

Stancetaking and vowel quality in bilingual speakers

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Throughout the history of both sound- and discourse-based approaches to variation in language, researchers have identified potential relationships between the two. Goffman (1981) writes that a change in footing may involve change in pitch, volume, rhythm, stress, or tonal quality; Johnstone (2007) finds that style, defined broadly but encompassing phonetic elements, plays a role in stancetaking. Goffman's and Johnstone's findings are echoed in the field of sociophonetics; Hay and Drager (2007) point out that "Recent work has shown that fine details of phonetic implementation are highly instrumental in the organization of discourse structure" (95), while Yaeger-Dror and Hall-Lew (2002) show that stance type can be a good predictor of prosodic variation, and Podesva (forthcoming) analyzes prosodic variation in conjunction with discourse elements, including stance, to understand the persona being performed in interaction.

While the above studies focus mainly on prosodic variation in the speech of native speakers of English, the present study considers the effects of stance-related discourse factors on vowel production by four non-native speakers of English (two men and two women). The goal of the study was to determine whether discourse factors can affect vowel quality and in particular whether they affect the influence of the speaker's native language phonology on his or her second language production. The discourse factors focused on were utterance topic and two elements of the stance triangle (Du Bois 2007): evaluation and alignment. I chose to focus on stancetaking because it has been shown to have interpersonal and intersubjective functions in discourse (Du Bois 2007; Kärkkäinen 2003, 2006; Lempert 2008, 2009), and therefore might be expected to influence self-positioning through linguistic style, including vowel production. When F1 and F2 for several vowel classes were subjected to multiple regression analysis with the relevant discourse factors, patterns emerged, showing that vowel production was affected by discourse factors in some similar ways and some different ways across speakers. All of the discourse factors considered had significant effects on the quality of at least some vowel classes for each speaker.

The significant correlations between stance type and vowel quality indicate the fruitfulness of this type of analysis to inform both our understanding of stancetaking and investigations of intraspeaker variation in vowel quality; both stance analysis and analysis of vowel quality variation may be used to enrich the findings of the other.