

Race in the performance of a Baltimore persona

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NWA 51
13 October 2023

Overview

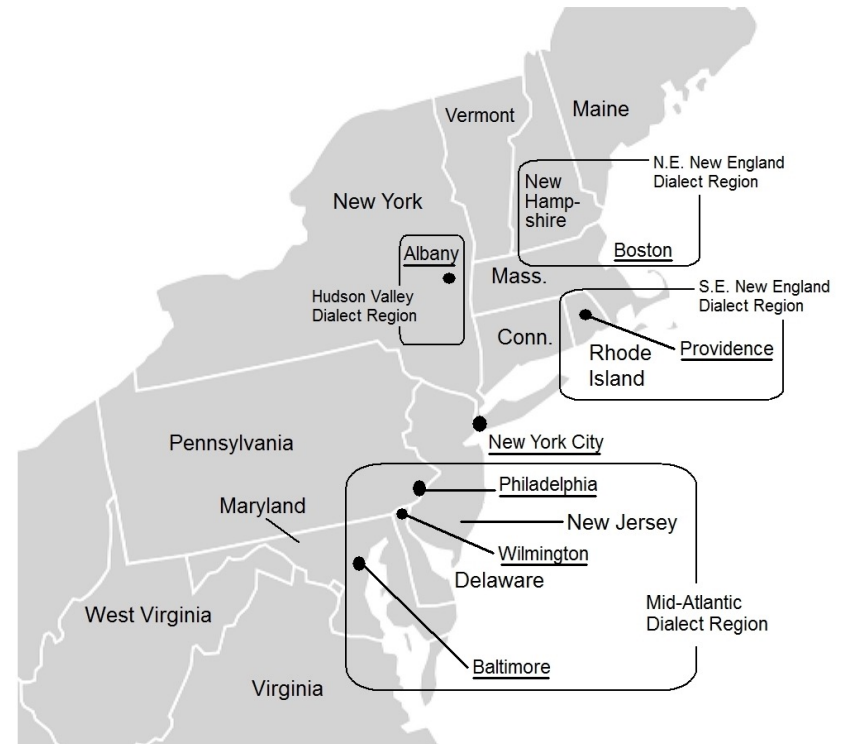
- Focus: The linguistic performance of Baltimore's Hon persona
- Questions:
 - What linguistic features are used in performing the Hon persona?
 - How does this differ between Black and white speakers?

Hon

- *Hon* is a term of endearment, from *honey*
 - "Thanks for coming to my talk, hon!"
- Strongly associated with Baltimore
- A *Hon* is also a type of person (see below)
- *Hon* is racialized as white; *honey* is more associated with Black speakers (see Puglia 2018: ch. 3)

Baltimore

- Deindustrialization
- White flight
- Population loss
 - 1950: ~950,000
 - 2022: ~570,000
- Demographic shift
 - 1950: ~76% white, ~24% Black
 - 2022: ~29% white, ~62% Black



Map from Malanoski & Newman (forthcoming). Courtesy of Raymond Hickey.

Hons and HonFest

- Hon persona (Rizzo 2010, Puglia 2018):
 - White working-class woman
 - Exaggerated 50s/60s style
 - Bawlmerese
- HonFest controversies
 - Parodying working-class women
 - Excluding/erasing Black population
- Hon Hive
 - Community of practice



Methods

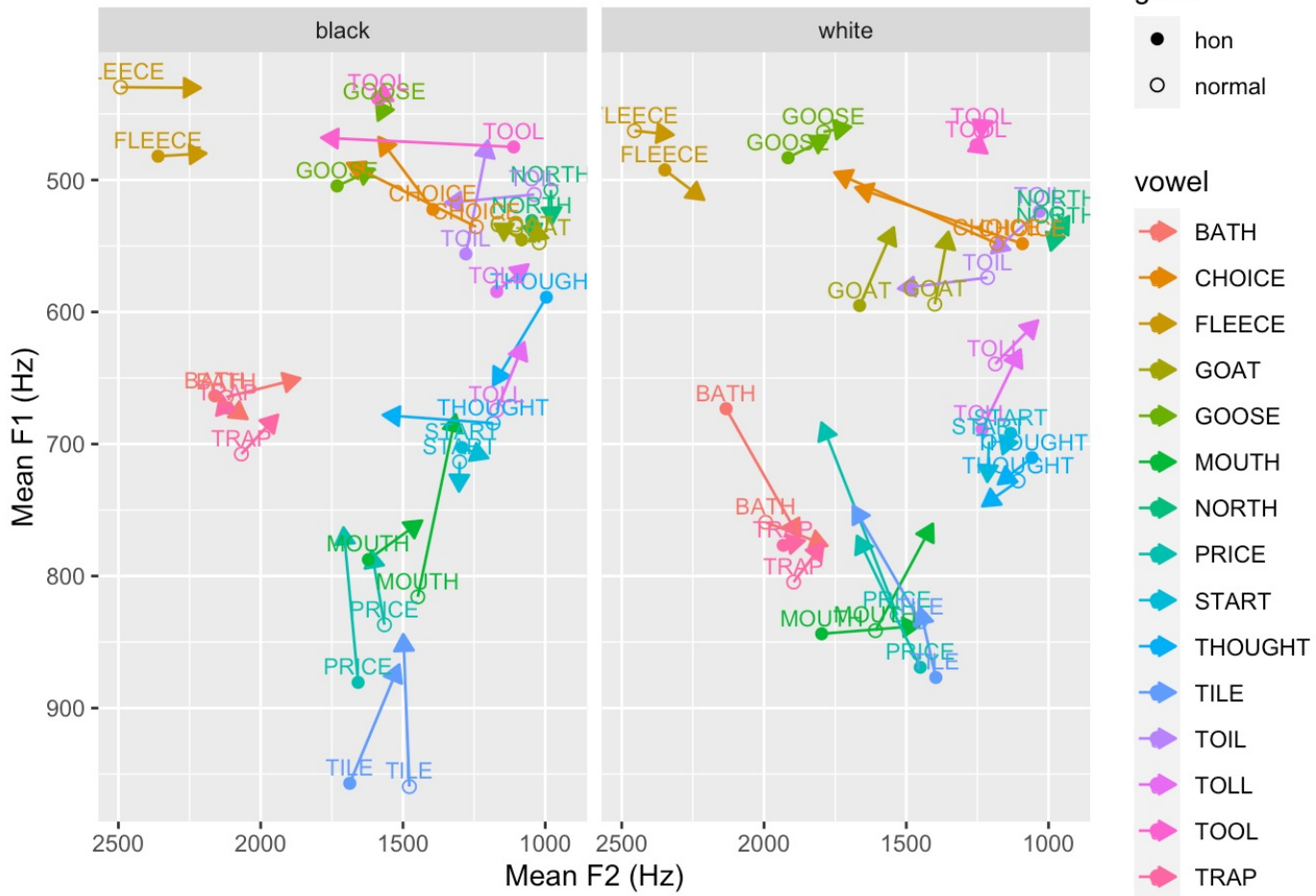
- Participants
 - 7 members of Hon Hive
 - All from Baltimore metro region
 - 6 white, 1 Black
- Procedure
 - 2 reading passages, 2 word lists
 - 1 passage and word list read in "normal" guise, the others read in "Hon" guise
 - Tasks counterbalanced across participants
- Transcripts aligned with Montreal Forced Aligner (McAuliffe et al. 2017)
- Formants extracted with FAVE (Rosenfelder et al. 2022)

Bawlmerese vocalic variables

- Most salient:
 - Fronted GOAT
 - Monophthongal PRICE
 - Monophthongal CHOICE
 - Not salient:
 - Raised NORTH/FORCE
 - Raised START
 - Tense BATH
 - Less salient:
 - Fronted GOOSE
 - Fronted MOUTH
- (Hisley 1964, Labov et al. 2006, personal knowledge)

Results

Difference between normal and Hon guise by race



Discussion

- Some norms are shared by Black and white speakers
- White speakers mainly use the most well-known features of Bawlmerese
- Raised BATH is also a salient feature of Bawlmerese, despite rarely being subject to conscious awareness (cf. Schilling-Estes 1998)
- Black speaker targets different norms—she uses "[her] African American style"
 - Suggests existence (or formation) of a register/persona comparable to Bawlmerese/the Hon

Thanks

Thank you to:

- Cecelia Cutler
- Bill Haddican
- Bonnie Hockstein
- Christine Mallinson
- Michael Newman
- David J. Puglia
- Michele Stickel
- Judy Templeton
- the Hons of HonFest.

References

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