Australian singer, American features: Performing authenticity in country music[1]

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1. Introduction: Popular music performance is often subject to stylization, where the artist uses non-native features in their performed speech. This may be clearly seen in globalized, transnational genres, as in the case of a Japanese rap group using stylized English in their lyrics (Pennycook, 2003). Such language use is what Berger (2003) considers to be 'participation-through-doing,' by which language choice may embody a social identity to a greater degree than mere description. While stylized use of another language is perhaps more obvious, it is worth observing that stylization in music may also occur in the adoption of non-native dialect features. In this paper, I consider an Anglophone case of transnational dialect contact, in which the artist adopts features of a stigmatized, non-native dialect. I focus on the use of Southern American English features in country music as performed by Keith Urban, a native Australian and speaker of Australian English. Born in Whangarei, New Zealand, Urban was raised in Caboolture, Queensland, and is a prominent country artist. He released his debut album in Australia before moving to Nashville, Tennessee, in the 1990s to pursue a music career in the United States. Since then, he has released eight albums that have achieved a high degree of popular and critical success in the US, Canada, and Australia.

The salient differences between American and Australian English dialects are primarily phonetic, and this paper focuses on phonetic variation as a result. I consider three variables: monophthongization of the PRICE vowel /aɪ/, alveolar or velar pronunciation of (ING), and rhotic or non-rhotic production of coda /r/. I compare Urban's production of each variable in speech and song, as well as that of three American artists, in order to contextualize Urban's results.

Country music is associated with the Southern US (Murphy, 2014), and Southern American English is negatively perceived by many Americans (Preston, 2002). Despite the stigma, previous studies have found that some Australian country singers adopt American features in song (Snider, 2002). As I will show, Urban behaves similarly, style shifting toward Southern American English features in the use of monophthongal PRICE, alveolar (ING), and rhotic /r/ in song. While American artists likely style shift as well, Urban does so to a greater degree than the Americans. The end result is that while Urban's speech is quite different from that of the Americans, each artist produces the variables roughly equally in song. This similarity necessitates an explanation. We might conceive of Urban's style shifting as a result of US hegemony, as Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2003) put forward in the context of New Zealand English adopting more American-like features at the expense of British-like ones. However, hegemony alone does not explain why each artist should produce multiple variables in the same way. Because in many ways country music is a genre defined by authenticity (Barker and Taylor, 2007), I offer an analysis which relies on this concept. I argue that authenticity is commodified (see section 2.2), making it a necessity for the successful performance of a genre. In this way, authenticity is performed, and several strategies, including linguistic practice, are available to the artist to achieve this performance. However, some strategies, such as the creation of an authentic backstory, are restricted for outsiders. This makes linguistic practice perhaps the only viable strategy in cases of transnational contact.

Urban and others' performance of country music serves as an illustration of this analysis, as he relies on linguistic practice to perform authenticity. At the same time, this shows how country music has developed a transnational standard that stands outside of

local value systems (even though it originally developed such a standard in a local context). Rather than diminish the authenticity of performers who are 'outsiders', this transnational reality exists to create and maintain it.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 offers background on style shifting in Anglophone music, country music, and an outline of the 'authenticity-as-commodity' analysis. Section 3 gives the methodology used to obtain the data, the results and analysis of which may be found in Section 4. The discussion in Section 5 contextualizes the data within the analysis outlined in Section 2. Finally, Section 6 is a short conclusion.

2. Authenticity and Anglophone Music: Stylization from transnational dialect contact may be seen in a variety of genres. In this section, I discuss previous studies of Anglophone music, linking them through a broader exploration of authenticity. I then give a brief history of country music and bring it into the larger discussion. I take a broad approach to style and style shifting; if style marks social differences, style shifting serves to manipulate those differences (Coupland, 2007). This ascribes a degree of intentionality to the speaker, which is compatible with several models of style shifting (Audience Design: Bell, 1984; Speaker Design: Schilling-Estes, 2002; Style As Stance: Kiesling, 2009).

2.1. Style Shifting in Anglophone Music: The social factors that influence style shifting in regular speech are similar to those that influence an artist's style shift from speech to song. Style shifting and the production of particular features in musical performances have been observed for some time (see Beal, 2009a; Gibson and Bell, 2012; Simpson,

1999; Trudgill, 1983; inter alia). Trudgill (1983) finds that the Beatles and Rolling Stones, both British rock artists, generally use a series of features that are not local. The artists use an alveolar flap [ɾ] allophone of /t/ in words like *bottle* and *better*; rhoticity in the codas of syllables in words like *girl* and *more*; a monophthongized PRICE vowel in words like *eye* and *fries*; [ə] as the vowel in words like *love*, and vowels similar to those used in American English in words like *dance, half,* and *top.* Some British dialects use one or more of these features; however, none use all of them. However, many of these features are common in combination to at least some American dialects. While adoption of these features may in part be attributed to blues influences, particularly in the case of the Rolling Stones, Trudgill suggests that such style shifting is also due to the British artists attempting to sing in American accents to adapt to an American-run industry. This is evidenced by the fact that the effect was lessened later in their careers when they had achieved commercial success. At this point, their native features began to make inroads.

Similarly, Simpson (1999) finds that many other artists use what he labels the 'USA-5' model: the alveolar flap [ɾ] allophone of /t/, rhoticity, a monophthongized PRICE vowel, a TRAP vowel similar to that of American English, and merged LOT and THOUGHT vowels. This model reflects not only his results but also those found in Trudgill (1983). The ostensibly American features of the USA-5 model are commonly found in British music from throughout the twentieth century. It should be noted, however, that style shifts do not always reflect an American influence. Simpson shows that the band Oasis, from Manchester, England, adopts distinctive features typical of Liverpool, England—the origin of the Beatles.

Style shifting to non-native dialect features is found within hip-hop as well. The genre is associated with African American English (AAE), and even native speakers of the dialect increase the use of features like copula deletion in order to project what Alim (2002) calls a street-conscious identity. Within the United States, there is dialect contact between African Americans and whites, and white artists in hip-hop also shift toward AAE features (Guy and Cutler, 2011). In particular, Guy (1991) finds an exponential relation between rates of coronal stop deletion in monomorphemic lexical items, regular past tense verbs, and irregular past tense verbs in English speech. However, white artists increase their deletion rates of coronal stop deletion such that the relation between these categories is significantly different from the relation in speech. For this reason, Guy and Cutler view white artists' style shifting as a performance of style. Although globally hip-hop often is performed using local languages, within Canada the tendency is to adopt AAE features (Clarke and Hiscock, 2009, p. 246), much like other Anglophone music.

Style shifting among Anglophone singers is so prevalent that some argue American English features serve as the default accent for popular music (Gibson and Bell, 2012). This is true to the extent that cases where a band does *not* shift are highly noteworthy. For example, Beal (2009a) looks at the Arctic Monkeys, a British rock band from Sheffield, England that uses predominantly local features. Although they achieved mainstream success in the 2000-2010s, they did not originate as a mainstream British rock band using the USA-5 model. Beal views the dialect choices of the Arctic Monkeys as an act of identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985). In their songs, it is important not only that there is the presence of local features, but also that there is the absence of the USA-5 features. Both are choices; in each case, the artist selects what identity to

present. In the case of the Arctic Monkeys, the indie band portrays themselves in their

chosen manner to highlight their rejection of the corporate structure of the music industry

(Beal, 2009a). Similarly, as in rock, there appear to be choices made when hip-hop is

performed in a local accent. For example, Gazeebow Unit, a hip-hop group from

Newfoundland, uses local features satirically (Clarke and Hiscock, 2009).

The choices that Beal argues for are made clear in Gibson and Bell's (2012) study

of New Zealand singers. Based on a phonetic analysis of eight vowels (DRESS, TRAP,

THOUGHT, LOT, START, GOOSE, GOAT, and PRICE) and interviews with the artists about their

work, they show that there were very few vowel tokens of New Zealand English that

appeared in song overall, and they did so only when the singer had explicitly indicated a

positive evaluation of NZE in interviews. Couching their discussion in terms of Audience

Design (Bell, 1984), they argue that artists will sing with the USA-5 model, unless they

feel strongly about their identity as a New Zealander. In this case, they will use more

local features.

2.2. Authenticity as Commodity: Much like news broadcasts and other types of mass

media, popular music raises questions of its authenticity when sung in a vernacular

dialect. In the context of speech, authenticity has been typically viewed as the vernacular

of a community (Coupland, 2009, p. 284). This contrasts with popular music.

Performances are planned speech, which has usually been seen as inauthentic. Clearly,

stylization has a complex relationship with authenticity (Coupland, 2001a). One issue

with the question of authentic speech is that speech may be just one element of a

performance. Authenticity may include authentic speech, but contains several other

elements, including (among others) a performer's dress and content. Instead of reifying a

clear binary of authenticity and inauthenticity, then, discussion of authenticity should center on who considers something to be authentic and on what basis that decision is made (van Leeuwen, 2001, pp. 396-397). For consumers of music, authenticity is not necessarily historically accurate. Rather, it is a social construct, a culturally agreed upon way to (mis)remember the past (Peterson, 1997). As such, Coupland (2001b) problematizes the view of authentic speech as vernacular, pointing out that depending on the context, there are several ways in which speech may be perceived as authentic. Of these, authentic speech in popular music could perhaps be seen as 'personal authenticity' or 'language expressing authentic cultural membership' (Coupland, 2001b). This view of authenticity fits in well with proposals from other fields; Barker and Taylor (2007) conceive of authenticity as being representational (something is what it claims to be), personal (something reflects its maker), or cultural (something is part of a cultural tradition).

Like Barker and Taylor (2007), I consider authenticity from the perspective of the audience. There may not be a clear definition of authenticity, but an audience member could reasonably claim to 'know it when they see it'. This means two things: there is something about a performance that registers as authentic, and it is important enough that the audience notices it. I posit that this something, tangible or not, is enregistered (Agha, 2003, see Beal, 2009b; Johnstone, 2009; Remlinger, 2009 for use in sociolinguistics) as authentic. A performance with authenticity, then, is one that contains some feature or value that is enregistered as authentic for a given genre. If it is a value that is enregistered as authentic, there must be some feature of the performance that indexes that value (Eckert, 2008). The importance of authenticity to a performance may be seen by

returning to the audience's perspective. If the audience perceives a performance as authentic, it is viewed more positively than if the performance is inauthentic. This makes authenticity a target to attempt to reach (Barker and Taylor, 2007), and performers may have to earn the perception of authenticity (Coupland, 2007, p. 184). As such, it is in the performer's interest to *perform authenticity*, that is, perform in a manner that indexes the values enregistered as authentic. Following Coupland (2001b), we may take popular music to be performing personal authenticity or authentic cultural membership. This means that depending on the context and genre, artists would perform authenticity differently.

Different genres are performed differently, and the value of a performance is rooted in the genre it is based in (Coupland, 2011). This means that the authenticity of a performance is likewise rooted in genre. Due to the need for authenticity, it is commodified (Johnstone, 2009). If the audience prefers an authentic performance, it is necessary for the artist to achieve authenticity in order to be commercially viable. Authenticity as commodity resembles, but crucially differs from, the position taken by Cutler (1999, 2002) that authenticity for white American hip-hoppers is constructed through commodified lifestyle choices. Under my approach, the lifestyle choices mark one as having the commodified authenticity. Note, however, that from both perspectives, style, commodification, and authenticity are closely linked. While there may well be an economic effect, this view of commodification is taken to mean the reification of a social process, rather than the more literal approach to merchandise like T-shirts and dialect dictionaries seen in Johnstone (2009) and Beal (2009b).

As language can be used to construct authenticity (Coupland, 2001a), it may also be used to perform it. This may be seen in the use or lack thereof of American English features by native non-American Anglophone singers. Artists adopt features of American English not because their music is American, but because their genres are sold as espousing American values. In this way, dialect stylization serves to perform a persona (Coupland, 2001a) of one who shares those values. We might expect that given the commodification of authenticity, every artist would style shift; however, there are two reasons not to do so. One is that the artist is already commercially successful, as in the case of the Beatles reverting toward their native speech (Trudgill, 1983). With their cultural authenticity well-established, personal authenticity may play a bigger role, encouraging the use of local features (Berger and Taylor, 2007). The other case is when a genre's authenticity entails a rejection of commodification and corporatism; this occurs in the case of the Arctic Monkeys (Beal, 2009a). Observe that in this case, however, language is still used to perform authenticity.

2.3. Country Music: Although country music is performed around the world, it is viewed as predominantly American (Murphy, 2014). As a result of conscious planning within the industry, it has in particular been traditionally linked to the white working-class of the Southern US. The music industry has historically used racial and cultural definitions to designate particular genres for particular consumer groups, regardless of the background of the music itself. This is especially true of country music (Barker and Taylor, 2007, p. 36). Country began as 'hillbilly music', recordings of traditional rural American music by white artists. This was looked down upon by record executives based

in New York, who saw it as a lower art. Hillbilly music was sharply defined by class, and the urban/rural divide already evident in the 1920s served to define hillbilly's target audience. Despite this, the Great Depression and the growth of radio combined to spread hillbilly throughout the Midwest and Southern US, as it was the cheapest way to fill airtime (Pecknold, 2007, pp. 18-36). Its radio presence led record companies to invest more in the genre. By the 1950s, the genre was based in Nashville, Tennessee, home of the Grand Old Opry radio program.

As the genre's popularity grew, the industry needed a less pejorative name for it than *hillbilly*; *Billboard* magazine settled on *country* by the mid-1940s (Pecknold, 2007, pp. 58-59). By the 1950s, there were clear definitions of the cultural values that country music espoused: those of the Southern, white working-class. It was this same time period that country music spread globally, aided by migration of soldiers from the Southern US (Peterson and DiMaggio, 1975, p. 502). Even as the target audience moved from the working-class to the middle and upper classes, the association with class remained. As a result, marketing practices still encouraged to listeners reject any middle-class influence on the music. The cultural values associated with country music have remained long past the initial stereotype (Pecknold, 2007).

After rock and roll gained popularity in the 1950s, country music rarely received airplay on the new Top 40 format radio stations. Artists and producers adjusted by abandoning what some would consider traditional country music in favor of incorporating pop elements into their music (Holt, 2009, pp. 66-69). Because most of the top singing talent worked with the same session musicians in Nashville studios, these adjustments became standardized into what was called the Nashville Sound. In this,

country styles like honky-tonk and bluegrass largely disappeared, exiled to other cities in

Texas and Southern California. At the same time, traditional instruments like steel

guitars, banjos, and fiddles were traded in for a more orchestral string accompaniment.

Above all, the Nashville Sound incorporated a smoother sound, taken from pop jazz

influences (Holt, 2009, pp. 70-72). In this way, country music became a corporate

production, meant to be sold to a mainstream audience. This has continued in Nashville

to the present day.

Not everyone appreciated the changes made in Nashville. Critics of the Nashville

Sound argued that it was not country music, because it ignored the key values of tradition

and authenticity (Holt, 2009, p. 75). Murphy (2014) views Nashville as practically

hegemonic within the genre, full of 'corporate propaganda' designed to convince the

public that country is exclusive to the Southern US and marginalize other varieties not

adhering to the stereotype. Yet the perception of country as Southern is quite strong, and

artists will move to Nashville in order to claim it as their background. While Southern

authenticity may be a myth (Murphy, 2014), it is very much reified. Rather than

traditional musical styles or songs, Peterson argues that values conveyed by the music—

the populism, individualism, fatalism, and anti-urbanism of poor and working-class

Southern whites—are what give it a sense of authenticity, more so than who the actual

listeners are or if the actual music accurately represents its historical tradition (Peterson,

1997, pp. 5-9). In other words, these values are enregistered as authentic—regardless of

whether the conveyer of such values is actually someone who those values describe. This

sense of authenticity has been a hallmark of country since its hillbilly days; radio

performers often had to dress for the role they played, even though no one would see

them (Peterson, 1997, p. 92). The highly commercialized nature of country music today, while perhaps not traditional in the sense that its critics would prefer, nevertheless has authenticity through the values it continues to convey. At the same time, the corporate production of country music lays bare the commodification of authenticity.

2.4. Is Authentic Country Expressed Linguistically? Because white Southern working-class values are enregistered as authentic, artists need some strategy for accessing them. Some strategies are more overt than others. For example, consider the radio performers dressing for their role (Peterson, 1997), or the backstories as hailing from the Southern or Western US that artists from New England would create for themselves (Murphy, 2014). Likewise, a cowboy hat and boots are nearly universal parts of modern country artists' wardrobes. We might expect language use to be another strategy, as it may be used to construct authenticity (Coupland, 2001a). This is especially the case because linguistic features in staged performances like recorded music are conscious and pre-meditated (Bell and Gibson, 2011, pp. 557-558). In the view of Bell and Gibson, this conscious selection of linguistic features occurs not to identify with audience members who use the features, but instead to refer to the accent with those features. If we view linguistic features as associated with an indexical field (Eckert, 2008), selective use of them would index a country persona and the values associated with it. In this manner, we would expect language use to index the values enregistered as authentic, and by extension, authenticity itself.

Ethnomusicological studies certainly suggest that country music's authenticity has had an effect on the speech of its artists. As the focus of these studies was on music and not language, however, they are understandably vague as to what that effect is exactly.

For example, Peterson (1997, p. 71) claims that in the early days of country music, a radio performer's accent, grammar, and vocabulary had to be sufficiently hillbilly to be believable. What those features were, however, is unknown. Discussion of modern music is even vaguer: Peterson (1997, pp. 150-151) claims that as the Nashville Sound came into effect, artists used more of a general American accent. From that point to at least the 1990s, he describes two general categories of country music—hard-core and soft-shell— which were accompanied by two different approaches to an artist's speech. A hard-core artist will use a Southern or Southwestern accent, with white Southern vocabulary and grammar whenever possible. Soft-shell singers, on the other hand, use standard American grammar, with a general American accent or 'a melodious regional accent with all the hard edges extracted' (Peterson, 1997, pp. 150-51). It is not at all clear what Peterson means by this.

Other attempts to be more specific understandably lack rigor as well; Murphy (2014, pp. 64-65) claims that country today uses nasality and twang, made with assistance from the 'flexibility of the palate.' While this and descriptions like it are not particularly clear or accurate, they do inform us in one important way: something appears to be going on with country singers and linguistic features. Because we have reason to expect this, there are grounds for a more rigorous linguistic study. Outside of one study showing some Australian country artists style shift while others do not (Snider, 2002), previous studies have focused more on the acoustics of singing, finding that country singers who are native speakers of Southern American English sing similarly to their speech in terms of formant frequency and long-term average spectrum (Cleveland et al., 2001; Stone et al., 1999).

3. Methodology: Alim (2002) shows through comparison of interview and song data that hip-hop performers produce linguistic features differently in song and speech. As such, it is important to compare both kinds of data for country singers. While Keith Urban, an Australian, is the central focus of this study, it is important to compare his production of variables to that of American artists. This serves to contextualize any differences between speech and song displayed by Urban, as well as to show how he behaves in relation to other performers of the genre. In order to directly compare the speech and singing styles of different artists, data was collected from artists of a similar age, gender, and career path. Based on these criteria, three American country artists were selected for analysis in addition to Urban: Kenny Chesney, Toby Keith, and Tim McGraw. Each artist was born and raised in a different place – Chesney in Knoxville, Tennessee, Keith in central Oklahoma, and McGraw in northeast Louisiana. However, the rest of their backgrounds are fairly similar. While each was raised in a different place, they are the same gender and close in age. Additionally, each began performing around the middle of the 1990s, and still perform today as highly regarded superstars.

We may wonder whether artists change their variable production in real time throughout their careers. While this was not the central focus of the current study, data was collected with this possibility in mind. As such, two songs were selected from each of several albums by each artist. For each artist, songs came from their debut album, a more recent album, and two or three albums spaced throughout their career, depending on the prolificness of the artist[2]. In all, data was collected from ten total songs across five

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[2]

       For Keith Urban, I counted his US debut as a member of The Ranch as his debut album.

albums for Keith and Chesney, and eight total songs across four albums for McGraw and Urban, for a total of 36 songs (see the Appendix for the complete discography). Under the reasoning that any song on an album should be representative of the whole, song selection was arbitrary. Speech samples were collected from podcasts; for Keith, McGraw, and Chesney, this was an interview with a country music-themed radio show from 2006, while for Urban it was an annotated playlist recorded for iTunes in 2009.

3.1. Features: Data was collected on three variables: PRICE monophthongization, (ING), and coda /r/ production. In each case, the variable was treated as a binary outcome and measured impressionistically. This approach does erase some of the variability in the production of the PRICE vowel: Fridland (2001, 2003) observes that the vowel may be produced with a full glide, a shortened glide, or no glide at all. The latter two are characteristic of Southern American English. Impressionistic data collection conflates these categories; however, this is not problematic, as Fridland (2003, p. 288) eventually combines the two in her data analysis. Tokens were additionally coded for variation within the feature. Since for many Southerners PRICE monophthongization occurs before voiced obstruents, but not voiceless (Bernstein, 2006; Fridland, 2001, 2003; Labov et al., 2006), the following environment was noted for this feature. Additionally, because the lexical item *I* is more common than other lexical items containing the PRICE vowel, the data was coded for whether the token represented *I* or some other lexical item. While the Australian English pronunciation would be with a diphthong, models of phonology that account for lexical frequency would predict lexical items like *I* to be reduced in production, potentially to a monophthong (see Bybee, 2001, among others, for discussion).

The (ING) variable was coded for production of the affix with either a velar nasal [ɪŋ] or an alveolar nasal [ɪn], in words like *running*. Again, tokens were coded for factors previously shown to influence variation. Because the history of *-ing* differs for nouns and participles, part of speech plays a role in favoring one variant or the other (Houston, 1985). Furthermore, lexical items ending in *–thing* have been shown to be produced by Southerners as nearly categorically [ɪn] in the case of *nothing, something*, and as nearly categorically [ɪŋ] in the case of *everything, anything* (Hazen, 2006). As such, tokens were coded as nominal, participial, or ending in *–thing*. Coda /r/ was coded as whether the consonant was present or absent in the artists' production. Data was additionally coded for the vowel preceding /r/, the following environment, and whether the variable appeared word-internally or word-finally.

The three features considered here represent three kinds of variables. PRICE monophthongization is a Southern American English feature that is highly salient and associated with the Southern US (Simpson, 1999, p. 347). While Simpson (1999) describes it as a feature used to approximate American English in popular music, we may expect it to potentially have a different meaning in the context of country music. As Bell (1984) observes, when a speaker is imitating a group that they are unfamiliar with, the speaker can make mistakes. In this view, singers aiming for a General American accent within Simpson's USA-5 model are making a mistake in their use of monophthong PRICE, as it is not a general American feature. In contrast, if country singers use this feature to reference a Southern accent, it would not be a mistake, as it actually is a Southern feature.

(ING), on the other hand, is a variable present in all varieties of English that more often reflects class divisions than regions (Hazen, 2006). However, some studies argue

the alveolar variant is favored in the Southern US (Campbell-Kibler, 2008; Hazen, 2006).

Despite this, listeners often perceive the alveolar variant of (ING) to be a Southern

feature (Campbell-Kibler, 2007). It is possible, then, that artists would utilize this feature

to access this perception. Finally, coda /r/ is a feature of General American English, while

Australian English is non-rhotic. Although Southern American English was historically

non-rhotic, it quickly underwent a change to rhoticity in the 20th century, becoming like

General American in this regard (Feagin, 1990; Labov et al., 2006). Australian English,

however, is non-rhotic (Trudgill and Gordon, 2006). While rhoticity is not a Southern

feature *per se*, it would be a highly salient feature for an Australian in contact with the

dialect.

4. Results and Data Analysis: This methodology obtained 1,438 tokens of the PRICE

vowel, 451 tokens of (ING), and 1,306 tokens of coda /r/. Data for each variable was

analyzed in the same manner: using a binary logistic regression model with fixed effects

(Bates et al., 2014), followed by a Tukey HSD post-hoc test (R Core Team, 2013). Binary

logistic regression is a type of model that estimates the probability of a binary,

categorical outcome occurring (for example [ɪn] vs. [ɪŋ]), represented for each factor by

the coefficient β. This differs from linear regression, where β represents the estimated

influence of the factor. The logistic regression model serves to look for differences

between artists and between speech and song after accounting for other variables, while

the post-hoc test shows where pairwise differences between artists are. In no case was

there an effect in real time; as such, the data from each album has been collapsed into one

category of sung data.

4.1. PRICE Monophthongization: As seen in Figure 1,[3] each artist monophthongizes PRICE at surprisingly high rates overall. The American artists each do so over 90% of the time in speech and song, and Keith Urban matches this rate in song. In the case of the Americans' speech, this greatly exceeds monophthongization rates found in the speech of speakers of Southern American English in Memphis, Tennessee (Fridland, 2003). It should be noted that Urban's monophthongization rate of approximately 60% in speech is also quite high compared to what we would expect from an Australian.
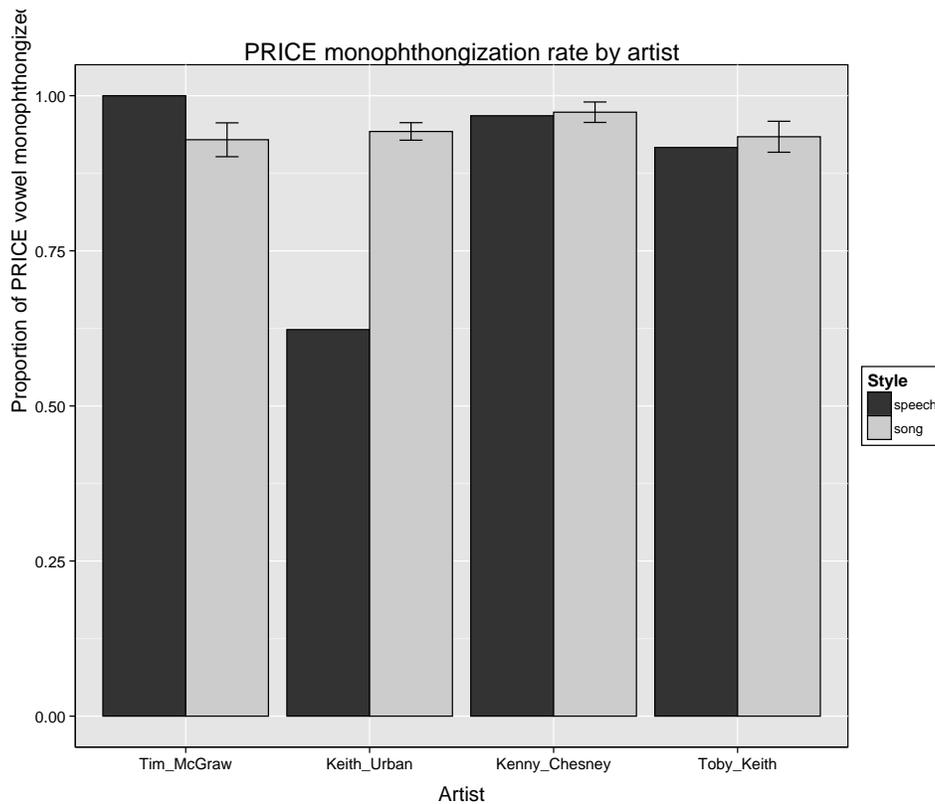

Figure 1. PRICE monophthongization rate by artist.

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 Error bars in the following figures represent the variability between individual songs in artists' production of each variable. Since only one podcast was used per artist, there are no error bars for speech because there is no variability between speech samples.

The logistic regression model uses as fixed effects the artist, speech style (song or speech), lexical item, and following segment. It additionally looked for an interaction between artist and style, as well as artist and the year the token was recorded. These interactions would show whether one artist in particular was style shifting more or less than the others in the case of the former, and whether any artist was changing their production over time in the case of the latter. The baseline condition used, represented in the intercept, was Tim McGraw's speech in a lexical item other than *I*, preceding a voiceless obstruent. As seen in Table 1, this baseline condition was an environment that favored PRICE monophthongization. Factors with significant effects refer to contexts in which monophthongization is more likely (positive values) or less likely (negative values). The coefficient β indicates the degree to which the probability is different; values further from zero indicate probabilities closer to 0% or 100%. As such, Keith Urban is less likely to monophthongize PRICE than McGraw ($p < 0.001$), with the other artists showing no significant difference. At the same time, if the vowel was sung, it is more likely to be monophthongized ($p \ll 0.0001$). This is true if the lexical item is *I* as well ($p \ll 0.0001$). Finally, monophthongization is slightly more likely when PRICE precedes a voiced obstruent ($p < 0.01$), reflecting the distribution of the variable in normal speech (Bernstein, 2003; Fridland, 2001; Labov et al., 2006). It is far less likely when preceding a vowel ($p \ll 0.0001$), however.

Factor	β	p-value
Intercept	1.17072	**0.001649**
Artist: Keith Urban	-1.06473	**0.000837**
Artist: Kenny Chesney	0.81834	0.065843
Artist: Toby Keith	-0.04023	0.908606
Style: song	1.50228	**0.00000000000914**
Lexical item is 'I'	1.3042	**0.00000187**
Following segment: Voiced obstruent	0.80991	**0.008229**

Following segment: Vowel	-3.00528	**0.0000000193**
Following segment: Other	-0.10868	0.708691

Table 1. Logistic regression of PRICE monophthongization

Tukey's HSD tests were used to examine pairwise differences between artists'

production of the variable. It was conducted on two subsets of the data: the sung tokens

and the spoken tokens. Table 2 gives the pairwise p-values between artists. Significant

effects reflect a difference in production between the pair. As seen, Keith Urban

significantly differs from each American artist in his spoken PRICE vowels ($p \ll 0.0001$),

although the Americans do not significantly differ from each other. In song, however, no

artist produces PRICE significantly differently than any other artist.

Artist Pair	Sung data p-value	Spoken data p-value
Urban-McGraw	0.987563	**0.0000009**
Chesney-McGraw	0.218503	0.975731
Keith-McGraw	0.956654	0.689054
Chesney-Urban	0.368471	**< 0.0000001**
Keith-Urban	0.998267	**0.0000004**
Keith-Chesney	0.430294	0.845492

Table 2. Tukey's HSD for PRICE monophthongization

4.2. (ING): Figure 2 shows the alveolar production [ɪn] of the (ING) variable. As the

figure shows, there is variability between artists in speech, although these differences are

lessened in song. Each artist uses the alveolar variant at quite high rates in song.
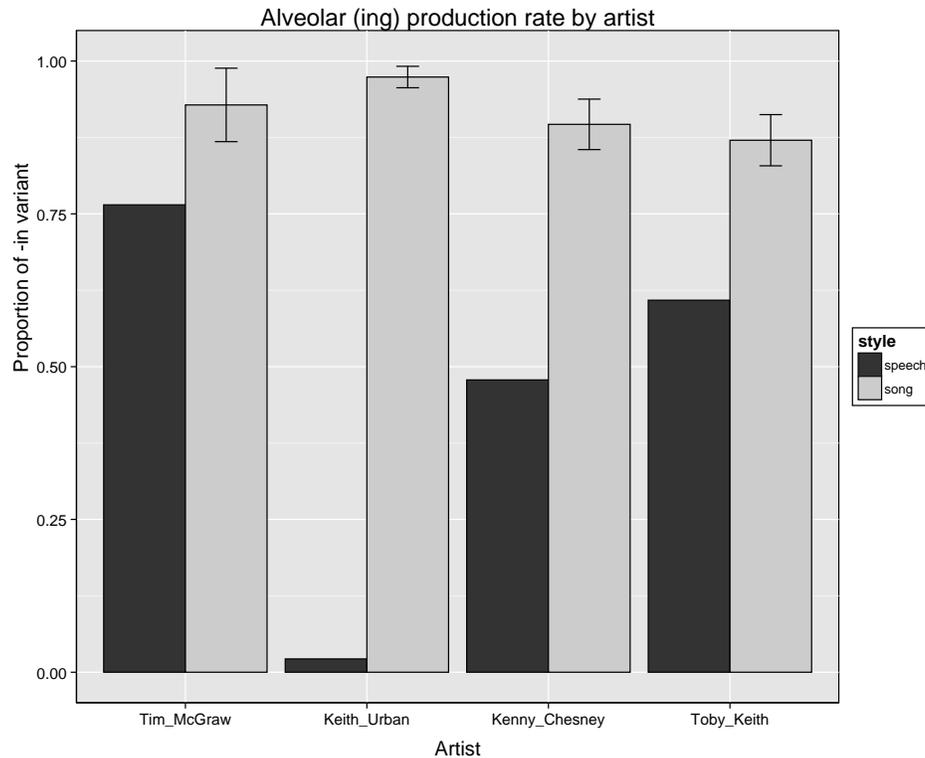
Figure 2. Alveolar (ING) production rate by artist.

The logistic regression model again uses the fixed effects of artist and style, as well as the type of –ing token (nominal, participial, etc.). As with the PRICE vowel, interactions between artist/style and artist/year recorded were considered. Likewise, Tim McGraw's speech was maintained as the baseline condition. Nominal –ing lexical items were treated as baseline. Table 3 shows the results of the regression model; negative effect sizes favor use of the alveolar variant. As seen, the baseline condition favors the alveolar variant. Keith Urban is far more likely to use the velar variant than McGraw ($p \ll 0.0001$), but Kenny Chesney and Toby Keith also favor the velar variant ($p < 0.05$ for each). Style by itself is not significant as a result of the strong interaction between style and song; compared to Tim McGraw, when Keith Urban sings, he is far more likely to use the alveolar variant ($p \ll 0.0001$). The net effect of this, however, is that Urban is

less likely than McGraw to use the alveolar variant in speech, but more likely in song.

Finally, while other lexical items like *morning, feeling*, and those ending in *–thing* are

more likely to be velar than nominals ($p \ll 0.0001$), there is no significant effect for

participials.

Factor	β	p-value
Intercept	-2.0192	**0.012**
Artist: Keith Urban	5.7849	**0.00000502**
Artist: Kenny Chesney	1.9317	**0.0299**
Artist: Toby Keith	1.8166	**0.0421**
Style: song	-1.2534	0.1678
Type: other	1.6281	**0.0228**
Type: participial	-0.8574	0.0812
Type: -thing	3.0894	**0.0000000603**
Artist: Keith Urban:style: song	-7.0959	**0.00000364**
Artist: Kenny Chesney:style: song	-1.4838	0.1855
Artist: Toby Keith:style: song	-0.4312	0.6948

Table 3. Logistic regression for (ING)

Table 4 shows the results of Tukey's HSD tests, again divided by spoken vs. sung

data. As with PRICE, Keith Urban's use of (ING) in speech is significantly different from

that of the Americans ($p \ll 0.0001$). Although there is variability in the Americans' use

of (ING) in speech, no one artist produced the variable significantly differently from

another. This difference again disappears in song; no artist sings (ING) significantly

differently from another.

Artist Pair	Sung data p-value	Spoken data p-value
Urban-McGraw	0.909974	**< 0.0000001**
Chesney-McGraw	0.506202	0.093538
Keith-McGraw	0.257899	0.577846
Chesney-Urban	0.149724	**0.0000484**
Keith-Urban	0.052502	**0.0000001**
Keith-Chesney	0.963018	0.652979

Table 4. Tukey's HSD for (ING)

4.3. Coda /r/: As with the other two variables, Keith Urban produces coda /r/ differently

from the Americans overall, as seen in Figure 3. Likewise, Urban again produces the

variable more in line with the Americans in song. However, this variable differs in that

Toby Keith and Kenny Chesney lower their rhoticity in song. While they are rhotic to

about the same degree as Urban in song, this is because Urban dramatically increases his

rhoticity in song. Tim McGraw, on the other hand, nearly matches his spoken rhoticity in

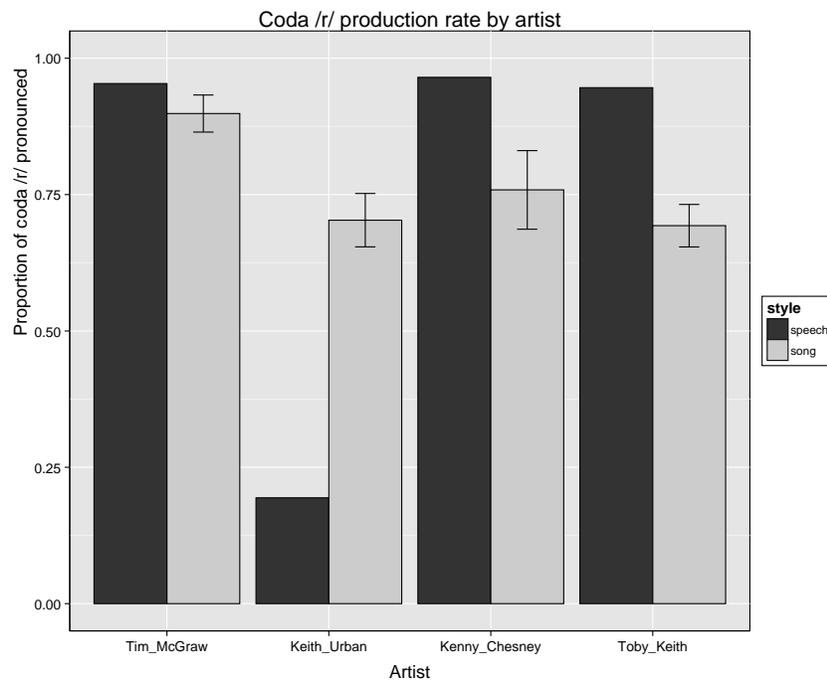song, with the effect that he appears to be more rhotic than the other artists.

Figure 3. Coda /r/ production rate by artist.

As with the other variables, the degree to which Keith Urban style shifts

dominates the logistic regression model. The model summarized in Table 5 uses fixed

effects of artist, style, following consonant, and preceding vowel. As before, it looks for

an interaction between artist and style and artist and year recorded. Tim McGraw's

speech remains the baseline condition, with a preceding vowel of LETTER and with a

pause following. Positive effect sizes indicate more rhoticity. As seen in Table 5, the baseline condition greatly favors rhoticity. Keith Urban is strongly likely to be non-rhotic (p << 0.0001), with no significant effect attributed to other artists. Occasional following consonants and preceding vowels have an effect: rhoticity is more likely when a voiced fricative follows (p < 0.05), while it is less likely when the vowel is START or NORTH (p < 0.01; p << 0.0001). There is again a significant interaction between artist and style, with Keith Urban much more likely to be rhotic in song than speech (p << 0.0001).

Factor	β	p-value
Intercept	3.58943	**0.00000220**
Artist: Keith Urban	-4.72746	**0.000000000817**
Artist: Kenny Chesney	0.28345	0.78357
Artist: Toby Keith	-0.32208	0.72077
Style: song	-1.20298	0.11467
Following consonant: voiced stop	-0.16984	0.52401
Following consonant: h	0.48445	0.32033
Following consonant: l	0.77044	0.06754
Following consonant: nasal	-0.14206	0.6118
Following consonant: r	-0.09149	0.89322
Following consonant: voiceless fricative	-0.50405	0.09121
Following consonant: voiceless stop	-0.31187	0.22645
Following consonant: glide	-0.02176	0.95282
Following consonant: voiced fricative	0.58935	**0.04569**
Vowel: START	-0.71697	**0.00212**
Vowel: SQUARE	-0.47427	0.11202
Vowel: NEAR	0.62632	0.11225
Vowel: NORTH	-1.09301	**0.00000846**
Vowel: CURE	-0.02632	0.90195
Vowel: HOUR	-0.76221	0.18619
Vowel: FIRE	-0.65522	0.26977
Artist: Keith Urban:style: song	3.33924	**0.0000382**
Artist: Kenny Chesney:style: song	-1.27271	0.23202
Artist: Toby Keith:style: song	-0.7829	0.40187

Table 5. Logistic regression for coda /r/

The results of Tukey's HSD tests are summarized in Table 6. As with PRICE and (ING), Urban's production of coda /r/ in speech differs from each American artist (p << 0.0001), although they do not differ from each other. In song, however, Urban does not differ from Kenny Chesney or Toby Keith. All three significantly differ from Tim McGraw (p < 0.001).

Artist Pair	Sung data p-value	Spoken data p-value
Urban-McGraw	**.0000017**	**< 0.0000001**
Chesney-McGraw	**0.000678**	0.997769
Keith-McGraw	**0.0000406**	0.999244
Chesney-Urban	0.478646	**< 0.0000001**
Keith-Urban	0.743013	**< 0.0000001**
Keith-Chesney	0.959729	0.985133

Table 6. Tukey's HSD for coda/r/

4.4. Summary: Visual inspection of the data for each variable suggests that Keith Urban produces them differently from the American artists in speech but not in song, which is confirmed by Tukey's HSD tests. While logistic regression shows other factors known to affect production of the variables to have an effect (particularly the segment following PRICE), the difference between Urban and the other artists persists. Although the Americans display some variability between speech and song, this effect is prominently on display in the case of Urban.

5. Discussion: Based on the data outlined above, it appears that Keith Urban engages in style shifting on each variable. While in speech he nearly categorically uses velar [ɪŋ] and non-rhoticity, he shifts to using alveolar [ɪn] and rhoticity in song. His use of monophthongal PRICE is moderate in speech, yet nearly categorical in song. While it is monophthongized significantly more before voiced obstruents than voiceless, it is still nearly categorical in all environments. This is interesting because the use of the

monophthong preceding voiceless obstruents has a working-class connotation, with those who use it labeled as 'hicks' (Bernstein, 2003). The level to which Urban shifts perhaps obscures any shifting the American artists may engage in, particularly with the (ING) variable, which may be seen through visual inspection of the data but does not reach significance. Evidence that style shifting is occurring lies in that there is no difference in (ING) production between nominal and participials, something which would be expected from non-shifted speech.

Likewise, the high degree of monophthongal PRICE use in speech seemingly obscures style shifting. Each American artist uses the monophthong at far higher rates than found in sociolinguistic interviews of Southerners (see Fridland, 2001, 2003). At the same time, Urban's moderate use of the monophthong is quite high in and of itself. This suggests that all four artists are in fact style shifting already in speech, using monophthong PRICE to index a country singer persona (see Eckert, 2008). Because the podcasts used involve the artists' public personas, this is not entirely surprising. It is striking to note, though, that Urban further style shifts in song.

A further finding is that while the American artists display some variability in speech, particularly the (ING) variable, they produce each variable remarkably similarly in song. Furthermore, Urban's style shifting places his sung variables in line with the production of the American artists. The sole exception is Tim McGraw's high degree of rhoticity in sung coda /r/; however, note that all four artists favor rhoticity in this situation. Although McGraw differs in degree, he does not differ in trend. Because listeners find multiple meanings in features (Campbell-Kibler, 2008), use of these

features combine to index a Southern working-class persona. This is potentially true of PRICE or (ING) in isolation, but their co-occurrence strengthens the connection.

We are thus left with two questions: why does Urban style shift so dramatically? And what do we make of the striking similarity between each of the artists in song? I argue that it stems from the commodification of authenticity in music genres. As discussed previously, while authenticity may not be precisely defined, there is a sense that it is necessary to be a successful performer. An artist must perform authenticity somehow, which means they must perform the values that make for an authentic performance of the genre. These values may vary by genre, but in the case of country music, white, Southern American working-class values are enregistered as authentically country. As a result, an artist's performance must index these values in order to be authentic and thus commercially viable.

There are several strategies one might take to index oneself as white, Southern American, and working-class.[4] One may give themselves a backstory as such a person, as done by many New England country and western singers of the early 20th century (Murphy, 2014, p. 131). This may be seen perhaps in the move to Nashville that all four artists in this study undertook. But note that Kenny Chesney, Tim McGraw, and Toby

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4

An anonymous reviewer asks whether working-class values are being co-performed with masculinity, since the artists sampled are all male. This does not seem to be the case, at least not to such a degree that it would stop female country singers from using the same features. While a more rigorous study is beyond the scope of this paper, anecdotally, female country singers seem to use the features described here in the same manner as males.

Keith were born and raised in the Southern US.[5] They actually have the authentic backstory to a degree, with little exaggeration needed. Keith Urban, despite his relocation to Nashville, remains an outsider, and cannot access such a backstory. Thus, this strategy is unavailable to him to perform authentic country.

A similar strategy lies in overt textual reference to being white, working-class, or from the South. Each of the American artists engage in explicit reference to these values. For example, Kenny Chesney speaks of East Tennessee in 'Baptism,' and 'Paris, Tennessee' is entirely about a rural town of that name that lies outside of Nashville. Likewise, Tim McGraw mentions New Orleans in 'Something Like That.' The explicit reference of Southern locales should not detract from the sense that the songs as a whole carry a rural connotation. Indeed, urban place references are few and urban cultural references are nearly non-existent.

Like the rural Southern values, working-class values appear in song lyrics. McGraw and Chesney reference it through allusion, using work on farms to represent working-class endeavors. For example, in 'She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy,' Chesney goes out of his way to emphasize that he works hard, proclaiming of his girlfriend, 'She's even kind of crazy 'bout my farmer's tan.' In the same manner, McGraw uses the farm to emphasize how hard he works in 'Ain't No Angels:'

> I've led a lifetime fightin' this land
> Workin' for nothin' with these dry, callused hands.
> I'm a slave to the sun, it ain't cuttin' me no slack.

5

One could perhaps argue that Keith, from rural Oklahoma, is not truly Southern, but he certainly has more ties to the region than Urban.

Gets me beggin' whenever I look back

Toby Keith more explicitly labels himself as working-class, much like Chesney and McGraw do with Southern locales. In his approach, he proves his working-class identity by reiterating it again and again in an attempt to earn authenticity as working-class. In the sample of songs used in this study, Keith explicitly claims to be working-class once, while referencing or calling himself 'average' or a 'regular Joe' five times. Furthermore, his song 'Can't Buy You Money' is entirely about being working-class, using referents like a trip to Wal-Mart, a broken-down truck, a low income, and an inability to pay bills. Likewise, in 'Get Drunk and Be Somebody,' Keith relates how despite working 40 hour weeks, he remains well below his boss in social rank. Finally, in 'Red Solo Cup,' Keith sings, 'And unlike my home they are not foreclosable. Freddie Mac[6] can kiss my ass!'

Keith Urban's lyrics provide a sharp contrast with the American artists, as his do not contain such explicit references to white Southern working-class values. Rather, what few songs appear to reference such values do so only vaguely. For example, 'Walk in the Country' would presumably reference the rural South, but does not explicitly represent anywhere in particular. Likewise, 'You'll Think of Me' mentions 'headlights on the interstate,' which is a reference to the US highway system. However, this reference is not restricted to the South in particular. I suggest that this avoidance of overt textual references is again due to Urban's status as an outsider; overt references may be perceived as inauthentic from him, while they would be perceived as authentic from

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6

    A mortgage company that foreclosed on many people's homes in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

McGraw, Chesney, or Keith. An example of this may be seen in 'Ghost in This Guitar,'
in which Urban relates a story of learning to play guitar from a black man in a segregated
town. Although racial issues are of course not limited solely to the United States, this
song appears to be clearly set in the US. Because Urban would not have actually
experienced such a situation, the song feels inauthentic.

If Keith Urban cannot perform country authenticity through his backstory or
lyrics, what strategies are left? I argue the remaining strategy available to him is
linguistic: by adopting features that index white Southern working-class values, he may
achieve perceived authenticity. As such, his use of monophthongal PRICE, alveolar (ING),
and rhoticity lend his performances a sense of authenticity where lyrics or backstory
cannot. Rhoticity marks Urban as a white American, while monophthong PRICE and
alveolar (ING) work together to index Southernness, as well as being working-class. This
linguistic practice bears a similarity to sung performances by Iggy Azalea, a white
Australian rapper who uses features of African American English in her performances
(see Eberhardt and Freeman, 2015). Based on this, an anonymous reviewer asks if Urban
is accepted by the public as a legitimate country singer. As far as I can tell, he appears to
be, given his successes both within and outside of music, including appearing on
American Idol as a talent judge. This is interesting, given the potential comparison to
Azalea, who has faced considerable backlash for cultural appropriation and perceived
inauthenticity. This may speak to differences in how authenticity is performed in the
different genres.

Of course, the American artists use these features as well. Where they differ from
Urban is in the importance of such features and the need to style shift to them. This is

because while the features are useful in performing authenticity for the American artists, their use is just one of several strategies they may employ in such a performance. This brings us to the questions raised by the data: the artists' production of each variable in song is strikingly similar because use of the variables to index white Southern working-class values allows artists to perform the commodified country authenticity. Keith Urban style shifts so dramatically compared to the Americans, however, because while style shifting is one of several strategies available to the Americans to achieve authenticity, it is the *only* strategy available to Urban. This situation resembles the case of white hip-hoppers discussed in Cutler 2002. Core hip-hoppers are secure in their connection to hip hop through MCing or DJing, although this does not preclude them from style shifting. In contrast, more peripheral hip-hoppers root their authenticity in their connection to the streets, using semiotic resources like language to establish themselves (Cutler, 2002, pp. 215-216). In the context of country music, this may be read as that Southern American country artists represent the 'core,' secure in their connection to country. However, non-American Anglophone artists like Keith Urban are more peripheral, necessitating the use of resources like language to root their authenticity. At the same time, because the artists who rely on linguistic features are peripheral, they may hypercorrect in their production of such features.[7]

In other words, while there is indeed a pressure to use certain features in one's sung speech, this pressure cannot simply be attributed to US hegemony. Rather, the commodification of authenticity provides it, necessitating a performance of authenticity

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[7]

        Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.

in order to be heavily commercialized. An artist does not *need* to perform authenticity then, but their work will be marginalized if they do not. This may be seen both in transnational and intra-national cases of dialect contact. Not every Australian country singer uses features that index white Southern working-class values (Snider, 2002), but those who do not are relatively unknown outside Australia. Likewise, Murphy (2014) observes that while country and western music is still played in New England, such artists are not well known. As such, commercialization and the commodification of authenticity has led to the development of a transnational standard for country music performance, which Keith Urban and the American country artists in this paper adhere to.

6. Conclusion: In this paper, I examine country music, a predominantly American genre, as performed by an Australian in a transnational case of dialect contact. Using the work of Keith Urban as an example, I compare his work to that of American artists in three features: monophthongal PRICE, (ING), and coda /r/. I demonstrate that while Urban heavily style shifts between speech and song, each artist examined behaves similarly to the others in song—including Urban. Offering a framework in which authenticity is commodified, I argue that white Southern working-class values are enregistered as authentic. The use of the features studied serves to index these enregistered values, offering artists a strategy for performing authenticity. While all artists engage in this, Urban does so particularly dramatically because as an outsider, other strategies for performing authenticity are unavailable to him. Under this analysis then, transnational dialect contact in popular music results in style shifting due to the need to perform the enregistered values of a genre's commodified authenticity.

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Appendix: Discography

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