

Constructions of Local and Non-Local Identity in Canadian Hip Hop Lyrics

Examining phonetic variation in Canadian Hip Hop artists' lyrics allows us to better understand how artists use subtle variations to construct and project a local or non-local (read: Americanized) identity. I examine two variables, one that is considered indexical of Canadian English, and one that is generally considered indexical of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and their frequency of use by Canadian Hip Hop artists. The feature which indicates a Canadian identity is diphthong raising ("Canadian Raising"):

"Struck by lightning brand new exciting dance/writing grants we mighta had a fighting chance"
[lʌjtɪnɪŋ] [ɛksʌɪtɪŋ] [ɪɹaɪtɪŋ] [mʌɪjɹə] [fʌɪtɪŋ]
(Terfry 2005)

On the other hand, r-lessness is a strictly non-Canadian feature; however, it occurs frequently in the speech of Canadian Hip Hop artists, regardless of their ethnicity and the fact that they are not American:

"See me on the bill better follow me there/I solemnly swear I'll make it back to Oliver Square"
[bɛrə] [ðea] [swea] [əlɪvə skwea]
(Pemberton 2006)

I find, transcribe and code approximately 600 tokens of Canadian Raising and 1700 tokens of r-lessness in the lyrics from four songs each from the nine artists in my corpus. Each token of a Canadian or non-Canadian variable will be coded for the artist's age, ethnicity and region in Canada in which they live. Statistical measures I will use in my analysis include a standard deviation, which I will calculate to determine whether there is a robust central tendency for artists to construct, or refrain from constructing, a Canadian identity. Preliminary results suggest that Canadian artists are strategically and perhaps consciously constructing and projecting a Canadian identity.

Pemberton, Roland [Cadence Weapon]. (2006). Oliver Square. On *Breaking Kayfabe* [CD].
Toronto: Upper Class Recordings.

Terfry, Richard [Buck 65]. (2005). Way Back When. On *Secret House Against the World* [CD].
Toronto: Warner Music Canada Co.