

Dude, we like totally rock: **Mediated African Performances of California Linguistic Styles**

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ABSTRACT

Most research on language in California has focused on everyday use, with considerably less attention given to ideologies and representations. Here, I look at the metapragmatic deployment of California linguistic features by members of a global audience. Crucially, the California media gives global reach to its own representations of self—instantiated here in the form of a cult-classic white male SoCal slacker film—which are then picked up by two African reality show contestants who enact their own ad-libbed performances of the film's two lead characters. But the features that the contestants draw on in their performance reach beyond the repertoire provided by the film, revealing a broader system of Hollywood-mediated ideologies linking linguistic features with California-associated styles.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Target of stylization "may not be represented in full" with some performers "more adept...than others" (Coupland, 2007:154)
- Multiple stylistic sources result in performances only fractionally congruent (Agha, 2007) with the original sources

BIG BROTHER AFRICA

- Global reality television show franchise launched in the Netherlands in 1999, now with thirty-eight national and seven regional incarnations
 - Third season of African show, produced by South Africa's Endemol in 2008
 - Airs in 42 African countries
- 12 initial contestants, each from a different African country, lived together in one house for 91 days under constant camera surveillance
 - Contestants eliminated weekly through viewer voting
 - Final three contestants: Ricco (Angola), Munya (Zimbabwe), and Hazel (Malawi)
- Ricco and Munya repeatedly stylize performances of Bill and Ted over two days, drawing on linguistic features as well as embodied elements, such as the use of wigs
- Data: web-based video clips available at: www.mnetafrica.com/bigbrother/

BILL AND TED

- 1989 Hollywood sci-fi/comedy film released by MGM (and 1991 sequel “Bogus Journey”)
- 2 white postadolescent male slackers-turned-musicians travel through time to study for a history exam.
- Alex Winter (Bill) and Keanu Reeves (Ted) linguistically perform a California youth style

Table 1: Examples of performed features of California youth style in the “Bill and Ted” films.

Phonology	Lexis	Interactional
Vowel fronting: <i>dude, totally, know, good, no, most [=very], bodacious</i> Vowel centralization: <i>back, thanks</i>	<i>dude, totally, party on, excellent, not bad, bodacious, bogus, no way, most [=very]</i>	simultaneous exclamations

ANALYSIS: REPRESENTING BILL AND TED, PERFORMING CALIFORNIA

1. “Spoofing Bill and Ted” (0:31): Ricco and Munya begin their performance of Bill and Ted with a metapragmatic discussion of ‘Ted’s’ use of *totally*, as well as a discussion of the quality of the marijuana they are pretending to smoke

19 MUNYA; <RASPYP> ^Dude_</dud/>, you `need to stop saying [that ^wor:d, man].
 20 RICCO; [###]
 21 RICCO; ... <RASPYP> What ^wor:d, ^ma:n,
 22 MUNYA; ... like, ^totally_</tθrəli/>,
 23 RICCO; Ok, ^totally_</todəli/> cool, I'll ^totally </todli/> stop.
 24 MUNYA; ... %^Totally_</tθrəli/>. </RASPYP>
 25 ... <VOX> ^Fully_</fYli/>, ^bro_</brθ/>, </VOX>
 26 RICCO; ... (H)H ^Fully_</fʊli/>.
 27 MUNYA; ... <RASPYP> ^Dude_</did/>,
 28 RICCO; ... ^Yeah:.
 29 MUNYA; ... <P> This is some ^good shit. </P>
 30 RICCO; ... I ^kno:w,
 31 MUNYA; ... Where'd you ^get this shit `from.
 32 RICCO; @@^@:: This ^^homey `ma:n=,
 33 MUNYA; =^Really=,
 34 RICCO; =Big ^^Brother, you ever ^heard of him?=
 35 MUNYA; =No:;,
 36 RICCO; It's like the h- --
 37 He's got `loads of this <VOX=AAVE> \^shi:t, /^dog </VOX>,
 38 MUNYA; ^Really,
 39 RICCO; ^Ye:a:h:;

40 MUNYA; ^Dude_</did/>, he must ^totally_</tourəli/>, ^like,
41 .. ^sell this, but `like, I ^mean like,
42 ... on `like a, on `like, a global ^scale? </RASPY>
43 You ^know_</nθ/>, `like --

44 RICCO ^du:de_</did/>],
45 MUNYA; <F> Let's like ^take, .. ^let's like, `start a ^business, ^man, </F>
46 RICCO; I go for that ^too, ^ma:n,
47 [^To]tally:_</todəli/> yeah: @:@: ^Awe:so[2:me] [3^Awe:so:me ^Y][4ea:h],
48 MUNYA; [Like] -- [2^Aw:]so[3:me:] [4^Yea:h].
</RASPY>

49 ((THE TWO DO "HANG LOOSE" SIGN AND LOCK PINKIES))
50 ... ^Pinky_</pInkjɛ/>.

51 MUNYA; ^Dude_</did/>, .. cause `like, ... I ^feel like,
52 ^people like, .. in ^Africa?
53 ... You ^know_</nθ/>, .. like,
54 my ^cousin was there,
55 a couple <VOX_STACCATO> ^days ago_</əgθ/> </VOX_STACCATO>,
56 ... and `like, ... they ^totally_</tourəli/> need some ^shit_</shɛt/> like this,
57 dude_</did/>.

- *Dude*
 - Munya pronounces *dude* with California fronted (lines 27, 40, 51, 57) vowels
 - Munya pronounces *dude* with unmarked back (19) vowels
- *Totally*
 - Munya pronounces *totally* with California fronted (22, 24) tonic vowels
 - Munya pronounces *totally* with unmarked back (40, 56) tonic vowels
 - Ricco pronounces *totally* with unmarked back (23, 47) tonic vowels
- Other California surfer lexis
 - Munya frequently uses *like* (22, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 51, 52, 53, 56)
 - Munya pronounces *fully* (25) and *bro* (25) with fronted tonic vowels
 - Ricco pronounces *fully* (26) with unmarked back tonic vowel
- Other words with fronted vowels
 - Munya pronounces *know* (43, 53) and *ago* (55) with fronted vowels
- Munya uses rising final intonation for a declarative clause (42)
- Both contestants use a raspy voice quality iconic of stoner-surfer practices
- Ricco uses features indexical of African American English AAE
 - Lexis such as *homey* (32) and *shit, dog* (37)
 - Falling-rising intonation on *shit, dog* (37)
- Ricco uses stylized rise-fall intonation over lengthened vowels (30, 32, 34) not transparently indexical of California surferhood or AAE

2. “Spoofing Bill and Ted” (2:42): Munya and Ricco have told Hazel, now portraying Donna Summer, that they too are in a band, a noteworthy adherence to the script of the film. Hazel believes one of them looks an awful lot like John Lennon

89 MUNYA; .. <RASPYP> You know we're still ^practicing,
 90 RICCO; .. <RASPYP> ^Totally_</tOteli/>,
 91 MUNYA; .. But uh, we're going to blow ^up soon.
 92 HAZEL; (H) ^Bu:t, .. um, .. if you're still ^practicing, how ^come you've got,
 93 uh, John ^Lennon, ^with you, and still ^practicing?
 94 MUNYA; .. Nah, that's just a ^stage name, ^du@@@de_</did/>,
 95 RICCO; ##:, [#:].
 96 MUNYA; [@@], She- – She ^to[2tally_</torli/>] thought [3you were `John ^Lennon,
 97 ^man],
 98 RICCO; [2##] [3@@:::]
 99 ^To:[4tally: _</toteli/>, @@@] ((RICCO AND MUNYA HIGH FIVE))
 100 MUNYA; [4^To:tally@_</torali/>], Ye@a@@@h.
 101 [5(H) Aw@@- --, Awe^so::me].
 102 RICCO; [5(H) Ah, cool, Awe^so::me], @@@=
 103 MUNYA; =@@@
 104 RICCO; ... @@@
 105 MUNYA; That's ^totally_</tOrali/> off the ^hook, man,

- The two contestants simultaneously exclaim *awesome* (101, 102)
- Laughter
 - Both contestants perform Bill and Ted’s laughter from the film (94, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104)
 - Munya places laughter within words (lines 94, 100, 101), indexical of this style
- Munya uses the construction *off the hook* (105)
- The contestants deploy additional tokens of *dude* and *totally* (90, 94, 96, 99, 100, 105)

3. “Spoofing Bill and Ted” (3:23): Here, Munya invites 'Donna Summer' to go surfing with them

117 MUNYA; ... <RASPYP> So you want to hit the ^waves some[2`time],
 118 RICCO; [2coo:!).
 119 HAZEL; ... I'd ^love to do that.
 120 # #Awe:so:me=
 121 MUNYA; <P> =^Swe[@e@t. .. ^Swe@e@@@t].
 122 RICCO; [#####],
 123 <P> ^To:tally_</tOdeli/>=, </P>
 124 MUNYA; =^To:tally_</tOrali/>, </P> </RASPYP>

- Munya uses the term *sweet* with additional interposing of word-medial laughter (121)
- Both contestants deploy additional tokens of *totally* (123, 124)

4. “Spoofing Bill and Ted” (4:42): Munya complains to Ricco that his ears are itchy from the wig he is wearing to perform Bill

171 MUNYA; <RASPY> [2my- -- .. Dude_ </dud> my, .. Dude_ </dud> my] ^ears are `itchy.
 172 RICCO; <P> <RASPY> [2#^Na::h, ^man, she was ^wicked, too:],
 173 MUNYA; <P> #It #must #be #this fucking -- </P>
 174 RICCO; U:h=
 175 MUNYA; =^Du:de_ </did/>. Mm mm.
 176 RICCO; Maybe you should /^{cut} \i:t. </P>
 177 (2.0) [@(SUSTAINED LAUGHTER) ###]
 178 MUNYA; [@(SUSTAINED LAUGHTER)]
 179 ^na@h dude_ </did/>, ^na@h du:de_ </did/>, .. ^na@@h]
 180 @@, @@=

- *Nah*
 - Munya uses the negative particle *nah* in collocation with *dude* and by itself (179)
 - Ricco uses *nah* by itself (172)
- Ricco uses the adjective *wicked* (172) meaning *awesome*
- Both contestants deploy additional simultaneous exclamations: laughter (177, 178)
- Munya deploys additional tokens of *dude* (171, 175, 179) while Ricco uses additional rise-fall intonation (176)

5. “Dazed and Confused” (1:24): Ricco and Munya pretend to have misunderstood 'surfing the internet' for surfing waves, thus having attempted to ride waves on top of computer components:

1 RICCO; <RASPY> `Then there [was] this ^other one?
 2 HAZEL; [^Oh, ^yeah?]
 3 RICCO; [2called] ^mother, ^mother, huh [3^mother boa:rd]?
 4 MUNYA; [2Like uh:] [3huh ^mother board]
 5 [4#I #don't ^know], dude_ </did/>,
 6 HAZEL; [4^Hey ##]
 7 RICCO; [4She was supposed to be] the ^phattest one, ya know I ^mean? ((VERTICAL
 AXIS OPEN PALM REPEATED DOWNWARD GESTURE))

- African American English
 - Ricco uses the construction *ya know I mean* (7)
 - Ricco uses the adjective *phattest* (7)
- Munya uses an additional token of *dude* (5)

6. “Pass the Courvoisier” (0:57): Munya and Ricco have just finished pretending to pass an invisible soccer ball back and forth using their laps, and, upon completion, they congratulate each other, briefly breaking into their Bill and Ted personae to do so

1 RICCO; <RASPYPY> V^Per%\fe:::ct. ... V^Awe%\so:::me=.

2 MUNYA; <RASPYPY> =^Awesome, `dude_</did/>.

3 RICCO; `Du:de_</did/>.

4 MUNYA; `Dude_</did/>, we ^totally_</tərelɪ/> ^rock. </RASPYPY>

5 ... <FALSETTO>Ah%.</FALSETTO> `Nigga's are ^crazy.

- Ricco uses a stylized fall-rise-fall intonation (1) that triggers Munya's switch into a performative frame
- Munya uses the verb *rock* in collocation with *totally* (4) to signify *be awesome*
- Munya utters *Nigga's are crazy* (5), indexing AAE, though this may fall outside the performative frame
- Both contestants deploy additional tokens of *dude* (2, 3, 4)

ANALYTIC SUMMARY

- Munya and Ricco portray themselves as "surfers," although Bill and Ted were not
- Munya deploys numerous California youth style features from the film and from other sources, in addition to features indexing AAE
- Ricco relies more heavily than Munya on features indexing AAE, but he also uses stylized features not obviously from either AAE or California youth
- Ricco and Munya thus differently achieve Bill and Ted by drawing on varied features only fractionally congruent with the performances in the movie
- The constestants' ideologies nonetheless indexically link these features to a California-centered surfer style, which is what, for them, Bill and Ted are fundamentally 'about'

CONCLUSION

- Mass media has enabled the appropriation of California styles by global audiences
- Locally relevant distinctions between styles, entextualized enactments of styles, and their constitutive features may be erased in this process of mediated global appropriation

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