

Derek Denis & Vidhya Elango (University of Toronto Mississauga, Canada)

Stylized performance, mediation, and the circulation of Multicultural Toronto English

Multicultural Toronto English (MTE) is a multiethnolect (Cheshire et al. 2015) spoken in Toronto, Canada (Denis 2016). Similar to multiethnolects found in Europe, MTE is primarily associated with racialized youth in linguistically and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. MTE is closely related to *Toronto Slang*, an emic term for MTE lexical items that are enregistered (Agha 2003) as *Toronto* words. As the majority of MTE lexical items originate in Jamaican Patwah and Somali, the languages of the two largest Black communities in the city, MTE also indexes Blackness, leading to tension between the ethnoracial and place-based social meanings of the register (Denis 2021; Khan 2020).

Much of the enregisterment of Toronto Slang has taken place in the past decade, particularly through metadiscourse on social media like TikTok and Instagram. In this talk, we examine comedic stylized performances of the register circulated on social media, as well as text comments replying to such posts. We observe how online stylized performances, and the metadiscourse around them, link linguistic features of MTE to characterological figures (Agha 2003), such as the 'Toronto Mans', a raced, classed, gendered, and place-d persona who is constructed as the typical user of MTE. The representation of these characterological figures and their non-standard speech, imbued with local social meaning and stereotypes, are disseminated to a wider audience, who may not have had direct contact with the register. Anxieties about this widening social domain appear in the metadiscourse, and we observe contestation and negotiation of the enregisterment of MTE in this arena.

References

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