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Stop Signs: The Intersection of Interdental Fricatives and Identity in Newfoundland

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1 Introduction

Multiple sociolinguistic studies of the same linguistic variable in communities around the world have often revealed similar linguistic constraints on variation with relatively consistent social patterning (Labov 1972). Intrinsic to nearly all of these studies of the patterns of variation in language within a community has been a consistent methodological framework and analysis protocol that each researcher examining the same variable follows. That is, once a method for examining linguistic variation for a particular variable is identified, it is adopted, and changes to the method are typically only the result of newly emergent data that cannot “fit” into or cannot be handled by the analysis framework we have (Blake 1997). However, with new methods for analysis and interdisciplinary perspectives consistently influencing sociolinguistic research, multiple examinations of the same variable, utilizing different communities representing a broad variety and novel methodological approaches to the analysis of a linguistic variable, provide a new depth to language change research.

To this end, this paper examines a highly salient variable in Newfoundland English, the interdental fricative, through the lens of four separate sociolinguistic studies. Each study looks at the same variable, some taking more traditional methodological approaches while others develop and adapt new methodologies, with an eye to presenting a view of the social meaning of an iconic linguistic variable in Newfoundland. While the findings of the studies are not all the same, with nuanced differences emerging, the different views of the variables and more importantly the social findings of the studies highlight the importance of multiple investigations of the same variable in a language variety and the role that identity plays in language variation.

2 Newfoundland

Newfoundland English (NE) has been described as the most diverse variety of English spoken in the world (Schneider 2005). The history and location of the province and its recent urbanization have contributed to this state of affairs. Newfoundland is the eastern-most province in Canada, accessible only by ferry or airplane. Historically this level of physical isolation helped to strengthen and maintain the traditional lifestyle of the province (including the language). However, within the last 60 years, Newfoundland has moved from a highly traditional and rural economy and culture to a more urbanized and integrated province. Events such as the World Wars, Confederation (1949), forced resettlement, the overhauling of the school system, development of offshore oil, and the cod moratorium (1992) have all pushed Newfoundland rapidly away from its traditional roots. The effects of urbanization on the language of the province have created a move toward more mainstream Canadian linguistic norms (Clarke 1991, Boberg 2005, D’Arcy 2005).

Currently, in Newfoundland this move toward urban norms is becoming more present within daily discourse. Most prominently on a local level this can be seen in the urban/rural distinction between *townies* and *baymen*. Townies are those who live in town, typically St. John’s or any other urban/suburban centre. Baymen are those who live in more rural areas or are “from around the bay.” This distinction is one that is used to describe a particular lifestyle (rural/urban) and is typically close at hand in descriptions of persons and functions as a primary means for self identification for many (young) Newfoundlanders. Another effect of the recent move toward urban norms in Newfoundland is a heightened sense of provincial (local) pride. A large majority of Newfoundlanders surveyed saw themselves as Newfoundlanders first and Canadians second when they were asked. Overall, urbanization has not removed Newfoundland identity from the province; rather, it has made identity a key issue, when during prior times identification as a Newfoundlander was an assumed category.

3 Methods

3.1 Variable

Variable production of [θ] and [ð] are longstanding features of NE. Work by Clarke (1991, 1997, 2004) has shown that the stopping of interdentalals appears in the casual speech of all social classes in urban and rural centres throughout the province. Previous studies (Colbourne 1982, Clarke 1991, 1997, Penney-Lanari 1994) have primarily examined the effects of speaker sex and age on production, with results for speaker sex indicating that men are most likely to use non-standard variants and results for age showing that older participants use non-standard variants more frequently than younger generations. Perhaps most interestingly, though, there is not one social hierarchy that can account for interdental production for all speakers of Newfoundland English. All of the social patterns have concurred that older males are the most vernacular, but there is little agreement on the place of other social groups in the hierarchy. Likewise, lexical effects on the production of interdentalals have not been considered in NE.

Work on interdental fricatives in English worldwide reports higher rates of stopping in informal speech and in function words (Wells 1982, Trudgill 1990, Dubois and Horvath 1998, 2003, Moothry and Deterding 2000, Bell and Gibson 2008). Perhaps most importantly, it is the attention that interdental fricatives receive both locally and non-locally in Newfoundland that make the variable of interest. Both loved for its “Newfoundlander” identity and stereotyped as Newfoundlander, the use of a stopped interdental fricative provides an important message in any communicative exchange.

3.2 Data Sources

The data for this large-scale study of interdental fricatives comes from four recent studies conducted in Newfoundland. The studies look at three different communities and utilize several different methods that will be detailed in their respective data sections. The Battery study, presented first, is a quantitative study of 12 speakers from the Battery community within St. John’s (the capital city). Two quantitative studies are presented on Petty Harbour, a current bedroom community to nearby St. John’s. A final study examines the townie/bayman distinction in St. John’s. Throughout all of the different studies one aspect remained consistent: the analysis of interdental fricatives and their role in local speech.

4 Data

4.1 The Battery Study

This study examines the realization and stratification of the voiced interdental /ð/ and its less prestigious variant [d] in the Battery, a small fishing village now part of St. John’s. Once socially marginalized and segregated, the Battery is today a highly sought-after area characterized by rampant development and expensive real estate, while still retaining some of its fishing village charm. It was assumed that the strength of the residents’ social networks and identities would be shaped by the increase in urbanization and shifting community structure and that this, in turn, would affect their use of the non-standard variant.

Ethnolinguistic data was collected from 12 Battery natives via questionnaires. Some of their questionnaire responses represented their social network based on the *Network Strength Scale* used in Milroy’s Belfast study (1977, 1980) as well as their social identity based on the *Social Identity* theory of Tajfel 1978. Participants and interviews were also categorized based on sex (male and female), generation (old and young), residence (absent or present in the community) and formality (informal and formal contexts). It was believed that there would be little to no difference between the older generation’s groups (Battery native old present (BNOP) and Battery native old absent (BNOA)) and that there would be stratification in the younger generation (Battery native young present (BNYP) and Battery native young absent (BNYA)). Specifically, those still residing in the Battery (BNYP) would likely align themselves with traditional social networking and identity, characteristic of the old Battery natives. Conversely, those who have left the Battery to live

elsewhere (BNYA) and break from the strong community ties would exhibit less variation in the use of the /ð/. This hypothesis was motivated by the *weak tie model*, which posits that the most mobile individuals have weak ties, and “...as a consequence of their mobility, occupy a position marginal to any given cohesive group, [and] are in a favourable position to diffuse innovation” (Milroy 2002:219).

The linguistic factors included were manner of articulation, place of articulation, word position (word-initial and word-medial), and word class (function and lexical words). Data was analyzed using GoldVarb X.

<i>Factor Groups</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
Manner of articulation	Voiceless stops	.68	75	440/589
	Vowels	.67	63	468/741
	Liquids	.67	71	270/381
	Voiced stops	.64	61	137/225
	Pause	.49	53	305/575
	Voiceless fricatives	.45	47	110/234
	Voiced fricatives	.27	33	84/258
	Nasals	.23	31	249/792
Word class	Lexical	.23	46	120/263
	Function	.52	55	1943/3532
Group status	BNOA	.69	68	266/393
	BNOP	.60	65	615/942
	BNYP	.48	52	432/1013
	BNYA	.36	43	450/1447
Sex	Men	.57	60	1304/2163
	Women	.41	47	759/1632
Formality	Informal	.57	60	1892/3179
	Formal	.21	28	171/616

Table 1: /ð/-stopping in the Battery.

Results show that of the 3,795 tokens in the corpus, 1,219 (32%) were realized as [ð], 2,063 (54%) as [d] and 513 (14%) as assimilated. Furthermore, there is evidence of an intergenerational dialect shift: younger Battery natives use standard [ð] more frequently than the older speakers, and there is stratification of /ð/ between members of the younger generation.

The findings based on sex (men at a factor weight of .57 (60%) and women at a factor weight of .41 (47%)) indicate that women tend toward the standard, likely because of their different occupational roles from those of the males; until the past few decades, men have typically worked in the fishing industry and women have traditionally been the primary caregivers, looking after their children. It is also possible that, because the men all worked together, there may have been more pressure for them to express their solidarity through vernacular forms (e.g., Eckert 1989). In the present Battery era, the stigma of the *old* Battery still lingers, which may be why younger men continue to use the identity marker [d] more than women. This relates to Trudgill’s (1988) notion of “covert prestige.” In addition, there were noteworthy interactions between two factor groups: formality and sex. In informal speech, the six men and six women had high (and relatively comparable) percentages for their use of [d], at 64% and 54% respectively. In formal speech, however, there was a substantial difference, with men using the [d] in 42% of the words and women using the same variant only 9% of the time, illustrating that women are more concerned with their use of /ð/ than men are.

Examination of the linguistic factors revealed manner of articulation and word class to be significant. While the results based on word class are widely accepted and common in other sociolinguistic studies (Kiparsky 1998, Bybee 2001), those for manner of articulation did not pattern in a predictable fashion.

4.2 Petty Harbour: Function Word Approach

Petty Harbour, a community around 15 kilometers from St. John's, has seen many recent changes. Once a fishing village, this community has changed significantly since the cod moratorium of the early 90s. As a result of the moratorium, which effectively halted the traditional cod fishery that had been central to the community's economy, many residents went back to school and now work in St. John's. Increasingly, young residents of the community (especially females) are attending university, and many residents of the community have higher education degrees, travel outside of the community very frequently, and travel out of the province quite a bit, all startling changes from community life 30 years ago. Despite these changes, Petty Harbour still stands as a community distinct from St. John's and strongly holds on to its identity.

This study of interdental fricatives examines 2,665 tokens of /θ/ and /ð/ from 24 speakers. Type token ratios were controlled to account for any skewing of the data that may occur as a result of high frequency words. Linguistically, data was coded for realization (stopped or standard), preceding and following phonetic environment, syllable position, and word class (+Function or -Function). The social variables recorded were age and sex. As with the previous study, all data was analyzed using GoldVarb X.

Analysis of /ð/ as seen in Figure 1 shows that age and sex figure prominently in the patterns of stopping. We see a decline in rates of non-standard production in the males, and a rather abrupt drop from the middle-aged males (MM) to the young males (YM). However, for the females we see a leveling off at about 30% from the middle-aged women (MF) down. This abrupt drop between middle aged and young males and the leveling among the females is of interest since it indicates a different progression in the movement toward the standard realization.

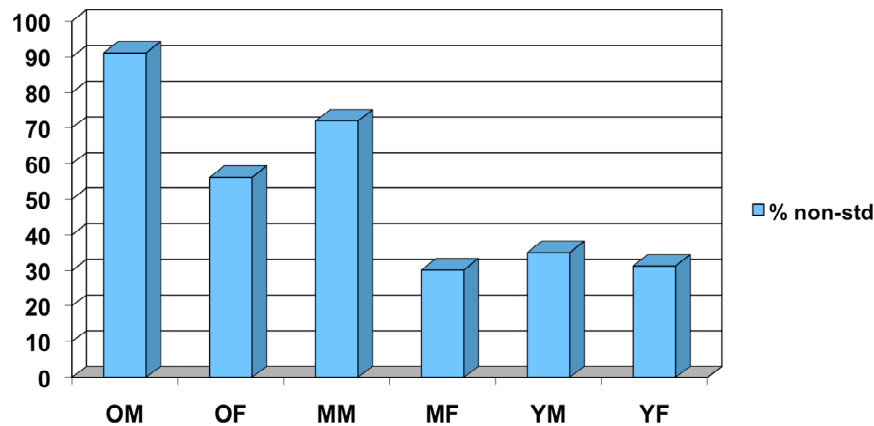


Figure 1: Percentage of non-standard /ð/ usage in Petty Harbour.

The analysis of /θ/ seen in Figure 2 (next page), again shows the expected decline. However, unlike the findings for /ð/, we do not see the large jumps from one age group to another. Rather, we see a predictable steady decline in non-standard use and we find women moving toward standard variants earlier than men.

Within the /ð/ data, function word status was also examined. Function words were defined as words that have little to no lexical meaning and serve a grammatical function, indicating a relationship between other items in a sentence. Another requirement imposed was that the words chosen had to be present in every interview. The function words included in the analysis were *the*, *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, *them*, *there*, and *their*, as well as contracted forms of these words. The findings for the analysis of function words seen on the following page in Table 2 show that function words favour stopping among all age groups. Note especially the young women, who seemingly maintain stopped variants only in function words and have abandoned them elsewhere. These findings for interdental fricatives in Petty Harbour show a movement toward standard realizations as is expected, especially in an urbanizing community. However, the high frequency usage of non-

standard variants in function words is interesting, especially among the young females, who may be using it as an off the shelf identity marker (Milroy 2007:151) when they need it.

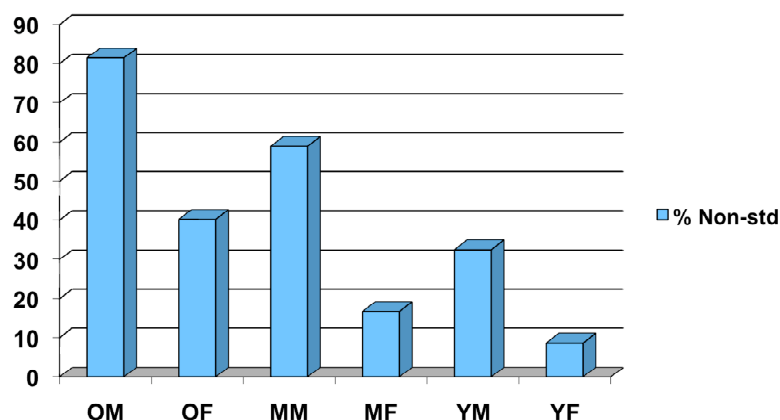


Figure 2. Percentage of non-standard /θ/ usage in Petty Harbour.

Group	Total +Function (N)	Total non-std +Function (%)	Total - Function (N)	Total non-std - Function (%)
Older women (60+)	163	80.3	93	13.9
Older men (60+)	146	88.3	91	95.6
Middle women (30-60)	165	38.8	86	15.1
Middle men (30-60)	141	74.5	123	69.1
Younger women (under 30)	175	42.8	90	8.9
Younger men (under 30)	156	38.5	95	29.4

Table 2: Rates of non-standard /ð/ in function words in Petty Harbour.

4.3 Petty Harbour: Timing Based Approach

Van Herk et al. (2009) classified words (housing interdental fricatives) into two groups: high-frequency +Function words, like *the* and *this*, and lower frequency -Function words. They found a greater rate of stopped interdental fricatives for high-frequency +Function words and proposed that this is due to their being “less salient and thus less suppressed” (Van Herk et al. 2009:92). However, an alternative possibility might be that high-frequency words like *the* and *this* are more salient by virtue of their frequency. That is, perhaps the high occurrence of these +Function words makes them more available for identity work and they are in fact the sites for localized identity making while the rarer forms are less available for this work. In this view, we might suppose that their higher rates of /ð/ stopping are performative acts, intentionally (or not) indexing a more localized identity, rather than lower rates indicating a form of suppression. In short, based purely on the rates of use of the variables, alternative and contradictory conclusions can be drawn. In Kendall 2009, we sought to investigate this tension by following up on findings from Van Herk et al. 2009.

Kendall (2009) investigated the realization of interdental fricatives by a subset of speakers from the Petty Harbour study from a perspective of speech timing. He examined the relationship between speaker hesitancy and the stopping of interdental fricatives, asking whether hesitancy – as measured by the ratio of pause-time to talk-time during stretches of uninterrupted talk by a single talker – predicted the realization of /ð/ as either [d] or [ð]. Drawing on psycholinguistic literature on hesitancy and speech timing in language production (Henderson et al. 1966, Goldman-Eisler 1968, Levelt 1989, Roberts and Kirsner 2000), Kendall developed a graphing method, called a “Henderson graph,” that provides a means to measure hesitancy in a systematic and quantitative fashion. A simplified Henderson graph is illustrated in Figure 3. In a Henderson graph, talk, i.e., actual phonation excluding any pauses (> 60 ms), is plotted extending horizontally from left to right, while pauses, measured as > 60 ms, are plotted extending upward in vertical lines. The ratio

of pause- to talk-time for a stretch of talk is captured by the slope of the best-fit line (generated from a linear model) for the spanned stretch of talk (see Henderson et al. 1966, Levelt 1989, Kendall 2009 for more.)

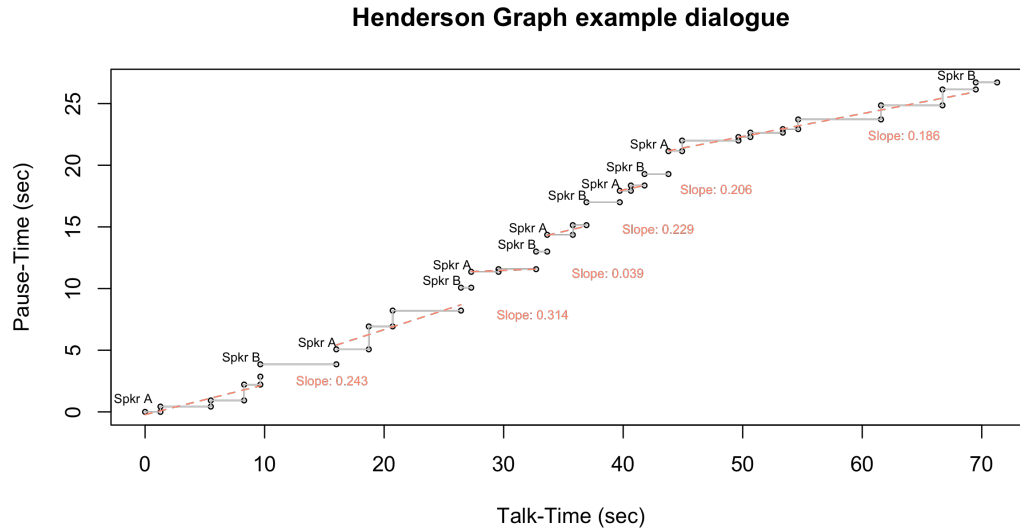


Figure 3: Henderson graph example dialogue.

Comparing the realization of voiced interdental fricatives in Van Herk et al.'s 2009 *+Function* word class, e.g., *the*, *this*, between some old male speakers and some young females from Petty Harbour yielded striking differences between these two groups. The old males were characterized as having no relationship between the realization of /ð/ and either the Henderson graph slopes or differences between different matrix word types. That is, /ð/ realization did not pattern significantly with any of Kendall's additional predictors for the old males. For the young females, however, the different matrix word types were found to significantly influence the realization of /ð/, and, even more interestingly, changes in the slope of the matrix utterance of a /ð/ realization were found to significantly influence the realized form. Changes in the temporal structure of that talk, in the direction of increased hesitancy, were found to predict a greater likelihood of the stopped form.

Overall, Kendall's findings reinforce the claim that young Newfoundland speakers make use of stopped interdentals as a form of identity production or performance. The specific findings—that increased hesitancy relates to increased likelihood of *stopped* forms—yields some insight into the specific processes of variable production. This part of the research is still in its beginning phases, but according to these results, it appears that the young females in Petty Harbour are actively making use of the stopped forms of the variable and not, as it were, actively suppressing the stopped form.

4.4 St. John's Townie/Bayman Study

We turn our focus now to a case of linguistic variation within a context of mobility and migration in which individuals have moved from rural to urban locations. In recent Newfoundland history, two governmental initiatives, Centralization and Resettlement, sought to relocate residents of small, geographically remote communities to larger centres, bringing into contact regionally, and at times linguistically, distinct communities. Today, these initiatives are no longer active, though it is not uncommon for young rural adults to migrate to larger urban centers seeking academic and employment opportunities. In St. John's itself, this scenario has led to the existence of a socio-cultural distinction between those who are natively born, the townies, and those who have moved to town from "around the bay," the baymen. Story et al. (1990:576) overtly define a townie as a

“native of St. John's, *especially a male*; usually derisive, and *contrasting with Bay Men*” (emphasis added).

The following data comes from the Townie/Bayman corpus, which is currently under development at the Memorial University Sociolinguistics Lab. To date, 15 individuals have been analyzed: seven of whom self-identify as baymen and eight as townies. Data was examined, using GoldVarb X, to determine the effect of three external factors on the variable realization of the standard interdental fricatives /θ, ð/: self-identification as either a townie or bayman, sex of the speaker, and stylistic context (either Interview or Casual Conversation). For this paper, 1,065 tokens were included in the statistical analysis. Both /θ/ and /ð/ are treated as one variant.

It was expected that baymen would exhibit lower rates of the fricative variant, given that changes towards the standard form initiate in urban areas and subsequently diffuse outward (Trudgill 1974, Bailey et al. 1993). Since all participants analyzed here are of the same age cohort (i.e., in their twenties), age will not be examined as a factor, though it is assumed that the participants use more of the standard variants than their older counterparts, similar to what was found in both the Battery and Petty Harbour studies. Concerning sex, we expected females to produce more standard variants than males, again a pattern consistent with that exhibited by the Battery and Petty Harbour informants.

Our results are shown in Tables 3 and 4 below. As expected for a variable which serves as a salient sociolinguistic marker (Labov 1972), both male and female speakers exhibit stylistic shifting across the interview and conversation contexts. Males increase their production of the standard variants by 11% in the structured interview whereas females shift by a rate of 14%. These results suggest that these speakers share a norm associating the standard variant with a more formal speech style. However, unexpectedly, it is our male informants who use this form the most, not the females, in both contexts.

	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Interview	88%	74%
Conversation	77%	60%

Table 3: Use of the standard variant by sex and stylistic context.

When we consider the relationship between sex, regionality (i.e., whether a speaker identifies as either a townie or a bayman), and speech style, another marked pattern emerges. In the interview context male townies use the standard forms at nearly categorical rates; in the casual conversation context, only a slight shift downwards is shown. A similar stylistic pattern is also exhibited by the female baymen, though their rates of standard variant usage are much lower: they use the standard variant only half of the time in both interview and conversation contexts. In between the male townies and the female baymen we find the female townies and male baymen, who shift by approximately 25% and 15%, respectively. As expected, the townies use the standard variant more often compared to the baymen. This is consistent with our hypothesis that the standard pronunciation is associated with urban center of St. John's. Those who had lived outside of the city and migrated later in life produce non-standard variants at much higher rates. However, what is noteworthy is the fact that males use the standard form more often than females of the same regionality. This runs contra to our expectations concerning sex and the use of overtly prestigious variants, which has been shown in numerous other studies to correlate with female informants, not males.

	<i>Male Townies</i>	<i>Female Townies</i>	<i>Male Baymen</i>	<i>Female Baymen</i>
Interview	99.4%	95.8%	77.2%	51.4%
Conversation	93.3%	70.4%	62.7%	50.0%

Table 4: Use of the standard variant by sex and regionality across stylistic contexts.

5 Results

The findings from these multiple studies, while at times expected, do not all present the same picture of the status and role of interdental fricatives in Newfoundland English. That females and young people are moving towards the standard is to be expected, and is found in a number of the studies. Likewise, several of the studies show higher rates of standard, non-stopped variants in more salient contexts (voiceless, non-function). These results, which all of the studies to some degree agree on, are not surprising. However, there are some surprises that suggest a more complex social profile for this variable. The increased pause/hesitation before function words by young women in Petty Harbour suggests they may be consciously inserting stops in contexts where using a non-stopped form would be marked. Similarly, the findings from the townie/bayman study, which show townie women becoming more vernacular than townie males in conversation and rural men using more standard variants than rural women, reveal a complex interaction of sex, urbanization, and style. These results make us consider issues of speaker and audience design for each of the social groups depending on their generation, level of urbanization, and their sex.

We consider the townie/bayman distinction particularly relevant here, especially in terms of how people position themselves with respect to an idealized authentic Newfoundlander, who we will call IAN for short. IAN acts as a third person referee, in the sense used in Bell 1984. Third person referees are abstract representations, “not physically present at an interaction, but [who possess] such salience for a speaker that they influence speech even in their absence” (Bell 1984: 186). Thus, we posit that style shifts are dictated by “persons” or the referee and that IAN helps informants create an identity from choices they make about speech and social practices. The same descriptions of IAN surfaced again and again in our interviews: IAN is friendly, generous, outdoorsy, proud to be called a Newfoundlander, maintains Newfoundland Vernacular English, and listens to traditional Newfoundland music. IAN’s characteristics are roughly those of a bayman, in comparison to the negatively-defined townies. For instance, bayman informant K described baymen as “...easy going, nice, probably lively, you know, full of life. Generous you know, caring and... Where you're from makes you bayman.” Townie informants, like M and N, often expressed negative self-images, indicating that they are not considered “...real Newfoundlanders” (M) and are “sub-Newfoundlanders” (N). They believe that there is no townie pride:

M: I don't think there is a townie pride out there.

N: I mean- um- I think there's probably a bayman pride, but I don't think there is a townie pride.

M: If someone asked me “are you a bayman or a townie?” I'd say townie, but I wouldn't proclaim it.

N: Yeah. I don't “Fxxx yeah townie!”

In effect, then, male townies don't get to be IAN. If they were to use the traditional Newfoundland speech features associated with IAN, they would conjure up images of another salient local identity type, the *skeet*, an urban working-class (usually male) hard case not unlike the *chavs*, *bogans*, or *Neds* found elsewhere in the world. The competing pushes and pulls of the Standard and of IAN and skeet referees may help explain some of our unusual findings. Female baymen maintain high rates of stopping in all contexts; they do not need to shift to the standard for social or economic capital. Male baymen and (especially) female townies show the most style shifting; they are actively positioning themselves, using IAN as a touchstone. They do not have to fear being taken for a skeet (or, perhaps, they do not mind). It seems likely that townie women are switching down to the local vernacular in casual speech, rather than switching up to the standard in interviews. This is hinted at by the fact that their low rates of stopping in interviews pretty well matches that of their male counterparts, and further by the (at first apparently contradictory) findings of the two Petty Harbour studies. In that community, positioned between town and bay, young women avoid stopping too much in salient (voiceless, lexical) contexts, which would make them sound “too bayman”, while at the same time appear to avoid fricating in frequent function words, which would make them sound “too townie”. This leaves us with male townies, who avoid stopping in all contexts, as their fear of being taken for a skeet is greater than their desire (or right) to be associated with IAN.

6 Conclusions

Through these studies of interdental fricatives, we have seen the various ways that speakers try to position themselves within the local landscape, and more importantly, the lack of a single specific pattern for a linguistic variable. While speakers are negotiating their social and linguistic identity with regard to their audience and other social attributes, they can do this in very different ways. While we see rural and formerly rural women keeping up the process of standardization, we simultaneously witness urban speakers, especially young urban women, adopt and reinvent local language features. Within the men, a group that most sociolinguistic studies find to be fairly predictable and homogeneous, we find great variability in the use of this variable, all predicated on identity-based characteristics. Perhaps the most important feature we have noticed is the conflicting identity that males must negotiate. This negotiation process often leads to sociolinguistic polarization (as seen in the townie men avoiding skeet identity). Males in these studies, when confronted with an identity that they want to avoid, will limit the use of a highly salient linguistic variant associated with that identity. Perhaps now more than ever in Newfoundland, men are having to negotiate the linguistic marketplace and are making linguistic choices to reflect their place within their community.

From a methodological perspective this study has shown the utility of examining a variable using multiple methods (surveys, timing based, traditional variationist). Although the findings from each method did not completely confirm one another, the places of overlap indicate large-scale patterns at work in Newfoundland English, and the areas of difference provide "hot spots" for researchers to be looking for newly emergent change, not only in Newfoundland but in all communities. Perhaps most interestingly, looking at communities within a 15-kilometer radius of each other did not produce results that were exact replicas of one another. Again, these differences in results highlight the need for researchers to examine variables using a number of methods in order to describe and understand how they function within a linguistic community.

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