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**The Role of Accent in Popular Music:  
An Interdisciplinary Approach**

**BY**

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# Abstract

In the thirty years that have passed since Peter Trudgill first published his study of British pop-song pronunciation, and fifteen years since Paul Simpson published his follow-up study of accents in pop and rock singing (1999), there have been several changes in the way linguists approach the sociolinguistics of singing. These changes include Franz Andres Morissey's introduction of sonority as a factor behind choosing particular phonological features, and the ongoing and evolving criticism of Trudgill's original assertion that singers were (and possibly still are) trying to 'imitate' Americans. The present study argues that existing theories are insufficient, and proposes a new framework for dealing with phonological choice in song, centred around three separate but unavoidably interrelated values that influence style choice – aesthetic, sonority, and indexicality. Unlike many related studies, it places emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, drawing upon the work of musicologists, philosophers and linguists, in an attempt to bring a fresh perspective on the phenomenon. Special attention is given to the notion that singers use accents to create (or be appropriate to) a particular aesthetic. The view is taken that music scenes act as unique speech communities that possess both socially and musically derived linguistic norms that all members accept (both performers and audience), but only few actively utilise in their language use (the singers).

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

The sociolinguistic study of singing styles is typically concerned with two (often overlapping) questions;

1. Why do people change/modify their accent when they sing?
2. Why do people use [x] accent (and not [y] accent)?

Thus far, these two questions have been approached from either a purely linguistic background, where the theoretical frameworks of language have been applied (Morrissey 2008, O'Hanlon 2006, Beal 2009, Simpson 1999), or have been approached from a purely musical background, where concerns of sociolinguistics have been minimal or non-existent (Durant 1984, Till 2010, Potter 1998). The sociolinguistic-only presumption made by most linguists working in this field is based on the fact that singers use words, use language(s), and it therefore makes a degree of sense that theories relating entirely to speech processes and identity frameworks will naturally apply to language in music. In making this presumption they are certainly not wrong, but red flags must be raised when musical concerns are being ignored.

The question to bear in mind is - are singers only motivated by factors such as social distance or identity in making style-choices? I believe there is another motivation – namely the aesthetic motivation that chiefly drives style-choice in musical contexts. It is for this reason that I wish to challenge the traditional sociolinguistic account of pop music pronunciation, by drawing together the breadth of work undertaken by both linguists and musicologists in what amounts to an interdisciplinary approach to accent analysis in the context of music. As Seeger writes, 'the safest assumption...would be that until we have good reason to believe otherwise, the speech and music

factors should be treated as equally important' (Seeger, 1958, p.4). I shall also take into account the various concerns of philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, music journalists and practitioners of other academic disciplines that relate to the topic at hand.

The purpose of this thesis is, primarily, to develop a descriptive framework that approaches accent study in music with solid, interdisciplinary methodology, and secondarily, to assist the researcher in answering the questions posed earlier in this chapter. Beal writes that, 'future research into the sociolinguistics of popular song performance would benefit from collaboration with (ethno)musciologists in a more multimodal analysis' (2009, p. 238). Much of this thesis shall therefore be devoted to discussing musicological research, and in sections devoted to the analysis of singers' language style, the focus shall be on both musical and linguistic concerns. The proposed descriptive framework must be robust and able to account for the nuances of accent-use in musical contexts, without the worry that the researcher is stepping too far away from one particular field (i.e. linguistics).

## **1.2 Data**

Whereas Trudgill (1983) largely studied music from the 60s and 70s (*The Beatles, The Clash, The Rolling Stones* and others), and Simpson (1999) studied accents in pop music through to the 90s, data from this project shall be taken from the last decade (from 2000-2015). Bands and singers have been chosen either because they good examples of particular phenomenon (i.e. *Alt J* are a very good example of sonorous singing), or because they are somehow unique in the way they use accent in music. Furthermore, the data has also been selected because few, if any, studies have undertaken linguistic analysis of these singers, and it is believed that the linguistic phenomenon these singers demonstrate is worth discussing and worth analysing.

Because this is a qualitative study, it has not been considered necessary to select artists from specific years, or employ some other methodology in choosing which artists should be studied.

Rather, singers have been included to be illustrative of a variety of linguistic phenomenon, and selected to demonstrate the various ways the proposed framework can be utilised to gain insight into accent-use in music. Nevertheless, with only one notable exception (*The Koxx*), the singers are Anglo-American, and mostly create and perform indie, folk or rock music. In order to demonstrate and test the proposed descriptive framework, examples from numerous musical contexts have also been included in various sections. This data has been included, wherever appropriate, as part of this project's qualitative analysis, and is largely used for illustrative purposes.

Furthermore, with few exceptions (*Skindred* and *Woodkid*), every singer included in the case studies does not sing in their native accent. The purpose of this is to demonstrate more clearly how singers use accent to construct a particular aesthetic. Since these singers are not using their native accent, a degree of intentional crafting has been involved in their singing styles, meaning that there must have been at least some motivation in their pronunciation choices. Included are American and South Korean singers who sound British (*The Killers* and *The Koxx*, respectively), English singers who sound Irish or Irish-American (*Mumford and Sons*, *Ben Howard*), and other singers who simply do not use many of the sounds of their native accent (*Alt J* and *Bombay Bicycle Club*).

### **1.3 Why?**

One of my earliest memories of exploring music during my teenage years involves being berated for using an American accent when I sang. Like most amateurs, I learned how to play music and learned how to sing by listening to music and copying it, and most of the music I listened to at the time was American (or at least sounded American). After performing a song that I had composed, I was told by an older fellow musician that I should avoid sounding American. Why? The concepts of authenticity and identity are certainly at play here, but is the way we approach spoken accent really the same as the way we approach sung accent? And furthermore, should it be the same? There appears to be certain musical contexts where being authentic is a fundamental concept, and others

where this is either irrelevant or unimportant. One of the goals of this thesis is to attempt to ascertain when and why authenticity is a key factor.

There is also a sociological aspect to the way accents are used in music. It is perhaps possible to view the 'default' nature of certain accents in certain types of music as the cultural capital of particular nations (namely, the UK and the USA) (Throsby, 1999). Mirroring economic and social capital, cultural capital is the sum of those attributes which provide an individual with particular advantages or status in a given context (Bourdieu, 1986), hence, accents can be used to position oneself in society, and arguably, in musical contexts. On the opposite end of the spectrum, it is argued that it is also possible for accents in music to achieve a level of covert prestige – i.e. when speakers believe their own language style to be somehow inferior and, through that belief, form a social bond and share common identity with others (Trudgill, 1972). Furthermore, anthropologists consider music as a cultural universal (Trehub, Becker, & Morley, 2015), it is a part of almost everybody's everyday lives, and many social-groups organise themselves and identify themselves with music as their common ground. The kind of music you listen to can give away information such as your age, your personal or cultural values, your religion, and, perhaps more pertinently, the accent and pronunciation you use when you sing can give away that same identity-laden information.

The purpose of this thesis is not to present the lay perceptions of accent in music, rather it is to describe and analyse how we, as human beings, as social beings, more generally use accent in musical contexts. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the argument presented in the forthcoming chapters is essentially a response to a particular set of lay perceptions of the phenomenon. That is, the perception that it appears to be perfectly acceptable for, say, British singer-songwriter Adele to sing with rather overt American pronunciation, whereas it appears to be not acceptable (or not done for that matter) for most American singers to sing with a British (or other) accent. There is a tension between a desire to use the sounds of one's own geographical location and using the appropriate



sounds of a particular musical genre. Accent straddles the line between possessing sounds with aesthetic qualities tied to certain styles of music, and possessing sounds that index various identities, and this tension shall be explored in greater detail throughout the rest of this thesis.

## 1.4 Outline

In chapters 2-4 I deal with previous research conducted in related fields, both linguistic and musical. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with style (speaking style and singing style respectively) and ultimately contribute towards a working definition of style that fits the purpose of this thesis (to answer the questions posed in chapter 1). In chapter 4 I present the notions of genre and scene, discuss how they relate to style-choices and provide a 'checklist' of musical concerns that may affect the forthcoming analysis in chapter 7. In chapter 5 I discuss the apparent differences and similarities between speaking and singing. In chapter 6 I present the descriptive framework that I have developed to account for style-choice in music, and argue that styles and linguistic variants in musical contexts possess three values – aesthetic, sonority and indexicality. Chapter 6 will discuss these three values in detail, and provide definitions and justification for their use in analysing accents in music. In chapter 7 I analyse a number of different linguistic phenomenon in music of the past decade in order to illustrate the various ways in which singing styles use the phonology of language in a creative manner. These linguistic phenomenon are as follows:

1. *A preference for phonological sonority and singability* – wherein I analyse the singing styles of Joe Newman, frontman of the indie rock band *Alt J*, Yoann Lemione (known as *Woodkid*) and Jack Steadman, the frontman of indie rock band *Bombay Bicycle Club*. The intention behind this section is to demonstrate how the level of sonority a phoneme has can explain certain pronunciation choices (Morrisey, 2008), and demonstrate how certain pronunciation choices are made to make a word more 'singable' – that, is easier to sing.

2. *Identity and indexicality in modern iterations of bluegrass and folk* – wherein I analyse the

singing styles of *Mumford and Sons* and *Ben Howard*. In this section we shall explore how in these modern styles of music, pronunciation choices point towards certain identities through indexicality – that is, the way in which certain linguistic forms (such as phonemes) evoke contextual information (Collins, 2011).

3. *Language style as an aspect of genre* – wherein I analyse the singing styles of Lee Hyeon-song, frontman of the Korean indie rock band *The Koxx*, and Brandon Flowers, frontman of American rock band *The Killers*. In this section we shall explore how language styles (the way in which a person speaks) can become fundamental aspects of particular genres – on equal footing with melodic structure, common rhythms and other musical aspects of genre.

Finally, in chapter 8 I draw together the research undertaken in this thesis and ask several further questions to potentially stimulate further study, whilst acknowledging the weaknesses and strengths of the present study.

Throughout this thesis I will be using Wells' Standard Lexical Sets (1982a), reproduced below for reference:

(50) The standard lexical sets

	RP	GenAm	keyword		RP	GenAm	keyword
1.	ɪ	ɪ	KIT	13.	ɔː	ɔ	THOUGHT
2.	e	ɛ	DRESS	14.	əʊ	o	GOAT
3.	æ	æ	TRAP	15.	uː	u	GOOSE
4.	ɒ	ɑ	LOT	16.	aɪ	aɪ	PRICE
5.	ʌ	ʌ	STRUT	17.	ɔɪ	ɔɪ	CHOICE
6.	ʊ	ʊ	FOOT	18.	aʊ	aʊ	MOUTH
7.	ɑː	æ	BATH	19.	ɪə <sup>1</sup>	ɪr	NEAR
8.	ɒ	ɔ	CLOTH	20.	ɛə <sup>1</sup>	ɛr	SQUARE
9.	ɜː <sup>1</sup>	ɜr	NURSE	21.	ɑː <sup>1</sup>	ɑr	START
10.	iː	i	FLEECE	22.	ɔː <sup>1</sup>	ɔr	NORTH
11.	eɪ	eɪ	FACE	23.	ɔː <sup>1</sup>	or	FORCE
12.	ɑː	ɑ	PALM	24.	ʊə <sup>1</sup>	ʊr	CURE

<sup>1</sup> with /r/ following before a vowel only.

Figure 1. The standard lexical sets.

Since vowels have a tendency to 'pattern' in a similar manner in different accents, these keywords

allow us concisely accurately describe a speaker's language style. For example, for most speakers of English (regardless of what accent they possess), the vowels present in the words 'boat', 'spoke' and 'wrote' (the GOAT lexical set) should be internally consistent (Collins & Mees, 2009).

For the sake of clarity, the term *style* shall largely be divided into two types – language style and musical style, although arguably both are quite possibly linked. As Bell writes, 'style means that speakers have alternative choices – a 'that' way' which could have been chosen instead of 'this way' (1984, p. 1). Taking a formalist approach to style,

Style is a replication of patterning, whether in human behaviour or in the artefacts produced by human behaviour, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints (Meyer, 1989).

Furthermore, language style variation (and musical styles) carries social meaning, depending on the context of the utterance. The definition of style I wish to use is essentially an amalgamation of both linguistic and aesthetic concerns. Thus, I have developed the following definition of style for the purposes of this work:

*An intended or perceived mode or form of expression that is recognised as possessing characteristics that are consistently regarded as indexical and/or aesthetic; can be said to belong to a particular category or group based on its likeness (or not) to other forms of communication and/or expression.*

## 2.0 Previous work on speaking style

### 2.1 Labov

Labov is often credited as initially introducing style as a sociolinguistic concept, however, his concept of style differs somewhat from the one used by others who have contributed to this field, and differs from the concept used throughout this paper (his is unidirectional, whereas mine is multidirectional). Nevertheless, Labov's five principles of style are still worth taking into consideration,

1. There are no single style speakers.
2. Styles can be ranged along a single dimension, measured by the amount of attention paid to speech.
3. The vernacular, in which the minimum attention is paid to speech, provides the most systematic data for linguistic analysis.
4. Any systematic observation of a speaker defines a formal context where more than the minimum attention is paid to speech.
5. Face-to-face interviews are the only means of obtaining the volume and quality of recorded speech that is needed for quantitative analysis. (Labov, 1984, p. 29)

Principle (1) is likely the most incontestable for the purposes of this study, since it would be difficult to imagine a person who is capable of singing with only a very specific set of variables. As a matter of fact, Labov's first principle lies at the heart of the present study, and is important to bear in mind when approaching singing styles. Simply through the act of singing, a person changes their language-style – since it requires more conscious, and more deliberate alteration of pitch, which unavoidably changes vowel, and occasionally, consonant quality. Just as there are no single style

speakers there are also no single style singers. Although many singers will remain somewhat consistent throughout their careers, singers, like speakers, are also capable of changing the way they sing, and are capable of overlaying different accents on their singing (with varying degrees of success).

(2) is perhaps the most contestable. 'Attention paid to speech' is not only difficult to quantify in a speaker, it is difficult to divine how exactly speakers are paying attention to their speech. Singers clearly must pay attention to their singing at some level, to maintain and manipulate pitch, timbre, vocal register etc, but that does not necessarily mean they are paying attention to their singing style. Arguably, in a musical context, even if a singer did pay attention to their singing style, and paid attention to its context, it would not necessarily alter that style – rather it may have the opposite effect and make the singer more consistent. (3), (4) and (5) relate to the observer's paradox, which can be happily avoided in this study. Singers have already created a vast library of publicly available data, and do not necessarily need to be interviewed, either for their speaking or singing styles (although such endeavours may yield interesting results – see Gibson & Bell, 2012).

Although Labov does not explicitly define style, the notion of linguistic variables possessing social meaning seems a core attribute. The social, or indexical dimension of style has received a huge amount of attention, and the following linguistic theories put forward by Giles and Coupland and Bell emerged in response to it.

## **2.2 Giles and Coupland**

Giles and Coupland's communication accommodation theory (CAT) links speaker style-choice to the identity of the person with whom they are talking, suggesting that speaker identity is a constant negotiation, depending on the interlocutors present (1975). It draws from psychological research that deals with similarity-attraction, where individuals form more favourable opinions of others when dissimilarities are mitigated and similarities are enhanced. Social approval is seen as the

driving factor behind style shifts, and linked to this are concepts such as face - 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact' (Goffman, 1955). Since consciously changing the way you speak requires some degree of effort, the value the speaker places on their social standing with the hearer must be high enough to warrant exerting that effort.

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's acts of identity framework has a similar focus, where style shifts are seen as channels for individuals to perform identities they wish to claim for themselves in particular interactions (1985). The idea of 'performing' is an attractive notion here, since performing is a salient element of singing. The problem however with CAT when it comes to studying singing style is due to the typically non-dyadic nature of singing. With a few notable exceptions (such as musicals or duets), singing does not generally occur in conversational settings that are typically associated with CAT. It does not seem likely that singers would ordinary style-shift differently depending on who is present (or if no-one is present). It would, for example, be very strange to hear Bob Dylan singing in an Australian accent just because he is singing in a stadium in Melbourne. Nevertheless, since singing does use language, it seems reasonable to assume that some factors associated with communication may persist, even in a musical context. If a singer is asked to perform before royalty, provided they were suitably versatile, would they perhaps opt for a song and singing style associated with a prestige variety of English? Perhaps that is a possibility, but the burden of proof would fall on anyone insisting that CAT applies to singing styles.

## **2.3 Bell**

Allan Bell's referee design model is perhaps the most appropriate framework in use to understand style shifting in the context of music. Bell describes referees as 'third persons not physically present at an interaction, but possessing such salience for a speaker that they influence speech even in their absence' (1984). Yet, there are a number of issues with Bell's early work when we attempt to place

referee design within the context of music. Bell identifies two referee divisions, ingroup (the speaker's own absent group) and outgroup (a group that that the speaker does not belong to), but these divisions do not seem to work well with the sociology of music.

With regards to the ingroup, Bell writes that, “such a speaker takes the initiative to deliberately reject identification with the immediate addressee, and identifies instead with an external referee” (1984, p. 197). To illustrate, Bell takes examples from Giles, stating that, 'if in Montreal, a bilingual uses French to an English monolingual (Giles 1980), or if a Welsh bilingual speaks Welsh to an English monolingual (Giles, 1977), that is ingroup referee design' (p. 197). But how can this be applied to musical language use? The audience of music is rarely explicitly stated - and even if were - it would not seem accurate to say that, Hip Hop artists for example, are rejecting identification with whoever happens to be listening for, say, socio-political reasons. It might be argued that they are only marketing their music towards a particular demographic, and that this is reflected in their accent, yet I am hard-pressed to find an American rapper who has gone on record stating that he or she doesn't want, say, middle-class British people listening to their music. Furthermore, Bell's description of ingroup referee design is centred around short-lived, confrontational encounters (as in the examples he provides). The flavour of ingroup referee design as described by Bell is surely evident in music, but it is not the whole picture of style shifting. On the one hand there is the Johnny Rotten of the *Sex Pistols*, who was supposedly chosen to be deliberately offensive to the mainstream (due to his style and attitude) (Till, 2010), and on the other we have a 'white, middle class' audience who listen to African American Hip Hop artists, purely in order to enjoy the music. To reiterate, it's highly doubtful that African American Hip Hop artists are rejecting identification with a potential audience who may be interested in listening to what they have to say. For musicians and singers it may not even be an issue worth considering. Echoing Tagg's point of view,

'the transfer of structuralist and semiotic methods, derived from linguistics,

to the realm of music seemed initially highly promising. However, several musicologists of semiotic bent have pointed out that models constructed to explain the denotative aspects of verbal language can by no means be transplanted wholesale into the field of music with its connotative, associative-affective character of discourse (1982, p. 5).

I maintain that although linguistic research is an excellent starting point, and its frameworks, terminology, and wealth of theories relating to style, identity and language will be of continuous use throughout this work, there is a place between the disciplines of sociolinguistics and musicology that needs to be utilised in order to fully appreciate style in the context of music.

Nevertheless, the notion of audience design is advocated by Gibson and Bell in a study of singers from New Zealand (2012), where they argue that American-influenced styles in NZ singers involves responsive referee design, whereas the use of NZ English in pop singing involves initiative audience design. That is, the presence of AmE is a response to AmE being institutionally embedded within pop music, and the use of NZE involves a deliberate attempt to 'change the situation'. They also argue that their findings suggest that, 'American accented singing is the default, automatic way to sing popular music', and present this finding in opposition to Trudgill's suggestion that singers were 'putting on' the accent (see below). This shall be dealt with in more detail in further chapters, but for now we can say that whilst they are certainly not wrong, it cannot be said that American accented singing is the only default, automatic way to sing popular music.



## 3.0 Previous work on singing style

### 3.1 Acts of Conflicting Identity

Although Trudgill (1983) was primarily interested in music that was British and pop, his discussion on possible linguistic motivations for singing style-shifting has been most influential on the wider discussion of music and language style. Trudgill rightly dismisses communication accommodation theory as being insufficient for accounting for pop-song language style, since as has been said, its application is limited to conversational speech. Rather than argue that singers adjust their pronunciation to more closely follow the patterns of their audience, Trudgill invokes Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's 'acts of identity' framework, and advocates the position that singers are modifying their speech to more closely resemble a particular group with which they wish to identify (namely – Americans, broadly speaking).

Trudgill found that the *Beatles'* motivation towards an American pronunciation model decreased over time, and points out that this coincides with a change in genre and lyrical content (a shift in focus to British themes). He further argues that this lack of motivation to sound like Americans can be observed across British music in general and that it reflects a wider change in cultural domination (i.e. the 'British invasion'). A more striking change occurs in the 1970s when 'punk-rock' is introduced, where covert prestige accents are common and emerge, seemingly, in direct opposition to the previous mainstream American model. Despite this, Trugill writes that,

The continued use in punk-rock of 'American' forms, however, shows that the assertion of a unique British working class identity is not the whole story. The old motivation of sounding American has not been replaced by the new motivation, but remains in competition with it (1983, p. 262).

Trudgill identified a number of features of punk-rock singing, which are associated with low-prestige south of England accents. These are as follows:

1. The use of wide diphthongs, as /ei/ = [æi] face, and /ou/ = [æu] go;
2. the pronunciation of /ai/ as [ɑi] sky, and of /au/ as [æu ~ eu] out;
3. the vocalization of /l/, as in milk [mɪɔk];
4. the (occasional) deletion of /h/;
5. the use of [ʔ] realizations of /t/ not only finally, as in get, but also intervocalically, where it is most socially stigmatized and conspicuous, as in better;

He also identified 5 features of American rock and roll that are used by British artists, which Simpson later isolated and merged to form the 'USA-5 model' (1999).

1. The voiceless stop consonant /t/, when occurring intervocalically or before a lateral approximant (as in 'city', 'little', 'bottle', or 'better'), is realised as [ɾ], a voiced alveolar flap. This contrasts with typical British English (BritE) use of either [t<sup>h</sup>] or [ʔ] in such environments.
2. BATH – the southern BritE long open [ɑ:] in words like 'dance', 'last', and 'ask' has a shorter more advanced realisation close to [æ]. In those lexical environments where northern English accents also contain an /ɑ:/, as in 'half', a similar change occurs.
3. Non-prevocalic /r/ (an /r/ that is pronounced before a consonant or a pause) is frequently present in words like 'girl' and 'farm', even when the singers' normal speech patterns are non-rhotic.
4. PRICE – the /aɪ/ glide in words like 'life', and 'my' is realised not as [aɪ] but as [a].
5. LOT – words such as 'body' and 'top' receive an unrounded type of vowel [a], rather than

widespread British English [ɒ]. Through this process, words like 'bomb' and 'balm' become homophones.

Trudgill's study uses quantitative methodology to demonstrate the 'conflicting motivations' of bands such as *Supertramp* and *Dire Straits*, who he describes as representing 'the phase after the weakening of American influence'. Although he does show that Ian Dury shows no conflicting motivation (with a singing style that fully utilises London working-class speech), he argues that 'not too much, however, should be concluded from that as far as pop-song pronunciation in general is concerned', and goes on to dismiss Dury as being on 'the fringes of pop-music', and believes that his singing style owes more to the music-hall tradition (i.e. Lonnie Donegan's 'My Old Man's a Dustman').

### **3.2 Another look at accents in pop and rock singing**

Paul Simpson continues where Trudgill left off by developing Trudgill's framework and discussing the phenomenon of accent modification in singing with a more qualitative approach. Simpson points out that shifts at the diatype level are worth exploring alongside shifts in dialect. He refers to Dire Straits single 'Money for Nothing', where British singer Mark Knopfler consistently uses traits and features of urban vernacular in New York City. Simpson discusses how the Hallidayan notions of field (the theme or setting) and tenor (the participants in discourse and their relationships) are particularly useful in understanding the motivation behind Knopfler's dialect shifting. According to Knopfler he was inspired to write the song after overhearing a conversation between two drunks in a bar in New York. Thus, the field and tenor of the song provide a strong motivation for Knopfler to adopt a 'linguistic persona' (i.e. a New Yorker) when performing the song 'Money for Nothing'.

Simpson ends with a discussion regarding the 1990s, the decade when his study ends, where he

describes an 'overlexicalization' of genre terms (britpop, indie, metal, hip hop, house, goth etc). This is seen as a symptom of bands attempting to carve out their own identity against a background of a 'perceived homogeneity' and 'extraordinary sameness' in popular music. In other words, long gone are the days when 'pop' music referred to one specific genre, it now refers to a range of 'scattered taste markets' (Frith, 1990) that can be popular or unpopular at any given time. Simpson believes that the linguistic climate of pop music in the 90s has mostly retained the US model, whereas genres such as punk 'have variable distribution according to specific subgenre'.

Importantly, Simpson draws attention to the way in which singer's accents can have musical influences. Using the example of 'Wonderwall' by *Oasis*, Simpson points out that whilst elements of the USA-5 model are definitely present in his style, lead singer Ian Gallagher also sings with Liverpool pronunciation, whereas his speaking style is clearly Mancunian. Simpson poses that Gallagher's singing style is potentially influenced by *The Beatles*, since *Oasis*, apparently, admired *The Beatles* and perhaps in many ways attempted to emulate them. Due to this observation, Simpson further argues that the persistence of Americanisms in Britpop do not necessarily indicate a sociolinguistic motivation. It is this precise point where I wish to begin to develop an interdisciplinary framework that applies to accent in music – as Simpson alludes to, it shall be argued that it is chiefly musical influences that motivate singers, rather than exclusively sociolinguistic motivations.

## 4.1 Genre and Scene

There is some conflict of terminology in studies of pop music regarding how music 'spaces' should be organised and categorised. Whilst Fabbri prefers to use the term 'genre' in his writings, many other musicologists such as Tagg (1982), Straw (1997), and Bennett and Peterson (2004) prefer to refer to musical categorisations as 'scenes'. Both terms shall be used in this paper, with the

following definitions:

1. A genre is 'a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules' (Fabbri, 1982, p.136)

2. Scenes are 'situations where performers, support facilities, and fans come together to collectively create music for their own enjoyment'. (Bennett & Peterson, 2004, p. 3)

The distinction I wish to make is between music spaces that are mostly divorced from their social/cultural dimension (genres) and those that are intrinsically defined by existing within particular social/cultural spaces (scenes). It is therefore possible to produce music in one particular genre, but not consider oneself a permanent member of the scene that genre is associated with, and equally possible to be a member of a particular scene, but not pay much attention to the genres of music that are considered components of the scene. Such situations can occur due to peer pressure amongst teens, where peers dress and behave in a similar manner, yet may not consistently listen to the music that is 'supposed to be' associated with those behavioural norms.

Spaces that sell music invariably attempt to use conventionalised categorisations to make the experience of browsing through the various singles and albums they have to offer easier for the consumer. Play.com, for example, lists the following genres that music can be broken down into:

Blues, Christmas and Seasonal, Classical, Compilations, Country, Dance, Easy Listening, Folk, Hip Hop and Rap, Indie, Jazz, Kids, Metal and Hard Rock, Pop, Reggae, Rock, Soul and R&B, World and International.

This is clearly not an exhaustive list (far from it), but it does demonstrate the perception that there exist such concrete, well defined categories as those presented above, and it demonstrates that

having such categories is important to music retailers and consumers.

The term 'scene' is preferred by many modern musicologists over 'subculture', despite having similar definitions in the view of the public and in the view of some music-based publications (Till, 2010). The connotations of 'subculture' implies that there exists an overarching culture, shared by the majority, and subcultures are therefore positioned as deviant from the mainstream. Furthermore, 'subculture' also implies that individuals participating within it are governed by subcultural standards (Bennett & Peterson, 2004), when in reality those individuals do not necessarily remain within any one 'subculture', and their participation may only be temporary or contextual'. That is to say, a 'goth' (for example) may only wear Victorian clothing when visiting Whitby's music festivals, and may wear contemporary, mainstream clothes in their daily lives. The individual's style is dependent on context (an ever-changing variable) and is performative – styles are 'acted out' as a result of wishing to portray a particular social image (or to not portray one). Individuals can be members of multiple scenes, and scenes can merge or split. They are naturally fluid categories that can only be defined in their unique contexts.

For the purposes of this paper, 'scene' should also be considered synonymous with 'speech community', defined by Gumperz as 'any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use' (1968, p. 66). Although, as shall be discussed, music scenes are in many ways very much unlike traditional speech communities, they share some basic similarities. Gumperz goes on to write that, 'most groups of any permanence...may be treated as speech communities, provided they show linguistic peculiarities that warrant study' (1968, p. 66). What follows is a justification for treating music scenes as speech communities in this manner.

Traditionally, music scenes begin life in a (geographic) local setting, and involve people from particular backgrounds, who already belong in one or more speech communities. Once they have been established they can become translocal, which is to say its members are no longer bound to a

particular geographic location. Fans of the style of music associated with the translocal scene may travel distance to the scene's original geographic location in order to listen and take part in the culture associated with the scene. Finally scenes will become virtual, where they become established as national or international scenes involving groups of people from any or all walks of life (Bennett & Peterson, 2004).

Typically what is observed is a seemingly natural tendency to use the native accent or dialect of the speech community the individuals creating the music belong to. This is observed today in 'underground' Hip Hop scenes that emerge in particular geographic locations. Consider the following musical acts: *Catchklick Emceez*, *Perfect Practice*, and *Werd (SOS)* are Scottish Hip Hop artist who both sing and rap with clear Scottish pronunciation. whilst *Die Antwoord*, *Constructus Corporation* and *Brasse Vannie Kaap* show heavy use of South African pronunciation. Although in many ways being musically transmuted in a translocal/virtual manner to these countries, they are evidence that music-based speech communities (scenes) can spring up based on particular accents.

Many scenes emerge more broadly, evolving from other forms of music that are already widespread across many geographical locations. Rock and Roll for example cannot be said to have been born in any particular location within the USA, due to its predecessor, rhythm and blues, having already become a translocal/virtual scene. This does not preclude it from containing linguistic norms however, since it is still an American invention, 'Americanised' (mostly deep south/south) pronunciation has become codified into the genre's aesthetic and American pronunciation was subsequently carried over the Atlantic to British performers. As previously mentioned, Trudgill argued that British singers who performed rock and roll and used USA-5 pronunciation were motivated towards Americans, but as shall be elaborated upon in further chapters, I contend that it is not Americans that British singers are/were style shifting towards, rather it is an exercise in being appropriate to the aspired genre and music scene. That is to say, it is not the 'American people' (from the deep south) who non-American rock and roll singers were

attempting to imitate, it was (and is), much more specifically, the singers.

The linguistic norms contained within scenes are only shared in the sense that there is a common understanding amongst the scene's members that the singers must operate under a specific set of linguistic and aesthetic constraints and rules. Therefore, music scenes are a type of asymmetrical speech community, where the linguistic standards and norms that have become codified in the repertoires and understanding of those involved are highly context driven, and for the most part, unidirectional from singer to audience. When audience members take a more active role (in, for example, singing along to a song at a concert) it is possible that those taking part would also adopt the style of the singer during the context of the event. Usage of musically derived linguistic norms is likely more common than one might expect. In a study of young non-African-Americans, it has been found that many young adults learn African-American English vocabulary through exposure to Hip-Hop music, and actively use this vocabulary in their day to day life, clearly adopting the lexical norms of the singers and rappers involved in the Hip-Hop music they listen to (Chesley, 2011). Such instances however are likely exceptions, rather than the rule, especially if we assume that most individuals do not only listen to music that is sung in one particular accent.

## **4.2 Analysing Popular Music**

Unlike many previous studies of a similar nature, the view is taken here that accent (the sound quality of a person's words) in a musical context is itself a facet of music, rather than merely possessing the properties of spoken language in a musical environment. As such, the tools of analysis popularly used in analysing music are considered helpful for our purposes. Tagg provides a 'checklist' that takes into consideration a broad range of factors that are connected to what he refers to the 'analysis object' (AO).

1. Aspects of time: duration of AO and relation of this to any other simultaneous forms of



communication; duration of sections within the AO; pulse, tempo, metre, periodicity; rhythmic texture and motifs.

2. Melodic aspects: register; pitch range; rhythmic motifs; tonal vocabulary; contour; timbre.
3. Orchestral aspects: type and number of voices, instruments, parts; technical aspects of performance; timbre; phrasing; accentuation.
4. Aspects of tonality and texture: tonal centre and type of tonality (if any); harmonic idiom; harmonic rhythm; type of harmonic change; chordal alteration; relationships between voices, parts, instruments; compositional texture and method.
5. Dynamic aspects: levels of sound strength; accentuation; audibility of parts.
6. Acoustical aspects: characteristics of (re-)performance 'venue'; degree of reverberation; distance between sound source and listener; simultaneous 'extraneous' sound.
7. Electromusical and mechanical aspects: panning, filtering, compressing, phrasing, distortion, delay, mixing, etc; muting, pizzicato, tongue flutter, etc (Tagg, 1982, p. 8-9).

Although there is likely much that may be considered irrelevant to musico-phonological analysis at first glance, it is surprising how many of these musical aspects of an AO affect or could hypothetically affect phonological choice, and affect (or reflect) sociolinguistic concerns such as indexicality. In the same way that the speed which one talks affects such phonological phenomenon as assimilation, hiatus, elision, etc, the rhythmic motifs, pulse and tempo can have an effect on phonological curiosities in a singer's style. Melodic aspects too are worth considering, since (as shall be discussed in the following chapters) sonority is potentially a concern in certain musical environments, such as places where the pitch contour of crescendos reaches its peak – in such environments we may expect vowel quality to show preference for more sonorous phonemes.

Furthermore, the central argument of this thesis is that accent and phoneme choice is a facet of (4) tonality and texture, and contributes to the compositional texture of a song through the

phonological timbre choice of the singer. (7.) is feasibly a concern for the analytical and interpretative process, since electromusical effects such as distortion and delay can obfuscate sound to a point where sung phonemes are indistinguishable. In musical environments where such effects are extreme the analysis must be put on hold, or better examples of the singer's style must be found.

Tagg also emphasises the concept of *musemes* (invented by Seeger, 1958), which he defines as 'minimal units of expression in any given musical style' (1982, p. 9). *Musemes* are considered a parallel concept to phonemes or morphemes, but differ in that they are not limited to linguistic, communicative meaning. Rather, *musemes* possess more abstract, culturally specific expressive or emotive meaning. The framework in the following chapter (5) can be considered one that describes motivation towards the usage of particular *musemes*.

## 5.0 Speaking and singing

It may seem like an obvious observation to make, but speaking and singing are very different activities. Despite the fact that we are (must be) consciously or unconsciously aware of this fact, it is something that has received relatively little attention in linguistic-based study of accent in music. This does not seem like a small oversight given the subject matter, and given the wealth of technical and philosophical writings that have preceded modern treatments of style and style-shifting in pop music. This chapter shall attempt to deal with the differences and similarities between speaking and singing, drawing upon the writings of those who have already amply trodden this ground, and will also provide justification regarding why a consideration of the differences (and similarities) between speaking and singing is an important one.

Western philosophical writings on music and language stem back to the Grecian era. Plato, for example, wrote about the way in which 'musical modes' uplift are uplifting, due to their similarly

with high-class speech (Neubaeur, 1986). Clearly then, a consideration of the relationship between speaking and singing is an ancient one, and we will naturally ask questions such as – which came first, music or language? A discussion regarding this question is beyond the scope and interest of this paper, but the question's implications are worth discussing before proceeding. It would seem intuitive to argue that speaking is either older, or a necessary foundation for singing since we appear to tend to learn how to speak before we learn how to sing (although, it seems it is possible that there are musical elements to infant babbling, see Tafuri & Villa, 2002). There is an important distinction between learning how to speak and sing competently, and being capable of speaking and singing. Being considered 'capable' of speaking requires a lot more foundational ability than being considered 'capable' of singing. It is even conceivable that a human being could grow up without ever being taught a language, but may be able to make musical sounds.

The difference between the German language and Beethoven's Symphonies may be patently obvious at first glance, but what do we do with the existence of tonal languages such as Silbo Gomero (a whistled form of a dialect of Spanish), and, say, instances of musical whistling? To further this point, it is certainly conceivable that an individual who is uninitiated in the details of Silbo Gomero might mistake it for spontaneous music, and may even (legitimately?) interpret it as such, and subsequently appreciate it as having musical qualities. So where, precisely, does the difference between language and music (speaking and singing) exist? The following chapters will present two approaches that attempt to deal with this question.

## **5.1 A technical approach**

Arguably, the obvious place of departure between singing and speaking is in the physical, technical way an individual manipulates their vocal cords to produce sound. The study of phonation is one that is typically focussed on linguistic spheres of interest, that is, in describing and analysing the vowels and consonants of the world's languages (Zemlin, 1998). But clearly, phonation, or voicing,

is also at play when a person sings without using constructions contained in any particular language.

The human voice can be described as having a variety of vocal registers (not to be confused with the linguistic notion of register), which describe the vibration patterns that the vocal folds are capable of producing. From lowest to highest these registers are: vocal fry, modal voice, falsetto, and whistle register (Large, 1972). However, we cannot consider these registers as being unique to singing, or as modes that make singing not speaking. Vocal fry is common in speech, modal voice is merely what is considered 'normal voice' (and therefore applies to both speaking and singing) and falsetto has been noted in the speech of African Americans (Rasmus, 2010), and is often used to express humour or irony (Cooper, 1973). Also, as previously mentioned, whistling is not purely musical, since there are many languages that use whistles to communicate. These are merely useful descriptive terms that appeal to musicology for their categorical value, and aren't popularly used by linguists due to the limited meaning-content they provide, although phenomenon such as wolf-whistles, and the expression of humour through falsetto etc has been studied in linguistic spheres. Therefore, an individual cannot be said to be singing by simply changing the register of their voice, or through applying a particular register to their voice.

Similarly, concepts such as vocal range, although highly useful to describe the musical notes that singers can reach (soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, etc) do not contribute to the difference between speaking and singing. It is merely the case that some individuals have higher or lower pitch voices than others, and although that range may only be typically revealed through singing, we still speak in particular vocal ranges depending on the nature of our vocal cords. Vocal range in our speaking voice is most noticeable in the way male and female speaking voices differ. As an illustration of this, through acoustic analysis of the dynamics and waveform of the human voice we can predict the gender of an individual with a high degree of accuracy (between 94.7% and 95.9%) (Sorokin & Makarov, 2008).

We may then consider the manipulation of pitch to be the technical place where speaking becomes singing. After all, attention to pitch is perhaps one of the most obvious technical aspects of singing – we constantly make judgements on an individual's singing ability based on whether or not they are singing too sharp or too flat. But like register, pitch too is not a convincing difference; intonation patterns in spoken language involve pitch variance, and tonal languages such as Mandarin Chinese use pitch contours to distinguish words that possess the same consonants and vowels. We occasionally use phrases such as 'she had a “sing-song” voice' when describing particular language styles, and frequently draw upon musical analogies to describe the way people speak (droning, high-pitched, toneless etc). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that lowering pitch when delivering bad news communicates empathy with the recipient (McHenry & Parker, 2012), which, incidentally, may lend support to the hotly debated idea that music is a language of the emotions (Davies, 1983).

If pitch does have a communicative function (which, based on the above examples – it surely must do), then it stands to reason that certain pitch contours in music (melodies) will carry similar (though perhaps not identical) prosodic meaning. What is more, it is trivially easy to conjure up examples of songs that are mostly monotone, yet still consist of what most people would describe as singing. British rock band *Elbow*'s song 'Any Day Now' (2001), which primarily consists of a vocal line that almost exclusively remains on a B natural note is a case in point. If speaking became singing when melody was attached to voice, then we would probably call Guy Garvey's singing in 'Any Day Now' speaking, which it clearly is not. The same can be said for the monotone 'melodies' found in *The Beastie Boys*' 'Sabotage' (1994) and *R.E.M.*'s 'End of the World' (1987).

We can also safely discount rhythm, another aspect of prosody, from being a salient factor in differentiating speaking from singing, through a similar line of reasoning. The existence of syllable-timed languages such as French, Welsh, and Icelandic shows that attention to rhythm and pace, although perhaps not quite as intentional or creative as music, can indeed be a facet of speaking.

Speaking patterns have syllables, rhythms, and of course timing is absolutely necessary in two-way conversation (turn taking, overlaps, etc). Wells even uses musical note lengths (minims and crotchets) to describe accents of the north of England, which occasionally vary from one another on a rhythmic basis (1982a).

Despite the above reservations regarding the aforementioned rigidly defined potential (but ultimately unfruitful) technical differences between speaking and singing, there does appear to be some differences in these two activities at the level of the brain. Tierney, Dick, Deutsch, & Sereno (2012) agree that whilst it naturally seems obvious to us whether or not someone is speaking or singing, acoustically there is negligible difference. Nevertheless, Tierney et al have found (through functional magnetic resonance imaging) that certain portions of the brain respond more strongly to the human voice when singing than when it is considered speaking (2012). Such studies suggest to us that the real difference between the two activities is neurological, and found in the way we interpret sounds that are being produced, rather than there being an actual technical difference. Even if this biological difference is natural (rather than culturally produced), it supports the forthcoming view that the difference between speaking and singing lies in our interpretation and understanding of speaking or singing as musical or communicative.

## **5.2 A contextual and indexical approach**

Given that a technical approach does not seem to yield the desired conclusions, I therefore propose that the primary place of departure between singing and speaking is in context and reception, rather than in technical or physical auditory differences. There are elements of music and language that enforce constraints upon the spheres in which they operate, and enable a separation of the two, despite potentially utilising precisely the same building blocks (phonemes, rhythms, pitches, etc). In other words, if the use of phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and other traditionally linguistic components of language is received, by an audience, as being musical (as opposed interactional,

then that must be what it is (insisting otherwise certainly seems like prescriptivism).

Consider the following example - if we were to listen to an individual 'speaking' Silbo Gomero, we may well interpret the sounds they are producing as a form of music, or as a form of song. However, if we had the prerequisite knowledge of what the whistles meant, then we would instead interpret it as a form of communication, and would perhaps not pay so much attention to any musical qualities those sounds might have (and may not interpret them musical at all).

It is simply the case that language has evolved to utilise the broad range of sounds we are capable of articulating, and (either pre, post, or simultaneous to the evolution of language), perhaps coincidentally, we are also capable of hearing those same sounds and appreciate them for their aesthetic value. Singing enjoys a conceptual place that straddles between possessing both meaningless, non-semiotic musical sounds and meaningful, semiotic phonemes. Techniques such as adding vibrato to one's voice has not received any semantic value in any language the researcher knows of, and has subsequently been confined almost exclusively to musical settings, yet this does not mean that there is something about vibrato that makes it musical and not communicative – there is no reason that such articulations could not theoretically receive meaning in a tonal language. Also, vocal techniques such as rap and sprechgesang<sup>1</sup> must therefore fall into conceptual alignment with what we might expect from 'traditional' singing.

We can therefore define 'singing' as follows,

*any activity that uses the human voice for expressive (semiotic and non-semiotic), artistic purposes, is intended as, and/or interpreted as being 'musical' and has a perceived value at the aesthetic level.*

This definition offers the possibility for language-use in singing, but does not necessitate its presence. It also provides us with a more useful starting point to analyse and describe the place of

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<sup>1</sup> Literally "spoken singing" – refers to an expressionist vocal technique that lies somewhere between speaking and singing

accent in song – we can now begin to form an argument against accent purely having sociolinguistic, indexical content, since singing is operating at a level that crosses boundaries outside the realms of language study. Singing, as a musical activity, may use the same phonemes, morphemes and words as speech, but the difference lies in richness of expression. Patel makes this point, drawing a comparison between melody and intonation,

...the network of pitch relations in intonation contours is not nearly as rich (as musical melodies). As a result, intonation contours are aesthetically inert, as evidenced by the fact that people rarely hum intonation contours or find themselves captivated by the pitch patterns of speech (2007, p. 183).

Interestingly however, Patel provides a counter-example to his own point in a footnote. Czech composer Leos Janacek reportedly found intonation contours fascinating, and even made a multitude of musical transcriptions of them (2007, p. 183). Again, we can see that it is in the reception of any given sounds where they are considered musical or not. Most of us may view intonation contours as 'aesthetically inert', but surely that is not necessarily because they are objectively aesthetically inert. In the same way that modern rock music (especially heavy metal varieties) can be viewed as melodically inert by some, it is not considered as such by those who enjoy and appreciate it. Patel also relies on trusting his audience to agree with him that it is indeed a 'fact' that people rarely find themselves captivated by the pitch patterns of speech (some phoneticians would likely vehemently disagree).

Nevertheless, Patel makes an important point that 'the organisation of pitch intervals and scales is a salient difference between music and ordinary speech' (2007, p. 183), and it is this intentional, higher-level organisation of pitch relations that makes language-use considered musical or not. A collection of sounds seems much more likely to have perceived value at the aesthetic level if there



are deliberate efforts to produce expressive, rich melodic and rhythmic patterns. This all also means that certain accents, or certain pronunciation choices can be viewed as aesthetically pleasing (or otherwise) in the context of music. Music can 'speak' to an individual by communicating emotions, or ideas through both semiotic and non-semiotic means, but it always exists somewhere along the aesthetic range.

### 5.3 Creative phonology

With the above technical/contextual tension taken into account, we can now begin to view phonological use in song as primarily being a creative endeavourer, rather than exclusively communicative. Singers have, throughout the history of music, passed down musemes that have been codified into singers' repertoire, and not (necessarily) into speakers' repertoire. This is achieved through the establishment of and legacy of musical communities such as scenes and speech communities associated with genres and styles of music. The driving force behind the development of musico-linguistic norms are the singers and songwriters working within and without these established scenes.

In the BBC 4 documentary 'Nile Rodgers: The Hitmaker' (2013), Rodgers recalls an instance where a fellow musician, Barnard, questioned him with reservations regarding Rodgers' lyrics. In the hit song 'Everybody Dance', the chorus is punctuated with brief melodic phrases sung by the backing singers, who use the musical morpheme /du:/. Barnard had asked what 'do do do' meant, to which Rodgers replied – it is like 'la la la', except 'la' is not 'hip', 'do' is hip. Neither /la:/ or /du:/ have semantic meaning in music (despite /du:/ having semantic meaning in the English language), yet they possess indexical order based on the musical experience of the individuals who hear and use these sounds.

Furthermore, /la:/ and /du:/ are both elements of the solfège system – a musical system that uses

syllables (or musical morphemes) to teach singers to mentally hear various pitches. In English, these syllables are: do, re, me, fa, so, la, and ti. Whilst we can assign semantic meaning to most of these syllables (see – Do-Re-Mi in the 1959 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical 'The Sound of Music'), they need not have any semantic meaning whatsoever. This reality presents us with intriguing possibilities for approaching instances of accent in song. Because sounds like /la:/ and /du:/ can have indexical meaning, they demonstrate that it is possible for any sound to shed itself of any semantic meaning, yet still retain its linguistic backlog of indexical value.

Accents then, are collections of sounds (timbres) that are at the disposal of singers to exploit creatively in whatever manner they wish. The potential novel human soundscapes are rarely sought after however, and it appears that the vast majority of singers do conform to pre-established sound schemes, using common musemes that are tied to specific genres. Nevertheless, there are certain sounds that appear to be used creatively for particular effects, or to overcome tricky melodic phrases. The glottal stop for example is often used to create a staccato effect. In Regina Spektor's song 'Fidelity' (2006), /ʔ/ is used extensively throughout, especially in the chorus – 'And it breaks my /hæʔ/ (heart)'. But it isn't just intervocalic /t/ that Spektor replaces with /ʔ/, arguably in keeping with her New Yorker accent, she also uses / ʔ/ in place of /l/ in the second chorus – 'and it breaks my /fæʔ/ (fall)'. Although the existence of /ʔ/ in her singing style could possibly be attributed to her speaking style, she is clearly using the phonology she has at her disposal in a creative way, generating a particular aesthetic through an 'overuse' of the sound. In the middle-eight (or bridge), Spektor ends repeating the word 'better' in a melodic crescendo, shifting from /bɛʔə/ to bɛrə/. The phonology in use here achieves two things; it assists in indexing Spektor's style as an American style (specifically of the Brooklyn area of New York), and creates a juxtaposition of staccato and legato melodies as the middle eight reaches its crescendo. What is of note here, is that singers are clearly limited in the types of sounds they have at their disposal, depending on the environments available in the words that they use.

Similarly, in *Athlete's* 'Westside' (2003), the bridge section features /weʔ/ (when) repeated throughout. Curiously though, unlike the above environment in 'Fidelity', the glottal stop replaces a pronunciation feature that in speaking styles would not typically be realised as a glottal stop (a nasal). Regrettably, I can only introspectively evaluate the indexicality of the phoneme, but I believe there is a good argument to be made that the existence of the sound still at the very least indexes London indie rock, the music scene in which *Athlete* are composing music.

Also, there are songs such as Katy Perry's 'Roar' (2013), which features a post-chorus section where Perry glides through vowels from low to high, punctuated by /ʔ/ to give it a staccato melody (she also uses this technique in the verses, e.g. 'nothing' /næʔθɪŋ/). Here, the feature lacks any indexicality, and is used purely to break up the words for the benefit of the melody.

Vowel sounds are also highly variable in music. This is especially a concern for sociolinguistic-based music analysis, due to accent largely relying on vowel realisation. Consider the chorus to Whitney Houston's version of I will Always Love You (1994) – the variation in melody in the second chorus on 'I' (/aɪ/) forces a dramatic shift in phonology, creating an elongated triphthong which ranges from open to near-close then back to open - /aɪɑ/. This creates a problem for the linguist who wishes to analyse singing styles – we can hear elements of the British diphthong in this sound, and it could easily be mistaken for /aɪ/, except Houston's vowels clearly move from back to front, hence /aɪɑ/, rather than /aɪɑ/, and the sound ends up realised closer to its American PRICE counterpart.

Many singers also employ 'warble', a method of singing that uses trills, runs and other musical techniques to embellish the sound of the voice. A simple, and very common lyric such as 'oh yeah', for example, can be potentially realised as /əʊwɪ:wəʊjeəjɪjeə:/, and is likely to be even more complex, depending on the melody that the singer chooses to sing (warbling is usually an improvised style). Such creative phonology would perhaps not be permissible or intelligible in spoken English language.

Phonological creativity can also be observed in doo-wop, a style of music that developed out of African American communities in the USA in the 1940s. This style of singing uses onomatopoeic sounds to mimic instruments (“shang-a-lang” for guitar sounds, and “doo-wop” sounds for brass etc), using the phonology of English as the sound bank for a whole host of possible timbres, rhythms and melodic phrases. As with the use of solfège sounds in song, doo-wop utilises the building blocks of the English language in a novel way, not because of its semantic content, but because of its aesthetic value.

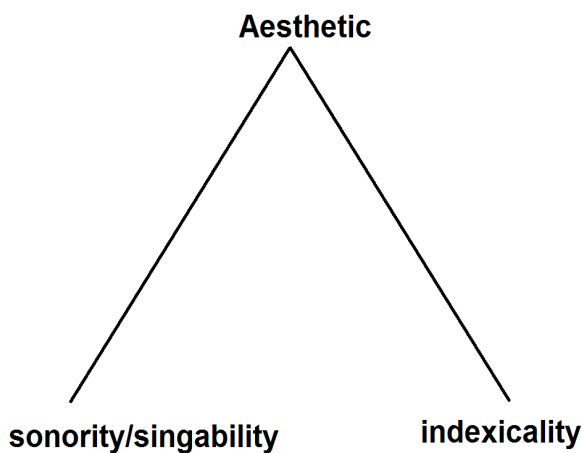
The ultimate point here is that the phonology of language can be used creatively, for aesthetic purposes, and that it is in this kind of intentional musical creativity where speaking and singing part ways. Furthermore, since the phonology of the English language, and other languages, quite clearly has an aesthetic value, we can begin to consider the aesthetic dimension of accent as the primary concern for singers and their audience.

## **6.0 The ASI framework**

As I began to explore the nature of the relationship between music and language, and by extension, the relationship between speaking and singing, it became apparent that the tools that linguists had been using to account for accent in music were not sufficient. As previously discussed, Bell's audience/referee design framework is an excellent tool for analysing style-shifting in various language-contexts, but as for the realm of music, it is somewhat ill-equipped, as is communication accommodation theory and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's acts of identity framework. This chapter serves as an introduction and explanation of the model I propose for dealing with accent in the context of music.

After considering a number of distinct approaches, it became apparent that these approaches could be narrowed down into three separate, but unavoidably interrelated spheres or values that are

generally (but perhaps not always) in effect when a singer sings in a particular way. These values are (a) the aesthetic or artistic quality of the singer's accent, (s) the level of sonority or singability the phonemes carry, and (i) its indexical nature, which (generally) signposts a particular identity. These three values can be considered to exist along a continuum where either equal or disproportionate weight can be placed upon them at the will of the singer and of at the whim of the audience (see figure 2 below). Where we place the value of a particular feature of pronunciation in a singer's repertoire depends highly on the perspective we take. For example, from the perspective of the singer, their voice's aesthetic may be dependent on singing a particular way (i.e. falsetto, crooning etc) and their latent 'talent' or training in the discipline of singing, whereas the audience may not spare a thought for their technique or style and may appreciate the aesthetic based on other entirely subjective criteria. This uneven, conflicting relationship between speaker and hearer, or singer and audience, shall be discussed in greater detail below.



*Figure 2.* Illustration of the ASI hierarchy.

## 6.1 Aesthetic and artistry

A consideration for the appreciation of beauty is a severely overlooked aspect of accent in music, to the point where I do not believe the concept has yet been looked at in great detail in the existing

literature. The reason for this oversight is likely due to the perception that the study of aesthetic is not particularly scientific (since linguistics is a social science), and due to the problematic nature of its inherent subjectiveness. Indeed, the *Journal of Aesthetics* is largely a philosophical publication, and linguistics is traditionally only interested in making an objective-as-possible, descriptive analysis of language, and is not usually prone to ponder questions pertaining to concepts such as 'artistic merit'.

But linguists do comment on the aesthetic of language, perhaps inadvertently, and surely do have opinions on certain aspects of its aesthetic. As an example, whilst discussing Ian Dury's singing-style model, Trudgill writes that,

His extensive usage of [ʔ], for instance, can certainly be attributed in part to the aggressive style of punk-rockers, but it can also be attributed to the music-hall tradition which has often used Cockney pronunciation for comic effect (1983, p. 264).

This appears to be an attempt to dismiss Dury's singing-style as atypical, since it does not fit in with Trudgill's view that in punk rock there are 'conflicting motivations' (to a greater or lesser degree, depending on which musical act is studied) towards sounding American and sounding British. Much of the argumentation I wish to bring forward is intended to challenge this view, and I believe that a more serious consideration for aesthetics will shed much needed light on the subject. Although on face value it would appear that the proposed view can be boiled down to [x] artist uses [y] phonology because it is aesthetically pleasing (at some level), the reality is much more complex than that, which is why the concepts of sonority and indexicality also require adequate treatment. A nod to the aesthetic dimension exists in the work of Coupland, who writes that 'the aesthetic qualities of styles relate... to the process of design, however naturalised that process and its results

might have become in our experience' (2007, p. 1), and also notes that 'styles involve a degree of crafting' (2007, p. 1). Although he does not expand upon the aesthetic dimension, this mention reveals that there does exist a very real attention to aesthetic even in spoken styles.

One reason why the study of aesthetics is so applicable to this field is due to the language-orientated debate that flits back and forth in its stance towards meaning in music (and other forms of art). Early attempts to ascribe meaning to music include Albert Schweitzer's interpretations of Bach's instrumental music in 1905 and Deryck Cooke's implementation of Schweitzer's methodology in working out emotive meaning in musical phrases (Cooke, 1959). Cooke in particular suggests that melodic patterns in music transmit consistent emotional meaning (outgoing, assertive, joyful, reassuring, inward-looking, despairing, anguished, etc), and thus likens understanding the meaning of melodic patterns to translating a foreign language. The view that music can even possess meaning has been continually criticised however. The following passage in Patel's *Music, Language and the Brain* is worth reproducing here:

...meaning should be reserved for the linguistic sense of references and predication. In this view music does not have meaning. Indeed, Kivy (personal communication) argues that music "cannot even be meaningless," because music does not have the possibility of being meaningful in this linguistic sense (2007, p 304).

Patel elaborates upon Kivy's view by likening the existence of meaning in music to asking whether a rock is dead, arguing that it is a category error. In this view, music and language are disparate entities that differ to such a considerable degree that any potential cross-over is more or less denied. I cannot help but view this as an overtly artificial way of enforcing semantic restrictions on the meaning of 'meaning', by calling for limitations on its use in this manner. As a counter-argument,

one would not think it would not be possible for Cooke to even ascribe (what he believes to be) meaning to musical patterns, if discussing music and meaning was such a fundamentally futile effort. Whilst rocks have no qualities that can be mistaken for life, music clearly has qualities that can be appropriated with meaning. Even if Cooke's meanings are purely his own, and not shared by any other individuals, the fact that he has ascribed meaning to musical sounds shows that it is certainly possible, in theory and in practice.

Nattiez argues that 'meaning exists when perception of an object/event brings something to mind other than the object/event itself' (1990, p. 115). In this view, language is not necessarily the bastion of meaning, and only ascribing meaning to spoken or written forms of communication seems like a grave error to make. It is worth considering the position of musical languages at this stage – it is surely just as possible to grant meaning to whistles, and use them to communicate, as it is to enjoy the sound as musical.

Solrelosol, a constructed musical language, is an excellent case in point. Created by Francois Sudre in 1827, Solrelosol uses seven musical notes as phonemes (along a scale in any key), and silences to separate words. Although it primarily uses musical notes to communicate meaning, since it uses the seven colours of the rainbow, individuals can even communicate through mediums such as painting. It survives to this day on the internet in small communities of enthusiasts. Musical notes therefore can have meaning, or can contribute to meaning, but just like language they need to have meaning attached to them in a semiotic fashion, and need to be shared through some form of social network or community.

Traditionally, the philosophy of aesthetics has dealt with the appreciation of beauty, and whilst this is the central drive behind including it as one of the factors behind singing-style choice, the term beauty poses some problems when considering certain styles. Marcel Duchamp's Fountain is one prototypical example of this problem. Fountain is a porcelain urinal that was submitted to the Society of Independent Artists' exhibition in 1917, and is an example of Dadaist, avant-garde, post-



modern art. Its existence raises the question; if the pursuit of the aesthetic is the pursuit of beauty, then what are we to make of such works of art? This is a question posed by and discussed by philosophers of aesthetics ad infinitum, but it bears repeating before we proceed into discussing particular accents in an aesthetic context. It is useful to consider the notion that whilst certain sounds, certain ways of expression, and certain singing techniques are not necessarily designed to be beautiful, they are still designed to portray a particular aesthetic. This view is reflected in the work of Kemp, who uses the example of three distinct descriptions to illustrate this point:

(a landscape as) 'windswept and barren'

(a musical piece as) 'alive and funky'

(a picture as) 'pristine and beautiful' (Kemp, 2007, p. 263)

Kemp argues that he '[does] not think we can say that “beautiful” calls out for categorically different treatment than the others' (2007, p. 263). Rather, all six descriptive terms that appear in the statements above are applicable to the aesthetic of the landscape, musical piece, or picture. These words bear 'expressive' meanings, as distinct from (or perhaps in addition to) 'descriptive' meanings. The emergence of an aesthetic then, is the result of our response to the thing (landscape, musical piece, picture), through the expressive notions it conjures up in our minds. To divert this point back towards the context at hand, if a singer's language choice involves an accent or style that is widely considered abrasive, aggressive, or comic (as with Trudgill's Ian Drury example), then these expressive terms must constitute our responsive appreciation of how that accent or style contributes to the music's aesthetic. Furthermore, calling something 'beautiful', 'funny', or 'sweet' is a culturally context-sensitive act, and these expressive terms are only intelligible when we take into account the cultural context.

A further facet of our understanding of contextual aesthetic to consider is the conceptually

dichotomous, but (in truth) often overlapping roles of speaker and hearer (singer and audience). This is exemplified through the difference between intention and reception. Davies illustrates this with the following analogy:

An audience may respond, say, to a poem as it was intended to respond, and it may also recognize that the poet intended it to respond this way, but the response, if aesthetic, is not determined by the recognition of the artist's intention (Davies, 1983, p. 226).

Unless the poet's intentions are announced, or otherwise brought to the attention of the audience, the audience's appreciation of the poem's aesthetic is independently derived (even if the audience are in complete agreement). The reason why I have described singer and audience as overlapping roles is due to the observation that the singer is, unavoidably also the audience (since they can, and probably must listen to their own voice). It is simply the case that s/he is privy to their own intentions, so is distinct from the broader audience group since his or her intentions do inform his or her aesthetic response. In the case of the poet in Davies' illustration above, through the act of writing or voicing the poet's work, the poet becomes the audience upon reading or hearing what they have created. However, the poet cannot escape the fact that both their receptions and intentions must be coloured (and in part, determined) by their receptions and intentions.

Ultimately, the point to bear in mind is that accents must have a certain aesthetic, based on the listener's linguistic experience and the subjective criteria they have acquired that causes them to emotionally/psychologically react in a particular way. This is true for spoken language, but for sung language the aesthetic concern is amplified. Findings gathered from the matched-guise technique (Lambert, 1967) for example, demonstrate that people can respond with favour (or not) to particular dialects. Strongman and Woosley's study of Yorkshire and London English speakers showed that

London speakers were seen as more self-confident, whereas Yorkshire speakers were seen as more honest and down-to-earth (1967). Furthermore, those who were identified as northern themselves tended to perceive their own group with much more favour than their southern counterparts' perceptions of themselves. Cheyne's study of Scottish English voices also reflects this 'accent loyalty' (1970). When we hear such accents in music, we surely must then react in a similar manner.

Arguably our responsive attitudes to sounds associated with a particular accent are heightened in a musical context, due to the primacy of our appreciation of its aesthetic. A singer chooses to sing in a certain way because that's how they want their voice to sound, that's the kind of timbral quality they wish to achieve; or even if they're singing with no conscious aesthetic concerns, we as the audience certainly have a responsive, aesthetic appreciation of their voice. We instantly like or dislike voices that are singing a certain way, whereas we may not even consider 'like' or 'dislike' as relevant concepts to speaking voices (in many/most circumstances). It is for this reason that the a-dimension is considered superordinate to sonority/singability and indexicality/identity. Sung language, whether it is linguistically meaningful or not (i.e. using the words of a specific language, rather than utterances such as 'la' or 'doo'), is always expressively meaningful at some level.

## **6.2 Sonority and singability**

The position of sonority in our understanding of style-choice in music has not yet been fully realised in related work. It was briefly taken into consideration by Gibson and Bell (2012), but their treatment of sonority has been left to a subsequent publication (as of writing this paragraph, not yet published). They draw upon the earlier introduction of the potential importance of sonority by Morrissey, who argues that it may resolve the problem with widely documented inconsistencies of many singers' styles (2008). Sounds that have the greatest 'carrying power', all things being equal,

have higher sonority, so it would seem natural for more sonorant variants of a phoneme to appear in musical phrases where such 'carrying power' is required. Vowels and consonants can be said to exist along a sonority scale, based on their relative 'carrying power', or amplitude. The sonority scale below has been developed from the work of various sources, using the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP) – the principle that 'in every syllable there is exactly one peak of sonority, contained in the nucleus' (Parker, 2008, p. 56).

(1)

**Most sonorous**

Sonorants

Open vowels [ɑ a ɒ]

Near-open vowels [æ]

Open-mid vowels [ɛ ɜ ʌ]

Mid vowels [ə]

Close-mid vowels [e]

Near-close vowels [ɪ ʊ]

Close vowels [i u]

Glides [w j]

Rhotic approximants [r]

Flaps [ɾ]

Laterals [l]

Nasals [n m ŋ]

Obstruents

Voiced fricatives [z ʒ v ð]

Voiced plosives [b d g]

Complex plosives/affricates [tʃ dʒ]

Voiceless fricatives [s ʃ f θ]

Voiceless plosives [p t k]

Glottals [ʔ h]

**Least sonorous**

(Adapted from Burquest & Payne 1993, Collins & Mees, 2009 and Parker, 2008)

In the above list I have attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, but it is important to note that there is some disagreement amongst phoneticians regarding the precise order of the sonority scale, and whether or not sonority is an important factor to take into consideration at all (Harris 2006, Parker 2007). Clements, for example, argues that there are no such divisions as presented above, and instead divides phonological sonority as below (1990):

(2)

**Most sonorous**

Vowels

Glides

Liquids

Nasals

Obstruents

**Least sonorous**

The reason why Clements does not divide sonorant phonology any further than this is due to him not considering place articulation as having an impact on sonority. For the purposes of this paper the view will be taken that there are sonorous distinctions between consonants – the difference between voiceless and voiced versions appears to be important, and glottals such as /h/ will be

thought to have the least sonority value. Regarding the obstruents in (1), Collins and Mees place voiceless fricatives above voiced plosives, whereas Parker places all voiced obstruents above their voiceless equivalents. Regrettably, Collins and Mees do not justify their hierarchy, but Parker draws attention to tokens that act as phonotactic examples that justify a preference of voiced over voiceless through the SSP. In the word 'midst', for example, /d/ is closer to the nucleus than /s/, and since they behave as a single syllable, Parker argues that /d/ must then have higher sonority than /s/ (2008). He also points out that many others adopt this stance towards obstruent sonority (Jespersen 1904, Boersma 1998, Gouskova, 2004).

Morrissey noticed that several of the variables that Trudgill uses (the USA-5) have higher sonority than their British equivalents (2008). He draws attention to the fifth feature in the USA-5, the alveolar flap [ɾ] typically associated with GenAm in the intervocalic /t/ environment. Flaps are considerably more sonorous than voiceless plosives and glottals ( $r > t + ?$ ), the latter of which are common realisations in SBE/RP. Morrissey goes on to write that /t/ and /?/ are more difficult to sing unless the melody is suitable for 'staccato phrasing' (2008, p. 213), and thus argues that it is possible that singers are choosing [ɾ] not because it indexes America or Americans, but because it has more carrying power. Here is where a distinction must be made between two facets of the s-dimension of style – that is a distinction between sonority and singability. Morrissey does not make this distinction, and in fact uses the terms sonority and singability interchangeably, leading to a number of questionable assertions regarding features of the USA-5 model.

The difference essentially lies between articulation and reception. Whereas sounds that are more sonorous are easier to hear (receive), sounds that are singable are easier to sing (articulate). To illustrate why this is an important distinction to make, consider the difference between an open vowel such as [ɒ] and a close vowel such as [u]. Both are rounded, so they require equal effort for the lips (if this is even a factor), and are articulated in different manners, but the difference does not necessarily make one easier to say or sing than the other. If we are to speak of their sonority, then

we are referring only to their amplitude, not to how either vowel makes the act of singing easier or more difficult. Voiced fricatives such as [z] have a lower sonority than glides such as [w], but arguably [z] is much more well suited for song than [w]. Since [z] is a sibilant, consistent air flow can control the sound's length. [w] on the other hand is a semivowel that would normally be used in a syllable boundary, making it difficult or unwieldy to sustain for long periods of time without additional vowel sounds. Of course, the lyrical content of a song will largely dictate the selection of phonemes a singer has at their disposal (I can think of no real conceivable situation where a choice out of [z] or [w] is likely), but the point still stands that certain sounds are simply easier to sing. The alveolar flap (discussed earlier) may be simultaneously more sonorous and more singable, but if this is the case then it is a happy coincidence, rather than a correlation between singability and sonority.

In practice, sonority has relevance when a more sonorant realisation of a particular allophone is adopted in environments where there is no linguistic motivation for choosing the sound for its indexical value. We can also use the proposed sonority scale to provide justification for a particular phoneme's existence as an indexical item in environments where both variants have either equal sonority or have very little difference between them, e.g. between GenAm [æ] and BritEng [ɑ:] (Morrissey, 2009). Care must be taken however – just because a particular feature of pronunciation is associated with a particular accent or identity, all things (sonority/singability) being equal, does not mean that the phoneme has been chosen for its indexical value. There must be other, contextually-based justifications for arguing that it has been chosen for such reasons.

### **6.3 Indexicality and identity**

The indexical value of phonemes is probably one of the most widely studied aspects that accent can take in the existing literature on pop-song pronunciation. The indexical power of the USA-5 model is what led Trudgill and Simpson to the conclusions they have made, and likewise with Gibson, Bell and Beal (and others) who have explored the prestige and indexical strength of style in a variety of

linguistic environments. Indexicality has been defined and developed by many sociolinguists, from Gumperz to Eckert, Labov to Silverstein.

The table below illustrates the development of indexicality:

	Labov (1972)	Silverstein (2003)
First-order indexicality	<p><b>Indicator:</b></p> <p>A variable feature which shows no pattern of stylistic variation in users' speech, affecting all items in the relevant word classes. Speakers are not aware of the variable. The variable is 'defined as a function of group membership,' or, as its use spreads in subsequent generations, group membership and age.</p>	<p><b>n-th-order indexical:</b></p> <p>A feature whose use can be correlated with a socio-demographic identity (e.g. region or class) or a semantic function (e.g. Number-marking). n-th-order accounts are 'scientific', i.e. could be generated by a cultural outsider such as a linguist. The feature's indexicality is 'presupposing:' occurrence of the feature can only be interpreted with reference to a pre-existing partition of social or semantic space</p>
Second-order indexicality	<p><b>Marker:</b></p> <p>A variable feature which shows stylistic variation, i.e. speakers use different variants in different contexts, because the use of one variant or another is socially meaningful. Speakers are not necessarily aware of the variables or their social meanings, however.</p>	<p><b>n + 1-th-order indexical:</b></p> <p>An n-th order indexical feature that has been assigned 'an ethno-metapragmatically driven native interpretation' i.e. A meaning in terms of one or more native ideologies (the idea that certain people speak more correctly than others, for example, or that some people are due greater respect than others). The feature has been 'enregistered.' That is, it has become associated with a style of speech and can be used to create a context for that style. Its indexicality is thus 'entailing' or 'creative.'</p>



Third-order indexicality	<p><b>Stereotype:</b></p> <p>A variable feature which is the overt topic of social comment: may become increasingly divorced from forms that are actually used: the form may eventually disappear from vernacular speech.</p>	<p><b>(n+1) + 1-th-order indexical:</b></p> <p>An indexical phenomenon at order n+1 can come to have another, (n+1) + 1-th-order, indexical meaning when a subset of <i>its</i> features come to be perceived as meaningful according to <i>another</i> ideological schema. Uses of features from this new subset presuppose the context that was created by the use of features at the n+1-th order of indexicality and can create a new context. Less precisely, each increase is a meta-level interpretation of the next-lower one.</p>
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(Adapted from Johnstone & Kiesling, 2008)

The differences between these orders of indexicality lies not in what is necessarily indexed, rather it lies in the way pronunciation features (phonemes that are remarkable in some way) are approached and assessed by speakers, and the level of awareness they have of the phenomenon in question. First order indexicality exists when a correlation is made between a certain dialectal feature and a particular identity or pragmatic function. Johnstone and Kiesling use the example of the monophthongization of the diphthong /aw/, which is said to be a feature of working class males born in Pittsburgh. It therefore acts as an first order indexical (or indicator) of that particular demographic. Second order indexicality is said to occur 'when people begin to use first-order correlations to do social work' (Johnstone & Kiesling, 2008). Those people who are aware of the identity indexed by either using /aw/ or not using /aw/ can use this feature to project whichever identity they wish to project.

With this level of metapragmatic awareness, indexicality works on the second order level, and in Labovian terminology such features are 'markers' of identity, rather than mere indicators. Johnstone

and Kiesling go on to suggest that /aw/ becomes a third order indexical when it becomes 'swept up into the explicit lists of local words and their meanings and reflexive performances of local identities' (2008, p. 10) – these indexicals become part of the broader discourse regarding the correlations found between local identities and the speech systems associated with them. Or in practical terms, since 'Pittsburgheese' was coined and discussed in newspapers (etc) in the 60s, /aw/ has gained third-order indexical status.

I would argue further that intentional role-playing and acting is also an out-working of third-order indexicality. In the movie 'Australia' for example, Nicole Kidman, an American-born Australian actress, plays the role of an English aristocrat, and subsequently makes use of the third-order indexicality provided by using the stereotype (in Labovian terms) associated with received pronunciation. In the same way, I argue that singers are also playing a role, consciously or unconsciously performing an identity, and this is partly achieved through the manipulation of accent.

Furthermore, the indexical dimension of accent feeds into our aesthetic appreciation of the sounds of a singer's voice when they sing. According to Wells, 'we use the indexical information we collect from listening to a person speak in order to slot him (sic) into an appropriate stereotype' (1982a, p. 29). We subsequently make judgements on other individual's social status, political and/or religious beliefs, age, gender or race through the way they speak, based on our pre-existing knowledge of the non-linguistic factors that we associate with certain types of accents. A punk band that uses a working class accent when they sing indexes, overtly or covertly, the attitudes, behaviours, and political beliefs associated with people who speak in that accent. Till describes the construction and emergence of the Sex Pistols as a 'deliberately offensive' endeavour (2010, p. 81), where McLaren, the group's manager, intentionally wanted to build a music scene around the band, drawing upon the 'offensive' and 'uncouth' indexicality that lead singer Johnny Rotten's singing style entailed. The Sex Pistols' aggressive attitude and chaotic nature, coupled with Rotten's technically

poor singing ability, and use of working class London pronunciation, generated the band's aggressive and chaotic identity.

Identity is frequently seen as key to the phenomenon of style shifting in music (see Gibson & Bell, 2012), and is often considered the prime motivation behind accent shifts (2012), as it is in spoken language use. Whilst I do propose that identity is not all that is indexed by style shifts in music, it is certainly one of its layers. Bucholtz and Hall propose a socially-defined identity-orientated framework that draws upon a wide range of sociolinguistic work conducted on indexicality and identity (2005). Their framework involves five principles, which shall be summarised below:

*The emergence principle* – identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon.

*The positionality principle* – identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles.

*The indexicality principle* – identity relations emerge in interaction through several related indexical processes, including: (a) overt mention of identity categories and labels; (b) implicatures and presupposition regarding one's own or others' identity position; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk, as well as interactional footings and participant roles; and (d) the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups.

*The relationality principle* – identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy.

*The partialness principle* – any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction. It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts.

The view taken here does not consider style-choice in music as 'acts of conflicting identity', rather it acknowledges the way in which identity construction is just as fluid and ever-changing as the music scenes that house the language styles that singers use. The Hip Hop scene, for example, possesses a metapragmatic level of awareness that elevates the indexicality order found in its music to the third order, where Hip Hop artists appear to be hyper-aware of their positionality, and consistently demonstrate the truth of Bucholtz and Hall's first identity principle. That is, identity emerges through an individual 'working-out' their identity, utilising their metapragmatic awareness of the indexicality accent stereotypes (n+1th order) hold amongst their peers and the broader music audience. *Catchklick Emceez* for example begins the verse of their song 'Athens of the North' with the following lyrics;

1. You can hear it in my accent when I talk

2. Yo, they call this the Athens of the north

(Catchklick Emceez, 2011)

Catchklick raps with Scottish pronunciation, and the lyrical content of the song relates to living in the geographical area of Edinburgh, and consistently affirms their identity as Scottish. Such Scottish Hip Hop groups are considered 'underground' artists, and do not seem to achieve much mainstream

success. The truth of this is most evident in the lives of Scottish Hip Hop duo *Silibil n Brains*, another example of a group possessing such metapragmatic awareness, though it is manifested in an altogether different manner. After attempting to secure a record deal with Sony, they were laughed out of the audition, and dubbed 'the rapping Proclaimers' (The Great Hip Hop Hoax, 2013). The duo subsequently devised Californian identities for themselves, practiced speaking and rapping in a Californian accent and engineered another meeting with a talent scout, who signed them up to a £25,000 record deal. However, the disconnect between their own native identities and the identities they had indexed through their use of third-order stereotypes ultimately proved difficult to maintain, since they attempted to perform their Californian identities across a variety of discourse contexts, including whilst at home and with their partners. In essence, they attempted to stretch the partialness principle to all contexts, whereas most musicians and performers will tend to index identity only in relevant contexts (such as – in front of a microphone or camera). For other musicians and singers, the notion of identity is perhaps less salient, but it is no less vital to the linguistic choices they make.

When we discuss indexicality that occurs in song, there are a variety of contexts that must be taken into account. This is echoed by Simpson, who writes that,

a truly comprehensive account of influences on singing style needs to consider three interwoven factors: the perceptual model aspired to, the groups who adopt it and the social make-up of the groups' fan base (1999, p. 364).

These aforementioned contexts include; the music scene, the music genre, the place of origin of the singer, the typical or generalised demographic of the audience members, and the place where the singer primarily performs. There is also an additional, somewhat less obvious context that appeals to higher order indexicality in a similar manner to Silverstein's 'oinoglossia' (wine talk) – consider a talent show contestant (on a television show such as 'X-Factor' or 'Pop Idol') who has never sung in

public prior to his or her appearance on the show. In this context – the context of being on a stage, before a vast audience and three judges – the 'ordinary person' is metaphorically transformed into a 'diva' or a 'rock star', during their brief moment of fame. The very act of standing up and vocally entertaining others is sufficient context to justify massive alterations in accent and identity.

In the case of the *X-Factor*, the disconnect between the down-to-earth, joe-public identity of the contestants and their 'rock star' persona that is activated as soon as they begin singing is one possible source of the show's success. *Stars in Their Eyes*, another British talent show that primarily aired during the 90s, similarly capitalised on the dramatic disconnect between the identities of the contestants. In this show, the contestants impersonated established stars, using their singing style and fashion style, and temporarily 'became' those stars in order to perform. This is merely a far more salient version of the phenomenon already discussed – even the pop stars who are being impersonated are, or were, 'putting on' their on-stage persona.

## 6.4 Art and identity

Whilst the s-dimension of accent has little, if any, sociolinguistic impact on our perceptions of musical meaning, there is a tangible tension between the notions of art and identity present in the above framework, and it is likely the reason why there exists a debate regarding pronunciation motivation in music. Furthermore, this tension is likely the reason why some listeners of music might accept certain accents in certain genres and reject others. Gibson and Bell argue that 'an American singing style is the default when singing popular music' and note that many of the New Zealand singers they interviewed did not realise they were singing with American pronunciation (2012, p. 163). If true (it is certainly the author's experience also), then it follows that for some singers and audience members, identity is not a factor, and that singers use the phonemes they use

simply because there exists a precedent for it. In popular music, American pronunciation can therefore be seen as the default aesthetic, in the same way that 4/4 time signatures are a staple of pop and rock, and particular chord sequences are common (the *Axis of Awesome's* 'Four Chords' (2008) song features a medley of over thirty pop songs that use a I-V-vi-IV chord progression, demonstrating the ubiquity of certain musical motifs).

Despite identity not necessarily being a salient factor, it is clearly possible for us to reflect on accents in-use in popular music and make judgements on them, as evidenced by the previous research in the field. Here is where our perceptions and intentions colour the way we appreciate the way certain words are pronounced in a musical context. Davies asks the question; what is the meaning of a piece of music, and answers it by arguing that 'it is that which interests us and which we value' (1983, p. 222). In conversational settings, all attention is placed upon our words – it is paramount that we receive and understand what is being said, whereas in musical settings we are perhaps more concerned with the *value* of what is being heard, rather than its meaning.

It is not surprising then that linguistic theories have emphasised identity frameworks in conversation, since phonetic indexicality arguably cannot be ignored in conversational scenarios. In music the situation is different. We are often less interested in what is being said, and how it is being said, and more interested in how much we enjoy the general aesthetic of the song (i.e. is it my kind of music? Do I like this singer's voice? Is it peaceful, upbeat, pleasing, aggressive, emotional?). This is also true for other musical aspects, such as chord progression, time signature, harmony, timbre (see Tagg's checklist in chapter 4 for more) – unless we are actively attempting to analyse the music in question, such concerns are not concerns.

This is all to say, whilst it is certainly possible to study a set of variables that index a particular identity, motivation requires intention, and without singers being conscious of their pronunciation decisions, arguing that they style shift only to index an identity seems like an overestimation of what singers are setting out to accomplish. Arguing that non-American pop singers use American

pronunciation to identify with Americans raises further questions – why do non-American singers require this motivation? Is every non-American American-influenced singer attempting to 'pass-off' as American, or attempting to use American-influenced styles to 'break in' to the US market? Whilst that certainly seems a possibility, it seems disingenuous to suggest it is endemic somehow.

But then, when can we say that a singer used [x] accent to index [y] and contribute to a construction of a corresponding identity? Is it merely enough that [x] *can* index [y], or does the singer's intention and audience's reception factor in at all? I would argue that singer's intention and audience's reception are all that matters, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to study that in great detail. Despite this limitation, we can speak conceptually, and the intention here for now is merely to raise these questions, and draw attention to the aesthetic-identity tension.

## **6.5 Musical sound as an aesthetic index of scene and genre**

In the same way that linguistic codes possess social meanings and index emergent identities, musical codes (or musemes) index aesthetic frames such as scenes and genres. Scenes, as musical communities, possess normative behaviour that allow us to categorise music, and establish expectations when we approach musical acts that claim to be, or are described by others as members of certain scenes. Consider the following examples; Mancunian pronunciation might be considered an aesthetic indexical of the 'Madchester'<sup>2</sup> music scene, growled vocals might be considered an aesthetic indexical of the Seattle music scene (i.e. grunge), and synthesised sounds might be considered an aesthetic indexical of New Wave music. Our musical experience influences the way we approach new musical sounds just as our linguistic experience influences the way we perceive and respond to others who use [x] or [y] accent.

If the above is true, then the ASI framework should also account for musemes in general. Consider the 'twang' of a banjo, for example. The banjo is an American musical instrument,

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<sup>2</sup> Intentionally misspelled – the Madchester scene involved artists such as the Stone Roses and the Happy Mondays.



developed from similar African instruments. The rolls and drones that the banjo produces, and is well suited for, can be considered indexicals of bluegrass and country music, and as indexicals of these kinds of music, the sounds of the banjo are part of their aesthetic. Arguably too, the relative sonority of the banjo, the way its sound sits on a higher pitch, heard above other instruments in an ensemble, also contributes to its unique aesthetic. A melody played on a violin or fiddle in a 6/8 rhythm can be considered indexical of Irish folk music, 5th chords played on a distorted electric guitar may be considered indexical of rock music, and the sound of a richter-tuned harmonica (known as a blues harp) can be considered an indexical of blues music, and, indexical of all the scenes and identities that are associated with these genres.

Through performing with these instruments, the musician positions themselves as scene members, and possesses the identity of, say, a 'blues performer', or a 'rocker'. Likewise, through using growled, angsty sounds in their voice, a musician playing the 5th chords on the distorted electric guitar is automatically considered a 'grunge' musician. There is a further linguistic layer (the American accent) that positions the musician as a member of the (virtualised) Seattle grunge scene. Thus, British groups such as *Send No Flowers* (signed to East West Records – an American record label) are not described as Britpop (despite performing in England, in the 90s, alongside other Britpop groups during a time when Britpop began to grow in popularity), instead, they are described as performing grunge, like their Seattle-based counterparts. *Send No Flowers* are not merely 'passing off' as Seattle-based, or even American musicians, for all intents and purposes, they *are* fully-fledged members of their associated musical scenes.

## 7.0 Case Studies

In this chapter we shall examine a number of different musicians, genres and music scenes, putting into practice the descriptive framework discussed in previous chapters. Each forthcoming section

will begin with a brief introduction, contextualising the music scene or musical acts under study, providing background that helps explain the novel phonological choices seen in some of the music that has been created and recorded in the last decade. The broad focus of these case studies is two-fold – to provide examples that illustrate the three primary facets of the ASI descriptive framework, and to use it to investigate the way which singing styles operate in certain genres. Background information is largely drawn from internet resource Allmusic, a widely cited and well respected archive of musical acts, both past and present. It is updated regularly, yet unlike resources such as Wikipedia, its articles have named authors.

## 7.1 Sonority and singability preference

According to Allmusic, *Alt J* are English indie rockers who met at Leeds University. The band's sound is described as a 'blend of layered, folk-inflected dub-pop and soaring alternative rock, which has been compared to everyone from the *Wild Beasts* and *Hot Chip* to *Coldplay*.' (Monger, 2014, p. 1) They formed in 2008, have been active since 2010 and are fronted by vocalist Joe Newman. Newman's singing style is of interest in this study due to the unique way in which he uses the nuances of language, especially as a self-confessed 'self-taught amateur'. Newman's singing style demonstrates an overwhelming preference for producing more singable and sonorous versions of lexemes and phonemes, whilst possibly still retaining some indexical value. In *Alt J*'s song 'Tesselate', Newman sings the following;

1. Bite chunks out of me

/baɪt tʃʌŋks aʊwə mi:/

2. You're a shark and I'm swimming

/jɔːrə ʃɑ:k ənaim swɪmɪŋ/

3. My heart still thumps as I bleed

/ma ha: sɪəw θʌms azəɪ bli:/

4. And all your friends come sniffing

/ənɔ: jɔ: frens klʌm snɪfɪŋ/

(Alt J, 2012c)

In numerous environments, Newman chooses to reduce consonant clusters – in line 1 for example, 'chunks' becomes /tʃʌns/, causing it to sound more like 'chance', especially when preceded by /baɪr/, where the alveolar flap is so slight the word sounds like 'by' (thus, causing it to sound like a prepositional phrase - by chance, rather than a verb phrase – bite chunks). Newman also frequently opts for more sonorous (and arguably more singable) realisations of consonants that would potentially otherwise interfere with the flow of his singing style. In line 1 we can observe phonetic assibilation where Newman opts for a sonorous glide [w] to replace the intervocalic /t/ in 'out'. He also shows a preference for the [w] glide in line 3, where he uses it instead of the lateral approximant [l], potentially in anticipation of positioning the tongue to sound the following dental fricative. According to the sonority chart in chapter 5, /w/ is far more sonorous than /t/ (it is a sonorant rather than an obstruent) and is slightly more sonorous than /l/, thus lending some support to the idea that Newman has a highly sonorant singing style.

Newman constantly employs elision to improve the singability of his lyrics (/ha:/ for heart and /bli:/ for bleed in line 3 for example), and possibly to force particular phrases to scan across the beats and rhythms of his melodies, and certainly in the case of /bli:/ he may be using this to force a rhyme with 'me' in line 1. Altering pronunciation for the purposes of rhyme is perhaps yet another poorly explored area of music and sociolinguistics. If we are to view accent shifts in music as aesthetic choices, then elision for the purposes of rhyme is strong evidence to support that view. Newman is demonstrating a kind of linguistic creativity that we would probably not see in spoken communication, yet in this musical context it feels perfectly validated, where the goal is not

necessarily to communicate information, or construct identity, but to entertain and perform.

Newman also uses an alveolar flap in place of intervocalic /t/, which as previously mentioned has typically been attributed to an American influence. But, Newman's lack of rhoticity, and preference for the 'London' /ʌ/ STRUT vowel (Wells, 1982c), tells us that it is highly unlikely that Newman is aspiring to shift towards anything like the USA-5 model described earlier. Rather, it seems more sensible to take the view of Morrissey here and deal with the prevalence of /ɾ/ in /t/ environments as a sonority/singability choice (2008).

We must also consider the fact that the act of singing melodies often requires constant, uninterrupted vocal cord stimulation. In the environments where /t/ might be a perfectly reasonable phonological choice, the melody Newman sings simply does not allow it. In line 1 the melody forces pronunciation to change twice – 'bite' quickly follows 'chunks', then 'out of me' is sung at a lower pitch, in more even rhythmic timing. To have sung /t/ in 'bite' would have been too melodically cumbersome, and the glide (/w/) which replaces /t/ in 'out' avoids staccato phrasing, and allows the melody to flow. This last phonological change especially tells us that Newman is not likely to be aiming for any particular geographical language style, and subsequently cannot be said to be overtly constructing an identity based on any particular style (other than the identity of a musician or performer). The individual variables present here are therefore behaving as markers or indicators (first and second order indexicals), and we do not observe third order (stereotype) indexicality.

Across *Alt J*'s music in their album 'An Awesome Wave', we can observe Newman's overwhelming preference to produce voiced versions of phonemes where voiceless ones would suffice. In their song 'Fitzpleasure' (Alt J, 2012a), Newman opens with the following lines:

1. In your snatch fits pleasure, broom shaped pleasure,

/i:n jɒ snæ: vɪz pleʒə: bu:m ʃeɪ pleʒæ:/

## 2. Deep greedy and googling in every corner.

/di:b gri:di: n gu:gəli:ŋ everɪ gwɔ:næ:/

Here, Newman demonstrates such a strong preference for both singable and sonorous sounds that the transcribed sections below each line above do not bear little resemblance to the lyrics. I have included spaces in the transcriptions to help show where each word begins and ends, but the reality is that these lines are sung very quickly – governed by a melodic movement down through the scale. Elision is Newman's most obvious technique here, and this contributes considerably to his lyrics' lack of intelligibility; *snatch* is reduced to /snæ:/, *broom* is reduced to /bu:m/ and *shaped* is reduced, quite dramatically, to /ʃeɪ/ - all in the same line (1). Omission is not the only contribution to Newman's lyrical unintelligibility, however. Perhaps more strikingly, Newman opts for voiced realisations of voiceless consonants – *fits* becomes /vɪz/ (line 1), which is given a voiced plosive and a voiced alveolar fricative, and *corner* becomes /gwɔ:næ:/, which is given a voiced plosive [g], and arguably a more sonorous vowel (where a schwa may have sufficed).

Newman's style therefore demonstrates the way in which singers can use singability and sonority to create a particular aesthetic. It is not necessarily the case that we must vehemently seek out indexicality and identity in every pronunciation choice a singer makes. Artistic intention, after all, must be paramount in all musical decisions, unless those decisions are in fact made for reasons of identity-construction. Sometimes a preference for singability and sonority can be at the expense of the intelligibility of lyrics, but this only draws attention to points already made – that is, music is not by necessity a mode of linguistic communication, rather it is concerned with expressive of aesthetic communication. Despite the fact that music and singing use language, use words, and the accents of spoken language (which, of course, in a spoken, communicative context unavoidably carry indexicality), music is ultimately a creative endeavour that eschews such features of speaking when appropriate. In other words, it is not necessarily important that we understand Newman's

lyrics (or, arguably, any other singer's lyrics for that matter), it is only necessary that we approach the sounds of his lyrics with an aesthetic appraisal.

Yoann Lemoine, a singer who goes by the stage name 'Woodkid' also demonstrates unusual singing techniques. According to Allmusic, Lemoine was born in Lyon, France and became a singer songwriter after a prolific career in music video direction (O'Brien, 2014). In interviews, Lemoine's accent falls somewhere in between French and General American, but his singing style is significantly more difficult to place, geographically speaking. I have transcribed a few verses from Woodkid's song 'Iron' below:

1. From the dawn of time to the end of days

/frʌm də dʌn ʌv taɪm tu: di: end ʌv daɪz/

2. I will have to run away

/ɑ: wəl hæv tu: rʌn ʌwaɪ/

3. I want to feel the pain and the bitter taste

/ə wɒn tu: fi:l ðə peɪn ən də bi:tə taɪs/

4. Of the blood on my lips again

/əv ðə blʌd ʌn mi li:ps əɡaɪn/

(Woodkid, 2011)

Many of Lemoine's vowels above demonstrate his preference for more open, sonorant sounds. At the end each line, we see Lemoine singing /aɪ/ as a FACE diphthong, which according to our sonority scale, is five steps higher in sonority than its more common, GenAm or RP English equivalent /eɪ/. Whilst /ð/ and /d/ are more or less equal on the sonority scale, there is an alternative explanation for the presence of /d/ in Lemoine's style - /ð/ is considered rare in most European languages (French in particular lacks this sound), and as a consequence it is often replaced with

either a voiced alveolar sibilant [z] or the voiced alveolar plosive we observe in Lemoine's singing style. In this case, it is possible that Lemoine's background with the French language is influencing his pronunciation here – but is [d] in place of [ð] an indexical? It is certainly not an indexical of France per se, rather it is an indexical of a stereotype of individuals who have difficulty with the English language.

Similarly, Lemoine's pronunciation of lips in line 4 certainly appears like a potential 'mistake' - /ɪ/ is not present in French phonology, and its closest approximant phoneme is /i:/. Hence lips being realised as /li:ps/. Yet, Lemoine's speaking style shows no evidence that Lemoine lacks this phoneme (An Interview with Woodkid (Yoann Lemoine) for Creatie, 2013) (i.e. when Lemoine says, 'people are going to /ʃit/ on you'), so it does not appear that we can dismiss such unusual pronunciation instances as mistakes. It is more convincing to suggest that Lemoine is (intentionally or unintentionally) creating an exotic aesthetic, through both the sonorants, and the indexicals present in his singing style. His style capitalises on our perceptions of the sounds he is using, which contributes to Lemoine's indie, anti-mainstream style (both musical and linguistic).

*Bombay Bicycle Club* are described by Allmusic as 'a melodic, guitar-driven indie rock outfit from North London... blending together sensual, reverb-slicked, post-punk sensibilities with the kind of bubbly, rhythmically adventurous quirkiness that evoked acts like *Orange Juice*, *Bloc Party* and *Vampire Weekend*' (Reges, M. 2014, p. 1). Like Newman and Lemoine, Jack Steadman, the *Bombay Bicycle Club*'s lead singer, has a singing style that highly favours sonority.

1. Can I wake you up?

/kən ə weɪk ju: wʊ/

2. Is it late enough?

/ɪz ɪt leɪt ənʊf/

3. There's a story in which my eyes' shut

/ðeəz əstɔ:ri: ɪn wɪtʃ maɪ aɪz fʌ/

4. Could you back me up?

/kʌdʒu: bæɡ mi: jʌb/

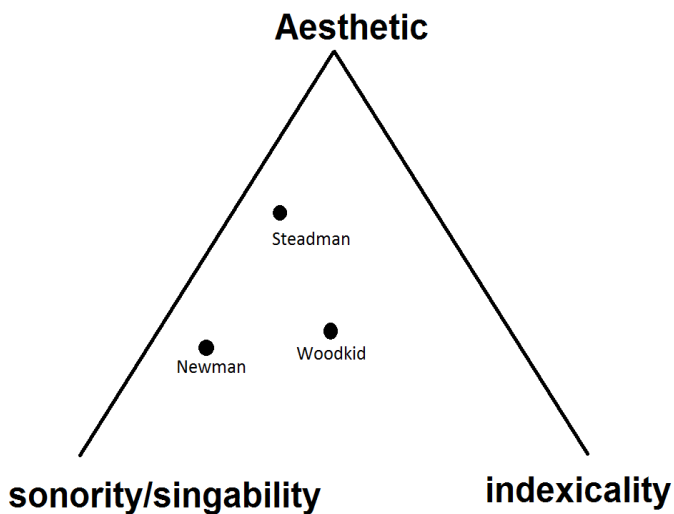
(Bombay Bicycle Club, 2011)

The presence of the alveolar flap and the monophthongal PRICE vowel above are very likely candidates for sonorous and singable vowels. We can consider /r/ both easier to sing, and far more sonorant than its intervocalic counterpart (/r/). It allows for flowing melodies, as in line 2 - /ɪz ɪr leɪr mʊ/ (and possibly contributes to their 'rhythmically adventurous quirkiness'), and helps the singer avoid a harsh plosive sound, which may possibly aesthetically clash with the music. As for the PRICE set, monophthongs are easier (or require less effort) to say, and are easier to sing, than diphthongs, and are well suited to melodies where the words must follow on from one another in quick succession. So again in line 1, Steadman sings a melody that favours a monophthong on 'I' /kɛn ə weɪk/, and allows for a diphthong on the FACE vowel in 'wake'. The phonological omissions at the end of each line, as well as possesses a singability value, allow for forced rhymes, in words that would normally end in sounds that do not quite match.

The common factor between these three singers is their preference for sonority, and the distinct lack of clear-cut identity-construction in their vocal aesthetic. Many of the features of the USA-5 are present – especially the alveolar flap, and the monophthongal PRICE vowel [a], though they are mixed with features of British accents (especially London English in Newman's singing style), as well as several features that are not part of the phonological scheme of any particular variety of English (/ɡwɔ:næ:/ - corner). In figure 3 (below), I have plotted Newman and Steadman's style as closer to the sonority/aesthetic scale, whereas I believe there is a case to be made that Woodkid's 'exotic' style possesses enough indexicality to give it a more central position. The creative phonology of these singers' voices is reflected in the way they are described by Allmusic – Alt J are



not described as playing within one particular genre (they play a 'blend of layered, folk-inflected dub-pop and soaring alternative rock').



*Figure 3.* Possible ASI plot points for Newman, Steadman and Woodkid.

Perhaps the act of singing with unusual pronunciation, with no real demonstrable attention to identity construction through indexicality, has contributed to their genres and scenes being difficult to place. As 'indie' artists, we would expect to hear something that is a break from the 'popular' mainstream, thus, an either conscious or unconscious rejection of the mainstream pop accent (American) is perhaps indicative of their 'independent' nature.

## **7.2 Identity and indexicality in modern iterations of bluegrass and folk**

The last decade has seen the emergence of a new genre of music that fuses together elements of country and bluegrass with traditional Irish/Gaelic folk music, variously dubbed 'indie folk', 'indie pop' or 'folk rock'. This apparent difficulty in pinpointing what genre of music these musicians are performing is reflected in the common linguistic code used by the singers involved. That is, the

singers do not demonstrate fully realised style shifts towards any specific regional linguistic code, and instead appear to 'pick and choose' depending on the flavour of the song or the identities that are artistically indexed by the chosen style of the singer(s). There are some differences in the precise phonology that is used, depending on the band or the singer's background, gender and musical intention. This section will focus on a brief phonetic analysis of lyrics of two musical acts: *Mumford and Sons* and *Ben Howard*.

Phares writes that *Mumford and Sons* are 'inspired by folk, rock, country, and bluegrass' and that 'they bonded over their shared love of rootsy music' (2014, p. 1). This 'love of rootsy music' is reflected in the group's general aesthetic – when performing they wear open waistcoats, straw hats and other re-appropriated 19th century attire. Mumford sings with a wide range of pronunciation features one might consider indicators and markers of the accent used in country music – but he also uses some features that cross geographical boundaries and act as markers for other identities.

Before we examine the singing style of Mumford, some background information regarding some phonological phenomenon is required. Rhoticity possesses a curious positionality within country and bluegrass. In these genres (most widely performed by singers and musicians from the American deep south), rhoticity is highly prevalent, yet only variably appears in the spoken accents of these singers. One such example of this phenomenon is John Denver, a performer who grew up in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. Denver's highly variable rhoticity can be heard in a speech he has given in Aspen, where he uses /r/ in 'part' /pært/ but not in concerts /kænsəts/ (John Denver: On Being Human, 2013). Wells presents arguments both for and against 'superficially' non-rhotic southern speech possessing underlying rhoticity (1982), but what is important to bear in mind is that there is no real consensus regarding the position of rhoticity in southern American English. Regardless of the problems surrounding rhoticity in Standard American English (SAE), Denver, like most country singers, demonstrates a unanimous preference for vowel plus /r/ in his singing style. In his song, 'Rocky Mountain High', the first verse begins as below;

He was born /bɔːrn/ in the summer /sʌmɜːr/ of his twenty-seventh year /tɪŋtɪ/

(John Denver, 1972)

It is unclear why rhoticity makes a consistent appearance in country music's language styles, given its variability in SAE. One possibility is that rhoticity possesses a perceived level of covert prestige for SAE speaking singers – Wells points out that 'non rhoticity is associated with... upper-class whites, and blacks. Rhoticity is... associated with lower-class whites' (1982c, p. 542). The use of rhoticity then, may be seen as a deliberate way of distancing country music from mainstream genres such as rock and roll, which has been largely influenced by African American performers. Regardless of the reasons why rhoticity came to be a staple of country and bluegrass singing styles, we must at this stage take for granted that it has now been established as a musical and linguistic norm in these genres, and accept that modern day singers who perform these genres are likely to adopt rhoticity as part of their repertoire, not for reasons of perceived prestige, rather they are likely to adopt it simply because it has been well established as part of the aspired-to aesthetic.

One geographical area that sees only minor variation in rhoticity is Ireland (Wells, 1982b), who, like many countries have their own historical folk music, which has seen a revival in modern times. Traditional Irish folk music shares many of the same instruments and timbres that are typically associated with country and bluegrass (with the exception of the banjo, which is uniquely American). This is perhaps unsurprising given the large number of Irish immigrants to the USA. This positions contemporary folk music as a highly suitable companion for country music, and it appears that many musicians, bands and singers have utilised a transatlantic fusion of folk and country to produce a new sound.

In Mumford and Sons' song, *Winter Winds*, we find evidence of the fusion of linguistic norms. The first line is sung as below;

As the winter winds litter London with lonely hearts

/æz ðə wɪntɜːr wɪnz lɪtɜːr lʌndən wɪð lʌŋlɪ hɑːrts/

(Mumford and Sons, 2009)

Here we have a peculiar mix of pronunciations – an RP-like pronunciation of London, in the same environment as heavy use of rhoticity in 'winter', 'litter', and 'hearts'. By referencing London, Mumford is distancing his music from country and bluegrass, which would typically feature lyrics about American locations. This distancing is also reflected in his pronunciation of London (/lʌndən/) and lonely (/lʌŋlɪ/), where his STRUT and GOAT vowels are behaving as markers (n+1<sup>th</sup> order indexicals) of London. Since he is singing about London, or singing from the perspective of someone who lives in London, he is arguably constructing an authentic identity to convince the listener he has lived what he is singing about. However, his use of rhoticity marks his style as distinctly not British, and most certainly not London English. So what purpose does Mumford's rhoticity serve in this context? As has been alluded to, I argue that Mumford's rhoticity is a bidirectional marker of country music and Irish folk music. As n+1<sup>th</sup> level indexicals, Mumford's rhoticity is a marker of styles of music that have influenced the genres his own band play. With a mixture of banjos, uilleann pipes, guitars and fiddles, *Mumford and Sons* musically index two distinct styles of music with complementary traditions, and I argue that this is reflected in the way that Mumford sings. If we take country and folk as one entity, we could argue that rhoticity is a marker of roots music in general, and an n+1<sup>th</sup> order indexical of periods of time such as the Great Depression and pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland – i.e. when music of this type began to develop.

*Mumford and Sons* are not unique in aiming for this kind of bidirectional indexicality. English singer-songwriter Ben Howard (Leahey, 2014a) shows evidence of this consistently throughout his recorded singing style. His song 'Old Pine' opens with the following lyrics;

1. Hot sand /sænd/ on toes /taʊz/, cold sand in sleeping /sli:pəm/ bags /bæ:gz/
2. I've come /kæm/ to know that memories were the best things /θeɪnz/ you ever /evɜ:r/ had /hæd/
3. The summer shone /ʃɔ:wən/ beat down on bony /bəʊne:/ backs
4. So far from home /həʊm/ where the ocean stood
5. Down dust and pine cone /kəʊn/ tracks
6. We slept like dogs down by the fire /faɪr/ side
7. Awoke to fog /fɔ:g/ all around /arəʊnd/ us
8. The boom of summer /sʌmə/ time

(Ben Howard, 2012)

The mix of American and Irish pronunciation here is perhaps even stronger than Mumford's singing style. Howard displays stereotypical Irish pronunciation in his MOUTH lexical set in line 7 ('around'), and inconsistently uses /ɔ:/ in his LOT lexical set, possibly reflecting Dublin-influenced pronunciation, where in many cases there has been a CLOTH-LOT split (Bertz, 1975). Howard's rhoticity is also decidedly Irish, but as with Mumford's style it is also potentially a marker of both Irish folk and American bluegrass. Evidence for this fused style lies in environments such 'sleeping' in line 1 and 'things' in line 2, where Howard uses the diphthong /eɪ/ before the nasal /n/ - a common, if somewhat historically stigmatized realisation found in the American south (Wells, 1982c). I therefore argue that Howard's style fuses an American 'twang' with an Irish 'lilt' to form a new, creative transatlantic style. This fusion is evidenced throughout his music. In 'The Wolves', Howard uses what might be considered a 'Native American ululation', and in 'Diamonds' American contractions such as 'ain't' appear throughout the chorus (e.g. 'Oh there ain't no diamonds in the boredom').

To summarise, both Howard and Mumford are essentially using the indexical order encoded

within the pronunciation features they use as a creative exercise, and subsequently, rather than being perceived to wish to belong to the American bluegrass scene, or the Irish folk scene, they are instead placeless. Under Bucholtz and Hall's identity-orientated framework, we can view the identities of these musicians as emergent and positional, invoking geographical place only when they are performing these fluid, transient identities in the musical context. This reflects the position of the aesthetic in music, where accent, a paradigm that is normally used in a communicative context, is being used to create, invent and innovate. I propose then, that modern day 'folk' bands such as *Mumford and Sons* and singers such as Ben Howard are in fact drawing upon the pre-established aesthetic of a variety of folk traditions, especially those of Gaelic origin (Sheridan, Macdonald, & Byrne, 2011), and that this is reflected, linguistically, in the way in which they sing. Figure 4 below illustrates Mumford and Howard's emphasis on aesthetics and indexicality:

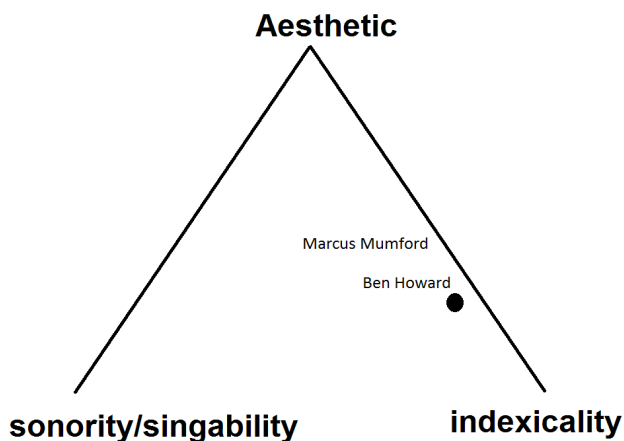


Figure 4. Possible ASI plot point for Marcus Mumford and Ben Howard.

### 7.3 Language style as an aspect of genre

Possibly the most common use of accent in music is its usage as an aesthetic element of the style of music that the singer is performing or creating. This phenomenon can be observed in almost every genre of music, but there are certain genres where its existence as an aesthetic design feature

becomes far more obvious.

*The Koxx*, for example, are a Korean indie rock band who perform a style of 'indie rock', similar to British and American groups like *The Kooks*, *Arcade Fire* and *The Killers* (as a matter of fact, I suspect the group's name is possibly an attempt at copying *The Kooks*). Some of their songs involve code switching, whereas others are sung entirely in English. 'Troublemaker' is one such example, where lead singer Lee Hyeon-song not only sings in English, but uses distinctly British pronunciation. The lyrics to the song are transcribed below:

Verse – repeated.

Officially, I shout to the lord

/əfɪʃəli: ə ʃəʊ tə lɔ:/

Chorus – repeated.

We are the trouble makers

/wi: æ ðə ʃrʌbəl mʌɪkəz/

When I lose the reason like the Undertaker

/wen ɜ: lu:z əzən laɪk ði: jʌndətʌɪkəz/

(The Koxx, 2010)

Although the lyrics are slurred somewhat (subsequently making them more singable), this too is an aesthetic element of the 'indie rock' genre, where the scene's identity emphasis is frequently placed on young people who are typically seen as underachievers, and, as the song's title suggests, 'trouble makers'. The accent in use here is non-rhotic, since rhoticity does not appear at all in any of the environments where we might find /r/, and furthermore /t/ is not realised as an alveolar flap, meaning that we are not likely dealing with a USA-5 related accent. Also, there a number of

pronunciation features here that may be considered elements of what is often called 'Estuary English', or perhaps more broadly, a 'London accent'. We have two instances of the London FACE vowel /aɪ/ in 'makers' and 'undertaker', and similarly there are two instances of its STRUT vowel /ʌ/ in 'trouble', and again in 'undertaker'. In the verse, whereas 'shout' is given the appropriate MOUTH diphthong /æʊ/, 'lord' is given the GOAT diphthong, /ʌʊ/, which may suggest that more is going on here than a mere imitation of a London accent. It may be a hypercorrection, but it is also unavoidably behaving as a aesthetic-component of the genre – by using the sounds of a London accent, in the same way that they are using the musical sounds of British indie rock (guitar riffs, drum beats, chord progressions, etc) the Koxs are attempting to perform the overall aesthetic of British indie rock.

So far in sociolinguistic studies of pop music the focus has been on non-American singers who sound American, but *The Koxs's* singing styles demonstrate that this is not an entirely universal phenomenon, and that motivation towards British models does exist. The fact that *The Koxs's* singing style is to be remarked upon calls the phenomenon into question however. We may well ask, why there are so few non-British singers singing with British pronunciation. To answer this question, it is helpful to look at potential reasons why any member of any nationality would or would not style-shift towards an accent that indexes another geographical location. Why, for example, do we not see singers from France singing with Scottish pronunciation? There are Scottish pop and rock singers who sing with their own accent, and Scottish rappers who rap in their own accent, and if language style in the context of music is merely an aesthetic concern, then why do we not see French 'Scottish Rock' singers? It would appear that style-shift motivation is strongest when the music scene in question has established itself internationally. The record industry is an Anglo-American (though chiefly American) innovation, as was the widespread introduction of sheet music prior, made possible through the invention of the printing press (Middleton, 1990). Subsequently, the USA has dominated popular music, through the widespread global consumption of rock and



roll, and most popular genres of music that developed since the 40s, 50s and 60s.

Similar to *The Koxs* in many ways, *The Killers* are another non-British group whose lead singer's language style shows British influence. Allmusic's biography of the band is rather telling: *The Killers* are from Las Vegas, but are said to be influenced by decidedly British sounding bands such as *Oasis*, were originally signed to a British indie record label (Lizard King), and toured alongside *British Sea Power* (a rock group from Brighton, UK) (Leahey, 2014 b). *The Killers* were clearly identified as performing within the British indie rock scene, and this is reflected in the way lead singer Brandon Flowers sings. However, the band also cite many American musicians as having influenced them (such as Bruce Springsteen), and arguably this too is evidenced in Flowers' singing style. The chorus of one of their earliest songs, 'Mr. Brightside', contains example of the London accent's PRICE, GOAT, STRUT and FACE vowels, alongside many features of General American.

1. Jealousy, turning saints into the sea

/dʒɜːləsiː tʌːrniŋ sʌɪnts ɪntuː ðə siː/

2. Swimming through sick lullabies

/swɜːmiŋ θruː sɪk lʌləbaɪz/

3. Choking on your alibis

/tʃʌkɪŋ əːn jɔːr əːləbaɪz/

4. But it's just the price I pay

/bʌt ɪts dʒʌs ðə praɪs aɪ paɪ/

5. Destiny is calling me

/destɜːniː ɪz kɔːlɪŋ miː/

6. Open up my eager eyes

/ʌpən ʌp maɪ iːgɜːr aɪz/

7. 'Cause I'm Mr Brightside

/kəz aɪmɪstə braɪ saɪd/

(The Killers, 2004)

It is probably safe to say that Flowers' singing style is rhotic, despite the environments in lines 3 (your alibis) and line 6 (eager eyes) potentially influencing a linking-r, or intrusive-r, line 1 shows evidence in 'turning' that there is some General American influence present. The alveolar flap, considered typical of GenAm is also present in line 4, but we cannot comment on this pronunciation feature's indexicality if it is behaving as a sonorant feature, which given the other features present, it may well be. For PRICE we have 'lullabies', 'alibis', 'eyes', 'price' and 'Brightside', all sung with distinctly London pronunciation, i.e. /aɪ/. Similarly, we have /ʌʊ/ (GOAT) in 'choking' on line 3, and 'open' on line 6; and /eɪ/ (FACE) in 'saints' on line 1, and 'pay' on line 4. But collectively, what do these features index? According to Allmusic, Flowers sings about his life in Las Vegas, and there is no extra-linguistic information that would suggest that Flowers is attempting to be identified as British. As second order indexes, these features are not necessarily acting as geographic markers, rather they are creatively used to produce a British aesthetic. In the same way that *The Killers* create music that is reminiscent of 80s-styled synth pop, Flowers' is using phonemes of a British accent as timbral elements of his voice.

The singing styles present in the music of *The Kox* and *The Killers* appears to be evidence that British rock music has now distanced itself from American rock to such a degree that it is considered a separate musical space, with its own social and musical norms. The various 'British invasions' of British music into the USA and the rest of the world has established the London accent as a key component of a certain brand of 'indie' music. According to Till, the efforts of pioneering, and reactionary British musical groups such as *Oasis* and *Blur* may have contributed towards this shift (2010). Morley and Robbins write that,

'Britpop emerged fairly explicitly as an anti-American sensibility, dedicated to the celebration of a specifically British music tradition. This distinctive tradition, its proponents claimed, stretched back through Ian Dury and the Beatles to the days of music hall and was characterised by a now self-conscious mobilization of particularly 'British' themes and styles.' (2001, p. 178).

However, this does not seem sufficient to produce a music scene substantial enough to justify the existence of non-English singers who are adopting English accents. The Scottish indie rock/pop scene has become considerable in the decade that has gone by, home to a large number of singers who sing with Scottish pronunciation. Such groups include *Biffy Clyro*, *Idlewild*, *Frightened Rabbit* and *Chvrches*. Despite this, I have not been able to track down any non-Scottish singers who sing with Scottish pronunciation. Why should this be so? I argue that the reason for this discrepancy lies in the degree in which the indexicality value of the accent in question has diminished, or shifted rather, to index genre rather than geography. For Scottish indie rock music, there simply has not been enough time, or the singers in question have not been granted enough airwave exposure (on the radio, or television etc) to effectively divorce their accent from its association with Scotland in a musical context.

For English indie rock bands such as *Oasis*, *Blur*, *The Strokes*, and *The Wombats*, there is, unavoidably, an element of their singing styles that indexes where they're from, and one who is somewhat unfamiliar with such music might remark upon it, but such bands have received enough exposure that the presence of English accents in their singing styles is no longer truly remarkable. The presence of 'London English' in pop music has reached the point where it has become an alternate default for singers who perform within British musical styles rather than American.

Consider, for example, the South African indie rock scene. As with most countries with exposure

to 'western' popular music, South Africa has a vibrant, popular music scene, and is home to bands that to American and British ears will sound very familiar (it appears to be common for singers not to use a South African accent). On the one hand there are bands such as *Seether* and *Sprinbok Nude Girls*, whose lead singers sing with notable American pronunciation, and on the other there are bands such as *The Parlotones*, whose lead singer sounds distinctly British. It seems disingenuous to suggest that these south African bands are enduring a crisis of identity, rather they are conforming to the musical norms of the genres and scenes their music is associated with. Choosing to sing in an American or British accent is a choice akin to other more overtly musical choices, such as choosing between the kinds of chords you might play (power chords, for example, are associated with rock music), the level of overdrive and distortion, drum beats/patterns/timbre (electronic or 'live'? Standard 4/4 or more experimental time signatures?). In a musical context, American or British accents are not indexical of America or Britain, they are indexical of an aesthetic – I.e. rock or Britpop.

Because bands such as *The Koxx* and *The Killers* are not British, it is easier to attribute their pronunciation patterns to aesthetic indexicals. Yet the same is true for 'home-grown' British bands who use London English. They too are using London English as an aesthetic index of 'Britpop' and 'alt rock', capitalising on the legacy of punk rock, and the codification of cockney and London English as a contributing factor to the rebellious nature of their associated genres and scenes. As a component of 'alternative' rock, the London English accent places itself as alternative to accents found in mainstream American rock, in the same way that the musical sounds of indie music are seen as more 'melodic, less noisy, and relatively angst-free' (Allmusic, 2014).

Another musical group whose sound presents two alternate indexical sound histories in a singular context is Skindred, who have been described by music journalists as a 'reggae rock' group, and have described themselves as performing 'ragga metal' (Loftus, 2014). However, *Skindred* do not use ska upstrokes typical of reggae music (their guitar techniques seem firmly grounded in

metal and contemporary rock), they do not generally use slow tempos (with few exceptions), and their drummer does not use high-tuned snares – a technique used by reggae drummers to simulate the sound of traditional timbales. The 'reggae' element of their sound is found almost entirely in the singing style of Benji Webbe, the band's lead singer. By utilising his own accent in his singing style, Webbe contributes towards the generation of the fusion genre 'reggae rock', through the indexicality that a Jamaican accent provides.

The Jamaican accent has had a highly specialised role in popular music. Throughout the course of its appearance in music it has been associated mainly with Jamaican styles of music – the kind that use the musical techniques described in the paragraph above. Due to this rich, geographically specific history, the Jamaican accent, in a musical context, appears to index 'reggae', regardless of the 'musical' elements of the song. It must be pointed out however, that the necessity of the scare quotes around 'musical' does draw attention to the primary focus of this thesis – that accent is a musical element. The voice is an instrument, so it is not surprising that by changing the timbre of the voice, one thereby changes the genre of a song. In the case of *Skindred*, Webbe's Jamaican 'sound' acts in the same way as *Mumford and Sons'* use of the banjo – it indexes a highly specific geographic area, and collection of genres that are associated with that area. The indexicality that such sounds generates therefore contributes to journalistic and aesthetic impressions of 'what kind of music' it is.

Figure 5 below illustrates and compares the emphasis that *The Koxs*, *The Killers* and *Skindred* place on A, S and I. It is argued that whilst *The Koxs* and *The Killers* certainly do index a particular genre with their accents (hence being closer to A & I, rather than A & S), *Skindred's* fusion of rock and reggae is a much more salient example of indexicality. Rather than complying with the norms of a particular genre (Britpop, in the case of *The Koxs* and *The Killers*), Webbe's Jamaican accent changes the very definition of his band's musical style.

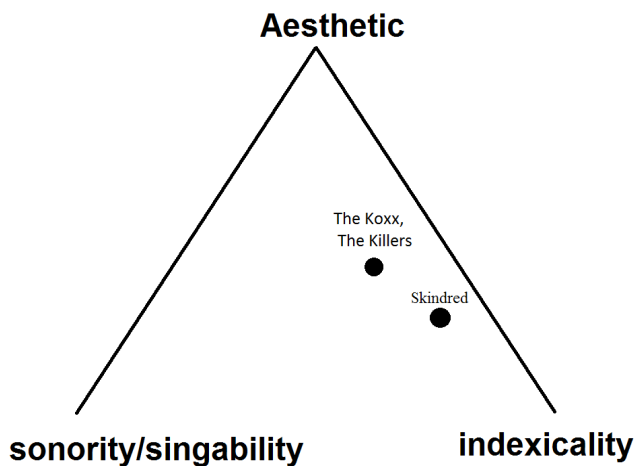


Figure 5. Possible ASI plot points for The Koxx, The Killers and Skindred.

## 8.0 Conclusion

In this paper, I have used a wide range of academic resources to produce a descriptive framework that assists the researcher in studying pronunciation choice in musical contexts. I began with brief explanations of both linguistic and musicological research that has contributed to this field, and discussed the nature of speaking and singing in an effort to introduce key ideas and theories that have influenced this work. Then, I introduced a descriptive framework involving three interrelated factors – aesthetic, sonority and indexicality (ASI). The triadic relationship of these factors was justified through a detailed analysis and discussion of previous research, and demonstrated through a series of case studies that put the ASI framework into practice.

Chapter 7 used the ASI framework to discuss possible reasons why certain pronunciation features may have been chosen by singers. It was argued that when pronunciation features were chosen due to their sonority or singability, it is often less likely that they were chosen for their indexicality (although a potential middle-ground existed in the case of *Woodkid*). Certain features,

such as [r] (voiced alveolar flap), typically associated with American pronunciation (part of the USA-5) were found amongst a number of phonemes that were consistently highly sonorous. This supports Morrisey's view that certain sounds are chosen due to their singability (2008, p. 213), which in turn does not necessitate indexical value.

Regarding the analysis of bluegrass and folk, and the various Britpop bands studied in chapters 7.2 and 7.3, I take the view that accent behaves as a timbral indicator of certain genres and scenes, through the indexical value certain pronunciation features possess. It was found that certain accents alone were enough to index particular genres (in the case of *Skindred* indexing reggae), and for singers who did not sing in their native accent, using the accent associated with particular genre was simply an exercise in being appropriate to the aspired aesthetic (*The Koxs* and *The Killers*). As a matter of fact, practically none the singers who were selected for analysis did not sing in their native accent (with the exception of Webbe and Lemoine). As mentioned in the data section (1.2), this was done to further demonstrate the way in which singers are (either intentionally or otherwise) achieving particular aesthetics through specific pronunciation choices, and through either using more sonorant forms and/or using indexical forms.

What is clear at this stage is that in order to fully test the ASI framework, more musico-linguistic analysis is required. Key genres such as Hip Hop, Opera, R&B, Soul (amongst many others) have been omitted to allow for a more focussed approach. However, a study of any of the above genres may raise additional issues that either cause problems for the ASI framework, or otherwise demonstrate ways in which to develop it further to account for the variety of ways singers use accent in musical contexts. For example, although Hip Hop has long been associated with African Americans (Chang, 2005), it has developed many sub-scenes all across the world. Thus, a detailed analysis of a variety of these scenes may shed light on the way singers create a particular aesthetic through indexicality. Whereas Opera, on the other hand, often uses very high notes and complicated melodies, and arguably this may mean Opera singers possess a higher preference for sonorant

vowels. Thus, a detailed analysis for French, Italian and English Opera may prove illuminating regarding aesthetic and sonority values. More generally, further studies of accent-use in musical contexts should continue to embrace an interdisciplinary approach. Although it is often tempting to view pronunciation choice in sociolinguistic terms – i.e. [x] singer chose [y] pronunciation because they wished to accommodate for a particular audience – this is clearly either an incomplete analysis of singers' motivations, or worse, completely misleading. Further study would benefit from giving singers the benefit of the doubt, approaching singers' singing styles with particular attention to the potential aesthetic that the singer may be attempting to achieve.

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