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## ‘If ur from Toronto you’ll understand’: register change and metadiscursive engagement with mediatized Multicultural Toronto English

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Multicultural Toronto English (MTE) is a register found in Toronto, Canada, associated with racialized youth. The ongoing enregisterment of MTE takes place, in part, through metadiscourse on social media, which disseminates the register to a wider audience. This article examines online metadiscursive engagement with representations of MTE. We consider how audiences take up, receive and recontextualize MTE through metadiscourse across grassroots and institutional media platforms. We argue that audience engagement with pop-cultural representations of language is a critical driving force of enregisterment and register change.

**Keywords:** enregisterment, register change, mediatization, stylization, sociolinguistics

### 1 Introduction

Being mainly performed language (Werner 2022), the language of pop-cultural artifacts ‘move[s] the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies into a reflexive arena’ (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 60; Coupland 2001). As such, pop culture invites metadiscursive activity that maintains and transforms registers of discourse, what Agha (2005) calls ENREGISTERMENT. Whether in traditional manifestations (e.g. listening to music through YouTube) or novel, channel-specific forms of content (e.g. Instagram reels), social media has become a primary channel of distribution through which people not only consume but also actively engage with pop-cultural artifacts; it is the ‘reflexive arena’ itself.

Following Maudlin & Sandlin (2015: 369), who define pop culture as a ‘broad range of texts that constitute the cultural landscape of a particular time and/or place, as well as the ways in which consumers engage with those texts and thus become producers of new negotiated meanings’, we understand both social media content *and* its subsequent user engagement to fall squarely within the scope of pop culture

linguistics. Where subsequent engagement of pop culture was once mostly ephemeral and temporally and virtually divorced from the consumption of the media (e.g. one might watch a television show on Sunday night and then chat with a workmate about the episode the next day at the water cooler), with social media, uptake and response can be immediate, can take place within the same virtual environment as the media itself and leaves behind its own (virtual) artifacts (which can also be engaged with) in the form of comments and replies. In this article, we detail the importance of this subsequent virtual engagement with social media representations of language for the process of enregisterment and register change.

We concern ourselves specifically with representations of what we have labeled MULTICULTURAL TORONTO ENGLISH (MTE) (Denis *et al.* 2023) that appear on the ‘participatory web’ (Androutsopoulos 2010) and specifically a locally salient persona linked with this register. We are less directly concerned with the content – linguistic, discursive or otherwise – of these representations (cf. Slobe 2018) and instead focus on the ways in which audiences engage with these representations through their comments on social media posts, the metadiscursive content of that engagement, and how representations of characterological figures work to diffuse and recontextualize the semiotic values of distinct ways of speaking. As Agha (2007: 196) argues, ‘implicit typifications [in representations] are rendered more explicit through “uptake” and response in subsequent speech events’.

Since many MTE features originate in Jamaican Patwa and Somali<sup>1</sup> (languages of the city’s largest Black community and largest African diasporic community respectively), there exists a metadiscursive tension between the register’s ethnoracial-based indexicality on the one hand and its place-based indexicality on the other hand (Denis 2021). Audience engagement with representations of MTE exposes concomitant anxieties around multiculturalism, cultural appropriation and authenticity, all filtered through language ideologies that are consequential for the ways that real-life users of MTE – particularly Black youth – may find their speech construed. We are also interested in the differences in metadiscursive engagement with grassroots social media and with mainstream institutional media, and the consequences that these contrasting outlets have for sociolinguistic change – that is, ‘changing relationships between language and society’ (Coupland 2014: 70; Androutsopoulos 2014) – in the Toronto and Canadian contexts.

We first introduce MTE and its attendant ideologies (section 2.1). Next, we review and define our assumptions around the key theoretical and analytical concepts we adopt (section 2.2). After that, we introduce the media outlets from which our source data come (section 3), followed by an analysis of five representations that we consider, along with representative examples of metadiscourses present in audience engagement (section 4). It is this engagement and uptake of metadiscourse that we track to understand the kinds and flows of discourse around MTE and the production, maintenance and transformation of its valuation. Our analysis of this metadiscourse considers three themes: (i) the difference in uptake of stylized versus authentic representations of the Toronto Mans

<sup>1</sup> Some of the features locally linked to Somali are traceable to Arabic borrowings into Somali.

(a local characterological figure); (ii) the semiotic ambiguity of Jamaican Patwa vis-à-vis MTE; and (iii) differences in engagement across media institutions. We conclude with preliminary observations about the consequences that these wide-scale pop-cultural representations have for the process of enregisterment and sociolinguistic change vis-à-vis real-life speakers of MTE.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 *Multicultural Toronto English, 'Toronto Slang' and the Toronto Mans*

In earlier work (Denis *et al.* 2023), we argue that a multiethnolect is present in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA; Canada's largest conurbation and one of the most multicultural and multilingual cities in the world), which we label 'Multicultural Toronto English' (MTE; inspired by Cheshire *et al.*'s (2011) 'Multicultural London English'). Following this work, we understand multiethnolects to be languaging practices of young people, typically immigrants or the children of immigrants, that emerge in urban, working-class neighborhoods of first arrival. These neighborhoods are defined by global rather than communal migration and the result is a high degree of local multilingualism.

As with multiethnolects that have been documented in Europe, features of MTE appear at all levels of the grammar against a backdrop of the local, dominant language. They include variable TH-stopping (*thing* [θɪŋ~tɪŋ], *that* [ðæt~dæt]) (Bigelow *et al.* 2020), a distinct vowel space (Denis *et al.* 2023), pronominal *mans* (Denis 2016), pragmatic markers such as the confirmational marker *ahlie* (borrowed from Jamaican Patwa), utterance-final concessive *styll*, the commissive marker *wallahi* (borrowed from Somali but ultimately from Arabic) and a wide repertoire of lexical features – many borrowed and some that are homegrown (e.g. *waste yute* and *bucktee*, both pejoratives from Patwa and Somali respectively; *cheesed* 'angry'). While MTE features are used by people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, not all language varieties spoken by its users influence it to the same degree (or in many cases at all). In particular, Jamaican Patwa and Somali appear to have the greatest influence on the lexical features associated with MTE, though recent fieldwork has shown that West African languages (e.g. Yoruba, Twi and Naijá) may have begun to influence the register, at least in particular neighborhoods.

MTE is best understood as a REGISTER OF DISCOURSE, in Agha's (2007: 81) sense, defined as a 'cultural model of action (a) which links speech repertoires to stereotypic indexical values, (b) is performable through utterances (yields enactable personae/relationships), [and] (c) is recognized by a sociohistorical population'. Agha (2007) identifies the sociohistorical process through which signs come to belong to a register and acquire their stereotypic indexical value as enregisterment.

Enregisterment is an ongoing process, not a singular event, and thus, registers are ever changing. In particular, Agha (2007: 169) notes three dimensions of register change: (i) changes to a register's REPERTOIRE (number and type of forms); (ii) changes

to a register's SOCIAL RANGE or the totality of its enactable pragmatic values (e.g. stereotypes of speakers or appropriate usage); and (iii) changes to a register's SOCIAL DOMAIN, which include the persons who recognize the register (domain of recognition) and the persons who are competent in the use of the register (domain of fluency). Each of these dimensions is relevant for the ongoing enregisterment of MTE and we adopt Agha's framework in our analysis.

While MTE is an academic label, not widely used outside the sociolinguistic study of the register, it is intimately connected with what is locally labeled TORONTO SLANG. Toronto Slang is effectively a subset of enregistered lexical and discourse-pragmatic MTE features. Features of Toronto Slang are appropriately understood as a repertoire of REGISTER SHIBBOLETHS, 'the most conspicuous anchors of being "in register"' (Silverstein 2023: 121). The use of one or more of these register shibboleths – for those socialized into the register at least – saliently invokes an array of contextual information. Toronto Slang has been subject to increasing metadiscourse across the early twenty-first century. In addition to being discussed in everyday, ephemeral interactions, Toronto Slang is the subject of thousands of YouTube videos, TikToks, tweets, and other forms of new and social media content. More recently, Toronto Slang (and therefore MTE) as an ethno-metapragmatic subject has entered into mainstream media as well, consequently expanding its social domain, in particular the domain of recognition.

Registers of discourse yield enactable social personae, or characterological figures, defined as 'any image of personhood that is performable through semiotic display or enactment (such as an utterance)' (Agha 2007: 177). These 'interactional sketches' are 'highly detachable from occasions of use and can be reinserted into different situations in literal and tropic ways to yield characterological figures readily construed by someone acquainted with the stereotype' (Agha 2007: 54). The linguistic (and non-linguistic) diacritics of a characterological figure invite role alignment (be it positive or negative) in interaction with that characterological figure, which can reinforce or modify a register's social range.

One salient characterological figure that is linked with MTE is labeled the TORONTO MANS.<sup>2</sup> This persona is comprised of a 'bundle of semiotic resources' (Bucholtz 2011: 11) all of which are mediated through cultural discourses around race, place, class and gender. The Toronto Mans is a local iteration of a global trope: hypermasculine and hyperheterosexual, young, and of a lower-working class background (roughly paralleling *chavs*, *ockers*, *ah bengs*, *skeets*, *gopniks*, etc. in other chronotopic contexts). In the Toronto context, he is also from the culturally diverse suburbs of the GTA like Scarborough and Brampton and makes extensive use of MTE. As Hulchanski's (2010) *Three Cities* report finds, lower-income neighborhoods in the GTA are disproportionately inhabited by immigrants and racialized people, and have

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned earlier, *mans* can be used in MTE as a multifunctional pronoun with first-, second- or third-person reference and with singular or plural reference (see Denis 2016), but as a nominal, as in the term *Toronto Mans*, *mans* is not unique to Toronto. The term typically has a male human referent and although it has ostensibly plural morphology, it can be used with either singular or plural reference.

increasingly become concentrated in the suburbs since the 1970s, spatially segregated from whiter, wealthier neighborhoods in the core. It is within this context that the specific *suburban* link is made with the Toronto Mans.

Elango (2021) found that, while young people in the GTA do not often explicitly reference race in their descriptions of the Toronto Mans, they consistently associate the persona with semiotic resources that are associated with North American tropes of Black masculinity (e.g. clothing associated with hip hop culture), suggesting that the Toronto Mans – and by extension MTE/Toronto Slang – is ideologically linked to Black masculinity, though the persona may be inhabited by, or seen to be inhabited by, anyone. The Toronto Mans is often stylized and performed in social media content where these indexical links between the repertoire of MTE/Toronto Slang and values of class, race, place and gender are drawn out.

Moreover, metadiscourse invites debate around authenticity and what is understood to be representationally accurate or not, consequently reinforcing, modifying and expanding the register's repertoire and social range. For example, Denis (2021), writing with focus on one particular Somali-origin Toronto Slang word, *bucktee*, argues that Patwa and Somali words are taken up by youth of other ethnicities owing to the desirable indices of Black language and culture. This uptake of Black semiotic resources by non-Black Torontonians opens up its social meaning to be revalorized as broadly *Toronto* in a process of INDEXICAL BLEACHING.<sup>3</sup> Thus, 'all other indexical links ... in particular, the ethnoracial meanings' become overshadowed (Denis 2021: 572). As Toronto Slang shibboleths become semiotically deracialized through indexical bleaching (at least in some models of the register for some people), they become further enregistered as Toronto words.<sup>4</sup> We can theorize this conflict as a result of coexisting, competing cultural models of the register. This produces an ongoing semiotic ambiguity, which is metapragmatically exploited by non-Somali, non-Caribbean and non-Black Torontonians to lay claim to authenticity (Denis 2021: 573).

## 2.2 Stylization and mediatization

We understand pop-cultural representations of language to be both mediatized and very often stylized. STYLIZATION is defined by Coupland (2001: 345) as the 'knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context'. Linguistic stylization can be understood as putting on a 'voice' that is not habitually ours, and it crucially

<sup>3</sup> We might also describe this process as LOCALIZATION, which Androutsopoulos (2010: 205) describes as a process where '[s]emiotic material from "elsewhere" is made to speak "from here" and "to here"'. Regardless, indexical bleaching is a semiotic process that promotes this localization.

<sup>4</sup> In its earliest usage, *Toronto* in 'Toronto Slang' likely had a *totum pro parte* synecdochal sense mostly referring to specific, highly racialized, working-class neighborhoods in the GTA rather than the whole region. Part of the indexical bleaching of the register described in Denis (2021) involves the semiotic ambiguity around reference to the parts or whole; as Agha (2007: 152) observes, register names tend to have nomic, universal interpretations – *Toronto* Slang entails 'all-only-always' Toronto.

operates in performance (Coupland 2001: 346). Within a definition of performance as instances of language that stand out from the ordinary, there are everyday, spontaneous instances of performance (e.g. when we modify our vocal pitch when quoting someone else) but we are focused on explicitly staged, *MEDIATIZED* performance – often (at least loosely) scripted and produced for the purpose of being shared with an audience beyond the present interactional context.

There is an array of understandings of mediatization and the related concept of mediation (see Hepp 2014 for an overview of perspectives). Here, we follow Agha (2011), where mediation refers to moments of transmission and reception of semiotic messages, while mediatization involves institutional practices that link mediated communication with commoditization. All semiotic communication, including language, is mediated but *mediatized* objects consist of instances of semiotic communication that are produced or promoted by institutions for large-scale diffusion. In this way, we understand the language of pop culture to be definitionally mediatized.

Agha (2011: 175) asserts that a commoditized semiotic object (and therefore a mediatized object) is more than a consumer commodity (i.e. something a consumer can purchase, such as a novel); some are public commodities, which do not involve any point of sale but are still paid for (such as public television, paid through government taxation); and some commoditized objects are commodities for producers, which the consumer does not pay for at all but that still further the operational goals of the institution that produces them (e.g. advertisements). Social media content falls within this latter definition; in online contexts, engagement with content – views, likes, shares or comments – is leveraged by institutions for material gain; more engagement means a wider audience, means more opportunity for larger economic gain. While Androutsopoulos (2010: 203) identifies *VERNACULAR SPECTACLES* as ‘multimedia content that is produced outside media institutions and uploaded, displayed and discussed on media-sharing websites’, we note that today, vernacular spectacles are often commoditized, and hence mediatized, whether it be institutions mimicking such content or directly sharing it to farm further engagement.

Mediatized objects are always situated within prior and subsequent acts of non-mediatized mediation of semiotic messages. For mediatized objects to be interpretable, audiences must have encountered their indexical presuppositions in previous interactions (Agha 2011: 165). Likewise, mediatized representations are encountered by, taken up by, and are available to be subsequently invoked and recontextualized by their audiences on a massive scale. This is particularly apparent in online contexts where the same representation is potentially encounterable thousands or even millions of times by new receivers without limitations of time or space.

Critically, each encounter with a representation is uniquely entextualized: the receiver brings with them both a unique set of presuppositions and a unique biographically specific discursive history. As such, its valuation is always subject to recontextualization; a natural consequence of this is the coexistence of competing cultural models of a represented register (Agha 2007: 78). While each post we examine and its comments represent fragments of the far larger network of discourses around

MTE, within these fragments we can find competing cultural models and indexical transvaluing as discussed above. Below we examine how competing models of MTE are contested and negotiated.

### 3 Sources, data and methodology

For our analysis, we consider five mediatized representations that appeared on two different media sources: @6ixbuzztv, a popular Toronto-based Instagram account, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the country's state broadcaster.<sup>5</sup>

6ixBuzz began in 2017 as a platform to support hip hop talent in Toronto but it quickly evolved to post Toronto-based memes, news and content aimed at youth and 'Black and POC, hip-hop and R&B communities', which have been traditionally underserved by mainstream Canadian media (Weekes 2018). Since then, it has amassed over two million followers. Most content on the account is aggregated from other sources (e.g. reposts of TikToks and tweets). A post typically garners thousands of user comments and replies. At the time of data collection in 2021, 6ixBuzz's focus on minoritized Toronto populations and their cultural productions made them arguably the largest media outlet to fulfill this niche.<sup>6</sup> In this article, we focus on three posts (all video 'reels') from February to April 2021 with exemplary comments: *Brampton man shoots his shot*, *Pray for broski* and *Should he leave Dougie alone*.<sup>7</sup>

The Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) is Canada's publicly funded state broadcaster. Since 1936, it has broadcast news and entertainment through television, radio and the internet. Its mandate includes being 'predominantly and distinctively Canadian', 'actively contribut[ing] to the flow and exchange of cultural expression' and 'reflect[ing] the multicultural and multiracial nature' of the country (Broadcasting Act, SC 1991, c 11). When compared to 6ixBuzz, it is much older and has a larger audience.

We discuss two videos that were produced by the CBC. The videos are from two sketch comedy series. The first, *Scarborough Doctor*, from the *Torontopia* webseries, was posted to the CBC Comedy YouTube channel in 2017.<sup>8</sup> The second video is from

<sup>5</sup> This research was conducted in accordance with a research ethics protocol approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board, protocol #40571.

<sup>6</sup> 6ixBuzz has been criticized for posting racist, homophobic and other controversial content to drive engagement (Dionne 2020; Jankowski 2021). Recently, in response to negative public opinion, the brand has attempted to 'professionalize' into a media platform and in doing so has shifted focus away from memes to reporting more general news with a right-wing bent. Gammage (2021) details this seemingly odd transformation from a platform originally intended for minority youth to a conservative media outlet.

<sup>7</sup> We initially examined 10 MTE-related 6ixBuzz posts, plus the first twenty comments and replies, as determined by the second author's Instagram comment prioritization algorithm. We determined a post to be MTE-related if (i) it used a lexical shibboleth of MTE and drew attention to its use; (ii) it involved speech that is labeled as 'Toronto' or 'GTA'; or (iii) the comments drew attention to the (real or imagined) speech of a represented figure.

<sup>8</sup> The YouTube video is available here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD1hzn12VJ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD1hzn12VJ0). Note that because user comments are removed from public view if a user suspends or deletes their account, some comments described below may not be visible presently.

*Tallboyz*, a television series broadcast on CBC's main television channel from 2019 to 2022.<sup>9</sup> The untitled sketch (which we call *If I hit this shot*) was posted on the CBC Comedy YouTube channel and the *Tallboyz* TikTok account. User comments on these two sketches were manually extracted and examined in February 2023.<sup>10</sup>

While the videos from the CBC are more or less illustrative of the representations of MTE that one is likely to come across elsewhere on social media (but see our analysis of critical differences below), to date, there are few other CBC-produced representations of this register. Indeed, to our knowledge, the only other such representations come from the same sketch-comedy productions as the videos we consider (*Torontopia* and *Tallboyz*).

Before moving to our analysis, it is important to acknowledge and contextualize a challenge of interpreting online discourse, namely anonymity. The metadiscursive data we discuss in the next section is all attributable to usernames only (and sometimes a profile picture), devoid of almost all sociocultural context (which is traditionally considered crucial in sociolinguistic work). In some cases, the comments themselves may reveal pieces of information about the poster (e.g. claims to certain identities) but most do not. It is thus difficult to determine or speculate what, and how much, metadiscourse around MTE any individual commenter may have encountered offline prior to commenting on any given post. That said, we do have an understanding of the general profile of the audiences (and differences between 6ixBuzz and CBC): given the initial target audience of 6ixBuzz, we can speculate that, compared to those commenting on the CBC representations, those commenting on 6ixBuzz posts are generally younger, more likely to be racialized, more likely to be from the GTA, and thus, more likely to have been previously socialized within the register of MTE.

#### 4 Analysis

In this section, we present transcripts of the five posts, along with representative comments. We organize our analysis around three themes and introduce each video as it becomes relevant.

##### 4.1 Stylized versus 'genuine' representations of the Toronto Mans

We begin our analysis by contrasting audience uptake of a stylized representation of the Toronto Mans characterological figure on the one hand and (at least what is perceived to be) a genuine presentation of someone who ostensibly fits the stereotype.

As with the other 6ixBuzz videos discussed below, *Brampton man shoots his shot* takes the form of a voicenote – a prerecorded audio-only message that can be sent via

<sup>9</sup> The YouTube video is available here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKqnmItM0AI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKqnmItM0AI).

<sup>10</sup> We were able to consider every YouTube comment since there was a relatively low number overall (47 on the *Scarborough Doctor*, 12 on *If I hit this shot*) and we considered a subset of the 566 comments on the *If I hit this shot* TikTok.





Figure 1. Screenshot of *Brampton man shoots his shot*

direct messaging (DM) on social media apps.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the message is left for the popular American rapper Saweetie. As seen in figure 1, the post itself is a screen-captured video showing the sender’s DM history with Saweetie. The single message in the chat history, the voicenote, can be seen playing; text is overlain which reads ‘Brampton Tøɾəntø Man shoots his shot at Saweetie 🏀🇨🇦’. The speaker himself, who is tagged in the caption, appears to have posted it on his own account for comedic purposes; 6ixBuzz has added the overlain text. A transcript is given below in (1).

- (1) *Brampton man shoots his shot*
- 1 Saying you’re si:ngle now, e::h?!
  - 2 Probably never fooled wi[t] a man from Toronto before.
  - 3 Well it’s not Toronto, it’s Br[æ]mpton, but like it’s cl[o:]se **styll**, y’know what I mean?
  - 4 Big m[æ]n [t]ing?
  - 5 I don’t really have [d]e funds for no Birkin but (.) you can get a **one-two** Cinnabon or Junior Chicken at Yorkdale, **styll**.
  - 6 And I can scoop you back to my **ends**, **ahlie ahlie ahlie** @@
  - 7 I don’t really have my G2 license yet but ((sucks teeth)) so I might have to use my Presto card.
  - 8 It’s so:f[Ø] [d]ough.
  - 9 Thing is, Quavo bricked with you. He’s a **wasteman** for [d]at. (.) Couldn’t fuck wi[t] [d]e real you, >y’know what I mean?<
  - 10 Real demon. Real demon. RA:::R real demon.

<sup>11</sup> The post is available here: [www.instagram.com/p/CMtOMj0AUnH/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CMtOMj0AUnH/)

This video is legible as a stylized performance of a Toronto Mans. Given that the recipient of the message is a famous performer and unlikely to ever open the DM, the goal of the message is performance rather than a genuine attempt to pursue Saweetie. The speaker stylizes the Toronto Mans characterological figure by making use of MTE forms (both phonetic and lexical), which are bolded in (1), including register shibboleths such as *styll*, *ahlie* and *wasteman*. The characterological figure is also invoked through other semiotic references to the persona: being broke (not ‘hav[ing] the funds for no’ luxury bag, only being able afford fast-food), young (not having a full ‘G2’ driver’s license) and from a suburban area of the GTA (Brampton). He also makes hyperlocal references to *Yorkdale* (a Toronto shopping mall) and the GTA-wide public transit payment system (*Presto*). Even metapragmatically, the act of sending unsolicited DMs to women is a trope of the more widely diffuse hyperheterosexual young man persona (of which the Toronto Mans is a local iteration). The caption and the overlain text also explicitly label the speaker as a *Brampton Man*; both include a ‘cry-laugh’ emoji, which primes the audience to interpret the post as comedic performance.

In (2), we provide a selection of comments and replies on this video.<sup>12</sup> Comments begin with a pseudonymized username (in bold). Replies to comments are indented and include an ‘@’ tag, tagging the user being responded to.

- (2) (a) **vance\_ukonu**: Man said rawr 🤔🤔🤔  
 (i) **relaxhimanshu**: @vance\_ukonu man said “i don’t have my g2 yet haha but presto card works styll” 🤔🤔🤔  
 (b) **tral**: This could literally be ANY of my friends.  
 (i) **kewtee\_**: @tral Factttttssss Lmfao 🤔🤔  
 (ii) **stacysdad**: @tral what do you mean your friends? This has [name redacted] written ALL over it 🤔  
 (iii) **tral**: @stacysdad this could have been you if we’re being real  
 (iv) **stacysdad**: @tral nyeeaaah eh stillll  
 (c) **\_sameerravi**: wallahi this is gonna work  
 (i) **01010\_11**: @\_sameerravi What the fuck is wallahi ?? Is it even a word ?? And why it’s used to much ?? I’m confused... isn’t Canadians speaking English and French ? 🤔♀  
 (ii) **33dawg**: come to Toronto and you’ll here a whole new language

Repetition of register shibboleths of MTE that appear in the video, in conjunction with emojis and acronyms signifying laughter, as in (2a), is common in the comments; some replies repeat a whole utterance, as in (2ai), which includes both linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic reference to the Toronto Mans. We understand these comments as instances of ROLE ALIGNMENT (Agha 2007), where, in interaction, language users align or disalign with registers and the social attributes they index. Metapragmatic judgements, whether positive or negative, are an overt kind of role alignment but the incorporation of a register’s features into one’s own speech is also a kind of (typically positive) role alignment.

<sup>12</sup> All comments are presented verbatim but comment threads have been edited down to relevant replies only.

Another category of responses is represented by the commenter in (2b), who aligns themselves and their friends with this way of speaking. Others agree (2bi) or point to specific friends who are similar to the character being performed (2bii). Other comments and replies incorporate supplemental register shibboleths not heard in the representation (e.g. *nyeaah eh* (2biii) and *wallahi* (2c)). Of note, (2cii) suggests that the language heard in the video is legible as a uniquely Toronto way of speaking. The most negative comment collected on this post is (2ci), which is in response to a supplemental shibboleth (*wallahi*), rather than to language in the representation. Most commenters seem to align themselves with the register and with the Toronto Mans – or at least its performance – through their laughter and own use of MTE.

The second video, *Pray for broski*, was aggregated from TikTok.<sup>13</sup> It too is a voicenote but rather than a screen-capture video, we see a 'shaky-cam' shot of another cell phone open to the Snapchat app with a voicenote message playing; there is a prelude image of the Toronto skyline with overlain text and a computerized voice reading 'Dating in Toronto be like ...'. The voicenote appears to have been sent by a man to a woman who has apparently wronged him romantically. A partial transcript of the audio is shown in (3), with features of MTE bolded.

(3) *Pray for broski*

- 1 A: {<computer synthesized voice> Dating in Toronto be like}  
 2 B: They told me **you're a good girl**, you wouldn't hurt me. Well, you I-- you- you hurt **mans** (h)  
 3 I can't even see: you?  
 4 You think I'm a fuckin' **goo:f**.  
 5 Whenever, I- Whenever I wanna see you, you're too busy.=  
 6 Think I'm a fuckin' **goof**=  
 7 >When I call, you don't wanna <[æ]::nswer.>  
 8 'Cause I kn[o:]>you're wi[t] 'ese fuckin' <**wastemans**> and shit that can't do shit for you. ((continues...))

While parallel in nature and content to the previous video – and posted less than two weeks later – *Pray for broski* is taken up differently. It is largely *not* understood as performance by the audience but rather as an example of a 'genuine' Toronto Mans. There are several features of the video that cue this interpretation: the perspective is the recipient's rather than the sender's, the opening image offers it up as implicit critique of the city's dating scene, and the caption does nothing to prime the audience that what they will see is performance.

Less obviously, within the Snapchat app, senders of messages are notified if the receiver has taken a screenshot or screen recording of their message. In this case, the receiver seems to be intentionally avoiding this by using another a phone to take the video (instead of taking a screen recording); the clandestine sharing of the voicenote

<sup>13</sup> The post is available here: [www.instagram.com/p/CNKr9kXgVqoMO5kD-faO3KUMHBUZMBjcmuvANU0/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CNKr9kXgVqoMO5kD-faO3KUMHBUZMBjcmuvANU0/)

further suggests that it is non-parodic and that the speaker intends to be heard authentically. A selection of comments to this video and replies are given in (4).

- (4) (a) **drive\_away**: Is there a English translation ?
- (i) **parker\_raptor\_**: @drive\_away sounded perfect too me
  - (ii) **shutthefrontdoor**: @drive\_away bruh it's so clear, how can't you understand???
  - (iii) **blue\_orchid19**: @driveaway it's torontarian they speak their own language 🤔@6ixbuzztv
  - (iv) **rethsogen**: @blue\_orchid19 waste yutes\*\* not all from Toronto
  - (v) **court\_jester22**: @driveaway These voices and accents are just despicable! 🤔
- (b) **paddie75**: Sounds like boomhauer
- (c) **tiffany85\_905**: Born and raised in Toronto and I still don't know anyone who speaks like this 🤔
- (i) **sary.olj**: @tiffany95\_905 I've heard a few people talk like this and it makes me cringe! Soooo unattractive. Litterally makes me look down on the person when they tall [sic] like this.
  - (ii) **tiffany85\_905**: @sary.olj so unattractive and highly irritating

In contrast to the comments on *Brampton man shoots his shot*, many of the comments on *Pray for broski* discuss the unintelligibility of the speaker. For example, (4a) asks for a translation, suggesting this is a different language. Likewise, (4b) references *Boomhauer*, a character from the television series *King of the Hill*; a running gag in the show involves Boomhauer's incomprehensibility. In addition to unintelligible, the language is recurrently labeled as aesthetically unpleasant: *despicable*, *cringe*, *unattractive* and *highly irritating*. While there is some pushback against the idea of unintelligible, the volume of negative sanctioning regarding speech in the comments to this post is much higher compared with the comedic performance in (1). For example, while (2cii) and (4aiii) each identify the speech in the representations as a uniquely Toronto way of speaking, (4aiv) asserts that the language does not represent all Torontonians but rather *waste yutes* from the city. There is an irony to using a word that is enregistered as Toronto Slang as a means of deprecating the register.

That said, we cannot speculate on the social profile of individual posters, but like other youth we have observed in Toronto on social media and in face-to-face conversation (some of whom are Black and/or racialized), this poster may be within the social domain of MTE but still reproduces negative tropes about it and distances themself from the register.<sup>14</sup> It may be that other posters, specifically (4a) and (4b), are

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Bigelow *et al.* (2020) discuss a YouTube video framed around a 'slang challenge'. In the video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3umEdWZIViY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3umEdWZIViY) several young people are interviewed on the street and asked what a variety of Toronto Slang words mean. One young person ostensibly aces the test, but at the end of the video looks straight into the camera and says:

'Can I just clarify something? Um, I- I like- what I go to school for requires me to speak English at a very proficient level. Normally I speak regular English, I just know this shit 'cause I live here. I'm not a- I'm not- I'm not a waste yute like that, I swear to God.' (Bigelow *et al.* 2020: 19)

truly outside the domain of recognition. However, they may also be feigning ignorance and their inability to understand in order to imply unintelligibility.

Androutsopoulos (2010: 221) finds that comments on YouTube videos of comedic performance of Bavarian are often 'cast in dialect, displaying an alliance to the clip's dialect voice'. Likewise, in the comments to *Brampton man shoots his shot*, we see role alignment with the Toronto Mans and how he speaks through the incorporation of MTE register shibboleths. Just as Androutsopoulos (2010) argues for Bavarian, if the representation can be understood to claim that 'this is how a Toronto Mans is/speaks', the comments which repeat or add supplemental shibboleths function to further reify the register. In contrast, the general sentiment toward *Pray for broski* is different. Here, an ostensibly genuine Toronto Mans is sanctioned and his language is subject mostly to metapragmatic rebuke. This is a different sort of role alignment from the one we observed in (2), one that functions to socially separate the commenter from the Toronto Mans. However, at the same time, these comments likewise function to cement the social valuation of the characterological figure and the register.

We understand this difference in interpretation and uptake in terms of different thresholds of normativity (Agha 2007: 125–6). While MTE is not a normative standard, it can be understood as a 'normalized model of behavior'; MTE is the 'norm' for a Toronto Mans. Audiences are able to praise the *performance* of expected behavior of a Toronto Mans and laugh along with him – and, given the sanctioning of MTE outside this context, perhaps self-deprecatingly, at themselves – in one case, but with the 'genuine' example, they instead sanction the breaching of the normative standard. In other words, stylizing a Toronto Mans is acceptable, but being a Toronto Mans is not.

#### 4.2 Semiotic ambiguity of Patwa in Toronto

In this subsection, we introduce a third representation from 6ixBuzz and one of its comment threads, then examine an additional comment thread from *Pray for broski*. These comments reveal the indexical tension between ethnoracial- and place-based claims to authenticity that have been documented elsewhere (Denis 2021) and the semiotic ambiguity around Jamaican Patwa vis-à-vis MTE.

*Should he leave Dougie alone* is another video of a voicenote.<sup>15</sup> It was recorded by someone who seems to be a Jamaican-Torontonian, who is leaving a message for Ontario Premier Doug Ford, regarding Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. The post is a screen capture recording of a chat history from the sender's perspective to the premier's Instagram account. A partial transcript of the audio is given in (5).

(5) *Should he leave Dougie alone*

- 1 Listen here you, ((censoring bleep)).
- 2 Here's the problem with me and you, okay?
- 3 See (.) I d[o:]n't really think you rea:ly underst[æ]nd.

<sup>15</sup> The post is available here: [www.instagram.com/p/CM-a2b3gxw8HAEvManOk-nGG70NEPF33HD7sRs0/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CM-a2b3gxw8HAEvManOk-nGG70NEPF33HD7sRs0/)

- 4 Outsides around #the **bludclot** corner#, you get me?=  
 5 <No one is **tanning** in their **y/a:/d**.> {no one is staying at home}  
 6 I-I >really need you to understand that.<  
 7 For real, for real. Like (.) you need to do what you got to do?  
 8 Because it's alm[o:]st June?  
 9 And (2.0) you know **wa gwan ova deh so, yuh zeemi** {what's happening over there,  
 right}? Since you know Jamaican talk so much.  
 10 So please, um (.) fix [d]e fuck up? (*continued...*)

Unlike the previous two videos, the language in *Should he leave Dougie alone* cannot be said to be MTE (stylized or otherwise). While the speaker uses several lexical items from Jamaican Patwa (bolded and italicized here), he does not use any that are widely enregistered as Toronto Slang (with the one exception of *wa gwan*, which is embedded in an utterance spoken entirely in Patwa and labeled explicitly as 'Jamaican talk'.) The speaker uses some phonetic features of MTE in his English (e.g. TH-stopping, a monophthongal GOAT vowel) but it is important to note that these features are generally present in Jamaican varieties as well.

In (6), we reproduce a comment thread from this post that highlights two competing cultural models around MTE and Patwa.

- (6) **\_wk\_86**: That's cool and all but did anyone actually understand a single word he said?  
 (a) **hightalkah**: @\_wk\_86 all people of all races that are from Toronto understand what he said.  
 (b) **regal.gee**: @\_wk\_86 yeah people of West Indian ethnicity, as everyone likes to try and impersonate our cultural tongue  
 (c) **tdottomaui**: @\_wk\_86 you're not from Toronto if you didn't 🤔  
 (i) **snoopy\_1234**: @tdottomaui no, he is probably not a lower class Toronto citizen like us. Only broke people speak that language.  
 (d) **\_streetdawg\_010**: @\_wk\_86 Stop with the uncultured low key ignorance. He spoke perfectly clear English with a few words in Jamaican Patois.  
 (i) **b\_cat2**: @\_streetdawg\_010 it's not ignorance lol how are ppl who don't understand patois gonna know that tanning in your yard means staying at home 🤔  
 (ii) **was\_adl**: @\_wk\_86 Honestly, it really wasn't all that clear 🤔. People only understand because they live in Toronto.

The original comment, which implies the unintelligibility of the speaker, is met mostly with backlash (unlike in *Pray for broski*), but different commenters appeal to different credentials to authenticate claims to understanding. Some replies (6a, 6c, 6dii) claim to understand what is said by virtue of being from Toronto, while (6b) and (6d) note that being Caribbean/Jamaican is what allows for understanding.

Given the lack of register shibboleths of MTE in (5) and, as (6d) accurately describes it, the language is objectively normative *English with a few words in Jamaican Patois*, the place-based claim to understanding is somewhat surprising. These comments represent two competing cultural models around Patwa and MTE. Patwa is known to be a large influence on MTE, so large that for some, these ways of

speaking are one and the same. Comments like (6a), that at once challenge stigmatizing unintelligibility discourses, also contribute to the further indexical bleaching of Black languaging practices. That is, as MTE register shibboleths originating in Patwa – and, in this case, Patwa itself – begin to be associated more with *Toronto*, the cultural model linking these features to Jamaicanness wanes in competition with this other, place-based model.

Thus, the social range of Patwa language features is extended to *Toronto* and becomes blurred with MTE, extending its repertoire and range; at the same time, we see how stigmatizing metapragmatic typifications of MTE (e.g. the persona type of a *broke, lower-class Toronto citizen*) (6ci) are mapped to any and all Patwa, not just features borrowed into MTE.

Complementary discourses appear in the comments to *Pray for broski* as shown in the thread in (7).

- (7) **sha647**: Born and raised in Toronto and I still don't know anyone who speaks like this 😏
- (a) **trinitina**: @sha647 wanna be Jamaicans I guess it's so awful like not even a Jamaican sounds like that but anything for hype I guess
- (b) **goosejohnny**: @trinitina it's a mix of jamaican and English but it's all fake nun of its real
- (c) **sha647**: @goosejohnny hunny I'm Jamaican and there is NOTHING Jamaican about that.
- (d) **goosejohnny**: @sha647 u do look jamaican but the accent istg {I swear to god} trying to be Jamaican

Recall that while the language in *Pray for broski* contains one loanword from Patwa (*waste yute*) and some phonetic features shared by MTE and Patwa (e.g. TH-stopping), the language used is objectively not Patwa. While (7a), (7b) and (7d) all note that the language in *Pray for broski* is but an inauthentic counterfeit of Patwa, this way of speaking (which we can call MTE) is still metadiscursively linked with Patwa. This discourse is perhaps a response to non-Jamaican Torontonians' claims to linguistic authenticity, which lie in the semiotic ambiguity that results from indexical bleaching of the Jamaican/Caribbean/Black-Torontonian meanings of MTE features in favor of a more place-based meaning (one that is perhaps still racialized but increasingly less ethnographically specific). However, while commenters' deployment of this discourse may be intended to differentiate Patwa and MTE and disrupt claims to place-based authenticity, when sha647 asserts their epistemic authority, as a Jamaican, around what is and what is not Patwa (7c) and their authority is even recognized, goosejohnny still asserts that the speaker is nevertheless *aiming* for Patwa (7d), further cementing the link between these two registers.

### 4.3 Engagement across media sources

The final theme we explore is how representations of MTE and engagement with these representations differ across different media sources. Posts like those discussed above

indicate that 6ixBuzz is an important institutional site of engagement with both mediatized MTE and the metadiscourse around the register. Next, we consider two representations of MTE that have been produced by Canada's national public broadcaster.

In (8), we include a partial transcript of *Scarborough Doctor*, bolding relevant MTE features. The sketch opens with an exterior shot of a medical office before cutting to a scene of a young Black man in a hospital gown sitting anxiously on a doctor's examination table. Eventually, a young White doctor wearing a labcoat and surgical cap, together with Timberland boots on his feet, a thick gold chain around his neck and a large, jeweled earring, enters.

(8) *Scarborough Doctor*

- 1 Nurse: Okay, so Chris uh the Doctor will be in shortly to talk to you about your condition. And (.) just so you know, he's from Scarborough.
- 2 Chris: Uh (.) okay?  
((Doctor enters exam room))
- 3 Chris: Hey [ um- ]
- 4 Doctor: [Hey yo] you good, **dawg**?
- 5 Chris: What?
- 6 Doctor: <**Are you good dawg?** You look **cheesed**, f[æ]m.>
- 7 Chris: No. That's why I'm here. I've been having serious stomach problems.
- 8 Doctor: Ah, it's a gut **ting styl**, **eh**?
- 9 Chris: Yeah a- a gut ting.
- 10 Doctor: ((grabs tongue depressor)) Lemme peep that grill right quick? Lemme see what **[d]**at mouth do. ((examines patient's mouth))
- 11 Seen. ((sucks teeth))
- 12 Yo, it's a tumor B.
- 13 Chris: What?!
- 14 Doctor: Naw, **mans** are playin'!
- 15 It's alopecia, yo! ((returns depressor to container))
- 16 Chris: I know for a fact I don't have alopecia. Can you please just tell me what's wrong with me?
- 17 Doctor: I don't know! I'm not a <doctor>?
- 18 Chris: We're in a doctor's office!
- 19 Doctor: No like I'm a <doctor> like it's my job like I'm a doctor but like it's like figure of speech. Like I'm not a <doctor>! I don't have **[d]e <[æ]nswers**> to everything. Like **mans** aren't like a wizard, you know what I'm saying? ((continues...))

A partial transcript of the second CBC representation is shown in (9), again bolding relevant features. This sketch takes place on a schoolyard basketball court. While the actors are all adult men, the setting and the characters' school uniforms and orthodontics cue the audience to interpret them as high-school-aged boys. One is taking shots from the free-throw line while the others watch on and banter.

(9) *If I hit this shot*

- 1 G: Yo, if I hit this shot, I'm gonna be rich.
- 2 V: Yeah, right!



- ((G makes basket))
- 3 V: [O:::h]
- 4 F: [O:::h ski↑rt ski↑rt]
- 5 T: [O:::h alright, Lamborghini!] You'll be countin' [d]em racks, f[æ]m!
- 6 G: Yo, yo, if I hit this shot, I'm ~smashin' the hottest girl in school~
- 7 V: Yeah, right!
- ((G misses basket))
- 8 T: [@@@@]
- 9 V: [@@@@ no::]
- 10 F: [@@@@ no::] yo it bricked bro! Yo this mans not havin' no sex yo::!
- 11 T: Yo, this guy's a waste yute for real bro! Absolute waste yute man!
- 12 G: <shut up ma:n>
- 13 T: Yo, straight up bucktee bro.
- 14 G: Yo, yo, if I hit this shot? Tee's gonna die.
- 15 T: Uh-uhm
- ((G makes basket))
- 16 V: Oh!
- 17 T: Yo, what [d]e frug man?
- 18 F: Yo::
- 19 V: Damn, that's [d]at mans' life, br[o:]. ((continues))

Before discussing how these representations are taken up by audiences, we note a few key differences with respect to the representations themselves compared with the previous three, and concomitant differences in how audiences are able to engage with the content. While the comical success of the stylized performance in *Brampton man shoots his shot* is mostly dependent on the perceived accuracy with which the speaker linguistically performs the Toronto Mans characterological figure, the two representations from the CBC rely more heavily on general cultural schemas, making their sketches legible to a wider audience. The poor bedside manner of an inappropriately joking doctor and teenage boys goofing off are widely available tropes that are exploited that allow audiences who may not have previously encountered the register or persona at all to still participate in the humor. A general audience can even find metapragmatic humor in the language without being acquainted with the indexical presuppositions of the register or, as Coupland (2001: 350) puts it, the success of the sketch is not dependent on 'an enculturated audience'.

With *Scarborough Doctor* the audience can laugh at the indexically non-congruent textual order of a White medical professional speaking in a (broadly perceived) non-normative way, while with *If I hit this shot* the order of the text is indexically congruent, affirming audience expectations that teenage boys speak in a non-normative way. Those who are already familiar with the register can find further comedic nuance in CBC's representations, but they are also able to laugh at 6ixBuzz's representations, which rely more on the locally salient semiosis of the Toronto Mans; for the 6ixBuzz representations, one needs to already be socialized into the register to get the joke, but the CBC representations are more accessible. It is within this context that the CBC sketches represent MTE for their audiences, and thus this context is

important for understanding how messages around MTE are taken up in subsequent comments.

One theme that appears in the comments, especially in response to *Scarborough Doctor*, is the subversion of expectations and in particular expectations of what Canada's national public broadcaster would produce. We can see these comments in (10).

- (10) (a) *Scarborough Doctor*
- (i) **maniamang9**: i cant believe cbc posted this lmao
  - (ii) **amielkind3245**: Lol, why does this remind me of 4yall entertainment so much? Like I'm done
  - (iii) **Paul Freeman**: This was pretty funny actually. "Bro, I'm not a Doctor!." haha
  - (iv) **Junglium**: this is actually mad funny
- (b) *If I hit this shot*
- (i) **plodictomoato23**: why is this so funny
  - (ii) **rustious!!!**: ngl i was entertained

We cannot be sure what it is about the sketch that subverts expectations, but it is reasonable to hypothesize that it is the stylization of MTE and the Toronto Mans in CBC content. This is explicit in (10ai), which is the most liked comment on this video. Consistent with this, another commenter compares the sketch to the grassroots, independent YouTube channel, 4Yall Entertainment, another sketch comedy project that often exploits MTE and commentary about Toronto Mans.

Likewise, another series of comments stood out to us, which note that the sketch was *actually* funny, (6aiii, 6aiv). *Actually* here may signal that these commenters initially encountered this sketch presupposing that CBC would not be able to produce a successful stylization, perhaps like something they are used to seeing from sources like 4Yall Entertainment and, indeed, 6ixBuzz.<sup>16</sup> Given that CBC's mandate is to 'reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada' (Broadcasting Act SC 1991) (whether that has been successful or not) and the wider trend of commoditizing vernacular spectacle, it perhaps should not be surprising that the CBC would attempt to produce mediatized representations of MTE that are similar to those produced by more 'grassroots' racialized creators. These mediatized representations on 6ixBuzz and elsewhere have widened the social domain of the register, and the CBC's representations simply widen it further.

There are only a few comments along these lines with *If I hit this shot* (10b). This may be because while the *Scarborough Doctor* video is presented explicitly as a CBC production (posted by the CBC Comedy channel with a CBC Comedy end screen), there is nothing obvious about the *If I hit this shot* TikTok that indicates it is a CBC production.

<sup>16</sup> Despite its mandate, CBC has not always been an institution that represents young, racialized Canadians, which is perhaps why outlets like 6ixBuzz were initially important for this audience.

Otherwise, comments on these representations are similar to the 6ixBuzz videos. We see the same repetition of register shibboleths from the representations in the comments, as in (11a–c), often with an explicit indication of laughter (e.g. *lmao*). There are also comments that include supplemental shibboleths of MTE (e.g. *ting* and *still*), as in (12).

(11) *Repetition of register shibboleths*

- (a) **Andre Uji:** He said you look mad *cheesed* lmao this is so (Scarborough  
fucking accurate Doctor)  
(b) **Jay: Bucktee** 😂 (If I hit this shot)  
(c) **Lass Place: waste yuteeeeeee** 😂 (If I hit this shot)

(12) *Supplemental register shibboleths not heard in the video*

- (a) **Piece Pat:** Yooo this is the funniest *ting* I seen in a minute (Scarborough  
Doctor)  
(b) **baby huey:** He’s a bucket *still* (If I hit this shot)

As in the comments to *Brampton Man shoots his shot*, these repeated and supplemental register shibboleths function as positive role alignment with the Toronto Mans and praise of the performance – at least for those in the audience already socialized into the register.

Another type of comment that we observe is place-based claims to authenticity. The commenter in (13a), in very similar wording to the commenter in (6c), claims that being from Toronto grants one the credentials to understand the register. Complementarily, (13b) notes how the text (the register shibboleth *waste yute*) projects the place-based context (Toronto).

(13) *Place-based claims to authenticity*

- (a) **David:** If ur from Toronto you’ll understand (If I hit this shot)  
(b) **ivi:** as soon as i heard ‘waste yute’ ik it was toronto (If I hit this shot)

Lastly, there are similar discourses around the semiotic ambiguity of Jamaican Patwa. In the comment thread in (14) from *If I hit this shot*, it is not just ambiguity between MTE and Patwa, but the additional consideration of *British slang* that is also negotiated. Note that the representation itself contains just one loanword from Patwa (*waste yute*) that is also found in Multicultural London English (MLE; which we assume is the referent for *British slang*). Pronominal *mans* is similar to MLE’s pronominal *man* and though both are often linked with Patwa neither is a direct borrowing (Denis 2016). *Bucktee* is a loanword from Somali and to our knowledge is not associated with MLE.

(14) *Semiotic ambiguity of Patwa*

- (a) **KIB:** nah tis the fact that they tryna use British slangs ya its kinda funny  
(i) **A:** Where do you think British get there slang 🤔 from the Jamaicans  
(ii) **KIB:** most of the slangs they used we’re from Jamaica and i picked up on the British slang only  
(iii) **Mike Mattews:** It’s patois

- (iv) **KDaBest**: It's Toronto accent I think
- (v) **dumb sloth**: didnt know you owned slang 🤔 toronto slang has words from all over the world, relax
- (vi) **KIB**: i never said i owned the slang im js saying it's funny how they using the slang 🤔
- (viii) **A**: So how do you know Toronto is tryna use British slang and not just Jamaican slang

In this comment thread we see several claims around authenticity and place: (i) MTE is an inauthentic replica of British slang; (ii) British Slang (and given the first claim, MTE) is an inauthentic replica of Jamaican slang; (iii) MTE is Patwa; and (iv) MTE contains loanwords from many sources and therefore no one owns it (with the implication that everyone in Toronto can claim authentic use). These claims are reminiscent of the discourses found in the 6ixBuzz representations: there is fuzzy understanding around the origin of register shibboleths of MTE and, consequently, disparate claims to authenticity.

The ways in which CBC representations are taken up in subsequent discourse are similar to the uptake of representations on 6ixBuzz. Those in the know (i.e. those socialized into the register) make comments that further reify the register, its repertoire and its valuation (even if there are coexisting, competing valorizations). However, as observed earlier, CBC has a wider audience of those *not* in the know; those who lack the presuppositions around the register encounter these messages *anew* – both within the representations and within the subsequent virtual metadiscourse – and bring them into subsequent encounters, reinforcing its social range to an expanded social domain of recognition, one that reaches well beyond the young, Black and POC, Toronto hip-hop community audience of 6ixBuzz to Canadians in general.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

Subsequent metadiscursive engagement by audiences of pop-cultural representations of language functions to typify registers. As Agha (2007: 153) argues, 'in so far as such typifications have a mass circulation, they play ... a role in establishing the register as a social formation, in maintaining or expanding the social domain of its users, and in providing individuals with common intuitions about the significance of usage'. This article has highlighted the role of social media in this process as a channel through which audiences both consume and engage with pop culture and pop-cultural representations of language.

In the case of Multicultural Toronto English, we have shown that anxieties around the valorization of race, place, class and gender meanings, and how these all relate to authenticity, are on the forefront of audiences' minds when engaging with mediated representations of the register, whether those representations appear in grassroots social media or mainstream outlets. Both 6ixBuzz, with its over two million follower count, and the CBC, with its national broadcasting reach, have served as important

institutions for the circulation of discourses around MTE, and both socialize (or further socialize) their audiences into the register. We suggest that a similar process of socialization can be described for any register that is stylized in pop-cultural artifacts, but especially through social media. Given that the processes of register change are on full display herein, we echo Werner (2022: 2) and others cited therein, who assert the 'social and practical relevance of pop culture' for linguistics.

With respect to MTE specifically, as seen in the fragments we present, there are two prevalent veins of metadiscourse. The first involves the question of authenticity and an anxious tension between ethnoracial and place-based indexicalities of the register. As its local register name suggests, Toronto Slang indexes a place – Toronto. Yet, given that the majority of register shibboleths originate in Patwa and Somali, these features also index Blackness (given that most speakers of these languages are racialized as Black). These conflicting cultural models have led to debate around cultural appropriation and who is an authentic and authorized speaker. Indeed, during our recent fieldwork in a highly multicultural neighborhood of in Toronto's northwest, young Black Torontonians shared their reservations about the appropriation of Black languaging practice.<sup>17</sup> Brainer, 15, a Black, Nigerian-Torontonian, put it like this: 'Black people are not seasoning and we should not be used as spice in conversation.'

As apparent in the comments, MTE is also subject to stigmatization – the second salient metadiscourse. Given MTE's associations with Black and other racialized youth, we understand this stigma to be primarily linked with raciolinguistic ideologies that 'conflate racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective linguistic practice' (Flores & Rosa 2015: 150) and standard language ideologies that make space for linguistic prejudice to stand in for racial prejudice (Lippi-Green 1994). We note that while one commenter (4aiii) links MTE to Toronto, the immediate reply asserts that this way of speaking is specific not to Toronto as a whole but rather to *waste yutes* in the city. This is but one example of how stigmatizing and subalterning discourses about this linguistic practice – and by association Black linguistic practice – manifest in our data and elsewhere. If the main source languages of borrowings are Black languages and the majority of people who speak this register everyday are Black or otherwise racialized youth from specific neighborhoods, labeling these speakers *waste yutes* (or with descriptors like *unattractive*, *cringy*, *despicable* or *unintelligible* or in even more vivid, vulgar and extreme terms not reported here) has far-reaching consequences for how racialized youth who use MTE in their everyday vernacular are perceived (see Ilbury 2023 on the roadman persona in London).

Moreover, the semiosis of the Toronto Mans characterological figure is at once racialized as Black but also typified as deviant, lower class and underachieving, and of course, speaking MTE. Even more fundamental than the resultant discourses we document here, the reproduction of such representations by institutional media is

<sup>17</sup> Some of this fieldwork was reported on in an exhibition that we co-curated with the Canadian Language Museum and the The Spot Community Centre titled *Toronto voices: Language and identity at The Spot* <https://languagemuseum.ca/about-us/past-events/>

consequential as well. There is an attempt at humor in the seemingly ‘accurate’ representation of an incompetent Toronto MTE doctor from Scarborough and audiences might find gratification in seeing their experiences represented on screen by the national broadcaster, but such wide-reaching stereotypical representations can be damaging for those who speak this way habitually. There are very likely real-world doctors from Scarborough who use MTE and who are entirely competent in their medical practice and all other matters.

Racialized youth who ostensibly fit the stereotype likewise do not deserve sanctioning for the way that they speak; this is linguistic discrimination. As Benedicta, 15, another Black, Nigerian-Torontonian youth we spoke with during recent fieldwork, put it: ‘people can put you in a bubble; you can be really intellectual and intelligent but speak this way because you grew up around the area but others won’t take you as seriously’. As audiences engage with representations, even when the social range of the register may be contested and negotiated, the potentially harmful stigma is further cemented for its expanding social domain. With a widening circulation of these discourses, critical assessment of their material consequences is an important area of future research. Nonetheless, we have shown that if the process of mediatization drives sociolinguistic changes (Coupland 2014), audience engagement with mediatized pop-cultural representations of language is an engine that propels those changes forward.

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