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Appeals to semiotic registers in ethno-metapragmatic accounts of variation

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Abstract

Discussions of folklinguistic accounts of language use are frequently focused on dismissing them because of their limitations. As a result, not a lot is written regarding how such accounts are done and how they ‘work’. This article examines how folklinguistic evaluations are achieved in interaction, particularly through appeals to semiotic registers (Agha 2007). It describes how in explaining their beliefs regarding linguistic variation, speakers frequently produce *voicings* with varying transparency. These rely on understandings of the social world and bring large collections of linguistic resources into play. They offer rich insights if analytic attention is given to their details because even when evaluating a single variant, whole ways of speaking, and even being, may be utilized. The paper explores in turn how analysis reveals the inseparability of variants, understandings of context and audience, the relationship between linguistic forms and social types, and the performance of social types via the evaluation of semiotic resources. In each section, discussion is grounded in extracts from interviews on Australian English with speakers of this variety of English. Cumulatively they show the primacy of semiotic registers in ethno-metapragmatic accounts.

Keywords: *enregisterment, voicings, identities, discourse analysis, Australian English*

1. Introduction

Comment on language from non-linguists has frequently been placed at the margin of linguistics, problematized as data because of its apparent lack of accuracy and evaluative loading, both contravening commitments of the discipline. Although similar commitments can be said to be held by most disciplines, linguistics seems to continually need to reassert that its own interests run contrary to public interest, no doubt because of the long history of prescriptivism dominating discussions of use in many languages. Folklinguistic accounts though, with proper attention to their ideological work, can reveal much about the social worlds of community members (Penry Williams 2011; 2019). Furthermore, as Preston (1996) argues, accuracy is far from the point of understanding the talk that circulates about talk itself. In fact, beliefs about language are not so much about language but those groups they index and their evaluation by another group (Niedzielski and Preston 2000). Folklinguistic discourse has limitations but there has been too grand a dismissal of its value (Wolfram 2007, Kroskrity 2000). Attention to such discourse provides access to understandings of the social meanings of forms, locally salient identity categories and the depth of language ideological work which may lie beneath even a short comment on language (Penry Williams 2011; 2019). I use the term *ethno-metapragmatics* here, roughly equivalent to *folklinguistics*, in order to highlight the links to metapragmatics and how evaluation is achieved. Although the prefixes *ethno-* and *folk-* are both relevant, the former is preferred in this article to emphasize cultural position rather than non-specialist views.

Research in variationist sociolinguistics, as part of understanding language change and everyday usage, seeks to understand the social correlates of language forms. As Agha asserts “language users are themselves correlationists *par excellence*, themselves interested in describing [correlations between speech behavior and social status] and in motivating social reality in terms of them” (1998, 187). In this way, everyday, non-specialist accounts of language draw on different sources, models and ‘methods’ but aim to do a similar task. Indeed these processes are vital to the understanding of language, as it is the ideological reinterpretation of existing indexicalities which create new ones (Silverstein 2003). Semiotic registers are (re)created through indexicality as cultural group members correlate (and conflate) forms and places, contexts and types of people (Agha 2005; 2007). These processes involve the iconization of some indexicalities and the erasure of others (Gal and Irvine 1995, Irvine and Gal 2000). The concept of semiotic registers recognizes that

forms of language are continually enregistered via indexical processes and that these ways of speaking are not separable from their social imagery and other non language-based resources. For example, Received Pronunciation (RP) is far more than a way of speaking (Agha 2003; 2007). When all this is considered, it is clear that exploring the inculcation of such processes in instances of ethno-metapragmatic discourse may provide insight (see also Cramer 2013, Johnstone 2013). This discourse is thus better understood as underexamined rather than ‘bad’ data.

In this article, I introduce a separation of language use from the metapragmatic mechanisms of mention and voicing (section 2). I then analyse discourse from semi-structured interviews (described in section 3), showing that attending to how metapragmatic evaluation is accomplished allows new understandings of language variation from such discourse (section 4). I argue that ethno-metapragmatic accounts appeal to the deep associations of clusters of semiotic resources: they show enregisterment in action.

2. Doing ethno-metapragmatic evaluation

Metapragmatics refers to a wide range of phenomena (Verschueren 2004), with elements present in all language use (Silverstein 1993). The focus here is on those elements which engage with the talk of others or the self, with the capacity to evaluate the form of talk or provide an assessment of the speaker. From Verschueren’s (2004) table of *indicators of metapragmatic awareness*, my narrowed focus includes the ‘explicit’ elements of mention, quoted and reported speech but excludes elements which organize discourse such as discourse/pragmatic particles/markers and sentence adverbs. In addition, there is one item from the “implicit” column which is relevant: “implicit ‘voices’” (2004, 61). Although the divide is somewhat artificial, to highlight these elements within the larger concept of metapragmatics, I refer these as *mechanisms for metapragmatic evaluation*. Metapragmatic discourse has largely been discussed with reference to “explicit” comment or approached in accounts of reported speech, direct and indirect quotation. There are few analyses of the details of these resources utilized in accounts of language. The limits of speakers without specialist vocabularies or training to comment on language are well-described in previous work (i.e. Silverstein 1981, Niedzielski and Preston 2000, Preston 1996). The focus here is on the achievement of evaluative ‘comment’ despite these limitations.

Before considering the original data, it is necessary to explore the tensions between explicit and implicit metapragmatic discourse and the use of various types of reported speech. Whilst the relationship of explicit to implicit discourse is usually, as in Verschueren (2004), conceptualized as a continuum, only the extremes are identified; there is no guidance as how the space between these two poles could be divided without this becoming extremely subjective and therefore not replicable across researchers. Similarly, discussions of the language of identifiable others within interaction relate largely to literature which explores the use of direct versus indirect reported speech and the differences between these.

Reported speech has been studied in storytelling, where it creates a more vivid narrative and is used to evaluate what was said or the embedded speaker simultaneous to the report (Holt 2000). The production of the ‘voice’ might be evaluative through its qualities and prosody (Günthner 2007). For example, on hearing a recognizable ‘dumb voice’ or ‘whinging voice’, the audience is to understand that this was not part of the original but an assessment of it or the person(s) it is attributed to. Indeed, this may be the sole purpose as in the instance of repeating what someone just said but producing one of these as affectation. Terminology for differentiating the diverse uses of reported speech is, however, limited. In fact, the notion of reported speech is itself problematic and better conceived as *constructed dialogue*. This concept recognizes the potential irretrievability of the relationships between the original and the report on it, given the limitations on human memory (Tannen 1986). It also allows the inclusion of talk presented as the speech of another which may have never been uttered (Tannen 1986). The category of constructed dialogue is also useful in reducing the need for certainty in instances in which it is unclear if there was an original utterance or if the speech was created for the current interaction. Furthermore, constructed dialogue allows the inclusion of other speech-like elements introduced by some quotatives. For example, BE LIKE can introduce speech but can also represent internal dialogue (*I was like get stuffed, but I said I could do it*), an attitude or demeanour (via the supposed internal dialogue of another) (*she was like, I’m too good for you all*), sounds or states/experiences (*it was like, bang, bang, bang*, which could be either a noise or a series of other forms of stimuli in close succession), or even the ‘dialogue’ of a non-human animal or inanimate object (*the printer was like, I don’t feel like it*) (see D’Arcy 2010, Blyth, Recktenwald, and Wang 1990).¹ Disentangling these categories in analysis can be complex. For example, there may be ambiguity as to whether something was said or thought in an attribution to the current speaker. Indeed, this device can make stories more exciting in cases where speech and actions were in contrast to

dramatic reactions not displayed. Whether these (re)actions were actually verbalized might not be important in how the interaction proceeds, in which case classification as either thought or speech is not just potentially inaccurate but potentially not meaningful.

If contrasting quoted speech with hypothetical speech has limited analytical value in this context, since the emphasis is not placed on the comparison to past action or talk, then how can the complexity of the relationship between the speaker and this sort of discourse still be acknowledged? A useful approach is to decompose the role of the speaker following Goffman's (1981) work on footing. Goffman highlights the simplification inherent in the idea of a *speaker*, noting that people may utter something but this not to say they are necessarily the source of the utterance or ideas behind it. In understanding the alignments within interactions, Goffman therefore divides the speaker into multiple roles. The *animator* is the person who physically produces the talk but may not be the *author* or source of the form, or the *principal* who is the source of the ideas. Although, again, this can suggest that these relationships are necessarily clear when, for instance, the role of the author and/or principal can be opaque, and potentially not even known to the animator. This is particularly so when attending to the inculcation and reproduction of dominant ideologies (Bourdieu 1991).

Within his discussion Goffman states that

[a]lthough linguists have provided us with very useful treatments of direct and indirect quotation, they have been less helpful in the question of how else, as animators, we can convey words that are not our own [...]. [W]e can mock an accent or dialect, projecting a stereotyped figure more in the manner that stage actors do than in the manner that mere quotation provides (1981, 150).

In this matter the work of Bakhtin is highly relevant and, in particular, his notion of *double-voiced discourse* (Bakhtin 1981). This concept highlights that words do not belong to one person but are full of the voices of others, noting the connection to linguistic variation in society and the importance of contextual factors in the meanings of language. The multiple voices within discourse are furthermore *internally dialogic*, interacting with one another and with the society and time that surround them. They can be in different types of relationship to

one another as either vari-directional or unidirectional double-voicing. In vari-directional double-voicing an opposition is recognizable, with the prior voice being questioned or parodied. In contrast, unidirectional double-voicing involves alignment or acceptance (Bakhtin 1984).

Within sociolinguistics, performance speech (Schilling-Estes 1998), stylization (Coupland 2001), mock varieties and crossing (Rampton 1995) can all be understood through speaker roles and double-voicing: they all relate to specific utilizations of unexpected ways of speaking and differ in terms of how *staged* they may be, recalling the quote from Goffman (1981, 150). Schilling[-Estes] (1998) discusses the idea that the vernacular can be a performance and is not always the unmonitored and freest form of talk but may be used to exemplify local ways of speaking (and being), for example to tourists. In fact, this performance could be restricted to the production of phrases which demonstrate salient linguistic features. In such cases, this is an example of the speaker as animator only. If there is evaluation present, for example as a humorous way of speaking, it is vari-directional but unidirectionality is also possible. Stylization (Coupland 2001, 2007 [drawing on Bakhtin (1981)]) recognizes speaking as though one was someone else, usually for the purposes of performance: “an artistic representation of another's linguistic style” (Bakhtin 1981, 362). For this, the animator is animating another with the possibility of this also being embodied. The animator may or may not also be principal or author. Mock varieties are stylizations in which an Other is represented in parody, such as stylized Asian English (potentially includes self-Othering) (Rampton, 1995), stylized Kanaksprak (Deppermann 2007), mock Spanish (Hill 1999) and mock Asian (Chun 2004). Crossing (Rampton 1995 [drawing on Bakhtin 1981, 1984]) also relates to possible linguistic transgressions but, in contrast to mock varieties is unidirectional and therefore affiliative in interaction. In crossing, there is the potential for the speaker to be performing all three of Goffman’s speaker roles although interactants or audience might associate the linguistic forms with animator₂ rather than the speaker in front of them (animator₁). Each of these types of talk is recognizable for its different functions but the distinct terminology obfuscates the similar mechanisms behind them, with ambiguity possible, especially without a strong understanding of the context and its framing.

The discussion of staged performance (e.g. Bell and Gibson 2011 and contributions to that volume) is also potentially relevant but has been conceived of as something that occurs on stage and not in all kinds of speech. In fact, as noted in the quote from Goffman (1981) above, in everyday talk there is similar staging in forms of linguistic play and parody, but perhaps this division is best preserved so they can be understood in context rather than characterized as one thing abstractly. Coupland (2007, 146–147) notes that it is useful to think of performance as a continuum: from mundane (unmarked) to high (publicly staged). In the study of enregisterment, for example of ‘Pittsburghese’, high performance has been examined in shared online-videos (Kiesling 2018), morning radio skits (Johnstone 2013) and talking dolls (Johnstone 2013; 2017).

It is difficult to meaningfully apply, to the diverse practices found in talk, ideas like those presented above. This is because they describe specific practices when in fact the boundaries between them move, merge, split and blur in the moment. For instance, voice effects such as doing a ‘dumb voice’ or imitating an accent may not be applied across a stretch of talk but just momentarily, yet they still ‘work’. Of course the role of interactants or audience is pivotal in this. If they are unfamiliar with the socio-historical context they may miss the direction of the dialogism and thus the alignment or parody (Bakhtin 1981). The audience must be able to differentiate the voices and be sufficiently knowledgeable to instantly assign one to the social type or individual it represents in cases of unnamed voices (Agha 2005).

Thus the literature contains references to continua but then little attention given to the phenomena in the ‘grey areas’, that is, between explicit and implicit, constructed dialogue with no reporting function, and neither mundane nor high performance, yet these are spaces which interactants often negotiate effortlessly. Bakhtin (1981, 339) asserts that

syntactic means for formulating the transmitted speech of another are far from exhausted by the grammatical paradigms of direct and indirect discourse: the means for its incorporation, for its formulation and for indicating different degrees of shading are highly varied. This must be kept in mind if we are to make good our claim that all of the words uttered in daily life, no less than half belong to someone else.

The earlier lines of the quote anticipate Goffman's (1981, 150), which I have addressed briefly above. The approach I develop in the final part of this section aims to provide a means to engage with the latter part of Bakhtin's quote: the varied 'shadings' and the spaces least described in metapragmatics, fundamental to how ethno-metapragmatic accounts are done.

To address the problems of the approaches I have highlighted above, whilst drawing on their insights, I suggest that language can be analysed as *use*, *mention* or *voicing* (Penry Williams 2011; 2019). Each of these is flexible in some ways, largely describable with the addition of the division of speaker following Goffman (1981) and Bakhtin's (1984) vari- and unidirectional discourse. Firstly, *use*, the focus of most discussion of language within linguistics, relates to mundane performance. The other two categories are mechanisms for metapragmatic evaluation. In *mention* language is an object separate from other dimensions of talk, often highlighted through stress placement, topicalization or lack of grammatical agreement, allowing *I don't like cookies* or *Cookies really grates on me* to be understood as a comment about the word not the baked goods. *Voicing* accepts the assertion that much of what is said is said through the words of others (Bakhtin 1981) but relates to (relatively) transparent double-voicing. The reproduction of talk from media, institutions, and community may often be analytically unrecoverable (see examples in Section 4) so I use *voicing(s)* rather than *double-voicing* to separate the two conceptualizations. In the case of ethno-metapragmatic discourse, voicings are frequently directed both towards what is being spoken about and towards the speech (i.e. some speakers). Voicings are diverse and do not correlate simply to form. Thus constructed dialogue may or may not be a voicing and a voicing may or may not contain a marked voice effect. The phenomena discussed above—performance speech, stylization, mock varieties and crossings—can all be categorized as types of voicings (Penry Williams 2018). As I argue below, voicing is partly recognizable via the invocation of semiotic registers. Once a voicing is recognized, great attention to that talk is required in analysis, with all elements of form and content potentially part of 'doing' the metapragmatic evaluation. These analytical categories are exemplified further in section 3.2, after outlining in 3.1 the data in which they are identified and indeed which led to the need for these distinctions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data

The data for this analysis are drawn from approximately 24 hours of audio-recorded interviews with 15 young adults between 20–25 years of age. The semi-structured interviews were one-to-one and conducted in the large city of Melbourne, the capital of the state of Victoria in south-eastern Australia.

The interviewees all grew up in Melbourne and had no training in linguistics. They self-identified as speakers of Australian English and had diverse interests, experiences and world-views. Some of them were in the first generation of their family born in Australia. All but two of them had completed or were undertaking post-secondary education, with some completing (post-)graduate qualifications. The participants and I (the interviewer) had not met before and earlier parts of the interaction established the interviewee as the primary speaker and the interviewer as an interested listener.

The central research question of the larger project related to uncovering the social meanings of language variation in Australian English. Interview questions began with personal topics such as details of their childhood, family and current life and later discussed broad issues such as ‘Australianness’ and what they saw as problems in contemporary Australian society. These questions involved categorization and identity work which were of interest in the research. A large part of the interview focused on eliciting ethno-metapragmatic accounts of variation in Australian English. This was sometimes through quite open questions but also employing small tasks such as naming objects in photographs and saying if pairs of words rhymed or did not. The tasks were intended to elicit more detailed accounts by emulating the typical occurrence of one comment or evaluation leading to series of others (Penry Williams 2011), but doing so without the interviewer stating any views. For example, participants were asked quickly name items in a small number of photographs. After this, they were asked if they were aware of other names for the item, if they used these other terms and, if so (or not), why (or why not). Within these discussions, they were asked if they could think of further examples of items with more than one name and to expand on any ideas or categories introduced in their reports of their own language practices (e.g. see section 4.2). Ensuing discussions frequently relied on Othering discourse and related language use to social groups or local types.

Analysis of the interview talk revealed locally salient Others in describing the variation within Australian English: posh types (linked to higher (than speaker) social class or pretentiousness), *the bogan* (originally about class but now more about styles of consumption), *the (northern) Queenslander* (regional Other), *the wog* (ethnocultural type, later youth style), and *the Ocker* (national(istic) imagery). Other than posh types, these were stigmatized social types associated with ‘bad’ linguistic practices. Importantly, being posh was also largely undesirable and in Australia while there is often judgement of speaking ‘badly’ one should also not speak ‘too’ well. In addition, most of what is more iconic and most spoken about in Australian English is the more non-standard forms (Penry Williams 2011; 2019).

To examine this discourse in detail, interviews were transcribed in Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2017), following the principles and conventions of Santa Barbara transcription DT2 (Du Bois et al. 1992, Du Bois 2006) (a key for understanding DT2 as used here can be found in Appendix A). Claims regarding phonetic characteristics of sounds and intonation are based on examination of pitch contours and spectrograms within Praat. It is of note that the DT2 system presents the transcriber with a considered scheme for representing constructed dialogue by not using quotation marks to divide speech but just noting the details of how (parts of) utterances are produced. This includes noting changes in voice qualities by marking the speech as having a quotation quality (<QUOTE>, noted as “rare”) or having a voice of another category (<VOX>), which includes the capability to show stereotyped voices (<VOX=DUMB> “specify voice quality, e.g. stereotype voice”). Through the breaking of the literary conventions surrounding the use of inverted commas and attending instead to how talk was produced, the use of DT2 facilitated greater understandings of the data in terms of issues discussed in the previous section.

3.2. Analysis

Throughout the data, instances of variation in Australian English identified in the sociolinguistic literature were coded as use, mention or voicing. I propose this type of classification is an important step even if data beyond use is not of interest in a study, as the inclusion of mentions and voicings as use could result in erroneous findings. Exclusions of ‘metalinguistic commentary’ for these purposes in variationist studies focus on mention with

little consideration of the complexity of reflexive elements in language (Penry Williams 2018).

To exemplify the operationalization of use, mention and voicing, Extract 1 demonstrates what was in the early stages of coding a more difficult example.²

Extract 1: Example showing use, mention and voice

<TIME=4335.568>

- 1 MELODY; I don't like saying ^girl, <L^>
- 2 (0.5)
- 3 oh this girl I <%> work with: </%>.
- 4 (H) .. I've decided <%> that's no good </%>.

Here Melody is introducing her dislike of using of *girl* to refer to a woman. In line 1 she stresses (^) *girl*, marking it out from the rest of her talk and in effect employing a mechanism which is similar to the use of inverted commas or italics in writing: she highlights the linguistic form as object. This employment of unexpected stress placement emphasizes the word and, through its separation from the surrounding talk, *mentions* the word *girl*. This is supported by the use of a speaking verb (*saying*) as framing, although the utterance could have been ambiguous in the moment if the stress was not also present. Note that the mention in this case is just a small part of the intonation unit (IU) in line 1.

Line 3 is perhaps less obviously an example of metapragmatic evaluation but it is, as a typification. *Oh* is frequently used in at the beginning of constructed dialogue in these data and there is further a constructed naturalness to the IU, which gives the impression of it belonging somewhere else. This is achieved through its separation from the surrounding talk by its just slightly faster pacing and the final intonation. The analysis of this utterance as a voicing is advantageous in that line 3 has ambiguous analytical status otherwise. It is potentially either a remembered fragment or made for the purpose of illustration and therefore original to this interaction, meaning the labelling it reported speech is problematic. Characterizing it as constructed dialogue only would miss its Otherness and its primary purpose of metapragmatic evaluation of the use of *girl*. Understanding it as mention, or not differentiating it from phenomenon in line 1, for example just labelling them ‘metalinguistic

commentary’, misses the detailed linguistic work and the transparency of the double-voicing here. The voicing is not noted as <VOX> as this is not justified in all contexts. Melody animates this speech but she is questioning and critiquing its putative author. Although this is extract was chosen for illustration because it is a less dramatic example, the variability involved is nevertheless clear.

The sequences *I don't like saying* in line 1 and *I've decided that's no good* in line 4 exemplify language *use*. There is no mechanism of metapragmatic evaluation and no evidence of lack of alignment between animator, author and principal. Whilst it is possible that there has been influence from previous interactions or language ideologies, potentially indicating that the discourse is double-voiced, this is not identifiable.

4. Appeals to semiotic registers

In the following sections, extracts of ethno-metapragmatic accounts and particularly voicings are analysed to demonstrate how they engage with enregisterment. This is revealing in terms of the speakers’ beliefs about Australian English, the relevant language ideologies and the identity work they do but the focus here is on the necessity of appealing to semiotic registers in discussing language variation: that speakers present an understanding of variation by re-embedding it in a larger system of signs. Whilst these accounts are no doubt frequent in the data because of what I asked of my participants, voicings are not just an artefact of the interview but exemplify established practices of everyday talk, which is not only mundane performance (use).

4.1. The inseparability of variants

Enregisterment (Agha 2007) involves a second order of indexicality, with distributions from macro-level categories ‘swept up’ into ideologically-laden reinterpretations of the first level of indexicality but then fixed as a social fact that can become presupposing (Silverstein 2003). To exemplify, a common process shown in Labov’s work, for example in the use of postvocalic /r/ in New York City (1966), is that a linguistic form associated with the higher prestige group(s) in a society is used as part of marking a formal situation (Hodge and Kress 1988/1997, Irvine 1989). This relates to the evaluation of the speech at the first level indexicality (e.g. higher social class/caste) as ‘better’ in some way. This evaluation leads to its use in certain contexts, where perhaps it is important to speak ‘well’ or ‘more correctly’. It

12 <SMILE> just </SMILE>,
 13 and changing_</η/> anything_</η/> and ^nothing_</η/>,
 14 [(H)] .. really,
 15 CARA; [mhm].
 16 KELLY; I ^al:ways notice that,<L^>
 17 (H) (SNIFF) (0.6) (VOCALISM) (TSK) <P> Things that people might
 18 pronounce differently </P> (Hx),
 19 (1.6)
 20 When people— —
 21 oh another lang— —
 22 linguistic thing I guess,
 23 (H) is when people put ^but_h,<L^>
 24 at the end of a sentence,<L^>
 25 (H) I didn't do: (Hx),
 26 w-(%) .. they were—
 27 h- I didn't do nothing_</n/> but.
 28 <%> or </%>,
 29 (H) I didn't go there <F> ^but </F>.
 30 (H) <SMILE><%> When I </%> get really fr-@^H,
 31 the ^buts at the end of the sentence,
 32 that's one thi<@>ng </@></SMILE> that I notice a lot,<L^>
 33 [(H)]
 34 CARA; [Where do you h]ear that on[2e]?
 35 KELLY; [2(Hx)]
 36 CARA; [3Or where have you noticed it]?
 37 KELLY; [3(H) A lot of yo]ung people,
 38 <SMILE> a lot of ^guys,
 39 around my a[ge].
 40 CARA; [mhm].
 41 KELLY; I g]uess in late teens early twenties,
 42 (H) (0.2) put the ^but,
 43 at the end of sentences,
 44 and say nothing_</η/> instead of anything_</η/>,

45 or ^nothin_</n/>.

46 (H)<WHISPER> with </WHISPER> no G on the end:.

Note that to begin with, in lines 1–3, my question regarding difference is reframed as ‘things that annoy her’, which itself is revealing in terms of the noticing of difference. She notes that her proposed topic does not completely align with the question (line 4), but I encourage her to pursue it (line 5). Kelly begins in lines 6–7 with the example *I didn’t do nothing*, introduced by the quotative SAY. This form of negative concord is an often mentioned and highly stigmatized feature in many varieties of English (Niedzielski and Preston 2000, Eckert 2000). Kelly specifically mentions *not* with *no(thing)* which is sometimes specified in sociolinguistic research given that some other forms do not attract the same social evaluation. This particular phrase, *I didn’t do nothing*, is commonly used when discussing the variation but I am unsure how it came to be the usual way to exemplify to this variation in negation strategy and it appears to be an example of a familiar but untraceable voice/author.³ The salience of the form is highlighted by Kelly in line 16 when she asserts that she *always notices that*. The IU in line 7 is a voicing, as evidenced in the production of *nothing* with /n/ in *-thing/(ING)* which contrasts with her mention in line 13 and her use elsewhere.⁴ This is further demonstrated in that it completes her turn and is separated out from other speech via the H* H-H% tune (ToBI notion, high rising tune starting from a high onset). Note too that Kelly thought a lot about language and understands that this variation is not about particular words (line 4) despite characterizing as the use of *nothing* rather than *anything* in line 9 and 13.

In line 17 she returns to my original question but then again in lines 20–22, probably because of my earlier encouragement, she broadens the focus to discuss something else she can think of in the moment. She then discusses *but at the end of sentence*, recognizing the possibility of the construction *X Y but* rather than canonical *X but Y* (Mulder, Thompson, and Penry Williams 2009, Mulder and Thompson 2008). As in other mentions or voicings in these interviews, the final particle *but* is missing its initial claim and therefore does not indicate that it marks a concession or contrast, aligning with the assessment of it as functionless, a common assessment of discourse/pragmatic markers/particles. In line 25 she begins to exemplify this but this utterance is discontinued and then in completed in line 27 with an alternative in line 29. The need for the two examples is unclear although it could relate to the level of *control* of the feature (Preston 1996) being low. The first reuses the

previous voicing, adding more to it again. In line 27 she produces a voicing, of an imagined or remembered type, that uses negative concord, final (particle) *but* and *nothing* with a final alveolar nasal. After these two voicings, the evaluation of (ING) becomes more explicit in line 45 where she repairs and ‘replaces’ the aforementioned *nothing* with /ŋ/ for one with /n/.⁵ This links negative concord and the realization of (ING) with /n/, suggesting it is unlikely one would hear this stigmatized form of negative concord alongside /ŋ/ in (ING).

In response to my follow up question about where she hears final *but* (lines 34 and 36), she reports on who uses it, characterizing it as a feature of younger male speech. While I cannot claim any particular purpose to my use of *where*, Kelly reframes the feature as belonging to a demographically-based group of speakers. Finally, she makes the (ING) evaluation fully explicit noting that the *nothing* would likely have *no G on the end* (line 46). While she clearly views the variation in these terms, she does not use the phrase *G dropping* neither does she use a prescriptive term like *double negative* for the use of *nothing* after *not*, instead her account is achieved through performing the features and the use of the features builds on each other via her voicing a type of person rather than a linguistic variant.

It does not seem that she originally planned to discuss the final segment of *nothing*, instead this is something she clarifies after her mention in line 44 with /ŋ/, yet the evaluation was already present in the voicings. Later in the interview, when discussing valuations of Australian English, she noted again, critically, the associations she has when she hears *I didn't do nothing but*. This voicing again contained negative concord, final particle *but*, /n/ in (ING) but additionally /θ/→[f], ‘TH-fronting’. Kelly’s voicing demonstrates how one form brings with it others with close associations and similar evaluations.

Treating the voicings in Extract 2 as mentions misses the insights available through analysing them. These are not just bits of dialogue recontextualized, they call forth systems of meaning not entirely divisible but embedded in the socio-historical imagery of social types. In such talk the animator is in dialogue with the imagined author and through engaging with them sometimes it appears that the performance is more complete than intended.

4.2. The importance of context and audience

In the discussion of language amongst non-linguists there is a strong understanding of the importance of where one is in the use of particular forms and features. This is an understanding of register and the consequences of not reproducing this social order. In Extract 3, I ask Daniel to expand on his comment regarding *lacker band*, after viewing photograph of a *rubber band/elastic band/lacker band* in a timed slideshow. Initially, Daniel calls it an *elastic band*. After the timed task, we look at the image again and I ask if he knows of other names for the item. He then notes that he uses *elastic-* or *lacker band*, depending on who he is talking to.

Extract 3: Talking to one of the guys

<TIME=5026.61>

- 1 CARA; .. What do you mean,
 2 depending on [who you're talking to].
 3 DANIEL; [(H) Wel]l if I was talking to:— ((HANDS IN
 FRONT OF MOUTH))
 4 you know,
 5 just,
 6 one of the guys,
 7 (VOCALISM) <VOS> chuck me a lacker band mate </VOS>.

Daniel responds to my enquiry (lines 1–2) with further explanation and a voicing, enclosed here with <VOS>, voice of self. This notation was added to the transcription conventions for examples such as this one in which participants perform their own ways of speaking in a way that breaks with the mundane performance which surrounds it. It is most like performance speech as discussed by Schilling[-Estes] (1998) in that it is a ‘self-conscious’ performance of a vernacular way of speaking which Daniel lays claim to as part of his repertoire. In some other cases the discourse is in fact voice of Self, creating and voicing a group of people in the performance of identity work, but here it represents the self elsewhere and talking to another interactant. This is not to say that the utterance does not do identity work. At the level of the interview interaction, it positions Daniel as someone who is articulate and thoughtful but can also relax and ‘be one of the guys’, which was a large part of how he presented himself. This

positioning further engages with ideologies around ‘Australianness’ and the importance of not taking yourself ‘too seriously’ or being ‘too intellectual’ (see e.g. Goddard 2009).

Returning to examine line 7, while there is a zero/no quotative or any other indication that a performance is to follow, Daniel’s utterance here differs from the surrounding speech. It is a unidirectional voicing, describing language usage to the current interactant in an accepting way. He has answered my question before providing this, so it can be understood to further his explanation. In the voicing the hypocoristic *lacker band* is being used in relaxed social situation with ‘the guys’, referring to male friends he spends a lot of time with. This is context far from the current one of a recorded interview with a female interactant who he has just met.⁶ From his perspective, Daniel is probably performing casualness in this voicing but close attention to the six-word voicing unravels the complexity within it.

Firstly, it is important to establish that the regional word *lacker band* is noted as ‘lower register’ (cf. *elastic/rubber band*) (Bryant 1997), likely related to its embellished clipping form. This is part of what Daniel recognizes in his account of using both *elastic-* and *lacker band* but associating the latter with an informal and familiar context, framed here with reference to his interactant(s) but via this with certain types of activities and locations in which ‘the guys’ are constituted. Secondly, this is further made clear by addressing the imagined interactant with the solidarity term *mate*, which indexes egalitarian relations. Following a request, *mate* can mitigate the potential negative impact of imposing and the use of an imperative via the egalitarian associations (Rendle-Short 2010). Thirdly, the verb *chuck* is also part of this; Daniel uses *throw* earlier in the interview and *chuck* here helps further mark the utterance as belonging elsewhere via lower register form. Finally, the /d/ in *band* also differs to preceding word-final ones which are affricated or aspirated while this one is deleted, meaning that the voicing further involves rapid speech processes not present in surrounding talk.

Thus, as Daniel produces *lacker band* for me he brings its world with it, it is not just a mention or imitation but a rich invocation of a larger set of forms across linguistic levels. It is shown to be not just a word that exists in isolation but as belonging to a context. This understanding is evident in his explanation, but in attending to the details of his voicing of self, an understanding of semiotic registers is clear. Without any of this needing to be stated, it is suggested that /d/ deletion, the solidarity term *mate* and verbs like *chuck* are part of how

young men talk with their friends and that these forms are deeply associated with one another in way that means the animation of one evokes the others.

4.3. Social types ‘attached’ to forms

In the discussion above, voicings have been described as utilizing semiotic registers to account for variation. In line with Agha (2007), these forms are bound to ideas of types of people and ascribed imagery. In this section, the extract analysed involves an example of a speaker acknowledging and describing some of this. Extract 4 is in response to a question about the variation between the PALM (/ɛ:/ in Australian English) and TRAP (/æ/) vowels in a subsection of what Wells (1982) calls BATH words (see e.g. Bradley 2003; 2004). Jacqui had just completed a short task in which she read aloud words and said if they rhymed or not, including two words which are *principal carriers* (Niedzielski and Preston 2000) of this variation but which often receive different social evaluations in the city of Melbourne due to some of the complexities of this variation (Penry Williams 2011; 2019).

Extract 4: /ɛ:/ in *dance* and *castle* and posh types

<TIME=2599.43>

- 1 JACQUI; in my head I think of:—
 2 .. when you say,
 3 ^dance_</ɛ:/> or castle_</ɛ:/>,
 4 I think of,
 5 (H) .. rich:.,
 6 ^stuck up,
 7 (0.2)
 8 people,
 9 holding a glass of <@> cham[pagne </@>,
 10 CARA; [@^N@^N]
 11 JACQUI; <SMILE> in like f]ur and @@,
 12 (H) <BREATHY> so #they're ah </BREATHY>,
 13 <VOX=POSH> shall we dance_</ɛ:/> <%> darling </VOX=POSH>,
 14 CARA; [@^N@^N]
 15 JACQUI; [like that] but yeah </%>,
 16 (H) it's not really,

17 (0.6)
 18 how it is but,
 19 (0.4)
 20 yeah that's what I see in my head.
 21 @ @ @

Jacqui makes explicit associations with PALM in *dance* and *castle*, although the voicing suggests a focus on *dance*. The vowel is linked to *rich*, *stuck up people* and the stereotyped practices of such people (i.e. drinking champagne and wearing fur coats). In line 13 she voices the PALM user in *shall we dance darling* which is recognizable in its production as a ‘posh voice’. This is partly achieved via *shall* and *darling*. *Shall* is rare and arguably marked in contemporary Australian English amongst younger speakers. For instance, it was also voiced alongside /dɜːns/ by another participant who suggested these were both mockable. Another interviewee evaluated the address term *darling* as pretentious. An indirect request to /dɜːns/ with *shall* is a recognizable chunk of language in linguistic play and folklinguistic discussion. This act, its imagined context, the politeness of it, the pronunciation and use of the formal/slightly ridiculous modal are linked in a way that is replicable.⁷

After establishing this evaluation and the social life /ɜː/ in varying BATH words, and receiving a form of acceptance of the assertions in my laughter (lines 10 and 14), Jacqui then goes on to dismiss this as a truthful representation (lines 16–18). This change in alignment suggests a backing down from the original assessment in the claim it is a personal response in line 20: this is not real but is it something she imagines (*see[s] in her head*). In light of this, it is worth noting that she reported she had begun using this variant (although she did not do so within the interview). In beginning to describe her own way of speaking, Jacqui started by saying that it was not *posh*. Thus Jacqui distances herself from posh types but does not fully reject them or accept the simplified imagery of them. This can perhaps be explained through understanding that *posh* is generally a negative evaluation in Australian English but whilst posh types are derided they are not truly stigmatized and only vaguely conceived (Penry Williams 2011; 2019).

The flexibility and unbounded formation of social types is part of their ongoing usefulness across disparate groups in that they can be reapplied through (fractal) recursivity (Gal and Irvine 1995, Irvine and Gal 2000), ensuring longevity (Penry Williams 2011; 2019).⁸

It further allows any person in Australia to potentially place the Self in a socially superior position in opposition to Others. Social types, and their associated semiotic registers in Australian English, are recognizable but not tangible. That is, accounts in my data, in media and the literature, demonstrate different imaginings. Whilst to one person they may be concrete, collating such descriptions makes their ‘leakiness’ (Agha 1998) apparent.

4.4. Social types drawn via the evaluation of semiotic resources

In this final example the situation is different to those above as the voicing is actually introduced as an imitation of accent. In a task, Ian evaluated a phonological variant as part of the ‘bogan’ accent, using an air (scare) quote gesture to physically signal vari-directionality: that the word is not his but someone else’s and that he is uneasy with being directly associated with it. Although some people may happily claim to be a bogan, this is generally a negative assessment and the label is somewhat taboo as a stigmatized Other. Originally quite class-based, it is now more centred on lifestyle choices and can be about being furiously mainstream. The shift to being about (poor) taste is second order indexicality of the class-based meaning. The bogan is again a loosely delineated type, its meanings changing across time and place and applied iteratively via recursivity (Penry Williams 2011; 2019). Without the space here to elaborate on the complexity of this locally salient Other, it can be noted as in opposition to the posh types introduced in the previous section.

Returning to the interview with Ian, when I followed up by asking what else he thought could be described in the same terms, he provided a brief description of the *bogan accent* but apparently frustrated by his vocabulary to explain his ideas, he produced the voicing in Extract 5.

Extract 5 Voicing a bogan

<TIME=3059.67>

- 1 IAN; But it's sort of like,
- 2 <VOX=BOGAN> yeah:,
- 3 going_</n/> down to,
- 4 (H) went down the shops,
- 5 to pick up the smokes and: /ən/ </VOX=BOGAN>,
- 6 (H) and oh: you know,

7 <VOX=BOGAN> I lost– I lost—
 8 I lost the tenner that was in my pocket,
 9 so I had to run home again,
 10 and grab some more ^cash and </VOX=BOGAN>,
 11 (H) # it's sort of yeah,
 12 (0.6)
 13 I think a little bit,
 14 .. #l—
 15 sort of a little bit like that.

As shown in the extract, this is framed as a performance. Ian had just prior said that this way of speaking involved *slang* and this probably, for him, describes the use of *tenner*, an embellished clipping ('ten dollar note'), and the lower register (in this usage) *cash* and *smokes*, potentially the phrasal verb *pick up* for the act of buying and even *grab*. He had also stated that there was a nasal and drawn out accent, which is imitated here including in the lengthened *yeah* at the beginning (line 2). These are terms frequently used to describe Broad(er) (varieties of) Australian English with differences from other sociolects centring on the realisation of vowels. He uses an alveolar in (ING) in line 3 but rewords this utterance afterwards. Both of these display pro-drop with the subject pronoun omitted. These features draw on ideas of broader accents and casual ways of speaking and again show the appeal to semiotic registers with the effortless interconnection of forms.

Whilst this is framed as an imitation of accent, the content of the story is likely important too. It is a bit of a 'loser' story with the animated speaker unable to buy cigarettes, which was the aim of going to *the shops*, and losing money which had not been placed in a wallet. Furthermore, this was all the money the speaker had and its loss meant returning home to get more, not relying on a credit or bank card. This narrative evaluates these 'lifestyle choices', along with the linguistic ones, and depicts the protagonist as a potentially low on funds, disorganized smoker thus represents a very complex piece of identity work through this multifaceted account. The person with the *bogan accent* does not just have an accent but represents a different way of living. It is possible that even the production of a story is meaningful and that this is some ways evaluated at the same time, or at least perhaps the telling of unexciting stories. Ian thus uses an array of signs, which he is able to recognize and perform, but which characterize someone vastly different from himself.

5. Conclusions

Ultimately this article has aimed to make points pertaining to each of ethno-metapragmatic data, their analysis and the theory of semiotic registers. Firstly, it has endeavoured to show that ethno-metapragmatic accounts are invaluable data, despite their limitations and evaluative nature. When I asked my participants for detailed accounts of language variation, they were able to accommodate this by producing *voicings*. These brought forth complex accounts of Australian English that could not necessarily be articulated by other means but, through this mechanism for metapragmatic evaluation, were presented with immense ethno-cultural detail. Secondly, I have outlined and demonstrated an approach for analysing such accounts via sorting language into use, mention and voicing and then examining the voicings for the positioning of the speaker in relation to both the discourse and the others (re)presented in it. This approach effectively links linguistic forms to issues around identity and language ideologies. Finally, I have demonstrated the primacy of semiotic registers in both the production of these ethno-metapragmatic accounts and their analysis.

In relation to this final point, recognizable voices in talk are not just the voices of existing characters and previous interactants in narratives but are representations of complex repertoires of semiotic resources which have been fused via processes of enregisterment. In (re)producing talk which indexes another context, place, group or social type, speakers appeal to semiotic registers and draw on these as coherent wholes which are largely indivisible. The association between forms means that even when variations are spoken about in isolation, the isolation is not maintained. Other deeply connected forms leak into to accounts or quickly follow as though a separate idea. Some variants immediately evoke social types, but the indexicality is not direct, as all the extracts show, other resources are ‘collected on the way’. Even the depiction of an ‘accent’ can provide a detailed account of ways of being. Importantly, these collections of enregistered forms are diverse, it is not, for example, that phonological variants produce further metapragmatic evaluation of other phonological variations but that forms across linguistic levels are deeply associated. A discussion of vowel variation simultaneously evaluates a modal usage and address term, providing short utterances rich with information about social worlds. Neither do such accounts achieve their richness through understanding language as separate to other semiotic resources. Social practices including physical styling and consumption are articulated in the same breath, even though these might be harder to engage with in the moment than the flexible resource of

language. Language variation is part of systems of social distinction but engaging with it via speaker's own accounts, in their ways of talking about language, it is clear that these elements are not separated from the bigger pictures they help construct.

Notes

¹ This quotative can also introduce gestures which characterize attitudes and demeanours (*He was like* [BIG SMILE]). While it is outside of the scope of this paper, for some forms *constructed action* (Metzger 1995) is also relevant.

² The extracts presented were also analysed previously (Penry Williams 2011) but here support the argument original to this article and so include expanded discussion. Pseudonyms are used for participants.

³ Given that the form and message are potentially both meaningful in voicings, it is not unimportant (to use an unstigmatized form of multiple negation (see Peters 2004, 163)) that *I didn't do nothing* suggests: (1) a denial or protest to an authority able to clear or judge the behaviour and thus places the speaker in a subordinate position, (2) potential 'wrong'-doing via the need to deny actions and (3) perhaps lying if the accusation is true with some of this supported by the notion the double negation = a positive form i.e. 'I did (do) something'. These potential inferences suggest the original speaker is not just 'behaving badly' by not using prescribed norms in English but also engaging in other transgressive behaviours whether they be judged merely naughty or grossly criminal. Thus it could be argued that this linguistic trope brings with it notions of the types of people who are likely to use it and a instantiation of the ideology that non-standard language use is linked to (other) poor moral practices.

⁴ The lack of /k/ epenthesis in the data meant that *-thing* forms were not removed from (ING) (cf. Shnukal 1982).

⁵ I use standard orthography in transcription as not doing so is problematic in that it is frequently understood as an evaluation, as though some speakers actually speak English with a perfect match for its orthography. Often other transcription choices obfuscate pronunciation when one is not familiar with the conventions and what it is being compared to (Bucholtz 2000; 2007, Preston 1985). If needed, I aim to make features of speech which are pertinent readable via use of the International Phonetic Alphabet. The exception to this is in representing the speaker's view, as in line 45 of Extract 2, where it the description in line 46 makes it plain.

⁶ I believe the primary meaning is amongst people with high familiarity and solidarity rather than about gender, although that this can be indicated by a man saying *the guys* (or a woman saying *the girls*) clearly says something about the importance of gender in friendship groups.

⁷ *Shall we dance* is a 1951 song from *The King and I* and the reference is continued in popular culture via the Japanese film and its 2004 Hollywood remake of the same name. I do not believe it is possible to ascertain if this is an example of publicity (media generated) or has become/was previously a folk culture artefact in its own right, using Preston and Niedzielski's (2000) terms. This illustrates the difficulties in determining author and principal in some cases.

⁸ Although literature dealing with similar issues often uses the term *persona*, I prefer *social type* to highlight its importance and broadness compared to the specificity and uniformity of a *persona* (e.g. the Ocker (social type, tropes) versus *Crocodile Dundee*/Paul Hogan (*persona*, lines/exact phrases)).

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Appendix A

Reference list of discourse transcription symbols:

‘DT2’ Version 2.1.0, revision of September 6, 2007 with some adaptations and additions.

Double brackets within the comments column enclose my explanation and notes on my operationalization.

Meaning	Symbol	Comments
timestamp	<TIME=54.73>	time in seconds from start of recording
intonation unit	<u>LINE</u>	one new line for each Intonation Unit
word	wor-	word not completed as projected (en dash)
truncated/cut-off		
final intonation	.	intonation signals finality (period)
continuing intonation	,	intonation signals continuation (comma)
appeal intonation	?	appeal intonation
truncated intonation	—	aborting projected IU (em dash)
high rising tunes (on statements)	<H^>	H* H-H% in ToBI notion
overlap (first set)	[]	align left square brackets vertically
overlap (2nd set)	[₂]	align left bracket and index with subscript number
hold/micropause	..	less than 150 milliseconds; brief silence, break in phonation
pause, timed	(1.2)	pause duration in seconds ((over 150 milliseconds))
stressed word	^	((unpredictably or a heavily stressed word; primary stress not marked in each IU. Added)) (circumflex accent)
lag/prosodic length :		lengthening of segment, slowing of local tempo ((for a plosive this indicates fricativization or affrication))
heavy aspirated	word_h	suffixed, for strongly aspirated stop consonant release

variant	_</æ/>	((IPA symbol(s) for varying forms in Australian English attached to word. Added – here only where the variable is discussed.))
sound	_/æ/	((IPA symbol(s) attached to word. Used for clarity))
in-breath	(H)	audible inhalation
nasal in-breath	(H) ^N	in-breath with mouth closed
laugh-gasp	(H) [@]	in-breath when out of breath from laughing ((or breath with a laugh quality—heavier))
out-breath	(Hx)	audible exhalation
laugh	@	one symbol per pulse of laughter
laugh, voiceless	@ ^H	superscript upper-case H
release		
laugh, nasal	@ ^N	superscript upper-case N
release		
vocalism	(<i>DESCRIPTION</i>)	various notations: (COUGH), (SNIFF), etc. ((just (VOCALISM) for partial sounds which aren't recoverable))
comment	((WORDS))	analyst's perspective inserted in transcript
unintelligible	###	one # per indecipherable syllable
uncertain hearing	#you're	marks transcribed words as uncertain
glottal stop, creak	(%)	separate vocalism = separate “word”
creaky	<%> um </%>	((For all manners / (slash) marks the end))
voice	< <i>DESCRIPTION</i> >	i.e. smile (voice), whisper, breathy
laugh voice	<@>	laughing while speaking ((a laugh quality rather than pulses))
vox: voice of another	<VOX>	((sometimes just a change in pitch or loudness etc. but clearly representing someone else's speech))
voice of another	<VOX=DUMB>	specify voice quality, e.g. stereotype voice
vos: voice of self	<VOS>	self or Self (group) ((added))
forte, loud	<F>	
piano, attenuated	<P>	quiet speech ((quieter than surrounding speech by 10dB+))