Black Language in the New Golden West: African American English in Portland

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Abstract

This is a study of the language of Black or African American natives of Portland, Oregon. Drawing from variationist sociophonetics and the ethnolinguistic repertoire model, I investigate several features of African American English, some of which I find to be present in the feature repertoires of Black Portlanders. Based on my data for the variables of /ay/ monophthongization, PIN/PEN and FEEL/FILL mergers, and several other phonological and morphosyntactic features, I conclude that my participants 1. do speak a form of AAE and 2. deploy traditionally AAE features in new or reconfigured ways to do identity work situated in their local context as Black Portlanders.

Introduction

> "I noticed growing up here, the streets just rapidly changing and like, more people moving in and more condos being built...we were the oldest family and then like the only family of color still on the block."

–Speaker 7

> "I like Portland! Portland's a good place....I just–it's hard to raise a child of color here."

–Speaker 6

> "'Black English' might be best used for the whole range of language forms used by Black people in the United States: a very large range indeed, extending from the Creole grammar of Gullah spoken in South Carolina to the most formal and accomplished literary style."

–Labov (1972a), [xiii]

> "...The social meanings of features of an ethnolinguistic repertoire are not always the same, nor do they necessarily stem from group-associational meanings. Rather, languaging in interaction means drawing on the multiple indexical meanings of any given variable in order to construct multiple–and at times, conflicting–identities of race, place, and class."

–Grieser (2015)

Grieser (2015)'s characterization of African American English here bears little resemblance to the description in Labov's (1972a) introduction of his seminal book, *Language in the Inner City*. In fact, the title of Labov's book is likely to make my generation of sociolinguists cringe. But while this thesis, Grieser (2015)'s work and many other recent studies of African American English (AAE) owe much to

Benor (2010), Silverstein (2003) and other anthropologically minded linguists (and linguistically grounded anthropologists), the influence of Labov, Rickford, Wolfram, and other variationists is just as important. Their studies of AAE were the opening salvo in a battle to convince the public (including other linguists) that the dialect of Black Americans had its own phonology and syntax – was a rule governed language like any other. And only once we believe that AAE has an underlying systematicity can we feel secure in saying "...and every speaker uses it differently."

But they do, of course. Differences in the use of the distinctive linguistic features that comprise AAE, both between speakers and different recordings of the same speaker, were in those early studies flattened into neat percentages in tables. In the years since, what those differences mean and accomplish in interaction has become a central concern for AAE scholarship and for how we do sociolinguistics. Sometimes the "first generation" of AAE scholars leads the charge in these investigations (Van Hofwegen and Wolfram, 2010).

It's at this historical moment that I've set myself the task of going out into Portland, seeing if there's AAE here, and saying something about it. The resulting study is a mix of quantitative variationism – where I measure features that have been measured before and compare the rates, more or less – and sociocultural linguistic analysis (Hymes, 1974), where I try to sketch some aspects of what these features mean for speakers. It's my hope that the result is a fair characterization of Portland AAE[1]: the AAE features available to my Portland speakers, and an account of who uses what features and why.

[1]I use "PAAE" and the term "ethnolect," and refer to PAAE as a "variety" throughout. This is largely for brevity and convenience; the theoretical frame of the ethnolinguistic repertoire is used in my analysis and is detailed in general terms in section 1.4

Chapter 1

Literature Review and Background

1.1 Introduction to Chapter One

This chapter introduces the distinct language variety of African American English and provides an overview of some of its structural characteristics. I also hope to shed some light on the complexity of circumscribing an ethnically marked language variety. I touch on issues of choosing and analyzing appropriate data, as well as potential problems with the "speech community" construct as applied to a nationwide non-standard variety like African American English. The chapter ends with a brief overview of regional differences that have been found in AAE across the U.S., and how this information affects my hypotheses about AAE in Portland. Briefly, I expect to find a lower level of highly marked AAE variables: morphosyntactic variables in general, as well as stigmatized lexical choices and potentially phonological features that are most different from those of the English of white Oregonians. However, it is possible that the Black community in Portland has also maintained and/or innovated a set of less recognizable AAE features at the level of prosody and phonology.

1.2 What Is AAE?

I use the term "African American English" to refer to the ethnolect[1] spoken by many African Americans in contexts that favor the expression of Black collective identity. The label "African American English" is the most accepted term for this variety today, but this wasn't always the case. "Negro dialect," (through the 1960s: cf. Bailey (1965); Stewart (1970)) "Black English Vernacular," (throughout the 1970s and 1980s

[1] I use "ethnolect" here to refer to a language variety whose use has the potential to mark the user as a member of a particular ethnic group.

(Labov, 1972a) "Black folk speech" or "Black street speech" (used in various other senses going back to the mid-20th century and as a synonym for AAE especially in the 1980s: cf. Bailey and Maynor (1985), Baugh (2010)) and so on have been used throughout the years, coincident with changing terms of reference for Black Americans (Smitherman, 1991). Many labels include the word "English," which emphasizes the ties between AAE and other Englishes. By the same token, proponents of terms like "African American Language" are highlighting AAE's putative creole origins and African roots (Green, 2002).

1.2.1 A Social Semiotic

"African American English" is a controversial term inasmuch as "African American" is a controversial term. As Smitherman (1991) points out, the label "African American" is hardly a consensus term of self-reference.[2] There are many objections to "African American", but a few stand out. For one thing, some Black Americans simply don't accept the notion of Afro-Diasporic solidarity and collective identity. For another, some people see the term as a symbolic painting-over of racism, imposing symmetry of terminology on a racial group that still doesn't have the privilege this would imply. Although I adopt the AAE label out of convenience and conformity, it's worth considering whether this (relatively new) standard term of reference is part of a long history of symbolic violence. From 1619[3] to the present, Black people as a subaltern population in the U.S. have had little control over the terms of reference applied to them by a society that privileges whiteness. However, given that none of my participants were vocally opposed to the term "AAE" (I asked each of them to weigh in on various terms of reference), I will stick with the popular designation.

I use "Portland African American English" (PAAE) to mean any and all distinctive language used by Portland natives of African American descent (and not, for instance, recent immigrants to Portland from Africa). I have set out to describe this distinctiveness in structural terms, but as this is the first study of PAAE and its scope is limited, such a description is necessarily incomplete.

1.2.2 Defining the Term

This chapter is, in part, an attempt to circumscribe the variety itself – should we define AAE by the social characteristics of its speech community? Can AAE be

[2] Smitherman was writing in the 1990s, but this remains true.

[3] A commonly cited start date to the transatlantic slave trade in North America

apprehended solely in its linguistic features? Or do we need knowledge of both to say whether a speech sample is AAE? My position on this is that linguistic variables are the most reliable criteria for identifying an utterance or text as AAE. This is a potentially problematic rule of thumb, in that it privileges the text over the discursive context and the field of indexical meanings a putatively "AAE" feature expresses. Of course, determining whether a feature or its application is distinctive to AAE requires social and demographic information about its use. My working conceptualization of AAE assumes that such distinctive features (or distinctive rates of features) 1. Can index African American ethnicity[4] and 2. Are likely to co-occur and predict each others' occurrence in individuals and speech communities. Given 2. above, it seems reasonable to assert that quantitative accounts of linguistic variables alone can be hugely helpful in making claims about PAAE.

AAE originated among slaves in the rural South in the 1600s, developed into a relatively uniform dialect, and was transplanted into the North and West as African Americans moved out of the South during the Great Migration, beginning after World War I and lasting until around 1970 (Wolfram and Thomas, 2008). It's important to note that AAE differed, and differs, considerably from local "white vernacular" varieties (Ash and Myhill, 1986). In advocating for space in AAE scholarship for regional variation studies, I'm not suggesting that AAE speakers are necessarily assimilating to the regional dialect of white speakers in their area.

In principle, one could argue that any U.S. native who identifies as African American or Black speaks AAE. This is a theoretical argument worth taking seriously. In practice, though, sociolinguists use this label to refer to a fairly definite set of characteristics, which are catalogued in section 2.1 below. In brief, AAE:

1. Has its own phonology, elements of which are used by nearly all AAE speakers.

2. Displays morphosyntactic features that are highly divergent from parallel constructions in Standard American English (SAE)[5], and shared with English creoles of the Caribbean.

3. Has discourse markers, distinctive prosodic features, and intonational semantics (Spears, 2009) that are not attested in SAE (or any other Englishes, for that matter). These are perhaps the least understood, and seem to be subject to

[4] In the sense of Silverstein (2003).

[5] A pan-regional ideological construct of "unaccented" American English. For a critical discussion of this linguistic myth and its social and political force, see Lippi-Green (1997). Here, I use it as shorthand for matrix white American varieties in the West (and other non-South regions, when relevant).

a tremendous amount of social variation and performative control within the larger envelope of "AAE features."

1.2.3 What's so special about AAE?

There's an enormous body of sociolinguistic scholarship on AAE; indeed, it's perhaps the most-studied variety of English in the U.S. This goes back decades – William Labov and Walt Wolfram, both influential in sociolinguistics more broadly, began studying AAE in the '60s, making it one of the first varieties to be studied under the framework of language variation and change.

So what makes AAE so interesting to sociolinguists? For one thing, it's structurally unique. As I've alluded to earlier, there are features at every level of the grammar that are distinct from all other varieties of English (Rickford, 1999). This alone is interesting. Even further, AAE has been argued to have descended from a colonial-era plantation creole of English and West African languages, which would make it the only multi-parent English variety spoken in the U.S (Wolfram and Thomas, 2008). This question and attempts to answer it are known as the origins controversy, a debate which has shaped and sustained AAE scholarship for at least 40 years.

Setting aside the structural distinctiveness of AAE, there's another obvious answer to why it's interesting to sociolinguists. AAE is a vibrant, actively changing non-standard variety of English that's associated with a marginalized racial group. This obviously goes hand in hand with heavy stigmatization of identifiably AAE-like speech. How such a variety is maintained and employed for self-expression by a speech community in the face of such widespread discrimination is an interesting and many-layered question. Further, AAE does, in fact, carry some social capital in mainstream U.S. society – in certain circumstances, it's a valued form of interaction. This should not surprise us as sociolinguists, since linguistic features that begin as distinctive to a certain group's repertoire are prime candidates for acquiring second-order indexical meaning, and being appropriated or re-purposed by speakers that we may or may not consider part of a lect's speech community (Silverstein, 2003).

1.3 Describing AAE

As mentioned above, AAE will be defined structurally for the present discussion. To that end, this chapter is a brief overview of relevant structural features of AAE. Note that 1. this list is by no means exhaustive and 2. I don't investigate all of these

variables in the present study. The following section is only to illustrate the kinds of linguistic features germane to AAE, and the ways linguists divide up and describe them.

1.3.1 Overview of Features

Phonology Summary

AAE, as a distinct ethnolect, has a phonology distinct from that of American English. Some phonological processes generally accepted as characteristic of AAE are listed below (Rickford, 1999; Thomas, 2007). The phonology of African American English shares some features with Southern American English; while my main focus is on features unique to AAE, features shared with Southern American English are important to highlight as distinguishing features of AAE in most other regions of the country.

- th-fortition: Initial /θ/ and /ð/ are sometimes realized as [t] and [d], respectively. This results in forms like [dæt] ("dat") for SAE *that* and [t^hɪŋ] ("ting") for SAE *thing*.

- th-frication: Medial and final /θ/ and /ð/ are sometimes realized as [f] and [v], respectively[6]. This rule results in forms like [bof] ("bof") for SAE *both* and [ˈbɹʌvəˇ] / [ˈbɹʌvə] ("bruvver / bruvva") for SAE *brother*.

- Realization of /θɹ/ sequences as [θ]. This can result in forms like [θu] ("thu") for SAE *through*.

- Higher rates of ING alveolarization than SAE ("walkin"' for *walking*, e.g.)

- PIN/PEN merger (also characteristic of Southern American English): the vowels /ɛ/ and /ɪ/ are merged before nasals. This means word pairs like "pin" and "pen" or "him" and "hem" are pronounced the same way.

- FEEL/FILL merger is also a phonologically conditioned merger characteristic of both AAE and Southern American English. This merger, as the term suggests, results in indistinguishable productions of word pairs like "feel" and "fill" or "heal" and "hill."

[6]The "th-stopping" or fortition rule (where the historical dental fricative is produced as a stop) is found in many non-standard varieties of English; the realization of dental fricatives as bilabial fricatives is much rarer, and is unique to AAE in North America.

- Realization of initial /stɹ/ clusters as [skɹ], as in skɹit ("skreet") for SAE *street*.
- (Probably lexicalized) metathesis of consonant clusters, especially clusters with / s/ (*ask* → "aks", e.g.) [7].
- Final consonant cluster simplification: the absence of stops in word-final clusters, for example [pæs] ("pas") for SAE *past*; [hol] ("hol") for SAE *hold*.
- Stopping of voiced fricatives (especially /v/ and /z/) before nasals (as in *idn'* for SAE "isn't")
- Lowering of /ɪŋ/ to [æŋ] in some environments. This gets us the oft-appropriated [θæŋ] ("thang") for SAE *thing*.
- Voiced stop glottalization: In AAE varieties, morpheme-final /b/, /d/, and /g/ can undergo devoicing, usually accompanied by glottalization, often fully subsuming the articulation of the stop (for example, [ˈdɪʔn̩t̚] ("di'int") for SAE *didn't*).

This is by nature an incomplete list, but should give the reader an idea of the diagnostic potential of phonological variables. Many of these features can play a role in style construction and social practice, and all vary along demographic lines.

/ay/ Monophthongization

/ay/ monophthongization[8], sometimes called "glide deletion," is the production of the SAE /aɪ/ phoneme as [ɑ], a low-back vowel, with little or no off glide (as in [hɑd] *hide*, for example). /ay/ monophthongization is one of the better studied features of AAE, partly because speakers seem to use it a great deal compared to other phonological features (Anderson, 2002). /ay/ monophthongization is a feature AAE shares with Southern American English, and it's been suggested that this commonality goes back at least 100 years (Bailey et al., 1998).

Given that timeline, it's not surprising that this feature is consistently found in all regions of AAE. There is also evidence that this feature is, at least in some regions, salient to African American identity: Anderson (2002) claims that in Detroit, a shift in the conditioning environment of /ay/ monophthongization occurred as a way for these Detroiters to distinguish their speech from that of Southern white Americans.

[7] The only other example with any traction seems to be the thinly attested "waps."

[8] Following Labov et al. (2005), I use the notation /ay/ for the phoneme / aɪ/

Another piece of evidence that this variable is highly salient as an AAE marker, even rising to the level of conscious control of variation, is Rahman (2007)'s study of this feature in African American standup comedians. She found that comedians performing working-class characters and/ or anti-establishment stances used significantly more monophthongal variants.

/r/ vocalization

/r/ vocalization, also called "r-lessness" is another distinctive feature of AAE: the variable realization of postvocalic /r/ as a weak neutral vowel. Final or pre-consonantal position and being part of an unstressed syllable are the most favoring environments for this feature (Thomas, 2007).

Like /ay/ monophthongization, /r/ vocalization is a feature shared with some white vernacular varieties. However, even in the South – historically a consistently non-rhotic region of the U.S.–rates of /r/ vocalization are higher among African Americans than among white speakers in the same areas (Wolfram and Thomas, 2002). In addition, /r/ vocalization is subject to social variation: rates of /r/ vocalization are inversely correlated with formality and social capital (Thomas, 2007).

/r/ vocalization interests me in particular because it displays a high degree of regional variation. For example, AAE speakers in Columbus, Ohio (Thomas, 1989) and in Davenport, Iowa have rates of /r/ vocalization near 0, even in favoring phonological environments. In contrast, Labov's (1972a) study of AAE in New York City has some speakers displaying rates of /r/ vocalization above 90%. This would seem to indicate some influence of contact with white regional vernacular varieties on phonological variables in regional AAEs. In fact, Becker (2014) provides evidence that Black speakers in New York may use /r/ vocalization as part of the construction of an eminently local identity that comprises race, place, and class meanings in combination. These findings underscore the relevance of situating any description of an ethnolinguistic repertoire in local context, both in theory and in the treatment of specific variables.

Morphosyntax Summary

AAE's morphosyntax is the site of its most divergent and, not coincidentally, most stigmatized features. There are many possible reasons for this, but my theoretical perspective here is that unlike lexical variation, which is easily read as "slang" or dialect difference and either appropriated or rejected on those terms, and phonological

variation, which is more difficult for non-linguists to characterize, morphosyntactic features are easily noticed and commented on.

For instance, the reader may recall hearing examples of the oft-maligned "double negative." Linguists refer to this is negative concord, reflecting the theoretical perspective that matrix negation can be spelled out on the main verb and one or more internal phrase boundaries. To illustrate (an example from my data): "he didn't (n)ever want to put (no) work in." (cf. SAE "he didn't ever want to put any work in"). This is a feature present in many socially stigmatized varieties of English, including AAE (Labov, 1972b).

Setting aside prescriptive disapproval of recognizably non-standard morphosyntax, differences in the morphosyntax make it easy for non-speakers of AAE to misunderstand (or fail to understand) many AAE constructions. For an example, I turn to Rickford (1975):

(1) "She BIN married" (SAE: She's been married for a long time, and still is.)

The point here is that non-Black speakers may interpret this as a past completed state, missing the sense of the tense marker BIN. Another point to bring up here is the notion of "camouflage" (Collins et al., 2008). This refers to a tendency in socially stigmatized dialects and language varieties, particularly AAE, to favor the adoption of elements and constructions that superficially resemble SAE constructions. In the above example, stressed BIN looks like the standard English form "been"–it just means something different. This serves the dual purpose of concealing use of the stigmatized dialect and making the meaning of distinctively AAE constructions opaque to non-speakers.

Another morphosyntactic feature that might be analyzed as camouflage is existential "it": speakers of AAE varieties variably use "it" as an existential quantifier, as in "it's a lot of people in here" (cf. SAE "there's / there are a lot of people in here").

Copula Absence

Copula absence is perhaps the most studied variable in sociolinguistics (Rickford et al., 1991; Holm, 1984).

Beginning with Labov and continuing to the present day, sociolinguists have quantified the proportion of constructions in a text that could contain a form of the copula but don't. The phenomenon is illustrated by constructions like these:

- She a doctor.
- He tall.
- They going to the game.

"Null copula" is a feature of many languages throughout the world, notably many creoles. By contrast, no (non-creole) Englishes anywhere are known to display copula absence. If one thinks this is a robust and long-standing feature of AAE (as seems to be the case, per Rickford (1998)), this is serious evidence for the creolist position. In any case, we know copula absence occurs in just about every regional AAE variant that's been studied, at varying rates.

In Rickford's longitudinal study, the young women interviewed show a dramatic decline in their rates of copula absence across a decade of study (Rickford and Price (2013): straight deletion calculation). This connects back to the notion of morphosyntactic variables being most stigmatized. The two women in the Rickford and Price study have not only aged, but have also gotten steady lower-middle-class jobs and expanded their social networks beyond their hometown friends. This is a potential case of a distinctively AAE variable being repressed by the demands of professional socialization and/or contact with non-Black speakers.

Prosody

While most agree that AAE has prosodic features that are every bit as distinctive as those in, say, the morphosyntax, not many studies have looked at what those might be. The most frequently cited intonational feature of AAE is a wider pitch (F0) range than that of white comparator varieties (Jun and Foreman, 1996; Tarone, 1973; Hudson and Holbrook, 1982). This may, in part, be due to a greater propensity among AAE speakers to use falsetto in conversation. Jun and Foreman (1996), using the refreshingly unorthodox method of writing dialogs for white and Black speakers to read out and re-enact, compared AAE intonation to white speakers' intonation. In their sample (notably, only female Californian subjects participated), a few novel AAE-specific trends emerge.

1. More variation in what can be a boundary tone in declaratives and questions (both yes/ no and Wh-type)
2. More likely to have pitch accents after the sentence nucleus
3. More likely to begin a sentence with a high tone

Additionally, Thomas (1999) found evidence of more high pitch accents overall and a less pronounced falling pitch contour on the whole sentence. These newer data, considered along with their own, lead Wolfram and Thomas (2008) to conclude that AAE has a fundamentally different intonational alignment than SAE. To wit: SAE assigns pitch accents across sentences, largely based on the type of sentence; lexical stress and sentence nuclei are overlaid onto the "template" for, say, a declarative. AAE, in contrast, appears to assign pitch accents in a high-low alternating fashion, onto which lexical stress and sentence nuclei are overlaid in a similar way. This explains most of the AAE intonation tendencies listed here, as well as being a distinct enough system that listeners can differentiate and even describe it (Foreman, 2000).

Discourse

Following Morgan (1998) and Spears (2009), I conceptualize AAE discourse according to a two-part framework: discourse norms and verbal genres. These "discourse norms" are a broadly defined set of interactional expectations and resources that structure all social interaction in AAE. "Verbal genres" are culturally salient discourse styles that serve as tools for speakers to navigate interactional settings. The importance of this theoretical construct is twofold: first, it asserts that AAE speakers have conversational norms and strategies that differ from those of SAE speakers (importantly, the normative strategy in the SAE system may in some cases violate an expectation an AAE speaker has about an interaction or vice versa). Second, it makes room for variation within this framework–though there are discernible norms and expectations around discourse in a speech community, speakers actively and consistently manipulate, re-evaluate, and violate them in everyday interaction. In this view, a conversation's register(s) and/ or verbal genres; its participants' identities, stances, and attitudes; and its extralinguistic context all affect how speakers collaboratively construct conversational norms, in ways we can't always predict.

It's also important to note here that AAE discourse styles and verbal genres are both stigmatized and fetishized by mainstream[9] white American society. The effects of and responses to this are impossible to ignore. Indirection and camouflage are some of the most frequently cited principles of AAE discourse, and are thought to have come about (at least partly) through AAE speakers' reaction to stigmatization and appropriation (Spears, 2009).

[9]I use "mainstream" in the lay sense i.e. adhering to a system of values associated with the middle class, and also to stand in for the clunkier "hegemonic" (in the sense of Gold (2004).)

1.3.2 The Nature of Variation Data

A Categorical Denial

Almost all of the variables listed in section 1.3.1 are realized not categorically, but variably, by AAE speakers. This is in fact a general principle of variationist sociolinguistics: to assert that a feature patterns socially, one must first assess its variance, and the linguistic and social contexts which constrain this variance.

The more one accounts for regional variation in AAE, the less likely it is to find categorically distinctive AAE features. Labov's (1972a) carefully delimited Harlem speech community, for instance, displayed nearly categorical /r/ vocalization. But Wolfram (2007) points out that this is likely due to a synergistic interaction of AAE /r/ vocalization with the longstanding variable /r/ vocalization rule in New York City–/r/ vocalization rates aren't nearly this high elsewhere.

It may be that none of the speakers in the present study use any AAE-associated variable more than 90% of the time; this does not impinge on the confidence with which they can be considered members of the AAE speech community. Rather, questions must be asked about 1. which variables are more or less present in Portland compared to other regions and 2. whether variables that have a distinctive overall alignment in Portland[10] additionally pattern according to finer-grained social variables.

Choice of Variables

In quantitative variationist studies, we are often limited to the quantification and analysis of a few discrete linguistic variables. This makes it crucial to consider the nuances of how different variables are used and interact. To illustrate, I turn to two different studies of AAE's social meaning.

Rahman (2008) is a perceptual study of middle-class African Americans' opinions of AAE. Her talkers use varying degrees of many AAE features; one of her measures was how many of her listener-participants identified a talker as "definitely African American." One of her talkers, "Debbi," used almost no features of AAE except certain distinctive elements of intonation. Nonetheless, she was identified as "definitely African American" by 68% of participants on the basis of a single 28-second speech sample. If Rahman had neglected to analyze her talkers' use of intonational variables, not only would this result be baffling, but also her excellent discussion of her participants' understanding of their own style shifting would not have had any data

[10]Or the Pacific Northwest more generally, as far as that can be ascertained.

to back it up. Her listeners often had very nuanced characterizations of their use of AAE across contexts. As one said, "...certain elements drop off. The first seems to be grammar. The second seems to be slang...The third element to drop off seems to be pronunciation. The intonation/ delivery I think is the characteristic that lingers no matter how educated you are...(163)." This characterization is almost exactly what Rahman argues is a real and significant pattern of style-shifting in AAE, based on her data and others'.

If it weren't for Rahman's decision to include this variable in her counts of AAE feature use, this participant's impressions would have been much less well-supported. This would be a shame, given that speaker descriptions of their own language behavior are, due to authoritative entextualization (Johnson, 2001) in the linguistic profession, an often ignored or underused data source. This example points to the importance of choosing variables covering as many levels of structure as possible.

A second point when choosing variables to analyze is to consider what favoring contexts or possible sources of variation are acting on the variables in question (and potentially not on others). To illustrate: the study of local officials mentioned above (Kendall and Wolfram, 2009) measured the rates of several phonological variables over two contexts: public speaking and an interview. One of their subjects, the Princeville, NC mayor, used consonant cluster reduction more in public speaking contexts and 3rd-singular -s absence less in this same context. Even in a study like the present one where context is held constant, there's an important lesson here. Not all AAE features respond the same way to social variation–it's not possible *a priori* to generalize "AAE use" or "style shifting" with only a small subset of variables. We have to use between-speaker comparisons to pick out notable rates of feature use and look for the reasons behind them.

The variables I quantify and analyze in Chapter 2 are /ay/ monophthongization, /r/ vocalization, and the PIN/PEN and FEEL/FILL mergers. These were chosen for a number of reasons outlined below, but my intention is not to treat these variables as interchangeable or definitive of the variety. Instead, I look at speakers' rates of these four phonological features as well as a summary of other AAE variables. The aim is to form accurate and detailed feature inventories for all my PAAE speakers before interpreting their repertoires' indexical potential.

1.3.3 Summary and Conclusions to Section 1.3

It's empirically the case that when we quantify the use of features associated with AAE, we see intraspeaker variation. Any sociolinguistic theory of AAE, and indeed any investigation of this variety, has to account for this observation. Theoretical perspectives on this have explained this variability in terms of 1. linguistic conditioning environments and 2. systematic social variation. Within this second option, there are numerous threads of research. For example, sociolinguists have described change over time, style shifting, and other more local indexical strategies. The deeper reasons for these shifts tend to involve the symbolic significance of AAE variables in the speaker's social world–for instance, most AAE speakers style shift when talking to white vs. Black speakers and in familiar vs. formal contexts.

We also, of course, observe interspeaker variation–something sociolinguists have traditionally been better equipped to explain. These explanations, though, aren't without problems–as Wolfram (2007) points out, falling back on apparent demographic tendencies toward AAE use can obscure more useful and accurate explanations for different speakers' rates of feature use. To tie this discussion back into my attempts to define the variety, I turn to a perspectives chapter by Walt Wolfram, written on the occasion of the (then) new millennium. According to Wolfram (2001), there is probably a "restricted subset of features" that are genuinely unique to AAE (336). However, he argues, "the uniqueness of AAE lies more in the particular array of structures that comprises the variety than it does in the restricted set of potentially unique structures [336]."

In essence, shibboleths of AAE are few, in that not many are absolutely diagnostic of the language variety in themselves. This fact does not diminish the reality or social availability of AAE as a distinct variety.

1.4 Three waves of variation study

The idea that linguistic variation is socially patterned is a continuous theoretical thread from the days of Labov and Trudgill to the present. The exact nature of this link, however, and the kinds of work it has motivated, have changed considerably. Following Eckert (2012), variationism can be thought of as having three distinct stages.

For Eckert, the first wave begins with Labov's seminal study on New York City English. Working on, to give one example, th-stopping among New Yorkers, Labov

found that this feature was realized more frequently by speakers of lower socioeconomic status (SES). This result illustrates the theoretical and methodological leap forward that Labov and his contemporaries made in the 1960s: using audio data from a carefully chosen sample of speakers, Labov correlated his measures of linguistic difference with demographic categories like class and race. Quantitative empiricism took root in sociolinguistics.

Aside from this foundational contribution, Labov's studies also supported the theoretical claim that regional and ethnic differences were most pronounced at the bottom of the socioeconomic class hierarchy. This wave of study in AAE scholarship was characterized by these kinds of demographically patterned generalizations. Labov (1972a) for instance, concludes that speakers from poorer communities use significantly more of the (mostly morphosyntactic) variables deemed "core" AAE features by Labov.

This brings us to the second wave of variationism, a movement characterized by a newfound focus on ethnographic methods. Essentially, sociolinguists like Milroy (1980) saw the results of Labov and Trudgill as hugely important, but were unsatisfied by their explanations. The theoretical remedy, also notably pursued by Rickford (1986), was to become familiar enough with the social world of the speakers under study to use distinctions and social groups relevant to the subjects as explanatory tools. The idea was that speakers are socially aware, active participants in the construction of linguistic norms. Instead of simply learning a set group of features that happen to distinguish their in-groups, people use linguistic features to mark themselves as members of groups they are socially invested in. This helps account for the variable preservation of linguistic forms stigmatized in mainstream social life.

There are two vital theoretical insights provided by this line of research: 1. The meaning of social group labels like "race" and "class" (and the appropriateness of using these labels at all) in the context of a given speech community are not knowable a priori, and vary widely in how they are viewed and constructed by community members; and 2. Speakers make socially informed choices about the linguistic features they use–patterns of variation are not merely a reflection of how society is divided, but a way to express and engage one's local, class, and/ or ethnic identity.

This wave in AAE scholarship is well represented by Rickford (1986). Using the example of creole feature density in Guyanese Creole, Rickford deconstructs the demographic notion of social class. In his data, traditional class indices like income and education hold little relevance to the speakers and do not predict their creole feature use to any great degree. Instead, Rickford found, a speaker's use of these

features was much better predicted by his proposed alternative class index: Estate Class (sugar cane farmworkers, primarily) vs. Non-Estate Class (service industry; skilled tradespeople). Though the class distinctions that are relevant to an AAE speech community in the U.S. are likely better described by multi-index scales of socioeconomic class than Rickford's Cane Walk speech community, the accuracy and relevance of these traditional demographic techniques cannot, Rickford argues, be assumed.

The third wave of variationism is defined by its focus on indexicality. The central claim here is that linguistic practice can and does express the full range of social information in a community; variation itself composes a system of social semiotics overlaid on the semantic meanings of language. Since the social life of any community is in continual flux, the social meaning of a linguistic feature cannot be fixed; indeed, research from this wave relies on the insight that the social meaning of even the most salient linguistic feature is underspecified. This means that an indexically meaningful feature has a field of potential social meanings, and which one is meant and interpreted is clear only given an account of the social interaction.

In a theoretical sense, the mechanism that allows a system like this to function is often "indexical order" (Silverstein, 2003). In this framework, salient linguistic features may come to be associated with a particular population or group. Through the interaction of ideology about that group and extraction of such a feature from its original context, the feature becomes an index of membership in that group. Further, it can then come to indicate even more abstract qualities or stances associated with that group, as when young white men use features of AAE to construct their masculinity (Cutler, 1999). In her study, Cutler argues convincingly that the white teenage boys in her sample are not, in fact, trying to gain access to Blackness in any form, or the social group connections that would entail. Instead, they see AAE as connected to a kind of subversive cool that they can partake in through their appropriation of AAE features.

The construct of indexical order has considerable explanatory power, and also makes a theory in which speakers switch from one distinct variety to another less plausible (and less desirable). My approach will be to follow Benor (2010) in positing a constitutive, constructivist approach to linguistic variation. Benor defines the ethnolinguistic repertoire as "a fluid set of linguistic resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their ethnic identities (159)." In Benor's repertoire model, speakers use the indexical meanings of their repertoire of linguistic features to construct their own identities and relationships, day to day and moment

to moment. This avoids describing a speaker as a bundle of fixed social identities.

As Benor points out, the idea of an "ethnolect" is open to charges of just this kind of theoretical clunkiness – the idea that any Black person is performing their identity of Blackness at every moment is, most generously, a poor account of identity work. I continue, nonetheless, to use this term, with the stipulation that it denotes an abstract and incomplete set of sociolinguistic resources, each of which may or may not be used by any particular Black-identifying speaker.

1.5 Regionality in AAE

As Wolfram (2007) points out, there is a considerable amount of data to suggest that AAE displays some degree of systematic variation by region (Hinton and Pollock, 2000; Thomas, 2007). This is, however, a fairly recent phenomenon–that is to say, sociolinguists haven't always been interested in collecting data that speaks to regional variation. The earliest variationist studies of AAE, in fact, often explicitly assumed that AAE was a "supra-regional" dialect or ethnolect, a seemingly reasonable position for a scholar right after (or even during) the Great Migration. The underlying similarity and (recent) common history of AAEs around the country shouldn't be brushed aside. But regional differences are numerous and important, and the supra-regionality hypothesis' effect was that we have only recently begun to assess them.

Further, there are very few studies on Northwest AAE and, to my knowledge, none at all whose main focus is to assess locally distinctive patterns of the Northwest, let alone Portland specifically.

1.5.1 The Pacific Northwest

In one of the few recent AAE studies in the Northwest, Scanlon and Wassink (2010) characterize their speaker JH as targeting standardness as part of her upwardly-mobile economic orientation and her heavily white professional social networks. This conclusion fits well with Rahman (2008)'s theoretical account that a subset of her speech samples was "standard AAE," an ethnically marked but substantially less structurally distinct (from SAE) register. For me, characterizing the speech of certain participants this way would problematic, though, because they *all* have a broad range of social connections with white Portlanders.

If the contact-plus-upward mobility explanatory framework of Scanlon and Wassink is the correct interpretation, we would therefore expect a huge portion of Black Port-

land natives to display these lower rates. What has been described thus far as interspeaker variation influenced by style shifting would, in such a case, be better described as wholesale language change (most likely in convergence with the local white norms for those variables). Whether there are in fact direct effects of social contact with white speakers, or evidence of language change for reasons internal to the speech community, are unanswered but answerable questions. Therefore, in contextualizing this study's results, it will be important to consider the degree and type of social contacts with white residents maintained by Black speakers in Portland and the larger Northwest.

1.6 Where Are the Black Portlanders?: Communities from Redlining to Displacement

Figure 1.1: A display at the historic Golden West Hotel downtown, a Black-owned business in turn-of-the-century Portland. Photo credit: Will Bennett, goldenwest.wordpress.com.

The Golden West Hotel (Figure 1.1) was only one of a concentrated group of Black-owned businesses in early 20th century Portland. Though notable for its early establishment, this small Black community made up an estimated less than 1% of the city's population (Tuttle, 1999). It wasn't until World War II, and the resultant boom in the manufacturing and shipbuilding industries, that Black Americans moved in large numbers to Portland (mostly from the South, as part of the post-Depression phase of the Great Migration). In a few short years, over 20,000 Black people moved to the Portland area, a tenfold increase in the permanent Black population of the state (Moreland et al., 1993).

The new Black residents were assiduously denied housing in Portland proper by the city government and neighborhood associations. So in late 1942, a backroom deal with a shipbuilding tycoon authorized the construction of the largest wartime housing project in the U.S.: Vanport City. In one year, about 10,000 units went up and most were occupied right away. After the wartime industries downsized and temporary residents had left, the sizable new Black community largely remained in Vanport, a hastily constructed development on the Columbia River floodplain. Black Portlanders were redlined [11] out of almost every part of Portland proper.

As a result, when the Vanport Flood turned the town into a lake in May 1948, a sizable majority of Portland's Black residents were displaced; over 16,000 people were made homeless overnight, of which over a third were Black. Many of these Black refugees settled in a concentrated area of inner Northeast Portland, which effectively became the new center of Portland's Black community in the 1950s on (Moreland et al., 1993).

Today, the Portland Urban League refers to the community's housing situation as one of "gentrification and displacement," noting that the proportion of Black residents is falling in many historically Black neighborhoods and increasing slowly across a wide area (mainly St. John's, and East Portland and Gresham past 82nd Avenue, sometimes called "the numbers" by locals) (Sawicki and Purcell, 2015). Almost all of my participants note that either they themselves or family members have been forced to move due to rising rents in North and Northeast Portland. Three of them also mentioned that one result of this displacement is that the geographical center of Portland's Black community is disappearing, and Black Portlanders are rapidly dispersing

[11] A term referring to a diverse assortment of discriminatory housing regulations and practices (in this case by the Housing Authority of Portland, federal housing projects, neighborhood associations and real estate brokers), whereby Black residents were prohibited from living in majority-white neighborhoods, and segregated from white residents in the neighborhoods they *were* allowed to live in.

into neighborhoods without histories of Black occupancy. Dynamics of displacement and/ or community cohesion will be important to consider when interpreting variation data from Portland.

1.7 Hypotheses

Although Wolfram (2007) pointed out that sociolinguists have neglected to study regionality in AAE adequately, and recent scholarship has tended to acknowledge regional difference as possible (Thomas, 2007), few studies to date have set out to quantify regional differences in the features that mark AAE. This section reviews some studies that have, in order to project the sorts of variation we might expect to find in the Northwest generally, and Portland in particular.

We know from Hinton and Pollock (2000) that AAE speakers in Davenport, Iowa display almost no /r/ vocalization. By contrast, their Memphis AAE speakers showed rates of 20% to 60% depending on the phonological environment. And Labov (1972) reported even higher rates (sometimes over 90%) for his adolescent male NYC speakers. Just based on this small data set, we can conjecture that /r/ vocalization in AAE can be anywhere from virtually absent to virtually obligatory, with regionality as a major predictor. This illustrates the extent to which even phonological variables, which are among the less stigmatized AAE features, correlate closely with region of origin. Given that quantitative studies of regionality like Hinton and Pollock's are sparse and recent, it seems reasonable to expect variables at any and all levels of language to display some noticeable levels of regional differentiation.

Almost inevitably, regionality will interact with what we traditionally call class or socioeconomic variables. I mean this not only in the narrow sense that different regions have different socioeconomic makeups, but in a whole set of complicated and potentially conflicting ways. Levels of integration in schools and housing, and the history of a city's African American community both in terms of relations with white residents and the city government, affect both levels and types of contact with white (and other non-Black) people and the closeness of a city's African American community. In simple terms, it will be important to look at how much Black Portlanders live and socialize with other Black Portlanders, and the constraints on these interactions.

1.8 Quantitative Predictions

/ay/ monophthongization is one of the most reported and best studied phonological variables in connection with AAE (Edwards et al., 1997; Gordon, 2000; Ash and Myhill, 1986). It's commonly accepted as a defining feature of AAE by sociolinguists. In fact, Rahman (2007) assumes it indexes AAE-linked personae in order to study its meaning in standup comedy.

This is not to say that every AAE speaker displays /ay/ monophthongization in all situations, or even at all. Rahman (2004) and Rahman (2007) highlight the high level of variability even in intraspeaker monophthongization rates. In Rahman (2008)'s data, rates range from 0 to 100%. She argues convincingly that these rates are negatively correlated with orientation towards middle class institutions and higher socioeconomic status, and that these associations are available to hearers when making judgments about the speakers.

Therefore, my hypothesis is that /ay/ monophthongization will be present but at low rates, and possibly absent in middle class and/ or upwardly mobile speakers.

/r/ vocalization, like /ay/ monophthongization, is an AAE feature shared with Southern American English. Unlike /ay/, though, it's also present in several other white American varieties, particularly on the East coast (Labov et al., 2005). The predictions here are similar: since this feature is divergent from all West Coast white English varieties, it would be a notably non-standard AAE variant if found in Portland. It's therefore likely to be present at low rates, and particularly avoided by higher-SES and upwardly mobile speakers. Following Hinton and Pollock (2000), it may even have disappeared almost completely.

Hinton and Pollock (2000) sampled AAE speakers in Davenport, Iowa, a community that has a similarly small minority of African Americans and a similar migration timeline (in both Portland and Davenport, African Americans from the South began to arrive in numbers during and after WWII). The authors even suggest that this variable has lost (or never had) "symbolic significance" (Denning, 1989) that would, for them, ensure its maintenance in the vernacular of this subcommunity. They do not mention the similar levels of r-lessness in the coastal South, likely because this site of regional variation was first discussed at length in Wolfram (2007) several years after the publication of their study. I would add an alternative explanation to the symbolic significance hypothesis, following Labov (2010): perhaps the informal dialect of AAE reported in Hinton and Pollock (2000) is in fact converging with the local white vernacular due to increased levels of contact.

The distinction is a tricky one: Hinton and Pollock (2000) actually seem to settle on the language contact or assimilation theory in their discussion, citing Ash and Myhill (1986). But in the "symbolic significance" account, it's possible that this particular variable (and maybe others) are simply passing out of the regional AAE variety. In the language contact account, in contrast, use of this variable (and almost certainly others) is decreasing because Davenport AAE speakers are assimilating to the regional white standard, implicating this regional AAE's status as a separate language variety. Of course, intra-variety change is not mutually exclusive with assimilation to the regional white norm, nor should such any assimilation be taken to apply to an entire speech community at the same rate.

In any case, /r/ vocalization is predicted to be low or absent in PAAE if the analogy holds.

PIN/PEN is, supposedly, more definitively unique to AAE speakers in the North. Labov et al. (2005)'s data demonstrates that outside the South, white Americans categorically do not have the PIN/PEN merger, while Black Americans in Labov et al. (2005)'s data display PIN/PEN merger robustly "at all social levels" even outside the South. This leads me to expect some incidence of the merger in my data, although since only 75% of Black speakers in the South had it (Labov et al., 2005), I expect a minority of my participants to be fully merged in production. I didn't formulate predictions for the FEEL/FILL merger at the outset of the study, but it can be conceptualized in much the same way as PIN/PEN. Thus, if it is present, it's likely distinctive to AAE in the local context.

1.9 Conclusions to Chapter One

According to the arguments put forth in Labov (2010), the expected result of higher levels of social contact between AAE speakers and white speakers in their area is the assimilation of the AAE system to the white vernacular norm. The specific phonological effects of this are difficult to predict, but assuming the morphosyntax of the white vernacular in question is more standard, this would lead to the loss of distinctively AAE morphosyntactic constructions.

Given that Portland has no census areas with more than 1/ 3 Black or African American residents (Census 2010), it's hard to imagine that many Black Portlanders are able to avoid some degree of social contact with non-Black residents. This was not always the case – even 10 years ago, North Portland in particular had a much higher percentage of Black residents (Sawicki and Purcell, 2015).

Still, if lower-SES Black Portlanders display dramatically higher rates of AAE features than middle-class Black Portlanders, controlling for inter-ethnic social contacts, this calls the Labov (2010) theory into question. Speakers, on this account, don't change their rates of indexically salient variables due to contact alone. A better model would be to reference what has social currency relevant to the speaker's life (Eckert, 2000; Milroy, 1980) – in this hypothetical, that might be (pan-regional) ethnic collective identity, and/ or locally mediated identities that are legible within the social matrix of Portland Black culture.

To address these questions empirically, I'm collecting speech data from African American Portlanders using sociolinguistic interview methods. The motivations for my measures and data collection are rooted in the preceding theory. To review, I'm using an indexical model of language variation: linguistic features that are used variably can and do take on social meanings. These certainly vary according to the context of the utterance, but in the context of PAAE, I will be looking for variables associated with AAE use more broadly. As Benor (2010) points out, speakers have a large repertoire of socially meaningful variables, and tend to use ethnically marked ones more in contexts where their ethnic identity is relevant. A third general pattern to keep in mind is that most AAE features are, even in the most favoring contexts, variably realized. This means that much of my analysis and interpretive work will involve comparing rates of the features under analysis. The major project here is to describe any variables that exhibit socially conditioned variability, at what levels of language, and to what degree relative to other regions and language varieties. My prediction is that almost all morphosyntactic features will be used less in Portland than other regions; however, I expect that the rates of some phonological and prosodic AAE features will be maintained or even increased to the extent that Portland AAE speakers are invested in marking their ethnicity.

Chapter 2

Methods and Data

2.1 Methods

2.1.1 Interview Protocol

In eliciting the data I'll be analyzing in the next section, I interviewed eight Black Portlanders. Participants were recruited through several channels; the majority were either people I knew personally or referred to my by those I knew personally, although two participants contacted me after seeing social media posts of mine. This might lead one to suspect that these two are more peripheral to my social network, but in fact I didn't interview any close personal friends; this would likely invite a complex and unpredictable confound.

The overarching principle behind the interviews was Labov (1972a)'s observation that the most reliably vernacular features are found in situations favoring fluent, naturally occurring speech – especially personal narratives. My theoretical alignment with Labov's New York method more or less ends here; the specific techniques for eliciting personal stories Labov elaborates in Language in the Inner City and later work on the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus are certainly of interest to me, but a reader familiar with the method will notice major differences. For this reason, I will avoid the term "sociolinguistic interview" although this is the methodological tradition I adhere to most closely. In terms of sociological methodology, my interviews are semi-standardized and non-scheduled: most of the same questions were asked of each participant, but the order and wording were variable and contingent upon the conversational context.

One major reason I don't adopt Labov and the PNC's sociolinguistic interview method completely is that, while it arguably accounts for one dimension of style shift-

ing, I argue that it ignores several other possible dimensions. Labov's naturalness/ self-consciousness continuum certainly influences the realization of variables I'm interested in, but with, say, ethnically marked variables, one must try to situate the speech data in question relative to how (perceived) ethnic, gender, and class differences, etc. influence a speaker's inclination towards using the variables in question. Since I am a young white man interviewing primarily African American women of various ages, there will clearly not be many opportunities for ethnic or gender solidarity. This is likely to depress rates of socially marked variables of all kinds. I have opted to try to positively influence rates of AAE variables in another way: I frame the interview as a chance for me to learn more about each participant's personal history and experiences growing up and living as a Black person in Portland. My assumption here is that speakers will be most comfortable (and hence most likely to tell stories, resulting in fluent speech on familiar topics) when they are relating facts and experiences on which they are primary authorities.

Impressionistically, I count this as a moderate success. In my first two interviews, I tried out several of Labov's sociolinguistic interview questions throughout the course of the conversation, and my own questions elicited as much or more narrative material from the same speakers, and the highest density of AAE variables was reliably in segments of talk dealing with participants' personal history and life events.

Interviews lasted between 40 and 70 minutes. Four (half) of the interviews were conducted at my desk on the Reed College campus, one in the interviewee's office, one in the interviewee's home, and two in coffee shops. I began interviews by saying, roughly, "This will be an informal interview – I'm going to be asking you about your experiences growing up in Portland, and at the end I'll have some questions about language and ethnicity." If participants asked about the analysis or hypothesis of the project, I deferred them to the end of the interview. However, after getting what I judged was enough fluent speech for my analysis, (generally 20-30 minutes of normally-paced conversation) I asked, "Have you heard the term African American English?" If so, I asked them what it meant; if not, I asked what they thought of it as a term for the distinctive speech of Black Americans.

I often followed up by asking for opinions of AAE if they weren't volunteered. I gathered data on language ideology with the previous question and the follow-up: "Is there any special way Black folks from Portland speak? Could you tell if a Black person was from Portland or somewhere else from their speech?" This qualitative data on perceptions of language is used in my discussion and interpretation of my quantitative data.

It's been shown (Rahman, 2008) that AAE speaker's perceptions of their own language are remarkably accurate regarding the markedness hierarchies of various levels of language, among other things. But even where my participants' impressions do not align with the quantitative data, they are useful in building a sociocultural account of this variety's internal variation and change.

There is a second goal of the inclusion of questions getting at perceptions of (Portland) AAE: by using the question framing mentioned above as well as the preceding conversational context, I hoped to interactionally construct each participant as an expert on their own language variety (as, in most senses, they are). I was simply providing vocabulary and hypotheses for them to assess. In this way, I hoped to push back against the phenomenon of professional and authoritative entextualization (Johnson, 2001): that is, the sociolinguist is a knowledge broker, implicitly invested in their own expertise and the advancement of their ways of understanding language. And everything about the circumstances of a sociolinguistic interview (I count the present study, as regards this point) reifies and reinforces this construction of expertise. The fact that this is an active constraint on all my conversations with participants should not be understated, but I hope at least to have mitigated pressure on participants to defer to me or suppress their opinions and perceptions.

2.1.2 Overview of Speakers

Speaker #	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Contact Index
Speaker 1	M	55	HS	Retired	2.4
Speaker 2	F	22	College	Student	3.6
Speaker 3	F	21	College	Student	2.8
Speaker 4	F	26	Advanced Degree	HR professional	2.5
Speaker 5	F	20	College	Student	3.6
Speaker 6	F	38	Advanced Degree	HR professional	3
Speaker 7	F	20	College	Student	2.2
Speaker 8	M	22	College	Retail	2.6

Table 2.1: Summary of Demographic Characteristics

A Note on the Contact Measure

My measure for contact with white speakers, reported in table 2.1 as "contact index," summarizes exposure to majority-white social environments throughout a speaker's life. Five periods of time and/ or institutional contexts–local neighborhood, grade

school, high school, current work (or college) colleagues, and current personal friendships– are scored out of 5 for density of white social contacts using responses to interview questions. On this scale, speakers with no white co-workers, for instance, would get a 0 out of 5 for "current work." A speaker with *only* white co-workers would get a 5 out of 5. All contexts for which I had the interview data to make an assessment were scored and the mean was calculated for each speaker. These means range from 2.2 to 3.6 in my sample.

It's important to note that with a 2.2, even Speaker 7 (who grew up, and still lives, in a majority Black neighborhood) can be thought of as having roughly equal amounts of social contact with white speakers compared with people of color, perhaps even a plurality of white contacts. Thus, even the speakers in my sample with the "least white" social environments have had, and continue to have, many white peers and contacts. This contrasts with how many early variationists characterized their most "vernacular" speech communities (Ash and Myhill, 1986; Labov, 1972a). These researchers reliably found AAE speakers who had minimal social contact with white speakers. This is likely partly due to the extraordinarily high levels of segregation in Harlem and Philadelphia during this time period; I can't make any claims as to whether this remains true, but present day Portland can be fairly characterized as less segregated than these cities were (cen, 2010).

Speaker 1

Speaker 1 is a retired man in his 50s who has "never been out of Oregon." I place Speaker 1 at the poorer pole of my sample's synthesized "SES" continuum; with his high school diploma, he has the least higher education among the sample. He spent a lot of his childhood in North Portland, but left "the hood," as he put it, when he was transferred to a center for youth in crisis in his adolescence. Speaker 1 characterizes himself as being raised by state institutions: foster care and state guardianship, and later jail. He describes some periods of homelessness in his adult life, but says he has lived mainly in North Portland for his whole life. Beginning about 10 years ago, Speaker 1 approached his childhood caseworker, a leader in Portland's Black community, about restoring a public display on a Black-owned hotel in downtown Portland. Since then, his work and passion has been researching and teaching about Portland's Black history – in grade schools, at public colleges, and in collaboration with community groups.

Speaker 1 says he's heard the term "African American English" before, and recalls "Ebonics" being the first reference to a Black American speech variety that

he heard. He had no opinions for or against the terms themselves when I asked him, but later expressed appreciation for the way these labels confer distinction on AAE. Speaker 1 said he doesn't think he could tell if an AAE speaker was from Portland or not, but it's worth noting that he said the same was true for white speakers. Essentially, Speaker 1's view is that Black Americans do have a distinctive way of talking, but that Black *Portlanders* don't have a distinctive accent or dialect compared with other regions.

Speaker 2

Speaker 2 is a college student, majoring in sociology. She was raised in Portland by separated parents: mainly by her mother (who is white) and lived in Beaverton. She also maintains a relationship with her father, who is Black, and lived in Northeast Portland and now lives in St. John's. She described a process of re-discovering her Black identity the previous year, when she became involved with the Portland chapter of Black Lives Matter (a process complicated, at least for Speaker 2, by being white-passing). I describe Speaker 2's background as low-SES based on her characterization of her parents as low-income; she also vividly remembers a high school guidance counselor urging her to only apply to lower-cost public universities that she could "afford" to go to. She went to public schools that she describes as being fairly racially diverse, but with low numbers of Black students.

Speaker 2 says she has heard the term "African American English" from a linguistics major friend. She evaluates this term positively, and mentions that as an adolescent she viewed AAE very negatively, but she now sees it as a valuable part of her identity. Speaker 2 also doesn't think she could identify Portland AAE speech vs. any other kind of AAE.

Speaker 3

Speaker 3 is also a college student majoring in sociology. She grew up in a middle-class, two parent household in Tualatin (a suburb of Portland) until early high school, when she moved to Portland proper with her family. She went to predominantly white schools until high school, when she began attending public school in Southeast Portland. This was a welcome transition for her; Speaker 3 even describes an attempt to reconnect with her (white, affluent) friend group from middle school after moving, and being alienated by the very different adolescent social norms and racial insensitivity she experienced.

Speaker 3 is the most ambivalent about the term "African American English"; she prefers "Black American" and "Black English" over "African American" and "AAE." Speaker 3 also says (in response to my initial question "have you heard the term 'African American English'?"):

> I mean I've *heard* that before but if someone said that to me, I [ɑ] would just look at them and be like "you mean Ebonics?"

Given that I in fact *did* say that to her moments before, I take this to be an example of indirectness (Spears, 2009), challenging me on the use of these terms. We didn't pursue this line of discussion in the interview, so it's unclear whether Speaker 3 was just making a joke, challenging my authority on AAE terminology as a white person, making a point about the continued stigmatization of the variety, or something else entirely. It seems likely, though, that her criticism aligns with that mentioned in section 1.2.1: she sees no reason the (now deprecated) term "Ebonics" should be changed, if white America's attitudes towards it haven't changed. In any event, Speaker 3 rearticulates her general distaste for "African American" in favor of "Black American" as a question of personal preference later in the conversation.

Speaker 4

Speaker 4 is a woman in her 20s; she was raised in a "predominantly Black" neighborhood in Northeast Portland, by a single mother. Her mother is from Atlanta, but Speaker 4 has lived her whole life in Portland except for a brief period around age five, and her college years. She relates her family being on various forms of public assistance for most of her memory. She went to public schools and was an excellent student, and got scholarships to get a Bachelor's degree in-state. After college, she got a Human Resources professional certification and began working in that field.

Speaker 4 related a lot of interesting comparisons between how she views AAE in Portland versus other cities, particularly Atlanta. She says Black people she's met from other parts of the country describe Black Portlanders as talking "slower" and more "proper," and had this to say about regional change:

> We are really late. So like slang words that come out in other cities an' other states–they come to Portland last. And the music–the hip hop music. It comes here last too.

Speaker 4 seems to believe that Portland is simply not somewhere that generates urban Black cultural production, at least in the categories she deems relevant here (slang and hip hop).

Speaker 4 also refers to her high school when describing group and individual variation in AAE–she mentions three groups (academically focused, sports focused, and those who were there "just to hang out") and says they each used language and conversation differently. However, she mentions that her perception of these linguistic differences may be "tainted" by her proficiency in (and valuation of) more prestigious linguistic styles.

Speaker 5

Speaker 5 is a college student, majoring in communications. She was raised mainly in Southeast Portland in a working-class household, first by just her mother until around age 12 and then by her mother and step-father. Speaker 5 remembers her schools as being mostly white, as is her current university, but many of her close friendships are with Black women around her age.

Speaker 5 reports having heard the term "African American English" before, but has no value judgments on the terms or AAE itself: she says more than once that he hasn't ever thought about this issue before. When talking about her impressions of the city's Black community, she compares it to her experiences talking to Black residents of Vancouver, Canada–there, she says, Black people identify more strongly with their specific heritage nations or status as immigrants or locals; here in Portland, perhaps because it's a small community, she thinks this nuance is less present: "we're just, *Black*."

Speaker 6

Speaker 6 is a woman around 40 who is a career H.R. professional. She grew up in a middle-class, two parent home in North Portland, and is Speaker 8's older sister. She has a masters degree in child literacy and a Ph.D. in family studies, for which she wrote a dissertation on Black family structure. Also notably, she is the only participant in my sample who is a parent. This fact brought up a long conversation about Portland's lack of diversity: "when [my husband] goes home [to L.A.] to visit, he stands on the corner and there's like four different languages being spoken...." This is not the case in Portland, in Speaker 6's experience.

What I find particularly interesting is her connection of general (lack of) linguistic diversity to her daughter's skewed view of "how the world looks" (from her mostly white private grade school), and then to her perspective on Portland's Black community. Speaker 6 is adamant that kids are most benefited by exposure to many

cultures and languages; she even makes the point that going to a predominantly Black public school is not, strictly speaking, "diversity." Speaker 6 had nothing negative to say about AAE, or indeed any particular language variety; this perspective only makes me wonder whether she would orient toward a more or less ethnically marked speaking style.

Speaker 7

Speaker 7 is a college student, majoring in communication studies. She grew up in a working-class, two parent home in North Portland, and her parents are Sierra Leonean immigrants. At home, her parents spoke Krio, the English-based creole lingua franca of Sierra Leone. She grew up in a neighborhood that was majority Black in her youth, and is now almost entirely white. Speaker 7 went to a predominantly white private high school, and now attends a predominantly Black campus of her college. She is involved in Black student and activist groups at her university, and hopes to pursue a career in broadcast journalism as well as continuing her activism.

Speaker 7 has heard the term "AAVE" (African American Vernacular English), and positively evaluates this terminology:

> I think [those terms] are good. Because I guess there's a distinctive way that some Black people in America speak.

It struck me that Speaker 7 was relatively unguarded and matter-of-fact about the existence and definition of AAE. When I followed up, she (one of the youngest speakers in the sample) didn't recall any moral panics around AAE, and she seemed to have internalized the notion that AA(V)E is a real and distinct language variety prior to this interview.

When I asked her whether she thought AAE differed by region, she had this to say:

> I think it's pretty much the same. The only thing that's different that I think I've heard is that accents are different, and then like some of the lingo. Like some of their terms...

It was interesting to me that Speaker 7 invoked similarity between regional AAEs first, and then followed it up with what might seem like major differences. I assume that Speaker 7 thinks morphosyntax is shared, and of course there are other markers, whether phonological or discourse-level, that she could use to identify speech broadly

as AAE. Nonetheless, there enough differences that she says she *could* identify an AAE speaker as local or not by accent, and her use of the pronoun "their" seems to delineate Portland AAE from other AAE speech communities.

Speaker 8

Speaker 8 is a man in his 20s, who recently earned his B.A. in Political Science from an Oregon university. He is Speaker 6's younger brother, and so was also raised in a middle-class, two parent home in North Portland. As I've noted, though, North Portland is rapidly becoming majority-white, so neighborhood demographics may have been different given their age gap. Speaker 8 is working part-time and applying for jobs in other regions of the country, and hopes to work in the fashion industry.

Speaker 8 hadn't heard of AAE prior to the interview, but he did have an idea of what "Ebonics" might be. To Speaker 8, these terms sound like they describe a particular style or register. He associates this style with casual, comfortable speech, generally between Black folks who are friends or otherwise close. He hadn't heard the term "code switching" either, but gave a textbook account of how code switching (style shifting) works for bidialectal AAE speakers:

> I talk to my friends a certain way...that I don't talk to people in positions of...power maybe? Or higher authority?

He also definitively believes that AAE differs by region. Black people talk differently in the South, he says, and on the East Coast; this he connects to differences in culture and social norms.

2.1.3 Methods of Acoustic Analysis

The interviews were recorded on a Zoom H4N portable recorder; three participants were recorded through a Lavalier microphone connected to the H4N and the others relied only on the built-in microphones. The recordings, encoded as .wav files, were transcribed using Praat acoustic analysis software (Boersma and Weenink, 2016). The resulting transcript files were uploaded to FAVE (Forced Alignment and Vowel Extraction (Rosenfelder et al., 2011)) for alignment. This process uses the uploaded audio and transcription data and its own phonemic dictionary to create a new transcript, divided by phonological segments. These aligned transcripts, in turn, were uploaded to FAVE-extract, another program which creates a data file of normalized

vowel formant measures.[1] This was the data used in the analysis below.[2]

/ay/ Monophthongization

/ay/ monophthongization is the deletion of the offglide in the vowel phoneme /ay/. What this means is that words like *prize* and *pry* get pronounced as "prahz" and "prah." In some regions of the south, this process is active on all instances of /ay/; however, in the majority of the South and for African Americans generally, this rule is phonologically conditioned. For AAE speakers and most Southerners, /ay/ segments preceding voiced segments or word-finally (*prize* or *pry*, respectively) undergo glide deletion or weakening, whereas /ay/ segments preceding voiceless consonants (*price*, e.g.) are produced as diphthongal (Thomas, 2007).

For this reason, I measured glide deletion rates only in contexts that were *not* pre-voiceless. In other words, I quantified PRIZE/PRY monophthongization and not PRIZE/PRY/PRICE monophthongization.

Monophthongization of /ay/ was coded by FAVE's automatic glide detection. FAVE defines monophthongization in terms of F2 movement: the detection function checks the F2 at the F1 maximum (its definition of the "nucleus" of the vowel) and then looks for the maximum value of F2 after that point. If the change in F2 is less than 100 Hz, this is classified as a monophthong. If the difference is more than 100 Hz, it's classified as a glide (100 to 300 Hz is marked a "short glide," though I don't use this distinction in my analysis). This dependent measure is a discrete, binary variable–each /ay/ token is coded as either a diphthong or a monophthong.

Some researchers who use automated formant analysis to analyze /ay/ monophthongization code tokens as full diphthongs, short glides, and monophthongs (and in at least one case, "very short" glides: see Fridland (2003)). To simplify the analysis and align with the typical schema for auditory coding, I just use the two basic categories of diphthong and monophthong.

To get the speaker monophthongization rate, the number of monophthongs is divided by the total token count. The sample average is the mean of these speaker means.

[1] The default options for measurement and normalization were used: these are detailed at http://fave.ling.upenn.edu/downloads/EFoptions.html

[2] Data manipulation and visualization were completed in Microsoft Excel, R Studio and NORM.

Conditioned Vowel Mergers

The PIN/PEN merger is the phenomenon of the word classes of PIN and PEN being realized with the same vowel. In phonological terms, this is a historical process by which the phonemic distinction between /ɛ/ and /ɪ/ is being lost in pre-nasal contexts.[3] This is a feature shared with Southern American English (Labov et al., 2005), (Thomas, 2007).

The data for the PIN/PEN and FEEL/FILL merger analysis consists of normalized formant pairs of the mean F1 and F2 values. The question is whether the set of realizations of one vowel class can be confidently distinguished from the other class. A comparison of vowel plots is useful here; refer to Appendix A for full vowel plots for each speaker. However, merger was also analyzed statistically by compiling data sets of pre-nasal [ɛ] and [ɪ] for each speaker, and then doing two-sample t-tests comparing these vowel categories for both F1 and F2 formant values. Using this statistical test, I aimed to determine whether the two vowel classes (in each formant dimension) were significantly different (and thus describable as distinct populations). If the difference between PIN and PEN is significant, I regard the speaker as having distinct vowel classes. However, not all speakers had the same result for F1 and F2, and vowel plots can certainly help with interpreting these results; see sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 for details.

The merger of /ɪ/ and /i/ before /l/ is another feature of AAE shared with Southern American English. Again, there is no previous evidence of this merger in the urban Northwest (Labov et al., 2005). The analysis here was the same as the PIN/PEN analysis, with the exception of the data sets. For FEEL/FILL, only Speakers 2, 3, and 4 had enough data (which I judged as five or more tokens of each vowel) to be analyzed.[4]

/r/ Vocalization

My last quantitative variable, /r/ vocalization (also called "non-rhoticity" or "r-lessness"), refers to postvocalic /r/ (a historical /r/ sound following a vowel) being pronounced as a weak neutral vowel (typically characterized as schwa [ə]). Thus, rhoticity versus non-rhoticity is the difference between "for" and "foah" *four*. As mentioned in Ch. 1, final and pre-consonantal positions as well as unstressed syllables

[3] Thus, these vowels are also merged in pre-/m/ and pre-/ŋ/ contexts.

[4] This is partly due to the nature of spontaneous production data and the fact that the FEEL and FILL classes are less common words. I also didn't check to make sure I had tokens of these words in the transcription phase, since my initial hypotheses didn't involve the FEEL/FILL merger.

Speaker #	/ay/ % m.	/r/ % const.	PIN/PEN merger?	FEEL/FILL merger?
Speaker 1	0.62	0.82	F1 only	No data
Speaker 2	0.25	1	No	No
Speaker 3	0.45	1	No	F1 only
Speaker 4	0.37	1	Yes	Yes
Speaker 5	0.44	1	No	No data
Speaker 6	0.34	1	No	No data
Speaker 7	0.35	0.97	Both marginal	No data
Speaker 8	0.43	0.87	F1 only	No data

Table 2.2: Rates of quantified phonological variables by speaker.

are the most favoring environments for /r/ vocalization (Thomas, 2007).

The vocalization of /r/ by white American speakers is restricted to the East Coast and the South (Labov et al., 2005). Therefore, any /r/ vocalization in my sample can be confidently called an AAE variable.

/r/ vocalization was coded auditorily[5]: I listened to around 30 tokens of postvocalic /r/ for each speaker and coded whether they were constricted or vocalized (this variable, like /ay/ monophthongization, is a discrete binary measure). The rate of constricted tokens was divided by the total number of tokens coded. The mean of these speaker rates was calculated to get the sample mean.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 /ay/ monophthongization

As Table 2.3 shows, rates of /ay/ monophthongization range from 25% to 62%. All of these are higher than I expected, and the sample average (41%) is relatively high in comparison to other regions. This is somewhat surprising, given that Portland is not in the South (where rates of /ay/ monophthongization are thought to be higher across all ethnicities) and the interview setting doesn't generally favor a variable that's nonstandard in a U.S. context and likely ethnically marked as well. Some possible reasons for this unexpected finding are discussed in Chapter 3.

A linear regression model with speaker age, education, occupation, and contact

[5]This is a common way of coding /r/, partly because common acoustic correlates of /r/ constriction (F3, for instance) are either difficult to extract digitally, or unreliable with reference to perceptual intuitions. Though my corpus is smaller than those used in focused studies of this variable (Becker (2009), for instance, uses a corpus of over 400 tokens per speaker), it will be more than sufficient to place PAAE along the continuum of /r/ vocalization relative to other regional AAEs.

Speaker #	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Rate of Mon.
Speaker 2	F	22	College	Student	0.25
Speaker 6	F	38	Advanced Degree	HR professional	0.34
Speaker 7	F	20	College	Student	0.35
Speaker 4	F	26	Advanced Degree	HR professional	0.37
Speaker 8	M	22	College	Retail	0.43
Speaker 5	F	20	College	Student	0.44
Speaker 3	F	21	College	Student	0.45
Speaker 1	M	55	HS	Ret.	0.62

Table 2.3: The PAAE sample ordered by rates of /ay/ monophthongization

level as factors was fit to the /ay/ data (N=2012). The only significant level of any factor was high school education, in that having a high school education predicts higher /ay/ monophthongization. Speaker 1 is the only participant in this factor level, so this isn't an especially informative finding (Speaker 1 is established as unique in this and other respects; see section 3.2).

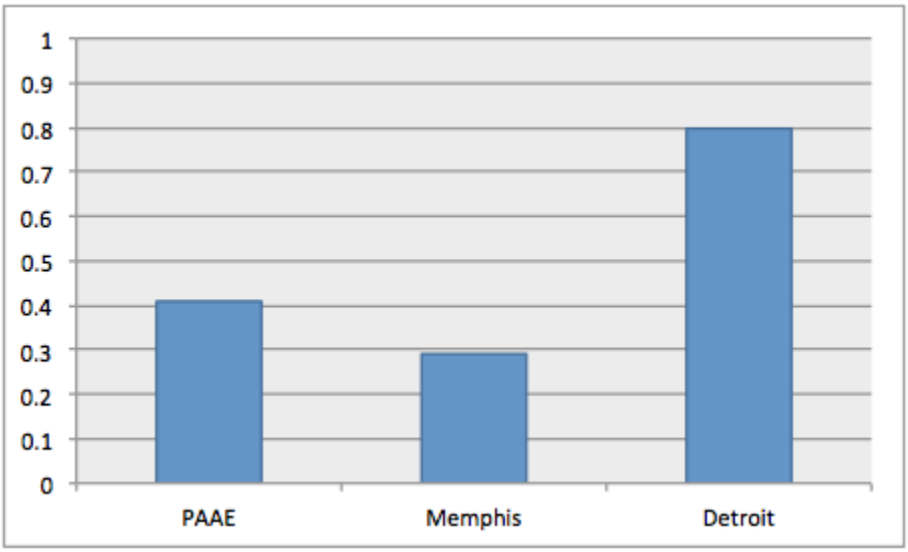

Figure 2.1: Comparison of /ay/ monophthongization rates in AAE across regions.

Figure 2.1 shows a comparison of the PAAE sample's /ay/ monophthongization rate with those of two other regional AAE samples. The Memphis data was compiled from weighted averages of rates in Fridland (2003). It was necessary to collapse Fridland's data – originally coded as full diphthongs, short glides, very short glides, and monophthongs – into a two-way monophthong vs. glide distinction, for reasons of

Speaker #	PIN F1	PEN F1	F1 p-value	PIN F2	PEN F2	F2 p-value
Speaker 1	590	661	0.067	2225	2003	0.043*
Speaker 2	594	710	0.08	1993	1849	0.02*
Speaker 3	564	667	0.043*	2054	1871	0.049*
Speaker 4	592	629	0.07	2047	2022	0.634
Speaker 5	578	696	5.74E-10*	1968	1764	0.003*
Speaker 6	542	602	1.67E-08*	2091	1976	0.001*
Speaker 7	631	700	2.20E-16*	1991	1802	3.48E-05*
Speaker 8	532	626	2.09E-05*	2215	1852	0.011*

Table 2.4: Means and t-test results for normalized PIN/PEN F1 and F2 data sets by speaker. * indicates significant difference at a p <0.05 threshold.

comparability. The Detroit data was pulled from Anderson (2002). As Anderson gives percentages broken down by phonological environment, I included only environments that I coded in my sample (i.e., preceding voiced consonants and word-final, as noted above).

2.2.2 PIN/PEN merger

The p-values listed in Table 2.4 are the output of two-sample t-tests performed with the formant data of each speaker (F1 values and F2 values were tested separately). By these criteria, only Speaker 4 displayed fully merged PIN and PEN word classes. However, the vowel plots are suggestive of partial merger and/ or merger undergoing change. Incidence of PIN/PEN merger outside the South is fairly rare, so the presence of this merger in my sample (though marginal) is evidence of some AAE patterning. It's unclear whether this merger is in progress, undergoing reversal, or simply not an important PAAE feature; these possibilities are further examined in Chapter 3.

Speaker 3 (Figure 2.2) displays a distinction in both dimensions for PIN/PEN.

Speaker 7 (Figure 2.3) may have a partial merger in production, as indicated by her vowel plot. Note that a t-test on her data found significant differences between PIN and PEN–these t-tests appear to be a fairly conservative statistical approach to this merger, given that I initially judged several of the speakers with significant differences in table 2.4 as sounding merged (specifically speakers 1, 6 and 8).

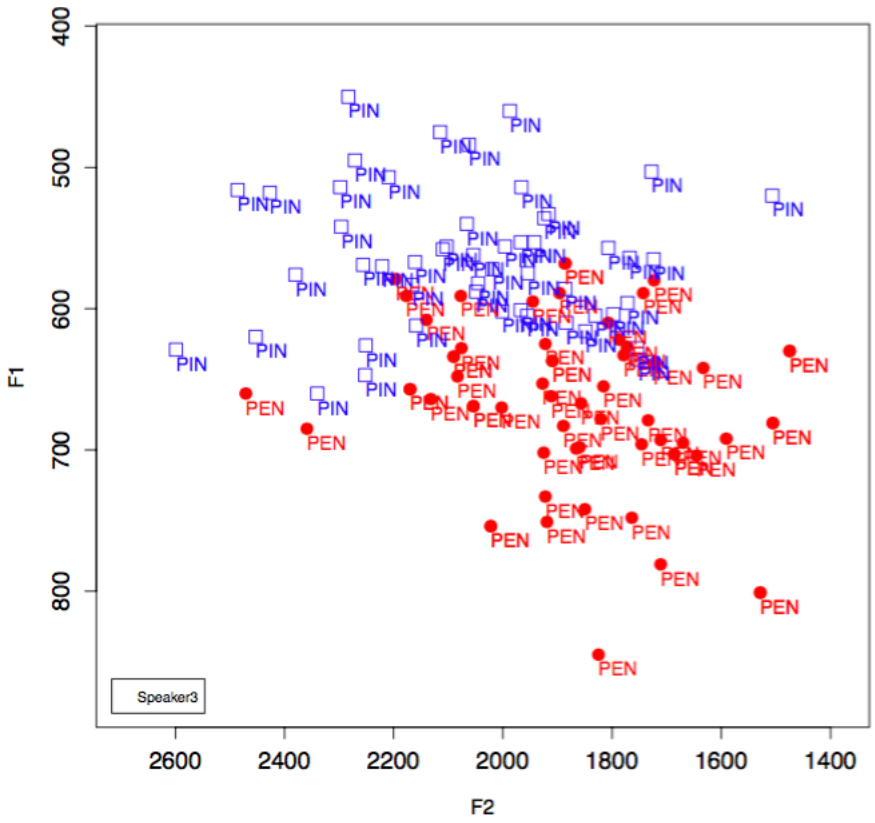

Figure 2.2: PIN/PEN vowel plot for Speaker 3, who displays a distinction

Speaker #	FEEL F1	FILL F1	F1 p-value	FEEL F2	FILL F2	F2 p-value
Speaker 2	442	528	2.91E-05*	2190	1852	0.003*
Speaker 3	466	513	0.463	2333	1769	0.024*
Speaker 4	547	581	0.575	2140	1789	0.117

Table 2.5: Means and t-test results for normalized FEEL/FILL F1 and F2 data sets by speaker. * indicates significant difference at a p <0.05 threshold.

2.2.3 FEEL/FILL merger

According to t-tests of both F1 and F2 values for each of the three speakers with more than 10 combined FEEL and FILL tokens (Table 2.5), only Speaker 4 (Figure 2.5) has fully merged FEEL and FILL classes. However, of the three, another (Speaker 3) doesn't have a distinction in F1 and her vowel plot (Figure 2.6) indicates she could have a partial or in-progress merger.

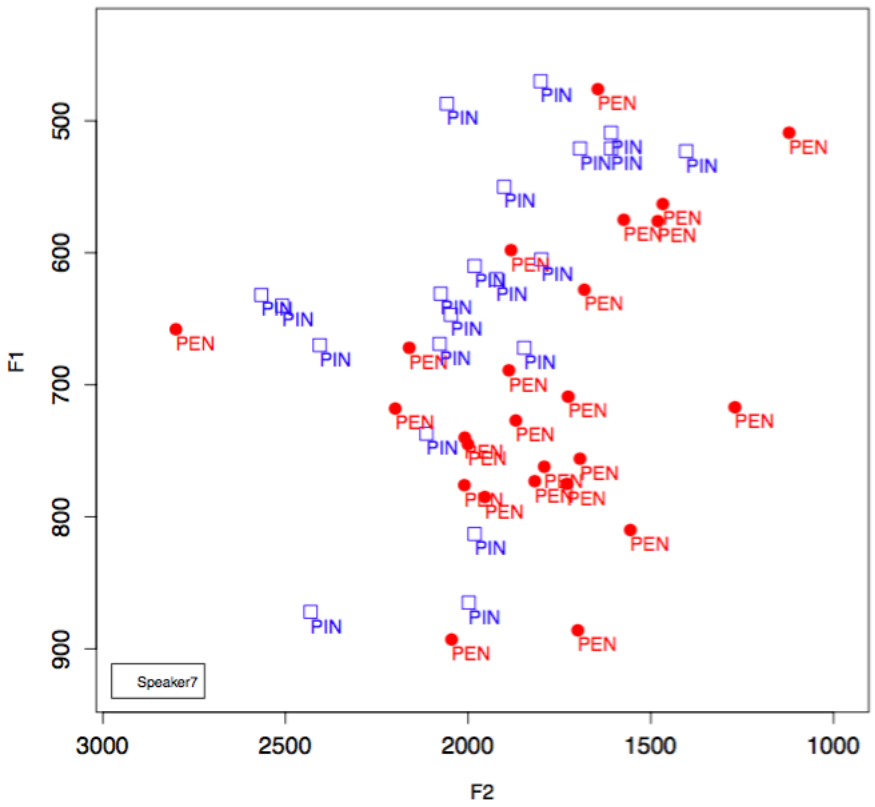

Figure 2.3: PIN/PEN vowel plot for Speaker 7, who is partially merged for pin/pen

2.2.4 /r/ vocalization

There are a few instances of vocalized /r/ in the speech of Speakers 1, 7, and 8 (refer to Table 2.2). Incidence of this variable is very low, however, which might be attributable to the interview setting, but is more likely a genuine reflection of /r/ vocalization's importance (or rather, lack thereof) in PAAE speakers' repertoires (an interpretation further developed in Chapter 3).

A linear regression model with speaker age, education, occupation, and contact level as factors was also fit to the /r/ data (N=277). Once again, only high school education predicts /r/ vocalization, meaning Speaker 1 is significantly more prone to use this variable.

Figure 2.7 shows a comparison of /r/ vocalization rates between the PAAE sample and other regions. The main takeaway is that /r/ vocalization is realized at highly variable rates in different communities even within one region, and not always in predictable ways. Even in the South, for instance, where /r/ vocalization has a long and robust history, there's no guarantee that a given AAE speech community will make

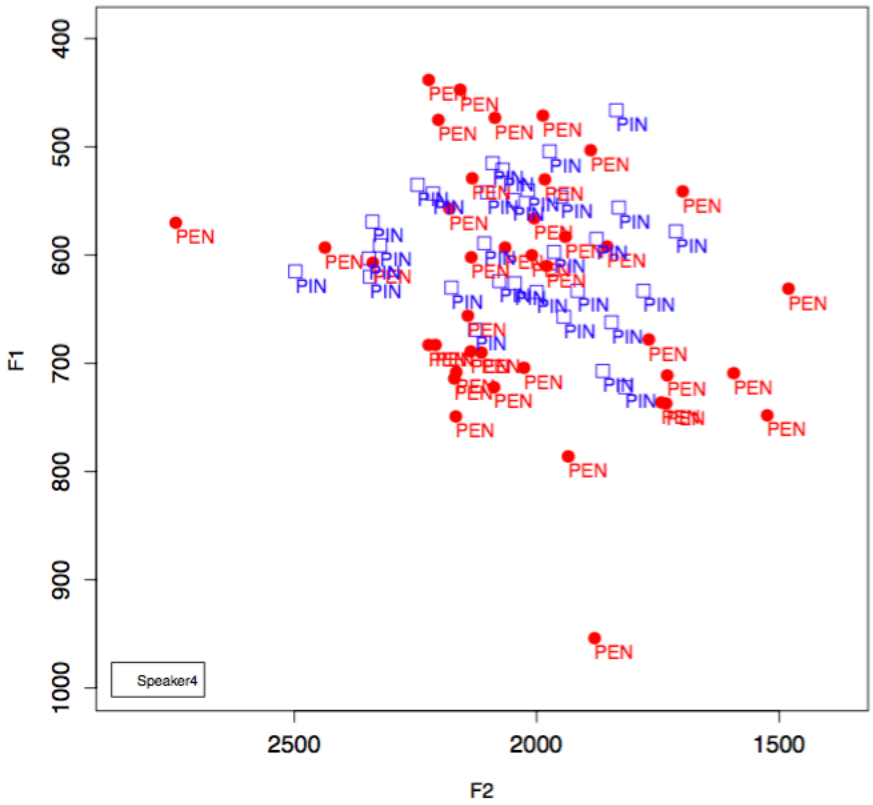

Figure 2.4: PIN/PEN vowel plot for Speaker 4, who is fully merged for pin/pen

much use of this variable.

The Davenport data is reported in Hinton and Pollock (2000), and was compiled from their averages for adult speakers. The NYC data is from Labov [1972a] and was pulled from Table 2.1, using the data reported for middle class adults in Harlem around 1968. The Texana and Princeville data are both reported in Wolfram [2007] and are estimated averages over the three reported age groups.

2.2.5 Qualitative Phonological Observations

Unquantified phonological observations cannot be used for direct comparisons to other variationist AAE studies, but are certainly useful for verifying the presence or absence of known AAE variables in the sample. The variables listed here are notable for their divergence from the regional white variant, and in all cases listed here, also from the speaker's own usual production (in the data set reported on here). Their status as AAE variables is assumed on the basis of the review by Thomas (2007) except where noted. However, some of these are not previously reported AAE variables, and are

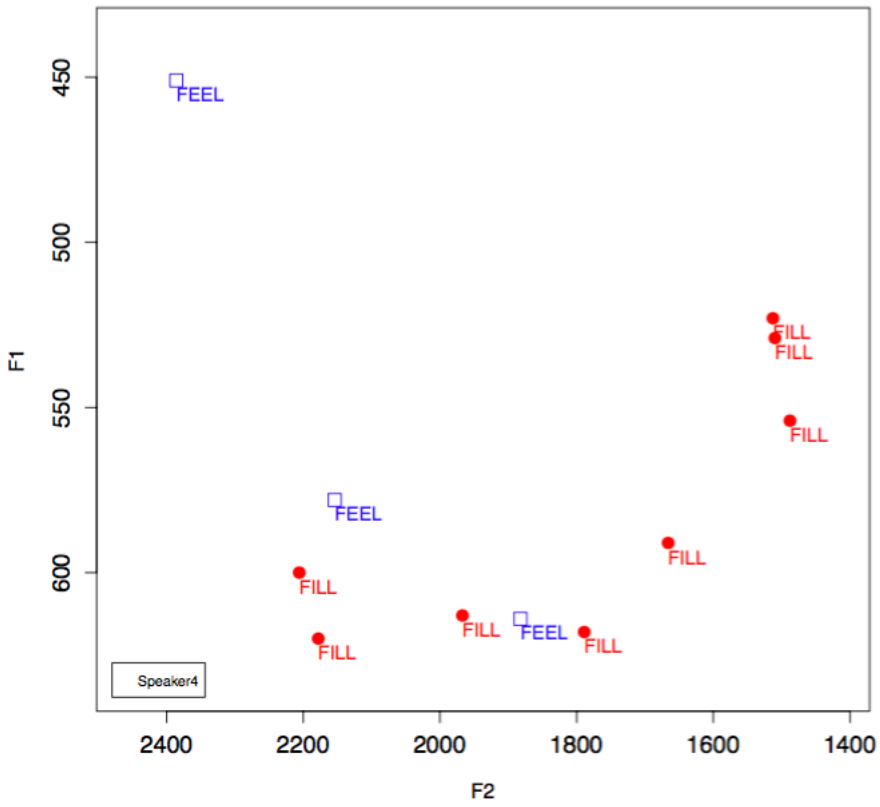

Figure 2.5: FEEL/FILL vowel plot for Speaker 4, showing evidence of merger.

discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

1. Post-/ θ/ r-lessness: Speaker 1 displays this feature, unique to AAE (Thomas, 2007).

2. θ & ð labialization: The realization of SAE /θ/ and /ð/ as the corresponding labial fricative (f or v). Speakers 4 and 8 show examples of the / θ/ → [f] rule, for example [bof] *both*.

3. Final consonant cluster simplification: the absence of stops in word-final clusters, for example [pæs] past; [hol] hold. All the speakers in my sample display some degree of this variable, as indeed do most American English speakers. The more AAE-marked (and, in particular, low SES AAE-marked) extension of the conditioning environment is application of the simplification rule when the following sound is a vowel (as in [pæs əˈnʌðəˇ haus] *past another house*). Speakers 1, 6, and 8 robustly display this pattern.

4. Voiced stop glottalization: In AAE varieties, morpheme-final / b/ , / d/ , and

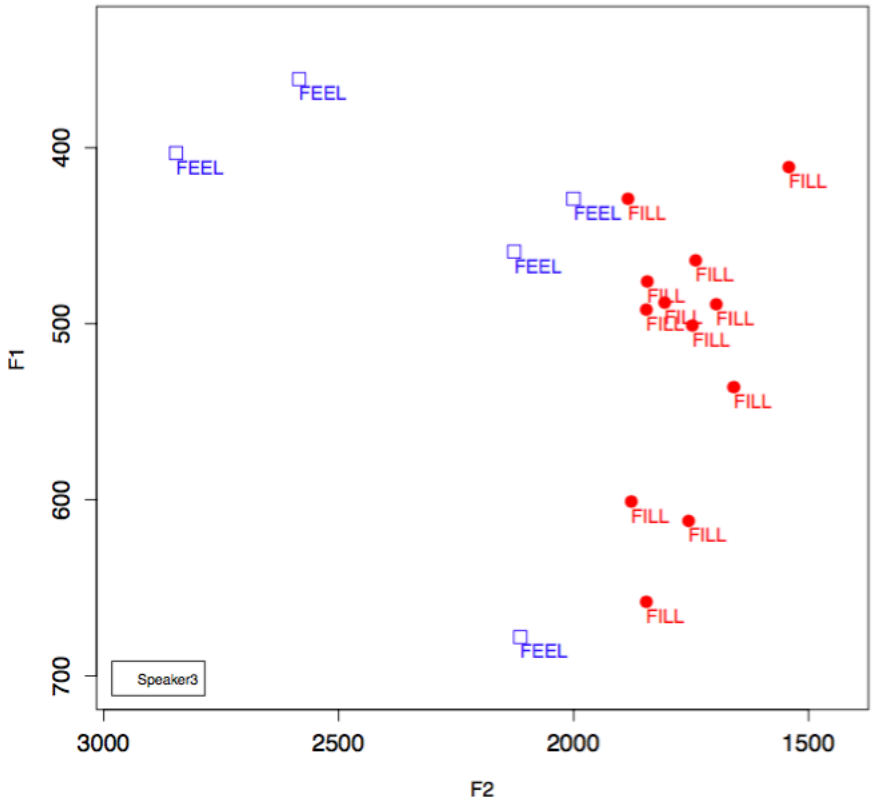

Figure 2.6: FEEL/FILL vowel plot for Speaker 3, showing some evidence of merger in F1.

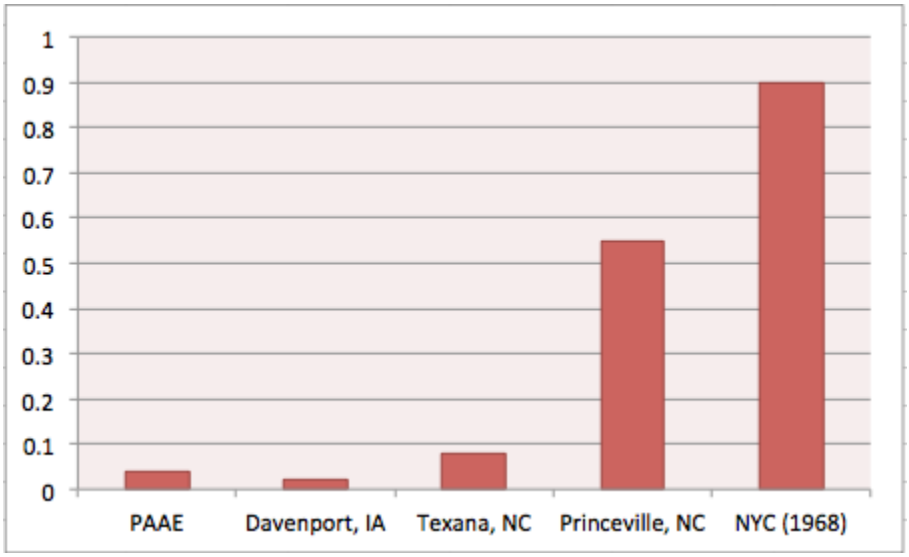

Figure 2.7: Rates of /r/ vocalization across regions

/ g/ can undergo devoicing, usually accompanied by glottalization, often fully subsuming the articulation of the stop (for example, [ˈdɪʔn̥t˺] *didn't*). Speakers 6 and 8 showed evidence of this phenomenon.

5. Aspirated medial / t/ : This refers to the release and aspiration of / t/ in word-medial positions (canonically, / t/ is only aspirated in word-initial position or at the beginning of a stressed syllable in American English) (Zue and Laferriere, 1979). For example, [əˈbɪlɪ˭tʰi] *ability*. Speakers 4 and 6 each show multiple instances of aspirated medial / t/ .

6. Fricative release / t/ : the release of / t/ into an alveolar sibilant – / t/ → [ts]. This phenomenon is only displayed by speaker 4.

2.2.6 Morphosyntactic Observations

Like the preceding section, this is an inventory of non-standard features present to any noticeable degree in the sample. Even more restricted than the non-quantified phonological features, these morphosyntactic rules are evidenced by only a few occurrences in the transcripts (generally 2-5 per speaker or less). This is notably less than in, for example, Labov's (1972a) data, but is not at all unexpected given the context of the conversation (see discussion in chapter 3).

1. Existential "it": speakers of AAE varieties variably use "it" as an existential quantifier, as in "it's a lot of people in here." Speakers 4 and 7 have examples of this in their transcripts.

2. Preterite/ perfect leveling: this is my chosen term for a phenomenon somewhat reminiscent of Rickford and Rafal (1996); the examples in my data do sometimes communicate a preterite meaning via had + V. This variable, though, is the use of the preterite verb form in had + V constructions cases where SAE has distinct preterite and past perfect verb forms, for example "I had went to. . . ." (cf. "I had gone to"). Speaker 3 has numerous instances of this variable.

3. Copula absence: Copula absence is a phenomenon by which present tense conjugated copula forms are optional (for example, "she a doctor" or "he tall" are grammatical in some AAE varieties). This is a feature unique to AAE among world Englishes (unless one considers English-based creoles members of this category) (Rickford et al., 1991). Only Speaker 8's transcripts show unambiguous examples of this.

Speaker #	Age	/ay/ % m.	/r/ % const.	PIN/PEN merger?	FEEL/FILL merger?	Other phonological features	Other morphosyntactic features
Speaker 5	20	0.44	1	No	No data		
Speaker 7	20	0.35	0.97	Both marginal	No data		Existential "it"
Speaker 3	21	0.45	1	No	F1 only	preterite/perfect leveling	
Speaker 2	22	0.25	1	No	No		
Speaker 8	22	0.43	0.87	F1 only	No data	th labialization; final cluster simplification; +voi stop glottalization	Copula absence; negative concord
Speaker 4	26	0.37	1	Yes	Yes	th labialization; aspirated medial t; fricative release t	Existential "it"
Speaker 6	38	0.34	1	No	No data	final cluster simplification; +voi stop glottalization; aspirated medial t	
Speaker 1	55	0.62	0.82	F1 only	No data	post-th r-lessness; final cluster simplification	

Table 2.6: PAAE feature rates and descriptions by speaker age.

Speaker #	Education	/ay/ % m.	/r/ % const.	PIN/PEN merger?	FEEL/FILL merger?	Other phonological features	Other morphosyntactic features
Speaker 4	Advanced Degree	0.37	1	Yes	Yes	th labialization; aspirated medial t; fricative release t	Existential "it"
Speaker 6	Advanced Degree	0.34	1	No	No data	final cluster simplification; +voi stop glottalization; aspirated medial t	
Speaker 2	College	0.25	1	No	No		
Speaker 3	College	0.45	1	No	F1 only	preterite/perfect leveling	
Speaker 5	College	0.44	1	No	No data		
Speaker 7	College	0.35	0.97	Both marginal	No data		Existential "it"
Speaker 8	College	0.43	0.87	F1 only	No data	th labialization; final cluster simplification; +voi stop glottalization	Copula absence; negative concord
Speaker 1	HS	0.62	0.82	F1 only	No data	post-th r-lessness; final cluster simplification	

Table 2.7: PAAE feature rates and descriptions by speaker education.

4. Negative concord: Matrix negation can be spelled out on the main verb and one or more internal phrase boundaries, as in "he didn't (n)ever want to put (no) work in." (cf. SAE "he didn't ever want to put any work in"). This is a feature present in many socially stigmatized varieties of English, including AAE (Labov, 1972b). Negative concord is present in Speaker 8's interview data.

2.3 Social Conditioning

There don't appear to be any trends in the rates of my quantified variables in Table 2.6, but interestingly, there's a modest pattern with regard to the unquantified phonological variables. Older speakers appear to have richer inventories of AAE phonology. Of course, only two speakers can be argued to belong to an older generation, so this is by no means a well supported finding. But if further studies were to confirm this pattern, it would raise questions about the loss of distinctively AAE phonology over apparent time.

There appears to be a moderate trend in Table 2.7 with regard to /ay/ monophthongization. The two speakers with graduate-level education are on the lower end of the range (compare Speakers 4 and 6's 0.37 and 0.34 to the sample average of 0.41).

Speaker #	/ay/ % m.	/r/ % const.	PIN/PEN merger?	FEEL/FILL merger?	Other phonological features	Other morphosyntactic features
Speaker 2	0.25	1	No	No		
Speaker 6	0.34	1	No	No data	final cluster simplification; +voi stop glottalization; aspirated medial t	
Speaker 7	0.35	0.97	Both marginal	No data		Existential "it"
Speaker 4	0.37	1	Yes	Yes	th labialization; aspirated medial t; fricative release t	Existential "it"
Speaker 8	0.43	0.87	F1 only	No data	th labialization; final cluster simplification; +voi stop glottalization	Copula absence; negative concord
Speaker 5	0.44	1	No	No data		
Speaker 3	0.45	1	No	F1 only	preterite/perfect leveling	
Speaker 1	0.62	0.82	F1 only	No data	post-th r-lessness; final cluster simplification	

Table 2.8: PAAE feature rates and descriptions by rate of /ay/ monophthongization.

The speaker with the least higher education is on the very highest extreme of the range (Speaker 1 at 0.62). The small numbers in each of these categories make it hard to make definitive claims, but this trend seems to align with the idea that more middle class and upwardly mobile AAE speakers minimize their use of marked AAE features.

Table 2.8 illustrates a moderate clustering of PIN/PEN and FEEL/FILL mergers in high-/ay/ monophthongizing speakers. That is, speakers who have higher rates of /ay/ monophthongization are more likely to have the conditioned mergers that I've analyzed. This pattern is consistent with my assertion that these three variables are part of an AAE ethnolinguistic repertoire, given (as I note above in section 1.2.2) that AAE-associated variables tend to cluster together within speakers and styles or registers.

Chapter 3

Discussion

3.1 Hypotheses

My hypothesis (refer to section 1.8) on /ay/ monophthongization in the Portland sample was that it would be present but at low rates, and possibly absent in middle class and/ or upwardly mobile speakers.

The data show a much more robust pattern of monophthongization than I anticipated. My sample mean for rate of /ay/ monophthongization exceeded that of Fridland (2003)'s Memphis sample, which is notable given that /ay/ monophthongization is available to speakers of all ethnicities in Memphis and there's no evidence this is so in Oregon (Labov et al., 2005). This may seem surprising, but if PAAE speakers are invested in signaling their ethnic identity, /ay/ monophthongization is a resource that can accomplish this in the Northwest, whereas it's not (categorically) racially distinctive in the South (of course, distinguishable rates and conditioning environments can be). This might lend the feature greater potential for identity construction, suggesting a process reminiscent of Anderson (2002)'s thesis that Black Detroiters are extending the monophthongization of /ay/ to pre-voiceless environments in order to reinforce a distinction between themselves and white Southerners. In the Portland case, it's sufficient that white Portlanders don't do /ay/ monophthongization at all – and therefore it could become a marker of Black Portland speech.

Similarly, /r/ vocalization was predicted to be low or absent in PAAE. This hypothesis proved to be more accurate than the previous one, with only three speakers out of eight showing any /r/ vocalization, and even then at rates from 3-18%. Still, the fact that the overall rate (4%) is comparable to the Davenport and Texana numbers reported in Figure 2.2.4 – and the fact that /r/ vocalization is present in PAAE at all – show that postvocalic /r/ in PAAE is not "diverging" wholesale from other regional

AAEs. The North Carolina numbers reported in Wolfram (2007), in fact, show the potential for very low rates of /r/ vocalization even in East Coast areas where the Black populations in question have a longer local history than Portland's.[1]

Incidence of PIN/PEN and FEEL/FILL mergers is, as mentioned in Chapter 2, reliably high in the South as well as in many regional AAEs. Labov et al. (2005) found high incidence (25/ 29 participants) of FEEL/FILL merger among African Americans in non-South regions, although notably none of these areas were in the Northwest. Based on this and scant other data on FEEL/FILL in the Northwest, I didn't initially formulate a hypothesis regarding this merger's position in PAAE. I only investigated it once I found auditory evidence of the FEEL/FILL merger in my data. Partly as a result of this, I only had the data to assess Speakers 2, 3, and 4 for the merger. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Speaker 4 certainly is merged and Speaker 3 has some evidence of merger.

A relevant theoretical question here is whether maintenance of the merger or the acquisition of a distinction (in line with the norm for white West coast speakers) indicate, respectively, an active ethnically distinctive variable vs. assimilation.

The answer depends on whether this merger is 1. truly distinctive of African Americans in this region and 2. is perceived as such by at least some portion of the population. I don't have the data to address 2. here, but given that 9/ 53 white Telsur speakers from non-South regions also display this merger, there's reason to doubt its facility for marking ethnicity. It's of course significant that Labov et al. (2005) call this a merger in progress. On this account, the novel merger began in the South and is spreading across the rest of the U.S. – more quickly among Black Americans than whites. This feature's presence in PAAE (though only speaker 4 unambiguously has it) is perhaps reflective of a common trajectory with other AAE speech communities, whether or not we are presently comfortable calling it an ethnolectal variable.

As mentioned in section 1.8, PIN/PEN is more definitively unique to AAE speakers in the North. Labov et al. (2005)'s data demonstrates that outside the South, white Americans categorically do not have the PIN/PEN merger, while Black Americans in the Telsur data display PIN/PEN merger robustly "at all social levels" even outside the South. This led me to expect some incidence of the merger in my data, although since only 75% of Black speakers in the South had it (Labov et al., 2005), I expected a minority of my participants to be fully merged in production.

[1]This is true whether one counts from the turn of the century Black downtown era (when the Black population of Portland was less than 1%) or from the Vanport era in the 1940s-50s, which seems more relevant to the history of PAAE.

This is in fact the case. It is possible that this is a merger in progress in most or all regional AAE systems (as evidenced in Labov et al. (2005)) that has spread less quickly in the Northwest than other regions. As Labov et al. (2005) point out, it is not the case that all and only AAE speakers outside the South exhibit this merger. The data here are consistent with this interpretation.

Another possibility is that this feature is age-graded. In this scenario, African American migrants to Portland (largely coming from the South in the 1940s and 50s) mostly had this merger, and rates of the merger have since trended downwards with each successive generation. The data here don't speak to that hypothesis, given the uneven age breakdown of the sample, although the oldest speaker in the sample (Speaker 1) does have some evidence of this merger. Interestingly, the three speaker whose parents are from the South (Speakers 4, 6, an 8) seem to have a higher incidence of PIN/PEN merger than the sample average.

While the PIN/PEN merger is unique to AAE speakers outside the South, its significance in the framework of an AAE ethnolect is less well studied than the first two variables. Given evidence of a change in progress and its directionality, I might have more to say about what it would mean for dialect convergence/ divergence.

3.2 Discussion of Individual Profiles

Portland is a unique place to study AAE because lower-SES Black residents don't seem to be any more isolated from speakers of other ethnicities than are middle class African Americans. This is not to say residential segregation does not exist. However, reports of inter-ethnic social relationships by participants do not differ much by SES. Rates of my variables correspond reasonably well with socioeconomic status, taking into account Speakers 2 and 6's low level of contact with other AAE speakers during their adolescence (see the following section for a more detailed discussion of the socioeconomic status of several participants). They do not appear to be predicted by degree of contact with whites, although an approximation of Ash and Myhill (1986)'s method of quantifying this was not attempted.

Speaker 4, who largely grew up in poverty, is in the bottom half of the sample for /ay/ monophthongization and has no evidence of /r/ vocalization. Given that she and Speaker 1 are from the lowest SES backgrounds, it's significant that Speaker 4 is the only one fully merged for both FEEL/FILL and PIN/PEN, and Speaker 1 is marginal for PIN/PEN. Of all four variables, these two seem to correlate most closely with SES, taking into account that Speakers 2 and 6 – also of lower-SES backgrounds

– had the least amount of contact with other AAE speakers in adolescence.

/ay/ seems to be the most sensitive to the present communicative worlds of the speakers. Speakers 4 and 7, both of whom have evidence of PIN/PEN merger (Speaker 7 also shows /r/ vocalization), have among the lower rates of /ay/ monophthongization.

Speaker 4 has a postsecondary degree and works in an office of similarly educated professionals, most of whom are white. She reports consciously adjusting her speech in the context of her workplace, a shift in style that likely applies to my interview with her as well. Speaker 7 is majoring in communications, and expressed interest in going into broadcast journalism. It's possible that these speakers are, consciously or not, decreasing their /ay/ monophthongization in reaction to perceived stigma or to construct a more formal or professional persona.

Speaker 4's speech data is an interesting case to examine in more detail. She is quintessentially "upwardly mobile." Based on her background information (see section 2.1.2, it seems likely that Speaker 4 would have access to a fairly complete repertoire of PAAE variables, but would minimize the more AAE-marked and/ or stigmatized features in this set. This prediction fits with the characterization of /ay/ monophthongization and /r/ vocalization as the most marked phonological features described here – Speaker 4 has low rates of both. These predictions about Speaker 4 are also reinforced by the notion that marked morphosyntactic features are avoided by middle class and/ or upwardly mobile AAE speakers (Britt and Weldon, 2015) – she has one example of existential "it" in her transcript, but no other morphosyntactic features of AAE.

Speaker 4 also mentions her academic motivation and focus on school numerous times in her responses and self-presentation. She constructs her past self as a bookish kid through her narration, and notes that this quality caused some trouble socializing with other Black students at Jefferson, her (predominantly Black) high school: she recalls classmates calling her "white girl" and being unable to use the "slang" that she identified with the popular students. This intellectual bent seems to be important to Speaker 4's identity, and something that she has been looking for a space for in her social world since adolescence. Speaker 4 also displays some linguistic practices that reinforce this identity or persona. Notably, she repeatedly produces the aspirated medial /t/ mentioned in Chapter 2, which is an example of "hyperstandardness," a defining trait of the language of "nerd girls" (Bucholtz, 1999).

An interesting and potentially related (though less well studied) phonological feature is the fricative release /t/ also mentioned in Chapter 2. The context of this

variable within the interview leads me to speculate that it's doing some stance and identity management work. For instance, when discussing applying to colleges:

> Speaker 4: I applied to [t^{s}u] – really my two choices, it came down to Hampton university, it was in Virginia. Hampton, Virginia. It was a HBCU, it was out of Oregon, and I wanted to go there. Like, academically challenging, private institution, like that was what I wanted to do.

Speaker 4's stance here isn't exactly defensive, but it's certainly authoritative; she's contextualizing my impression of how she ended up going to college in Oregon. Her first choice, Hampton, was "academically challenging" as well as being a historically Black university – a setting that would allow Speaker 4 to fully inhabit an intellectual identity in a predominantly Black space. She deems this worth telling me about even though she didn't end up going there, a demonstration of what she valued in her application process. And in the course of this description, her style is not at all hyperstandard. In fact, she uses the non-standard leveled variant of a/ an "a HBCU" (cf. "an HBCU") right in middle of it, and the variable at hand – fricative release /t/ – at the beginning. What do we make of this?

In my view, this variable is a non-standard form marked for ethnicity and likely gender, which Speaker 4 uses in parallel to her elaboration of her "nerd" values. The effect for me as her interlocutor was a recasting of how she had previously narrated her Blackness, femaleness and intellectuality. Navigating the intersection of these parts of her identity had been marked by conflict in her adolescence, but she clearly does not see these parts of herself as contradictory – on the contrary, she expresses an inseparably multiplex intellectual Black woman identity through a dense, but effortless, interweaving of styles and content.

Speaker 1 can be assumed to have had a high level of exposure to both AAE-speaking and non-AAE-speaking peers in his youth. In his adulthood, particularly in the past ten years, he has devoted much of his time to independently researching the history of Portland's Black community, and restoring displays and landmarks pertaining to Portland Black history. This investment in the Black community's past and future, and/ or his age and SES (he's also the oldest speaker in the sample) may explain his exceptionally high /ay/ monophthongization and /r/ vocalization rates.

From this and the preceding review, I tentatively conclude that PAAE's feature matrix is similar to those reported in Thomas (2007). /ay/ monophthongization is part of my whole sample's ethnolinguistic repertoire, and /r/ vocalization and the PIN/PEN merger seem to have this status for at least some of them.

3.3 A Repertoire Approach to PAAE

A Labovian, first-wave variationist approach would find plenty of interest in my data, particularly the stratified rates of /ay/ monophthongization. Such an approach would look for demographic patterns in these monophthongization rates, for instance. As Table 2.8 shows, this interpretation isn't without merit. A Labovian reader might note that speakers with lower levels of education tend to use more /ay/ monophthongization, and the inverse is also true. The less educated, lower-SES speakers in my sample might fall under Labov's (1972a) definition of core speakers, which predicts that their rates of AAE variables will be high.

But there are a few ways in which this interpretation misses the full picture my data paints. For one, the less educated and/or more monophthong-prone speakers in my sample show no trend towards less contact with white speakers, another criterion for the core speaker designation. In fact, the low variance in my contact measure and its high mean seem to indicate that contact with white speakers won't have much predictive power at all. And if none of my speakers can be characterized as isolated from white social contacts, how are they using such high rates of an AAE variable like /ay/?

Not only are they using /ay/ monopthongization, my PAAE participants do so more than many speakers of other regional AAEs. They also have very different combinations of features, both phonological and morphosyntactic. This is inconsistent with a first wave prediction about speakers with uniform levels of contact with whites.

So, a first wave approach isn't well equipped to capture these data. A more ethnographic, second wave approach would try to ascertain what social categories are relevant in the speech community in question–Portland's Black community. This approach gives us a way to foreground the local meanings of features and styles. I can't claim to have done real ethnographic work, but the data do seem to indicate a locally distinctive repertoire.

An indexical, ethnolinguistic repertoire approach gives us a mechanism to connect social meanings to the sample's feature sets. Using the repertoire model (Benor, 2010), we can look at social meaning in interaction, without just positing new fixed identity categories (and I hope to have done so in the preceding section).

So what makes a variable like /ay/ monophthongization good for constructing ethnically specific meaning in interaction? One reason is that it's not as stigmatized as some morphosyntactic variables might be. However, white speakers in the community don't typically use it, so it's almost categorically ethnically distinctive. PAAE

speakers may want to participate without undue censure in white social space, while still marking themselves as distinctly Black. The indexical potential of /ay/ for this kind of meaning is well documented. Black Detroiters appear to have extended the phonological conditioning environment of /ay/ monophthongization to distinguish their speech from white Southern speech (Anderson, 2002). And Rahman (2007) notes that Black standup comics use diphthongal /ay/ when performing white or "establishment" characters, and more monophthongs when voicing "authentic" and relatably Black characters.

Conclusion

The rates of /ay/ monophthongization, /r/ vocalization, and PIN/PEN merger present in the data here are evidence that the array of distinctive features in the sample constitutes an alignment with AAE. The mergers specifically may indicate recent influence of Southern AAE. As Speaker 6 mentioned, many middle-aged Black Portlanders (as well as Speaker 4 in my sample) are "first generation Oregonians" whose parents came from the South. If this is so, the degree to which Black Portlanders are "un-merging" PIN and PEN may not indicate a disidentification with AAE as a whole, but rather a more Portland-centered local identity.

The position of /ay/ monophthongization is especially interesting. PAAE may be a speech community in which a local AAE is responding to the overwhelmingly white public social space around it by using an AAE feature that is *not* categorically ethnically distinctive in the South, but *is* in the Northwest. As evidence for this, we see higher rates of /ay/ monophthongization in PAAE than in some Southern AAEs.

My data appears not to support Labov (2010)'s hypothesis that more contact with white speakers will lead to the loss of AAE features. Certainly some AAE features are being depressed or lost, but there's reason to believe that Portland AAE speakers are very often invested in marking their ethnic identity through language. Benor (2010) gives me better tools to understand the PAAE data, focusing on profiles of variables taken together within and among speakers. As I've said and reviewed in Chapter 2, rates of indexically meaningful variables are extremely plastic within speech communities and within speakers, especially AAE variables across regions. Perhaps the study of AAE more generally could stand to focus less on intra-sample rate comparisons in favor or more analysis of which features are present for most or all speakers in a community, and which seem to be distributed in socially meaningful ways.

Most of my speakers reported that Black folks in Portland had no distinctive way of speaking compared to other Black Americans. Many also mentioned that Black Americans from other regions said Black Portlanders sounded "proper" or

"white." This would seem to indicate some loss of distinctive features, and I do in fact demonstrate an exceptionally low incidence of morphosyntactic variables of AAE. This should be taken with a grain of salt, however, given the social context of the interviews.

To the extent that this discussion accurately reflects my participants' conception of their own language variety (or non-variety), it seems that Black Portlanders have some unique demands on their identity construction. What if sounding like a local in Portland's Black community means you sound less "Black" – or perhaps just less casual or friendly – to other Black Americans?

This situation would predict a tremendous amount of intraspeaker variation according to the social situation, which might be a rewarding thread of further research. On this subject, it would also be valuable to investigate the extent to which Black Portlanders participate in the low-back merger (Labov et al., 2005) and TRAP-backing associated with the California Vowel Shift, also evident in Portland (Becker et al., 2015).

To restate Wolfram (2001), "the uniqueness of AAE lies more in the particular array of structures that comprises the variety than it does in the restricted set of potentially unique structures (336)."

I hope I've begun to explain some of the ways in which PAAE surfaces in speakers' construction of local and racial identity. Sometimes they may conflict, sometimes one subsumes the other – but certainly PAAE represents a novel description of communicative competence in AAE, grounded in place and the social alignments of its speakers.

Appendix A

Vowel Plots by Speaker

As mentioned in section 2.1.3, vowel formant data was normalized by FAVE according to the parameters outlined in Lobanov (1971). These plots were created in Norm from this normalized formant data. Means of F1 and F2 are plotted for monophthongs; representation of glides used F1 and F2 measures from 50% and 80% of the vowel's duration.

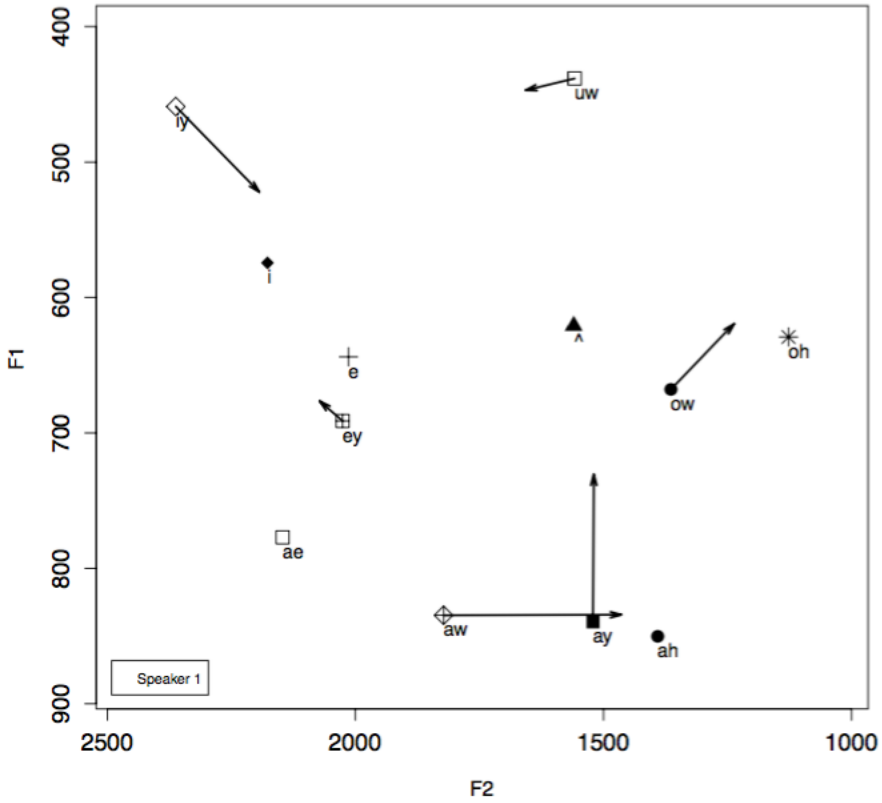

Figure A.1: Vowel Plot for Speaker 1

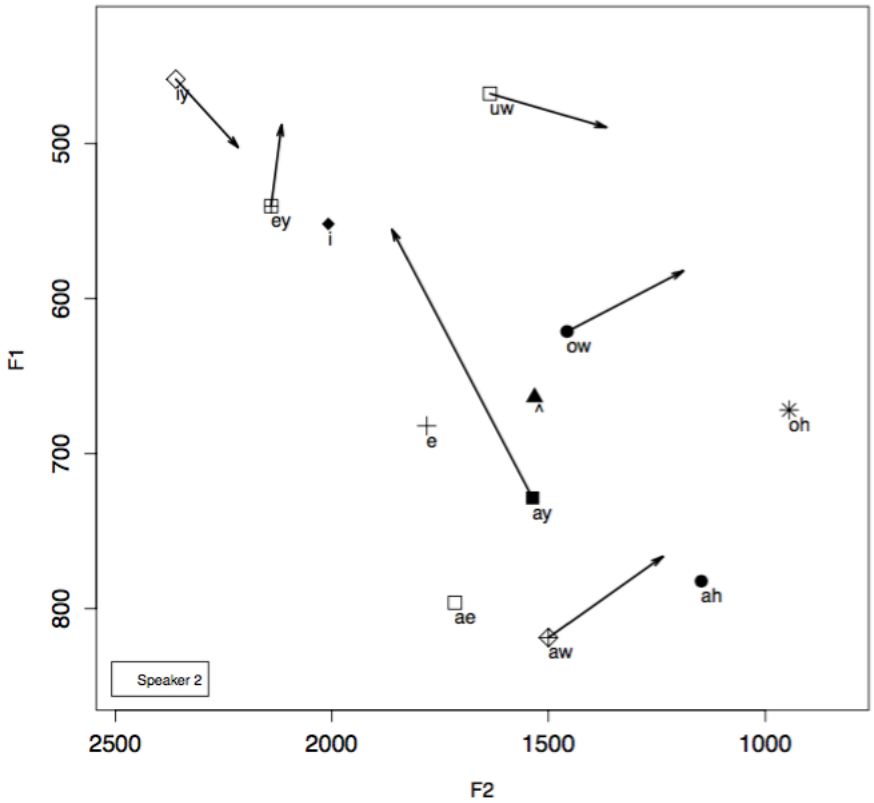

Figure A.2: Vowel Plot for Speaker 2

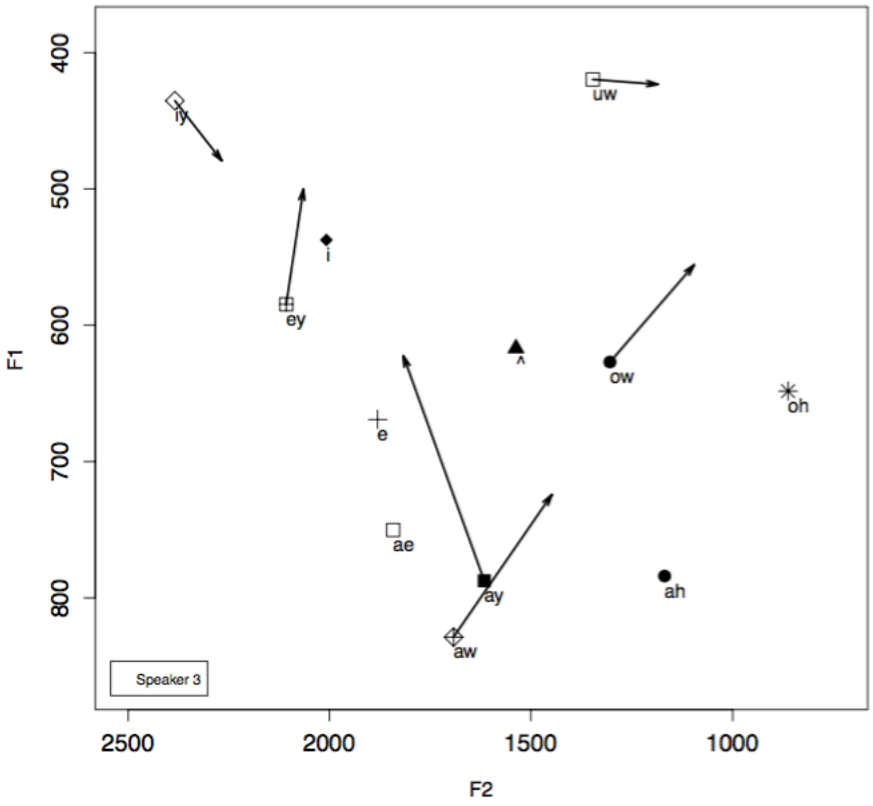

Figure A.3: Vowel Plot for Speaker 3

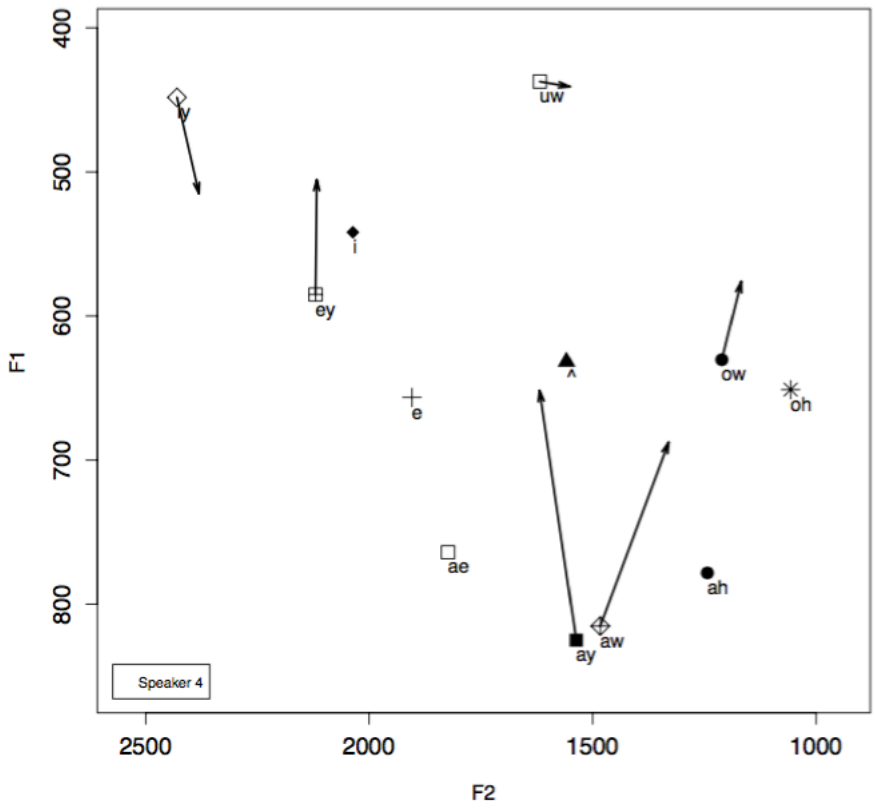

Figure A.4: Vowel Plot for Speaker 4

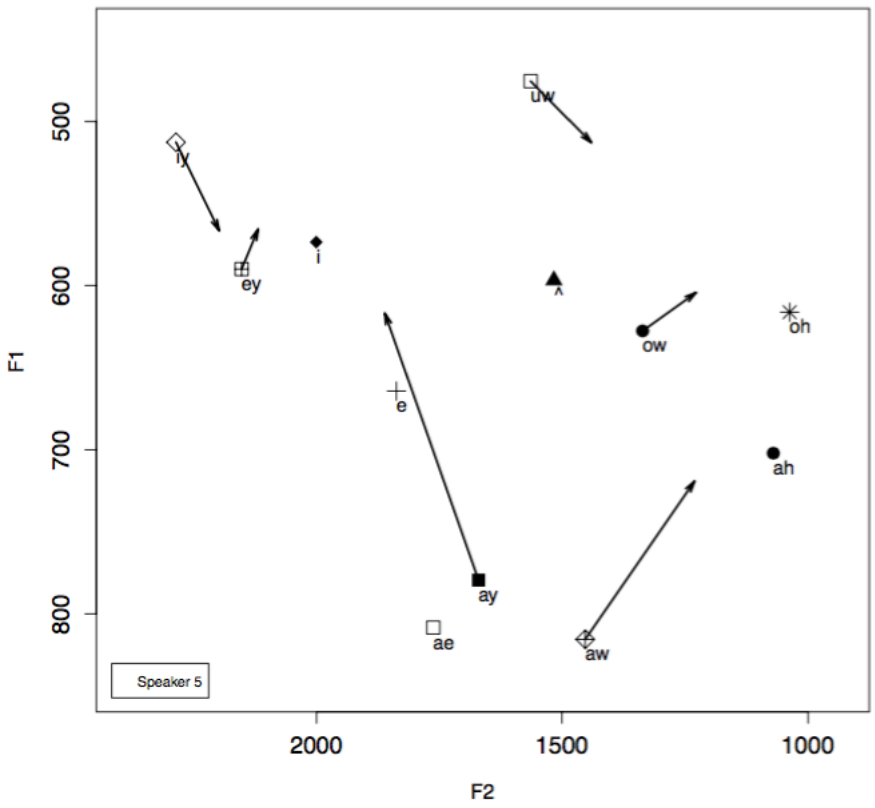

Figure A.5: Vowel Plot for Speaker 5

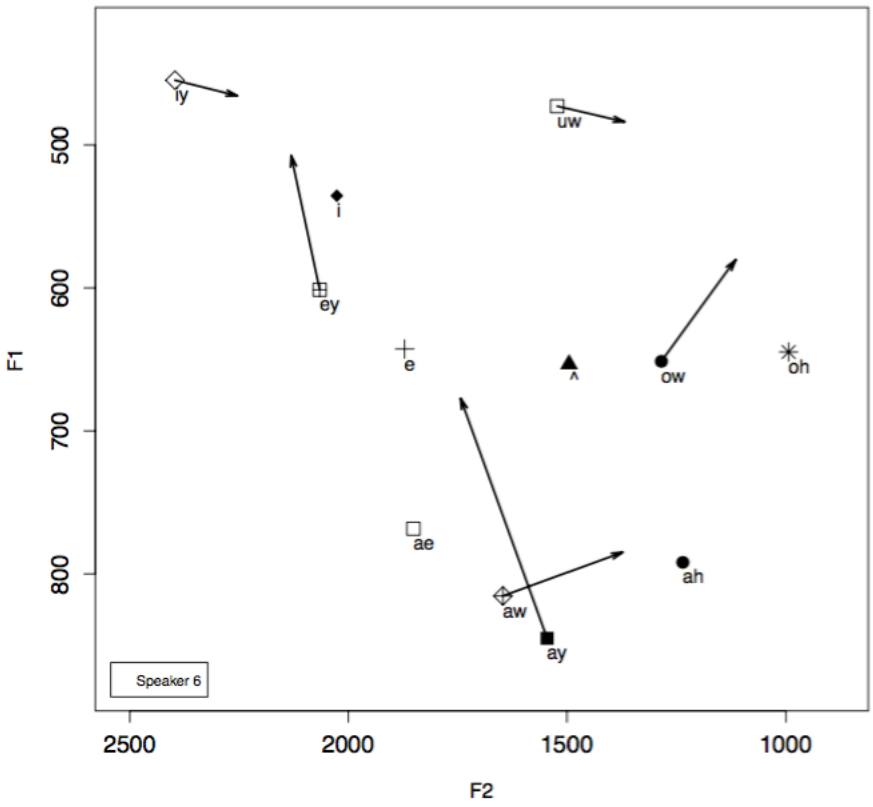

Figure A.6: Vowel Plot for Speaker 6

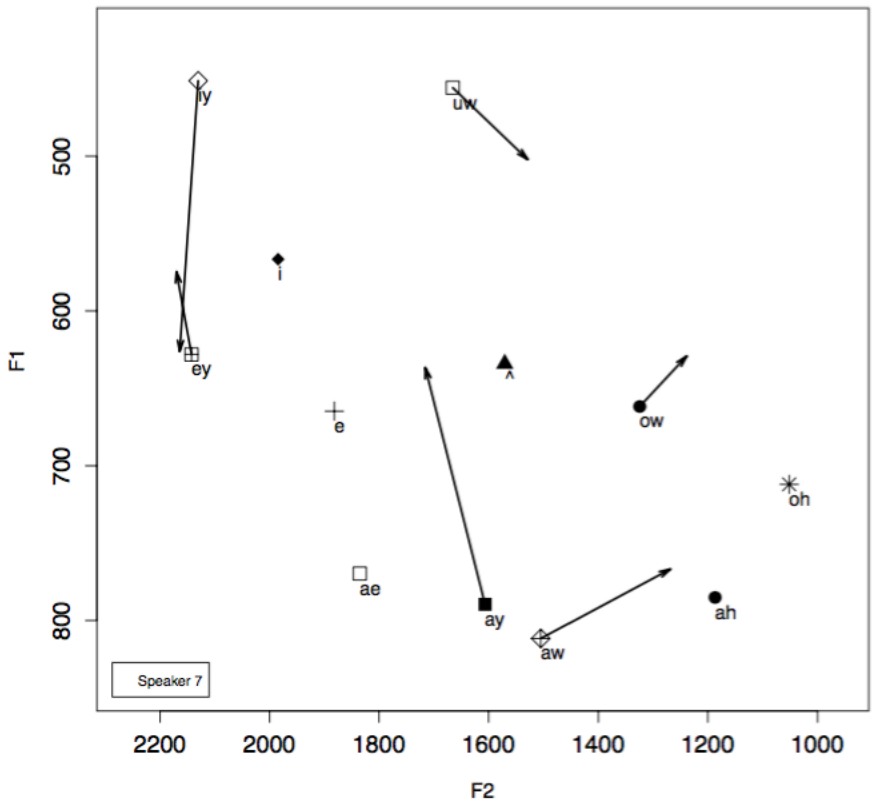

Figure A.7: Vowel Plot for Speaker 7

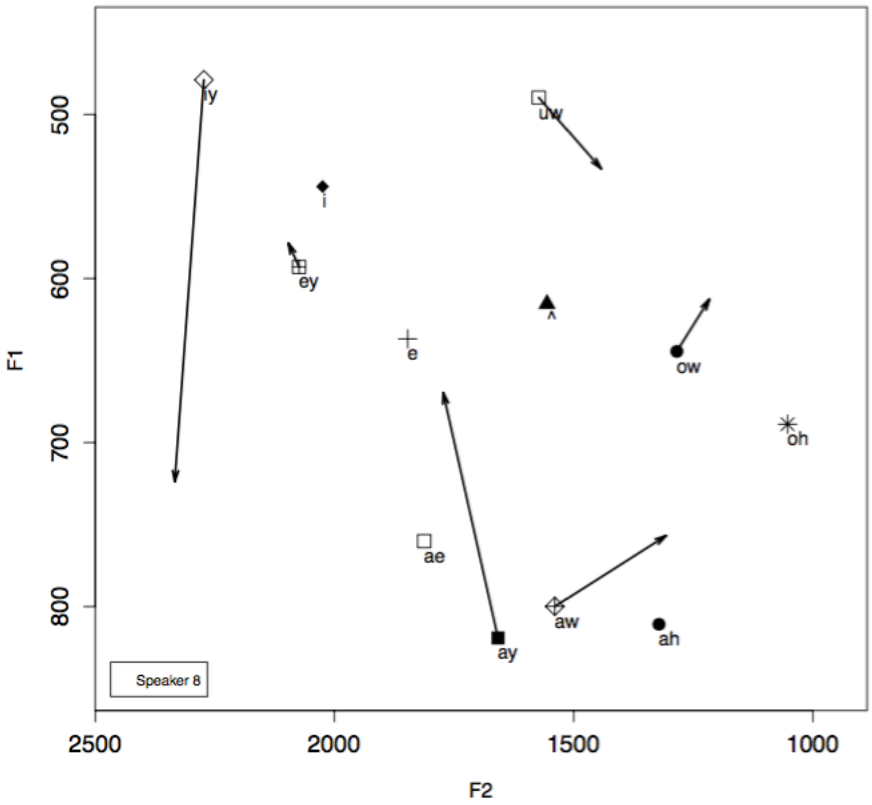

Figure A.8: Vowel Plot for Speaker 8

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