Ethnolinguistic repertoire: Shifting the analytic focus in language and ethnicity[1]

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This paper addresses a contradiction in research on language and ethnicity: how can we discuss distinctively ethnic ways of speaking and still account for the variation and fluidity that characterize them? The theoretical construct introduced in this paper enables researchers to avoid this contradiction. 'Ethnolinguistic repertoire' is defined as a fluid set of linguistic resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their ethnic identities. This construct shifts the analytic focus from ethnic 'language varieties' to individuals, ethnic groups, and their distinctive linguistic features. It addresses problems of inter-group, inter-speaker, and intra-speaker variation, as well as debates about who should be considered a speaker of a dialect. This approach, which can also be applied to social groupings beyond ethnicity, is discussed in relation to other approaches and is supported with data on language use in African American, Latino, and Jewish communities in the United States.

KEYWORDS: Language and ethnicity, repertoire, ethnolect, style shifting, African American Vernacular English, Jewish English

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTRADICTION

In the study of language and ethnicity, there is a major contradiction. Researchers refer to distinctive language use by members of an ethnic group as 'an ethnolect' (e.g. Clyne 2000; Androutsopoulos 2001; Verschik 2007), or, more commonly in variationist sociolinguistics, an ethnic 'dialect,' 'language variety,' 'system,' or 'grammar' (e.g. Labov 1972; Baugh 1983; Leap 1993; Green 2002; Fought 2006; Mendoza-Denton 2008). But the researchers who use these terms spend pages and chapters describing variation and explaining that not all group members use the linguistic features they have described as comprising the language variety. Although this reification is criticized by many sociolinguists (e.g. Irvine 2001; Fought 2003; Coupland 2007; Eckert 2008b; Heller 2008), including some who study 'ethnolects' (e.g. Jaspers 2008; Nortier 2008), it currently seems unavoidable: we need a way to refer to the speech that distinguishes members of various groups. The theoretical construct proposed in this paper enables us to avoid this contradiction.

Ethnolinguistic repertoire (Benor 2008) is defined as a fluid set of linguistic resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their ethnic identities. In this paper, I describe the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach and show how it solves five theoretical problems with the notion of 'ethnic language variety' as a bounded entity:

1. Intra-group variation.
2. Intra-speaker variation.
3. Out-group use.
4. Delineating the ethnic group.
5. Delineating 'ethnolect'.

Supporting data come from my research on the language of Jewish Americans, as well as work by others on African Americans, Latinos, and other groups. This approach enables researchers to analyze ethnolinguistic variation in a more realistic way and can also be applied to other dimensions of social organization, including profession, social class, sexual orientation, and region.

THE ETHNOLINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE APPROACH

The notion of 'ethnolinguistic repertoire' is influenced by constructivist work in 'sociocultural linguistics' (Bucholtz and Hall 2008), including some on ethnicity (e.g. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Johnstone 1996; Kiesling 1998; Bucholtz 1999, 2003; Eckert 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Mendoza-Denton 2000, 2002, 2008; Schilling-Estes 2000, 2004; Chun 2001; Coupland 2001, 2005, 2007; Irvine 2001; Fought 2002, 2003, 2006; Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Davies 2006, 2007; Auer 2007). Whereas much research sees linguistic variation as correlating with pre-determined social categories, this work attributes more agency to individuals and sees language as playing a major role in the construction of social categories. Speakers are seen as using linguistic variation – consciously or subconsciously – to align themselves with some people and distinguish themselves from others. The social meaning of language is not fixed; it changes according to context, and it is negotiated in interactions, partly based on contrast or distinction. In the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach, the work of alignment and distinction is done through the variable use of what I call 'distinctive linguistic features,' any elements of language that are marked as distinct from language used in other groups (whether or not speakers are aware of them), including system-level morphosyntactic, phonological, and prosodic features, as well as sporadic lexical and discourse features.

The notion of linguistic repertoire is not new. Studies of multilingual communities have discussed a repertoire of codes (e.g. Blom and Gumperz 1972), and studies of monolingual communities have discussed a repertoire of linguistic styles (e.g. Gumperz 1964; Hymes 1986[1967]). Gumperz (1964) defined 'the verbal repertoire' as:

the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed in the course of socially significant interaction . . . The verbal repertoire then contains all the accepted ways of formulating messages. It provides the weapons of everyday communication. Speakers choose among this arsenal in accordance with the meanings they wish to convey. (1964: 137–138)[2]

My approach follows Gumperz's understanding of speakers' choice from an arsenal. But the notion of repertoire proposed here has a more narrow scope: the arsenal of distinctive resources used by a particular group.

The notion of repertoire can also be seen in research that focuses on individual speakers. In line with work outside of linguistics that sees culture as a 'tool kit' from which individuals select cultural practices (Swidler 1986), recent work on sociolinguistic style sees individuals as making use of a repertoire of sociolinguistic resources (e.g. Johnstone 1996; Davies 2007) through the practice of 'bricolage' (e.g. California Style Collective 1993; Eckert 2000). This approach is especially common in work on Asian Americans (e.g. Chun 2001; Bucholtz 2004; Reyes 2007). Much of this work argues that we should avoid ethnic-group-level characterizations and focus instead on the individual. Individuals actively construct their identities (ethnic and otherwise) by deploying linguistic resources from various sources.

While I agree that it is important to focus on the individual, and the approach presented here is strongly influenced by this work, I also call for an additional analytic focus on the ethnic group, for a few reasons. First, examining an ethnic group's distinctive language enables a better understanding of the group's ancestral migrations, activities, ideologies, allegiances, contacts with other groups, boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and, especially, variation within the group. Second, the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach enables comparison across ethnic groups, whereas focusing on the individual does not. We can ask why some groups have more distinctive repertoires than others, looking to residential separation and discrimination as possible explanations. And we can consider the educational and economic implications of different ethnolinguistic repertoires being evaluated differently. Finally, focusing on the group level allows us to explore how a group's repertoire crystallizes, often after migration or colonization; how features are added to and removed from the repertoire; how (if) people who use the repertoire come to be seen as speakers of a dialect; and how a repertoire changes as its speakers integrate into other groups (see work on dialect divergence, dialect convergence or leveling, and enregisterment – the process by which distinct forms of speech come to be ideologically associated with a group of speakers, e.g. Kerswill 1994; Agha 2003; Auer, Hinskens and Kerswill 2005; Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006; Johnstone 2009; Remlinger 2009). Beyond these arguments, an analytic focus on the ethnic group is necessary because scholars continue to include it in their work – even many who critique the reification of ethnic language varieties and also focus on the individual.

The repertoire approach is most similar to Fought's notion of a 'pool of resources from which members of a speech community draw the linguistic tools they need' (2006: 21). As Fought conceptualizes this pool of resources, it consists of the use of a heritage language, code-switching, specific linguistic, suprasegmantal, and discourse features, and use of 'a borrowed variety' (2006: 22). In addition, Fought aptly addresses many of the problems with analyzing language use in an ethnic group as a separate linguistic entity (e.g. Fought 2003: 16–17). Even so, without the theoretical apparatus proposed here, Fought has no choice but to refer to the language used in an ethnic group as a 'variety' or a 'dialect' and to view the alternation between more and less distinctive language as 'switching.' For example, in Fought's discussion of George Lopez, a Mexican-American comedian, she describes his 'regular' voice in contrast to his voicing of white characters: 'It is usually Chicano English, a non-standard variety, though in other places he seems to switch to a fairly standard variety with only a few Chicano English phonetic features' (Fought 2006: 128). The repertoire approach would word this sentence differently: 'He usually makes ample use of the Chicano repertoire, though in other places he uses only a few distinctive phonetic features.' Surely, this is a more realistic way to view intra-speaker variation than switching between varieties or dialects.

In short, while the approach proposed in this paper is influenced by previous work on individuals' linguistic repertoires, it offers a new understanding of repertoire: the arsenal of distinctive linguistic features available to members of a given group. While the notion of 'group linguistic repertoire' might be used in research on many social dimensions, this paper focuses on ethnicity.

PROBLEMS WITH 'ETHNOLECT'

The ethnolinguistic repertoire approach addresses several problems that arise when researchers understand an ethnic group as using a distinct dialect or language variety. For purposes of comparison, I refer to this traditional sociolinguistic understanding as 'the ethnolect approach.'

Intra-group variation

The first problem with the ethnolect approach is intra-group variation. There is a wide range of variation within any ethnic group: some group members use few or no elements of an ethnolect, and others use many. As Labov puts it in his discussion of African American speech: 'we find a continuum of styles and an intimate mixing of different values of the variants' (Labov 1998: 140).

Variable use of a given group's distinctive linguistic features has been shown to correlate with differences in ethnically-oriented activities and stances, social networks, and ideologies surrounding social categories and language. Studies of this nature have been conducted in diverse groups, including:

- Black and White Philadelphians (Ash and Myhill 1986);
- German Americans in Wisconsin (Rose 2006);
- Japanese Americans (Mendoza-Denton and Iwai 1993);
- Chicanos in California (Mendoza-Denton 1997, 2008; Fought 2003);
- Latinos in New York (Slomanson and Newman 2005; Newman 2010);
- Chinese Americans (Wong 2007); and
- Irish Americans (Kirke 2004) in New York,

just to mention a few of the United States-based studies. Some people who consider themselves group members may even use none of the repertoire.

In my research on Jewish Americans, I certainly found a vast range of variation in the use of elements of the distinctive Jewish American linguistic repertoire. These data come from an online survey I conducted with sociologist Steven M. Cohen, which yielded a non-random sample of 25,179 Jews of various backgrounds from around the United States. Using snowball sampling via an e-mail invitation, the survey asked respondents for self-reports of their use of Hebrew and Yiddish loanwords (like *keppie* 'head [dim.]', *daven* 'pray', and *kal vachomer* 'all the moreso') and Yiddish-influenced grammatical constructions (like 'staying *by* us' and 'I don't know *from* that'), among other linguistic features (see details in Benor and Cohen forthcoming; Benor forthcoming).

The survey indicates variation according to social networks. Jews with more Jewish friends score higher on a 23-item scale of loanwords and constructions, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Jews' use of loanwords and constructions according to social networks

Close friends who are Jewish	Mean score on 23-item index (range: 0–100%)
None	30%
Some	35
About half	41
Most	49
All or almost all	56

Table 2: Percentage of Orthodox vs. non-Orthodox Jews who refer to synagogue as *shul*, by frequency of synagogue attendance

Frequency of synagogue attendance	Jewish denomination	
	Orthodox	Non-Orthodox
Never/special occasions	67%	41%
High Holidays	80	46
A few times a year	91	51
About once a month	96	56
Several times a month or more	98	69

Table 3: Percentage of frequent synagogue-going Jews who report using the word *davka* ('specifically, purposely') according to reported Jewish denomination

Jewish denomination	% using *davka*
Reform	23
Conservative	38
Other non-Orthodox	43
Modern Orthodox	65
Orthodox	71
Black Hat/Haredi Orthodox	77

It also indicates variation according to religious denomination and religious engagement, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Jews who are part of more traditional denominations, especially Orthodoxy, and participate more in religious life are more likely to use Hebrew and Yiddish loanwords and Yiddish constructions, and these linguistic resources enable them to indicate to others not only that they are Jewish but also that they are a certain type of Jew.

This vast range of variation begs the question: where do we draw the line between speakers and non-speakers of an ethnolect? How many Hebrew/Yiddish elements must a Jew use to be considered a speaker of Jewish English? Should the Latina girls in Mendoza-Denton's (2008) study who use only a few distinctive features be considered speakers of Latino/a English? Should an African American whose speech is indistinguishable from that of European Americans, except for his occasional use of distinctive lexical items, be considered a speaker of African American English?[3] Should linguists' judgments of participation in a speech community be made on linguistic or extra-linguistic criteria? In the repertoire approach, this question is no longer necessary: we can analyze any individual's use (or non-use) of a group's distinctive repertoire, whether or not she considers herself part of the group.

A related issue is that different group members prefer different linguistic resources. For example, Newman (2010) found that English-speaking Latinos in New York made variable use of the Spanish-origin features he analyzed: while most used light /l/, only a few used syllable-timed prosody, and even fewer used spirantized intervocalic /d/. Similarly, Chun (2001), Bucholtz (2004), and Reyes (2007) show how individual Asian Americans use different linguistic resources to construct their ethnic identity within an ethnic landscape where black and white are seen as central.

I also found the use of different features by different speakers in my survey data. While some Jews use Yiddish loanwords like *heymish* 'homey, informal' and *macher* 'important person,' those who are younger, are more engaged in religious life, and have a closer connection to Israel make more use of Israeli Hebrew words like *balagan* 'mess, bedlam' and *yofi* 'nice.' While the Hebrew and

Table 4: Pearson correlations between different Hebrew and Yiddish words among Jewish respondents

	macher (Yid. 'important person')	*yofi* (Heb. 'nice')
heymish (Yid. 'homey, informal')	.550	.221
balagan (Heb. 'mess, bedlam')	.235	.681

Yiddish words correlate significantly with each other, the correlation values are much higher for words from the same source language (see Table 4).

One common solution to this theoretical problem is to incorporate information about variation into definitions of ethnolects. In Fought's book about Chicano English she writes:

> Like other dialects, it is not a single monolithic entity, but a range of ways of speaking that have certain features in common. Chicano English can vary on a continuum from less to more standard, and from less to more influenced by other dialects, and it encompasses a wide range of stylistic options. (Fought 2003: 2–3)

Similarly, several scholars of African American speech use 'African American English' (AAE) as an umbrella term for a continuum of linguistic distinctness. As Rickford conceptualizes it, the AAE continuum ranges 'from the most mainstream or standard speech (like Bryant Gumbel's, virtually indistinguishable from the formal speech of white and other Americans), to the most vernacular or non-mainstream variety' (Rickford 1999: xxi). He uses 'African American *Vernacular* English' to refer to 'the variety most widespread among working-class African Americans in inner-city areas.' He does this 'to avoid the impression that every African American would use the feature associated with that variety' (1999: xxi). Labov's definition of AAVE is even more restrictive: 'the uniform grammar used by African Americans who have minimal contact with other dialects typically in contexts where only speakers of that vernacular are present' (Labov 1998: 116; see similar understandings in Labov 1972 and Baugh 1983).

These qualifications and modifiers are important, but they only go so far in solving the problem that intra-group variation poses for the ethnolect approach. Even African Americans with 'minimal contact with other dialects' exhibit variable use of copula deletion, verbal marking, and other features. And there are certainly 'working-class African Americans in inner-city areas' who use most of the distinctive features of AAVE but avoid some of them categorically for ideological reasons. Even the most 'vernacular' speakers exhibit a continuum of distinctness.

Intra-group variation does not pose a problem for the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach. Rather than characterizing ethnic group members as speakers or non-speakers of their group's ethnolect, researchers can see them as making selective use of an ethnically distinctive repertoire, along with resources

from other sources, as they construct their identities within a diverse ethnic landscape.

Intra-speaker variation

Speakers of 'ethnolects' tend to have some degree of awareness that their speech is distinct from others'. They may temper their use of distinctive features when they speak to non-group members, and they may be able to switch fluidly between the 'ethnolect' and 'Standard English.' Some researchers have considered this type of alternation to be 'code-switching' or 'style shifting,' and some have considered the speakers who do it to be 'bidialectal' (see Hazen 2001 for an examination of this term). The question arises: how many distinctive features must be present for a given stretch of speech to be considered part of the ethnolect rather than the standard? Is a 'Chicano English speaker' 'switching into Standard English' when he uses one token of dark /l/ or [θ]? Should an African American who often speaks without distinctively African American features be seen as switching into AAVE when she uses one token of remote *been*?

As an example, take the following excerpt from Lanita Jacobs-Huey's work on cosmetology schools. The instructor is an African American woman named Mrs. Collins (Jacobs-Huey 2006: 42–3):

4	You want them to be satisfied and that's your work and your
5	talent that you let walk out the door and . . . when somebody asks her
6	who did her hair, she's gonna . . . - You know I was in a grocery store
7	yesterday in [name of city]. I was at Winn Dixie shopping and
8	bo::y it was two ladies standing at the - two black ladies standing at
9	that counter. I don't know WHO this cosmetologist was or you know
10	that they go to to get they hair done but boy they was dogging her
11	name in the grocery store . . .
63	And don't try to rush your client 'cause a lot of people do not need you
64	and you know for yourself when you do a rush job, you gonna do a
65	bum up job.

While Jacobs-Huey does not analyze this passage linguistically, it offers a fine example of intra-speaker variation. In the ethnolect approach, a researcher might offer this excerpt as evidence of the speaker's bidialectalism and might analyze the shift in line 8 as a code switch: Mrs. Collins speaks Standard English in lines 4–7 and AAVE in 8–11 (because of the presence of several grammatical features: 'it was,' 'they hair,' 'they was dogging'). But a problem arises when we come to lines 63–65. Mrs. Collins could be seen as switching back into Standard English, except for her copula deletion in line 64. Should the second half of line 64 be seen as a brief code-switch back into AAVE? This selective use of elements of an 'ethnolect' confounds the notion of code-switching.

In the repertoire approach, this problem disappears. We would say that in this excerpt Mrs. Collins is speaking in one code, but she is making increased use of a distinctly African American repertoire in lines 8–11 and then decreased use

of the repertoire in the last section. There is clearly a stylistic shift, but the three sections are not different codes or dialects.

The repertoire approach also enables us to account for another type of intra-speaker variation: individuals who drastically change the way they speak their native language over their life course. We see this in many domains, including people who change identifications and allegiances with respect to region, social class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and their ethnic group or a sub-group thereof. An example is Patricia, a Mexican-American teenager in Norma Mendoza-Denton's ethnography of Latina youth gangs. Mendoza-Denton reports that she was surprised one day to hear Patricia pronounce 'nothing' with a dentalized stop [t] and a high, tense [i], as she had previously pronounced this word with the standard fricative [θ] and lax [ɪ]. Mendoza-Denton analyzes this change using the notion of repertoire:

> Both of these features were associated with the defiant girls forming the core gang group who, though native speakers of English and perfectly able to produce the fricative /θ/ and lax /ɪ/, chose to draw upon the symbolic repertoire of Spanish phonology as part of their linguistic production. (Mendoza-Denton 2008: 208)

This minor linguistic change, in combination with Patricia's heavier makeup and modified hair style, led Mendoza-Denton to guess – correctly – that Patricia had been 'jumped in,' or initiated into a gang.

Another example of individual language change comes from my research on Jews who grow up non-Orthodox and choose to become Orthodox as adults (Benor 2004). In their new communities they encounter a distinctive linguistic repertoire, including thousands of Hebrew and Yiddish loanwords, Yiddish semantic and syntactic influences (e.g. 'staying *by* us,' 'I want *that you should* see this' 'I*'m living* here *already* 20 years,' 'If I see him, *so* I'll let you know'), and some phonological features (non-raising of pre-nasal /æ/, word-final devoicing, and frequent word-final /t/ release). As Jews integrate into Orthodox communities, they acquire many of the features in this repertoire, and different speakers make use of different features, based partly on ideology. For example, three newcomers who have been living as Orthodox Jews in Orthodox communities for at least a few years take very different approaches to the Orthodox linguistic repertoire. Rivka-Bracha has taken on so many Orthodox features that she has been told she sounds even more *frum* ('Orthodox, religious') than many people who grew up in the community. David uses many Hebrew/Yiddish loanwords, chanting intonation, and final devoicing, but he avoids Yiddish semantic and syntactic influences like 'staying *by* them' and 'I want *that you should* see this,' because he considers them bad grammar. And Samuel avoids all Orthodox linguistic features except loanwords, because he does not see them as an important part of being Orthodox.

In my previous work I labeled the change newly-Orthodox Jews go through 'second style acquisition' (Benor 2004). Using the approach presented here, I would now call it 'second repertoire acquisition.' The individuals are not

acquiring *a* new style, but rather a new repertoire of features that differ from what they are used to. With varying levels of awareness and intention, and constrained by linguistic, cognitive, and social factors, they use or avoid certain features in this repertoire. If we looked at 'Orthodox Jewish English' as a dialect or even a style, we would have a harder time describing and analyzing the changes Rivka-Bracha, David, and Samuel go through. The repertoire approach allows for a more accurate representation of intra-speaker variation, including individual change over time.

Out-group use

Another theoretical problem is the fact that some non-group members use elements of the group's ethnolect. We see this in imitations and parodies of individuals and groups (e.g. Rickford and Rickford 2000; Fought 2006; Rahman 2007) and in politicians' use of linguistic features in an effort to bond with members of an ethnic group they do not belong to (Benor ms). We see it in 'crossing' in the context of playful banter in multi-ethnic friendship groups (e.g. Rampton 1995) and in the use of elements of AAVE or Hip Hop Nation Language (Alim 2005) by people who have little contact with African Americans (e.g. Bucholtz 1999; Cutler 1999, 2003, 2008; Chun 2001). And we see it in the use of much of a group's repertoire by non-group members who spend much of their time with group members (e.g. Hatala 1976; Sweetland 2002).

The repertoire approach is better able to account for out-group language use. Rather than asking if the speaker is using the ethnolect, we would ask which features of the repertoire he is using and why. As Eckert points out, 'the linguistic resources that ethnolectal speakers deploy in their day-to-day lives are not all specific to the ethnic category, and those that appear to be specifically ethnic can index far more than ethnicity' (2008b: 26).

The concepts of indexicality (Silverstein 1985, 2003; Ochs 1992) and indexical field (Eckert 2008a) help us conceptualize out-group language use. Although the use of monophthongization, copula deletion and other elements of the African American repertoire may index African American identity, they do so through the mediating level of stances, activities, and personae associated with African American identity. These might include realness, toughness, and participation in the hip hop scene. When young white or Asian men use these linguistic features, they do so likely because they associate them with these and other qualities, stances, and activities they admire. These linguistic features can then be seen as part of a new repertoire, perhaps a young, male, hip hop repertoire. The approach proposed in this paper allows for transfer of linguistic resources from one group's repertoire to another.

Delineating the ethnic group

In contemporary Western societies, ethnic groups are porous and fluid. Ethnicity is not identified on passports, and even the census categories change from

time to time. Individuals often have shifting ethnic identifications over their life course. As they transition between life stages and make decisions related to education, jobs, leisure time, residential location, etc., they go in and out of multiple communities of practice and shift their orientations toward subgroups within their ethnic group(s), toward their ethnic group(s), and toward other ethnic groups, including the dominant ones. Even on a given day, an individual might orient herself toward multiple imagined communities (Anderson 1983). Speakers make variable use of their group's ethnolinguistic repertoire to index their complex and shifting orientations, and listeners use these linguistic cues to perceive and categorize speakers.

Delilah, a young white woman described by Sweetland (2002), who uses many elements of AAVE, has spent most of her life participating in African American communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). From her classes in elementary school to her card game buddies to the black beauty shop where she works as a stylist, she has always interacted primarily with African Americans. In addition, Delilah is oriented toward black cultural norms in her hair styles and accessories. Should she be considered African American? As her friend Will sees it:

> Well, she basically black . . . she listen to the good shit [rap], act stupid and loud just like we do, she talk to all black guys basically . . . but it's not like she just doin' it cause they black and she's tryin' to be down or something like that. That's just how she is. She *been* like that . . . I mean, she came up with blacks so that's how she acts. (Sweetland 2002: 525)

While none of Delilah's ancestors lived in Africa, she is seen as black by some criteria. Ethnic group membership is constructed not just on the basis of descent but also on the basis of symbolic practices, including language.

In addition, an increasing number of Americans consider themselves part of two or more ethnic groups. In an ethnolect approach, how would we characterize the speech of someone who identifies as African American, Latino, and Cherokee and uses distinctive features associated with all of those groups? Does having one Mexican parent make a man an 'authentic' speaker of Chicano English, or is he 'crossing' when he uses distinctive Chicano features? What about if that same man had only one Mexican great-grandparent and all the rest of his ancestors were of European origin? Another example is a woman with one black parent and one white parent who grows up in a white community speaking English with no AAVE features. In college, that woman begins to identify with her black heritage and acquires several features of AAVE. Would the ethnolect approach see her speech as an example of 'cross-racial AAVE' (Bucholtz 1999) or African American AAVE? The repertoire approach sees each ethnic group as having a set of distinctive features at its disposal. Individuals who identify with that ethnic group at a given moment (whether or not they share blood lines) may make use of those features.

Finally, it is important to point out that ethnic groups do not exist *a priori* but are socially-constructed phenomena that come into being through the discourse of members and non-members. When describing an ethnic group's distinctive linguistic repertoire, researchers might begin by identifying ideologies surrounding the group and its boundaries in the discourse of core members, marginal members, and non-members. In short, the boundaries of ethnic groups are fluid, and sociolinguistic theory must take this into account.

Delineating 'ethnolect:' Ethnic variety vs. ethnic variation

A final theoretical issue, as Eckert (2008b) points out, is whether a given group's language should be seen as a separate ethnic variety – like AAVE and Chicano English have been characterized – or merely as minor variation from an abstract norm, such as phonological variation among Jewish, Italian, and Irish Americans in New York, Boston, and Montreal (Labov 1966; Laferriere 1979; Boberg 2004). Newman and Wu (ms) consider this question in their perception study of Asian American speech, and they conclude that Asian American speech should be considered a repertoire while African American English and Chicano English should be considered 'ethnolects.'

In the repertoire approach, this issue is moot: Jewish Americans and African Americans, for example, are both seen as making use of their distinctive repertoires. At the same time, it can be theoretically fruitful to compare language use in different ethnic groups. Based on the number of distinct features or the comparison of system-level and surface-level features, we might characterize the repertoire used by African Americans as much more distinct from mainstream American English than the repertoire used by Jewish Americans.[4] The ethnolinguistic repertoire approach facilitates comparison across groups, whereas a focus only on the individual does not.

DISTINCTION FROM WHAT?

The notion that an ethnic group uses distinctive linguistic features begs the question: distinct from what? Individuals' linguistic difference is highlighted in local interactions with members of other groups or members of their own group who speak differently, as well as through media exposure. But researchers who wish to describe what is distinctive, or marked, about language use in a particular group need a more general abstraction of unmarked language.

Linguists studying ethnic language use various instantiations of an unmarked or standard norm. Leap's book on American Indian English organizes its linguistic description 'around the contrasts between Indian English and Standard English' (1993: 45) in phonology, morpho-syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Mendoza-Denton explains that 'Chicano English' is 'markedly different from Standard English in phonology (pronunciation) and lexicon (vocabulary)' (2008: 61).

Perhaps recognizing problems with the notion of 'Standard English,' some researchers use labels that identify the unmarked norm as white or European American, sometimes situated in a specific locale. Mendoza-Denton contrasts 'various forms of Chicano English' with 'Standard California Euro-American English' (2008: 28), and Fought discusses 'differences between Chicano English and California Anglo English' (2003: 62). Fought qualifies her use of the latter term in a footnote:

> This dialect is, of course, spoken by many people who are not Anglos. I have chosen this term, though, because the local regional dialect in an area is often associated with the majority white population, and speakers from ethnic communities where other dialects are spoken may be accused of 'sounding white' when they use the more general regional dialect. (Fought 2003: 238)

Other researchers avoid terms like 'White English' for various reasons. In Chun's analysis of language use among Asian American men, she calls the unmarked variety 'Mainstream American English,' 'because it is problematic to claim that the vast majority of Asian Americans who use this variety are speaking "White English"' (Chun 2001: 53). 'Mainstream English' is also the preferred term in Green's descriptions of African American English (2002, 2004). She lists lexical, syntactic, and phonological 'features' of AAE that help 'distinguish it from other varieties of English' (2004: 81) including 'mainstream English' (2004: 85). Even Lippi-Green's (1997) critique of 'standard language ideology' uses 'Mainstream U.S. English' and 'Non-Mainstream U.S. English,' with a lengthy discussion about their limitations (1997: 59–62). Similarly, in her critique of the representation of African American English in sociolinguistics and discussion of African American language ideologies, Morgan (2001 [1994]) contrasts AAE with American English.

It is clear that our analyses of inter- and intra-speaker variation in ethnic groups require a theoretical concept of unmarked language. This construct might be called 'unmarked American English:'[5] an abstract, idealized representation of speech that might be used by middle-class members of any ethnic group in any region of the United States[6] but that lacks features marked as belonging to the distinctive repertoire of a particular group. Labov (1998) uses a similar theoretical construct in his work on AAVE:

> AAVE consists of two distinct components: the General English (GE) component, which is similar to the grammar of OAD [Other American Dialects], and the African-American (AA) component . . . On the one hand, GE is a fairly complete set of syntactic, morphological, and phonological structures, which can function independently . . . The AA component is not a complete grammar, but a subset of grammatical and lexical forms that are used in combination with much but not all of the grammatical inventory of GE. (Labov 1998: 117–118)

Labov's notion is similar to the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach not only in its use of an unmarked norm that serves as a base component but also in its reference to an ethnic group's distinctive features.

Like all of the notions of unmarked language discussed in the literature (e.g. 'General American:' see critique in Kretzschmar forthcoming), the abstraction 'unmarked American English' has major limitations. First, it reifies a standard 'dialect,' 'variety,' or 'language.' Giving a name to a non-existent entity yields many of the same problems described above. Because of variation among those who are seen as speaking in an unmarked way, it may be impossible to write a complete description of 'unmarked American English,' even if it left several variables underspecified.

Second, the notion of an unmarked norm reinforces standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 1997; Milroy and Milroy 1999). As several scholars point out (e.g. Morgan 2001[1994]; Walters 1996; Bucholtz 2003), sociolinguists' language ideologies shine through in their academic work. Like most of the existing research on ethnic language use, the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach is influenced by an ideology that those in a position of power, most of whom are white, speak in an unmarked way and others, who may be disenfranchised to varying extents, speak differently. The notion of an unmarked norm privileges the speech of middle- and upper-class European Americans and others in power.

Because of these problems, I am uncomfortable with the theoretical use of an abstract unmarked norm, whether that norm be 'unmarked English,' 'white English,' or some other construct. However, I believe it is impossible to discuss ethnic language variation without incorporating the notion of markedness. There are three alternatives, and I believe they are all untenable. First, we could continue the current modus operandi of sociolinguistics: discussing each ethnic group's language variety as a bounded entity and qualifying these statements with critiques of reification. As I have argued above, I believe it is in our interest to move beyond this contradiction. Another alternative is to stop analyzing ethnic language variation all together, certainly not a desirable option. The third alternative is to look at a given language variety – say African American Vernacular English – as the unmarked norm and describe how the speech of European Americans and others deviates from it. Perhaps the standard would be 100 percent copula absence and 100 percent post-vocalic /r/ absence, and speakers of any race who deviate from this standard would be seen as incorporating features from the distinctive White repertoire. This approach would certainly be a powerful anti-hegemonic statement. But it would be even more unrealistic than the alternative, as we would be hard-pressed to find any one speaker who uses uniformly 'AAVE' speech. Unfortunately, it seems that the use of an unmarked norm is a descriptive and theoretical necessity, an instance of what we might call 'strategic reification,' akin to the 'strategic essentialism' that has been so common and useful in sociolinguistics (Bucholtz 2003; Bucholtz and Hall 2004).

Some may be concerned that ethnic group members will take offense at representations of their speech as marked. As Morgan says, 'Once sociolinguistic theories privilege the standard variety as the 'norm' in relation to competing varieties, the intent of both language plans and planners becomes suspect,

and speakers sense that linguistics may be dangerous to the health of their speech community' (2001: 74). However, the alternative, presenting AAVE as a separate, unified system, can also be looked at by African Americans as suspect and problematic (Walters 1996; Wolfram 2007; Queen and Baptista 2008). Walters (1996) argues that the way AAVE is presented in introductory linguistics textbooks essentially forces African American students to declare loyalty to Standard English or to AAVE. Similarly, Queen and Baptista write about the mixed reactions linguistics professors observe when they teach about African American English in an introductory class: 'some nods of acknowledgment, some arms crossed in disagreement, some signs of interest and surprise, and some delight at recognizing a previously unknown puzzle start to come together' (Queen and Baptista 2008: 185). In my 'Language and Identity among "Hyphenated" Americans' course at the University of Southern California, I have seen the same reactions. But in 2009, when, for the first time, I presented the speech of African Americans as English with the variable and selective incorporation of a repertoire of distinctive features, I perceived the students' response as more uniformly positive. If instruction on language and ethnicity uses the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach, combined with information on community language ideologies (Morgan 2001[1994]; Walters 1996), power relations, inter- and intra-speaker variation, and a theoretical and historical discussion of the notion of Standard English (e.g. Milroy and Milroy 1999; Kretzschmar forthcoming), then our textbooks and lectures about distinctive ethnic language will likely be considered more accurate and realistic.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE REPERTOIRE APPROACH: DISCUSSION AND DISCLAIMERS

Agency

Because the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach emphasizes individuals' selective use of linguistic features, it might be seen as arguing for complete agency over sociolinguistic variation. I see this not as an *a priori* assumption but rather as an empirical question. The approach proposed here sees individuals as making selective use of a distinctive repertoire, but it makes no claims as to the consciousness surrounding that selective use. Certainly many individuals are not aware of how their speech differs from that of non-group members. And some individuals who are aware of distinctive phonological features, for example, and want to avoid them may not be able to. Individuals' variable and selective use of their group's repertoire is constrained by linguistic and cognitive factors. The theoretical questions remain: how aware are speakers of their distinctive features, and to what extent can they manipulate them? The repertoire approach makes it easier to answer these questions empirically through ethnographic and experimental methods.

Systematicity

It is possible that arguing against AAVE and other language varieties as separate systems might be perceived as countering the important work of legitimization of the past 40 years. This is by no means my intention. The distinctive features that comprise a given ethnolinguistic repertoire distinguish the grammar of their users from that of other speakers of American English, but they certainly do not render the speakers' language unsystematic. While I am arguing against the notion of ethnolects as separate grammars, I, of course, fully support the notion that each individual's language is grammatical.

Co-occurrence

Along the same lines, research has repeatedly shown that ethnic group members tend to use certain linguistic features together: that co-occurrence (Ervin-Tripp 1972) is a hallmark of 'ethnic language varieties.' There may be general constraints on co-occurrence, but the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach sees those constraints as violable. While it may be possible to construct implicational scales in which the use of certain features implies the use of other features (Rickford 2002), these scales might not predict 100 percent of language use. As work on Black Standard English (e.g. Taylor 1971; Rahman 2008) shows, many ethnic group members use distinctive phonology and prosody but avoid distinctive morphosyntax. But there may be some who use distinctive morphosyntax but not phonology. And although it may be the case that most African Americans who use remote *been* (variably) also use invariant *be* (variably), there may be some who do not, perhaps for ideological reasons. The repertoire approach allows for individuals who buck the norms. Similarly, research may find that certain types of linguistic features are more manipulable than others, but it is important to allow for the possibility of variability in this area, as well.

Ideology of distinctness

The ethnolinguistic repertoire approach sees ethnic group members as using language that is distinct from an abstract norm. This could be seen as implying that ethnic group members view their language use as deviating from a standard. While this may sometimes be the case, the opposite may also be true: ethnic group members may feel that they speak normally and others deviate from that norm. They may feel that they speak English with the incorporation of some slang or that they speak a different dialect or language than other groups. The question of group members' and non-members' views about language is an empirical issue, and we have already seen a good deal of research on it using the lenses of folk linguistics, language ideology, and enregisterment (e.g. Preston 1989; Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000; Rahman 2008; Johnstone 2009; Remlinger 2009). Related to this, it is important to investigate

the social construct of the ethnic group. How is it constructed discursively, and what role does language ideology play in that construction?

Glottonyms

Several glottonyms have been used by sociolinguists researching language and ethnicity in the United States, including African American English, American Indian English, Chicano English, German English, Irish English, Italian English, Jewish English, Puerto Rican English, and Vietnamese English (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006). Within the ethnolinguistic repertoire approach, these terms would generally be passed over in favor of descriptors such as 'the English speech of German Americans' or 'language use among African Americans.' Even so, there may be instances where these terms are useful, as long as they are acknowledged as abstractions.

Scope of analysis

The repertoire approach allows for analysis at the pan-regional, regional, local, and individual levels. For scholars interested in language use and its relation to ethnic identity, a fruitful unit of analysis is the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). This unit enables the researcher to be a participant-observer and to analyze language use *in situ*, as well as ideologies about language and social categories. By focusing on this small unit, researchers can explore how and to what extent speakers make use of the distinctive features in their ethnolinguistic repertoire, how those features cluster, what those features mean socially, and how language helps individuals to construct relationships of alignment and distinction with others in their community of practice, with larger social networks (Milroy 1980), and with the imagined communities of various ethnic groups and regional and national entities.

Research has shown that some linguistic variables have different meanings in different regions. For example, Anderson (2002) gives evidence that African Americans in Detroit are changing their use of monophthongization to distinguish themselves from white Detroiters and align themselves with white Southern migrants to Detroit. Fought (2003) found that the local California sound change of /u/ fronting was more common among Chicanos who do not affiliate with gangs than those who do. And Wong's (2007) study of American-born Chinese women in New York found that those with more Chinese social networks had lower rates of open /o/ raising (as in 'caught') than those with more American social networks. These studies could only be conducted locally, as these variables have different social meanings (or are not used) in other parts of the country.

Therefore, while a description of an ethnic group's distinctive repertoire can be pan-regional, the analysis of individuals' language use must be done in relation to regional variables. While we might include /ay/ monophthongization in the

ethnolinguistic repertoire of African Americans, it is only ethnically meaningful – or indexically linked to African Americans – in the north, since it is also used by European Americans in the south. Local studies around the country can contribute to our understanding of how group membership is constructed linguistically.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical construct of ethnolinguistic repertoire enables us to resolve a nagging contradiction that pervades research on language and ethnicity, as well as sociolinguistic variation more generally: how to talk about distinctive ways of speaking and still account for the variation and fluidity that characterize them. Using the notion that a group has a distinctive linguistic repertoire, we have no need to classify individuals as speakers or non-speakers of a particular language variety. Our sociolinguistic analyses can focus on African Americans and Chicanos and their variable use of distinctive features, rather than AAVE speakers and Chicano English speakers and their variable use of AAVE and Chicano English. In analyzing an excerpt of speech, we now have no need to characterize each utterance as belonging to one or another language variety. Debates about whether non-group members can be considered speakers of an ethnolect are rendered moot. And we no longer have to wonder whether an ethnic group's speech is distinct enough for linguists to consider it a separate dialect. The ethnolinguistic repertoire approach facilitates our investigation of inter-group, inter-speaker, and intra-speaker variation and enables us to present language and ethnicity more realistically in our academic and popular work.

In addition, the approach introduced here enables us to ask several questions. How do individual linguistic features become part of a particular group's repertoire, and how are features added to or removed from the repertoire over time? In a comparison of two groups' repertoires on a continuum of distinctness, what role do power and discrimination play? Do groups whose members tend to have more access to education and other institutionalized forms of power necessarily have less distinct repertoires? Answering these questions requires diverse methodology, combining linguistic analysis with historical and ethnographic work.

This paper has focused solely on the contemporary United States. The ethnolinguistic repertoire approach is most likely applicable to other contemporary post-colonial or immigration-heavy societies with relatively fluid ethnic identities, including England, France, The Netherlands, Israel, and former British colonies like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (see, e.g. Horvath 1985; D'Arcy 2010). The approach is most likely not generalizable to situations where ethnic boundaries are maintained through the use of unrelated languages (e.g. Tamil and Hindi speakers in India; Basque and Spanish speakers in Spain; Cajun French and English speakers in Louisiana, except insofar as speakers of one language speak the other language with distinctive features).[7] Further

research is necessary to determine how applicable this approach is to historical sociolinguistic situations.

The notion of a group having a distinctive repertoire is useful for our understanding of the linguistic construction of membership in groups of many kinds, including those based on professions, like doctors, lawyers, and car mechanics; those based on gender and sexual orientation, like gay men, lesbians, and transgendered people; those based on religiosity, like Pentecostals, Latter Day Saints, and Orthodox Jews; and those based on region, like Pittsburghers, Valley Girls, Bostonians, and Southerners.[8] This paper focuses on ethnicity, but many of the points here are also applicable to other types of imagined communities. In short, the repertoire approach allows for a more realistic representation of sociolinguistic variation in many situations. By shifting our analytic focus from the language variety to the individual, the group, and distinctive linguistic features, we can shed light on the social meaning of language, a primary goal of sociolinguistics.

NOTES

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2. See critique in Coupland (2007: 83–84).
3. See Bucholtz (2003) for a discussion of sociolinguists' authenticating practices: considering the most isolated 'vernacular' speakers as the most 'authentic' speakers of a language variety.
4. This is not to say that all African Americans speak more distinctly than all Jewish Americans; there are certainly Orthodox Jews whose speech is unintelligible to most Americans and African Americans whose speech is not distinct at all.
5. The term 'White English' might be appropriate in analyses of groups who are not considered white but not in research on Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, German Americans, and other groups who are considered white.
6. When a group's ethnolinguistic repertoire is discussed in a pan-regional analysis, 'unmarked American English' must remain underspecified in terms of regional features. When an analysis of ethnic language use is locally situated, then this abstraction can be defined locally (although it still might remain partially underspecified).
7. This brings up the sticky issue of how to distinguish a language from a dialect. Would the notion of repertoire be useful in situations where two related and largely intelligible 'languages' are spoken by neighboring ethnic groups, such as Spanish and Catalan in Spain? What if those languages are spoken in separate political entities, such as German and Dutch along the German-Dutch border? In these situations, which language would be analyzed as the 'unmarked' norm against

which the other is compared to describe the group's ethnolinguistic repertoire? These questions suggest that the repertoire approach is not applicable to all sociolinguistic situations.

8. The concept of linguistic repertoire might be applied to regional variation using an abstract, unmarked norm like Veatch's (1991) 'Reference American,' with acknowledgements of its limitations.

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