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CHOICES IN LANGUAGE ACCOMMODATION AT THE CROSSROADS:  
CONVERGENCE, DIVERGENCE, AND MIXING<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

This article seeks to explain a community's unique collective pronunciation of an otherwise shared word form through the lens of indexical field (Silverstein 2003). Three groups of speakers physically converge at an area in south-western Senegal dubbed 'the crossroads'. Those familiar with the area regard each group as speaking a separate language, two of which are closely related genetically. Although there are areas of overlap and clear borrowings, despite close proximity and long-term language contact among the speakers, the languages remain grammatically and phonetically distinct. Specifically, one community pronounces all (corresponding and otherwise) words with initial velar plosives as voiced [g], whereas one other uses [k], and the third uses [g] in some instances and [k] in others. An example of this potential for phonetic convergence or divergence across the three languages occurs in the word for 'peace', [kə- ~ gə-ssumay]. Unexpectedly, if viewed through the lens of ethnic identity, the community that is of a more distantly related grouping, the Baïnouk of Djibonker, more often aligns itself with the pronunciation of the Jóola of Brin, while that of the closer genetically (but geographically remoter) group uses the uncommon [gə-] form heard among the Jóola of Essil. It is postulated here that the groupings of Djibonker and Brin are indexing an identity that is mutually aligned with a broader, pan-Jóola identity, whereas those from Essil are distancing themselves from this identity, which, ironically, they interpret as being indexical of the Baïnouk identity.

**I. Introduction**

Many factors contribute to the projection of an external identity, one of them being language. Specifically, pronunciation may become indexical of a particular identity. In the area of Senegal that is the focus of this study, people who have been categorized as belonging to the same ethnic and linguistic grouping have been heard using variable, indexically relevant pronunciations, showing that ethnolinguistic grouping does not always match identity.

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Witnessed at the crossroads where members of three such groupings meet are two types of phonetic convergence and divergence. Residents of Brin or Djibonker may converge their speech patterns with those of Essil by using an initial [g] rather than [k], particularly in greetings. However, another type of accommodation has become pervasive throughout the language, and it is that which is explored in detail here.

### *Ia. The crossroads*

A group of villages in south-western Senegal, each with its own linguistic identity, converge geographically at a crossroads. An aerial view of the crossroads area is shown on the map in Figure 1. The three villages at the crossroads which are the focus of this discussion, Essil, Brin and Djibonker, and their inhabitants, are genealogically and geographically distinct to varying degrees: Brin is directly to the north-west of Djibonker along a paved highway and six kilometres east on an unpaved road from Essil, the third village at the crossroads, situated in a larger Jóola region encompassing ten villages in an area known as The Kingdom. Focusing for the moment only on the languages associated with Essil, Brin and Djibonker, namely Banjal, Kujireray and Gubëeher respectively, it is important to understand that the first two are linguistically classified as Jóola languages, while the language of Djibonker, Gubëeher, belongs to the distantly related Baïnouk grouping (Pozdniakov and Segerer, in preparation).

Upon first encountering the crossroads area, I was surprised to discover that speakers did not regard their linguistic practices as matching the borders between their villages, as I have found in other areas of West Africa. Instead, as Eckert has suggested (2008: 464), ‘...speakers use variables not simply to reflect or reassert their particular pre-ordained place on the social map but to make ideological moves’.



Figure 1. The crossroads area

Residents of the crossroads villages do not necessarily adhere to any one fixed ethnic identity, and the fluidity of their identity is projected through their linguistic practices. Through an exploratory study of greetings at this crossroads, this article seeks to examine the ways in which residents of the crossroads area identify through accommodation strategies of pronunciation. Specifically, the article seeks to answer the following research question: Is it possible that the prototypical pronunciation of the inhabitants of Essil has diverged from those of Brin and Djibonker as a way of distancing themselves from what they interpret as a Baïnouk identity?

To answer this question, we examine the identities that are indexed by each pronunciation. As Irvine (2001: 28) states, ‘A speech community might split, its offshoots migrating in opposite directions and entirely losing touch with one another; their forms of speech could drift apart without anyone’s being aware that other dialects even existed’.

### ***Ib. Integration and opposition***

Observed by the researcher, and discussed in detail by Cobbinah et al. (in press), at the local level, although to a lesser degree than in previous times, tensions exist between those who identify as Jóola and those who consider themselves to be of Baïnouk origin. The languages of Essil and Brin are classified as being Jóola, yet Brin village is not geographically encompassed within The Kingdom where Essil is located. Jóola residents of The Kingdom refer to those in both Brin and neighbouring Djibonker collectively as [fu-lun], ‘Baïnouk’

while, as Cobbinah et al. (in press) also mention, those of Brin commonly refer to themselves as being part of a mixed Jóola-Bainounk identity and as speaking a hybrid language.

## **II. Greetings at the crossroads**

Residents of the crossroads area often physically converge while travelling southeast to the regional capital city Ziguinchor or northwest towards the coast. Each encounter at the crossroads necessitates a greeting. In Casamance, as in other parts of Senegal, greetings are an obligatory commencement to the communicative process. Among Wolof speakers in the north of Senegal, greetings establish one's place in a hierarchical social structure (Irvine 1974). The crossroads area differs culturally from the north of Senegal in its non-hierarchical social structure and linguistically by speakers' frequent and nearly simultaneous use of multiple, locally bound languages. Because the greeting sequence introduces a speech encounter, I argue here that it serves to index a speaker's identity in the mind of the listener (cf. Eckert 1989, Silverstein 2003). Because identities in the area are not static, speakers project different identities through language. The greeting is the perfect opportunity to introduce a new identity, and the pronunciation of the initial consonant of the first word of the greeting does just that.

### ***Ila. Expressions of peace***

The term 'peace' in greetings is commonly used both cross-culturally and cross-linguistically in Senegal and beyond. In the area in which the crossroads is located, Casamance, the word for peace, is widely used by those wishing to index themselves with the region's dominant ethnicity, Jóola, and has a similar form in all Jóola languages. At the crossroads, not only do the Jóola Kujireray speakers of Brin employ the form [kəssumay], the Bainounk Gubëeher speakers of Djibonker also often use the term, even when speaking in what can otherwise be considered prototypical Bainounk for the village. Pronunciation varies among Jóola varieties with respect to vowel quality and quantity, but, to the researcher's knowledge, The Kingdom is the only locality in which pronunciation presents an initial [g].

### ***Ilb. Theoretical underpinning and organization***

Foundational work on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) by Giles (2008) and Giles, Coupland, and Coupland (1991) provides the basis for the analysis in this study, namely

of multilingual speakers' phonetic variation at the crossroads. While diachronically divergent phonological processes have brought about synchronically distinct systems, as described in detail in section III, it is suggested here that intraspeaker variation is due to convergence and divergence patterns at the crossroads. Silverstein's (2003) Indexical Order Principle is employed to show how the variable use of a phoneme from one language becomes emblematic of situated identity (see Lüpke in press-a, in press-b, for overviews of concepts of identity at the crossroads area).

Data provided in sub-section III d are drawn from a combination of participant observation, elicitation and information collected at the crossroads by the entirety of the researchers in the project. Examples of a multi-party conversation are looked at through the lens of Giles et al.'s (1991) Speech Accommodation Theory to view the ebbs and flows of the waves of convergence and divergence that run through a sequence of greetings. Following the exposition and detailed examination of the given examples, arguments are given in favour of an indexical interpretation of the speakers' intentions. The situation at the crossroads is located in the wider context of the Casamance region in which the villages themselves are located, and the relationship and overlap that the speakers have with others in the area are briefly noted. The conclusion suggests avenues for future research.

### *IIIa. Language landscape*

The boundaries that separate the three crossroads villages, Brin, Djibonker and Essil, are no more visible than those that separate the villages' ideological three languages, Jóola Kujireray, Baïnounk Gubëeher and Jóola Banjal respectively. Many other Jóola and Baïnounk languages are spoken beyond the crossroads, throughout the Casamance region. Each village at the crossroads is referred to as having a language, an inheritance from the fathers who established the original village settlements. The languages associated with the three crossroads villages are therefore better described as 'father' rather than 'mother tongues', or as patrimonial languages (Lüpke, in press-a). Mothers, then, contribute to the multilingual scenery of the language landscape when they migrate into the village, often through marriage, with their own inherited ways of speaking. Children too, who are frequently fostered from faraway villages and towns, bring their own linguistic background along with them. Migration to and from the area by both men and women also adds to the variety of spoken repertoires.

### ***IIIb. Multiplicity of languages***

The linguistic combinations that emerge within one crossroads village multiply exponentially each time speakers from any of the three villages meet. The linguistic reality that emerges encompasses the three named patrimonial languages, but also all those that are brought in with the immigration of diverse populations, including their similarly amalgamated existence. In many situations, rather than to choose to speak the creole of the wider area, Casamance Creole, or one of the dominant languages such as French or Wolof which have been superimposed upon the more locally associated (patrimonial) linguistic varieties, members of the crossroads community are able to extract and distinguish features of their speech to fulfil specific requirements, diverging or converging their speech with that of their interlocutor. That the crossroads area is multilingual is not surprising given the multitude of ethnicities that have migrated into the area and that interact with those who live there. What is either rare or has been overlooked until recently is speakers' maintenance of their proportionally small, yet numerous languages. Recent research by Lüpke (in press-b) indicates that the situation at the crossroads is not as unique as it may appear to the outside eye, and the same author (in press-a) provides crucial historical and ethnographic framing to help us picture the motivations for this maintenance.

### ***IIIc. Convergence and divergence***

Despite long-standing contact among the residents of the crossroads and (at some level) genetic relatedness, the three main languages spoken at the crossroads are not mutually intelligible, and not all crossroads residents report speaking all the three languages proficiently. As Cobbinah (2013) notes, descendants of the settlers of Djibonker claim that they were the first to arrive in the area. Thus, as Lüpke shows (in press-a), in line with Brooks' (1993) 'landlords and strangers' hospitality pattern, residents of Djibonker illustrate their claimed first-comer ancestry in their language accommodation to both communities of Brin and Essil. Most residents of Djibonker speak Jóola Kujireray and Jóola Banjal to some degree, whereas the reverse situation does not hold. Unless someone from one of the Jóola-speaking communities has resided in Djibonker for a substantial period of time, s/he will not claim to speak Baïnounk Gubëeher. Furthermore, despite living in close contact, the two Jóola communities do not necessarily understand each other; residents of Brin then tend to accommodate to those from Essil. Because of the infrastructure of the highway at the

crossroads (see Fig. 1), those from Essil visit those in Brin more often than the other way around. Again referencing the crossroads hospitality pattern that offers respect automatically to the guest, we expect residents of Brin to have a higher proficiency in Jóola Banjal. The commutative diagram in Figure 2 illustrates the overall directionality of language accommodation.

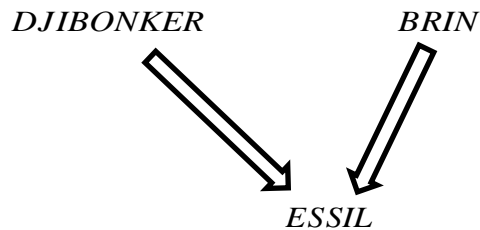


Figure 2. Commutative Diagram of Language Accommodation

The reason residents of the crossroads do not have full communicative access to the others' repertoires is because there are differences among all the languages' grammars which begin at the most basic level, that of the phonetic representation of sounds. Some words that are structurally the same or similar (composed of the same class prefix and root) have differences in their prototypical pronunciation (cf. Watson 2014). A prototypical use of a word is one that is determined by the speakers themselves as being emblematic of their language in terms of sound and form. Particularly salient in pronunciation for speakers at the crossroads is the difference between word-initial consonants' voicing specifications, [k] and [g]. Besides the prominent position of these consonants within a word, the sounds [k g] play different, and in the cases of the Jóola languages, opposing roles.

In prototypical Jóola Kujireray, the voiceless velar plosive /k/ is a phoneme that does not contrast with the voiced variant [g] word-initially. The voiced counterpart /g/ is phonemic in Jóola Banjal. In the former, [g] can appear word-medially as an allophone of /k/ due to a process of postvocalic lenition. In the latter, [k] only emerges as a simplified geminate word-finally. Therefore, the lack of contrast between /k/ and /g/ in the Jóola languages Kujireray and Banjal makes the velar plosive, in Labovian terms, an indicator (Labov 1972, 2001), or a first order index of identity (Silverstein 2003). Words that begin with [k] are associated with



Kujireray speakers from Brin, and words that begin with [g] with those who speak Banjál and are from Essil. Whereas there is a lack of contrast between the velar plosives in the two Jóola languages, in the phonemic inventory of Baïnouk Gubëeher, both velar plosives /k g/ may appear word-initially. Despite the map shown in Figure 1, there are no visible borders between the villages at the crossroads. However, an auditory boundary exists between the prototypical pronunciations of words that begin with velar plosives in the crossroads languages.

Whether through borrowing, contact, or a common ancestor, there are overlaps among the crossroads languages. A shared word that begins with a velar plosive is that which can be translated as ‘peace’. Most likely of Jóola origin, since the word is found among most Jóola languages in Casamance, the prototypical pronunciation of ‘peace’ in Kujireray is [kasuumay], and in Banjál is [gəssumay]. Other differences illustrated in this word between the two Jóola languages’ phonemic inventories and phonological patterns emerge here as a productive system of tense/lax vowel harmony in the latter but not in the former, and the presence of long vowels in the former with corresponding geminates in the latter. It is hypothesized here that these features are less salient than the initial segments’ voicing specifications. Even though the form attested for ‘peace’ in Gubëeher is [ba-li], which matches that in Gujaher, another Baïnouk language not spoken at the crossroads (Friederike Lüpke, p.c.), speakers from Djibonker also are observed using [kəssumay], a form which resembles aspects of the pronunciation of both Jóola languages.

Because the genetic distance that separates Jóola Kujireray and Baïnouk Gubëeher puts them in different branches of the Atlantic grouping (Pozdniakov and Segerer in preparation), the geographical proximity and social coherence between Brin and Djibonker must be considered a factor in their convergence and divergence patterns. Heggarty (2010: 305) makes a comment with respect to lexicostatistics that is relevant to this generalisation: ‘...any measures of language divergence – lexicostatistics included – can reflect differences not in time-depth but in the degree of coherence of speaker communities (especially across a continuum)’. Watson (2014) and (Lüpke, in press-a) discuss the linguistic and cultural links between Brin and Djibonker. As stated above, the language of Brin is sometimes referred to by crossroads community members as being Baïnouk-Jóola (this mixed identity further discussed in section V).

The word ‘peace’ specifically is important to this study not only because a velar plosive is the first segment of this word, but because it appears in the first sequences of utterances of a communicative event: the greeting.

### *III.d. Language soundscape*

Greetings are the perfect communicative context in which to examine true convergences and divergences, as the sequences are formulaic or involve stereotyped sequences, as Green and Abutalebi (2013) note. Even if a speaker lacks proficiency in one of the languages, s/he can easily perform greeting sequences, which are understood, and therefore communicative reasons for language changes can, for the most part, be ruled out.

Whether used by those who identify themselves as Jóola or Bañounk, a common greeting formula witnessed through observation or among the data gathered at the crossroads goes as follows (using Irvine’s (1974) terminology for participants):<sup>3</sup>

- (1) Initiator-Questioner: *nisaafi/nisaaful* ‘I greet you/you.pl’  
‘Hello.’  
Respondent: *məsuume* ‘all is peaceful’ ‘Hello.’

The root [-suum] (or [-ssum]) forms the response ‘all is peaceful’ with the addition of the adverbial noun class prefix [ma-] in Banjal. The tense vowel of the root triggers harmony with the prefix. Variations are attested in the length and quality of the vowels and consonants. The words listed here are prototypical pronunciations for both Jóola languages of the crossroads. However, use of these terms in the greeting sequence is not limited to residents of Essil and Brin. Irrespective of this introductory sequence, the portion can be omitted, in which case the greeting simply consists of:

- (2) Initiator-Questioner: *kəsuumay?* ‘goodness?/peace?’ ‘Is everything well?’  
Respondent: *kəsuumay bare*. ‘There is peace only.’ ‘All is well.’

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<sup>3</sup> In cases where more than one language is used in the clause, the abbreviations GUB (Gubëeher), KUJ (Kujireray), BAN (Banjal), WOL (Wolof), or FR (French) are subscripted.

Whereas the word ‘only’ [bare] is also associated with prototypical Jóola (Kujireray or Banjal), even when a prototypical Baïnounk Gubëeher question is posed as a greeting, the response can be the crossroaders’ shared form for ‘peace’:

- (3) Initiator-Questioner: *ugunaa?GUB* ‘goodness?/peace?’ ‘Is everything well?’  
Respondent: *kəsuumay*. ‘There is peace.’ ‘All is well.’

The form which corresponds to ‘peace’ is also witnessed at the crossroads as [kasuumay], [gəsuumay] or [gəssumay], depending, as claimed in this discussion, on the identity the speaker wishes to project. For example, (4 - 5) illustrate the pronunciation of the prototypical form of the word ‘peace’ for Jóola Kujireray and Jóola Banjal respectively:

- (4) Initiator-Questioner: *bu, kasuumay?* ‘is there peace?’ ‘Hello, how are you?’  
Respondent: *kasuumay*. ‘there is peace’ ‘I am fine.’

(Source MSRWNOP41: two speakers who are both from Brin and have been asked to speak Kujireray for the purpose of the recording.)

- (5) Initiator-Questioner: *gəssumay?* ‘is there peace?’ ‘Hello, how are you?’  
Respondent: *gəssumay bare*. ‘there is peace only’ ‘I am fine.’

(Source ESS22032015KMD: two speakers who are both from Essil and have been asked to speak Banjal for the purpose of the recording.)

Both of the examples shown here were recorded in contexts in which the speakers were addressing a person or people from their respective villages. Further, in comparing their pronunciations with those collected during elicitation, these utterances can be taken to be prototypical. Illustrated in the examples, a prototypical Jóola Kujireray pronunciation of the word for ‘peace’ is that which begins with [k], whereas in the case of Jóola Banjal it starts with [g].

In Baïnouk Gubëeher, the feature [voice] is contrastive among plosives in word-initial position. Further, recall that residents of Djibonker tend to accommodate to those of both Essil and Brin. These two factors begin to explain why the manner in which ‘peace’ is usually pronounced in Baïnouk Gubëeher, [kəssumay], can be viewed as an ‘interlingual’ (Ju and Luce 2004:314) pronunciation: the initial [k] is emblematic of Jóola Kujireray, while the tense vowel and geminate consonant are associated with the phonemic inventory of Jóola Banjal (compare the prefix [ka-] and long vowel in the root [-suum] in 4 with those of 5, [gə-] and [-ssum], respectively). In fact, as Ju and Luce point out, the idea that speakers ‘switch’ languages or codes is something of a misnomer; the actual cerebral activity may correspond better if viewed as a type of co-phonology (Orgun 1996) rather than as separate, discrete entities (also see Garcia and Wei 2014).

### *IIIe. Social landscape*

Giles states, ‘CAT proposes that speech convergence reflects, in the unmarked case, a speakers’ or a group’s need (often unconscious) for social integration or identification with another’ (2008:15). In this section, an example of greetings that occurred in a natural conversational context is examined in order to explore the social motivations to accommodate speech patterns to that of an interlocutor.

An aspect of greetings at the crossroads that is similar to that of other parts of Senegal is that the initiator is most commonly the person who is entering the home (Irvine 1974: 69). In (6) the initiator-questioners are CD4 and DB2, who have entered into the conversation that was taking place between JTD, a former resident of Brin who now lives in Djibonker, and his interviewers (not included in this portion of the greeting sequence, which was transcribed and translated by a researcher of the crossroads project with assistance from a resident of Djibonker. The language labels are those that were assigned by the transcribers):

(6) Initiator-Questioner-CD4: *monfrère!FR* ‘my brother’ ‘My brother!’

Respondent-JTD: *monfrère!FR* ‘my brother’ ‘My brother!’

Respondent-JTD: *bunulobe? bu?KUIJ* ‘what are you saying? how?’ ‘What’s new? How are you?’

Initiator-Questioner-CD4: *monfrère!FR* ‘my brother’ ‘My brother!’

Although the interview was taking place in Djibonker, the participants were conversing in French and Jóola Kujireray at the time the two new participants entered JTD's home. The initiator, CD4, a resident of Djibonker since birth, begins with French, to which the respondent, JTD, replies. Then JTD uses what is a prototypical greeting for Jóola Kujireray. This portion of the greeting sequence concludes with a return to the original use of French by CD4, who essentially repeats his initial statement.

The conversation continues from here (not included), and at one point the visitors ask if the others are having a meeting. The person who is holding the interview explains that they are working. Another round of salutations ensues, a common practice not only at the crossroads but elsewhere in Senegal. In the sequence above JTD assumed the role of respondent, as was appropriate, since two newcomers to the conversation approached him. In (7), we will see that JTD becomes the Initiator-Questioner.

The other incoming participant, DB2, is a resident of Djibonker. With his entrance into the conversation we encounter the use of Wolof, a language which all the participants report speaking, but which has no local identity, or patrimonial deixis (Lüpke, in press-a) with which it is associated.

(7) Initiator-Questioner-DB2: *goro.WOL* 'in-law' 'in-law!'

Respondent-JTD: *goro.WOL* 'in-law' 'in-law!'

Initiator-Questioner-DB2: *ne gulobi?GUB* 'what is the talk?' 'What's new?'

Respondent-JTD: *honjahonj.GUB* 'nothing' 'Not much.'

Initiator-Questioner-JTD: *goro,WOL bu?KUJ* 'in-law, how?' 'in-law,  
how are you?'

Respondent-DB2: *honjahonj.GUB* 'nothing' 'I am fine.'

DB2 follows his introductory Wolof interjection with a prototypical Baïnouk Gubëeher greeting to which JTD responds, but when JTD initiates his own greeting, he commences with a mixture of Wolof and Jóola Kujireray. It is from here that we see in the next example the use of the 'peace' expression.

(8) Initiator-Questioner-JTD: *kəssumay?GUJ* ‘peace?’ ‘How are you?’

Respondent-DB2: *kəssumay.GUJ* ‘there is peace’ ‘I am fine.’

Initiator-Questioner-JTD: *koona?GUB* ‘house’ ‘How is your family?’

Respondent-DB2: *hani honjahonj, koona honjahonj.GUB* ‘nothing the house is nothing’  
‘Not much, not much is new with the family.’

(Source DJI070316JS: House Interview Djibonker)

### ***III.f. Speech styles***

The instantiations of ‘peace’ uttered here are labelled GUJ to represent Gujireray (a term coined by one of the crossroads transcribers as a slip of the tongue), a language, or rather a ‘style’ (Eckert 2008, Irvine 2001), of speaking at the crossroads. As explained in the preceding sections, the use of [kəssumay] by a speaker of Bāinounk Gubēeher uses prototypical aspects of both Jóola languages, and yet is in and of itself an unprototypical form for the language.

The greeting sequence presents us with a perfect window through which to view naturally occurring accommodation patterns among crossroads individuals. The participants in the conversation use a style that is emblematic of the crossroads; the languages they use are blended in a way that is at the same time one and many (Lüpke 2016, referencing Auer 1999). As with the map of the crossroads area shown in Figure 1, from an aerial view of the word forms, the transcribed text appears to be divided into distinguishable, bounded languages with lines that can be switched between them yet not crossed.

On the other hand, at the level of pronunciation, we hear, rather than see, a fusion. What is not represented in the transcription is JTD’s ‘accent’, as it were; he in fact simplifies the initial consonant cluster of [fr] in ‘frère’ to [ϕ], matching a more prototypical Jóola Kujireray syllable structure and consonant inventory, whereas his pronunciation of the Wolof and Bāinounk Gubēeher match that of his interlocutor. Giles (2008) differentiates between receiver-centred and sender-oriented speech communities. JTD, in his role as host (recall the implications of ‘host’ in sub-section 2.4), accommodates to receiving his guests with his sender-oriented approach to greeting. He expresses respect through his use of honorific familial terms and through his style of speaking, mirroring that of his interlocutor.

Giles et al. (1991) discuss at length the complexity of the strategies of converging and diverging towards and away from reference points. In many cases, a divergence from an exterior category signifies an in-group commonality. They suggest that ‘...divergence can be a tactic of intergroup distinctiveness of individuals in search of a positive social identity’ (ibid. 28), and that ‘some divergent acts can occur for seemingly convergent motives and even some convergent acts accomplished toward divergent ends...’. These intertwined goals are explored in the next section about the indexicality of identity and belonging to a group.

### ***IIIg. Indexical field***

Eckert (1989) was among the first sociolinguists to study linguistic variation in a community in which the differences among speakers were, in comparison with previously referenced categories of race or class, self-imposed. She found that speakers sought to assert their distinctiveness from each other through their linguistic practices. Irvine (2001) echoes her findings in her discussion of speakers who use style as a way to oppose their identity to that of another group.

The effect of ideology on language is a central tenet in the fields of socio-linguistics and anthropological linguistics. As Lesley Milroy stated in a recent lecture, ‘there is no ideology-free way to look at language’ (2016). She references the later work of Judith Irvine (2001) as noting the efforts of speakers to distinguish themselves from a stylistic norm.

Seen through an African lens (Di Carlo & Good 2014, Kopytoff 1987, and specifically for the crossroads area Lüpke 2010, also Lüpke in press-a), the concept of an immutable identity is foreign. Rather than adhering to the features and habits of one’s forefathers, members of the crossroads community express themselves through continuous restructuring and realignment, depending on the situation they find themselves in and the speaker’s motivations.

When a visitor from Essil travels to visit Brin, s/he expresses a first-order indexical difference between the phonologies of the two Jóola languages with the utterance of an initial voiced velar plosive. When a shopkeeper in Brin converges with, or imitates, his Essil client’s clear [g-] leading [gëssumay] greeting, the variable has become a second-order index. The mixed or fused version that is commonly witnessed among those from Djibonker is an *n<sup>th</sup>* order index that speaks to a complex, yet at the same time deviating identity of belonging. At the crossroads, velars serve as an indexical field (Eckert 2008).

#### IV. Conclusion

Since Labov (1963) linguists have shown how diachronic distinctions among geographically distinct dialects have assumed ideological significance as emblematic features of a community. This study seeks to replicate those results in a multilingual community.

In this brief examination of the use of a shared vocabulary item and its variants at the crossroads area of south-western Senegal, I have tried to show that the impetus to converge or diverge is based on an outward expression of one's identity through the manipulation of language. The results of this study will be incorporated into a larger look at the Crossroads project's corpus to quantify the variable usage of velars within the contextualization of conversation.

As Eckert (2008) cautions, style encompasses more than one variable. As a result, the accompanying differences between these languages will have to be accounted for, rather than focusing exclusively on the primary consonant, however salient this distinction may be.

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