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Loudness registers: Normalising cosmopolitan identities in a narrative of ethnic othering¹

An analysis of one narrative shows how loudness of voice acquires indexical meaning in interaction and becomes a resource for the narrator to position himself along an axis of social differentiation defined in terms of morality. The narrative was collected among young, male, migrant hip hop artists in Delhi who experienced ethnic othering. In the narrative, loudness registers are used to establish voice contrasts between two antagonistic characters: the racist people of Delhi and the cosmopolitan hip hop self. The racist people speak in soft (*piano*) and loud (*forte*) registers, while the cosmopolitan self speaks in normal-volume registers. The prosodic normalisation of the self allows the narrator to differentiate himself from racist others, take moral stances on global solidarity and construct his cosmopolitan identity.

KEYWORDS: Hip hop, Delhi, intensity, voice register, indexical field, deontic stance

1. INTRODUCTION

The voices we produce and hear in speech, narrative, interaction, writing and in other modes of communication index who we are in relation to others. Voices acquire their indexical meanings through *linguistic registers*; socially recognisable language varieties or styles that speakers deploy to appropriately respond to as well as construct social contexts and participant roles. A linguistic register, say *militarese*, becomes socially meaningful only in relation and contrast to other linguistic registers that circulate in a society, say *parentese* or Standard English. Loudness, alongside other prosodic and acoustic voice qualities like intonation or creakiness, can become part of such linguistic registers; a sociolinguistic process called *enregisterment* (Agha 2005). In fact, voice qualities can become the primary index in a speaker's style-shifting into a particular linguistic register. Sicoli (2010; 2015) introduces the notion of *voice registers* to discuss such indexicality and enregisterment of voice quality in Lachixío Zapotec speaking communities in Mesoamerica. Voice registers are 'linguistic registers in which the primary marker is an acoustic quality of the voice layered on a stretch of talk and used in speech situations to predictably define participant roles, stances and activities' (Sicoli 2015: 105). *Loudness registers*, then, can be understood as one sub-category of voice registers, namely one which uses the intensity of voice (measured in decibels) to style-shift into recognisable linguistic registers. Different from lexical registers, Sicoli stresses that all voice registers operate on non-referential tiers of meaning (i.e. independently of semantic and morphosyntactic referentiality) and therefore allow for

moment-to-moment stylings and stylisations in speech (Mendoza-Denton 2011) and a layering of narrative voices (Hill 1995; Günthner 1999). While intonation and other prosodic resources like creakiness have received some attention in sociolinguistics, loudness as a stylistic resource is relatively understudied (as also observed by Archakis and Papazachariou 2008: 63).

In this article I provide a detailed analysis of one narrative, taken from an interview I conducted with the graffiti writer Leeroy (a pseudonym) in Delhi, to show how loudness acquires indexical meaning in narrative dialogues and how loudness is juxtaposed with other prosodic resources, such as creakiness and *cantante* ('singsong') intonation, as well as with lexical taboo registers and metaphorical code-switching into Hindi. In this orchestration of loudness, the narrator establishes a contrast between a marked soft (*piano*) voice register and an unmarked normal-volume voice register and assigns these contrastive registers to two antagonistic characters in the story world: *the racist people of Delhi* and *the cosmopolitan hip hop self*. The two narrative voices speak in direct reported speech or, better, constructed dialogues (Tannen 2007). In these narrative dialogues the narrator orchestrates loudness registers in ways that allow him to prosodically normalise an antiracist stance for himself in the story world and construct his cosmopolitan identity in the storytelling world of the ethnographic interview. In other words, this dialogic play allows Leeroy to position himself along an axis of social differentiation defined in terms of opposing moral or deontic stances: cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism. Importantly, loudness registers do not carry inherent meanings. Rather it is the enregisterment of loudness contrasts in the interactional real-time, as well as their co-occurrence with other resources, that construct the indexical meanings of loudness in this narrative. My analysis reveals that the *piano* voice of the racist people first and foremost functions as an othering device, which normalises Leeroy's own voice and narratively reverses the ethnic othering he experienced. As I will also show in my analysis, *piano*, and especially whisper (*pianissimo*), can figuratively index a stance of secretiveness, which is indirectly indexical of the local Delhiites' ignorance and their racist views and practices.

The article begins by detailing how identity is dialectically constructed in indexical fields (Section 2). Next, I describe the ethnographic context of Delhi (Section 3) and my methodology (Section 4). I then present Leeroy's narrative of ethnic othering and analyse the moment-to-moment enregistering of loudness to make suggestions about the social meaningfulness of voice registers in this narrative (Section 5). I end the article by discussing the normalisation of voice as a dialectic of constructing cosmopolitan identities (Section 6) and conclude with a summary of the findings and a reflection on my study (Section 7).

2. IDENTITY IN INDEXICAL FIELDS AND THE DEONTIC STANCE OF COSMOPOLITANISM

Identity is a key analytical category in sociolinguistic research. The way we speak, the styles we draw on and the narratives we tell, index how we want to be perceived momentarily and in relation to others (e.g. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Bamberg 1997; Coupland 2007). Following Hastings and Manning (2004), I understand identity as emerging from a

contrast with an alterity; a voice of the other (see also Rampton 1999; Agha 2005; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Levon 2012). Thus, the voice of the racist Delhiites indexed through *piano* voice in Leeroy's narrative represents an alterity in relation to which the narrator constructs his identity.

We can understand identity and alterity as dialectic opposites of social meaning in an indexical field (Eckert 2008). Indexical fields order sociolinguistic variants as linguistic registers, which speakers deploy to take stances and construct social identities. The concept of indexical field is useful to investigate how speakers' micro-stylistic choices and stancetaking reflect and construct larger ideological imaginations of social groups in contrastive relation to the self. In other words, indexical fields link the speaking acoustic voice (its articulations, pronunciations, phonations and prosodies) with socially-typified Bakhtinian voices, which represent and construct dominant ideological tensions in a given linguistic community (Bakhtin 1984).

Eckert (2008: 464) stresses that indexical field are neither universal nor static. Although speakers draw on widely recognised registers of language to construct indexical fields, they use these registers for various purposes and they also constantly enregister new linguistic forms, variants and voice qualities as meaningful indexes in the field. In my analysis I show how the narrator, in the real-time unfolding of narrative talk, enregisters loudness alongside other stylistic resources (such as creak voice, *cantante* intonation and Hindi) to become indexical of opposing moral stances and social voices. Focusing on the lesser-studied variable of loudness, the analysis traces the narrative orchestration of three loudness registers: *piano*, normal-volume and *forte*. These loudness registers do not necessarily mean anything by themselves, rather they become meaningful in relation and contrast to one another and in combination with other stylistic resources in the unfolding of the narrative.

In the contrastive indexical field in Leeroy's narrative, the voice of the self seems to assume a *cosmopolitan orientation* (Canagarajah 2013), which acknowledges and valorises difference and strives towards a more heterogenous future. Canagarajah, who discusses types of vernacular cosmopolitanism rather than elite ones (p. 197), argues that cosmopolitans shuttle between polycentric norms cooperatively and freely and thereby 'closely engage with each other's difference [which] generates a reflexive self- and other awareness' (p. 196). Similarly, Hannerz (1990: 239) writes that cosmopolitanism is a 'willingness to engage with the Other' and 'an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather than uniformity.' Or, in Beck's (2006: 4-5) words, cosmopolitan identities profess a 'both/and logic of inclusive differentiation.' Cosmopolitans seem to become aware of and comfortable with the constant presence of the other in the self. In Bakhtinian parlance, the voice of the other and the voice of the self are always in playful, carnivalesque, awareness of each other, always performatively respecting and upholding their contrast (i.e. never merging into one) and striving towards a more centrifugal world in which difference is imagined as something positive. (On related conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism within recent sociolinguistic research, see Wilczek-Watson 2016; Matrn Rojo and Molina 2017; Zhang 2018.)

As a future-oriented resistance against nationalism and parochialism, cosmopolitanism affords deontic stances – moral positions about how the world *should be* in the future or in hypothetical time (Stevanovic and Svennevig 2015) – to envision a society in which

difference is accepted as the new norm. My participants frequently articulated such cosmopolitan deontic stances in our ethnographic encounters. They often told me how they and their hip hop affiliated friends socialised across national and social borders. For example, one participant, Aiku (a pseudonym), put it this way: *if i would have not done hip hop. there is no way i could have met so many DIFFerent people from different various communities. this is hip hop. so socially it's so powerful. that you know if this thing gets done in the right way (.) it'll connect- i guess nothing can connect people faster than this.*

To become analytically relevant, the micro-analysis of such interactive fragments requires a thorough contextualisation of the sociohistorical realities from which these fragments were lifted. Linguistic ethnography (Tusting and Maybin 2007; Copland, Shaw and Snell 2015), with its emphasis on detailed analyses of speech and long-term immersion in a community, is a useful research strategy to situate textual fragments within their wider social contexts as well as within the *particular* ethnographic encounter in which these fragments occur. Such particularisation (Erickson 1986: 130) allows linguistic ethnographers to move beyond the investigation of the generalisable patterns of orderly heterogeneity that we find in sociolinguistic communities (Labov 1972) and account for the interactive moment-to-moment construction of identities that position speakers and voices in relation and contrast to one another. Thus, linguistic ethnography, in my view, also cultivates a research ethos that takes seriously the deontic stances our participants take in relation to cosmopolitanism, rather than reducing them to mere exemplifications of a linguistic phenomenon in which we are interested. In order to achieve such contextualisation and particularisation, I now describe the social context of the hip hop scene as I witnessed it during eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2013.

3. THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF POST-LIBERALISATION DELHI

Delhi is India's capital and has been of significant importance for regional and global empires over the last three millennia. In the city's recent history, the most striking socioeconomic changes occurred in the years following 1991, when India transformed its economy from socialist state-protectionism to neoliberal models of market-driven free trade attracting foreign investment. For Delhi, economic liberalisation meant unprecedented urban sprawl, gentrification, "slum" clearances, expansive modernisations of infrastructures, such as malls, metro-lines and roads, and increasing socioeconomic inequity (Batra and Mehra 2008; Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2015). Since liberalisation in 1991, the city has dramatically expanded in size and its population almost doubled (India, Census 2011). Roughly half of Delhi's inhabitants were born in the two decades between 1991 and 2011 (*ibid.*).

My research participants all grew up in these twenty years of post-liberalisation Delhi. Surprisingly perhaps, despite Delhi's size, expansive modernisations, national and global importance and complex imperial history, my participants often described the city as conservative, racist, sexist, backward and dangerous, when compared to other Indian metropolises which were considered more cosmopolitan and progressive, such as Mumbai, Pune and Bengaluru. The frequent rapes, one of the most protuberant, perhaps, being the brutal gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh in December 2012 (see Atluri 2013), three weeks

before I commenced my fieldwork in Delhi, were condemned in interviews, hip hop performances and in the online interactions I followed. One female participant, a graffiti writer, reported that she felt that her freedom to move around in the city, especially after dark, was drastically curtailed after the incident. Also, several violent racial unrests between Indian working-class men and African migrants in 2013 and 2014 (see Dattatreya 2015), created a sense of fear and non-belonging among some of my Somali and Nigerian participants, as well as among their friends who were concerned about the safety of their African homies (see also Sabeet's narrative, briefly discussed below). The sexually- and racially-motivated violence that took place in the city during my research, shaped an image of Delhi as a dangerous and socially-regressive city. This image was constructed and circulated in the news media at the time (e.g. Pandey and Biswas 2013; Singh 2014) and it gave Delhi the shaming title of India's "crime capital" (Singh 2016).

As I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork, it soon struck me that all the youthful dancers, artists and musicians I was meeting experienced migration as part of their family's history. I did not set out to study migrant hip hoppers specifically, nor did I expect to encounter mostly migrants. Yet, Gabriel Dattatreya, an anthropologist researching the Delhi hip hop scene at the same time, pointed out to me early on in our coincidental ethnographic collaborations that either our participants themselves or their parents or grandparents were not from Delhi but migrated from other regions of India and from abroad. While Delhi's rapid urbanisation in the last 25 years after India's economic liberalisation makes the majority of Delhiites migrants, the hip hop scene in Delhi seemed to be particularly accessible also to those migrants who were *ethnically marked as other*. East-African refugees, for instance, participated in the scene (see Dattatreya 2015; 2018), as did students and young entrepreneurs from West Africa (see Sabeet's narrative) and migrants from the Northeast of India (see Leroy's narrative) as well as from Nepal and Afghanistan. These participants had some ethnic identification markers inscribed on their bodies or in their language use that made them become recognised as "not from here," as "Un-Indian" and they all experienced ethnic othering while navigating their lives in Delhi.

My participants were all dancers, musicians and/or visual artists in their late teens and early twenties who used the forms, semiotics and aesthetics as well as the moral frameworks of global hip hop to articulate a unique positionality for themselves within the rapidly changing urban environments of Delhi. In their artistic engagements with hip hop, they put Delhi, and India at large, on the map of what has come to be known as the global hood (Osumare 2001). As indicated in Aiku's reflection above, my participants regularly socialised with like-minded young people from various social classes and castes in Delhi and with visiting artists, musicians and dancers, as well as journalists and researchers, from other parts of India and the world. In these encounters with diverse actors, they fostered a type of hip hop-inflected vernacular cosmopolitanism, what Osumare (2001) calls *connective marginalities*. Osumare defines connective marginalities as 'social resonances between black expressive culture within its contextual political history and similar dynamics in other nations' (p. 172). In this sense, connective marginalities can be understood as 'a cultural bridge to explore other hip hop sites inhabited by young people who have their own issues of marginalization, be they class, culture, historical oppression, or simply being youths in an adult-dominated world' (p. 180). My participants valorised such vernacular cosmopolitan

connections across the postcolony as “normal” and they indexed this normalisation partly by voicing their narrative selves in normal-volume loudness registers.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Loudness as stylistic resource in sociolinguistic research

Loudness is often attributed to what was called paralinguistics. Loudness has primarily been understood as a prosodic device to indicate word stress (Crystal 1975: 94) and being ‘in control’ (Knowles 1987: 210). The descriptions of loudness in this literature remain impressionistic and anecdotal.

Within sociolinguistics, loudness has received only scarce attention. Irvine (1974) studies Wolof greetings and finds that the local caste hierarchies are reflected in contrastive speech styles: the ‘high, strident, rapid speech of the griot (as the epitome of the low-caste speaker) contrasts with the low-pitched, quiet, terse speaking style of the high-ranking noble’ (p. 184). Importantly, these speech styles are not fixed, in the sense that griots always greet in loud and high-pitched registers. Rather, Wolof speakers may use elements of each speech style to mark their social status relative to their interactants (pp. 184-186). Thus, in Wolof greetings voice registers of loudness, pitch and rhythm index the social positioning of the speaker relative to their interactants, constructing both alterity and identity in the moment-to-moment reproduction and construction of the social order.

Selting (1996) discusses loudness together with intonation as ‘clusters of prosodic cues’ (p. 264) in initiations of repair sequences in southwest German conversations. She finds a difference between unmarked and marked prosodic cues. While unmarked loudness and intonation signal “normal” repair questions pertaining mostly to acoustic misunderstanding between interactants, marked intonation and loudness (i.e. increased fundamental frequency and increased intensity) signal activity-types of “surprise” and “astonishment.” Building on the insights of Selting and Irvine, this article demonstrates that the intricate intraspeaker style variation of loudness, alongside intonation and other prosodic qualities of voice, is a powerful communicative resource for speakers to negotiate social and linguistic meaning in interaction and produce and reproduce, as well as challenge, ideological difference in society.

While Selting and Irvine rely on perceptual analysis of loudness, Archakis and Papazachariou’s (2008) provide exact measurements of intensity. In their corpus of narratives told by young Greek females, Archakis and Papazachariou find that the storytellers use loudness variation as contextualisation cues for direct speech. The narrators use “soft voice” to make narrative figures speak that belong to the out-group; namely teachers, parents and other figures with authority. In contrast, they use “loud voice” to construct in-group dialogues between their peers. Archakis and Papazachariou interpret these differences in intensity in relation to power. They suggest that the narrating girls use soft voice for figures with power to evaluate them negatively and ‘undermine their authority and to protect their own face in the narrative world they create’ (p. 643). The girls use loud voice to construct narrative figures of the in-group to contextualise involvement, ‘vividness and enthusiasm’ and ‘solidarity bonds’ (p. 638).

Archakis and Papazachariou perform statistical analyses of loudness across narratives and interviews to make generalisable claims about the social functions of soft and loud voice in their corpus of reported speech in the Greek girls' narratives. While these findings provide empirical evidence for the systematic indexical distribution of loudness across narratives, the linguistic ethnographic approach developed in my analysis promises to complement and complexify general findings with particularisable (Erickson 1986: 130) insights to reveal how loudness is orchestrated in the real-time interactional unfolding of one narrative. I found that loudness can index social meanings in complex and at times contradictory ways in Leeroy's narrative. A linguistically-detailed and ethnographically-rich analysis attempts to account for such complexity, rather than reduce it for the sake of an analytical logic that sociolinguistics inherits from structuralism (Blommaert 2016). A general trend can nevertheless be discerned in the narrative: soft (*piano*) and loud (*forte*) voice tends to index ignorant, secretive and racist positionalities connected with the voice of the local Delhiite, whereas normal-volume voice tends to index cosmopolitan positionalities connected with the self (see also Figure 2 below).

4.2 Measuring loudness

Intensity, also called sound pressure level, is measured in decibels (dB) and is perceived as loudness by human ears/brains. Decibel values are not linear but logarithmic (O'Grady 2013: 78), so that for example a 3dB increase in intensity would increase the perceived loudness of a sound by around 23 percent, a 6dB increase by around 52 percent and a 10dB increase would double it. Thus, even small variation in intensity will have significant effects on our perception of loudness.

The software *Praat* (Boersma and Weenink 2013) allowed me to select utterances, here defined as tone units, and measure the mean intensity as well as intensity peaks.² To illustrate such measurements, Figure 1 presents the waveform and intensity contour of eight utterances taken from Leeroy's narrative.

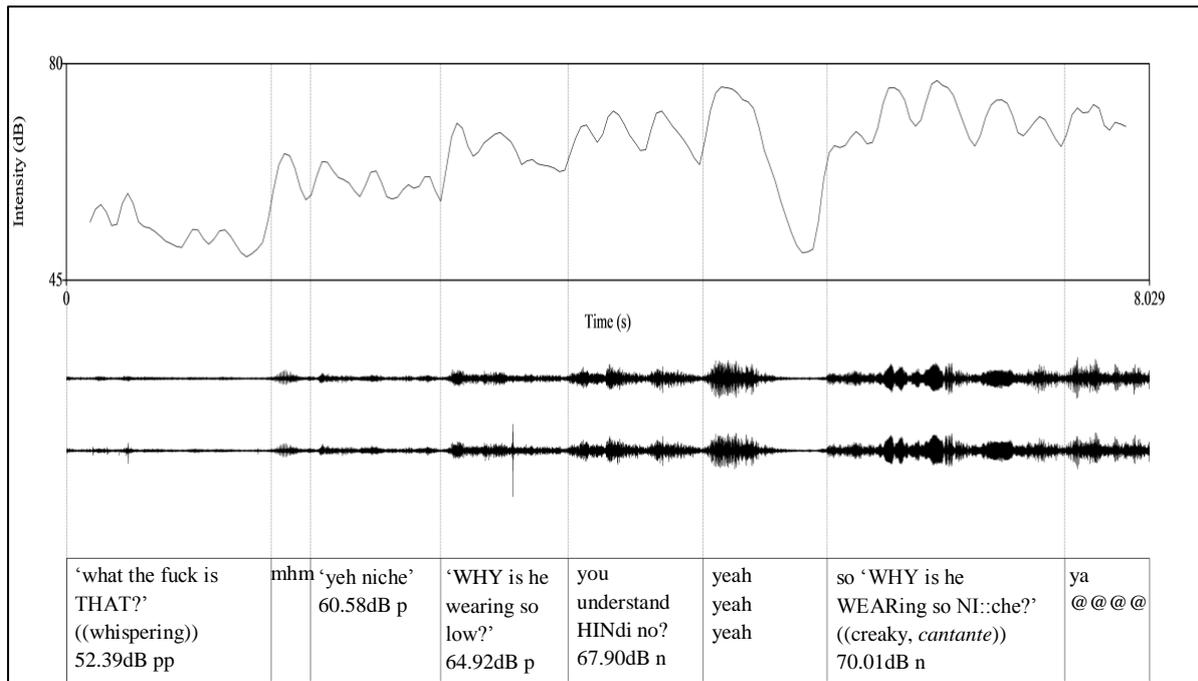


Figure 1: Praat intensity contour and waveform in Leeroy's narrative (lines 51-58)

Based on the means, each utterance was assigned one loudness register. I distinguish between three principal loudness registers: normal-volume (n), soft or *piano* (p) and loud or *forte* (f). Where necessary, I make further distinctions, such as very soft or *pianissimo* (pp). The distinction between the three loudness registers is not absolute but relative to the immediately preceding and following speech. For this reason, the transcription of Leeroy's narrative contains the dB difference between consecutive utterances in superscript. If analytically relevant, I provide descriptions of further prosodic qualities, such as creakiness or smile voice (☺). The interviewer's (i.e. my) voice was not measured for intensity, unless interviewer's voice overlaps with narrator's voice.

5. RACIST AND COSMOPOLITAN VOICES IN NARRATIVES OF ETHNIC OTHERING

5.1 Overview of narratives of ethnic othering

During the fieldwork, I conducted 22 interviews (approximately 36 hours of recorded speech) with 26 participants (24 males and two females⁴). The interviews were all conducted in English, because my competence in Hindi and other Indian languages is low. The fact that I could only speak in English, clearly positioned me as an international visitor and, in turn, this circumstance possibly also affected the choice of the stories participants would tell me and the cosmopolitan orientations that we co-constructed in our ethnographic encounters. While my participants all spoke English with varying fluency, they all also spoke Indian languages, such as Khariboli (the Hindi dialect of Delhi), Panjabi or Mizo. Although I have some passive knowledge of Hindi and Panjabi through my father who was an Indian national, and although I have gained some structural knowledge of Hindi through my self-study as a young

adult, I was unable to hold fluent, colloquial Hindi conversations with participants. My first language is German, and I presently consider English to be my main language. My low competence of Hindi becomes a topic in Leeroy's narrative.

In my corpus of conversational interviews (Rapley 2001), narrative talk featured frequently. Narratives consist of a minimal sequence of *complicating action* and *evaluative resolution*, although other parts like *abstract*, *orientation* and *coda* might also occur (Labov and Waletzky 1969). In narrative talk, speakers change the spatio-temporal deixis to index a *story world* (there-and-then) that is different from a *storytelling world* (here-and-now) (Bamberg 1997). The story world is peopled with *narrative figures*, who might speak in constructed dialogues and represent contrastive sociocultural and moral roles. I follow Tannen (2007) in preferring the notion of *constructed dialogues* over direct speech because narrators hardly ever quote exactly what others have said, but rather stylise the voices of others in ways that they become recognised as stereotypical characterisations of how particular people or groups speak habitually. The voices that the narrators orchestrate to animate figures in their narratives thus communicate more than the propositional content of a stretch of direct speech; they also index the dialogic relationship between the self and the other in the story world and the narrator's moral evaluation of the story in the storytelling world of the ethnographic encounter. In this way, narratives seem to play into the moment-to-moment construction of the narrator's identities (Bamberg 1997).

Such constructions of identity were particularly pronounced when participants told me narratives of ethnic othering. I use this coding category broadly to include narratives of othering based on ethnicity, race and caste. 73 narratives were coded with the thematic label "ethnic othering." Let me provide two brief examples. Anonymised audio files are included in the online version of this article.

Bhimrao (a pseudonym), a b-boy (breakdancer) from Delhi, told me how his caste identity was made relevant on a visit to his family's village. There, he was instructed by his grandmother to not sit next to a high-caste villager. In his narrative, he uses *piano* voice to animate the secretive but determined voice of the grandmother asking him to get up and sit somewhere else. Bhimrao challenges his grandmother in normal-volume voice: '*you're not supposed to do this shit!*' (*angry, creaky*)), reminding her that casteism has been made illegal by order of the Indian Constitution. He concludes his narrative by declaring that *b-boying has no fucking casteism. hip hop has no casteism. It has ONE language. love. and it has ONE language. your HARD work.* In this formulation hip hop is construed as a universal language (*ONE language*), which is based on solidarity (*love*) and personal merit (*your HARD work*). For Bhimrao, this new set of global moral values promises to replace older categorisations of caste and race.

Similarly, Sabeet (a pseudonym), a rapper from Delhi, tells a story of his Nigerian friend and hip hop singer visiting his neighbourhood in West Delhi for collaborative music recording sessions. He uses *piano* voice to narrate how his neighbours secretly and silently talk amongst themselves and express their suspicion of the African man, as Africans are often stereotyped as drug dealers, pimps or even cannibals in Delhi. Sabeet contests his neighbours in normal-volume voice: *so I said. 'who the FUCK are you man? (angry, creaky)). he's my friend. he's my homie (.) i don't give a fuck to you (1.3) i just care about MY homies.'* A *homie*, from homeboy, is someone from your place, your hood; a friend with whom you grew

up and share history. In hip hop jargon, it can also have an extended meaning of “partners in rhyme,” i.e. artists who collaborate over some period of time but who are not necessarily from the same place. Collaborating with the Nigerian singer helps Sabeet to imagine a sense of cosmopolitan belonging by means of which his own neighbourhood is translocalised as the global hood. The collaboration offers up ways for decolonial histories to inspire each other and foster cosmopolitan solidarity and normalise connective marginalities (Osumare 2001). The term *homie*, in this sense, invokes another postcolonial subject with whom Sabeet shares hip hop music and who, although not from his neighbourhood, enjoys Sabeet’s protection in the global hood. Let me now turn to a more detailed analysis of loudness and voice registers in a narrative told by the graffiti writer Leeroy.

5.2 Leeroy’s narrative: People don’t even know I’m from Mizoram

Leeroy and his family are from Mizoram in the Northeast of India. Like many, they came to Delhi to escape the violent political unrests in the Northeast in the 1990s and early 2000s. While trying to make a life in the booming capital, their ethnic appearance as Northeasteners mark them as other, as non-Indian, as Chinese or East Asian perhaps. McDuie-Ra (2012a; 2012b) reports that many of his Northeastern participants were verbally and also physically abused by local Delhiites. In Leeroy’s narrative the local Delhi *people* (line 4) are first described as entirely ignorant of the Northeast and later as overtly racist. The people first speak in *piano* loudness register, which indexes their ignorance and secretiveness and later in *forte* loudness register, which indexes their racist behaviours. The people also metaphorically code-switch into Hindi and they use *cantante* (‘singsong’) Indian intonation (further discussed below), which indexes their monoglot and monocultural Indianness. These markers of otherness – *piano*, *forte*, Hindi and *cantante* – contrast with the voice that the narrator constructs for himself. The narrative figure he constructs for himself in the story world speaks in the same “normal” voice register as the narrator in the storytelling world.

The narrative has four episodes, divided by laughter. Full transcription conventions can be found at the end of this article. An audio file can be found in the online version.

Leeroy’s narrative

Delhi, 2013 {33.04 - 34.37}

Line Speaker dB^{+/-} Reg. Utterance

Episode 1

01	Leeroy:	72.28	n	because when when i FIRST came to delhi
02		66.51 ^{-5.77}	n	er pff in two thousand two thousand ONE (2.0)
03		71.57 ^{+5.06}	n	er (1.2)
04		75.24 ^{+3.67}	n	like people don’t even KNOW you know
05		70.86 ^{-4.38}	n	like ‘i’m from-’
06		76.79 ^{+5.93}	n	when i tell- when i would tell them
07		70.49 ^{-6.30}	n	‘oh i’m from mizoram’
08		59.73 ^{-10.76}	pp	‘oh (.) where is where is THAT?’
09	Author:			okay
10	Leeroy:	64.64 ^{+4.91}	p	‘WHERE is WHERE is mizoram?’

11 63.61^{+1.03} p 'is it near china, is it near nepal? where IS that?'
 12 Author: mmh (1.0)
 13 Leeroy: 68.67^{+5.06} n BUT
 14 Author: 76.70 @@ [☺ 'i'm INdian yeah motherfucker' ☺]
 15 Leeroy: 76.70^{+8.03} n [@@@ (.) yeah @@@@ @@@@ @@@@]

Episode 2

16 75.41^{-1.29} n cos i've done C-
 17 71.74^{-3.67} n cos we have this board no? C.B.S.E.?
 18 Author: ya
 19 Leeroy: 70.84^{-0.90} n C.B.S.E. is like a educational board
 20 67.87^{-2.97} n where ev- most of the public schools follow
 21 71.64^{+3.77} n we follow the same thing in shillong ((in the Northeast))
 22 66.87^{-4.77} n and when i came here i went to C.B.S.E. again
 23 Author: ya
 24 Leeroy: 74.39^{+7.49} n so those guys were doing the same-
 25 73.54^{-0.85} n the same courses i did
 26 Author: ya ya
 27 Leeroy: 76.36^{+2.82} n how come i know ALL the states of in[dia]=
 28 Author: 76.36 [dia]=
 29 =and they don't=
 30 Leeroy 75.86^{-0.50} n =they don't know the small part
 31 71.47^{-4.39} n you know
 32 72.04^{+0.57} n so i'd have to tell them
 33 73.80^{+1.76} n 'west benGAL'
 34 73.38^{-0.42} n 'from there west benGAL'
 35 69.42^{-3.96} n 'you go HERE?'
 36 75.71^{+6.29} n 'blablaBLA?'
 37 Author: 75.71 uhum
 38 Leeroy 70.78^{-4.93} n and sometimes just one of them
 39 65.36^{-5.42} p 'oh achcha yeh wala'
 # Gl.: 'oh okay this one'
 40 72.31^{+6.95} n you know=
 41 Author: =mhmhmmh ha ha okay=
 42 Leeroy: 75.38^{+3.07} n =it's like THAT [@@@]
 43 Author: 75.38 [yeah yeah yeah]
 44 Leeroy: 73.72^{-1.66} n yeah

Episode 3

45 76.89^{+3.17} n so and THEN
 46 73.72^{-3.17} n back THEN
 47 72.84^{+0.88} n when i would b-boy in SCHOOL
 48 72.23^{-0.62} n i would- i would like
 49 71.21^{-1.02} n wear my jeans all like sh- you know like WAY down
 50 Author: mhm

51 Leeroy: 52.39^{-18.82} pp ‘what the fuck is THAT?’ ((whispering))
 52 Author: mhm
 53 Leeroy: 60.58^{+8.19} p ‘yeh niche’ ((/je: ni:tʃə/, creaky))
 # Gloss: *So low*
 54 64.92^{+4.34} p ‘WHY is he wearing so low?’
 55 67.90^{+2.98} n you understand hindi [no?]
 56 Author: [yeah] yeah yeah
 57 Leeroy: 70.01^{+2.11} n so ‘why is he WEARing so Niche::?’ ((creaky, *cantante*))
 58 Author: ya @@@@

Episode 4

59 Leeroy: 75.50^{+5.49} n ALL of that you know they call us that like
 60 74.67^{-0.83} f ‘O:: BRUCE lee’ ((creaky))
 61 75.16^{+0.49} f ‘O:: JACKie chan’ ((creaky))
 62 Author: (.) okay
 63 Leeroy: 77.46^{+2.30} n like ya they’re RAcial you [know that] thing.
 64 Author: 77.46 [yeah yeah]
 65 Leeroy: 71.70^{-5.76} n just to (.) TEASE us just to like
 66 71.97^{+0.27} n you know
 67 Author: yeah yeah
 68 Leeroy: 69.81^{+2.16} n like pick a FIGHT maybe you know
 69 Author: yeah yeah
 70 Leeroy: 73.47^{+3.66} n and back then we wouldn’t STAND up like
 71 63.61^{+9.86} p ‘what the fuck YOU do?’
 72 77.16^{+13.55} n and EVeryone would think that
 73 73.57^{-3.59} n i know kung FU
 74 Author: 75.74 [@@@@@@@@@]
 75 Leeroy: 75.74^{+2.1} n [@@@@@@@@@]

Leeroy’s narrative is about his experiences of ethnic othering when he came to Delhi from Mizoram as a teenager. The narrative has four episodes that hang together loosely and are separated by laughter and humorous co-evaluations by narrator and interviewer. Lines 1-15 are about Leeroy arriving in Delhi as a teenager and having to explain to his classmates where Mizoram is located in India. In lines 16-44, he continues to narrate that despite the fact that secondary education in India is standardised under the framework of the Central Board for Secondary Education (C.B.S.E.), his classmates in Delhi were entirely ignorant of Mizoram and the fact that it was a state in the Northeast of India. While these two episodes highlight the ignorance of the *people* (line 4), the remainder of his narrative reveals the people’s exclusionary and racist behaviours towards Northeasteners. In lines 45-58, Leeroy narrates how he sagged his jeans (wore them very low) in school as an index of his affiliation to hip hop culture, but that the people were unaware of the meaning of sagging jeans and commented on Leeroy’s clothing styles in secretive talk amongst themselves. In lines 59-75, the final part, the people’s ignorance and secretiveness turn into verbal abuse and mockery, as

they shout out names of famous Hong Kong cinema actors in *forte* voice to ethnically stereotype Leeroy and his fellow Northeasteners.

In Leeroy's narrative three loudness registers are orchestrated: normal-volume, *piano* and *forte*. For the most part, Leeroy's voice as narrative figure in the story world (lines 5; 7; 33-36) speaks in the same normal-volume loudness register as the voice of Leeroy the narrator in the storytelling world. In contrast, the voice of the people mostly speaks in *piano* volume register, ranging between 5dB and 10dB below the normal-volume register. Figure 2 depicts all utterances in Leeroy's narrative. The voice of the interviewer has been omitted.

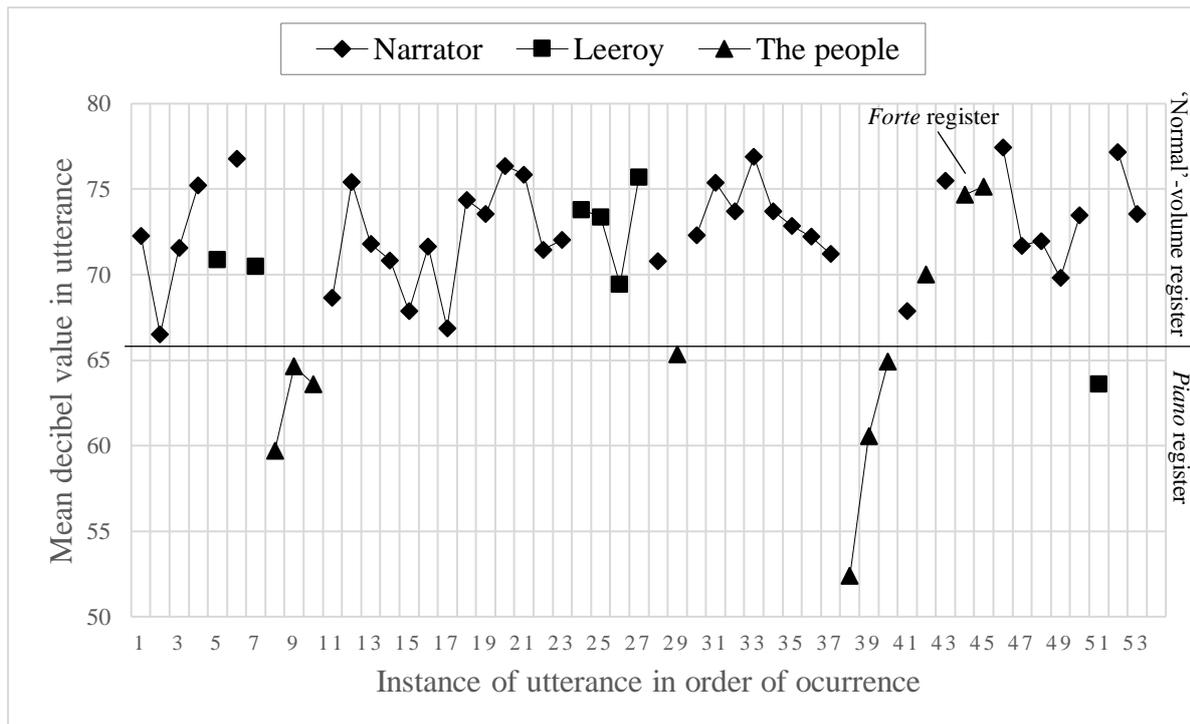


Figure 2: Decibel values in Leeroy's narrative

We can instantly see a voice contrast between the two narrative figures. The seven constructed dialogues of the narrative figure Leeroy (squares) range between 63dB and 75dB, with an average of 71.04dB. This is similar to the voice of the narrator (diamonds), which ranges between 66dB and 78dB and averages at 72.69dB. This is the normal-volume voice register in this narrative. In contrast, the voice of the narrative figure of the people (pyramids) ranges between 52.39dB and 75.16dB, with an average of 65.11dB. The contrast becomes even more marked when we exclude the final two *forte* voicings, in which the people shout racist comments. Without those, the average of the voice of the people is 62.11dB, 10dB below the normal-volume voices of Leeroy as narrator and as narrative figure. The line at around 66dB indicates a general threshold between *piano* and normal-volume registers in this narrative. Yet, in the real-time unfolding of the narrative the contrast between loudness registers can operate at another threshold.

In the chart we can also discern a trajectory of incremental loudness in the people's voice. When the contrast is initiated in utterance 8, the voice of the people is softest, and it increases in the subsequent utterances 9 and 10. The same pattern occurs when the voice of the people

is reintroduced later in the narrative, in utterances 38, 39 and 40. This supports the observation that the orchestration of loudness can establish an *initial* contrast of voices and that this contrast can be diminished or entirely given up once it has been marked who speaks. This parallels Sicoli's (2010) description of high-pitched (*false*) voice, used to index respect in Lachixío Zapotec speech. He shows that men can relax *false* once the social order of respect has been established. In Leeroy's narrative, other prosodic and linguistic features, such as creakiness and the use of Hindi, can be enregistered to uphold the voice contrast and add further social and moral characteristics to the narrative figure of the people. These voice qualities and language-ideological features in combination, not in isolation, construct the socially meaningful indexical field of marked alterity and unmarked identity in this narrative.

In line 51 (utterance 38 in Figure 2; see also Figure 1), the narrator uses a *pianissimo* whispering voice to reintroduce the people. This is the softest voice (52.39dB) in the entire narrative and it sharply contrasts with the narrator's previous orienting utterance (71.21dB) in line 49. The 18.82dB drop in intensity happens abruptly and note that the *pianissimo* voice is introduced without *verba dicendi* or quotatives. It seems that reducing the loudness to *pianissimo* is index enough to mark who speaks, since the normal-volume vs. *piano* contrast had already been established in the first and second episodes. Furthermore, similar to the *piano* voice of Subjeet's neighbours and Bhimrao's grandmother, the whispering voice of the people characterises the people as exclusionary and secretive. Van Leeuwen (2009: 71) notes that a whispering voice can signal 'intimacy or conspiracy' and that it can be used literally or figuratively to exclude overhearers. This figurative whisper is discussed also in Sicoli (2010: 539-540), who reports that a woman uses a whisper register and eye gaze to address her husband and figuratively exclude an older woman from overhearing their conversation, which relieves her of the responsibility to use a respectful *false* voice. The whispering voice of the people in line 51 seems to figuratively exclude Leeroy from the secretive talk amongst the people, although, certainly, the fact that the narrator can recreate the people's whispering voice of course demonstrates that he has heard the people's secretive talk or that he imagines the people to whisper behind his back in such ways.

The people then continue their secret conversation by using Hindi (lines 53; 57, see also line 39). Here, the narrator draws on a language-ideological opposition between Hindi and English that exists both in Delhi and in the Northeast. Among certain groups in Delhi, for example urban elites (Chand 2009) and western-oriented lesbians (Hall 2009), English is indexical of progressive and aspirational lifestyles, while Hindi can become indexical of social backwardness and low class. In the Northeast of India, Hindi also carries negative, even hostile, connotations (Hvenekilde 2001). The long history of political and militant opposition to the Indian nation-state in the Northeast renders Hindi as a language that belongs to mainland India. While Leeroy learnt Hindi in school in the Northeast and expanded his competence during his time in Delhi, he mainly uses English with his friends and fellow hip hop heads from around the country and from abroad. With his family members and other Northeasteners in Delhi he also speaks Mizo, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in parts of the Northeast where he grew up.

The different scales on which the opposition English vs. Hindi operates for the Northeastern diaspora in Delhi are thus complex. As McDuaie-Ra (2012a; 2012b) shows, the

Northeasteners' English competences make them highly desirable employees for international call-centres and upmarket retail, for example, yet, their assumed or real incompetence in Hindi also puts them at risk of monetary exploitation, fraud and verbal and physical abuse from local landlords, the police and other neighbourhood "officials." McDuierra (2012a: 100) reports that Hindi was used by local Delhiites to exclude Northeastern migrants from conversations and talk *about* them. With these details in mind, I suggest that the people's use of Hindi in this narrative can be regarded as a metaphorical code-switch (Blom and Gumperz 1972), which adds indexicalities of localness, lower-class backwardness and, parallel to whispering voice, exclusionary practices to the people's voice in the story. As the voice of the people represents the alterity in the story, opposite indexicalities emerge for Leeroy's identity. In other words, Leeroy's use of English normalises his translocalness and his open, cosmopolitan orientation.

In episode 3 (lines 51-58, see also Figure 1 above), the meaning of using Hindi in the story world is made interactively relevant. Leeroy and I engage in a metalingual negotiation around the Hindi term *niche* (pronounced /ni:tʃə/). He introduces the term in line 53 as part of a constructed dialogue in which the people comment on Leeroy sagging his jeans (line 49), when he was a b-boy (breakdancer) in school (line 47). Upon encountering Leeroy with sagged jeans, the people first ask each other in a whispering voice *what the fuck is THAT?* (line 51) and then switch into Hindi *yeh niche?* (line 53), which translates as "so low?" or "so down?" The narrator himself offers this translation in line 54, when he re-voices the people saying 'why is he wearing so low?' In line 55, he makes this translation metalinguistically relevant by asking me if I was able to understand Hindi, which I confirm in line 56 (but see Section 5.1 above). His metalingual question *you understand HINDi no?* seems to aim at more than making sure that I understand the semantic meaning of the specific word *niche* (which he had already translated in his re-voicing of the people in line 53). The question rather aims at my understanding of the social meaning of Hindi as indexical of the local people. In other words, the interactive negotiations around the use of Hindi are not only metalingual but also metapragmatic. The use of *niche*, although it is a "word" formally operating on the referential tier of semantic meaning, is metapragmatically independent of this referential tier and thus part of a non-referential voice register (albeit a non-prosodic one) used to index the social characteristics of the people.

As soon as I signal understanding of this complex social meaning of the use of Hindi in line 56, Leeroy re-voices the people yet again in line 57, this time re-inserting the Hindi term *niche* and stylising the constructed dialogue with *cantante* ('singsong') intonation and creakiness to stereotype Indian speech. *Cantante* is the default prosodic pattern in Hindi and it is characterised as a chunking of an utterance into relatively short stressed rhythmic units, with each unit carrying a default rising tone and the utterance final unit carrying either a rise for questions or a fall for declaratives (Sengar and Mannell 2012: 152). *Cantante* as a resource for the stylisation of Indian English is attested in Rampton's examples of crossing, such as the utterance *after 'you::'* (Rampton 1995: 72), with a distinctly stylised rise-fall intonation. These *cantante* intonations were used by British-Asian boys to playfully challenge the social order teachers established in the school (see p. 68 for Rampton's description of the prosodic features of Stylised Asian English).

I confirm my recognition that Hindi and *cantante* are indexical of the people by laughing in line 58 and I thereby resolve the narrative tension of this episode. Laughter occurs in all four instances of narrative resolutions (lines 14-15; 42; 58; 74-75), each time evaluating the preceding episode and introducing a new aspect of the story. Laughter thus seems to structure narrative episodes and become a resource for an interactive negotiation of narrative resolutions.

The use of taboo registers, on the other hand, seem to construct the complicating actions; the tensions of the story. Taboo registers occur three times in Leeroy's narrative. In line 51, the people whisper '*what the fuck is THAT?*', secretively commenting on Leeroy's clothing style. In line 68, Leeroy's hypothetical self-quote '*what the fuck YOU do?*' reverses the othering and confronts the local racist people in ways similar to Subject's '*who the FUCK are you man?*' ((*angry, creaky*)) and '*i don't give a fuck to you*' and Bhimrao's '*you're not supposed to do this shit!*', which I briefly mentioned in Section 5.1 above. Such switches into taboo registers seem to help the narrators to create narrative worlds of a dangerous and racist local environment and imagine themselves as part of a globally-unfolding culture of cosmopolitan hip hop resistance. In fact, my own positionality as a global hip hop scholar co-constructed this indexicality of taboo registers. This becomes evident in line 14, where I appropriate the narrator's voice and take a stance for the narrative figure of Leeroy by combining a taboo register with smile voice: ☺ '*i'm INdian yeah motherfucker*' ☺, which Leeroy overlaps with continuous laughter in the resolving moment of episode 1. Leeroy, ventriloquised by me, boldly challenges monoracial ideas of who is and who cannot be an Indian.

Towards the end of the narrative, the people ethnically stereotype Leeroy and his fellow Northeasteners by shouting out names of famous Hong Kong cinema actors: '*O:: BRUCE Lee*' ((74.67, *creaky*)) (line 60), '*O:: JACKie Chan*' ((75.16, *creaky*)) (line 61). Although the intensity of these two constructed dialogues falls into what I have called the normal-volume loudness register (averaging at 72.69dB), the values are markedly high in comparison with the previous constructed dialogues of the people (averaging at 62.11dB). Thus, for the narrative figure of the people these two voicings can be said to belong to a *forte* register. The narrator's use of *forte* to construct the people's shouting of racial insults can thus be interpreted as further characterising the people as racist and hostile, which the narrator indeed explicitly comments on in his evaluation of the shouting voice: *like ya they're RAcial you know that thing* (line 63). Leeroy ends his narrative by mentioning that *EVERYone would think that (.) i know kung FU?*, which leads to wholehearted laughter and a resolution of this narrative of ethnic othering. We continue our interview with discussing another topic.

In sum, the narrator uses *piano*, *pianissimo*, and *forte* voice registers to animate the voice of the people. The people represent the alterity in this story and they take ignorant, secretive and racist stances. Additional sociolinguistic resources, such as creakiness, *cantante* and the use of Hindi get enregistered to further depict the people as socially backward and monoculturally Indian. These sociolinguistic resources in combination work as an othering device to construct the people as morally different from himself. This difference is at times explicitly negotiated between the narrator and the interviewer (as in episode 3) or it is implicitly evaluated through laughter in the resolutions of the narrative episodes. In contrast to the voice of the people, Leeroy's own voice as a narrative figure stays "normal"

throughout; i.e. it sounds just like narrator's voice. This suggests that the prosodic and linguistic normalisation of his own voice can be interpreted as a normalisation of his, and in fact our, moral stancetaking in interaction as well as of the cosmopolitan identities constructed in this ethnographic encounter.

6. DISCUSSION

The normalisation of cosmopolitan identities in Leeroy's narrative reverses the ethnic othering he experiences as he navigates a marginalised life in Delhi. The narrator's use of "other" or "abnormal" voice registers – *piano*, *pianissimo*, *forte*, Hindi, *cantante* and creaky – allows him to narratively create a moral distance between himself and the ignorant, secretive, exclusionary and racist Delhi people. I would therefore suggest that the deontic stance of progress attributed to cosmopolitanism that Leeroy, as well as Subjeet and Bhimrao, seem to advocate is not posited in a utopian vacuum; in some kind of positivistic ideal of what society should look like. Rather, my participants' deontic cosmopolitanism emerges from a reflexive engagement and contrast with others; including *its* other, the non-cosmopolitan status quo.

Beck (2006) argues that 'cosmopolitanization itself promotes resistance to cosmopolitanization' (p. 111). Anti-cosmopolitanism is already dialectically inherent in any articulation of cosmopolitanism and it challenges and contradicts the progressive stance of cosmopolitanism by reinforcing vacillating boundaries anew and falling back on essentialism and fear of the other. In the micro-social dialogical narrative world that Leeroy creates, the voice of the racist people represents this anti-cosmopolitan orientation: the people of Delhi are steeped in ignorance, ethnic stereotyping and simplistic, monoethnic ideas of what constitutes a Delhiite and by extension an Indian citizen. The voice of the self, in contrast, can stay "normally" cosmopolitan in its dialogues with the racist people. In this relational sense, the voice registers of the self and the other contrast and gain meaning in an indexical field of opposing moral frameworks, which allows the narrator to distance himself from some voices, while aligning with others. The dialogues constructed in these narratives open up perspectives to understand how cosmopolitanism is reflexively negotiated and normalised by urban Indian youth who navigate their complex migration histories and hip hop futures and strive to find opportunities to connect their marginal positionalities in the global hood. (Vernacular) cosmopolitan identities, then, do confront racist voices, as much as they rely on their homogenising and exclusionary ideology of racism to appear as normal.

7. CONCLUSION

By focussing on the understudied variable of loudness, this article made a case for sociolinguistic research into the moment-to-moment interactive enregistering of voice qualities. Leeroy orchestrates loudness registers to establish voice contrasts between his own voice and the voices of the racist people of Delhi. These contrasts can be given up once the narrator has made it clear who speaks, yet the contrasts can also be reintroduced at a later point in the narrative to make the same figure speak again. Further resources, such as

creakiness, *cantante*, whisper or metapragmatically negotiated use of Hindi, can be employed to uphold the voice contrast and ascribe additional social or moral characteristics to the narrative figure of the people.

A linguistic ethnographic approach was adopted to account for the particular indexical meanings of loudness in the real-time interactive orchestration of voices within one narrative, rather than trying to make generalisable, or even universal, claims about the meanings of loud voice and soft voice across narratives. While I provided readers with ethnographically-rich background information about the sociohistorical context in which the narrative is situated, the linguistically-detailed micro analysis was limited because many other narratives could have been selected. Of the 36 hours of audio-recorded talk which I collected in Delhi, I merely analysed 90 seconds of narrative talk in this article. An analysis of the many narratives of ethnic othering that I chose to leave out would have certainly provided different and more complex results and insights. Nonetheless, I was able to empirically validate that loudness is one among several sociolinguistic resources available to speakers to navigate narrative selves and make moral judgements about the world.

Loudness deserves more attention in our field. What else can loudness index as people sociolinguistically create and represent their worlds? If we better understand the material, semiotic and discursive foundations of the complex relational and contrastive construction of identities in contemporary globalisation, we might be able to continue to promote an empirically-informed academic advocacy for cosmopolitan perspectives in our rapidly changing – and increasingly anti-cosmopolitan – global societies.

NOTES

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2. Mean intensity values were used to determine the loudness of each utterance. First, because means even out peaks that might be caused solely by word stress. Secondly, because the means provide results by and large similar to peaks. For example, when we compare the intensity peaks with the intensity means in the five utterances spoken by Leeroy in Figure 1, we can observe the same general trend of increasing intensity, albeit the differences in increase from one to the next utterance might be quite dissimilar, perhaps due to word stress or crackles in the recording.

Peaks:	62.71	+4.34	67.05	+4.15	71.20	+3.61	74.81	+3.68	78.49
Means:	52.39	+8.19	60.58	+4.34	64.92	+2.98	67.90	+2.11	70.01

3. Although I do not discuss constructions of sex and gender in this article, we can immediately see that the very low number of females and the absence of openly non-heterosexual males in my study constructs an overtly heteronormative male texture of hip hop in Delhi.

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

‘...’	Constructed dialogue
CAPS	Prominent syllable
-	Unfinished syllable/utterance
:	Vowel lengthening
☺...☺	Smile-voice
((...))	Transcriber’s comments
[...]	Overlapping and simultaneous talk
[...]	
=	Latching
@	Laughing syllable
(.)	Unmeasured micro-pause (circa 0.3-0.5 sec.)
(1.3)	Measured pause
...	Utterance in Hindi
<i>Gl.</i>	Gloss (free translation)
Reg.	Register
dB	Decibel
<i>p</i>	<i>Piano</i> (soft) register
<i>pp</i>	<i>Pianissimo</i> (very soft) register
<i>n</i>	Normal-volume loudness register
<i>f</i>	<i>Forte</i> (loud) register

CONTACT DETAILS

Jaspal Naveel Singh
School of English
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
SAR China

Email: singhjn@hku.hk

ORCID ID

0000-0002-2693-6718