

## **A discursive approach to linguistic style and the construction of an “expert” identity**

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Recent studies of how speakers construct identities in interaction have focused on the combination of linguistic variables and how these variables, often phonetic, create and reflect social meanings collectively. This paper presents an ethnographically-situated analysis of a locally-defined identity created through the bricolage of discursive variables. Specifically, I explore how focus group participants construct a locally-relevant “expert” style by appropriating and melding different discursive resources across the course of an interaction. My analysis draws primarily on recent literature on style, specifically viewing sociolinguistic style as a process of bricolage, resulting in an interactionally cohesive collection of various linguistic resources (California Style Collective 1993). Previous studies have identified sets of phonetic variables (e.g., vowel locus, voice quality, pitch level) that index multiple aspects of identities and personae that coalesce into a coherent local style of meaning (e.g., Bucholtz 1996; Eckert 2002, 2008; Podesva, et al. 2002; Zhang 2005). Similarly, I focus on discursive variables to show that a successful “expert” linguistic style requires the sustained use of multiple discursive variables, and I find that the occasional use of “expert” style variables does not allow participants to successfully construct an expert persona.

My data come from two separate semi-structured focus group discussions about country music totaling approximately three hours. In these conversations, participants draw on multiple discursive resources to index their relative levels of expertise. First, participants use certain epistemic modality markers (I know, definitely), indicating a confident epistemic stance. Second, participants use an academic register to talk about country music, applying a confident, *authoritative tone to the specific subject at hand* (so therefore the way she presents herself and who she is physically appeals to everyone). Third, participants cite news media as external sources of authority (that's what Redbook told me), enacting a well-informed persona. Fourth, participants directly reference multiple aspects of country music (singers, songs, and lyrics), demonstrating their knowledge of the focus group discussion topic. Fifth, by creatively incorporating country music lyrics into their conversational style, participants draw on their high degree of familiarity with country music and the cleverness required to manipulate lyrics. Narrowing my analysis to one of the two focus groups, I ethnographically examine interpersonal dynamics and each speaker's relative expert status throughout the conversation. I find that two of the five participants successfully establish themselves as experts by regularly using all of the above discursive variables. Conversely, the other three participants periodically use one or more of these discursive resources, but not with the frequency or consistency required to index an expert identity. In other words, the use of one of the above discursive resources may momentarily demonstrate expertise, but the whole set of features must be used repeatedly throughout the interaction to create an expert persona. Therefore, I argue that the successful construction of a locally-relevant “expert” style is only accomplished through the process of bricolage, by which speakers use disparate discursive resources to construct a cohesive “expert” style.