other impressions you had about it other than the room [and the food?]
12 *Michael:* [I was MAD[c#ø]=
13 *Interviewer:* You were [mad
14  *Michael:* [=Cause I didn’t DO nothing.
15  I was like,
16  why is I’m down here,
17  I ain’t even do nothing.

In the beginning of the extract, Michael is talking about getting up early and eating food. First he calls the food nasty (2), but changes it to okay (3). The ambiguous message about the food may be revealed in (9), where he talks about not having a “CHOICE,” including emphatic stress, in terms of what food he can and cannot eat. Following the initial exchanges, Michael is asked about his other impression in jail (10-11). Note that the interviewer is asking about impressions Michael had in addition to the room and the food. While the question is posed in connection with objects in the prison, Michael chooses to evaluate on his internal emotional state, expressed by the first person singular pronoun “I.” Once again, his style shift clusters with other AAE features: There is a double negative with “didn’t…nothing,” the single final consonant is lost in “MAD,” “nothing” is pronounced with an alveolar
nasal instead of a velar one and a glottal stop instead of an interdental fricative. Note also the very rare “is I’m” (16) construction (Schilling-Estes 2006) right after the utterance with falsetto. In addition, both of the pronouns are monophthongal\(^{52}\) which shows that the falsetto clusters with other vernacular features of AAE. The falsetto reaches its pitch peak on “MAD” with a pitch of 426 Hz, which Figure 4.17 illustrates.

![Figure 4.17 Falsetto used as a response to sociocultural constraints](image)

Michael’s repositioning of his situation in jail is completed with “[=Cause I didn’t DO nothing,” which is accentuated by his immediate internal dialogue in 15-17, finishing the narrative with “I ain't even do nothing.”

Following Goffman (1981), the oppositional repositioning can be accomplished through different conversational moves: either as part of an avoidance strategy, a retaliation move, or as a response to sociocultural constraints in a narrative. However, the three moves are all similar when looking at the larger positioning in which the falsetto speech occurs, and the social meaning conveyed in the discourse: Falsetto is used to convey indignation as a part of the larger discursive act forced self-positioning followed by a repositioning, which I call oppositional repositioning. The final section of the chapter summarizes the findings, proposes the final social

\(^{52}\) First I: F1 = 694 Hz; F2 = 1276 Hz; Second I: F1 = 768 Hz; F2 = 1512 Hz
meanings of falsetto, and views the current findings in connection with previous studies of AAE falsetto speech.

4.9 The Social Meaning of Falsetto Phonation

Podesva (2007) argues that researchers face a great challenge when trying to link social meaning to phonological variables. First of all, metalinguistic commentary on language variation often reveals more about societal ideologies and stereotypes than how people actually produce, for instance, phonological variables (Podesva 2007). Second of all, how linguistic features become meaningful at the interactional level is obscured in large-scale survey studies, where variables are abstracted away from the naturalistic, conversational setting. I have mapped social meanings to falsetto speech in this chapter to help fulfill the need for studies that show how variables can become meaningful in specific moments of interaction. However, these moments of interaction never happen in a social vacuum and may also be influenced by large-scale ideological associations (rooted in correlational associations) that already exist between linguistic forms and social groups. I have demonstrated the importance of the close examination of interactional moments by showing that falsetto speech patterns according to specific positioning types, thus demonstrating that the force of falsetto (in terms of max f0, f0 range, and duration) can be explained when showing that falsetto patterns according to similar and recurring positioning types, and thus similar moments of interaction. However, other studies may also shed light on the current analysis, if we link Michael’s falsetto speech to aggregate patterns and interactional meanings in the speech of other African Americans, in other sub-groups within Michael’s community (e.g. girls) as well as other
communities (e.g. middle-class African Americans, African Americans in different types of urban and rural settings).

Falsetto is used to be expressive in oppositional alignment in general, and it is used to convey indignation in severe cases of oppositional repositioning. The analysis presented in the current study is supported by previous findings on falsetto. The expressive nature of falsetto speech has been demonstrated by Tarone (1973), Goodwin et al. (2002), and Podesva (2007). In addition, when revisiting the studies on falsetto in AAE, it is evident from the specific examples provided that falsetto occurs in oppositional or divergent alignment as in this study. First of all, Podesva and Lee (2010) demonstrates that the 17 highest cases of falsetto are used to evaluate racism and gentrification negatively, which shows how falsetto in divergent alignment is used to respond to adversity and the changing ethnoracial landscape in Washington, D.C. in certain neighborhoods. Falsetto has also been reported as taking place in speech events that simultaneously challenge speaker positioning and co-construct group solidarity (Tarone 1973, Alim 2004). Tarone (1973) describes that falsetto is being used by a man to protest the idea of supporting a woman financially, which is a discursive act of oppositional alignment. Loman (1975) reports that falsetto is used as an indignant correction, and Alim (2004) argues that falsetto occurs in a battling mode to contest, for instance, speaker attitudes. Alim only analyses two instances of falsetto and describes them as an interrogative challenger and a declarative emphasizer. However, considering all eight examples of falsetto in the study, it is equally evident that Black American Falsetto is used in divergent or oppositional alignment between interactants and that falsetto carries a core expressive meaning, which is suggested by the word emphasizer in addition to
a specific analysis of the conversations. In Alim’s study, falsetto phonation emerges in specific turns in the conversations, in which one interactant either protests, challenges, complains, or is in disbelief over a specific issue. In other words, falsetto is used to convey expressiveness in oppositional alignment between speakers.

The current analysis also provides a perfect illustration of Eckert’s (2008) notion of indexical fields, since it is evident that falsetto speech has multiple yet related social meanings. Recall that the indexical field represents a constellation of related core meanings that speakers can draw upon to invoke pre-existing group associational or interactional meanings as well as rework them in an ongoing interaction to construct new local meanings. In other words, the core meaning of a variant can become specified in local interactional settings to index specific meanings. As such, a speaker can variously employ the same variant in different interactional moments to indicate different social meanings; in turn, an interactant can evaluate the same variant in a number of ways, again depending on the specific interactional context and interactional moment. In fact, listener evaluation is crucial, since a variant can either invoke a pre-existing meaning or make claim to a new one in a current context.

Falsetto phonation appears to be a variable with a global core meaning that is not tied to African Americans per se, but also to other communities of practice. For example, Podesva (2007) demonstrates that falsetto has a core expressive meaning, which can become specified to create a ‘bitchy diva’ persona, which may be part of certain types of gay identity. In a different setting, Goodwin et al. (2002) demonstrate that Latina girls use falsetto to be expressive while playing games, and the falsetto is primarily used in
oppositional stances. As such, the expressive meaning of falsetto goes beyond African American communities. However, falsetto, I would argue, is also a core feature of African American English more globally. It has been linked to African American women (Podesva and Lee 2010) and more generally to African Americans (Loman 1967, 1975; Tarone 1973, Alim 2004). What binds these studies together is that falsetto speech appears to have a shared core meaning of expressiveness that can index solidarity or opposition depending on the specific interactional goals and positions taken up by interlocutors. As such, the indexical field for falsetto appears to have quite different yet actually related ideological meanings in African American speech communities. Consider Alim’s argument that falsetto is simultaneously used to co-construct opposition and solidarity. These meanings are ideologically related, since they both draw upon the expressive nature of falsetto, but the meaning can become specified depending on the interlocutors, the interactional goals, and the alignment between speakers to create either opposition or in-group solidarity or both simultaneously. Alim’s analysis provides a convincing explanation not only for his own data, but also for the African American communities in previous studies (California, Seattle, Washington, D.C.). To support this fact, Tarone (1973) also notes that falsetto is used to construct solidarity at the “game” level of interaction, but it was also used as a protest. Similarly, Loman (1975) noticed that falsetto was used by “spirited” groups to create in-group solidarity (supposedly), but also that it was used to convey a rather indignant tone. In the current study, Michael also draws upon the expressive nature of falsetto, but we only see the oppositional nature of it as he talks to a community outsider (the interviewer), and he is forced to take particular oppositional positions
towards the interviewer (or the questions) and antagonists in the story world. Whether or not Michael also uses falsetto to construct solidarity cannot be determined from this study, but based on the indexical field for falsetto from previous studies, I would not be surprised if communal stances are part of his falsetto repertoire.

To sum up, the current study shows that Michael uses falsetto to be expressive in oppositional alignment, and in the most extreme cases to convey indignation. From the interview discourse, it is unlikely that Michael uses falsetto to co-construct opposition and solidarity as in Alim’s (2004) study, especially considering the direct and confronting nature of the semi-structured interview. Figure 4.18 below illustrates the overall analysis of falsetto speech in this chapter: Falsetto phonation may be viewed as a sociolinguistic variable that is produced on a continuum of expressiveness in terms of max f0, f0 range, and duration. The expressive nature is found in oppositional alignment, and the most extreme cases of falsetto occur in the discursive act of oppositional repositioning, in which the social meaning is indignation.

A Continuum of Expressiveness

Expressive: Oppositional Alignment

Indignation:
Max f0 (Hz)
Range (Hz)
Duration (ms)

Figure 4.18. A continuum of expressiveness in oppositional alignment
4.10 Chapter Summary

The instances of falsetto speech in this chapter were found to have related expressive meanings, which is in line with previous studies (e.g., Tarone 1973, Loman 1967, 1975). However, the present study also departs from previous studies in several ways: Michael’s falsetto speech indexes various degrees of expressiveness in different interactional moments and when different positions are taken up between Michael and the interviewer, as well as between Michael and the sociocultural constraints he faces in the storyworld. Falsetto speech as a linguistic variable of AAE has proven to be a stylistic resource that depends greatly on the interlocutors’ fluid and rapid changing positions in the interview discourse. The integration of discourse analysis with more traditional variationist methods allowed me to infer the meanings of falsetto from the interview discourse – social meanings that would have been lost had I not analyzed Michael’s falsetto in its conversational context.

The most extreme instances of falsetto in terms of max f0, f0 range, and duration index indignation towards the interviewer’s questions that cause oppositional alignment and are accounted for through oppositional repositionings. By using falsetto as a stylistic resource, Michael is able to resist and reposition the interviewer’s implications (linguistically) in addition to resisting a life of sociocultural constraints and oppression.
CHAPTER 5. PROSODIC RHYTHM IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

The Stylistic Use of Prosodic Rhythm

5.1 Introduction

The current chapter investigates the social meaning of prosodic rhythm (or timing) in African American English, and how this paralinguistic signal varies within the speech of a single individual – Michael. The study of rhythm in African American English has mainly compared group scores from speakers of European American English and African American English using the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI) (Low and Grabe 1995), which measures the degree with which a language variety is, for instance, stress-timed or syllable-timed. The only preexisting study of AAE prosodic rhythm found no measurable synchronic differences between the abovementioned groups (Thomas and Carter 2006), yet prosody and rhythm are viewed as salient features of African American English (Spears 1988, Wolfram and Thomas 2002, Thomas 2007). Further, our understanding is limited with regards to possible intra-individual variation in prosodic rhythm, including how individuals strategically use rhythm to project personal identities and create positions, for example, in relation to sociocultural opportunities and constraints.

In the present chapter, I address the above shortcoming by mapping PVI scores to specific moments in discoursal interaction. Specifically, I focus on how prosodic rhythm is used in constructed dialogue in narratives, which increases the immediacy of a past utterance in a present conversation (e.g., Hymes 1977, Schiffrin 1981) and recontextualizes a previous utterance in a current narrative or piece of discourse (Tannen, 2007). The benefit from such a
quantitative and qualitative fusion is an understanding of how rhythm can shift from being syllable-timed to stress-timed in order to accomplish specific interactional goals, including creating diverging stances and alignment between speakers. In this chapter, prosodic rhythm is calculated using the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI) as used by (Carter 2007) but developed by (Low and Grabe 1995). The PVI index is calculated from vowel nuclei in adjacent syllables. In the current chapter, a total of 282 measurements were made, which resulted in 141 PVI calculations, as it took two syllables to calculate a PVI score. These measurements were conducted in 24 cases of constructed dialogue in narratives, where Michael performs the speech of other people. The measurements included the constructed dialogue (N=88) and the non-dialogue narrative discourse (N=194) immediately preceding and following the quote to investigate if style shifts occur in connection with constructed dialogue. Finally, I argue that skillful narration and manipulation of syllable timing is an essential part of the African American verbal strategy marking. The chapter is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference in rhythm (PVI) between constructed dialogue within narratives and non-dialogue narrative discourse?
2. Does rhythm in a narrative depend on speaker alignment?
3. What are the social meanings of rhythmic style shifts in narratives?

5.2 Rhythm in Sociolinguistics

Rhythm in African American English is a poorly understood area of inquiry, though it is argued to be a salient part of AAE prosody (Spears 1988, Rickford and Rickford 2000, Alim 2004). Rhythm and prosodic features are difficult to study without the proper technology for carrying out acoustic analyses, which is one of the main reasons for the lack of explorations into the nature of
AAE rhythm. Nonetheless, the past couple of decades have seen a growing interest in the study of rhythm, especially after Low and Grabe (1995) introduced the Pairwise Variability Index (PVI), which measures the degree with which a language variety is more or less stress-timed or syllable-timed. To account for languages such as Japanese and Hawaiian, the term mora-timed languages (equal distance between each mora) was later included (see, e.g., Ramus et al 1999). It was previously held that in syllable-timed speech, such as in Spanish, each syllable has approximately the same duration, whereas in stress-timed speech, such as in English and Dutch, the duration from one stressed syllable to the next stressed syllable is roughly identical. However, Torgersen and Szakay (2011:165) describe the difference between syllable-timing and stress-timing as:

Duration, which is linked to time, is the most frequent unit to measure...So-called syllable-timed languages will have a near-equal duration of units (e.g. syllables or vowels). Examples of such languages are Mandarin and Spanish. Stress-timed languages, on the other hand, will have larger durational variability of units.

As such, stress-timed varieties are viewed as having larger durational variability in units regardless of whether or not vowels or entire syllables are measured. It cannot be argued then that stress-timed varieties have equal distance between each stressed syllable, but the durational variability of units in stress-timed varieties will distinguish stress-timing and syllable-timing perceptually. In general, the lower the PVI score the more syllable-timed a language is, whereas higher scores will indicate more durational variability and thus stress-timing.

Low and Grabe (1995) and Low, Grabe, and Nolan (2000) developed a method for calculating PVI scores, which has set the standard for current
studies. Different flavors of the PVI equation exists, but there is little disagreement as to whether or not PVI is a reliable measure of syllable-timing and stress-timing. Low and Grabe’s (1995) equation compares the duration of two adjacent syllables, by taking the difference in duration of two adjacent syllables, and dividing it by the mean duration of the same syllables. Mean scores are then calculated based on, e.g., an entire sentence or intonation phrase. The equation has the advantage that it controls for overall speaking rate, which is a methodological challenge that has divided scholars in the past, based on differing opinions as to whether or not overall speaking rate has an influence on rhythm in a language. The equation used in this chapter will be discussed in the method section.

Today, there is somewhat of a consensus in the field regarding PVI, but such a consensus has not always existed. Dellwo and Wagner (2003) and Torgersen and Szakuy (2011) argue that a high speech rate tends to make stress-timed speech more syllable-timed, although Low and Grabe’s equation in general controls for overall speaking rate. It is also common belief today that syllable-timing and stress-timing are not absolute entities but more of a gradable phenomenon, as Ramus et al (1999) argue: languages are more or less stress-timed and more or less syllable-timed. A speaker of a stress-timed language will exhibit several stretches of syllable-timed speech throughout a conversation and vice versa, which suggests great intra-speaker variation. Before I turn to the specific observations on AAE rhythm, I turn to the growing body of PVI studies, since the current chapter is based on newer acoustical techniques adopted from these studies.

Pike (1945) was the first to coin the terms stress-timed and syllable-timed speech, but it was Low and Grabe (1995) that first introduced the
Pairwise Variability Index (PVI). Almost two decades later, PVI calculations have been used to study and compare languages, dialects, individual speakers, and social meaning although studies on the latter are scarce. Low and Grabe (1995) used PVI to study English, German, Dutch, Spanish, French, and Mandarin, and concluded that the Germanic languages are more stress-timed than Spanish and Mandarin – both considered syllable-timed languages. As mentioned, the divide between stress-timing and syllable-timing was initially viewed as an absolute dichotomy and not as a scalar or continuous phenomenon. In fact, early studies, such as Dauer (1983), argued that languages do not have syllable-timing patterns that are independent of phonological structures. From such a perspective, what makes most of the Germanic languages, such as English and Dutch, syllable-timed languages is frequent vowel reductions in unstressed syllables, whereas most Romance languages do not reduce vowels at the same rate, making the languages more syllable-timed. Ramus et al. (1999) reached a similar conclusion based on their study of syllable-timed (French, Italian, Spanish), stress-timed (English, Dutch), and one mora-timed language (Japanese): rhythm is a result of the languages’ general phonological structures.

Gut et al. (2002) studied three West African languages: Ibibio (Nigeria), Anyi (Ivory Coast) and Ega (Ivory Coast) and came to a different conclusion than Dauer (1983) and Ramus et al. (1999). The three languages vary according to phonotactic constraints, in which the language from Nigeria, Ibibio, disfavors consonant clusters but allows consonants in the coda position. On the other hand, Anyi from the Ivory Coast allows consonant clusters but disfavors consonants in the coda. Ega, also from the Ivory Coast, is different from Anyi and Ibibio in that it allows both coda consonants and
consonant clusters alike. Gut et al. (2002) concluded that all three languages are syllable-timed despite varying phonotactic constraints, which is an argument against previous conclusions that syllable timing depends crucially on the overall phonological structure in a language.

Most current studies of PVI involve dialects of English, with an eye to establishing if minority dialects tend to shift towards the majority dialect in terms of either stress-timing or syllable-timing. In addition, many newer studies investigate timing shifts in English dialects outside the UK and the USA, and they conclude that dialects may become more leveled with contact languages if these languages are syllable-timed. For example, Deterding (2001) used naturalistic data to establish that speakers of Singapore English are more syllable-timed than speakers of RP as a result of substrate influence from Chinese languages that tend to be more syllable-timed. On a similar note, Gut (2002) and Udofot (2003) show that Nigerian English is more syllable-timed than British English – especially for those Nigerians who have English as a second language.

Variation in stress-timing and syllable-timing has also been found between distinct dialects of English in the UK and the USA. Spencelayh (2001) compared dialects from Derby, Newcastle, and York in Northern England and Buckie in Scotland. York and Derby were stress-timed, Newcastle was in between, and Buckie was syllable-timed, probably caused by the Scottish vowel-lengthening rule. Szakay (2008) compared rhythm in Maori and Pakeha New Zealand English, and concluded that substrate influence from mora-timed Maori most likely led to a more syllable-timed Maori New Zealand English. Pakeha English, on the other hand, was the more syllable-timed variety of New Zealand English. In a newer study, Torgersen and
Szakuy (2011) compared speech from two boroughs in London: Hackney in the East End part of inner city London, and Havering in the eastern outskirts of London. Hackney has a diverse, multiethnic population, whereas Havering consists mainly of self-identified white Brits. The study showed a tendency for syllable-timed speech in Hackney, especially for adolescent, non-Anglo immigrants, speaking a variety of Multicultural London English (MLE). The speakers from Havering exhibited PVI scores closer to Grabe and Low’s (2002) scores for RP speakers. They finally conclude (2011:172), “as an increased level of syllable timing is also found in Maori New Zealand English, Singapore English and Jamaican English, a more syllable-timed speech rhythm appears to be a feature of contact varieties of English.” That is, language contact between English and another language tends to make the new variety more syllable-timed.

Contact situations have also been found in the U.S. Fought and Fought (2002), while not using PVI measures, found that there was a difference between Chicano English speakers and European American speakers in California. The Chicano speakers were more syllable timed – especially in the beginning of sentences. Coggshall (2008) compared Eastern Cherokee English, Lumbee English, European American English, and African American English in North Carolina. The main focus, however, was on the Indian American English spoken by the Cherokee and Lumbee groups. While both groups can be labeled ‘Native American,’ they differ greatly in terms of ancestral language, as the Cherokee group has knowledge of an ancestral Native American language whereas the Lumbee do not. Coggshall found that due to contact influence from Cherokee, Eastern Cherokee English was much more syllable-timed than Lumbee English. Lumbee English in turn was more
similar to stress-timed European American English and African American English, which have leveled in this region. The surprising finding in this study is that the younger group of Lumbee shifted towards a more syllable-timed speech, which stands in contrast to Wolford and Carter (2007), who showed that the Lumbee moved towards stress-timed speech.

To my knowledge, only one study (Thomas and Carter 2006) has investigated rhythm in African American English, using the Pairwise Variability Index proposed by Low, Grabe, and Nolan (2000). As such, the Thomas and Carter (2006) study is the most important one for this chapter, as it serves not only as inspiration for the current chapter but also for the purpose of comparing results. Thomas and Carter (2006) studied 20 African Americans and 20 European Americans from three rural North Carolina counties: Hyde County (coastal), Warren County (borders Virginia), and Robeson County (borders South Carolina). The main focus was to compare rhythmic scores from European Americans and African Americans, though other data was included in the study (pre-1860 European Americans, ex-slave recordings, Jamaican and Hispanic (Mexican origin) L2 speakers, and L1 Spanish speakers (control group)).

The results showed no statistical difference in the rhythm produced by modern day African Americans and European Americans in North Carolina. Another interesting finding concerns the rhythmic patterns found in the ex-slave recordings. While there is some evidence for similarity between the ex-slaves and the Jamaican and Hispanic L2 groups, the ex-slaves do not overlap with the younger groups of African Americans and European Americans. In addition, there is no overlap between ex-slaves and the pre-1860 European Americans, strongly suggesting that rhythmic patterns between African
Americans and European Americans have leveled, where there was a clear distinction in the past. Figure 5.1 illustrates the median PVI scores based on demographic group in the Thomas and Carter (2006:345) study, showing that the African American and European American groups are the most stress-timed and the Spanish speakers are more syllable timed. The English L2 speakers are in between. Figure 5.2 shows the scores for African American speakers in the study, including the ex-slave recordings. Note that higher PVI scores indicate a greater degree of stress-timing.

![Figure 5.1. PVI scores from each demographic group (adopted from Thomas and Carter 2006:345).](image-url)
When looking at the data presented in Figure 5.2, it is evident that the regression line illustrates a clear shift towards syllable-timed speech in African American English in North Carolina over time. Recordings from the ex-slaves reveal a tendency skewed towards syllable-time speech, whereas younger speakers today are overwhelmingly stress-timed. The authors argue that this may be evidence for the convergence hypothesis between AAE and EAE in the convergence/divergence controversy. In other words, speakers of AAE and EAE are becoming more similar.

Note that Thomas and Carter decided to report mean of median scores instead of mean scores, as they argue center scores are more appropriate for inter-group comparisons. They state, “the distribution of PVI values for any speaker is skewed,” which means that for any speaker there is great variation (i.e., intra-individual variation) between syllable-timed and stress-timed speech, and therefore they want to exclude all extreme scores from either end of the PVI continuum. Drager, Eckert and Moon (2008) found also that intra-speaker rhythm varies depending on topic, for instance, the topic of “drama”
among elementary school children in northern California— a finding also confirmed by Spencelayh (2001).

Only two studies (Carter 2007, Callier 2011) have investigated intra-speaker variation and the social meaning of prosodic rhythm. Carter (2007) studied what he called “linguistic reinvention,” which denotes a linguistic shift in an individual over time. In contrast to predominant models for stylistic variation which focus on intra-speaker variation within single interactions or several interactions over a relatively short period of time, Carter aspired to theorize about the implications for style when an individual shifts speaking style over a longer period of time. Carter investigated the rhythm in the speech of ‘Maria,’ a 14-year-old Mexican American woman, who was born in Mexico City, but came to Raleigh, North Carolina at the age of eight. Carter noticed that Maria’s speech changed over a period of three years from an initial suburban white variety of English to a Latina dialect, which was accompanied by an orientation towards the urban landscape including hip hop clothing. While Maria had shifted her speech at the segmental level to “match up with the racialized social milieu” (2007:12) of her school, she did not change her rhythm significantly although it did become more stress-timed, and matched up well with the other Latino groups in the area. The rhythmic change over time was not significant, but the Carter study does suggest that rhythm, just like any other variable, should be investigated as a stylistic resource for the construction of the linguistic self.

Callier (2011) observed in Zhang’s (2005) study that Beijing professionals exhibit a certain rhythmic dialect pattern, which led him to investigate rhythm in the Mandarin Chinese produced by six characters (three

Note that Drager, Eckert, and Moon (2008) investigate f0 PVI and not durational PVI.
women and three men) in a Chinese TV drama. Callier studied rhythm and final syllable lengthening for all six characters, and found a divide in variability between the men and the women, where the men favored a more “measured” style compared to the women’s “variable” style. The “variable” style consisted in general of more rhythmic variability and a greater degree of syllable lengthening, which leaves an overall impression of women having a more dynamic prosody. In addition, Callier argues that the male/female discrepancy may also be found in distinct *wen* and *wu*\(^54\) male identity categories that draw stylistic resources from the measured/variable divide thus producing a type of fractal recursivity (Irvine and Gal 2000) or “gendered masculinities” (Callier 2011:49). Accordingly, Callier attaches social meaning to PVI scores\(^55\) and demonstrates that variation in PVI is expanding the range of gender identities.

It is evident from previous research on prosodic rhythm – at least since the creation of the Pairwise Variability Index – that scholars have approached rhythm from a first wave perspective. The field has primarily focused on classifying languages or groups with distinctive dialects as being either stress-timed, syllable-timed, or in between. The studies that do consider social factors have approached the social in a traditional way by correlating PVI scores with pre-defined social demographic categories, such as European American, African American, and Native American. Secondary objectives have been concerned with establishing direction of shifts to find out if two social groups in contact become more similar or distinct over time. Few studies have focused on individual speakers (e.g., Carter 2006, Callier 2011),

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\(^{54}\) *Wen* and *wu* are binary masculinity categories associated with a traditional way of dividing masculinities in China. *Wen* refers to “literature, refinement,” whereas *wu* is described as “martiality” (Callier 2011).

\(^{55}\) Callier used a version called nSPVI.
and these show great promise for future endeavors into the study of rhythm as a stylistic variable that is sensitive to style shifts. More studies of stylistic variation in prosodic rhythm are needed, including the investigation of how rhythm can be used to accomplish specific interactional goals in face-to-face interaction. In the field of AAE, rhythm has mainly been noted impressionistically rather than quantitatively. However, despite the literature gaps, the existing observations are still crucial for our general understanding of AAE prosody and for the current chapter. The studies on rhythm in AAE will be addressed in the following section.

5.3 Prosody and Rhythm in African American English

It is common belief that intonation and prosody are just as characteristic of African American English as phonological and morphosyntactic features (Tarone 1973, Spears 1988, Alim 2004). Rhythm has been studied as a salient aspect of call and response in African American churches (Smitherman 1977, Green 2002), but these studies are more an articulation of rhythmic cohesion between the preacher and the congregation, and not so much about intra-speaker variation. Except for the recent study by Thomas and Carter (2006), most observations on rhythm remain impressionistic, most likely because of nonexistent reliable ways of measuring prosody acoustically. Some of the major insights into AAE prosody that may have an influence on rhythm are as follows: 1. Varieties of AAE tend of have more primary stresses and continuing shifts between high and low pitches, caused by a higher level of primary stresses (Loman 1967, 1975; Tarone 1973). 2. African American English has a greater pitch range (Mitchell-Kernan 1972, Tarone 1973, Loman 1975, Jun, S. and C. Foreman 1996, Feagin 1997, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes
The high pitches often shift into falsetto, especially for men, as we saw in the previous chapter (Johnson 1971, Loman 1975, Alim 2004, Schilling-Estes 2004a, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006, Nielsen 2009). 3. Rhythm: There is no measurable synchronic difference in PVI scores between African American English and European American English in North Carolina – both groups are stressed-timed speakers. This similarity may be an indication of convergence between AAE and EAE in the convergence/divergence debate (Thomas and Carter 2006).56

Though rhythm has not been established quantitatively to be a salient factor in the production of AAE, there are indications that rhythm correlates positively with identifying AAE perceptually. In Rickford’s perception study in the early 1970s (see Rickford and Rickford 2000:102), respondents identified African American ethnicity correctly in 86% of all cases, using words such as “inflection,” “variation in pitch and rhythm,” “intonation,” and “tone” to identify African Americans. Rickford and Rickford (2000:19) have also argued that cadence is essential in constructing social meaning:

In black speech, cadence is as crucial to meaning as the words themselves. The rhythm, inflection, and rhetorical style are organic to the message, the clues that the speaker provides as to his or her mood and the nature of his or her relationship with the audience.

In addition, Green (2002:160) argues that different rhetorical strategies in AAE are just as important as variation in lexical, morpho-syntactic, and phonological features; and variation in rhythmic patterns contribute to the construction of these rhetorical strategies. One of the questions that remain then is what language or discourse features contribute to the construction of

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56 An interesting venue for further explorations would be to see studies of AAE vs. European American English in urban contexts, and even other Southern contexts with different historical relations between African Americans and European Americans.
these rhetorical strategies and do rhythmic style shifts contribute to create these strategies? Apparently, African American verbal strategies are constructed based on a conglomeration of linguistic features, and variation in rhythm appears to be a salient factor in these strategies. Accordingly, I turn to a short discussion of AAE verbal strategies in which rhythm appears to be a salient factor.

5.4 Rhythm and African American Verbal Strategies

From Labov’s (1972a) groundbreaking work on narratives, we know that a key aspect of African American English lies in the narrative skills found in many African American verbal traditions. These skills require not only a mastery of AAE phonology and morphosyntactic features, but also a command of paralinguistic features that are just as important for the construction of AAE as the grammatical features found in more traditional approaches to variation. Some of the better known verbal strategies include *signifying* (“the verbal art of insult,” Smitherman 1977), *playing the dozens* (also an art of insult but even more insulting than signifying, Smitherman 1977), *loud-talking* (high volume talk indented for a third party, Mitchell-Kernan 1972), and *marking* (constructed dialogue for the purpose of mocking someone, Mitchell-Kernan 1972). The verbal strategies are often associated with expressive language with a certain flow and rhythm, and Green (2002) argues that the traditional verbal strategies may not always be articulated with the most studied features of AAE. Instead, the verbal strategies are performed with:
the use of different rhetorical strategies and expressive language. In some cases, the speaker uses indirectness; in others he uses a bragging or boasting tone and signification, and in still others he uses repetition and specific rhythmic patterns (Green 2002:160).

In a similar vein, Smitherman (2000) notes that the African American Verbal Tradition (AVT) is signified by a dynamic expression of “impassioned language use” and that in AVT “the speech rhythms reflect emotional intensity” (Smitherman 2000:258). Accordingly, it appears that a key component for understanding African American English lies in understanding the expressive nature of the verbal traditions. However, which specific linguistic features that are used to assemble these strategies remain to be addressed in the variationist paradigm.

5.4.1 The Verbal Strategy Marking

The verbal strategy marking appears to be one of the strategies in which rhythm could play a significant role, since Mitchell-Kernan (1972:176) argues that the most important language features and functional effect of marking is “paralinguistic mimicry.” Marking is linguistically similar to Labov’s (1972a) concept of narrative evaluation, or, more specifically, one of the entailed categories: quotation. Evaluation, and therefore also quotation, may constitute one of the most important aspects of a narrative, since the main point is often conveyed as an evaluation of people and events. Labov (1972a) demonstrates that one of the devices used for embedded evaluation is quotation, which Mitchel-Kernan (1972) argues make up the verbal strategy marking. That is, a particular type of double voiced quotation, or constructed dialogue, constitutes marking. Mitchel-Kernan (1972: 176) defines marking as follows:
A common black narrative tactic in the folk tale genre and in accounts of actual events is the individuation of characters through the use of direct quotation. When in addition, in reproducing the words of individual actors, a narrator affects the voice and mannerisms of the speakers, he is using the style referred to as marking (clearly related to the standard English ‘mocking’). Marking is essentially a mode of characterization. The marker attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said, in order to offer implicit comment on the speaker’s background, personality, or intent.

The idea that a marker not only reports what was said, but also comments on the way it was said, is similar to Bakhtin’s (1981[1953]) notion of heteroglossic discourse, and Tannen’s (1986) work on constructed dialogue, in which she argues that the reported dialogue is not a report but rather “the recontextualization of words in a current discourse” (Tannen 2007:17). Marking is performed with constructed dialogue to mock the speech of a person either present or absent in the discourse. However, recall that marking is not any type of performance speech, and should be understood in terms of Bakhtin’s (1984) notions of uni-directional and vari-directional double voicing. Uni-directional double-voicing refers to the performance of another voice, in which the speaker aligns positively with the performed speech. Vari-directional double voicing in contrast happens when a speaker uses constructed dialogue to take an opposing (perhaps negative) stance towards the voice being performed. Accordingly, marking should be viewed as a type of vari-directional double voicing, since the marker “attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said” for the purpose of mocking someone (i.e. to align negatively with the performed voice). From Bakhtin’s (1981[1953]) notion of heteroglossic discourse, all discourse is multi-voiced, and discourses are if not completely, then at least partially constructed from other discourses and speaking styles. In particular, when a speaker chooses to construct the dialogue of another person – either present or absent in the
interaction – that very same speaker makes choices about what was said, and how it was said to represent the ideas, intentions, and values of the constructed speaker (see, e.g., Johnstone 2008).

In marking, segmental and suprasegmental features are used to create certain effects in the narrative discourse that “carry expressive value” (Mitchell-Kernan 1972:176). Mitchell-Kernan mentions high pitch contours when marking, possibly even shifting into falsetto speech, although she never describes or analyses any specific linguistic features in detail. She maintains, however, that marking can be performed with phonological and grammatical features that deviate from a speaker’s normative behavior in social interaction. Obviously, this behavior must be interpreted as marking by listeners in order for the verbal strategy to have the desired effect, which suggests that marking often happens in an in-group setting between participants who recognize the ‘mocking’ and know how to decode the specific contextualization cues used to construct marking.

As mentioned, Mitchell-Kernan argues that the most important language features and functional effects of marking is what she calls “paralinguistic mimicry,” which is superordinate to features such as “mispronounced words,” “provincial idioms,” and “dialectal pronunciation.” (1972:176). The mimicry refers to the double voiced constructed dialogue, and the paralinguistic features most likely refer to phenomena such as tone of voice, pitch, and rhythm though she never defines ‘paralinguistic.’ In other words, an essential feature of marking is performing the speech of a person either present or absent in the discourse, in which paralinguistic, expressive features are employed as a marking strategy. Standing in contrast to such performed speech is a more emotionally detached description of a person.
What remains to be investigated then, is which specific paralinguistic features participate in assembling the verbal strategy, and how these features participate in the construction of social meaning. In addition, if marking is truly an African American verbal strategy, then some linguistic features unique to AAE or specific arrangements in the discourse system must be employed in the marking – otherwise, the quoted speech will not be differentiated from most varieties of English. Some language features may participate in the construction of marking, but which remain to be established from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. It is also possible that the skills needed to manipulate the paralinguistic signals are different from those of other ethnic and social groups. That is, features such as tone of voice, pitch, and rhythm could be factors differentiating ethnic groups and how these language features are used to construct verbal strategies.

Marking also appears to involve topics or people that evoke a highly emotive investment in the performed speech, since an interactant would under normal circumstances not use expressive paralinguistic cues unless some face-work is at stake. In this connection, Michel-Kernan (1972:177) argues that marking often involves “a caricature of a social type which is frequently the object of scorn and derision,” such as a police officer in an inner city neighborhood. Mitchel-Kernan also mentions the Uncle Tom stereotype as a frequent object of scorn and derision, thus making the Uncle Tom performance a common case of marking. Similarly, Alim (2004:51) notes how he one time was marked by an African American friend, Jamila, who performed Alim’s speech with a “Whitey voice” through overly nasalized speech. This happened, since the person was used to talk to Alim in the mode of “Black talk,” but she heard him talk to a professor where he supposedly
had used a more standard or educated voice, which came as a surprise to her. To mock Alim, Jamila performed a nasalized “Whitey voice,” linking the nasality to whiteness.

Finally, the expressive nature of marking appears to be more important than mere referential linguistic meaning, since “change in posture, speech rate, tone of voice, facial expression, etc., may signal a change in meaning.” (Mitchel-Kernan 1972:179). As a consequence, rhythm appears to play a central role in marking, which is why I address rhythm in constructed dialogue in this chapter to see if certain cases of constructed dialogue can be considered cases of marking and also to see if rhythmic style shifts play a role. What remains to be studied in AAE rhythm is similar to the shortcomings in the study of falsetto speech: Either researchers merely comment upon rhythm in African American English impressionistically without looking at quantitative patterns or they lump ethnicities into predefined categories for the comparison of PVI scores without paying attention to the potential social meaning conveyed through style shifts in syllable timing. Accordingly, we need a combined methods approach that seeks to understand the overall PVI patterns, but at the same time aims to uncover the social meaning of PVI and how rhythm is used as a discursive strategy to accomplish specific interactional goals. When studying marking, issues of speaker representation, stancetaking, and alignment between speakers must be considered, since marking appears to happen in divergent alignment between subjects – i.e. between the marker and the marked subject. Based on the gaps in the literature, the current chapter is guided by the following research questions:
1. Is there a difference in rhythm (PVI) between constructed dialogue within narratives and non-dialogue narrative discourse?
2. Does rhythm in a narrative depend on speaker alignment?
3. What are the social meanings of rhythmic style shifts in narratives?

5.5 Michael and Data

The data for this chapter also comes from the one-hour sociological interview with Michael. As mentioned earlier, Michael is a vivid storyteller, and he often goes off on tangents to tell narratives about fighting, run-ins with law enforcement, going to prison, and dating (Schilling-Estes 2006), which makes the interview an ideal site for investigating identity and style shifts. Further, Michael often displays agentive behavior and takes control of the conversation to tell stories, and he often uses constructed dialogue to perform the views of his friends, girlfriend, and family. However, Michael also performs the speech of the antagonists in his life, such as police officers in his neighborhood, who find his behavior suspicious, and he also performs the speech of a person with whom he gets into a fight. As such, the interview with Michael is an ideal site for investigating the complexities of social meanings expressed through constructed dialogue. Since Michael performs the speech of friends and foes alike, the constructed dialogue appears in cases displaying various types of alignment with narrative characters, such as divergent and convergent alignment. An ideal framework for investigating alignment is that of Du Bois (2007), and it represents the second discourse framework that I seek to integrate with the variationist paradigm. The following section provides specific examples of how I operationalize stance theory and thus fuse it with the variationist paradigm and the Pairwise Variability Index.
5.6 Operationalizing Stance Theory

The theoretical chapter outlines the general principles of stance and why it is relevant to variationists. In this section, I demonstrate how I integrate stance theory into the study of AAE for quantitative and qualitative benefits. Stance should be understood as a type of linguistic social action that aligns interactants with respect to objects and people in the real world and story world. Stance appears to be a central aspect of constructed dialogue and marking, since the most important form of stancetaking is *evaluation* (Du Bois 2007:142). Marking is precisely the act of evaluating a character through constructed dialogue, thus recontextualizing previously spoken discourse. Recall that the stance act involves *evaluation, positioning, and alignment* between speakers (Du Bois 2007:163). These components all constitute an overall stance act as the stance triangle illustrates in Figure 5.3

![Stance Triangle Diagram](image)

**Figure 5.3.** The Stance Triangle (Du Bois 2007:163)

The alignment between speakers creates intersubjectivity, and thus “I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you” (Du Bois
In the current chapter, I will adopt Du Bois’ (2007) perspective of scalar alignment, in which alignment is viewed as a continuous phenomenon. Alignment here is defined “as the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers” (Du Bois 2007:162). In other terms, the calibration is a measure of relative agreement between interactants, and it involves convergent, divergent, or ambiguous alignment between interactants from the scalar perspective, since the alignment always occurs to a certain degree and not in absolute terms (i.e., one agrees to a certain extent with another person). Here, stance or stancetaking involves linguistic ways in which interactants create and signal relationships with other interactants, discursively constructed personas, or objects and ideas. Accordingly, I will identify cases of constructed dialogue, and determine alignment between subject 1 and subject 2. Then I categorize alignment in constructed dialogue as being either convergent, divergent, or ambiguous, while mapping these dynamic, discursively founded categories with PVI scores in constructed dialogue and compare it with non-dialogue narrative discourse. Constructed dialogue is thus a discursive choice that aligns people in the story world and by extension in the social world. These choices, if they recur, contribute to an emerging speaking style, and the language patterns become ideologically linked with social meanings created in the discourse (Irvine 2001).

The following section demonstrates three examples of what I have classified convergent, divergent, and ambiguous alignment in the interview with Michael. In the first example, which is a case of convergent alignment
involving constructed dialogue, Michael talks about who should pay in a relationship – the boy or the girl. The interviewer has just asked if it would be okay for a girl to pay on a date. The constructed dialogue, where Michael performs the speech of his girlfriend, shows convergence between Michael and his girlfriend (stance subject 1 and 2). The constructed dialogue appears in quotation marks:

**Extract 5.1**

1. *Michael:* Yeah, I had a girl like that,
2. this girl named Crystal.
3. I[a:] told[øc] her[ø] I[a:] had[c#ø] no money.
4. She’s like,
6. I was like,
7. "Okay, okay,
8. I- I[a:] ain’t got no money."
9. And I’m and I- and she’s like,
10. I- I- yeah,
11. "I’ll do it [d]this time because,
12. you do it for[ø] me ever[crø]y time."
13. Girls should pay someti[a:]mes too.

In this example, Michael uses constructed dialogue in several cases to perform the speech of his girlfriend Crystal. He also quotes himself, which increases the immediacy of a past utterance in a present conversation (e.g., Hymes 1977, Schiffrin 1981), thus drawing the listener in to the story, making the past seem more vivid. Michael begins the story by talking about his girlfriend, Crystal (1, 2), who pays on the date. Michael constructs (or reconstructs) the dialogue for the interviewer by quoting himself saying that on this particular date, he did not have any money (3). The constructed girlfriend says that she has money and will pay for Michael (5). Michael shows convergence with her suggestion by the use of the repeated discourse marker "okay, okay" (7), but restates his lack
marker okay in, “Okay, okay” (7), but restates his lack of money. Then the girlfriend finally offers to pay for him, since he usually pays for her (11-12).

In order to analyze the alignment between Michael and Crystal within the stance framework, consider the alignment diagram in Table 5.1, which constitutes an analysis of the extract by operationalizing the stance triangle. The key components of the stance triangle are represented in the top line with the stance subject, positions/evaluation, the stance object, and alignment between speakers. The numbers on the left hand side illustrate the line number in the extract, and the sentences are key sentences in the dialogic construction of speaker alignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Stance Subject</th>
<th>Positions/Evaluates</th>
<th>Stance Object</th>
<th>Aligns (convergent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>had no</td>
<td>money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>got</td>
<td>money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>’ll pay</td>
<td>{pay with money}</td>
<td>for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Okay, okay, I</td>
<td>ain’t got no</td>
<td>money</td>
<td>{Okay, okay}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>’ll do</td>
<td>it [d]this time</td>
<td>{for you}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>You</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>it</td>
<td>{pay with money}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1. An alignment diagram showing convergent alignment

In line 3, Michael is speaker 1, and is also the stance subject realized by the first person pronoun “I.” Michael evaluates (“had no”) the stance object “money,” making it clear that he is not able to pay on the date. Crystal responds with a counterstance (Du Bois 2007:149) in line 6, which is the appropriate sequential response to Michael’s stance. In her response, the stance object is no longer formulated explicitly, but we can deduce from the context that she will pay with her money as a response to Michael’s “no money.” In addition, Crystal shows convergent alignment through her
evaluation of the stance object “money,” and thereby positions her in relation to the stance object. By adding a “for you,” she aligns positively with Michael by saying she will do something for him, which is “pay” in this case. In Michael’s response in 7, he initially converges towards Crystal’s “for you” by repeating the discourse marker “Okay, okay” but then repeats that he does not have any money. Crystal expresses a counterstance in 11-12, in which she converges in the alignment by situating herself as the stance subject, evaluates (“’ll do”) the stance object “it,” which refers to “pay for Michael,” and the implicit alignment marker “{for you}” can be induced from the parallel structure in the alignment diagram. She completes the convergent alignment in 12, by stating that Michael usually pays for her “You do it for me ever[crø]y time.” The constructed dialogue is completed with many features of AAE including double negative in 7 “ain’t got no,” stopping of an interdental fricative in 11 “[d]this” and a loss of /r/ after consonants in 12 “ever[crø]y”. Thus Michael is highly vernacular in his speech as he recontextualizes the dialogue.

The next extract (5.2) shows divergence in the narrative. In this case, Michael is performing the speech of a police officer, and the constructed dialogue imitates the line of questioning Michael and his friend is subjected to from the police officer. Michael’s immediate response diverges from the speech of the performed police officer.
The interviewer asks Michael what his general feeling is towards the police, which elicits the narrative in Extract 5.2. Michael’s first response is that he dislikes the police (1), and continues to talk about how the marshals use violence (4-5). The constructed dialogue occurs in line 14, “Where [Øc] you at? Where [Øc] you going?” in which Michael performs the speech of a police officer who follows Michael and his friend around the neighborhood, and questions their intentions, which Michael finds unwarranted, as shown in line 10, “Just come to you for no reason.” It is evident from lines 14-15 that Michael is disaligned with the constructed dialogue of the police in the story world and by extension with the police in the life world. The parallel dialogic syntax in 14 and 15 brings alignment to the surface between the interactional personas, but more importantly when there is a contrast between two similar syntactic constructions, the parallel structure resonates and emphasizes the
disaligned aspect. This example is similar to Tannen’s (1987) repetition with an additional expansion of the repetition, mentioned in the falsetto chapter. Table 5.2 illustrates the repetition with expansion. In this particular case, the expansion occurs before the repetition in line 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Expansion</th>
<th>Repetition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Where [Øc] you at?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Where [Øc] you going?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.2.** Repetition with additional expansion of repetition

The repetition and expanded structural parallelism echoes Michael’s position and thus highlights his annoyance with the unwarranted line of questioning. The alignment diagram represented in Table 5.3 demonstrates the divergent alignment between Michael and the police officers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 1</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 2</th>
<th>Positions/Evaluates</th>
<th>Stance Object</th>
<th>Aligns (divergent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>{we}</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>[Øc] going</td>
<td>where</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>{you}</td>
<td>[Øc] going</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>{It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø]}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.3.** An alignment diagram showing divergent alignment

If we take a closer look at the performed sentence (14), “Where [Øc] you at? Where [Øc] you going?” it is evident that Michael is disaligned with the statement based on the counterstance in line 15 “It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø] where[ø] we [Øc] going[n]!” The stance object in 14 is the interrogative pronoun “where,” which is realized with a deleted copula plus the present progressive “going,” thus positioning the stance subject 2 “you” in relation to the object. The implied stance subject 1 is the police officers, which can be deduced from the previous discourse (“they”) in 13 “they come at you
with[c#ø] like,” and earlier references to the police. In other words, the officers want Michael and his friend to account for their behavior, and are thus disaligned with Michael and his friend. This divergence is amplified in 15, in which Michael quickly counters the police officers’ stance act (14) with a counter stance. The evaluation and the stance object are echoed through the parallel syntactic structure, but now stance subject 1 is changed to reflect Michael and his friend’s point of view, making the implied stance subject 2 the police “{you}.” The evaluation and the stance object is resonated with “[Øc] going” and “where,” but the parallelism is contrasted with the expanded structure “It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø],” which negates the previous stance act set forth by the police, while highlighting the divergence in alignment. Figure 5.4 illustrates the counterstance in line 15 with a schematic representation of the stance triangle, and it is simultaneously an example of how stance theory can be operationalized to show divergent alignment:

![Stance Triangle Diagram]

**Figure 5.4.** The stance triangle and divergent alignment
Whereas Extract 5.2 represents constructed dialogue in divergent alignment, Extract 5.3 below is an example of ambiguous alignment from the interview. Though the constructed dialogue is a short sentence, the quote is extracted from a larger narrative about Michael meeting his lawyer:

**Extract 5.3**

1. *Interviewer*: You didn’t know that she was your lawyer?
2. *Michael*: No, I[a:] thought she was just[œc] like,
3. they gave us- gave[c#ø] me a lawyer[ø].
4. But I[a:].[already had..
5. *Interviewer*: [She didn’t talk to you,
6. prior to that,
7. about what happened?
8. *Michael*: My[a:] parents talked to her.
9. *Interviewer*: Your parents did.
10. So did you talk with your parents and? You are talking
11. about your grandparents?
12. *Michael*: Yeah, I met her[ø],
13. but I don’t- I ain’t never[mn] know her[ø] name.
15. *Michael*: She just[œc] say[V],
16. "I’m your[ø] lawyer[ø]" and all this.
17. Blah, blah, blah.

The interviewer asks in (1) if Michael has met the lawyer before, and he initially replies no (2), but later corrects his statement saying that he met her before, but never knew her name (13). The constructed dialogue is introduced in 15, “She just[œc] say[V],” and completed in 16, “I’m your[ø] lawyer[ø].” The alignment between Michael and the lawyer is ambiguous, since the stance object is not overtly present in the discourse, and is simultaneously difficult to infer from the discourse prior to and following the constructed dialogue. Table 5.4 is an alignment diagram representing the constructed dialogue in Extract 5.3:
Table 5.4. An alignment diagram showing ambiguous alignment

Stance subject 1 is the lawyer, which is evident from the first person pronoun “I.” Stance subject 2 is Michael, and it can be inferred from prior interview discourse, “Yeah, I met her[ø],” in line 12, in which “I” is Michael. However, in the constructed dialogue, there is no shared stance object between subject 1 and 2, which makes it difficult to determine intersubjectivity and hence alignment between the two stance subjects. Since there is no evaluation of a stance object, the two subjects are difficult to position in relation to each other, following the stance triangle. Obviously, “your” positions the lawyer in relation to Michael, as she will represent him in a court trial, but there is no evaluation of her specifically.

The final statement from Michael in line 17, “Blah, blah, blah” could indicate divergent alignment between Michael and the lawyer, since “Blah, blah, blah” could be interpreted as mocking or as taking an indifferent stance towards the lawyer’s bureaucratic language in the court setting (or maybe he is just bored). However, the alignment is ambiguous, since the lawyer is representing Michael and there is no indication that Michael is dissatisfied with her, despite evaluating her dialogue with “Blah, blah, blah.” Due to no simultaneous orientation towards a shared stance object and because of the mixed stance signals, I have classified the alignment as being ambiguous. Now that I have demonstrated how stance theory can be operationalized to analyze alignment in a naturalistic conversation, it is time to turn to the method section for the current chapter.
5.7 Method

The date comes from the one-hour interview with Michael. In order to measure rhythm in constructed dialogue, discourse analysis based on stance theory (Du Bois 2007) was used to locate instances of constructed dialogue in narrative discourse, since all cases of constructed dialogue were performed as part of a larger narrative. Narratives were identified following Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972), in which a narrative must have at least two temporally ordered clauses to be considered a narrative. I identified constructed dialogue by locating quotatives\(^{57}\), which are words in the narrative discourse that signal a reported context and thus constructed dialogue (Tannen 2007, Johnstone 2008). The constructed dialogue in the narratives were introduced by quotatives *be like/like* (N=16), *say* (N=5), and *tell/telling* (N=3). The three lines below illustrate how Michael uses *like* in (1), *say* I (2), and *tell* (3) to introduce constructed dialogue. The quotatives are marked in bold and italic writing:

(1) They come at you with[c#ø] *like,* “Where [Øc] you at? Where [Øc] you going?”

(2) They-[d]they *said,* “Don’t[øc] DO it!” [d]They gonna sit us in this PROgram.

(3) She *tell* me straight up, “I ain’t got AIDS.”

A total of 282 measurements were made of vowel nuclei in PRAAT (version 5.1.30; Boersma and Weenink 2010), which resulted in 141 PVI calculations, as it took two syllables to calculate a PVI score. These measurements were conducted in 24 cases of constructed dialogue in a narrative, where Michael performs the speech of another person. The measurements included the

\(^{57}\) Obviously, constructed dialogue is not always introduced by quotatives, and other linguistic resources such as a shifts in deixis can introduce constructed dialogue, but I only included cases with quotatives to make sure I was consistent in identifying constructed dialogue.
vowel nuclei in the constructed dialogue (N=88) and in the non-dialogue narrative discourse (N=194) immediately preceding and following the quote to investigate if style shifts occur in connection with constructed dialogue. As such, PVI measurements were taken before the constructed dialogue in the non-dialogue narrative discourse and after the constructed dialogue in the non-dialogue narrative discourse. Accordingly, I made more than twice as many non-dialogue measurements compared to dialogue measurements. Several cases of constructed dialogue were excluded from the analysis – especially the cases where Michael’s speech is not fluent due to long pauses, false starts, and inaudible language. Accordingly, the aim was to find passages of speech in which both the constructed dialogue and the surrounding non-dialogue discourse gave the percepts of a fluent rhythm. The total number of measurements (N=282) well exceeds the 200 token threshold established in current PVI studies for averaging out deviations, “due to segmental factors, such as intrinsically longer or shorter vowels (Peterson and Lehiste 1960) or the voicing of the following consonant (e.g. House and Fairbanks 1953)” (Thomas and Carter 2006). Though Thomas and Carter (2006) argue for a 200 token threshold, Carter (2007) only includes 176 measurements for one time period in his study of ‘Maria,’ suggesting that an even lower number is sufficient for measuring PVI.

As mentioned, PVI scores are a measure of the degree with which speech is more or less syllable-timed or stress-timed. The method for calculating PVI was adopted from Low and Grabe (1995), which was later modified by Low, Grabe, and Nolan (2000). The original method was adopted for this study due to concerns about recording quality, which is a similar concern Carter (2007) had. The equation used to calculate PVI scores is
presented in Figure 5.5. The equation compares the duration of two adjacent syllables, and controls for speaking rate by taking the difference in duration of two adjacent syllables, and dividing it by the mean duration of the same syllables.

\[
PVI = \frac{\text{[syllable } a \text{ – syllable } b]}{a + b}
\]

\[
\text{[syllable } a \text{ – syllable } b]\]
\[
a + b
\]
\[
2
\]

**Figure 5.5.** Equation for calculating PVI

Low and Grabe (1995) used laboratory speech and were able to include consonant syllable onsets and codas in their measurements because of high recording quality. However, the data in this study made it difficult to determine onsets of many consonants, and it was difficult to determine which syllable an intervocalic consonant should be assigned to. Accordingly, and just like Carter (2007), only vocalic nuclei were measured in this study. The only cases where consonants were included were in the case of coda liquids /l, r/ which were treated as glides and thus as part of the vowel. Due to the effect of pre-pausal lengthening, syllables in pre-pausal feet were excluded from the analysis, with pauses being determined as perceptible breaks. T-tests were conducted to determine significant difference between constructed dialogue and non-dialogue discourse.

To revisit, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference in rhythm (PVI) between constructed dialogue and non-dialogue discourse?
2. Does rhythm in a narrative depend on speaker alignment?
3. What is the social meaning of rhythmic style shifts in narratives?
5.8 Results

The results of the first research question involving difference in PVI between constructed dialogue and non-dialogue narrative discourse are presented in Figure 5.6 and Table 5.5:

![Figure 5.6. PVI constructed dialogue vs. PVI non-dialogue discourse](image)

**Table 5.5.** PVI results for constructed dialogue and narrative discourse
(Note: * = significant at p < 0.05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PVI Types</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>t stat</th>
<th>st dev</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PVI Constructed Dialogue</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>1.977</td>
<td>3.165</td>
<td>.386</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>*0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVI Non-dialogue Discourse</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>.422</td>
<td>3.165</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that Michael’s rhythm in constructed dialogue is much more stressed-timed compared to the surrounding non-dialogue narrative discourse. Table 5.5 provides information about PVI type (constructed dialogue and non-dialogue narrative discourse), the total number of
measurements (N) for each discourse type, the mean PVI score, t scores, t stat, standard deviation, df, and a p-value. The average PVI-score for constructed dialogue is .623 compared to .422 for narrative discourse. The difference is significant, statistically speaking with a p-value at .002 (p=0.002). Note from Figure 5.6 that Michael’s mean PVI score was .485, which places him in the lower end of the stress-timed continuum. While Michael’s scores cannot be compared directly to Thomas and Carter’s (2006) study of African American prosodic rhythm in North Carolina, it is still interesting to speculate about the similarities and differences. It is not surprising that Michael’s overall score is in the low end of stress-timed speech, since Michael talks very fast throughout most of the interview, and a fast speech rate tends to correlate positively with syllable-timed speech in stress-timed languages (Dellwo and Wagner 2003, Callier 2011). Thomas and Carter (2006) found that African Americans in North Carolina have a clear tendency to move towards stress-timed speech over time, which is evident from Figure 5.7.

![Figure 5.7](image)

**Figure 5.7.** PVI scores for African Americans in North Carolina based on year of birth (adopted from Thomas and Carter 2006:346).
While this study cannot be compared directly to African Americans in North Carolina, it could be interesting to see in future studies of urban varieties of AAE tend to have lower PVI scores than varieties in rural areas.

Michael’s rhythm varies depending on discourse function, which is evident by higher PVI scores in constructed dialogue compared to the surrounding non-dialogue discourse. Accordingly, the discourse context should be investigated in greater detail and take speaker alignment into account, which is the goal of research question number 2.

For research question number 2: Does rhythm in a narrative depend on speaker alignment, the answer is also affirmative, which is evident from Figure 5.8.

![Figure 5.8](image.png)

**Figure 5.8.** Constructed dialogue vs. non-dialogue narrative discourse based on alignment

Figure 5.8 illustrates that the rhythm in constructed dialogue and non-dialogue narrative discourse is highly similar when the constructed dialogue occurs in stance acts in which Michael shows either convergent alignment,
which he did in 10 cases (N=10), or ambiguous alignment (N=4). When the constructed dialogue is performed in a stance act in which Michael conveys divergent alignment (N=10), the PVI score for constructed dialogue reveals highly stress-timed speech (0.659), compared to the surrounding syllable-timed speech (0.379). The difference is significant with p=0.02 as illustrated in Table 5.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PVI Types</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>t stat</th>
<th>st dev</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PVI Divergent Alignment</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.659</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>2.649</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVI Non-dialogue Discourse</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6. PVI scores for constructed dialogue in divergent alignment compared to non-dialogue discourse.

Figure 5.9 below shows the relationship between prosodic rhythm and alignment type. The trend lines reveal that the less agreement there is between Michael and the other stance subject in the dialogic syntax, the bigger the difference is between syllable-timed and stress-timed speech, creating a more dramatic style shift.
Figure 5.9. The relationship between PVI scores and alignment type

The variation in prosodic rhythm based on alignment in the interview discourse suggests that identity work is at play in divergent alignment. It appears that Michael is using stylistic shifts in rhythm to convey a particular type of social meaning in these specific moments of interaction. The final research question in this chapter seeks to uncover the social meaning of rhythm.

As mentioned, the last research question aims to understand the social meaning of rhythmic shifts in narrative discourse. This question is more difficult to answer, but when taking a closer look at where the biggest differences are between stressed-timed and syllable-timed speech, a pattern starts to emerge. I will propose that rhythmic style shifts in general are used to be expressive in constructed dialogue. In addition, I will argue that great variation in syllable timing in diverging alignment may be part of the African American verbal strategy *marking*, especially in cases where Michael uses
paralinguistic mimicry to construct caricatures of certain recognizable social types, such as a police officer. The most extreme rhythmic shifts between stress-timed and syllable-timed speech was found in topics that involved run-ins with the police, contact with the correctional system, and getting into fights – all topics that trigger highly divergent stances in Michael’s case. Most cases of ambiguous and converging alignment were found in narratives involving dating and gender ideology as, for example, when Michael performs the speech of his girlfriend analyzed in Extract 5.1 (e.g., “I got money, I’ll pay for you”). It appears that performative, stylistic behavior is at play in divergent alignment, and the more Michael distances himself from antagonists in the interactional world, the greater the distance is in PVI scores between syllable-timed and stress-timed speech. For the remaining sections of the chapter, I turn to cases of divergent alignment for a more in-depth analysis of the most extreme rhythmic shifts. Table 5.7 below shows all ten cases of constructed dialogue in divergent alignment along with a description of the discourse context in which the quoted speech appeared in the interview:
Table 5.7. Constructed dialogue in divergent alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse Context</th>
<th>Constructed Dialogue (Divergent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (1) Talking about being charged in court  
(Quoting court official) | “Don’t do it! They gonna sit us in this program” |
| (2) Police following Michael and his friend  
(Quoting police) | “Where you at? Where you going?” |
| (3) Police following Michael and his friend  
(Quoting police) | “If the school not open, can’t sit right there” |
| (4) Getting into a fight  
(Quoting antagonist in fight) | “You gonna help him? I thought you was with us” |
| (5) Arguing with girlfriend about why he got into a fight  
(Quoting girlfriend in argument) | “Why did you do that? He was just playing” |
| (6) Arguing with girlfriend because he got into a fight  
(Quoting girlfriend in argument) | “I don’t think we should go together for a while” |
| (7) Arguing with girlfriend because he got into a fight  
(Quoting girlfriend in argument) | “These are my friends that go to my school” |
| (8) Arguing with girlfriend because he got into a fight  
(Quoting girlfriend in argument) | “Why you do that?” |
| (9) Arguing with girlfriend because he got into a fight  
(Quoting girlfriend in argument) | “We was just playing” |
| (10) Performing grandmother arguing with girl who accused Michael of getting her pregnant  
(Quoting grandmother) | “You called this house last night and said you pregnant” |

It is evident from Table 5.7 that Michael uses constructed dialogue to perform the speech of various people, including the police and other legal officials (1-3), the antagonist in a fight that Michael got into (4), his girlfriend (5-9), and his grandmother (10). Example 10 is different from the others, since the constructed dialogue involves Michael’s grandmother talking to the girl accusing Michael of getting her pregnant, whereas the other examples involve Michael talking to antagonists in the story world. The biggest difference between constructed dialogue and the surrounding non-dialogue discourse is found in examples 1-4 with an average PVI score of 0.814 for constructed
dialogue and 0.259 for narrative discourse, meaning that the performed speech is highly stress-timed compared to the highly syllable-timed surrounding non-dialogue discourse. The four examples thus represent extreme cases of stylistic shifts in prosodic rhythm, which I will argue are part of a marking verbal strategy. All ten examples of constructed dialogue in divergent alignment could potentially be part of a marking strategy, since stylistic shifts in rhythm are used to perform and recontextualize the speech of other individuals, which partly meets Mitchell-Kernan’s (1972) description of marking. However, examples 1-4 are different from the other six examples, as they involve performances of personas that represent sociocultural challenges to Michael’s everyday life, including the police, correctional officers, and a violent antagonist. While the girlfriend and the grandmother could represent similar challenges, Michael does not appear to take an indignant stance towards them to the same degree he does with the personas in example 1-4, which is also reflected in the rhythmic patterns. As mentioned, example 10 is different altogether, since the constructed dialogue involves the grandmother talking to the girl accusing Michael of getting her pregnant, whereas the other nine examples involve narrative characters talking to Michael in the storyworld.

All ten examples represent modes of characterization performed by the use of “paralinguistic mimicry” that “carry expressive value,” which partly constitutes marking according to Mitchell-Kernan (1972). In addition, the double voiced speech recontextualizes the quote, while representing intentions and values of the speakers, and in that sense all cases are examples of marking. However, Mitchell-Kernan’s (1972:177) argument that marking often involves “a caricature of a social type which is frequently the object of
scorn and derision” appears to apply specifically to examples 1-4 and to a lesser extent to the other six examples. The first four examples are similar in the way the constructed dialogue characterizes personas that represent oppression and violence in Michael’s world – whether it is officials from societal institutions representing asymmetrical power relationships (e.g., police or correctional officials) or an antagonist engaging Michael violently.

Looking at the first three examples in Table 5.7, it is evident that the constructed dialogue takes on different syntactic structures. Example 1 is a command “Don’t do it! They gonna sit us in this program,” whereas example 2 is made up of questions, “Where you at? Where you going?” and example 3 is a conditional construction, “If the school not open, can’t sit right there.” However, what matters is the alignment conveyed in the discourse. In the first example presented in Extract 5.4 (also presented in Extract 4.4), Michael uses constructed dialogue to perform the speech of a prosecutor. The interviewer asks what Michael likes the least about his family, and responds “the nagging” with falsetto speech, setting the stage for the narrative about getting in trouble with the law:
The stage is set for the divergent alignment, when Michael responds to the forced-positioning of others when he uses falsetto speech indexing an oppositional stance in line 3, “the nagging.” The constructed dialogue appears in lines 13-14, and the alignment diagram in Table 5.8 below illustrates an alignment analysis of the relationship between Michael and the prosecutors:

Table 5.8. Divergent alignment between Michael and a prosecutor

The stance object “it” in line 13 “Don’t do it” refers to stealing a car, which is evident from prior discourse. The object is evaluated and negated with “don’t do,” in which the prosecutors demand that Michael should not steal cars. Line 14 sums up the consequences for what will happen if Michael and his friend steal a car: they will be put in the OCC program, which is juvenile detention and also the evaluated stance object in line 14 “this program.” The constructed dialogue is highly stress-timed compared to the surrounding
non-dialogue discourse, creating a stylistic shift in rhythm when performing the speech of the prosecutor. I will argue that Michael is using rhythm to mark the prosecutors in this case, as the performed quote is appearing in severe oppositional alignment between Michael and the prosecutors, who are then objects of ‘scorn’ and ‘derision.’ Additional support for this claim is found in the immediate interaction between Michael and the interviewer that follows the rhythmic style shift, as the interviewer keeps asking Michael about the OCC program. The lines that follow are the ones analyzed in connection with falsetto speech in Extract 4.3, in which Michael finally responds to the interviewers questions with indignant falsetto phonation:

**Extract 4.3**

1. *Interviewer:* What's that? I'm not familiar with OCC.
4. *Interviewer:* What is it?
5. *Michael:* It's this program.
7. *Interviewer:* Like a residential program?
8. *Michael:* I[a:] *don't[oc] know WHAT IT is!

The expanded structural parallelism in lines 2 and 8 highlights the indignant stance that Michael takes towards the OCC program and the false accusations from the prosecutors. Accordingly, Michael imbues the prosecutors with certain authoritative ideologies, and Michael uses rhythm to mark, or mock, the characters through constructed dialogue. However, it appears that the interviewer does not decode Michael’s indignation towards the experience and keeps asking about the OCC program, which Michael clearly does not want to talk about. The result is indignant falsetto caused by a severe forced self-positioning.
Example number 2 of marking is a case in which Michael performs the speech of a police officer following him and his friend around the neighborhood. The example was analyzed in greater detail in Extract 5.2, but for the ease of reading, the extract will be replicated here:

Extract 5.2

1  Michael:  I[a:] don’t[øc] like [d]the pólice.
2    Like [d]the mar[ø]shals,
3    they- they WILL hit you.
4    Downtown at the mar[ø]shals,
5    they’ll hit you.
6    if you do something,
7    like to- like do something BAD,
8    curse them out or something.
9    That’s[øc] why I don’t like ‘em the pólice [d]the:re.
10   Just come to you for no reason.
11   Like if you walk in a neighbor[ø]hood,
12   where you don’t live at,
13   they come at you with[c#ø] like,
15   It don’t[øc] MATTER[ø] where[ø] we [Øc] going[n]!
16   We didn’t do nothing[mn] so why is[gen2] you,
17   asking[met] where we going?
18   So we was[gen] like,
19   it look[V] like we suspicious,
20   we look[V] suspicious,

The constructed dialogue appears in line 14, and Michael disaligns with the quote in line 15. Recall the alignment diagram from Table 5.3 (Table 5.9 below) showing divergent alignment between Michael and the police officer:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 1</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 2</th>
<th>Positions/ Evaluates</th>
<th>Stance Object</th>
<th>Aligns (divergent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>{we}</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>{Øc} going</td>
<td>where</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>{you}</td>
<td>{Øc} going</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>{It don’t[Øc] MATTER[ø]}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.9. An alignment diagram showing divergent alignment

Michael follows the police officer’s stance act in 14 with a counter stance, in which he is highly vernacular and uses emphatic stress on “matter” to display his indignant stance towards the police officer. In addition, Michael uses an expanded structural parallelism to highlight the severe divergence in alignment. Again, the constructed dialogue is highly stress-timed compared to the surrounding non-dialogue discourse, thus creating a rhythmic shift in style, while using paralinguistic mimicry to be expressive in divergent alignment. This expressiveness clusters with emphatic stress patterns and features linked to African American ethnic identity, showing Michael’s emotional involvement in the story. Accordingly, the police officer is being marked through Michael’s rhythmic style shifts.

In the final example, Michael also performs the speech of a police officer, following him and his friend around the neighborhood. Again, we see that the performed speech is highly stress-timed whereas the non-dialogue discourse is more syllable-timed. Michael has just been asked if he has had run-ins with the police about things that he did not do. He answers that one time the police asked him and his friend to move away from school property after opening hours, after stating that Michael and his friend were nearly locked up for trespassing. The constructed dialogue is presented in Extract 5.5:
Extract 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 1</th>
<th>Stance Subj. 2</th>
<th>Positions/ Evaluates</th>
<th>Stance Object</th>
<th>Aligns (divergent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>{we}</td>
<td>{you}</td>
<td>can’t sit</td>
<td>right [d]there</td>
<td>{can’t}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The alignment diagram in Table 5.10 demonstrates the divergent alignment, as the police officer instructs Michael and his friend to move away from school property if they do not want to get arrested.

Table 5.10. Divergent alignment in police narrative

Michael’s emotional involvement in the narrative and oppositional stance to the police is evident in the overall response to the question if the police confront Michael without reason. In Extract 5.5, Michael’s sudden commitment and involvement in the narrative appears in line 5 when Michael self-repairs (Schiffrin 2006) his initial response with emphatic phonology on “CAUSE,” which introduces the constructed dialogue “If the school not open, can’t sit right there.” In line 9 after the performed quote, Michael once again self-repairs in, “And I was- I MOved” with emphatic stress on “moved,” showing that Michael does not want to face the consequences of not
complying with police orders, as he has previously been struck by the police in Washington, D.C. The disaligned aspect is completed by the threat in line 11-12, “they could have locked us up for trespassing,” in which the police inform the boys of the possible consequences for not complying with police orders. The police do not take action towards Michael and his friend, but the threat remains: do as we say or you will go to jail. The expressive nature of the rhythmic style shift clusters with other expressive stress patterns in “CAUSE” and “MOVed,” and Michael shows highly vernacular speech with the use of a verb stem to denote past tense “say[V]” (5), copula deletion “if the school [Øc] not[?] open” (6) as well as phonological features, such as stopping of interdental fricatives (7, 15) and r-lessness (11), and l-vocalization (2). In this example, the performed speech is significantly more stressed-timed compared to the more syllable-timed surrounding speech in the non-dialogue discourse (PVI stress-timed speech = 0.71; PVI syllable-timed speech = 0.29; p=0.03), which is used to mark the police officer.

Finally, the marking in the final example is also carried out with rapid and continuing shifts between high and low pitches, which Tarone (1973) and Loman (1967, 1975) have argued are highly salient factors of African American English. Figure 5.10 illustrates this example in constructed dialogue, and I have found this pattern to be common in Michael’s performed speech.
While it is not the goal here to investigate the social meaning of continuing shifts between high and low pitches, the co-occurrence between constructed dialogue, stylistic shifts in prosodic rhythm, and a fluctuating pitch track could possibly serve as inspiration for future studies: I would argue that the shift from syllable-timed speech to more stress-timed speech enables the occurrence of shifting stress patterns and amplifies patterns of continuing shifts between high and low pitches, because in stress-timed speech the duration from one stressed syllable to the next is greater than in syllable-timed speech. Accordingly, it is articulatory easier to have high pitches on stressed syllables and low pitches on unstressed syllables than it is to have such fluctuating stress patterns on syllables that are short and almost identical in duration. However, these issues should be addressed in future studies.

5.9 The Social Meaning of Prosodic Rhythm

I argue that a stylistic shift in rhythm from highly syllable-timed speech to stress-timed speech conveys expressiveness in general and marking in severe cases of divergent alignment. The final three examples above illustrate typical rhythmic style shifts in Michael’s constructed dialogue when he discusses topics of sociocultural constraints – such as run-ins with law enforcement and
going to jail. In these examples, I argue that Michael uses variation in prosodic rhythm to position his antagonists in the storyworld and imbue certain authoritative character traits, while subjecting the characters to scorn and derision. Michael is not only reproducing the words of individual actors, he also mocks the voice of the actors.

To revisit what Mitchel-Kernan (1972) has said in relation to marking, “The marker attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said, in order to offer explicit comment on the speaker’s background, personality, or intent.” A switch in rhythm for Michael is a stance taking strategy that occurs in oppositional alignment with authoritative figures in the narratives that he tells. The marking that emerges from a skillful manipulation of syllable timing, or rhythm, creates an ideological link between Michael and the sociocultural challenges he faces in the urban landscape. I maintain that the changes in rhythm is part of a marking verbal strategy in which he not only performs or constructs the voice of a police officer, but, simultaneously, he imbues the officer with intentions of unnecessary aggression and unreasonable behavior. To summarize these findings, Figure 5.11 below formalizes the social meaning of rhythm in Michael’s speech, which may be indicative of how rhythm is used in African American English in general:
Figure 5.11. The social meaning of prosodic rhythm

It is also possible that an additional meaning to Michael’s style shifts could be *clarity*. That is, Michael’s highly stress-timed speech often gives a percept of a slower rhythm compared to his syllable-timed speech. If we draw upon Eckert’s (2008) notion of indexical fields, the fact that Michael speaks slower and with a different rhythm when he marks an authority could be tied to the ideological notion of standard versus vernacular speech. Standard speech is ideologically tied to formal institutions of power, and characters holding such power. Hence, Michael could be using stress-timed rhythm to signal standardness, institutional power, which indexes the speech of, for instance, a police officer in the story world. To take it a step further, one might argue that stress-timing is somewhat associated with white vs. black speech, even though Thomas and Carter (2006) show increasing convergence of black and white speech in terms stress-timing in North Carolina. However, there used to be a historical difference between EAE and AAE, and further studies in different contexts might show a current difference.

On a final note, although that Thomas and Carter (2006) demonstrate convergence in rhythm between African American English and European
American English in North Carolina and that Michael is somewhat comparable to African Americans in North Carolina, I would still be careful about saying that African Americans and European Americans are similar in the use of prosodic rhythm. PVI scores can be similar between ethnic groups speaking English, but that does not mean the discursive strategies are arranged similarly. I argue in this chapter that in narratives and constructed dialogue, there is great variation in rhythm, which may very well distinguish African American English from European American English. However, such an interactional perspective is obscured if only PVI group scores are compared, and if we as researchers do not take time to investigate the vast amount of variation found within a single individual as in the case of Michael, where rhythm depends on the fluid negotiated relationship between Michael and the sociocultural constraints, often symbolized in the shape of antagonists he finds in the urban landscape.

5.10 Chapter Summary
The analysis of 282 PVI measurements demonstrates that Michael throughout the interview is a stress-timed speaker, in line with previous group findings on African American prosodic rhythm (Thomas and Carter 2006). However, the distinction between stress-timed or syllable-timed speech is highlighted when viewing rhythm in specific moments of interaction, since variation in rhythm is used to create personas and thus evaluate these personas in a certain light. The switch from more or less syllable-timed speech to highly stress-timed speech in constructed dialogue co-occurs with the occurrence of shifting stress patterns and amplifies patterns of continuing shifts between high and low pitches (Loman 1967, 1975; Tarone 1973), which is in line with
previous findings on African American English. In the convergence vs. divergence debate, and based on the current chapter, I would be very reluctant to say that there is a convergence between AAE and EAE even though Michael’s overall PVI score is similar to varieties of EAE. PVI scores can be similar between ethnic groups, but verbal strategies may be arranged differently. However, such an interactional perspective is obscured if only PVI scores are compared, without paying attention to what is being accomplished in the discourse. I have argued here that in narratives, great variation in rhythm may be part of the verbal strategy of marking, especially in severe cases of divergent alignment, in which Michael mocks social stereotypes, such as police officers in inner city Washington, D.C. neighborhoods.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

New Perspectives in the Study of African American English

6.1 Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation was to investigate African American English prosodic features, and how these linguistic features are used as resources for constructing and negotiating social meaning. In particular, the aim was to investigate how and why paralinguistic features are used to construct meaning in unfolding interaction, based on rapid and ever changing positionings and alignment in unfolding interaction. As such, the dissertation aims to advance the sociolinguistic field on methodological and theoretical fronts, while investigating the social meanings of underexamined variables. First, I proposed that AAE can be studied in new ways by developing a theoretical framework that favors a social constructionist approach to sociolinguistic variation by viewing ethnicity as something people do rather than something people are. In other words, what matters is how people act in the social world towards each other and with each other rather than starting from the vantage point that people behave a certain way due to predetermined demographic or even biological characteristics.

6.2 Conclusion: Theoretical Framework and Methods

I proposed that the study of AAE can be advanced by integrating two lines of sociolinguistic inquiry that traditionally have been viewed as standing in stark contrast to each other: sociolinguistic variation and discourse analysis. I argued that the benefit from integrating the two subfields allows the researcher to reassemble the often taken for granted category African American
by putting a focus on the dynamic ties created between interactants in conversation, rather than theorizing about the static categories that previously have been viewed as the building blocks of speech communities – categories such as age, gender, and race. Such a focus places this study in line with current third wave approaches to language variation, and constitutes a complementary way of analyzing variation in African American English. By combining newer sociophonetic methods with positioning theory and stance theory, an integration of variation theory and discourse analysis allowed me to infer the social meaning of falsetto phonation and prosodic rhythm (using the Pairwise Variability Index).

The data for this dissertation came from preexisting data from a sociological study and constituted a semi-structured interview with Michael, a fourteen-year-old African American male from Washington, D.C. Michael was chosen for linguistic and social reasons. Due to his high involvement and eagerness to tell stories of concern to him, in addition to his interaction with the interviewer, Michael displayed many prosodic features that have been linked to African American ethnicity but are poorly understood. In addition, his linguistic patterns could be placed against the backdrop of AAE studies generally, but specifically against the backdrop of the growing body of survey studies in Washington, D.C. His speech was by no means studied in a vacuum, and this case study may thus provide insights into the meanings underlying large-scale patterns of linguistic variation in AAE in Washington, D.C., which connects this study of an individual at the local level with a more global understanding of group variation in D.C. In this way, the current study will hopefully inspire researchers to conduct additional large-scale studies (and concurrent case studies) in the city.
A further reason for using the preexisting data from the sociological study and favoring a case study over a survey approach is unfortunately due to the fact that Southeast Washington D.C. is highly racially segregated and characterized by a vicious cycle of poverty and failure in education (Labov 2008, 2010). Southeast D.C. is extremely poor, has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and has a flourishing informal economy that has left the area crime-ridden with a high number of homicides. As mentioned, when the data for this study was gathered in 2003, 248 homicides were registered in Washington, D.C. by the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, and about half of the homicides took place in Ward 7 and 8 where Michael grew up. In addition, the areas are filled with drugs, and HIV/AIDS rates are at an alarming epidemic level. Hence, it is at the same time extremely difficult but extremely important to conduct sociolinguistic studies of this part of the city, not only for the purpose of furthering our sociolinguistic knowledge but also to apply our knowledge to efforts to overcome the history of discrimination and residential segregation that has left a section of Washington, D.C. in a dire situation. Much more work is needed to overcome the past, so that the positive trend of declining homicide rates can continue in addition to all the other challenges faced in Southeast D.C. Careful planning is needed to conduct a large-scale study in Southeast D.C., and the case study can help illuminate the challenges researchers face when trying to enter the area’s quite closed networks and, frankly, dangerous environs. The data and the conclusions of the sociological study of teens from Ward 7 and 8 in D.C. (Froyum Roise 2004) are of great importance considering the dire social situation; sociolinguistic study of the same data further add to its importance.
Finally, although the data collection process diverged from a traditional sociolinguistic interview, the interview with Michael was highly successful in eliciting prosodic features of AAE in addition to insights into the sociocultural situation in Washington, D.C. The semi-structured interview was designed to be more topic controlled, but Michael often went off on tangents and told elaborate narratives about issues that reflected topics of concern to him, such as fighting, confrontations with law enforcement, and going to jail. Due to Michael’s agentive behavior in a highly topic controlled interview, the interview turned out to be an ideal site for investigating the fluid aspects of identity – and how identity is a co-constructed process. The data proved useful for testing the intersection of variation and discourse analysis, and as an extension for testing the mixed theoretical approach developed in this dissertation.

The theoretical framework was designed to integrate traditional approaches to variation, but with an eye to locating the fluid construction of identity. The focus was just as much on the why aspect of variation – i.e. social meanings – in addition to the traditional how questions that seek to find the overall distribution of variables based on predefined social categories. I demonstrated that the discourse approaches positioning theory and stance theory can be integrated into the variationist paradigm with the benefit of studying variables in their natural conversational setting rather than extracting variables for blind tabulations and correlations. As such, my research urges the researcher to be cautious when correlating variables and predefined demographic categories, while offering these correlations as explanations for the reason behind linguistic variation.
6.3 Conclusions: African American English Prosody

Positioning theory was used to study falsetto phonation in AAE. The instances of falsetto speech in this dissertation were found to have related expressive meanings, which is in line with previous studies (e.g., Tarone 1973, Loman 1967, 1975, Alim 2004). However, the present study also departs from previous studies in several ways: Michael’s falsetto speech indexes various degrees of expressiveness depending on fluid face-to-face interaction and the positions taken up between Michael and the interviewer. Falsetto speech as a linguistic variable of AAE has proven to be a phonation type and stylistic resource that depended greatly on the interlocutor’s fluid and rapid changing stances in the interview discourse. The integration of positioning theory with more traditional variationist methods allowed me to infer the meanings of the falsetto from the interview discourse – social meanings that would have been lost had I not analyzed Michael’s falsetto in its natural conversational context.

Falsetto was studied in four different positioning contexts: deliberate self-positioning, deliberate positioning of others, forced self-positioning, and forced positioning of others. The first two types are instances of performative positioning, whereas the latter two are accountive instances of positioning. It was argued that the general meaning of falsetto speech was expressiveness, and the most extreme instances of falsetto in terms of max f0, f0 range, and duration index indignation towards the interview questions that cause oppositional alignment. Further, the most severe cases of indignation was found in forced self-positioning + repositioning, which I called oppositional repositioning, in which we saw a co-occurrence of the most extreme cases of falsetto phonation and extreme indignant stances towards either the interviewer or the antagonists in Michael’s story world. The oppositional
repositioning were accomplished by different conversational moves: as part of an avoidance strategy, retaliation, or as a response to sociocultural challenges in the story world. However, all the conversational moves were embedded in a larger discursive act of creating oppositional repositioning. By using falsetto as an agentive, stylistic resource, Michael was able to resist and reposition the interviewer’s implications (linguistically) in addition to resisting a life of sociocultural constraints and oppression. This analysis was supported by previous findings in the literature. While other scholars do not use the exact same terminology as presented in this study, a careful analysis of the examples from previous studies revealed a similar trend as in this study: falsetto is used to be expressive in oppositional alignment between interactants. Falsetto speech may thus be classified as a continuous variable that can be placed on a continuum of expressiveness, in which the most extreme cases of falsetto in terms of max f0, f0 range, and duration are used to convey indignation (i.e. the meaning became specified in specific interactional moments). The articulatory force depends on very specific and fluid conversational moves that can only be uncovered through an in-depth analysis of the unfolding discourse.

Chapter 5 addressed another underexamined area of African American English prosody: rhythm. In particular, I examined stress-timed vs. syllable-timed speech by using the recently developed Pairwise Variability Index (PVI), which is a measure of the degree with which a language variety is relatively more syllable-timed or stress-timed. Only a few studies have previously addressed the social meaning of prosodic rhythm. The PVI chapter investigated rhythm in constructed dialogue versus the non-dialogue narrative discourse in larger narratives, since previous studies have suggested
that rhythm and constructed dialogue may be part of the African American verbal strategy *marking*. In addition, rhythm appears to be a central factor when marking people. Since marking is a particular discursive act or speech genre that has been studied under the purview of interactional sociolinguistics, stance theory was integrated into the study of prosodic rhythm to fuse variationist sociolinguistics with discourse analysis.

Stance theory was understood as a type of social action expressed through linguistic means, in which interactants are aligned with respect to a stance object. The alignment creates interpersonal relationships, or intersubjectivity, and interactants are aligned to a certain degree – what was referred to as scalar alignment. Rhythm was studied with respect to ambiguous, convergent, and divergent alignment, thus representing the alignment continuum. The reason for fusing stance theory with variationist approaches to rhythm was once more for the purpose of studying linguistic variables in their natural conversational setting. In this respect, the rhythm chapter departs from most variationist studies in general and rhythm studies in particular.

The chapter demonstrated that the more the alignment diverged between Michael and the interviewer or narrative antagonists, the greater the style shift would be from syllable-timed to stress-timed speech. Prosodic rhythm was thus used to construct a stylistic shift to create an expressive or even dramatic effect. Similar to falsetto phonation, identity work was at play in divergent alignment. The core meaning of rhythm was proposed to be expressiveness in constructed dialogue, and the most extreme style shifts between syllable-timed and stress-timed speech was proposed to constitute instances of the verbal strategy marking. These extreme style shifts were all
found in emotive responses to topics involving run-ins with the police, contact with the correctional system, and getting into fights – topics that all represent sociocultural constraints in Michael’s daily life. Michael used rhythmic style shifts to exercise paralinguistic mimicry, while performing the speech of antagonists in the life world and story world. The constructed dialogue, used as performance speech, not only mimics the speech of individuals but simultaneously recontextualizes the quote through vari-directional double voicing (Bakhtin 1984). In other words, Michael used rhythm in constructed dialogue to laminate narrative characters with discriminatory values – especially police officers. Finally, Thomas and Carter (2006) have argued that African Americans and European Americans show convergence in prosodic rhythm based on similar group scores. However, this linguistic case study demonstrated great variation within a single individual, and the shift from syllable-timed to stress-timed speech appeared to be part of an African American verbal strategy. This finding epitomizes a major point in this dissertation: there is more to social meaning in sociolinguistics than statistics and correlations of linguistic and social factors. African Americans and European Americans may show similar overall scores, but verbal strategies and discourse systems may easily be arranged in very different ways, as suggested in this dissertation. When variables are extracted from the natural conversational setting, we lose much of the social aspect in sociolinguistics. Accordingly, third wave studies in the future must address this challenge if we are to advance our understanding of linguistic social meaning.

While it is obvious that the case study presents certain opportunities and advantages in sociolinguistic inquiry, there are some obvious limitations
to this approach and third wave studies in general. First of all, the case study lacks generalizability and does not say much about the community of practice, the social network, or the speech community to which the individual belongs. A case study lends insight into the linguistic individual, but it is difficult to create larger theories of the social based on isolated insights of individual stylistic patterns. Secondly, case studies, and particularly sociophonetic studies combined with discourse analysis such as the present study are very time consuming, which makes it difficult for individual researchers to move up to large-scale studies. The time it takes to find a community, enter a community, gather data, code data, analyze data, and report data represent great challenges to researchers, and these studies are therefore more appropriate for research teams if these techniques are to be developed for large scale studies with several hundred participants. In addition, even though I would like to see this type of study for larger speech communities, I am not arguing that an approach integrating discourse analysis and variation analysis should replace traditional first wave studies. I am arguing that the two approaches offer different yet complementary sociolinguistic insights. First wave studies are highly relevant and effective for getting an overview of a large speech community, such as North America. Researchers can then use these large-scale studies as a backdrop for comparing and contrasting a potentially more in-depth second or third wave study of a given community of practice or even an individual. I my view, the field of sociolinguistics will come to depend on all of these complementary approaches as they are all essential for a full understanding of language in its social context. I have made the case in this dissertation that first wave scholars should be careful about how they construct demographic categories in
society, considering how much linguistic and social variation we find within a single individual. On the other hand, third wave scholars will have a hard time studying social meaning in specific moments of interaction without large scale studies, since variables also become meaningful based on group associational meanings. From this perspective, scholars invested in third wave studies should not forget that social structures in society are very real, although a focus on individual identities and speaker design approaches are exciting new areas of inquiry. However, as Schilling (2013) argues, even though new creative styles are constructed based on individual creative abilities, these styles are not created out of nothing. Speakers still draw upon preexisting group associational meanings to construct new identities (e.g., Barrett 1995) in addition to more locally interactional meanings. Positioning theory tries to overcome the micro/macro distinction and it recognizes both reactive and proactive dimensions of interaction; that said, all meaningful types of positioning and interactional stances must draw upon preexisting ideological associations in a relational social hierarchy – otherwise, interactants will not be able to decode these interactional moves. Accordingly, while approaches to speaker design offer new insights into intra-speaker variation, scholars must not forget the constant influence of social structures on language specifically and on human actions more generally.

While this dissertation aims to advance on linguistic and theoretical fronts it also questions a commonly held belief in sociolinguistic methodology: that the sociolinguistic interview is the best way to elicit the so-called vernacular. When reading through the severe cases of divergent alignment between Michael and the interviewer, the trained linguists would hardly classify this data as a successful sociolinguistic interview, since
Michael is far from comfortable in many cases. However, it was never the interviewer’s intention to make Michael comfortable per se, since the main focus was on gathering responses to a set list of questions for a sociological study, even though the interview was deemed ‘semi-structured.’ I am not sure I want to encourage data gathering of this nature for sociolinguistic studies, but considering the fact that the most expressiveness occurred in oppositional alignment, and the most extreme cases of falsetto in indignant oppositional repositionings, perhaps the traditional sociolinguistic interview would not be that effective as a means for gathering certain variables (such as falsetto speech) – at least not in the speech community to which Michael belongs. On the similar vein, the most extreme stylistic shifts in prosodic rhythm were also found in severe cases of divergent alignment, and if the interviewer had not taken a more confronting stance compared to what many sociolinguistic fieldworkers would do, we may not have gained the insights into falsetto phonation and prosodic rhythm found in this particular interview. Finally, the interview with Michael demonstrates that Michael (and interactants generally) are very agentive in displaying and creating identity in interview interaction, since even in highly controlled interviews, interviewees can still exercise a great deal of influence on the interaction and steer the interview in the direction of topics they are interested in talking about. Michael and his ability to display agency when the interviewer attempted to exert control also questions the nature of the sociolinguistic interview, which should be taken into consideration if researchers want to conduct a large-scale study of Southeast Washington, D.C.
6.4 New Perspectives in the Study of African American English

About a decade ago, Wolfram (2001) argued that the study of African American English could advance on several fronts from synchronic and diachronic concerns to more practical applications of research. Wolfram believed that a broader definition of AAE would open the field to more functional approaches that would not rely solely on structure, but also look towards how AAE is used in interaction as well as being open to variation within the African American community. Today, a decade later, we have seen great advances in terms of in-group variation, but more work is needed to unfold the category African American, and we still do not know much about variation in terms of gender, class/socioeconomic status, and the simultaneous construction of all these categories. In addition, we already know that speakers show variation based on a perceived audience, and this study shows variation based on specific and similar moments of interaction. Therefore, we need studies that keep questioning the lumping of speakers into a unified group, such as inner city, lower class, young African American male, and start unpacking the great variation found within and between individuals. Labov’s insights on ‘Lames’ in New York City has given the field great insights with regards to the individual’s relation to a larger social group, but we still remain to address satisfactorily how an individual simultaneously manages to reproduce and depart from group based patterns of variation. In this respect, we also remain to address how African American English varies according to social setting – a study that could be inspired by Podesva (2007). The current dissertation has showed how instrumental sociophonetic techniques and discourse analysis can contribute to investigating the social meanings of AAE variation, and similar techniques could be used to study
intraspeaker variation based on specific moments of interaction, intersituational variation, in addition to other types of stylistic variation based on traditional approaches to style such as audience design and speaker design.

With respect to class variation, third wave techniques may also be employed to study, e.g., middle-class speakers of AAE. Most scholars agree that Standard African American English exists, but whether or not this particular variety only shares similar prosodic features with more vernacular varieties or whether or not there are overlaps in segmental and morphosyntactic features remains to be investigated. Another likely solution is that SAAE is a constantly shaped, reshaped, and co-constructed variety of AAE that changes quickly based on the social and political climate and domain of use. We may never reach a specific definition of SAAE, and it may be a much more fluid variety that surfaces only in specific situations or in specific moments of interaction, rather than viewing it as a stable dialect that constitutes the first dialect acquired by a speaker during childhood. These questions are intriguing, and should be investigated in detail in the future. We may not be able to solve this issue or even agree on a specific narrow definition of SAAE, but learning more about an AAE variety that approximates a perceived “standard” will give us great insights into the nature of SAAE in addition to more vernacular varieties of AAE.

Finally, Wolfram (2001:353) also argued a decade ago that “there is need for a closer examination of style-shifting and code-switching among African American speakers.” The analysis chapters in this dissertation have demonstrated interactional variation in the prosodic areas of falsetto phonation and prosodic rhythm, and the mixed methods approach was
designed to account for the contextual analysis of prosodic features in relation to stylistic variation. However, all features of AAE could potentially be investigated in such a manner to uncover individual variation to see if the features studied “ad nauseum” contribute to the construction of certain verbal genres in the same way prosodic rhythm appears to participate in constructing the verbal strategy marking. Further, considering the technological tools researchers now have at their ready disposal for acoustic and statistical analysis, a door has been opened for viewing variables in gradient terms more so than in binary term. The increased attention to phonetic detail should open doors within this line of inquiry.

In addition to style-shifting and code-switching, the growing body of studies on crossing and passing promises to be a rich site for further research on stylistic variation in AAE. For example, studies on the influence of AAE on Latino varieties in, e.g., California (Fought 2006) where African American groups and Latino groups interact daily and influence each other socially and linguistically may provide insight into how variables of AAE are perceived by community outsiders. In addition, studies on crossing and passing in White communities (e.g., Bucholtz 2011) give insights into the social construction of racialized ideologies and how communities are formed through cultural means, including linguistic variation. Such studies also give insight into the status of AAE variables and how they add to the perception and ideological evaluation of AAE. While crossing often draws linguistic resources from AAE in the construction of a White youth identity, the very same crossing results in the maintenance of racial ideologies, and the creation of social group boundaries in society.
Finally, researchers engaged in the study of AAE have always been concerned with how the linguistic insights can help overcome some of the inequalities found in the educational system caused by misguided language ideologies found throughout the educational system – ideologies that view any type of language variation as poor or uneducated language. Despite efforts from sociolinguists to raise awareness of the true nature of dialect variation through a variety of venues ranging from national and state-wide media to localized classroom curricula and community presentations (Wolfram et al. 2008), African American English is still viewed as a linguistic subordinate dialect in the U.S. As such, there are still underexplored areas for disseminating knowledge about the systematic and rule-governed nature of AAE. If society ever gets beyond the black-white ideological divide that is still prevalent in debates daily is unlikely in the near future. What we do know is that the ethnic make-up in the U.S. has changed, and the Hispanic population now constitutes the biggest minority group in the country. Issues of race and ethnicity is growing increasingly complex as other languages, especially Spanish, and a growing population of Latinos/Latinas of African descent will problematize the black-white divide and the role of English dialects attached to this ideological divide. In addition, larger groups of Africans in the U.S. will also become more visible after the election of Barack Obama and his ties to Kenya. In Washington, D.C. we do not have to look far to find mixed neighborhoods with African Americans and first/second generation immigrants from Africa. For example, the Shaw neighborhood in the Northwest quadrant of Washington, D.C. has a large East African population that shares a common cultural heritage that is not shared by African Americans who have been in the same neighborhood for generations.
The role of AAE in relation to African dialects of English or L2 English varieties and the mutual influence caused by language contact will also lend great insights into the study of AAE. Much more research needs to be conducted within the complexities outlined above, but the way we conceptualize race and ethnicity and AAE’s role in the changing ethnoracial make-up in the U.S. poses new challenges to be addressed in future studies.

The call I have made here to increase the complexity of studies on AAE and move away from methodological heterogeneity may be somewhat contradictory, as I have chosen to study an inner city young male. I agree with some scholars in the field (e.g., Rickford 1999) who argue that it is time to move beyond inner city young males who often tell stories about being at odds with social oppression from law enforcement, violence, and even shootings in crime-ridden neighborhoods. However, I am also of the conviction that scholars should continue to collect and analyze data from inner city neighborhoods, as these neighborhood studies will continue to shed light on the hardships and social injustices that are still, regrettably, prevailing in many inner city neighborhoods in the U.S. today. There is always a danger of creating a certain type of ideology, even stereotypes, by focusing too much on certain members of a large and highly diverse demographic category, such as African American. Researchers may unintentionally and in good faith erase in-group differentiation by creating a metonymically compressed relationship between, for instance, inner city young males and the larger category African American by focusing too much on the inner city. In addition, linguists have tried to demonstrate the systematic and rule-governed aspects of AAE for almost half a century now to fight against dialect discrimination, which have highlighted homogeneity at
the expense of diversity in certain cases. However, there is a difference between acknowledging the need for new studies in underexplored areas of inquiry and arguing for the discontinuation of studies in the inner city. I simply fail to see how the field specifically and society generally can benefit from not knowing about the life young African American males face in many poverty stricken and crime-ridden inner city neighborhoods (cf. Labov 2008, 2010). If people do not want to listen to the stories someone like Michael has to tell, society will never be able to take measures to overcome a history of discrimination and residential segregation. Studies of the inner city are essential to overcoming the past, in my view.

Ethnicity is something we do and not something we are. As Bucholtz (2011:246) has argued, “as a social construct, race must be sustained not only through the workings of large institutional structures but through the everyday practices of ordinary people.” These practices, including linguistic practices, create community boundaries based on perceived and self-identified group membership. However, despite half a century of studies on African American English, we still do not know much about the individual’s role in relation to the group, and we still do not know much about intonation and prosody, even though scholars have argued that intonation cues may rank higher than segmental cues in identifying the dialect. In addition, we know very little about how linguistic variation, including the most common studied variables, contribute to the creation of social meanings – whether it is based on overall quantitative patterns, through style-shifts using highly salient variables, or based on how these variables are employed in the assembling of larger verbal genres. In this dissertation, I have tried to address the poorly understood area of African American English prosody in addition
to the complexities involved in the social and linguistic construction of
ethnoracial identities. I hope this linguistic case-study and focus on intra-
speaker variation has contributed to a greater understanding of AAE
intonation in general and falsetto speech and prosodic rhythm in particular –
and that this dissertation will inspire others to study social meaning in larger
African American communities. Even though African American English is
without comparison the most studied dialect of English, new ways of
analyzing ethnicity from interdisciplinary perspectives will open new and
exiting doors: in fact, I think the time is now to start reassembling the often
taken for granted category *African American*. 


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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Transcription Symbols</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R-lessness (r-/0) in post-vocalic environments</td>
<td>[ø] (lower case ø)</td>
<td>Car[ø], mor[ø]ning</td>
<td>Labov et al. (1968), Fasold and Wolfram (1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronounced r (r-/l) in post-vocalic environments</td>
<td>[r]</td>
<td>Car[r], mor[r]ning</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monophthongal /ay/</td>
<td>[a:]</td>
<td>Pie[a:], I[a:]</td>
<td>Rickford (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopping of interdental fricative eth -&gt; /d/</td>
<td>[d]</td>
<td>[d]that</td>
<td>Rickford (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alveolar stops /d/ realized as glottal stop</td>
<td>[?]</td>
<td>did[?]n’t</td>
<td>Fasold and Wolfram (1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falsetto speech</td>
<td>Bold</td>
<td>&quot;I ain’t had sex with the girl.&quot;</td>
<td>Alim (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of single final consonant</td>
<td>[c#ø]</td>
<td>I was MAD[c#ø]</td>
<td>Bailey and Thomas (1981). See reference in Fought</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Grammatical Features of AAE: Syntax and morphology</th>
<th>Transcription Symbols</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copula Deletion</td>
<td>[Øc] (capital Ø)</td>
<td>she [Øc] pregnant</td>
<td>Labov (1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization of was/were</td>
<td>[gen]</td>
<td>you was[gen] with us</td>
<td>Wolfram (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization of is/are</td>
<td>[gen2]</td>
<td>why is[gen2] you asking</td>
<td>Wolfram (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of ain’t for negation</td>
<td>ain’t</td>
<td>I ain’t gonna let him go out like that</td>
<td>Rickford (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of verb stem as past tense or preterite form</td>
<td>[V]</td>
<td>They say[stem] it wasn’t ours and,</td>
<td>Wolfram (1993:12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Negation</td>
<td>[mn]</td>
<td>We didn’t do nothing[mn]</td>
<td>Labov (1972)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcription Conventions</th>
<th>Transcription Symbols</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final rise as in a yes/no</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>In your own neighborhood</td>
<td>Schiffirin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotation Type</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Reference(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short pause</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>Schiffrin (1987, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>they found out it wasn't...me and my friend[œç].</td>
<td>Tannen (1989)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary stress</td>
<td>'</td>
<td>Schiffrin (1987, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cause one day I was fighting.</td>
<td>Tannen (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I said, &quot;Because he SHOT me.&quot;</td>
<td>Tannen (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So she's not preg[nant]? [I[a:] was-</td>
<td>Tannen (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And I got MA:D!,</td>
<td>Tannen (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue, quoted words</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>Schiffrin (1987, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I said, &quot;Because he SHOT me.&quot;</td>
<td>Tannen (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At right of line indicates</td>
<td>[I was MAD][c#ø]=</td>
<td>Schiffrin (1987, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>segment to be continued after another’s turn</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tannen (1989)</td>
<td></td>
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