

Race and the Rise of Standard American



Language, Power and
Social Process 7

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Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

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by

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Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York 2002

Mouton de Gruyter (formerly Mouton, The Hague)
is a Division of Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin.

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Die Deutsche Bibliothek – Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bonfiglio, Thomas Paul:
Race and the rise of standard American / by Thomas Paul Bonfiglio.
– Berlin ; New York : Mouton de Gruyter, 2002
(Language, power and social process ; 7)
ISBN 3-11-017190-2
ISBN 3-11-017189-9

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Cover design: Christopher Schneider.
Printed in Germany.

For Gina

Acknowledgements

The realization of this project was facilitated by a sabbatical leave from the University of Richmond, generous grant support from the Faculty Research Committee, and the unwavering interlibrary loan services of the Boatwright Library in obtaining the most obscure of materials. For their interest, continual encouragement, and valuable comments, I am indebted to my colleagues at the university, especially those in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. I am also grateful to Richard Watts, Monica Heller, and Lesley Milroy for their indispensable help with the manuscript. Further thanks go to Oliver Pollak for supplying valuable documents from Harvard University and to The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, The Amon Carter Museum, The Enoch Pratt Free Library, The National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, The Frederic Remington Art Museum, The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, The New York Public Library, and The Brandywine River Museum for reprints and reproduction permission.

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Introduction

In the first half of the twentieth century, Americans began to view the accent of the midwest and west as a “general American accent” that represented a standard for pronunciation. In the second half of the twentieth century, American linguists began to reject the rubrics of *midwestern* and *general American* and to problematize the status of a standard American speech in itself. This had little or no effect upon the popular consciousness; folkish notions of a standard American and (mid)western accent continued throughout the century and were extended to include network broadcast speech, as well. Indeed, Americans came to recognize the pronunciation of network announcers as a (mid)western norm. The general features of this accent are readily identifiable; the phoneme /r/ is pronounced both before and after vowels, there is no intrusive /r/, as in “I ‘sawr’ her standing there,” diphthongs like /ay/ and /aw/ are not monophthongized, and the phoneme /æ/ is used in words like *rather*, *bath*, and *calf*. Americans came to recognize obvious deviations from these sounds as nonstandard and regional, such as the dropping of /r/ after vowels in New York and Boston, the Bostonian pronunciation of “rather” so that it rhymes with “father,” and the southern pronunciation of “right” as /ra:t/.

The question as to why and how this (mid)western accent rose to be perceived as the standard has neither been satisfactorily answered nor engaged in a systematic way. The discourses of popular social science and popular opinion have been content with tangential and impressionistic explanations for the evolution of standard American pronunciation. The discipline of sociolinguistics has not fared much better in this regard. It has either avoided the issue, offered its own insufficient explanations, or made some late inroads, most notably in the research done in the recently emerged field of perceptual dialectology (folk linguistics).

2 Introduction

Explanations for the etiology of standard American pronunciation have been riddled with misprisions from the onset. Some of the major ones are:

- American English pronounced the /r/ after vowels in order to differentiate from British speech, not from other forms of American speech.
- Because America is a democracy, the speech of the average person was taken as a standard. Two-thirds of the country pronounced the /r/ after vowels in the 1920's; the standard was simply the pronunciation of the majority.
- The standard that arose was simply the pattern of speech that was most pleasing to the greatest spectrum of radio listeners.
- The early radio announcers were from the midwest. This caused the mid-western pronunciation to become imitated and standardized.
- American English has no real standard pronunciation. There are many speech areas and differing pronunciations within any given speech area.
- There is no such thing as "general American" or even "mid-western" pronunciation.

This study progressively engages and deconstructs these myths in the process of developing its thesis.

My curiosity on this subject was stimulated by the observation that the process of standardization in the United States occurred in a fashion quite dissimilar from standardization in other countries, especially as regards phenomena of economic, social, and cultural power. Economic power is an important determinant of the status of a kind of speech and generally marks the difference between a language and a dialect. There are some jokes in linguistics that demonstrate this; one is that a dialect becomes a language when the dialect speakers get rich; another is that a language is a dialect with an army. In general, the standard language of a nation will derive from the speech area that is also the center of economic and cultural power in that nation. Examples of this are the British "received pronunciation," which derives from upper-class London speech; simi-

larly, Parisian is the hegemonic standard for French, and the standard for German is generally associated with the northern industrial centers. It is highly uncommon that standard pronunciation should be taken from rural or agrarian areas. It would be strange to imagine British emulating the speech of Yorkshire or German emulating the Alpine dialects. Yet, this is basically what happened in the standardization of American English. The pronunciation of the economic and cultural centers of power was not taken as a model. Instead, the pronunciation of a largely rural area, the midwest and west, was preferred.

New York was clearly the American center of economic power at the turn of the twentieth century. It had a metropolitan population of nearly four million, at a time when there were only two other American cities with populations over a million, and was the cultural center of the country as well. Along with Boston, it centralized the power of the northeast, which was clearly the most influential part of the country at that time. The combined population of New York and the New England states comprised one-sixth of the national population in 1900 and had comprised one-fourth of the national population in 1850. The most distinctive phonetic feature of this area was the marked dropping of postvocalic /r/. Why then did this feature not develop into the national standard? Some massive cultural counterforce must have been at work here that was strong enough to override the power of the patrician pronunciations of New York and New England, which remained the determinants of American stage pronunciation in the first half of the twentieth century. This stage pronunciation generally replaces postvocalic /r/ with a schwa. The diction of Katharine Hepburn is a prime example of this type of speech, and one would have well expected it to rise to the status of a national standard, especially in view of the cultural power of such figures as Hepburn and of the New York milieu with which they are associated. Even though this was also the pronunciation for radio plays, it eventually yielded to the (mid)western pronunciation for radio broadcast speech.

The period of standardization of American pronunciation coincided with the growth of radio, and these developments also occurred during and in the aftermath of the passing of 12 million im-

migrants through Ellis Island, New York (1892–1924). Most of this immigration was from southern and eastern Europe. In 1907, 75% of immigration was from those regions. By 1910, 75% of the population of New York and Boston was comprised of immigrants or the children of immigrants, and 25% of the population of New York consisted in Russians and Italians. 1907 was also the year that the American congress started looking into the restriction of immigration. This culminated in the Immigration Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924, which reduced the average southern and eastern European immigration from an average of 783,000 per year to a maximum of 155,000 in 1921 and 25,000 in 1924 (Chermayeff 1991: 70, 17). The cultural and economic national capitals of New York and Boston came to be seen as sources of contamination of the “purity” of America. This was especially true of New York, which saw the immigration of 2.3 million eastern European Jews, and which became the focus of extreme antisemitism. This aversion to the large cities may be compared to similar phenomena in the prefascist movements in Germany at the turn of the century that idealized the rural German as an unspoiled, uncitified, and unsemiticized noble man of the soil. For similar reasons, Americans began to emulate the (mid-)westerner; he was the Nordic man, be he of native Anglo-Saxon or immigrant northern European “blood.”

Major shifts in the cultural values of a nation will be reflected in the language of that nation. This brings me to my thesis: the adoption of western speech patterns as the preferred norm was influenced by the xenophobic and antisemitic movements of the early twentieth century. Thus Americans gravitated toward the pronunciation associated with a “purer” region of the country, and they did so in a largely non-conscious manner. Consequently, this study gradually moves toward the reintroduction of the regional terms *western* and *midwestern*, which linguistics discarded after 1945 as overgeneralizations. This study shows that the ideological construction of the categories *western* and *midwestern* was a prime agent in the process of the standardization of American pronunciation.

Thus this study coordinates a dialogue between the waxing xenophobia of the early twentieth century and the discussion of American pronunciation, linking the two via the common discourses of

empowerment, disempowerment, and the articulation of identity. The dynamics of pronunciation that I am trying to illuminate by using models of ethnocentrism are largely unconscious. While the antisemitic and racial statements themselves were clearly conscious, if not shameless, the evolution of pronunciation itself was not one that was consciously mapped out, nor was it the product of a conscious, unified decision. It is analogous to the phenomenon of the post-war "white flight" to the suburbs, which was a process of gradual and incremental gravitation, the ethnocentrism of which can generally be read only on the level of submerged or coded discourse.

While this study is clearly indebted to the work done by William Labov on the changes in the speech patterns of New York City, it reviews that work, however, within an alternative methodology. Labov's findings, produced by an inquiry that is categorically linguistic in nature, are rearticulated here in a broader sociohistorical and sociocultural context, which enables this study to arrive at different causal explanations than those offered by Labov. While Labov speculated that the shift in the pronunciation of postvocalic /r/ could be coordinated with the role of the United States in World War II, this study demonstrates that the determining factors for the change were already operative well before the decade of the forties and corresponded to radically different social phenomena.

It is not the purpose of this inquiry to offer a detailed description of the phonetics of American English. Indeed, such an endeavor would be an impediment to the objective at hand. I am concerned instead with the larger cultural causes for the popular perception and valorization of regional accents and with describing the cultural milieu that gave rise to positive and negative value judgments. For this study will seek to demonstrate that it was the prejudices of nonlinguists that created the idea of standard American pronunciation. In his work on perceptual dialectology, Preston (1999) has pointed out that it is imperative to study "the triggering mechanisms of language regard among the folk and through such study the potential influence of such regard on the more general process of variation and change" (xxxviii). In his studies of the perceptions of standard United States English, he emphasizes that "research puts the weight of describing SUSE precisely where it belongs—in the mind, out of

the mouths, and from the word processors of nonlinguists" (29). And this evidence can answer the questions as to how and why American English pronunciation standardized as "network standard" or, informally, "midwestern" in the twentieth century.

It should be emphasized, however, that the phenomenon of a standard language cannot be reduced to pronunciation alone, which is but a subset thereof; nor can it be claimed that postvocalic /r/ constitutes a whole variety in itself. This study views pronunciation, especially that of postvocalic /r/, rather as a reduction, as a symptomatic and metonymic indication of a preferential shift in prestige discourse, and not as constituting prestige discourse in itself.

In order to illuminate the cultural milieu that generated the popular perception and evaluation of regional accents, this study focuses on the linguistic, racial, and ethnic ideologies of influential figures in the United States, among them statesmen, writers, philologists, speech trainers, and historians. It also investigates the perception and reception of the accents of major American actors, announcers, and political figures. The ideologies and receptions of such influential figures are not only symptoms, but also determiners of the national consciousness of pronunciation as it relates to race, class, and power. With that in mind, the study discusses the findings of linguistic experiments on attitudes toward various American accents, for explicating the influence of the kinds of American figures mentioned above can help reveal the larger socio-cultural background that determined the results of those experiments and place the data in a larger interpretive context.

Consequently, the investigation will concern itself with phonemes that have high cultural visibility and that can be focused upon as diagnostic markers of the migration and legitimation of accent. The most central and pivotal of these phonemes is the characteristic American /r/; it was a principal marker of the difference between British and American, as well as between inland and coastal American speech. This phoneme became a major point of contention in pronunciation debates, invested with the ideologies of the first half of the twentieth century, and supercharged with linguistic capital and cultural significance.

The standard American postvocalic /r/ is referred to in this study variously as continuant, constricted, alveolar, retained, and rhotic. (The category of retroflex is reserved for the /r/ of the inland, i.e. non-coastal south, which includes the southern mountain, south midland, and Texas areas.) All of these designations refer to the same phoneme; it is the unmistakable sound of /r/ heard in the diction of standard network broadcasters from Lowell Thomas to Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather. It is peculiar to the United States and Canada. It is contrasted with the coastal postvocalic /r/, which is referred to here as dropped and non-rhotic. Among the other strong phonemes discussed are the more constricted retroflex /r/ of the inland south, the phoneme /oy/ of the New York and Tidewater areas, the back vowel /ɑ/ of the northeastern coast, found in the Boston pronunciation of *dance* as /dɑnts/, and the inland standard low front vowel /æ/. This last vowel is also a very strong marker of the characteristic American pronunciation.

It will be emphasized throughout this study that the phonemes in question have no essential value in themselves. The history of post-Saussurean linguistics has firmly held that there is no natural or ontological connection between a sign and its referent. This means that signs in themselves do not possess any particular intrinsic value or meaning; their value is gotten by virtue of their relationship to other signs. Thus value is culturally constructed by an associative network of signs. Sounds will gain value in the same fashion. A certain sound becomes associated with a certain positive or negative sign or image. Then, the relationship becomes reciprocal, not unlike a conditioned response, with the sign evoking the sound image and the sound image evoking the sign. Finally, the relationship becomes iconic, and the sound image is held to convey the value in itself. Network standard speech, which arose by the power of its association with midwestern and western speech, came to evoke positive personality images, i.e. to "sound better." Thus the characteristic phonemes of that speech came to indicate these positive personality values. To say that these phonemes in themselves already had *a priori* the requisite positive connotations would be untenable and would contravene the progress of linguistics in the twentieth century.

Chapter one of this study develops a social theoretical construct for analyzing the legitimation of accent, reviews the recent literature on language standardization, and develops a working concept of standard American English, especially in the context of power, race, and class. It also accounts for the differing regional pronunciations of postvocalic /r/ and the origins of those differences. Chapter two focuses on the relationship between pronunciation and ideology in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries and demonstrates that the prescriptive discussion of proper American pronunciation does not exist in a vacuum, but is instead buttressed and rationalized by ideological interests of morality, class, race, and ethnicity. It also shows how fundamental ideologies of race and immigration were instrumental in determining the modes of the broadcast voice. In order to illustrate the socio-cultural context that generated prescriptions on pronunciation, the methodology of chapter two departs from the realm of the purely linguistic. These excursions, however, are always intended to be viewed for their sociolinguistic implications, for the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that there is, in the United States, a long historical tradition of confounding the linguistic and the extra-linguistic and of configuring pronunciation within a matrix of race and class. Chapter three examines the relationship between immigration to the eastern seaboard and migration to the western regions and correlates this relationship with a phonemic shift away from New England and New York toward western and midwestern prestige patterns. It also shows how this shift precipitated a reversal in the speech patterns of New York City itself.

The (mid)western accent was constructed and desired by forces external to the area itself that projected a preferred ethnicity upon that region and defined it within a power dynamic of difference, i.e. it was precisely *not* the speech of the ethnically contaminated areas of the northeast metropolis and the south. Prior to a discussion of the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the discourses of race, ethnicity, and standardization in the United States as they existed in the popular sphere, it is necessary to develop an operative model of pronunciation as a strategic social phenomenon that is determined by factors of economy, prestige, status, and power.

Chapter 1

The legitimation of accent

1. Power, pronunciation, and the symbolic

It was Karl Marx who first formulated the relationship between structures of economic power and structures of thought. Marx argued that ideas do not have an independent existence, but are instead generated and maintained by the material, economic, and commercial conditions that humans live and experience. In *The German Ideology*, he held that human history began at that point when humans started to produce their own means of material existence; this is the point at which humans left the animal state, and the ideas that they created have always been subsequent to and fashioned by material necessity.

For Marx, all modes of thought are the direct result of observable material behavior, and the language of politics, law, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc.—indeed all human representations—have their origin in the material and economic interests of their producers. In any given epoch, there will be certain ideas that take precedence and dominate over others; these will be the ideas of the dominant class. Thus the class that is in possession of material power will also be in possession of intellectual power, and the ideas manufactured by the dominant class will act to preserve and protect the power of that class. Both the problem and the beauty of this system lie in the fact that those ideas will appear as abstract, independent, and universal, i.e. they will lose their visible connection to their generating economic base, appear to have their own existence, and also appear to be generally valid for the good of the whole population. A given structure of material power will thus generate cultural symbols that support that system and the class that benefits from the extant structure. Marx referred to these ideas as sublimates from a material substrate, thus employing a chemical metaphor to explain a social proc-

ess. For instance, just as alcohol bears no ostensible connection to the grain base that produced it, so do cultural symbols lack a visible connection to the dynamics of power and class interest that created them. Just as the chemist can trace the process of sublimation from grain spirit back to grain, so can the social historian trace the process of sublimation from the spiritual/intellectual back to the material.

An example of such a creation of cultural symbols from an economic and political substratum can be taken from the dominant political situation in the United States, which have long celebrated the advantages of individualism and weak, decentralized government. From a Marxist perspective, one could argue that the interests of an affluent American entrepreneurial class are well served by an ideology of economic liberalism and laissez-faire politics, which ideology then must of necessity desire a form of government that is non-interventionist and non-regulatory, and that levies minimal taxes. Such an ideology will then view a large governmental system as ominous, sinister, invasive, etc., and it will also view the free exercise of individual power as moral, proper, and curative. This particular kind of political economy will then generate cultural symbols and artifacts that reflect and support its ideology. A primary example would be the classic American narrative of the self-made man who triumphs in the face of overwhelming opposition. This nuclear tale then becomes retold in numerous permutations, one of which is the American film *Star Wars*, the fable of the rustic Luke Skywalker and rugged individual Han Solo who destroy the massive evil empire. Such tales are basically retellings of the American war of independence, in which a tiny colony of individuals triumphed over a taxing empire.

Such cultural manifestations will, however, as Marx said, have no ostensible connection to the political and economic substratum that generated them and will instead appear in abstract form as the independent and innocuous ideas of, for instance, a writer, screenwriter, or director. In addition, they will appear in generalized form, i.e. they will be taken for granted as ideas that serve the general good, and that are thus resistant to criticism. Thus the heroic resolution of *Star Wars* will appear as politically and socially moral.

This supplies a model for viewing cultural artifacts as commodities generated by and dependent upon economic and class interests. Among such signs of cultural capital, language is certainly to be found, especially in its ideological, discriminatory, and divisive manifestations. Like all ideologies, the linguistic ideology will also appear to be abstract and general, and will not readily reveal an ostensible connection to its generating infrastructure. Certain locutions will appear to be "proper," "good," pleasant," "elevated," "strong," etc., and others will appear to be lacking in or opposed to those qualities. In addition, the absence or presence of these qualities will be expressed and evaluated on an ethical watershed; i.e., a transparent morality will be assigned to the presence of these qualities and their associated speech patterns. Techniques of linguistic archeology will be necessary in order to expose the infrastructural ideological mechanisms that generate these values and assign them to certain speech patterns. While Marx himself never discussed the symbolic function of language in this regard, some social historians who were influenced by him have investigated language from this perspective and formulated theories of speech patterns as certain kinds of commodities, ones that have the value of symbolic capital.

In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), The French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu has formulated a complex theory of language as symbolic capital that, while clearly influenced by Marxist concepts, also supersedes the strict economic determinism characteristic of much of Marxist theory. For Bourdieu, there are many forms of capital and many kinds of markets, only one of which is the economic. He prefers to see phenomena of economic symbolic capital, cultural capital, linguistic capital, etc., as each having a certain autonomy, although they are interrelated, and he resists the strict Marxist view that sees all forms of capital as permutations of the economic. In addition, he also departs from the Marxist notion of class, saying that it is too abstract, general, and monolithic in nature, and substitutes instead the more specific notion of group; i.e. there are divisions and competitions among numerous groups, even though the groups may be of the same social class. This has clear value for studies of differences in sociolect.

It is Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital that is of primary importance for the purposes of this study. Linguistic capital is the capacity to tailor specific locutions to the demands of specific markets. Just as there is an uneven distribution of capital in the Marxist model, so is there an uneven distribution of linguistic capital in Bourdieu's model. Certain individuals have more linguistic power at their disposal than others and can use their fluency to a social advantage. In the act of exercising this social advantage, which is itself the instantiation of status, an element of power is ineluctable and increases as a function of the discrepancy in status between and among speakers. Bourdieu holds that "the relations of communication *par excellence*—linguistic exchanges—are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized" (Bourdieu 1991: 37). He describes the mechanisms of power at work in the standardization of French, in which the dialect of Paris was adopted as the official language and implemented in schools, so that it effectively suppressed regional dialects. There was, clearly, an implicit intimidation, coercion, and violence present in the domination of Parisian speech patterns over regional *patois*. He also holds, however, that official adaptation is not the sole condition of power and domination; these may also exist in social settings that juxtapose a standard and a non-standard speaker and a given standard and nonstandard pronunciation. Such a situation could occur, for instance, between a French speaker using the received uvular /r/ and one using the *patois* alveolar /r/. Depending on the relationship between the two speakers, this may involve a certain inevitable intimidation, "a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is (to the extent that it implies no *act of intimidation*)" (51). This violence "can only be exerted on a person predisposed (in his habitus) to feel it, whereas others will ignore it" (51). This would posit a person aware of the implications of status and power within the symbolic exchange: "The cause of the timidity lies in the relation between the situation or the intimidating person ... and the person intimidated" (51). It is important to emphasize that the violence involved in such symbolic exchanges at the level of pronunciation will be ostensibly innocuous:

The factors which are most influential in the formation of the habitus are transmitted without passing through language and consciousness, but through suggestions inscribed in the most apparently insignificant aspects of the things, situations, and practices of everyday life. Thus the modalities of practices, the ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even of speaking ("reproachful looks" or "tones," "disapproving glances" and so on) are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating. (51)

Here, Bourdieu has astutely isolated the dynamics that determine standardization in an unregulated environment. In a situation in which there is no official prescribed language, no language that would have a kind of legal status, one of publicly accessible laws, there still remains a powerful class-conscious notion of acceptability and unacceptability, of locutionary standardness and nonstandardness. It is this notion that indicates societal group membership, and it should be emphasized that the rules that determine membership in the most influential social and cultural groups are never explicit, never spelled out, but instead always intuited by those included and, often, by those excluded, as well. Their formal decipherment is the task of the social scientist. Bourdieu indicates that this type of communication proceeds as a "secret code" (51) implicitly understood by its interlocutors. Thus the most powerful factor is the most subtle one; it is the strength of the silent implications in a social situation.

Bourdieu discusses a situation of social coercion that has a direct application for this study: "The recognition extorted by this invisible, silent violence is expressed in explicit statements, such as those which enable Labov to establish that one finds the same *evaluation* of the phoneme 'r' among speakers who come from different classes and who therefore differ in their actual *production* of 'r'" (52). Bourdieu is referring to Labov's 1966 study of the social evaluation of rhotic and non-rhotic /r/ in New York City speech, a study that is discussed at length below. The body of this study will demonstrate that the mechanisms of implicit coercion that Bourdieu discusses are those that, in their class-conscious and race-conscious forms, determined the standardization of American pronunciation in the twentieth century. In this process, the postvocalic /r/ was a pivotal pho-

neme, hypersaturated with the social dynamics and significance that Bourdieu illuminates.

There are certain lacunae, however, in the writings of both Bourdieu and Marx. While Marx's system facilitates the discussion of cultural symbols as products of the dynamics of class and power and also offers a basis for the inclusion of the mechanisms of race and ethnicity, Marx himself did not fully develop these connections. Similarly, Bourdieu makes little mention of the role of race and ethnicity in the formation of social divisions; this is certainly missing when he discusses the divisions that are also inscribed by linguistic demarcations. It is important to emphasize that, when a certain locution becomes stigmatized and avoided by a given group, it is because of the associations and connotations of that locution. When one asks the question as to what is really being avoided in the stigmatizing of a given speech form, the answer often points to the associations of that locution with a specific ethnic or racial group. It is important to construct a model that includes race, ethnicity, class, and power within the discourse of standardization.

It was Friedrich Nietzsche who first formulated the relationship among morality, race, and class as a function of a differential of power. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he works within the basic dyad of good and evil and seeks to show how these categories are based on class and race. For Nietzsche, morality originated when the upper classes held their comportment to be "proper" in an act of differentiation from the lower classes. Their behavior then became the locus of good, and that which was simply other became the locus of evil. In speaking of the upper classes, Nietzsche refers to them by using the adjective *vornehm*, which contains the meanings of elegant, proper, noble, and elevated. His choice of term indicates that the modes of behavior of those in power came to signify that power itself. Those modes of action then became codified in a basic act of segregation from the plebeian class that was seen as "low" and undesirable. Thus Nietzsche holds early on that the designations of good and evil have no ontological referential value, and that their value emerges from their moment of difference from the other. Nietzsche also argues that the segregation and subjugation of the other exists not only in the interests of the maintenance of power

and property, but also in an act of racial prejudice. Using the Indian caste system as a model and observing the general European prejudicial valorization of lighter complexion over darker, he argues that the Indo-European migrations and conquests instituted a system of racial stratification that maintained well into his time, and that added the aspect of race into the matrix of class and power. Thus that which signifies good, high, noble, mannerly, etc. not only also signifies power and wealth, but, as well, the “proper” race and ethnicity, visible in the notion of “good breeding.” This sets up a possible chain of substitutions among the signs of value, power, class, and race, which means that an element of a set or subset of signifiers from one phenomenon can substitute for an element of a set or subset of signifiers from another phenomenon.

Nietzsche displays a kind of linguistic idealism, in that he sees the seigniorial privilege (*das Herrenrecht*) of bestowing names as an indication of the very nature of language as an articulation of the power of the ruling classes. He makes use of etymologies—some fanciful, but nonetheless illustrative of his points—to underpin his arguments and argues that the connection between the German *schlicht* (simple, common) and *schlecht* (bad) is a linguistic attestation of the connection between class difference and morality. He argues that the perception of someone as being a “simple” or “common” person is the product of the interested and skewed gaze of the viewer, who, for Nietzsche would be a spokesperson for the class in power. This apprehension makes the object of its perception also the object of its prejudices. A similar argument could be made for the English term “mean;” that which is average becomes that which is base. Thus those terms designating the class of commoners then generate metaphorical extensions that contain meanings of evilness. Conversely, those terms designating the class of nobles generate metaphors of goodness.

This discussion of Marx, Nietzsche, and Bourdieu provides a model for situating speech within a signifying matrix of race, class, and morality. Qualitative, evaluative, and prescriptive assessments of pronunciation reveal themselves as ideological judgments that supersede the realm of language in itself. They contain a symbolic hierarchy of empowered and disempowered cultural artifacts and

reflect a competition for desired commodities, as well as a devaluation of undesirable ones. The class of signs that comprise cultivated or “proper” elocution, as well as any of the characteristic phonemes of that type of elocution that is held to be proper and elevated, are pronouncements of linguistic capital and contain resonances of other elements of the signifying system of race, class, and morality.

2. Standard ideology

In the work *Eloquence and Power*, John E. Joseph opens with the following words:

Within a group of communities that define themselves as a unitary region, it is impossible for all these communities to be precisely equal in political power ... Only one community will be recognized as the region's capital, leading to a further centralization of political and cultural institutions. Even in the most egalitarian-spirited of regions, then, one community will emerge as first among equals ... sheer pragmatics make it likely that the dialect of this dominant community will be used in any function which concerns the region as a whole. (Joseph 1987: 1–2)

Joseph uses “the rhetorical term synecdoche” (2) for the process that bestows the name of the dominant dialect upon the region as a whole. Synecdoche normally designates the relationship between the part and the whole, in which the part serves to represent the totality. The use of the term in current rhetoric largely derives from the studies of Kenneth Burke (1969), and, subsequently, Harold Bloom (1979). Its use, however, is generally limited in scope, concerns a nearly ideal system of paradigmatic vertical substitutions, and does not include signifiers that are laterally and tangentially associated with the signifier in question. It is useful to augment synecdoche with the trope of metonymy, also a productive critical tool, that goes beyond the vertical substitution of part for whole and thus can access the associative network of signs that are related to the phenomenon under investigation in a syntagmatic manner as displacements, substitutions, partial correspondences, inductive leaps, etc. In this study of American English, it shall be demonstrated how the process of metonymy or displacement generated the folk designa-

tions “western” and “midwest(ern)” to indicate the American standard, both in terms of pronunciation as well as identity.

Joseph also states that the linguistic standard must be “associated with prestigious cultural realms” (6). Here, the dynamics are largely metonymic, as the perception of prestige arises largely by association: “Prestige is transferred to attributes of the prestigious persons other than those on which their prestige is founded, and these prestigious-by-transfer attributes include things which others in the community may more easily imitate and acquire, if they so choose. Language is one of these” (31). Thus a particular dialect or pronunciation has no ontological status *per se*; its status is acquired by its association with prestigious images and figures. The language of the dominant class will acquire prestige by its association with the power of that class. With few exceptions, the standard language will arise from the metropolitan center of economic power. The linguistic hegemony of London, for England, and Paris, for France, serve as two premier examples of this rule. Joseph discusses two exceptions:

The standard is usually associated with upper-class speech, but in Iceland the prestigious dialects upon which the standard is based were originally those of lower-class rural speakers, thought to be closer to the “pure” Icelandic of an earlier era than was the Danish-influenced upper-class speech of the time at which the standard was formed. Similarly in Senegal rural Wolof is valorized over urban Wolof because the latter is felt to be tinged with “the harmful influences of the city and above all of contact with French.” (1987: 58) (see also Aléong 1983: 270–271; Haugen 1968: 278)

Joseph adds that “one thing is constant: it is the people with power and prestige who determine the prestigious dialect. The Icelandic case is unusual only in that prestige was at a given moment defined by Romantic notions of racial purity rather than by the usual class-capital hierarchies of post-Renaissance Western culture. In social and geographical terms, prestige usually means upper-class and urban” (59). It can be shown that, alongside the unusual example of tiny Iceland, one can place the unusual example of the massive United States, for a similar romantic ideology of racial and rural purity motivated the migration of prestigious American English in a westward direction away from the eastern urban metropolises. Al-