More than Frybread: English prosody and Native American ethnic identity

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Prior work has examined "Native American English" features in various parts of North America (Wolfram & Dannenberg 1999; Schilling-Estes 2000; Leap 1993; Hazen 2000; Coggshall 2008; Fought 2006). However, few studies have explored these features using acoustic sociophonetic methods. Moreover, prior workhas rarely considered morethan one or two tribes at once, yet Native Americans from different tribes report a shared linguistic experience. As one respondent notes, "There's sort of a Pan-Indian [English] dialect that exists, that people who aren't Native might not understand." The present study uses acoustic methods to examine English features across a wide range of tribes. All fieldwork was conducted by Native American co-authors as participant-observers in their own communities, thus providing culture-specific perspectives. Results suggest that a particular set of prosodic features is indexing Native American ethnic identity across the continent.

Methods: We recorded 33 Native American adults(gender-balanced) in three diverse locations: (1) Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, (2) aSahtu Dene community of Northwest Territories, Canada, and (3) a northeastern U.S. university withan especially diverse Native student community. 14 different tribes were represented. One-on-one interviews included a game activity discussing everyday objects and interview questions about contemporary Nativeissues. We also recorded groups of 4-8 people in casual group settings.To avoid outsider biases about which sociophonetic phenomena might be socially meaningful, a Native American cultural-insider listened to recordings and marked a PraatTextGrid each time she perceived a "distinctively Native-sounding" syllable. We analyzed those items quantitatively and acoustically in Praat, normalizing for individuals' mean F0 (converted to semitones).

Results:Few such features appeared in the formal interviews, but they were prevalent in casual groupsettings: 177 instances of "Native-sounding" prosodic features were observed in722 total utterances/intonation-units (segmental and lexical features are not analyzed here). We classified these prosodic features as (a) pitch accent with high F0 (22 tokens), (b) high-falling syllable (8 tokens), (c) low tonic syllable(39), (d) high-rise terminal/uptalk (48), and (e) lengthened utterance-final syllable(55).The latter twofeatures were most common (t-test, $p<0.05$), suggesting the importance of utterance-final phenomena. Among the prosodic features, we identified a set of one-syllable and two-syllable items that consistently follow the pitch-accented pattern in Figure 1 (below). Further, in disyllabic trochees, such as the word *Thomas*, the raised F0 appears on the second syllable: delayed accent.
Gender, age, tribe, and region were not significant factors. Instead, we found that these prosodic features are best viewed in terms of particular discourse moments: story-telling, "playful" imitations, expressing offense, and expressing solidarity.

Conclusion: Naturally, there is considerable English diversity acrossvarious Native communities, but our study uncovers a comparatively universal set of prosodic features shared among speakersacross the continent. Combining our quantitative acoustic sociophoneticresults with insiders' ethnographic perspectives, we argue that these features play an active role in the shared construction of ethnic identity in modern Native America.

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