PRAGMATICS AND THE THIRD WAVE: THE SOCIAL MEANING OF DEFINITES
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> It is time to integrate the study of variation with the study of meaning in language more generally.
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> - Eckert (2011: 4–5). 'The future of variation studies.'

1. INTRODUCTION. For half a century variationist sociolinguistics (Labov 1963 et seq.) and Gricean pragmatics (Grice 1975 [1967] et seq.) have been united by a question at the center of both enterprises: Why do speakers say what they say the way that they say it? But despite this kindred interest, the two traditions have proceeded largely in silos.

Pragmatics in the tradition of Grice has focused primarily on pressures to say relevant, truthful, and informative things in clear and concise terms, and on the inferences engendered by these pressures (see e.g. Horn 2004 for a helpful overview). In the main, the inferences examined concern the relevant utterance's *descriptive meaning*—that is, they concern the nature of the events being talked about and the referents involved. Inferences about the traits, moods, attitudes, and relations of the interlocutors themselves—that is, *social meaning*—have received considerably less attention, and the vast majority of pragmatic research examining such matters has been in the area of politeness (e.g. Brown & Levinson 1987). Pragmatic research on politeness and descriptive content has yielded profound insights, but the space of meanings that fall outside of these realms is vast and largely undocumented by the pragmatic cartographer (though see e.g. Davis & Potts 2010, Acton 2014, Acton & Potts 2014, Beltrama & Staum Casasanto 2017, Burnett 2017).

Meanwhile, a great bulk of work in the variationist sociolinguistic tradition traces variation in language use to linguistic and social structures and features of the context of utterance (see Eckert 2012 for a helpful overview). In many such analyses, social meaning plays at most a minor role. Indeed, some works argue vigorously against the idea of social meaning having any explanatory importance for certain phenomena (e.g. Trudgill 2008). In those cases, the theoretical picture is akin to a prototypical case of Newtonian mechanics, with a naturally inert body (the speaker) subjected to multiple exogenous forces (social and linguistic factors), the net effect of which results in movement in a particular direction (the production of a particular variant)—absent any self-propulsion.

But from the beginning of the modern variationist movement (Labov 1963) there have been analyses that place meaning at the heart of language variation and change, where variants take on distinctive social meanings, in turn making them differentially useful to speakers depending on their communicative goals in the context at hand. On this *third-wave* view (Eckert 2012), what speakers say and how they say it is not merely the product of exogenous forces but also depends upon speakers' beliefs about how listeners would evaluate a given variant—and, in turn, how useful the variant would be in helping them achieve their desired ends.

In foregrounding meaning and agency in the study of variation, Eckert's (2008, 2012) theorizing of third-wave variationism has not only had a profound impact on the field of sociolinguistics in its own right; as I aim to illustrate herein, it has also done a great deal to render visible the underlying kinship, indeed the interdependence, between sociolinguistics and pragmatics. And as the third wave of variation studies swells, that interdependence comes ever more clearly into focus.

The goal of the present work, very simply, is to uphold Eckert's exhortation in the epigraph above. More specifically, I intend to show that (i) despite historical differences in their methods and empirical foci, third-wave variationism and pragmatics share much at their foundations; and (ii) the two traditions are not only compatible, but mutually enriching—together providing broader empirical coverage and deeper theoretical insight than the sum of each tradition taken on its own (see also Cheshire 2005, Cameron & Schwenter 2013, Acton 2014, Acton & Potts 2014, Beltrama & Staum Casasanto 2017, Burnett 2017).

The remainder of this work is structured as follows. In section 2, I lay out what I take to be among the key theoretical underpinnings of both traditions. Building on this foundation, I then present two sociopragmatic principles of language use and interpretation (section 3). As I will show in sections 4 and 5, these principles underlie a wide range of phenomena observed in the third-wave and pragmatics literature, and exemplify the benefits of pursuing pragmatics and third-wave variationism together. I will focus on two cases of social meaning (historically, the stuff of third-wave variationism) that are rooted in semantically-based inferences (historically, the stuff of pragmatics). First, I apply the principles to a conspicuous moment from a 2008 U.S. presidential debate in which Senator John McCain referred to then Senator Barack Obama as 'that one'—a phrase that was widely criticized as othering. I then show how the principles explain why using a *the*-plural (e.g. *the Democrats*) to talk about all or typical members of a

group of individuals generally depicts that group as a bloc of which the speaker is not a member, and to an extent that using a bare plural (e.g. *Democrats*) does not (Acton accepted). This latter case also demonstrates the utility of the two sociopragmatic principles in the quantitative study of variation. In particular, Acton (accepted) shows that speakers opt for *the*-plurals over bare plurals at significantly higher rates when talking about groups of which they are not a part or from which they wish to indicate distance—a pattern clearly related to the sociopragmatically derived difference in social meaning between the two forms. Thus, though the social meaning here is rooted in semantics, it exemplifies the broader, well-documented pattern in third-wave variationism whereby differences in meaning engender differences in distribution, and vice versa. Indeed, the scope of the sociopragmatic principles presented herein is not limited to cases of semantically-based social meaning. Rather, as I will discuss below, they apply just as well to sociophonetic phenomena examined in third-wave variationist research.

Taking all this together, one finds that meanings are deeply context-sensitive, bound up with ideology, and diverse in kind and source (see e.g. Silverstein 1976), yet all the while united by general principles of language use and interpretation. The task before us then is to press forward towards uncovering diversity in the realm of meaning-making and the unifying principles that underlie it.

2. PRINCIPLES OF PRAGMATICS AND THIRD-WAVE VARIATIONISM. The work of this section is to provide an overview of key principles underlying the two traditions, focusing on what unites the traditions and how they complement each other. Due to limitations of space, I will keep my comments relatively brief. For more on the foundations of pragmatics and third-wave variationism respectively, see for example Grice (1975), Horn (2004); Labov (1963), Eckert (2008, 2012).

2.1. LANGUAGE-USERS ARE PURPOSIVE AGENTS. As noted above, the defining feature of third-wave variationism is its view of speakers as goal-oriented agents who (consciously or not) design their utterances largely according to the effects they wish to achieve, the manner in which they wish to achieve them, and the nature of the linguistic resources at their disposal. Eckert's (2012) conception of the third wave depicts speakers as "exploit[ing] linguistic variability to [convey] social meaning" (88). Whether a speaker uses a given variant, then, is not merely a function of

the forces of linguistic and social structure (though such forces are no doubt instrumental) but also of the potential difference in impact of using that variant over another.

At this level of abstraction, this principle is central in pragmatic research. In Grice's (1975: 47) seminal work on implicature, he describes "talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational, behavior." As Horn (2004) points out, Grice's work and the neo-Gricean (Horn 1984, Levinson 2000) and relevance theoretic (Sperber & Wilson 2004) programs that followed are united by a perspective whereby (consciously or not) speakers seek to design their utterances so as to achieve their intended effects at the lowest possible cost. Thus, both traditions conceive of speakers as agents selecting from a variety of possible utterances in an attempt to best achieve their desired ends.

To be sure, the methods and empirical foci vary between the two traditions. But this diversity in approach makes the two traditions all the more complementary. Within pragmatic research, the speaker-goals of interest generally concern conveying relevant descriptive (roughly, literal) content and direct enrichments thereof—the 'exchange of information'. Costs in pragmatics are most often operationalized as saying something that requires considerable effort to produce or process (violating Grice's Manner maxim); and saying something for which one lacks sufficient evidence (violating Grice's Quality maxim). In pragmatic research on politeness (e.g. Brown & Levinson 1987), the range of costs and benefits is expanded to include things like face threat and maintenance. But beyond pragmatic studies of politeness, relatively little attention has been given to social goals and costs as a broad class, and there can be no doubt that the social considerations that influence our utterances extend far beyond issues of being polite and providing relevant information in a concise manner. Still, pragmatics has delivered deep insights into the rationality-based principles underlying language use and interpretation (see e.g. Horn 2004)—principles that, appropriately generalized, apply to descriptive and social meaning alike, as I will discuss below.

On the third-wave side of things, there is generally less talk of rationality or costs and benefits, but speakers are clearly viewed as goal-oriented agents. Here, however, the goals most often examined have little to do with descriptive content, but instead tend to involve conveying social meaning. But despite the focus on social meaning, the findings and theory growing out of this research are applicable to the study of linguistic meaning more broadly. For instance, because social meanings are often highly malleable, context-sensitive, and ideological, third-

wave research, in taking on social meaning as a central object of study, has foregrounded and illuminated the multitude of considerations underlying utterance design and interpretation, stretching well beyond descriptive content, effort, and face concerns.

Thus the shared conception of language-users as creative, goal-oriented agents in pragmatic and third-wave variationist research unites the two traditions, while their differences in methods and empirical foci lends them complementarity—a point I will continue to develop below.

2.2. UTTERANCES' MEANINGS ARE UNDERSPECIFIED, AND LANGUAGE-USERS SEEK TO ENRICH THEM. The context-sensitivity and underspecification of meaning is arguably the *raison d'être* for pragmatics as a field of study. Third-wave variationism, too, clearly adopts a view of utterance meaning as underdetermined by the utterance itself: 'the meanings of variables are underspecified, gaining more specific meanings in the context of styles' (Eckert 2012: 87).

In addition to viewing utterances' meanings as underspecified, both pragmatics and third-wave variationism hold that language users enrich the meanings of utterances beyond their entailments. Were this not so, there would be no notion of conversational implicature, nor would it make sense to speak of the particularized social meaning of a variant in a context.

2.3. LANGUAGE-USERS HAVE CONTEXT-SENSITIVE EXPECTATIONS FOR UTTERANCES. The familiar Gricean maxims can be understood as specifying expectations for utterances (Grice 1975; Horn 2004)—that they will generally be truthful, relevant, informative, and so on. And as Keenan's (1976) work on Malagasy (and Horn's 1984 analysis thereof) suggest, the weight of these expectations can shift from one situation to the next. The variationist literature likewise highlights the role of context-sensitive expectations in language use and interpretation. Indeed, context-based variation is the *sine qua non* of variationist research, and variationist research has shown that language users are at least on some level aware of such variation and form and interpret utterances accordingly (e.g. Bell 1984, Campbell-Kibler 2007).

2.4. LANGUAGE-USERS MAKE ASSOCIATIONS AND GENERALIZE, AND DRAW ON IDEOLOGY IN DOING SO. The basic picture here is this: if we observe two things co-occurring, or if our ideology suggests that they co-occur, we tend to form a link between them and to expect them to co-occur in the future. Put another way, if we encounter a situation *s* that instantiates some feature, we will increase our assessment of the probability that whatever else we believe to have held in other situations instantiating that feature and that is not inconsistent with *s* holds in *s*.

Such a principle underlies key aspects of pragmatic theory. Horn's *division of pragmatic labor* (1984: 22), claims that unmarked variants 'tend to become associated […] with unmarked situation[s], representing stereotype[s] or salient [situations]'. Levinson suggests that listeners "assume that stereotypical relations obtain between referents or events, unless this is inconsistent with [other assumptions or contextual features]," and notes the influence of ideology on stereotypes (Levinson 2000: 114-5). The pragmatics literature also cites cases of *short-circuited* implicature, where an inference is not calculated in real-time but rather achieved based on association with past uses of a similar form (see Horn 2004)—so that something like, "Can you pass the salt?" can automatically be interpreted as a request, rather than involving a complex process of reasoning.

The notion that language-users make associations and generalizations has been richly developed in third-wave variationism (Eckert 2008, 2012), where it plays a starring role. In particular, this principle is manifested as *indexicality* in the sense of Peirce (1955) and Silverstein (2003). In brief, a linguistic unit comes to be associated with particular traits, stances, moods, etc. in virtue of the actual contexts of use and the ideological matrix in which it occurs, and in turn can be used as a sign—specifically, an *index*—of those traits, stances, and so on. Third-wave variationist research has fruitfully applied this meaning-by-association perspective to a wide variety of variables, from the phonological (e.g., Benor 2001, Zhang 2005) to the lexical (e.g., Kiesling 2004), to the morphosyntactic (Moore & Podesva 2009).

2.5. LANGUAGE-USERS ON SOME LEVEL KNOW THAT THE ABOVE HOLD. The final principle I wish to note here is that language-users—whether consciously or not, and surely to varying degrees—know that above principles hold. It is this overarching principle that gives the former much of their theoretical importance. Being aware that one's interlocutor is a purposive agent, for instance, is what allows one to ascribe to the interlocutor an intention to communicate something to begin with. Similarly, without language-users having some knowledge of context-sensitive conversational expectations, we should be surprised to find the great degree of systematicity observed in discourse. And without a view of language-users as being aware that their interlocutors made indexical associations, it doesn't make sense to talk of speakers, 'exploit[ing] the indexical value associated with' linguistic forms (Eckert 2012: 96).

2.6. TAKING STOCK. In brief, central to the programs of pragmatics and third-wave variationism is the idea that language-users are purposive agents, with context-sensitive

expectations for discourse, who generalize, draw associations, read into utterances, and on some level know that the foregoing holds. The two traditions have distinctive ancestries and perspectives, but share this common foundation. Taking these perspectives together, it is clear that language-users have remarkably rich resources for making meaning in context, including the form, descriptive character, and indexicality of their utterances; discourse expectations, other aspects of context, and ideology; and general principles of use and interpretation grounded in rationality. All of these elements have a crucial role to play, together providing for a massive array of potential meanings and ways of expressing them.

Combining these perspectives not only sheds light on the richness and contingency of meaning in language. As I aim to show in the remainder of this work, it also provides a better understanding of the relevant dynamics and the effects they produce. To that end, in the next section I offer two additional sociopragmatic principles of use and interpretation—rooted in the discussion above and equipped to illuminate a wide range of phenomena from the pragmatics and third-wave variationist literature.[1]

3. TWO SOCIOPRAGMATIC PRINCIPLES.

3.1. CONSEQUENCES OF SPEAKER RATIONALITY. The foundation of the two principles presented in this section is the principle that language-users are purposive, rational agents. As suggested in section **2.1**, one way to spell out that principle on the speaker side of things is to say that in designing utterances, speakers attempt to opt for the utterance that they believe will have the highest possible net benefit (benefits less costs) in the context. It is worth emphasizing that possible goals/benefits are many (Grice 1975, Keller 1994, inter alia). They can include anything from conveying propositional content; to showing a sign of (dis)respect to one's addressee; to coming off as articulate, friendly, or tough; to expressing joy, anger, or apathy; to changing the topic of conversation. Costs, too, can come in multiple forms, from expending planning, articulatory, or processing effort; to violating social norms; to overcommitting oneself; to running the risk of sounding like a phony (Lakoff 1973, Brown & Levinson 1987, Horn 2004,

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[1] Due to space constraints, I will limit my discussion of these principles here—for related formulations and more discussion of their motivation, see Acton 2014, accepted.

Campbell-Kibler 2007, inter alia).[2] Of course, given our finite capacities, there are limits on how good we are at predicting what utterances will best serve our needs, and we will only put so much effort (conscious or unconscious) into making such determinations before we speak (see e.g. Cameron & Schwenter 2013 on limits to rationality).

That point notwithstanding, we may still reasonably conceive of speakers as doing their best, within limits, to optimize the anticipated mix of costs and benefits in selecting their utterance. Crucially, insofar as this holds, when a speaker issues some utterance u, we know that there is no alternative utterance α that the speaker thought would offer a higher net benefit than u.

3.2. THE HEARER'S PERSPECTIVE. Let us now consider the perspective of a hearer, who has just observed an utterance u and is interpreting it. In addition to calculating any entailments provided for by the semantics of the utterance, what types of inference might the hearer draw?

For one, there are those inferences derived from the principle discussed in section 2.4—that language users make experience- and ideology-based associations and generalizations. If, for instance, the hearer hears u as bearing the mark of a particular regional accent, they might well conclude that the speaker is from the relevant region, and may also ascribe further properties to that person based on previous experiences with or ideologies about people from that region, and so on. The same can of course happen at the level of the semantic content, too. If the speaker has said, "I have a cat," a hearer might (though need not!) presume, based on previous experience with that phrase and beliefs about the kind of cat a person might reasonably have, that the cat in question is a stereotypical domestic feline (see Levinson 2000).

But there is yet another potential layer to interpretation, derived from the presumption discussed in section 3.1: namely, that speakers attempt to pick the utterance that best suits their needs. As noted above, insofar as this presumption holds, it means that when a speaker says u there is no alternative utterance that the speaker thought would offer a better mix of costs and benefits. Now if I hear an utterance u, and, prima facie, it seems that the speaker ought to have preferred some alternative α to u, that suggests that my beliefs about the speaker or the broader

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[2] As Lauren Hall-Lew (p.c.) notes, the discussion of "costs" and "benefits" invokes Bourdieu's notion of *linguistic capital*. I intend for the terms *cost* and *benefit* to encompass the kinds of consideration discussed by Bourdieu (e.g. prestige associated with particular language varieties), but to include other kinds of cost and benefit as well.

situation are faulty and should change so as to be consistent with the speaker's actual choice. In response, I may entertain hypotheses as to why the speaker did indeed prefer *u* to α, and update my beliefs about the speaker/situation—that is, draw inferences—based on which hypotheses I think best explain the speaker's actual preference for *u*.

One potential hypothesis would be that α is simply not part of the speaker's repertoire.[3] Drawing that conclusion in and of itself means changing one's beliefs about the speaker— moving, for instance, from believing that the speaker is a local to abandoning that belief.

The other option is to presume that α was available to the speaker, who chose not use it. In such cases, it stands to reason that an utterance *u* will be less obviously preferable to an alternative α: (i) the less costly α appears to be relative to *u*, (ii) the greater the apparent overlap in benefits between α and *u*, and (iii) the greater the overall benefits of α appear to be (Acton, accepted; see also Levinson 2000, Katzir 2007, inter alia). And the less obvious it is why *u* is preferable to α, the more strongly that suggests that my belief state could use improvement, and the greater the incentive for me to consider why *u* might be preferable to α and draw inferences accordingly.[4]

3.3. THE PRINCIPLES. We can operationalize these dynamics via two principles, given in (1) and (2) (see Acton 2014, accepted, for similar formulations). (2) relies on the notion of markedness. For that, I adopt a modified version of Levinson's (2000: 137) informal characterization of markedness, given in (3).

(1) FS Principle (full significance): The full significance of a (sub-)utterance *u* depends upon context and what makes *u* distinctive relative to contextually relevant alternatives.

(2) RA Principle (relevance of alternatives): Given a (sub-)utterance *u* uttered in a context *C* and observed by hearer *H*, the relevance of a potential alternative (sub-)utterance α to *H*'s interpretation of *u* varies:

(a) Inversely with how marked (*H* thinks the speaker would think) α is vis-à-vis *u* in *C*

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[3] I thank a reviewer for suggesting that I address this important case.

[4] Ceteris paribus, and assuming that the hearer thinks that the difference between *u* and α is great enough that it might yield nontrivial differences in the profile of costs and benefits.

> (b) Directly with (i) how desirably informative (*H* thinks the speaker would think) α is in *C*; and (ii) with the degree of overlap in other shared benefits (*H* thinks the speaker would think) α has with *u* in *C*

 (3)   Marked forms, relative to their less marked counterparts, are more morphologically complex, less lexicalized, more prolix, less frequent or consistent with the speaker's grammar and repertoire, or less consistent with context-specific social norms.

Let's unpack these principles. Consonant with the immediately preceding discussion, FS says that the interpretation of an utterance or part thereof depends on what sets that utterance apart from relevant alternative utterances. As noted above, in the most general terms alternatives that are most likely to receive consideration are those that seem relatively 'inexpensive' compared to the observed utterance, seem to offer a valuable mix of benefits, or both. RA spells out what that might look like more specifically. (2a) covers the bulk of the cost side of things in terms of markedness. Markedness and cost vary directly: marked forms involve violating social norms or expending greater effort than their less marked counterparts require. Infrequent forms, for example, generally take more time and effort to retrieve and process (Podesva 2011, Jaeger & Weatherholtz 2016 inter alia). And violating social norms minimally means taking on the risk of offending a listener's sensibilities, not to mention perhaps making one's utterance more jarring and hence harder to process.[5]

 (2b) covers benefits and is left rather general. The only specific item included therein is 'desirable informativity'—that is, any entailments or associations borne by the utterance/alternative that the hearer has reason to think that the speaker wishes to invoke. Any entailments or associations borne by an utterance/alternative that it appears that the speaker would *not* want to invoke would count as a strike against that utterance/alternative. This provision concerning desirable informativity does the work of the familiar default assumption (Horn 2004) in pragmatics that speakers will provide as much relevant information as possible, without requiring that they desire to do so in every case. There are of course other potential

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[5] It is worth noting that all of these costs can also be construed as benefits of a sort in certain contexts. If my goal is to be transgressive, for instance, then violating social norms promises benefits for me. But, crucially, even in those circumstances I still incur some cost—if not, my action would carry no value as a transgressive act.

benefits that an utterance/alternative may afford a speaker, which RA provides for. As with all other potential costs and benefits thus far, determining what those potential benefits might be in the eyes of the speaker depends importantly on one's prior beliefs about the speaker and the broader context, coupled with whatever evidence the actual utterance provides.

In brief, these principles state that utterances are evaluated not only according to their own character but also according to what sets them apart from alternatives that appear to offer a favorable mix of costs and benefits in context. Before putting the principles to work, a few additional notes are in order. First, these principles are deeply context-sensitive. As RA acknowledges, which alternatives are given consideration is a function of who is doing the considering, who the speaker is, and other aspects of the context. A particular form may accord with one speaker's repertoire and not another's (making it considerably more marked for the latter individual); the social norms in force change from one situation to the next; a hearer's assessment of the benefits of a potential alternative utterance depends on that hearer's beliefs about the speaker's goals; and so on.

Secondly, whether and which alternatives are considered depends importantly on the nature of the utterance itself. (2a), for example, states that the relevance of an alternative depends not simply upon the markedness of that alternative in some absolute sense, but rather upon how marked it is *relative to* the observed utterance. Hence, the more marked an utterance is, the more relevant a given alternative will be, ceteris paribus. This accords with pragmatic principles like Horn's (1984) *division of pragmatic labor*, whereby marked forms tend to be ascribed special significance, and with linguistic research concerning salience (e.g. Podesva 2011, Jaeger & Weatherholtz 2016, Beltrama & Staum Casasanto 2017). For Podesva (2011), for instance, social meaning is particularly likely to attach to forms that are particularly salient, which in his framework is bound up with markedness.

Finally, it bears repeating that costs and benefits can come in many forms and from many sources—whether from an utterance's semantic or indexical character, its social acceptability, its production and processing requirements, or what have you. Inferences may thus be derived on the basis of entailments, sociohistorical and ideological associations, iconicity, or any mix thereof. Moreover, as the remainder of this work will show, the inferences are not relegated to any one dimension of meaning; they may be social, descriptive, or both.

With these points in mind, let's now put these principles to work, beginning with the case of McCain's *that one*.

4. THE PRINCIPLES AT WORK: *THAT ONE*. I begin with the following quote from a 2008 presidential debate between Senator John McCain and then Senator Barack Obama.

(4)   SEN. MCCAIN: It was an energy bill on the floor of the Senate – loaded down with goodies, billions for the oil companies […] You know who voted for it? You might never know. **That one** [gesturing to Obama]. You know who voted against it? Me.

McCain's use of that one drew extensive negative press, being called, for instance, a "slightly dehumanizing phrase" (Walls 2008). Of course, *that one* doesn't entail that the speaker views the referent as contemptible or subhuman, as the exchange in (5) illustrates.

(5)   [Two adults looking adoringly at newborns through the window of a hospital nursery]
A: Which one is yours?
B: [smiling] **That one** there on the far left is my Annie.

(5) is perfectly compatible with the sense that speaker B admires Annie. Why, then, would McCain's use of *that one* be interpreted as dehumanizing?

FS and RA both point to a central role for context in interpretation, so let's consider some key aspects of the context of McCain's utterance. In practice, the set of potentially relevant contextual features is large and varies from one hearer to the next, but I take the following to be among the most salient, especially as regards the interpretations of interest. For one, the discourse event was a debate, providing for an oppositional tone. Second, the broader discourse surrounding the event repeatedly emphasized Obama's as young, relatively new to federal politics, and perhaps above all African American. McCain stood in contrast as an older, white, long-time politician. Thus the grounds for distinction and othering were already laid. As regards language more specifically, there are relatively narrow and well-established conventions for referring to one's opponent in a presidential debate, including proper names (typically with titles), gendered pronouns, and perhaps a few stock expressions like *my opponent*.

Now to the utterance itself. McCain said, 'that one', referring to Obama. This utterance is rather marked as regards context-specific social norms, as the immediately preceding discussion suggests. It is also formally marked relative to pronouns like *him*, being more prolix. Given the marked status of *that one*, part (a) of RA predicts that alternatives are likely to be relevant to its interpretation.

The next question is which particular alternatives are likely to be relevant. RA predicts that it will be those alternatives that are relatively unmarked or appear to offer benefits to the speaker—either based on sharing benefits with the utterance itself or affording additional benefits in its own right. It's clear that one of McCain's central goals in saying, 'that one' was to refer to Obama. Presumably, then, any relevant alternative ought to be well equipped to do the same. By RA (a), relatively unmarked alternatives, too, ought to be particularly relevant. *(Mister/Senator) Obama*, *him*, and *my opponent* all score well on both considerations—they are expected and relatively concise, and they refer as desired in the context. As for shared benefits, we might consider alternatives that also involve a demonstrative, on the hypothesis that the speaker deliberately included a demonstrative form because of some benefit it offers. This might bring forms like *that guy*, *this one*, or *this guy*—all similar to the observed utterance in terms of markedness and all affording whatever benefits a demonstrative buys the speaker—into the mix. These considerations yield the hypothetical set of alternatives in (6).

(6)   *(Mister/Senator) Obama*, *him*, *my opponent*, *that guy*, *this one*, *this guy*

To be sure, not all of these alternatives would be deemed equally relevant by every interpreter, and there may be other important alternatives worth considering. Nor have we said anything about the phonetic character of McCain's utterance and alternatives thereof. Nevertheless, this is a principled set of alternatives, and, as I will now show, one that explains the widely circulated reactions that the utterance received.

Returning to the FS principle, the next step is to consider what sets the observed utterance apart from the alternatives. First, all but one of the alternatives (namely, *this one*) involves an expression that either by its semantic entailments or by strong associations with prior uses suggests that the referent is human (or is being anthropomorphized). Senators, misters, hims, and guys are generally people. Such is clearly not the case for the highly nonspecific phrase *that one*. Thus, it may well seem that McCain has gone out of his way to use a form that is silent on Obama's personhood, especially in light of the availability of less marked forms like *him*. Hence we have commentators calling the phrase "slightly dehumanizing".

Second, unlike all of the other alternatives but *that guy*, McCain's phrase makes use of the demonstrative *that*. A distinguishing characteristic of *that* is that, given its relation to the proximal demonstrative *this*, it suggests that the relevant referent is nontrivially distant from the speaker. Thus, McCain's marked phrase is not only silent on Obama's personhood, but also

depicts Obama as being distant from McCain. It is a short ideological step, especially in the light of the broader context of utterance, from indicating distance to depicting the referent as Other.

Such are the basic dynamics. We observe an utterance and, particularly if the utterance is marked, we may ask what it is about that utterance that favorably sets it apart from other seemingly viable alternatives in the eyes of the speaker and draw inferences accordingly. In this case, two prominent distinguishing characteristics of McCain's utterance are the absence of expressions associated with personhood and the inclusion of the 'distal' demonstrative *that*. This isn't to say that McCain intended the interpretations his utterance received. Rather, the point here is that we have a principled explanation for why those interpretations were what they were.

Of course, because the principles are relativized to the individual hearer, they allow for variation in interpretation across hearers insofar as hearers have different ideologies, beliefs, and expectations. Depending on other aspects of one's assessment of the situation, one might conclude, for instance, that McCain's use of a demonstrative sprang not from a view of Obama as 'Other' but from a desire to set up a sharp contrast between himself and his opponent, given demonstratives' frequent role in statements of differentiation (Roberts 2002). Indeed, some commentators suggested that the phrase was not indicative of an othering view, as in the following from the *Washington Post*: 'It was probably an off hand (read: unintentional) comment from McCain'.[6] Thus, these principles make predictions concerning likely interpretations, while still leaving room for inter-interpreter differences.

5. THE LINK TO VARIATION. These same basic dynamics can be used to explain a range of social meanings and effects associated with various terms of reference. Consider for example the use of *your son* to refer to one's own child (as said to the child's other parent). In this case, the form is silent as to the speaker's relation to the child and, given the availability of a more presuppositionally informative alternative like *our son*, *your son* said in such a context licenses an inference that the speaker wishes to express distance from the relevant child.

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[6] Cillizza, Chris. The Nashville Skyline Debate: First thoughts. *Washington Post* (online). 7 October 2008. Last accessed 12 July 2014. http://voices.washingtonpost.com/thefix/ eye-on-2008/the-nashville-skyline-debate-f.html.

Using *the* combined with a plural NP (a *the*-plural) to refer to all or typical members of a group of individuals presents a similar, if slightly more complicated, case. As I have discussed elsewhere (Acton 2014, accepted), such uses tend to depict the relevant individuals as a monolith of which the speaker is not a part, and to an extent that using a bare plural does not. The contrast in (7) illustrates. (7a) generally suggests that the speaker is not an American, whereas (7b) is less definitive on the matter. The former is also more likely to depict Americans as a bloc.

(7) a. **The Americans** love cars.

b. **Americans** love cars.   Acton (accepted: ex.1)

In Acton (2014, accepted) I show how these effects can be derived from important differences in the form and semantics of these expressions in the light of the sociopragmatic principles above. The basic picture is as follows. *The*-plurals, by their very semantics, pick out particular, object-level individuals as a collective—namely, the collection of all individuals bearing the relevant property in the relevant situation (see e.g. Sharvy 1980, Abbott 2008). Bare plurals (BPs), in contrast, do not pick out determinate collections of individuals (see e.g. Chierchia 1998; Dayal 2004, 2013). *The*-plurals are also more prolix and hence more formally marked than BPs, always being one word longer. Thus, the use of a *the*-plural like *the Americans* where the speaker might just as well have used a BP like *Americans* (hence incurring a lesser cost) may well trigger the inference that the speaker is deliberately presenting the relevant group as a bloc.

Moreover, *the*-plurals are closer to first-person forms like *we Americans* in terms of markedness and potential shared benefits than BPs are, given their formal similarity and the fact that both are definites. Thus, by RA, first-person forms like *we Americans* are more likely to play a role in the interpretation of a *the*-plural than in that of a BP, ceteris paribus. And, crucially, first-person forms include the speaker in their semantics, so that the use of a *the*-plural (which is silent on the matter) where a first-person form is available may well suggest that the speaker is not a member of the relevant group, wishes to downplay their membership, or wishes to highlight their nonmembership.[7]

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[7] RA also allows for instances where a BP might signal speaker-nonmembership—for instance, after a first mention where a bare pronoun like *we* is available. But RA also rightly predicts that *the*-plurals are at least as likely to signal speaker-nonmembership in such contexts, given that *the*-plurals are more marked and more semantically similar to first-person forms.

Again we see a picture whereby utterances and their parts mean not only in virtue of what they entail or are associated with, but also in virtue of what sets them apart from ostensibly viable alternatives. In the cases discussed thus far, the crucial features of the expressions of interest trace back to their semantics—the fact that *that one* is silent on the personhood of its referent and involves the 'distal' demonstrative *that*; and the fact that *the*-plurals pick out object-level collectives and are silent as regards speaker membership. From these semantic features, thrown into relief by the availability of relevant alternatives, social meanings are born. Similar dynamics can be found in Davis & Potts (2010) and Acton & Potts' (2014) research on demonstratives, Glass's (2015) research on modals, and Beltrama & Staum Casasanto's (2017) research on intensifiers.

As I will discuss momentarily, the principles developed in section 3.3 apply not only to semantic meaning, as in the cases examined thus far, but to indexical and iconic meanings as well. First, however, I will show that, as expected from a third-wave perspective, the social meanings of *the*-plurals are bound up with patterns of variation in use.

5.1. SOCIAL MEANING BEGETS VARIATION, AND VICE VERSA. The difference in social meaning between *the*-plurals and BPs leads to a principled hypothesis about the distribution of the two forms: ceteris paribus, speakers should have a higher ratio of *the*-plurals to BPs in talking about groups of which they are not a part or wish to express distance from than in talking about groups of which they are a part or wish to express an affinity for. Indeed, Acton (accepted), shows that this prediction is robustly exemplified in the speech of members of the U.S. House of Representatives—on average, representatives use *the*-plurals over BPs far more in talking about their opposing party than in talking about their own. Table 1 presents a high-level summary of this analysis, based on the full proceedings of the House from 1993 to 2012 (Djalali 2013). Column '*Dem the*-%' reports, for each party, the number of tokens of *the Democrats* divided by the sum of the number of tokens of *the Democrats* and the number of tokens of BP *Democrats* (and similarly for '*Rep the*-%').

Speaker Party	Dem the-%	Rep the-%	Dem N	Rep N
Democratic	30.4%	54.4%	11,352	18,992
Republican	53.3%	26.1%	13,007	11,042

TABLE 1. Aggregate *the*-% for U.S. House Representatives by party (Acton, accepted: Table 1)

Acton (accepted) also identifies other quantitative patterns that are clearly consistent with the social meaning of *the*-plurals and their BP counterparts. For instance, the analysis shows that representatives, regardless of party affiliation, opt for BPs over *the*-plurals far more often in statements encouraging cooperation between the two parties. This is unsurprising on the idea that *the*-plurals deliver the individuals of interest as a bloc, making them less appropriate where the goal is to foster intermingling and collaboration between groups.

Furthermore, as compared to representatives in the House, pundits on the U.S. political talk show *The McLaughlin Group* use *the*-plurals at higher rates in talking about both of the two parties, consistent with the pundits' status as outside observers. Moreover, whereas House representatives' ratio of *the*-plurals to BPs is hugely dependent on whether they are talking about their opposing party or their own, the effect is not as stark among the pundits. This, too, accords with an important contextual difference between the two corpora: the pundits face greater pressure to display journalistic objectivity (see Acton, accepted for examples and discussion). The quantitative details of these aggregate differences are displayed in Table 2.

Political Leaning	Corpus	*Dem* *the*-%	*Rep* *the*-%	Differential (abs value)
Republican	House Proceedings	53.3%	26.1%	27.2%
	McLaughlin Group	62.3%	50.3%	12.0%
	Difference	-9.0%	-24.2%	15.2%
Democratic	House Proceedings	30.4%	54.4%	24.0%
	McLaughlin Group	55.4%	60.5%	5.1%
	Difference	-25.0%	-6.1%	18.9%

TABLE 2. Comparison of aggregate *the*-% in the House Proceedings and *McLaughlin Group*, organized by speaker's political leaning (Acton, accepted: Table 4)

In this way, differences in social meaning rooted in semantic content engender differences in distribution. Moreover, as a given *the*-plural is repeatedly employed in contexts suggesting

distance between the speaker and the relevant group, associations are formed, shifting the semiotic value of the form (by the principle discussed in section 2.4) which feeds back into patterns of use, and so on. Thus, though in this case rooted in semantics, the relation between differences in meaning and differences in distribution is just as it is in more familiar sociophonetic cases in the third-wave literature. One need not zoom out very far, then, to see that the dynamics are the same whether the source of social meaning lies in semantics or elsewhere.

5.2. APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES TO MEANINGS ROOTED IN INDEXICALITY AND ICONICITY. The principles outlined above apply just as well to cases where the source of the meaning of interest is not semantic but socio-historical or iconic. The dynamics clearly hold in Labov's (1963) Martha's Vineyard study, for instance, in which certain inhabitants of the island community were centralizing the nucleus of /ay/ at considerable rates, thereby diverging from not only mainland speech norms but also from local norms on the island itself, where centralized /ay/ had previously been in decline. For many of its users, then, centralized /ay/ was a rather marked variant, with both the local speech patterns of the previous generation and at least certain kinds of prestige working against it. In keeping with the FS and RA principles, marked variants raise questions—why use a marked form when there is an ostensibly less costly form available? Again, under the presumption of basic speaker rationality, the marked form must offer some benefit that an unmarked form would not in the eyes of the speaker. What makes centralized /ay/ distinctive relative to the lower variant? Labov suggests that the relevant distinguishing feature of this form was its association with a time when the Vineyard was more autonomous and the fishing industry throve. Thus, in much the same way that a saying 'the Americans' depicts Americans as a collective (unlike saying 'Americans') and does not entail that the speaker is an American (unlike saying 'we Americans')—thereby opening the door to inferences about the speaker's view of and relation to Americans—using a centralized variant of /ay/ invokes associations with a bygone era of autonomy on the island (unlike using a lower variant)—opening the door to inferences about the speaker's stance towards and embodiment of the ideals and character traits associated with that time and place. In the case of /ay/, the social meaning is born of associations and ideology rather than semantics, but the core dynamics are the same.

As Eckert (2008, 2012) and others point out, iconicity can also be a source of social meaning. In keeping with RA, a markedly fortis realization of a variable—say, a sentence-final /t/ release (e.g. Benor 2001)—being unusual and effortful and hence, in a sense, costly, is likely to raise the

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question of what benefit it affords over a less marked alternative variant. One salient distinguishing feature of fortis variants is that, unlike less strongly articulated variants, they are iconically linked to "emphasis or force" (Eckert 2012: 97). On encountering a fortis variant, then, one might reasonably hypothesize that the speaker is invoking this iconic link in an attempt to signal something related to force like "focus, power, or even anger" (Eckert 2012: 97). The precise character of the inference will depend on other features of the context, but the iconic nature of the variant constrains the interpretation in principled way nonetheless. (It would be quite surprising to find, for instance, a fortis variant interpreted as indexing languor.) Thus, an inference to social meaning may have its source in semantics, sociohistorically-based indexicality, iconicity, or, presumably, any mix thereof.

5.3. ON REASONING AND INDEXICALIZATION. The final matter I wish to discuss before concluding concerns when and how these inferences happen. In the preceding sections, I have tried to be explicit about how the inferences of interest can be understood as deriving from principles of (bounded) rationality. I hope to have been clear, however, that I do not presume that these inferences take place consciously. As far as I'm concerned, in some cases they may, and in others they may not (Babel 2016, Eckert 2016).

This raises a related point, referenced briefly in the discussion of the social meaning of *the*-plurals above. As observed throughout the third-wave literature and as spelled out in the principle in section 2.4, language users make associations between linguistic units and features of the contexts in which they occur, including the interpretations they receive. Thus, what may begin as an inference that depends crucially upon comparing an observed variant to related alternatives may at some latter stage become so deeply indexically associated with the relevant meaning that there is no need for even unconscious comparison to alternatives in real time.[8] Such may be the case, for instance, for certain *the*-plurals like *the gays* and *the blacks*, which immediately strike me as deeply derogatory (Acton 2014, accepted). Nonetheless, as I hope to have made clear, even in those cases the FS and RA principles help explain how the inferences (automatic though they may be) got off the ground and are what they are. That is, though perhaps thoroughly indexicalized at present, the origin of such meanings can be reconstructed in a

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[8] See also Grice (1975: 58) on the possibility of conversational implicatures becoming conventionalized.

principled way by examining what sets the relevant linguistic unit apart from related alternatives in the light of the broader ideological and sociohistorical context in which they occur.

6. LOOKING AHEAD. We have now seen several cases of how context, associations, and entailments conspire with general sociopragmatic principles to engender social meanings, whether the origins of such meanings are semantic, indexical, or iconic. By way of closing, I wish to demonstrate the deep generality of the sociopragmatic principles discussed herein by showing that they can engender not only social meanings (for example, meanings concerning interlocutors' traits and stances) but also meanings that directly enrich the descriptive (referential) content of an utterance itself—that is, meanings that further specify the state/event description entailed by the semantics of the utterance.

Suppose we have a close friend named Pat, and we know that Pat is a highly educated, rather fastidious, upper-middle-class individual and a scarce user of the *–in'* variant of (ING). We ask about Pat's weekend plans and Pat replies as in (8).

(8)   I'm goin' fishin'!

The use of the *–in'* form is marked for Pat, hence raising the question of why Pat didn't use what for Pat is a less marked form, namely *–ing*. The question, then, is what about *–in'* might make it advantageous vis-à-vis *–ing* in this context.

As reported in Campbell-Kibler (2007) and schematized in Eckert (2008), the *–in'* form indexes things like lack of education, relaxedness, easygoingness, inarticulateness, and unpretentiousness. We know Pat well, and we know what Pat's enduring qualities are. It is therefore unlikely that we will infer from (8) that Pat is generally easygoing or inarticulate or uneducated, and it is rather unlikely that Pat would try to communicate as much with (8).

Nonetheless, insofar as we maintain the presumption that speakers generally don't use what for them is a marked form for no reason, we must conclude that Pat used *–in'* for a purpose, even if not to claim the traits associated with *–in'* as enduring personal qualities. For instance, a particular phonetic realization of a given expression can in principle be used to characterize not only the speaker but also the referent of the expression itself. Hence, Pat's invocation of the indexical field of *–in'* might have been intended to say something about fishing in general, perhaps that it is an unsophisticated pastime. Another reasonable motivation for Pat to use *–in'* would be to signal that some subset of the qualities indexed by *–in'* will characterize the particular fishing event being described or Pat's anticipated behavior in that event. We might

hypothesize, for instance, that Pat intends to communicate that the fishing event entailed by the semantics of (8) will be an informal and carefree affair. In this case, then, Pat's use of the marked form associated with relaxedness and easygoingness leads to an inference that enriches the description of the event being talked about. Thus, just as descriptive, semantic meaning can feed into inferences concerning social meaning—as in the case of *that one* and *the Americans*—so too, can socio-indexical meaning feed into inferences concerning descriptive content.

Eckert's pioneering work at the intersection of meaning and variation has driven the third wave of variation research to a full swell, and cleared a way for seeing the intimate connections between third-wave variationism and pragmatic research. Propelled by this wave, the perspective developed herein leads us to expect to find complex and varied interactions across and within multiple dimensions of meaning—social or descriptive; inferred or entailed; symbolic, indexical, or iconic; and so on. The sociophonetic character of a single phoneme may enrich an event description, just as the semantic character of a determiner may tell us something about the speaker's view of the social landscape. No two distinct utterances, no matter how similar and no matter the source of their difference, have identical semiotic potential. And it is now more clear than ever that our understanding of meaning cannot be divorced from our understanding of variation and the social world.

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