

ENREGISTERMENT: A SPECIAL ISSUE

This issue of *American Speech* is a rich one, indeed. Besides usual features of the summer issue, like the annual section on pedagogy and “Among the New Words,” it includes a cluster of articles on “enregisterment” of linguistic features. The notion of ENREGISTERMENT, proposed by Asif Agha (2003), is relatively new. Soon after publication of Agha’s seminal article, Barbara Johnstone, Jennifer Andrus, and Andrew E. Danielson (2006) fused Agha’s enregisterment with Michael Silverstein’s “orders of indexicality” (1995, 2003) and proposed (2006, 78), “on the basis of historical research, ethnography, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistic interviews, [to] describe how a set of linguistic features that were once not noticed at all, then used and heard primarily as markers of socioeconomic class, have come to be linked increasingly to place and ‘enregistered’ . . . as a dialect.” Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson wrote about enregisterment of “Pittsburghese,” to which Johnstone returns in this issue, though with a twist.

Like Johnstone’s contribution on “Pittsburghese” T-shirts, all of the articles in this issue are concerned to greater or lesser extent with commodification of dialect features, as well as with “talk about talk,” which encompasses T-shirt and bumper sticker commentary, dictionaries for tourists, and metadiscursive accounts (evaluation of dialect produced in field interviews, newspaper articles, etc.) that assert specific relationships among dialect, people, and place. As Kathryn Remlinger (p. 131 below) argues in her contribution, “When dialect is used as a marketing tool, discursive and metadiscursive practices and cultural values combine not only to sell physical items but to sell notions about the dialect, residents, and the local area.” While T-shirts, postcards, and the like are evidence of enregisterment, they also further enregister the dialects they identify and promote. What they “really” promote is an ideology of difference essential to the very notion of dialect, as well as a sense of identity for speakers of the enregistered dialect enabled by that ideology.

Enregisterment is a powerful theory. *American Speech* refrains from publishing language theory qua theory, but discussion of enregisterment is an exception. First, it helps to explain a lot that interests sociolinguists; indeed, it engages several of the “approaches that make up (or include) some form of ‘sociolinguistics’” broad-mindedly identified by Preston (2004, 141). As Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson (2006, 78) suggested of their study,

In addition to arguing for the relevance of the ideas of enregisterment and indexicality to the historical dialectology of American English, we model a particularistic

approach to linguistic and ideological change that is sensitive not only to ideas about language that circulate in the media but also to the life experiences of particular speakers. Furthermore, we show how an understanding of variability in speech communities, language attitudes, and the stylized performance of dialect is enhanced by exploring the historical and ideological processes that make resources for these practices available.

Second, the articles in this issue operate along similar particularistic lines: they test and elaborate the theory by telling us about understandings of and attitudes toward dialects of English of places with particular histories, particular socioeconomic profiles, and specific material and commercial cultures. These places are made places partly by enregisterment and its linguistic artifacts; some of those artifacts are robust features current in dialects of those places, while others are relics of a particular heritage. As the nominalists at the medieval University of Paris used to say, *Rien ne vit qu'en détails*.

There is much to admire about theories of enregisterment as means to exploring the value of dialect in social and ideological context. The relationship enregisterment constructs between theory and detail is especially valuable. The theory thus has immediate explanatory value and is grounded in the experience of language, not only by speakers, nor only within a community, but also by a community in contact with outsiders. The articles included in this issue account for communities in the American North, Midlands, and South, and these American examples of enregisterment and its effects are complemented by Joan C. Beal's study of the contrasts between "Geordie" and "Sheffieldish" dialects of the north of England. I especially like the way enregisterment, as an analytical approach to dialect, synthesizes history (including current history), material culture, linguistic fieldwork, folk linguistics/perceptual dialectology, discourse, style, phonology, lexis, syntax—in fact, nearly every aspect of American speech and nearly every approach to studying it. Thus, it offers something to every reader of *American Speech*. For a journal with the broad and varied mission of publishing the best scholarship about American speech, this synthesis is very attractive—it simultaneously focuses and enlarges the discipline.

Enregisterment (the theoretical construct, not the fact) is so new that we can easily trace its development to date. Agha's article was published in 2003, and Silverstein's argument for orders of indexicality, though first published in 1976, was reiterated in an article also published in 2003. In fact, both articles appeared, contiguously, in a special issue of *Language and Communication* devoted to the work of Silverstein and his students (of whom Agha is one). This circumstance may have prompted Johnstone and Andrus to adapt enregisterment to the purposes of American dialectology in time to present a paper about it at the University of Cardiff in 2005, after which

they revised their work, supplemented by Danielson's previous research in Pittsburgh newspaper archives, into the article published in the *Journal of English Linguistics* (Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson 2006, 77).

Subsequently, Joan C. Beal organized a session on enregisterment for Studies in the History of the English Language 5 (SHEL 5) at the University of Georgia, October 4–6, 2007, which included early versions of the articles by Johnstone, Beal, and Remlinger published here. Remlinger, Salmons, and von Schneidemesser presented an early version of their contribution at the American Dialect Society meeting in Chicago, January 3–6, 2008 (which means they must have conceived the paper in time for the August deadline for abstract submissions). I sat next to Connie C. Eble, formerly editor of this journal, during both conferences, and the papers on enregisterment caught her imagination, too, prompting her to write the short article on New Orleans speech published in this issue's "Miscellany." Given the mounting enthusiasm for enregisterment, it seems appropriate for *American Speech*, given its mission, to collect work on it at this time.

Since SHEL 5, Kathryn Remlinger has acted as Guest Editor of the cluster of articles about enregisterment published here. I would like to thank her for taking on the job so willingly and for seeing the project through to the end. The articles speak eloquently for themselves, and if this introductory note has been unnecessary, it has nonetheless been an honor to write it, as it is an honor to share this special issue on enregisterment of English (especially American) dialects with our readers.

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MICHAEL ADAMS
Indiana University at Bloomington