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THE GUIDEBOOK TO
SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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being observed. They are however best regarded as methodological ploys for simulating a range of speech levels rather than themselves representing styles. Their relationship to speech beyond the interview remains questionable – people do not often speak in minimal pairs. Labov's attribution of graded levels of attention paid to speech as the operative factor has been widely challenged since (e.g. Bell 1984). Attention can be directed at producing all levels of linguistic alternatives not just the more prestigious – recall Kiesling's fraternity members who positioned themselves with *in* as well as with *ing* (Chapter 7.6). My Audience Design approach, to which we turn next, was developed partly in reaction to what I regarded as the mechanistic attribution of style to attention. I believed that style centred on persons not mechanisms.

Although I have distinguished two broad approaches to style in this section, in the past decade or more there has been an increasing and fruitful crossover between the two. Variationist analysis has been extended to a wide range of stylistic material, and richer social concepts have been applied to all kinds of language. When I began research on style in the 1970s, I could justifiably label it 'the neglected dimension'. Now style is at the centre of sociolinguistic theorization and method, and we turn to explore what this means.

11.2 AUDIENCE DESIGN

Genesis

Audience Design has been the central model of sociolinguistic style since being proposed in Bell (1984). In search of an explanation of the style differences I was finding in my doctoral research on the language of radio news in Auckland, I turned up a situation which proved to be tailored to spotlighting style differences. Two of the radio stations originated in the same public-broadcasting organization, using the same newscasters, in the same studios. It was in effect a natural matched guise situation – different audiences listening to the same newscaster who was switching between stations.

Working in variationist fashion, I examined a number of linguistic variables, including intervocalic /t/ voicing – the flap that makes words like *writer* sound like *rider*. In New Zealand this is a variable feature, and in the broadcast context it indexes informality and Americanness (since it is semi-categorical in American English). Figure 11.2 shows the percentage of intervocalic /t/ voicing for four newscasters that I recorded on the two stations. YA is New Zealand's 'National Radio', which has a higher status audience than the local community station ZB (see Bell 1991a for detail on the study). The graph shows that each newscaster shifts considerably and consistently between the two stations. To return to the question which opened the chapter: *Why do these speakers say it in these different ways on these occasions?* There is after all just one individual producing two divergent styles. The institution, the genre, the topic mix of the news, the studio setting and the amount of attention paid to speech are held constant in each 'guise'. Only the audience differences appear to be a plausible explanation.

Looking beyond my study, I began to see that the same regularities which were writ large in my media-originated data were also operating in face-to-face communication. Later I discovered that outside sociolinguistics this idea was not quite new when I encountered Speech Accommodation Theory – see later in section 11.2.

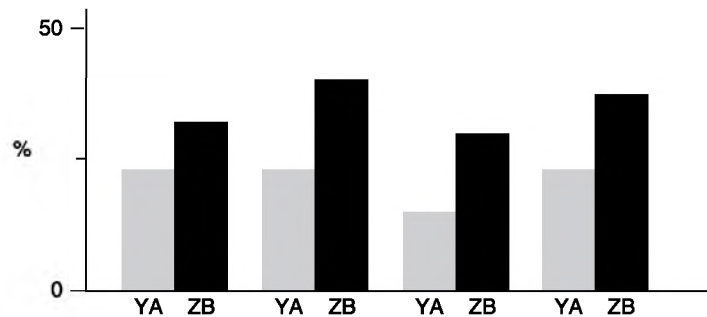


Figure 11.2 Percentage of intervocalic /t/ voicing by four newscasters on two New Zealand radio stations

Source: Bell (1984), figure 9

The model

In Bell (1997a) I summarized the Audience Design model under nine points, revised and expanded somewhat here in the light of subsequent developments:

1 *Style is what an individual speaker does with a language in relation to self and others.* The premise of Audience Design is that style focuses on people, it is essentially a social thing. Style is interactive and contrastive, marking personal identification and interpersonal relations.

2 *Style derives its meaning from the association of linguistic features with particular social groups.* As developed in the Indexical Cycle (Figure 10.2), the social evaluation of a group is projected onto the linguistic features associated with that group. Style therefore has a normative basis. That is, a particular style carries with it the flavour of its associations. Bakhtin puts it this way:

All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. (1981: 293)

3 *Speakers design their style primarily for and in response to their audience.* This is the heart of Audience Design. I regard response to the audience as the primary mode of style shift – but it is an active responsiveness not passivity. Bakhtin again: 'Discourse ... is oriented toward an understanding that is "responsive" ... Responsive understanding is ... an *active* understanding' (1981: 280). There is nothing, he writes, more terrible than a lack of response. The audience is as crucial in interaction as the speaker (Exercise 11.2). To illustrate: Coupland (1984) recorded a travel agent in conversation with a wide social range of clients, and analysed the level of /t/ voicing in the speech of both her and her clients. The agent converged towards more /t/ voicing with lower-class clients, who were themselves using more voicing, and she used less voicing when talking to higher-class clients, who used less voicing (Figure 11.3).

4 *Audience Design applies to all codes and levels of a language repertoire.* As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, bilinguals' language choices largely depend on who their

Exercise 11.2 Bakhtin on response

He writes:

The person to whom I respond is my addressee, from whom I, in turn expect a response (or in any case an active responsive understanding) ... After all, the utterance of the person to whom I am responding (I agree, I object, I execute, I take under advisement, and so forth) is already at hand, but his response (or responsive understanding) is still forthcoming. When constructing my utterance, I try actively to determine this response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance (I parry objections that I foresee, I make all kinds of provisos, and so forth). When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee's perception of my speech ... These considerations also determine my choice of a genre for my utterance, my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the *style* of my utterance. (1986: 95)

- Unpack the specifics of the to-and-fro process Bakhtin describes for how speakers conduct conversations. How does this work? How conscious do you think it is?
- What implications does it have for our language style choices?
- Do you agree that this is how we operate in conversation?

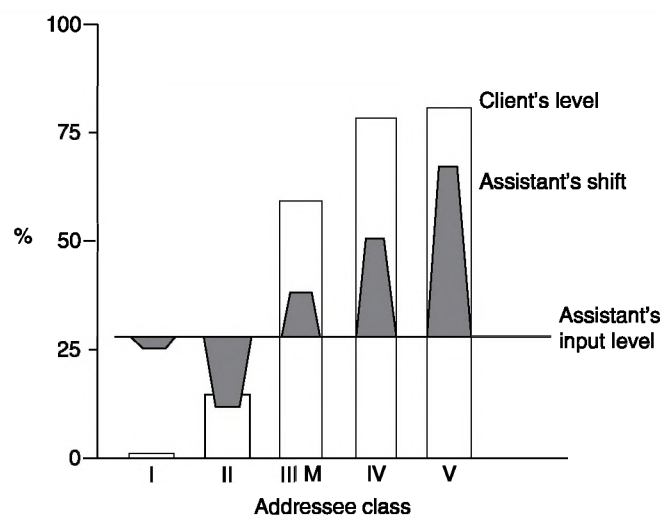


Figure 11.3 Convergence by Cardiff travel agent on intervocalic /t/ voicing to five occupational classes of clients (Class I highest, Class V lowest)

Source: Bell (1984), figure 8, derived from Coupland (1984), figure 4

audience is. The same process underlies monolingual style shifting, as argued earlier in this chapter. In addition, Audience Design applies to all levels of language not just variationist style shift. Some early sociolinguistic work took account of interlocutors. In Brown and Gilman's study (1960) of the T/V pronouns in European languages (such

as French *tu* and *vous*), the focus on the second person form necessarily prioritizes the addressee.

5 *A speaker's range of styles generally derives from and echoes the range that exists among speakers in the community.* As speakers we mainly draw on the linguistic range we hear about us as the resource for our own range of variety. While all speakers are creative, most of their creativity lies in novel use of the existing variety in their speech community rather than in creating new forms. Most of us are not innovators like Labov's Celeste and Eckert's Judy (Chapter 8). This follows directly from the Indexical Cycle, the processes by which language generates social meaning: it is the common pool of linguistic variety that speakers draw on in their styling. And that is the reason why graphs of the shape of Figure 11.1d do not (generally) occur, because they would presuppose the existence of extreme styling alongside little social variation. They imply that you can have second-order indexing without first-order, counter to the cycle shown in Figure 10.2. On the other hand, as we have seen, it is completely possible to have variables where there is difference between speakers but no style movement – those are the indicators, the first-order indexes. And as in Figure 11.1b, quantitative style shifts are normally less than the differences between social groups (what Labov 2001b: 86 terms 'Bell's principle') reinforcing the sense of the stylistic echoing the social.

6 *Speakers show a fine-grained ability to design their style for a range of different addressees, and to a lessening degree for other audience members.* In Chapter 6.4 I presented the concept of layered audience roles – the direct addressee, the unaddressed auditor, and the unratified overhearer (Table 6.4). We saw how the different audience members can affect bilinguals' language choices. By the same token monolingual speakers can subtly adjust their style to audience changes, for example when a stranger joins a group. A study by Bickerton showed a Hawaiian creole speaker shifting markedly towards standard English variants to address the researcher, but only half as much when the researcher was present just as an auditor but not being directly addressed (Bell 1984: 173).

7 *Styling according to topic or setting derives its meaning and direction from the underlying association of topics or settings with typical audience members.* This kind of association among audience, topic and setting is the foundation of Fishman's domains concept (Chapter 6.1). It is, however, one of the more tentative proposals of the Audience Design model, and there is evidence for and against it.

8 *As well as the 'Responsive' dimension of style, there is the 'Initiative' dimension where a shift in style itself initiates a change in the situation rather than resulting from such a change.*

9 *Such initiative style shifts are in essence 'Referee Design', by which the linguistic features associated with a group can be used to express affiliation with that group.*

These last two briefly-put points constitute a major dimension of style, and will be the focus of much of the rest of the chapter. Research on style necessarily investigates in depth, and therefore usually takes few speakers – often just one. In a study of style shifting by an African American teenager, Rickford and McNair-Knox explicitly set out to test some of the 'bold hypotheses and predictions' (1994: 241) of Audience Design as outlined earlier. They found a high degree of influence by audience and by topic on their informant's style. Exercise 11.3 invites you to assess and critique the theory for yourself.

Exercise 11.3 Critiquing Audience Design

Like all models, Audience Design has been challenged for its inadequacies. One of the most detailed comes in Coupland's *Style*, the best book on the subject (2007). Coupland devotes a chapter to Audience Design, and I see eight main challenges being raised:

- 1 Argument by elimination is unsatisfactory, for example in setting aside factors other than audience in the radio station data exemplified by Figure 11.2.
- 2 Style is treated as a linear scale (as in earlier variationist work), linked to a framework of static social categories such as class.
- 3 The quantification of 'social' and 'style' categories, particularly in relation to each other, is founded on questionable assumptions about community linguistic ranges.
- 4 Stylistic frequencies are assumed to be socially meaningful without theorizing how that happens, for example through indexicality.
- 5 The nature of the audience is inadequately theorized, for example the formulations of styling as both 'for and in response to' an audience conflates two different things.
- 6 The significance of 'design' needs to be unpacked, particularly in relation to what precisely 'responsiveness' means.
- 7 Audience Design over-stresses the audience aspect of verbal interaction and underplays the role of the speaker.
- 8 The approach over-stresses the constraints on speakers' styling, without adequate account of speakers' creative freedom.

Decades on, I agree with some among these criticisms, and in my exposition of the framework here have re-formulated certain things accordingly (in the early 1980s I had not come across Bakhtin, for example). Here are some ways to assess the theory and challenges to it:

- 9 Class members could take up one or more challenges from the eight above and research them.
- 10 Read Bell (1984) or (1997a) on Audience Design, and evaluate the model. See also Rickford and McNair-Knox's article (1994) which builds on it.
- 11 Read especially chapter 3 of Coupland (2007). Consider Coupland's challenges and evaluate them.
- 12 Draw your own conclusions about the different arguments. See also the chapters in Eckert and Rickford (2001) for a range of theory and data on style, including by Labov, Coupland, Giles and Bell.

Accommodation theory

While I was beginning to work up Audience Design in New Zealand, the Welsh social psychologist Howard Giles and his associates were much further advanced in devising a parallel approach, accommodation theory (Giles and Powesland 1975). Accommodation means adjusting your speech to the people you are interacting with. Initially titled Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT), it was broadened in the 1980s to encompass wider aspects of interaction as 'Communication Accommodation

Theory' (CAT). The theory goes beyond description to give social-psychological content to the processes I have described.

Accommodation commonly shows in a speaker shifting her style to be more like that of the person she is talking to – **convergence**. The convergence may be upwards or downwards depending on the relative social status of the interlocutors, symmetrical or asymmetrical depending whether the shift is unilateral or mutual. Alternatively, instead of converging, speakers may diverge from their addressee. Divergence is regarded as a tactic for differentiating oneself from others. Research examined issues like the motivations for accommodation (such as seeking approval) and how it is evaluated (Giles and Ogay 2007).

The theory became increasingly complex as it tried to cope with findings which did not sit easily with simple convergence or divergence. For example, Giles and Smith (1979) found that speakers can converge too much, causing addressees to react unfavourably to what they may feel is patronizing or ingratiating behaviour (recall the listeners' reactions to 'Valerie' in Campbell-Kibler's ING experiment, Exercise 10.6). Riders to the theory proliferated in the 1980s, and while research activity has continued apace, the theory has not advanced greatly, perhaps partly because the models had already become quite unwieldy.

To linguists, early accommodation theory's chief deficiency was its linguistic naivety, dealing largely in parameters such as speech rate or ratings of whole 'accents'. By the 1980s, some sociolinguists came to accommodation theory in search of an explanation of the patterns they were finding in their study of specific linguistic features. As well as Coupland and myself, this included Trudgill, who re-visited his Norwich interviews in order to investigate accommodation there, by comparing his own speech as interviewer with his informants'. The result for the variable of glottalization of /t/ in words like *butter* is shown in Figure 11.4. Trudgill is clearly in his own production tracking the /t/ levels of the informants, who are ordered by social class.

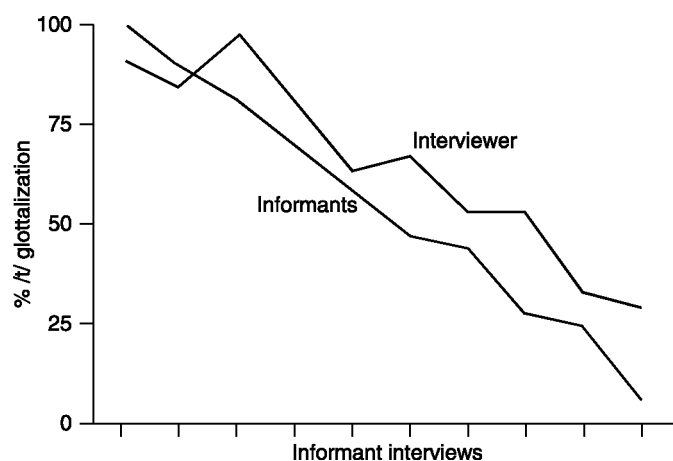


Figure 11.4 An interviewer's accommodation to 10 informants on /t/ glottalization in Norwich
Source: Bell (1984), figure 7, after Trudgill

11.3 REFEREE DESIGN

Frames for stylization

Rex O'Neal stands on a dock on the island of Ocracoke, North Carolina, performing his *hoi toide* vowels. An upper-middle-class teenager from New York uses features from African American Vernacular English. A white adolescent Londoner breaks into a phrase of Panjabi. Moroccan teenagers in Belgium take on the local Antwerp dialect usually associated with anti-immigrant racists.

These are stylizations, roughly what I have called earlier **Referee Design**. The previous section dealt with the 'responsive' dimension of style, and we now turn to the 'initiative' dimension (points 8 and 9 in the Audience Design model) where speakers intentionally stylize linguistic features in order to call up associations with particular groups or identities. There have been a series of attempts in sociolinguistics to capture how this works, listed in Table 11.1. This smorgasbord of frameworks and labellings covers socially similar phenomena with a range of linguistic outcomes, from a bilingual's switching to a monolingual's manipulation of dialects.

Here language makes reference to a group – often an outgroup, but it may also be the speaker's own group – through intentional use of its linguistic code. That is, in line with the Indexical Cycle, the language associated with a group can be used to evoke that group. These references are by their nature usually short-term, but in some circumstances, outgroup referee design can be long-term. Silverstein notes (1979) that a form may go from being 'creative' in his terms to being 'presupposing' – that is, it becomes established as a norm, taking on a new cycle of indexicality. This may even be the case for a whole linguistic code. In diglossia (Chapter 5.3) part of a speech community's repertoire is a code from a different place or time. Usually we would class this as an initiative or referee situation, but here it is normalized as part of the baseline.

The approaches in Table 11.1 differ in terminology and emphasis, but the commonalities between them are more striking than their differences. All of them assume that linguistic form has social meaning and that it is imbued and moulded by the multitude of past usages. They propose that those meanings can be intentionally applied and manipulated in speakers' performances. And they accept that there is a dialectical movement back-and-forth between the responsive and initiative dimensions, by which meanings are adapted in the very acts of being adopted.

Taking the initiative

In these frameworks, a responsive shift results from a change in the situation, and an initiative shift itself **initiates** such a change. This is the 'situational' and 'metaphorical' switching that Blom and Gumperz (1972) found in the Norwegian community they researched. In responsive style there tends to be a regular association between language and social situation, which initiative style trades on, infusing the flavour of one setting into a different context. To quote Bakhtin again:

Table 11.1 Approaches to stylization

<i>Responsive</i>	<i>Initiative</i>	<i>Source</i>
Style	Stylization	Bakhtin (1981) [1934/5]
Situational	Metaphorical	Blom and Gumperz (1972)
Presupposing	Creating	Silverstein (1979)
Audience Design	Referee Design	Bell (1984, 2001a)
–	Crossing	Rampton (1995)
Relational	Identity	Coupland (2001a, 2007)

- Different class members/groups can each research one of these approaches (omit Bakhtin).
- Summarize and present the framework to the class, including some of the data to which it has been applied. Assess each framework and how well it explains the example data.
- Compare the frameworks. Can you suggest an overarching approach which incorporates the best aspects of them all? What terms would you adopt?

As a result of the work done by all these stratifying forces in language, there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms – words and forms that can belong to ‘no one’; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents ... Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life. (1981: 293)

Bakhtin’s own term ‘stylization’ is the simplest and perhaps clearest, with its implication of the intentional re-configuring of the style resource of a community. Stylization often involves a re-orientation by speakers of their own identity in relation to their audience, hence my term Referee Design – the linguistic features associated with a group are used to refer to that group. Sometimes that will focus on an absent reference group – for example by adopting another accent – rather than the present addressee. Referee Design can involve a speaker shifting to identify more strongly with their own ingroup, or to an outgroup with which they wish to associate. It can even involve simultaneous identification with two groups at once: Yaeger-Dror (1993) found that Israeli singers could co-articulate two variants of /r/ simultaneously, thus aiming at two targets at the same time.

The force of stylization

If a particular style can be used to create a situation, the question is how does it get to carry the meaning that makes it usable for that purpose? It gets the force that can be put to work in initiative style from its routine use in response to certain kinds of situation – the Indexical Cycle. The notion that we can stylize another group’s speech presupposes that their variety has some distinguishable and relatively stable linguistic features. For me to be able to ‘sound American’ or ‘sound RP’ requires that there are some forms, or clusters of forms, or frequencies of forms which are distinctive to those varieties. If analysts wishes to cut loose from all such categorization, they must provide an explanation for the pervasive if partial regularities which we find in speakers’ style choices – just as those

who wish to establish generalizations must make allowance for that significant chunk of style which even their best theories refuse to account for.

The question arises then of what 'referring' to the language of a group means. Speakers' Referee Design may run the full gamut of degrees of association with the referred-to group, from simple evocation of the other's voice, through to whole-hearted identification with the group to which the code belongs. At the maximal end of association lies the possibility of **appropriation**, whereby an outgroup takes possession of another group's code. Cases where an outgroup speaker adopts African American Vernacular forms could be construed in this way, at least by African Americans themselves. In contrast, the kind of 'crossing' to Stylized Asian English that Rampton researched (1995), although relatively frequent, does not appear to be attempting appropriation or to carry the pejorative implication of that label (Example 11.1). It evokes rather than appropriates.

Critiques

The preceding section is my own account of stylization – but others would disagree. To my mind the main challenge for any theory of style, including Audience Design, is to take account of the dynamics of stylization while achieving a worthwhile level of generalization about the patterns that we can discern in style. The basic criticism of frameworks that attempt to systematize style is that they are reductionist: they minimize or discount the complexity of speakers' moment-by-moment, self-expressive use of language – of the kind Eckert's burned-out burnouts display. This is indeed an issue for Audience Design, but it is equally one that **any** style model will face, because any attempt to discern patterns or regularities in people's style will be open to the same challenge.

There is force to the challenges made by scholars such as Eckert (2000), Schilling-Estes (2004) and Coupland (2007). I think the basis of a dynamic view of style is present in my concept of Referee Design; however as originally presented in Bell (1984) it had the character of an add-on. I treated Referee Design as a secondary dimension, which could kick in when Audience Design failed. At very least, this left the problem of knowing what was the boundary between the two dimensions: where did Audience Design end, and Referee Design begin? When did speakers shift from responsive to initiative mode?

More recently I have tended to the view (Bell 2001a) that we have to acknowledge Referee Design as an ever-present part of individuals' use of language. We are always proactively positioning ourselves in relation to our own ingroup, other groups and our interlocutors. These are complementary and co-existent dimensions of style, which operate simultaneously in all speech events. Yes, we are designing our talk for our audience. But we are also concurrently designing it in relation to other factors and referee groups. The intractable fact nevertheless remains that the initiative dimension does derive from the responsive. As the Indexical Cycle shows, stylization only works because it leverages off a style with known social associations.

The responsive and initiative dimensions of style are part of a dilemma that has a long history in social theory – the relationship between **structure** and **agency**. Structure is the social scaffolding that shapes and constrains the way we live, and agency is our ability as humans to take our own actions, follow our own practices, make our own way. The social sciences have a long tradition of oscillating between the two dimensions.

Exercise 11.4 Stylizing ethnicity

Natalie Schilling-Estes (2004) analysed a single conversation between an African American and a Lumbee Indian. She found considerable evidence that these two speakers were adjusting their speech styles to accommodate each other at different stages of the conversation, sometimes converging and sometimes diverging. The speakers used the linguistic resources at their disposal to actively adopt different stances and personas, and to take the initiative in framing the encounter, their relationship and their positioning towards what they were discussing. Schilling-Estes mixed both quantitative and qualitative analysis to present a much more complete account of this interaction than has often been achieved.

- Record a conversation between two people you know who speak different ethnic varieties. Ask them to talk about ethnic relations in your country.
- Analyse their linguistic self-presentation, both across the whole interview and as the interview develops from topic to topic and the two participants position themselves in relation to each other. For example studies, see Schilling-Estes (2004) and Bell (2001a – next section).

In sociolinguistics the pendulum has currently swung very much towards agency rather than structure. This has major repercussions for our approach to style. I take the view that the swing to agency has unbalanced our view of language style. Approaches which treat speakers as untrammelled agents do not take enough account of the role of structure in interaction and life, just as approaches which treat speakers as sociodemographic correlates did not take adequate account of individual agency. I return to the social theory underlying the responsive/initiative dilemma in the next, concluding chapter.

11.4 PERFORMING SOCIOLINGUISTIC IDENTITIES

What I have called stylization or Referee Design involves speakers performing language. Now, there is a sense in which all language is performed – very obviously by speakers like Eckert's burned-out burnouts, who appear to be always 'on stage'. More commonly language performance occurs when a speaker breaks out briefly from conversation into an overt performance mode. Here a speaker puts language on display, most obviously when quoting or reporting speech. In the flow of an otherwise everyday interaction, a speaker takes on – spontaneously and fleetingly – a performing role. What differentiates this 'mundane' performance (Coupland 2007) from staged performance is that it is informal, transient, unscheduled, uninstitutionalized.

Such everyday language performance is close bound with notions of identity, as my exposition of Referee Design will have indicated. 'Identity' is one of the most used and least specified terms in sociolinguistic studies, and there is a case for avoiding it – but the notion is not easily avoidable. I take identity to include both structured and agentive dimensions. It is partly a product, a given – you cannot choose where you were born,