8
The Local and Supralocal Contexts for the Patterns of Usage

This chapter discusses and contextualizes the results for /u/ and /u/ (Chapter 6) and /ai/ (Chapter 7) in terms of the local contact situation in Detroit as well as the supralocal context of American English. Section 8.1 provides comments on Detroit and its relationship to the suburbs. Participants discuss residential segregation, “White Flight” out of Detroit, perceptions concerning the suburbs, poverty and crime in Detroit, the 1967 riot, and Coleman Young, the first African American mayor of Detroit. Section 8.2 provides comments on migration, the South, and Southern cultural practices. Speakers discuss reverse migration and purchasing property in the South, ties to the South which include trips to South and loved ones who either remained in the South or returned there, rural cultural traditions brought to Detroit by first-generation migrants and persisting for later generations, relationships between African American and Appalachian White Southern migrants, the self-reported categories of “Southern” and “Hillbilly,” and metapragmatic commentary on language.

8.1 Participant comments on Detroit and its relationship to the suburbs

In commenting on daily life, participants are offering interpretations on their conditions and situations and on everyday life in Detroit. Before each interview, the participants in this study were given a flyer that explained the purpose of the project.
We want to audiotope a series of conversations lasting between 45 and 60 minutes with Detroiters from a number of different neighborhoods. These will help us understand how developments over the last 40 years or so have affected men and women of different generations in their everyday lives. We will use the tapes to learn about changes in peoples’ views of their work and their leisure and about the way Detroiters speak of their city and to each other. In short we want a record of what Detroiters’ say about their city, at the beginning of the twenty first century. (Excerpt from the Flyer, Conversations in Motown at the turn of the century: Detroit people and Detroit neighborhoods, for The Detroit Project, Directed by Lesley Milroy at the University of Michigan)

/ai/ shows massive differentiation among socially salient groups in the Detroit area (Edwards 1997; Eckert 2000; Anderson 2003). Several themes emerge in the recorded interviews which provide a window into patterns of social indexing that are particularly helpful in understanding the patterning of /ai/ presented in Chapter 7. Section 8.1.1 provides comments from the interviews that reveal, for the African American participants, the salience of residential segregation, stances toward the suburbs, perceptions of the White exodus out of Detroit, the 1967 riot, Coleman Young, and the salience of poverty, lack of jobs, and other struggles that characterize life in the inner city. Section 8.1.2 presents commentary on migration, the South, differentiation between Southern migrants and Midwestern Whites, and Southern cultural practices as well as metapragmatic commentary on language.

8.1.1 Residential segregation
The sociologists Farley et al. describe Detroit as “... a metropolitan that is exceptionally segregated—by 1990, Detroit was more residentially segregated than other US metropolis” (2000: 161). Through extensive surveys of residents of Detroit and the suburbs of Detroit, these researchers compiled “residential isolation indexes” to measure the degree of segregation in the Detroit metro area. For Whites in the area, the index score was 92, which means “... that the typical White lived in a neighborhood where 92% of other residents were White” (163). Farley et al. conclude, “regardless of their poverty or prosperity, Detroit Whites generally lived in the suburbs and Blacks