

## **The Significance of Phonetic Style in Constructing Social Meaning**

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Recent approaches to variation have moved away from considering sociolinguistic variation as a mechanism for language change and toward treating it as a resource for constructing social meaning synchronically. As sociolinguistic research in the domain of sound typically examines variation only between categories of variant, the meaning of variation is thought to derive from the frequency with which variants occur; these approaches often ignore the considerable phonetic variation within a class of variant. In this talk, I present evidence that patterned variation arises not only across categories of variant, but within them, through the phonetic details differentiating one token from another. Focusing on the speech of Heath, a speaker exhibiting a considerable stylistic range, I show that the significance of phonetic detail is broad, investigating variation at three levels of representation: the segmental level (-t/d), the prosodic level (declarative intonation), and the phonatory level (falsetto). By examining the conversational and situational contexts in which variation occurs, I demonstrate that an approach which takes into account the phonetic details characterizing variants can bring to the surface a rich palate of meanings that cannot be accessed through considering only their distributional properties. This talk also illustrates how individual variables (and the meanings they index) interact with one another to create styles, with distinct personae emerging from different constellations of linguistic features. Heath performs a 'diva' persona in one situation and a 'caring doctor' in another, and these personae are linguistically differentiated by Heath's sociophonetic implementation of the variables discussed above. Thus, in order to tap into the full range of social meaning encoded in phonological variation, both the categorical and phonetic properties of variation should be considered.