

Adolescence

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0 Introduction

Adolescents have long been recognized as influential in the processes of language variation and change. Survey studies have uncovered their unique role in patterns of inter-generational change, leading to the identification of the *adolescent peak*. Subsequent research has examined the social practice of adolescents in order to uncover what it is that makes them so influential in language change. In addition to augmenting approaches to adolescent speakers, this work has significantly influenced the scope of variationist analyses more generally. This chapter charts the progress of research on adolescence in variationist sociolinguistics and explores how this work has shaped the variationist enterprise. In particular, we explore some of the relationships between different strands of research and suggest that a combined approach could lead to a better understanding of the role adolescents play in language variation and change, as well as further enriching our knowledge of the stylistic capabilities and constraints on human language behaviour.¹

1 Defining adolescence

Adolescence is the period that emerges as a consequence of a series of biological, psychological and social transitions between childhood and adulthood. As a consequence, *adolescence* has been studied in a number of disciplines. In psychology, it was originally conceptualized as a series of physiological and psychological processes (Hall 1904) that coincide with “the second decade of

¹ J.K. Chambers & Natalie Schilling (eds) *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*. Second edition. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 277–296.

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life” (Reuter 1937: 414). More recently, it has been associated with pubertal development, an increase in the likelihood of being depressed, and an increase in risky and delinquent behaviour (Spear 2000; Steinberg & Morris 2001; Susman et al. 2003). Neurobiological research suggests that adolescence represents a transitional phase in terms of brain development (Blakemore 2008; Somerville et al. 2011). While these biological processes generally coincide with the adolescent life stage, the effect of cultural forces on physiological processes is also well known, such as the impact of socioeconomic deprivation on the age of pubertal onset (Belsky et al. 2007). The extent of this relationship is illustrated by the continuing fall in the age of puberty in the United States, which some believe may eventually require a reconceptualization of the childhood/adolescence boundary (Herman-Giddens 2007).

In sociology, adolescence was initially conceptualized as an oppositional culture, defined in relation to adults and adult institutions (Coleman 1961). Subsequent research has revealed a much more complex picture of the relationship between adolescents and adults, with adolescence acting more as a renegotiation of the parent/child relationship than a process of complete disengagement (Crosnoe & Johnson 2011: 444). Other work has focused upon the dynamics of interpersonal relations and the influence of the peer network. Adolescence marks a sharp increase in the frequency of interactions with peers, as well as a greater desire to maintain a coherent sense of identification (Brechwald & Prinstein 2011). Educational institutions force adolescents to socialize with people of their own age and offer little opportunity for meaningful contact with individuals outside this age bracket. For this reason, schools have a profound influence on the ways in which adolescents organise themselves into friendship groups, to the extent that Eckert (2003: 112) chooses to define adolescence as “a response to the constraints (and opportunities) that these conditions place on the age group.”ⁱ Sociolinguists have seized on this situation as an opportunity for observing the evolution of sociolinguistic meaning in adolescent language and the use of variation to construct social identities.

Despite the central role of adolescents in variationist sociolinguistic research, not all

variationists have drawn upon the psychological, sociological and anthropological literature in defining this life stage. Adolescents are often only defined implicitly in much research, usually in terms of chronological age. Adolescents are sometimes also included as part of a ‘younger’ age group, which can be comprised of individuals aged anywhere between 12 and 27 years old (see, for instance, Dyer 2002; Watt 2002). Etic approaches, which group cohorts in equal time-spans (such as decades) can be convenient for graphic displays of the data and for descriptive comparisons. However, broad categorizations may obscure trends that emerge at more specific age ranges. Furthermore, as researcher-defined constructs, they may also fail to reflect the socially constructed nature of adolescence in the community under study. It is for this reason that Eckert (1997) encourages the use of emic approaches, which group speakers according to their shared experiences. In the following two sections, we demonstrate how the conceptualization of adolescence significantly affects what it is possible to learn and explain about age-correlated language variation and change.

2 The role of adolescents in language change

2.1 *The adolescent peak*

Adolescents have long been a focus in variationist work for what they can tell us about inter-generational dialect transmission and change. One reason for this is that adolescents often have a highly sophisticated knowledge of adult norms, but at the same time are influenced more by their peers than by adults (Kerswill 1996: 198). Adolescence has also been claimed to represent the “critical stage” in second-dialect acquisition (Chambers 2009: 181-84), although this situation is now thought to be much more complex than has previously been assumed.

Labov’s (2001: 454) discussion of the transmission of a sound change identifies a pattern that recurs in a range of studies. When a change-in-progress is underway, the innovative variant is used with greater frequency as the generations get younger, until adolescence, where the innovative form peaks in frequency and is then used less frequently by preadolescents. This peak around

adolescence is not only found in studies of phonological variation (Trudgill 1974; Ash 1982; Cedergren 1988), but also in studies of morphosyntax and discourse features (Tagliamonte & D’Arcy 2009). It has been characterized as the outcome of vernacular reorganization (Labov 2001: 415-417), the process by which children come to speak differently from their caregivers and, in doing so, advance a linguistic change. Kerswill & Williams (2000) have shown that children’s speech mirrors that of their caregivers until around four years, after which social forces lead children to focus on a new linguistic norm, which may involve the steady advancement of linguistic changes. Stabilization of the vernacular is believed to occur between the ages of 14 and 17 (Chambers 2009: 175; Labov 2001: 447; Taglimonte & D’Arcy 2009: 66), although there is still much debate about the extent of that stability, given real-time evidence of linguistic change in adults (Cedergren 1988; Blondeau 2001; Sankoff 2004). However, types of linguistic modification are clearly age-related, such that vocabulary is easily acquired whereas lexically unpredictable phonological rules are not (Kerswill 1996: 200). In this sense, the adolescent peak is the result of the vernacular stabilization of those features that are less easily acquired later in life.

While some have interpreted the adolescent peak as evidence of age-grading (Chambers 2009: 200), Tagliamonte & D’Arcy (2009: 70) argue that it is a straightforward artefact of the “logistic incrementation of linguistic change.” As linguistic change sweeps across successive generations, we should expect each generation to show a steady increase at adolescence. Older speakers have lower rates of use because their language use stabilized at an earlier (lower) increment than that achieved by the current group of adolescents. Similarly, younger speakers only have lower use of the incoming form because they are still in the process of incrementation and have had less time to accrue increments. Unless the change reaches completion, these younger speakers will eventually surpass the current group of adolescents when their vernacular stabilizes. Viewed this way, it looks like the peak is a consequence of a mechanical linguistic process, which concludes at the critical age of vernacular stabilization.

Does this mean that adolescence is only significant as a developmental watershed? Given

what we know about the complexity of this life stage, this is unlikely. Adolescence marks a time in which individuals seek to differentiate themselves from the adjacent life stages of childhood and adulthood. In this sense, what is socially significant about adolescent language may not be the acceleration of vernacular use alone, but the fact that this life stage provides “a license and an imperative to begin acting on certain kinds of social knowledge that the age cohort has been developing for years” (Eckert 2000: 8). In this sense, it provides the perfect context in which to adapt, resignify and reconstrue language variation, irrespective of whether that variation has been first acquired in a probabilistic fashion or not.

The study of adolescent language is thus incredibly instructive in two important ways. First, it represents “the most uniform and characteristic variety” of vernacular English (Labov 1973: 81), as illustrated by the adolescent peaks found for change in progress. In this way, studies of adolescence provide the latest insights into processes of variation and change. We illustrate this in the next section by exploring how research on adolescents in Britain has identified a particular type of language change. Second, the fact that adolescence is “both short and intense – a social hothouse” (Eckert 2000: 15-16) makes it the perfect context in which to test the limits of the relationship between language and social categories, and language and social meaning. The nature of these relationships is explored in §§4 and 5 respectively.

2.2 *Dialect levelling and innovation*

Much of the research on adolescent speakers in British speech communities has been concerned with adolescents’ participation in what has been termed *regional dialect levelling*. Williams & Kerswill (1999: 149) describe this as “a process whereby differences between regional varieties are reduced, features which make varieties distinctive disappear, and new features emerge and are adopted by speakers over a wide geographical area”. These new forms are claimed to possess greater geographical currency than traditional features and can sometimes represent the development of a set of supralocal linguistic norms that spread across geographical regions

(Kerswill 2003: 224).

Kerswill & Williams' study of Milton Keynes, a 'new town' in the south of England, illustrates this process. At the time of their study, Milton Keynes was overwhelmingly comprised of incomers from different dialect areas, resulting in considerable heterogeneity amongst the adult population. The children of these incomers became the first group of native-born individuals in the new town. Kerswill & Williams (2000) investigated ten phonological variables in the speech of these children and found that 12 year old adolescents possessed different phonetic realizations of these variables when compared to both adults and younger children. One change occurring more broadly in the south east of England was fronting of the off-glide of the GOAT diphthong, giving [ɛʏ] or [ɛɪ] in place of the more traditional [əʊ] or [ɔɪ].ⁱⁱ This change was found to be advanced in the 12-year-olds, suggesting that focusing – the development of norms in patterns of linguistic behaviour – was already taking place in the speech of native-born children who grew up in Milton Keynes. The greatest effects were found in the adolescents who were at once tightly integrated into a local peer group and had access to extensive social contacts (Kerswill & Williams 2000: 94). This suggests that adolescence is not only characterized by a shift to a more peer-oriented culture (in comparison to the more home-oriented culture of young children), but it may also involve a change in social networks, and changes in forms of social integration.

Writing elsewhere on this research, Williams & Kerswill (1999) observe that some of the consonantal features identified in Milton Keynes (believed to have diffused from London) have been found in other British urban communities. These features include /t/-glottaling (the realization of /t/ as [ʔ] in word-medial intervocalic position) and TH-/DH-fronting (the realization of /θ/ as [f] and /ð/ as [v]). Williams & Kerswill not only find these features in the speech of working-class adolescents in another southern city, Reading, but also in the speech of the individuals with the same demographic characteristics in a north-eastern city, Hull. Other features which have been identified as “a set of ‘youth norms’ adopted by young people in many areas of Great Britain” (Williams & Kerswill 1999: 159) include labiodental /r/ (the realisation of /r/ as [v] rather than as

the approximant [ɹ]; see Foulkes & Docherty 2000) and /l/-vocalisation, where /l/ is realized as a high back rounded vowel (see Stuart-Smith 1999: 210). Kerswill (2003: 231) considers their spread to be a case of geographical diffusion, going so far as to describe /t/-glottaling, TH-fronting and labiodental /ɹ/ as the “torchbearers” of this process. However, explaining how these features might have diffused from south to north is not straightforward, given Britain’s well-established north-south divide, which has been described as social, linguistic and perceptual (Wales 2000, 2006; Montgomery 2006). Any diffusion account ought to be able to evidence dialect contact, at the very least, and perhaps also positive orientation to the variety from which the form has diffused. It is not yet clear how these circumstances have been met for some of the varieties in which the levelled features have been observed. This has led Britain (2009: 139) to suggest that the preponderance of these features may not be a consequence of diffusion at all. He argues that some of the levelled ‘youth’ features are acquired early by many Anglophone children and that their increased use may be a consequence of their typologically unmarked status. This is supported by Johnson & Britain (2007), who propose that /l/-vocalisation is a natural development in dialects which have acquired dark /l/ in syllable rhyme contexts. Intriguingly, Beal (2010, 83) notes that dialects which lack this innovation (such as those of Newcastle and Norwich) lack the light/dark allophonic distinction.

The explanation for adolescent dialect levelling is unlikely to be simple or universal. In their analysis of the spread of TH-fronting in Glasgow, Stuart-Smith & Timmins (2010) propose a complex interaction of dialect contact, social practices, attitudes, personality, and capacity to innovate. One aspect of social practice considered in their study is media engagement. Public discourse commonly denigrates adolescent speech (Eckert 2004: 361) and blames the influence of television and the internet (as in newspaper stories such as “The teens who can barely talk”, *The Daily Mail* 11th January 2011); but this influence has not been evidenced in the linguistic research. This may be because it has not been comprehensively investigated. Stuart-Smith & Timmins (2010) suggest the ways in which speakers appropriate media material through their social practice may affect, or at the very least interact with, their language use. The full report on this research is still

forthcoming, but initial findings suggest that variationists may have to attend to media influence in the future – at least in terms of how it interacts with other forms of social practice (Stuart-Smith et al. forthcoming). This is particularly pertinent in work on adolescence, given the ever increasing use technology plays in the activities of this life stage.

Technology is not the only change experienced by present-day adolescents; recent work on dialect levelling and innovation is also exploring the changing composition of modern urban communities. A number of studies attest the use of adolescent ‘multiethnolects’ in large multilingual cities, language varieties that are used by “several minority groups [...] collectively to express their minority status and/or as a reaction to that status to upgrade it” (Clyne 2000: 87). Multiethnolects have been identified across a range of European contexts (Kotsinas 1992; Nortier 2001; Quist 2008; Weise 2009; Quist & Svendsen 2010; Cheshire et al. 2011; Fox et al. 2011). In their work on London English, Cheshire et al. (2008, 2011) find that non-Anglo adolescents lead in the use of variants emerging from language contact, such as the adoption of narrow diphthongs and monophthongs in the FACE, GOAT, MOUTH and PRICE vowels, while their Anglo counterparts level variants that are diffusing geographically. Most strikingly, they find that “[m]inority ethnic speakers lead innovations, regardless of which minority they belong to” (Cheshire et al. 2008: 3) and that adolescents who belong to multiethnic social networks are able to use features that may be associated with an ethnic group to which they do not belong. This is reminiscent of Rampton’s (1995) study of “crossing”, but Cheshire et al. find this systematic variation in everyday speech, not just in performance or stylized talk. They label the resulting “variety space” *Multicultural London English*, on the basis that “the features are only loosely associated with specific ethnicities or language backgrounds” (Cheshire et al. 2011: 190). Whether the rest of the adolescent community follows this pattern over time should motivate further research into this kind of dialect situation.

This work suggests that specific local factors may affect adolescents’ engagement in dialect levelling, and this has been reported elsewhere. For example, Watson (2006) finds that adolescents in Liverpool are increasingly diverging from the supralocal variants discussed above. His data show

no evidence of the supralocal glottal realizations of /t/. Pre-pausal /t/ is instead commonly realized as [h], a widely stereotyped feature in Liverpool English. In fact, Liverpool adolescents not only avoid the supralocal form, they are increasing their use of the localized form over time. Watson stops short of explicitly explaining these patterns, but he implies that they are a consequence of Liverpool's distinctive regional identity. In reviewing this work, Beal (2010: 85) surmises that there may be little incentive for Liverpudlian adolescents to adopt /t/ glottaling when [h] already serves similar social functions in the community.

There is also evidence to show that, even if adolescents appear to be using supralocal variants, they may be using them to produce distinctively local forms of differentiation, rather than to index participation in a national 'youth culture'. Llamas (2007) finds an increase in glottal stops for /t/ in her data from Middlesbrough, a city in the northeast of England. Middlesbrough adolescents thus differ from those in the nearby area of Tyneside, who have typically been more resistant to this innovation (although there is some evidence that this is beginning to change, see Watt & Milroy 1999: 29-30). Llamas argues that the Middlesbrough adolescents' adoption of the glottal stop serves to differentiate them from the more traditional glottal /t/ found in Tyneside. In this case, the supralocal variation is recruited to signal more local geographical distinctions.

Levelled forms have been found to mark local differentiation elsewhere. To return to the Glasgow patterns discussed above, Stuart-Smith et al. (2007) suggest that the use of TH-fronting enables working-class adolescents to reify the social divide between themselves and middle-class adults who retain the majority of the regional Scottish English forms, despite their higher levels of mobility and greater opportunity for contact with speakers of other British English varieties. Here, then, the social meaning of the diffused forms is recruited to mark local distinctions around social class status.

The work of Stuart-Smith et al. illustrates the benefits of further stratifying the adolescent category. Because work on language variation and change has focused on tracing language change across generations, adolescents are often represented as a single homogeneous category. This has

been instructive for our description of the general advancement of language change, but may have inhibited our ability to fully explain the observed variation. For instance, while phonological changes typically show adolescent peaks in apparent time for women only, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy (2009) find that discourse-pragmatic and morphosyntactic (-semantic) changes show adolescent peaks for both females and males. They are unable to explain this difference because, as they themselves observe, that would require researchers to “move deeper into the speech community and attempt to understand the contribution of individuals” (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2009: 98). Likewise, the British research on dialect levelling reveals a number of cross-community similarities, but the source and meaning of these innovations has yet to be fully established for many of the adolescent communities studied. Understanding why adolescents lead change requires that we take a more fine-grained view of this life stage. In the next section we show how, in attempting to explain the role of adolescents in language variation and change, this research has produced a more nuanced approach to the social categories considered in variationist analyses.

3 Adolescence and social categorization

While we have been inured to think about adolescents leading language change, the reality is that only a subset typically advances change. This has been shown most clearly in Eckert's extensive work on the Detroit adolescents of Belten High School (see, for instance, Eckert 1989; 2000; 2009a). Eckert's work shows how two distinct adolescent *communities of practice* (CofPs), the jocks and the burnouts, engage with the Northern Cities Shift (a vowel shift in the US that involves all the mid and low vowels). The jocks and the burnouts represent middle class and working class cultures, respectively, and their language behaviour reflects this difference. The three latest sound changes in Detroit are the backing of DRESS to [ʌ], the backing of STRUT to [ɔ], and the raising and the backing of the nucleus of the PRICE diphthong to [ɔ]. Eckert shows that the burnouts lead

the jocks in all three of these sound changes. She argues that this is a consequence of the urban orientation of the burnouts, which simultaneously brings them into contact with these urban variants and provides their motivation to acquire them.

The ethnography behind Eckert's analysis provides a view on variation that would be difficult to uncover using other methods. It enables her to make more nuanced observations about the relationship between language, structural factors such as class and gender, and CofP membership. A CofP is "an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour" and is "defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992: 464). It captures the site at which individuals experience more abstract social categorizations. For instance, while Eckert notes the class orientations of the jock and burnout groups, she is at pains to stress that these categorizations do not always determine how individuals engage socially – some burnouts have middle class parents and, likewise, some jocks have working class roots. This is no small point in the context of our discussion of adolescence – Eckert (2009a: 138) argues that the correlation between adolescents' language and their parents' socioeconomic class is less robust than the correlation between children and their parents. She suggests that this is a consequence of the range of potential influences available to adolescents (such as neighbourhoods, peers, and heterogeneous school networks).ⁱⁱⁱ

Perhaps the most significant implication of Eckert's work is its demonstration that adolescents seek to differentiate themselves from each other, and not just from the adjacent life stages of adulthood and childhood. Jock girls are distinguishable from jock boys by lagging in their raising and backing of the nucleus of PRICE, but they are most distinct from the burnout girls. This suggests a complex interaction between class, gender and social practice. Eckert's study shows that it is not adolescents who lead language change, but particular groups of adolescents whose innovations reflect their pursuit of social differentiation. In addition to refining our understanding of exactly who leads linguistic change, Eckert's work sets a new standard for the description of social

differentiation. Her work at Belten High shows how gender and class are locally experienced, but her more recent work has focused upon the situated nature of ethnicity (Eckert 2008). While research on adult populations has tended to treat ethnic categories as homogeneous, recent work on adolescent communities illustrates the kind of intra-group diversity already shown for other forms of social categorization. In this way, work on adolescence is expanding our understanding of sociolinguistic heterogeneity. We exemplify this in the following section by focusing upon variation in ethnically-complex adolescent groups.

3.1 *Ethnic diversity*

Practice-based approaches have featured widely in research on adolescent ethnic groups. Mendoza-Denton's (1996, 2008) study of Latina girl gangs in California focused upon two CofPs, the Norteñas and the Sureñas. She found that more central gang members produced more raised realizations of the KIT vowel /ɪ/, regardless of their specific CofP membership. While this feature clearly reflects and construes the shared ethnic identity of these girls, Mendoza-Denton shows that these girls construct quite distinct social identities. Whereas the Norteñas' practices situate them as bicultural and modern, the Sureñas situate them as traditionally Mexican. Consequently, the meanings associated with raised /ɪ/ shift according to the specific Latina style in which the variant occurs. Because of her focus on social practice, Mendoza-Denton is able to show that shared ethnicity does not necessarily result in a homogeneous adolescent style.

Alam's study of adolescent Scottish Pakistani girls represents the first CofP study of an ethnic minority population in Britain (Alam 2007; Alam & Stuart-Smith 2011). Alam conducted a three-year ethnography in a high school during which she observed the social practices of Glaswegian girls of Pakistani heritage. Her analysis concentrates on the realization of syllable-initial /t/, which has a highly stereotyped realization in British Asian English as retroflex or postalveolar (Lambert et al. 2007; Kirkham 2011a; Sharma & Sankaran 2011). Based on detailed ethnographic fieldwork, she identified a number of CofPs for the Pakistani girls, including the

Conservatives (who wear headscarves and adhere to traditional Pakistani values), the *Moderns* (who wear trendy clothing and engage in more daring behaviour, but still within the boundaries of community standards), and the *Messabouts* (who engage in risky social practices, such as drinking and swearing). Alam finds that the concentration of spectral energy in syllable-initial /t/ closely patterns with CofP membership and that this fine-grained variation is used in order to signal local ethnic identities. Her analysis highlights a range of intra-ethnic variation that is often erased from studies of sociolinguistic variation. In doing so, it demonstrates the rewards to be gained from carrying out ethnographic fieldwork with adolescent communities and reveals the extent to which adolescents use fine phonetic detail to communicate social information.

Mendoza-Denton and Alam focus on ethnic minority communities in contexts where the groups make up a significant proportion of the school population. In both cases, the peer networks within the school are largely replicated outside the school. This is unsurprising given the traditional correspondence in demographic make-up between schools and neighbourhoods. However, educational trends, in Britain at least, point towards a weakening of the link between the demographics of the school and the surrounding neighbourhood, with the majority of children no longer attending the school nearest to their home (Allen 2007). Kirkham's (2013) research in a multiethnic high school explores what happens when neighbourhood peer groups are not replicated in the school. His ethnographic fieldwork was conducted at a school located in an affluent area of Sheffield (a city in the north-east of England), which admits a mix of children from across the city. This results in a high proportion of ethnic minority adolescents, with the main ethnic groups in the school being of White British, Pakistani, Somali, African Caribbean and Yemeni heritage. The school thus exemplifies what happens at the boundaries of social and ethnic contact, and provides a social context for studying ethnicity as a relational construct. Kirkham conducts fine-grained acoustic analysis of a number of phonetic variables, including word-initial /t/, /l/, and the happy vowel (the word-final vowel in words such as 'happy' and 'really'). While some variables appear to be more strongly tied to ethnicity (for example, /t/ and /l/), others are more strongly tied to social

practices that transcend ethnic categorizations (such as happy). Kirkham demonstrates that understanding the relationship between phonetic variation and ethnicity depends on our ability to understand the social structure of the community under study and the relations between social groups.

The studies discussed in this section illustrate how research into adolescence is leading our understanding of the nature of the relationship between language and forms of social categorization. In particular, they suggest a distinction between structurally-constrained variation and stylistic adaptation. Both Alam and Kirkham find correlations between /t/ realization and ethnicity, but this variation is differently construed by Pakistani speakers in Glasgow and Sheffield due to the differing relationships between the Pakistani and host communities. This kind of research on adolescence shows how the linguistic-geographical make-up of a community exerts considerable influence on available social meanings. The following section expands on these findings further by addressing the ways in which other social meanings are locally construed and negotiated in adolescent communities.

4 Adolescence and social meaning

Research on adolescent language variation and change has shown links to particular kinds of linguistic behaviour that typify the innovation and rebellion of this life stage. However, the previous section has shown that adolescence – like any other social grouping – is a simplification, which erases diversity of experience. So, while some adolescents are rebellious, others are incredibly conventional; and while some may enthusiastically drive innovation, others may simply be caught up in the relentless “logistic incrementation of linguistic change” (Tagliamonte & D’Arcy 2009: 70).

As implied in §3.1, how adolescents engage with linguistic variation is likely a combination of their location in the social order and their response to the freedom and constraints duly imposed upon them. This has been shown by Moore (2010), who considers how nonstandard *were* (the use

of *were* in first and third singular contexts, for example, *it weren't that bad*) is distributed amongst adolescent girls in a high school in Bolton, a north-west British town. Moore considers how the form correlates with a number of social factors: CofP, self-identification, social class and parental place of birth. Four CofPs were identified: the populars (who were anti-school, sporty yet feminine, and moderately rebellious); the townies (who emerged from the popular group but exhibited a more extreme anti-school attitude and engaged in more risky social activities); the geeks (who were institutionally orientated and conformist); and the Eden Village girls (who were also institutionally-orientated and named after their desirable home area). The most robust correlation was between CofP and nonstandard *were*, confirming Eckert's (2009a: 138) observation that the correlation between adolescents' language and their parents' social status is less robust than many survey studies have implied. However, Moore shows that adolescents are variably constrained by their social backgrounds, depending upon the specifics of their life experience. So, while there is no interaction between social class and the townie, popular or geek CofPs, there is a strong interaction between social class and the Eden Village CofP. All but one of the Eden Village girls live in the prestigious locale after which their CofP is named. The village is a three-mile bus journey from their school (the majority of the other kids live within walking distance) and is a highly desirable and expensive place to live. Its population includes aspirational Boltonians who have moved there from other districts and wealthy incomers who have been drawn by the desirability of an elite home address. This means that the Eden Village girls' social engagements are largely limited to high status networks, which simultaneously isolate them from their school peers and constrain their conservative, near-categorical use of standard *was*. The social and linguistic behaviour of the other girls is less constrained because they do not experience the same sociocultural and geographical isolation. In fact, of the four townie girls, two are in the higher social class in the sample and still use very high frequencies of nonstandard *were*.

The townies' use of a local nonstandard form, irrespective of their social class status, suggests that the social meaning of nonstandard *were* may transcend its local class associations. In

using this variant as a component of their unique sociolinguistic style, the townies not only exploit its historical associations, but they also construct more contemporary meanings for the feature which index the wild and rebellious social practices in which they engage. That adolescents, in particular, use nonstandard *were* to reflect their social practices, may serve to ensure the feature's robust "sociolinguistic vitality" (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994: 298) in the face of competing forms.

Moore's (2010) work suggests that, while adolescents may innovate by leading linguistic change, they may also innovate by expanding the social meanings associated with established linguistic variants. Understanding the social meaning of linguistic features is essential to explaining patterns of variation, but it is also necessary if we are to truly understand human language capabilities. As Moore (2011: 228) and Eckert (2012) point out, linguists interested in acquisition and psycholinguistic processing are now beginning to explore the constraints on variation, and variationists have a role to play in elaborating the social contexts of that variation. If variationists claim to explore the relationship between language and its social correlates, then the question of what counts as 'social meaning' must be tackled by those working in the field – a point which is now well established (Silverstein 2003; Eckert 2008b; Woolard 2008).

Those concerned with adolescent language are well-placed to explore the granularity of social meaning, given that adolescents have been found to exploit every kind of linguistic innovation. In previous sections, adolescents have been shown to use linguistic features to index structural demographic social types associated with class, gender, ethnicity and geography; or personae associated with local social practice (jocks, burnouts, townies). Other research has illustrated how adolescents may also use language to index more fleeting social identity processes such as stance. These micro-level meanings are implicit in much of the work we have already discussed. For instance, Eckert (2008b: 459) notes that the burned-out burnout girls (a group of burnouts who are even wilder than the regular burnouts) lead in all of the Northern Cities Shift urban variables and in a well-known grammatical variable, negative concord. Because boys

generally lead in the use of negative concord (in Belten High and elsewhere), it is tempting to assume that the burned-out burnout girls are trying to “talk like boys”. However, Eckert notes that these girls engage in feminine practices as well as participating in other female-led changes. She argues that their use of negative concord reflects their urban engagement and its social associations, such as danger and diversity. In this sense, their use of negative concord simultaneously reflects their stance towards the urban environment and expands the social meanings signalled by negative concord.

Stance has been construed in a number of ways in sociolinguistic work (see Jaffe 2009), but it tends to be used to refer to a form of evaluation. This evaluation may be enacted through social orientation (as in the Eckert example), or via an expression of affect or personal alignment. In an exploration of Scottish working class adolescents from a Glasgow high school, Lawson (2009, 2011) shows that phonetic features can align boys with anti-establishment behaviour. The boys most stereotypically associated with a violent counter-culture, the neds, tend to make greater use of vernacular features such as TH-fronting. However, they are not the exclusive users of this variant and Lawson argues that its occurrence in other speech styles is a consequence of its reflection of personal alignment to status (in particular whether or not one is perceived as ‘posh’) or the establishment. The use of other variants may be more subtle. The phonetic variable CAT (equivalent to the TRAP/BATH/PALM set in other varieties of English) shows a range of variants across the CofPs studied, but the extremes of behaviour are embodied by the neds, who tend to lower and front CAT, and the schoolies, who have more raised articulations. However, when these tokens occur in discourse with a negative affect (primarily associated with violence), these patterns seem to be reversed: the neds variants are more retracted and the schoolies are more fronted. The patterns are rather tenuous and Lawson (2009: 358-368) is circumspect about their significance; however, they imply that the schoolies may be using fronted tokens of CAT to perform a more violent stance, which is not generally reflected in their actual social behaviour.

While studies of stance have largely focused on L1 speech, work on speakers’ second

languages has also been revealing. Rindal (2010) finds that Norwegian adolescent learners of English attribute different social meanings to American and British varieties of English and that they exploit these meanings for particular social affect. Students often used more American English variants in peer conversations and more British English variants in reading word lists, reflecting their perception of different levels of formality and the prototypical stances associated with each variety. Nance's (2013) study of adolescents in a Scottish Gaelic medium high school in Glasgow also uncovers stylistic uses of a second language. She finds that the Glaswegian adolescents exclusively use English, not Gaelic, as a peer group language, but that social practice differences are nonetheless present in their Gaelic pronunciations. For example, the anti-school adolescents display more fronted productions of /u/ than pro-school adolescents in their Gaelic, illustrating the novel finding that non-peer group language can still be used to mark peer group distinctions.

Providing evidence of stance-taking is more difficult than charting a correlation between a social category and a linguistic feature, and researchers using adolescent case studies have been instrumental in developing new ways to access these social meanings. Some researchers have used perceptual experiments to uncover the stance-related meanings associated with linguistic features. In a sociophonetic ethnography of New Zealand high school girls, Drager (2009) finds that listeners are able to identify whether the speaker ate lunch in the school common room or not depending on whether the experimental stimulus featured a voice they recognized and/or contained a token of quotative *be like* that had a monophthongal vowel. Drager argues that listeners are responding to speakers' exploitation of the social meaning associated with this feature. The girls who do not eat lunch in the common room are separated into different groups (such as goths and geeks) and, while the overall styles of these groups are different from one another, their shared productions of quotative *like* reflect their stance towards a group of girls they mutually oppose: those who eat lunch in the common room.

In recent years, several studies have traced language change in the British and North American English quotative systems (see, for instance, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004; Buchstaller

2006; Rickford et al. 2007). This work has focused on adolescents' innovative use of *be like* and *be all* in place of more traditional forms such as *say* or *go*. Buchstaller (2006) has demonstrated that, while *be like* is globally perceived as 'young', listeners in different locales (Britain and the US) associate the form with different gender, personality and geo-spatial traits. This implies that quotatives can be used to enact different stances depending upon the local styles in which they occur – something that has been illustrated by Bucholtz (2011: 101-115) in her analysis of students from a San Francisco Bay area high school. Rather than using perception experiments, Bucholtz uses fine-grained discourse analysis to identify the social meanings articulated by these forms in interaction. Her study shows that *be all* occurs most frequently in the speech of 'preppy' girls. These girls tended to use the form to articulate a neutral stance (that is, one which did not index a strongly affective stance to the reported talk). However, when this form occurred in the talk of other social groups in the school, it most frequently signalled a negative stance towards the speech being quoted. Bucholtz argues that this is because *be all* is associated with a preppy identity, which, in turn, is perceived as being excessively evaluative. Thus, in using *be all* to express a negative stance, the non-preppy kids are drawing upon the association between the quotative form and the stereotypical preppy persona.

Bucholtz's work reveals that different levels of social meaning (social type, persona and stance) are interconnected. Research on adolescent speakers has made use of Silverstein's (1976, 1998, 2003) notion of indexical orders to understand these connections. Silverstein argues that social meanings are constructed as speakers rationalize correlations between linguistic features and competing social meanings. The interpretative process occurs when a correlation of some sort (for instance, that between burnouts and negative concord) is ideologically reinterpreted (such that the social practice of the burnouts associated with rebelliousness leads to that association for negative concord, for instance). There has been a tendency to imply that indexical orders at the level of social category are indexically superior, but Silverstein (1998: 128-129) claims that there is no absolute or prior indexical order. Any correlation (be it at the level of stance, persona or social type)

can be ideologically reinterpreted to generate social meaning at a different level.

This has been shown using data from the Bolton adolescents described earlier (Moore 2010). Moore & Podesva (2009) show the range of social meanings that can be assigned to a grammatically complex discourse item, the tag question. Quantitative analysis revealed two key discourse properties that were similar or identical across the townie, popular, geek and Eden Village CofPs: all groups use tag questions at the end of turns the majority of the time, and interlocutors most frequently expressed agreement with tags which occurred at the end of speakers' turns. Drawing upon previous research on the syntax and semantics of tag questions (such as Hudson 1975 and Kimps 2007), Moore & Podesva (2009) argue that tag questions are conducive – given that their discourse placement encourages the hearer to agree with a proposition. However, by analysing variations in discourse structure, the various grammatical constructions of tag questions (whether or not they occur with standard or nonstandard phonology and morphosyntax) and the topics their structure is used to convey, Moore and Podesva show that this conducive function can be operationalized to express a number of different stances, personae and social types. For instance, the tags used by populars are moderately nonstandard in design and predominantly occur in discussions of in- and out-group status. This enables them to articulate rather evaluative and critical stances. On the other hand, the Eden Village tags tend to occur in grammatically standard, highly interactive discourse (their tags most frequently resulted in agreement, and this agreement most frequently occurred during overlap of the tag itself); they therefore convey more collective, inclusive stances. Moore and Podesva go on to demonstrate that these stances can come to index both personae and social types. For instance, the frequency with which the populars used tag questions (much higher than the other CofPs) allowed their peers to identify these features as a key component of their linguistic style. In this way, the popular persona itself was recognized as a higher level indexical association. Other ideological associations were made at the level of social type. While all girls in the study unambiguously classified themselves as female, the Eden Village girls explicitly referred to themselves as “girly girls” and their ultra-collaborative style may have

also allowed their specific flavour of tag to be ideologically interpreted as ‘female’. Via the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the tag question, Moore and Podesva show the full extent of its social potential, incorporating stance, persona and social type, and filling out a comprehensive “indexical field” (Eckert 2008b) for this feature.

This section has demonstrated that researchers working on adolescent datasets have been in the vanguard of work on the social meaning of linguistic variation. In particular, this work has illustrated how perceptual experiments and discourse analysis can expand our understanding of the social meanings associated with language features. This work identifies interactional meanings associated with stance, and is at its most powerful when combined with traditional quantitative analysis which identifies correlations between linguistic variants and social group identities.

5 Future directions

Research on adolescence has identified the importance of this life stage in processes of variation and change. It has also advanced our understanding of the stylistic capabilities of language users and the socio-indexical potential of variation. As Eckert (2003) has noted, future work would do well to apply the approaches developed in recent adolescent research to individuals of all ages and social backgrounds. Used alongside traditional variationist techniques, these approaches will continue to expand our understanding of the relationship between language and agency, identity, style, indexicality, and forms of social categorization.

To understand more about the dynamics of adolescence itself, further research on the transitions into, through, and out of this life stage would be illuminating. Some work along these lines is already in progress. Eckert’s (2008a, 2009b) research on preadolescence tracks the emergence of social distinctions in this age group. Hilton’s (2010) work on Hønefoss Norwegian examines the effect of adolescents’ progression through local and regional schools on language ideology and usage. Wagner’s (2008) longitudinal study of high school girls in Philadelphia examines the linguistic correlates of the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. Recent

studies also examine the accent changes that accompany young adults' participation in new institutions, such as higher education (Evans & Iverson 2007), as well as the dynamics of sociolinguistic meaning in higher education communities (Kirkham 2011b). These are just a few examples, but there exists ample scope for development.

Research to date has demonstrated that adolescents are the leaders in sound change, as well as being heavily engaged in processes of constructing social meaning. However, there is still much to learn. For instance, more work is needed to explore how adolescents use innovative variants in order to construct particular stances in the communities under study. Is the same supralocal feature used in similar ways in different communities? How are supralocal and/or geographically specific meanings negotiated in interaction? Addressing these questions will require that a more extensive range of adolescent communities are considered. Given the way in which adolescent research has already shaped the variationist enterprise, this future work will undoubtedly play a key role in determining the future of our discipline.

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ⁱ This is not to say that adolescence is unique to heavily institutionalized or industrialized cultures. Bucholtz (2002) notes that similar categories occur across a range of cultures.

ⁱⁱ Throughout this chapter we make reference to vocalic variables using Wells' (1982) lexical sets.

ⁱⁱⁱ If forms of social stratification are not identical across life stages, then we might question the reliability of approaches to social stratification that imply uniformity of social experience across time.