"You haven't been to Queens": The epistemics of identity and place

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Introduction. In recent years, many have researched the linguistic construction of social identities (e.g. Ochs, 1993; Schiffrin, 1996; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Their work has established that social identity is indeed discursively constructed; it is not a pre-given characteristic that inherently exists within individuals, but rather it emerges through interaction. Identity construction can take different forms depending on the speakers, context, topic, and myriad other factors. More recently, the role of epistemics and epistemic rights – what we know and how we establish our rights to that knowledge – have been highlighted in the study of interactional identity construction (e.g. Raymond & Heritage, 2006), and van Dijk (2013) has called for a line of research on Epistemic Discourse Analysis. In this paper, we contribute to the growing body of work on identity and epistemics in discourse, with a particular focus on the construction of place identity.

Our analysis centers on the emergence of a speaker's place identity as a New York City resident. We demonstrate how this speaker constructs this New Yorker identity in relation to the context and his interlocutors, and how such construction depends greatly on the speaker's negotiation of epistemic rights. This speaker frequently utilizes a process of authentication in order to legitimize his claims to knowledge and thus his identity, while also engaging in a process of denaturalization that acts to downplay other's rights to knowledge and constructs their identities as partial or inauthentic.

Theoretical background. Ochs (1993: 288) described social identity as covering a "range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community identities one may attempt to claim or assign in the course of social life". Social identity is rarely explicitly stated in discourse, but speakers encode their identity using various linguistic strategies. Ochs (1993) focused on how speakers establish social identities through verbally performing social acts (any socially recognized, goal-directed behavior) and stances (displays of epistemic and affective attitudes). Based on interpretation of the act and stance meanings encoded by linguistic constructions, we can examine social identity.

Ochs (1993) encouraged a social constructivist approach to identity, where researchers should ask, "What kind of social identity is a person attempting to construct in performing this kind of verbal act or in verbally expressing this kind of stance?" Ochs (1993) also stressed that "in all situations, even the most institutionalized and ritualized, people are *agents* in the production of their own and others' social selves" (186) and that "social identities evolve in the course of social interaction, transformed in response to the acts and stances of other interlocutors as well as to fluctuations in how a speaker decides to participate in the activity at hand" (198).

Building on previous work on this topic, Bucholtz & Hall (2005) developed five principles that provide a framework for examining identity. The emergence principle describes how

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identity is not an internal psychological phenomenon, but emerges in interaction. The positionality principle states that identities may consist of macro-level demographic categories, but also local and temporary roles. The third principle, indexicality, provides the ways through which indexical processes can construct identity, including stance-taking, which has been elaborated by Du Bois (2007). The partialness principle states that identity constantly shifts across interaction and contexts, and will always be partial.

The "heart of the model" is the relationality principle, which describes how identities are "intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 589). One of the identity relations named by Bucholtz & Hall is authentication/denaturalization, which "[work] off the ideological perception of realness and artifice" (2004: 498). Authentication is the social process in which identities are verified in discourse: "the processes by which authenticity is claimed, imposed, or perceived" (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 465). Denaturalization "foregrounds untruth, pretense, and imposture" and is any process in which identity is constructed as "crafted, fragmented, problematic, or false" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004: 498; 2005: 602). Bucholtz & Hall (2004) stress that these are active processes that are interactionally achieved by speakers.

While authentication has been analyzed by a variety of researchers, Bucholtz & Hall (2004) noted that there has been much less work on denaturalization. Bucholtz (2003) drew attention to the importance of denaturalization:

> Perhaps more than any of the other tactics of intersubjectivity, denaturalization highlights the value of conceptualizing identity relations as polar, for this arrangement forces analytic attention to precisely those aspects of identity practice least examined by sociolinguists: those that emphasize the gap between a performed identity and an assumed target reality. (Bucholtz 2003: 409).

Bucholtz & Hall (2004) also write: "Denaturalization may also occur when the authenticity of an identity is challenged or questioned because a rupture of that identity has been perceived" (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 501).

Research has also found that epistemics can play an important role in identity construction. Raymond & Heritage (2006) define the 'epistemics of social relations' as "methods for managing rights to identity-bound knowledge in self-other relations" and they demonstrate how the management of epistemics can be a resource for constructing specific relevant identities in interaction (678, 680). Here, we argue that epistemics can play an important role in the processes of authentication and denaturalization in identity construction.

While Johnstone (1990; 1999) has discussed the link between place identity and regional dialect features, and Eckert (1996; 2000; 2004) has described how social persona can be linked with place, researchers such as Myers (2006) and Modan (2007) have analyzed place as socially and interactionally constructed in discourse. We follow in these researchers' line of work in order to better understand how place identity is interactionally constructed via the processes of authentication and denaturalization, with a focus on epistemics in conversation.

Data and methodology. In this paper, we examined data from a conversation recorded in Alex's living room, in Washington, D.C. Alex, Sylvia, and Meg had met four months before this conversation, as first year graduate students in the linguistics program at Georgetown University.

Before moving to D.C., Alex had been living in Boston, her hometown. Meg is originally from India but had lived in New York for five years before moving to D.C., and Sylvia was born in New York but grew up in different parts of the U.S. Alex had invited Meg and Sylvia over for dinner and a movie and to meet her boyfriend, Mike, for the first time. Mike is originally from Boston, but had moved to New York three years prior to this conversation to pursue a career in acting.

In the data, Mike's place identity emerges according to the context, interlocutors, and the topic of conversation. His place identity relies on the management of epistemics, which is active here in the processes of authentication and denaturalization. Mike's place identity emerges as that of a New York City resident, one that is knowledgeable about the city, its neighborhoods, and the people who reside there. Throughout the data, this is the identity that most clearly and most frequently emerges[1].

New York City place identity. In the first excerpt, Mike engages in a process of authentication of his identity as a current New York resident. He makes claims about the possibility of being mugged in New York, and evaluates the neighborhoods of New York and their safety, using epistemic stances in the process of authentication:

(1)   11 →   Mike   It depends where in New York. (*pause*)
           12 →   If I lived in Brooklyn (I probably would've.)
           13   Meg   Well it depends where in Brooklyn too.
           14   If you live in *Dum*bo[2],
           15   the hipsters aren't gonna mug you.
           16   Sylvia   [hahaha
           17 →   Mike   [Right, but if you live in *Bed*-Stuy[3]-
           18   If you live in Bed-Stuy.

In (11), Mike takes the epistemic stance that a potential mugging "depends where in New York," asserting his knowledge of the neighborhoods within New York City. He specifies his knowledge further in (12), with another epistemic stance that evaluates the burrough of Brooklyn as a dangerous place where he "probably would've" been mugged. Meg challenges Mike on this point, and with an even more place-specific epistemic stance, asserts that a potential mugging also "depends where in Brooklyn too. If you live in Dumbo, the hipsters aren't gonna mug you" in (13-15). In (17), Mike affirms her epistemic claims, with "right", but follows this affirmation with "but" and contrasts Dumbo with Bed-Stuy, thus naming another neighborhood within Brooklyn and evaluating this is a dangerous part of Brooklyn. In this example, both Mike and Meg engage in a process of authentication in which they use "insider" places names (Dumbo and Bed-Stuy) as resources and epistemic stances towards these places to construct their identities as knowledgeable New York residents.

In the next example we see Mike engage in a process of denaturalization, where he dismisses the neighborhood where Meg lived as being part of New York City, and thus her claims to epistemic rights on the topic of the city and her identity as a New Yorker:

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[1] Other salient identities (religious, professional) were also analyzed, but for this paper we focus on place identity.
[2] Acronym for "Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass", a neighborhood in Brooklyn
[3] Abbreviation for Bedford-Stuyvesant, a neighborhood in Brooklyn

(2)	23	Meg	I lived in Forest Hills.
	24		That's like- (*pause*)
	25	Alex	Is that good or bad.
	26 →	Mike	That doesn't count.
	27	Meg	Haha it really doesn't count.

In (23), Meg states where she lived in New York City, "Forest Hills," an upper middle-class neighborhood in Queens. Mike evaluates Forest Hills in (26), stating "That doesn't count." With this strong epistemic stance, Mike swiftly dismisses Meg's claims to authenticity, thus denaturalizing her identity and in this process also authenticating his own identity as a knowledgeable New York resident who knows enough about the city that he can make the judgment of what "doesn't count". Interestingly, Meg aligns herself with Mike and his stance in (27) – "Haha it really doesn't count".

Later on in the same conversation, Alex and Meg are discussing Spanish-speaking groups in New York, when Mike says, "You haven't been to Queens." This example illustrates a complex instance where both authentication and denaturalization are evident:

(3)	27	Alex	Oh but most Spanish [speakers=
	28 →	Mike	[You haven't been to-
	29	Meg	=but [the most Spanish-speaking are
	30		Puerto Ricans
	31 →	Mike	[You haven't been to-Queens.
	32 →		You haven't been to [Queens.
	33	Alex	[No I'm not going off of what I *obser(h)ved*

Mike's statement is on the surface an example of denaturalization. Here, Mike constructs Alex's knowledge about New York as insufficient, by stating, "You haven't been to Queens." By using the pronoun "you", he also creates a contrast between Alex's experience and his own experience, which serves to further the process of authentication of his own identity as a New York resident. He uses the place name "Queens" as a resource to show his own knowledge and rights to evaluate New York residents, and with this statement he also demonstrates that he knows enough about New York to know about the demographics of Queens.

Conclusion We show through this analysis that the construction of a speaker's place identity relies on a complex negotiation of epistemic rights, which is crucial in the intertwined processes of authentication and denaturalization. This analysis has shed light on how an individual may construct a relevant identity – using epistemic stances in the authentication or denaturalization – to affirm their identity and/or disaffirm the knowledge and identity claims of others.

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