

Urban communities of practice

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Abstract

This chapter discusses research on communities of practice in urban spaces, with a particular focus on language variation and change in multiethnic communities in Europe. I outline research showing that the community of practice approach is a valuable tool for analysing sociolinguistic dynamics in contemporary urban societies, but also suggest that it can be augmented with other complementary approaches in better understanding the social meanings of linguistic variation. Section 1 provides a brief overview of the community of practice approach and its theoretical basis. Section 2 covers research on urban communities of practice in the study of language variation and change. Section 3 specifically focuses on multiethnic urban communities of practice. Section 4 briefly discusses alternatives to the community of practice approach, as well as some complementary perspectives, whilst Section 4 concludes with some suggestions for future research.

1. Definitions and key terms

The community of practice (CofP) was theorised by Lave and Wenger (1991), who developed the concept in order to understand forms of social learning. They noted that traditional models of learning, such as the transmission of information from a teacher to a student, did not apply to more informal learning situations, such as apprenticeships or particular kinds of workplace socialisation. The CofP approach has been most widely popularised in sociolinguistics by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), who describe a community of practice as ‘an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour’ (Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 1992, 464). Communities of practice represent the social groupings that individuals construct for themselves (Moore 2011, 224) and, as such, they contrast with the social structures that analysts may sometimes use to organise their data, such as demographic categories or social networks. Membership in a community of practice differs from some other forms of social categorisation, such as social networks and speech communities, as it is ultimately defined by participation in a shared activity, which is hypothesised to give rise to mutually constituted practices and behaviours. In order to understand the nature of such participation, CofP research is usually ethnographic in nature, with Moore (2011, note 3) suggesting that ‘it is not possible to do a community of practice study without ethnography’.

Before discussing specific applications of this research, it is first worth unpacking what exactly comprises a CofP. Wenger (1998, 76-84) outlines the three main determinants as follows:

1. Mutual engagement
2. Joint enterprise
3. Shared repertoire

One of the key points is that a CofP is not simply a collective of people who engage in the same activity, but a group of people who engage in an activity together, hence the focus on *mutual engagement* (see Wenger 1998, Holmes/Meyerhoff 1999, Meyerhoff/Strycharz 2013 for a more detailed discussion). Wenger (1998, 74) stresses that CofP is ‘not a synonym for group, team, or network’ and that membership of a social category or a networks of interpersonal relations is not a sufficient condition for a CofP. For example, if a group of adolescents in a school listen to avant garde electronic music then this does not necessarily entail that they comprise a CofP. What would be important in determining whether they formed a CofP is that their appreciation of avant garde electronic music is something in which they are mutually engaged as a group.

Wenger’s notion of *joint enterprise* highlights the fact that mutual engagement in shared practices also means engagement in negotiating the meanings and values of those practices. He notes that ‘practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life’ (Wenger 1998, 52) and that people are engaged in a CofP when they are ‘engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another’ (Wenger 1998, 73). This consensus-based dimension of CofPs suggests a complex relationship between the individual and the group, with engagement in a joint enterprise being a power-laden and contested notion (Tusting 2005). However, Wenger (1998, 78) points out that ‘joint’ does not necessarily mean that everybody agrees upon everything, but that meaning has instead been ‘communally negotiated’. The specific processes behind this negotiation are likely to be specific to the CofP in question, but some have criticised the CofP approach for its lack of detail concerning the power dynamics involved in different kinds of CofP membership (e.g. Davies 2005). Subsequent work has increasingly attended to the role of power and the negotiation of participation; for example, Myers (2005) highlights the ideological struggles in contesting what counts as ‘legitimate participation’, whilst Moore (2010a) explores distinctions between *peripheral* and *marginal* participation (see also Eckert/Wenger 2005, Meyerhoff 2005, Moore 2006). Moore explains that ‘[p]eripheral participants are not core members of a CofP, but they nonetheless engage in and contribute to some of the *practices* of the CofP and, in doing so, can potentially affect the overall CofP style. Marginal participants are involved in the same *activity* as CofP members, but not in an ‘engaged’ way.’ (Moore 2010a: 126). These are important points in any discussion of urban CofPs, because urban CofPs are commonly situated within very large and complex networks, with individuals potentially experiencing differing types of participation across different CofPs. Notions of peripherality may influence the extent to which an individual participates in the sociolinguistic practices of the group. In addition to this, it may also be important to account for the range of CofPs that somebody belongs to, given that the linguistic practices of an individual are unlikely to be wholly determined by

their membership of a single CofP (Moore 2010a, 127-132). This idea is explored further in Section 4.

The final point outlined by Wenger is the idea of a *shared repertoire*, which is the aspect of CofPs that has received the most focus in sociolinguistic research. Wenger (1998, 85) proposes that mutual engagement in a joint enterprise produces shared ways of doing things, which emerge out of the processes of negotiating and co-constructing meaning (cf. Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 1992, 464). Clearly this is of great interest to those interested in language, as it follows that CofPs are likely to develop shared social practices, one of which is likely to be language (Eckert/McConnell Ginet 1992, Eckert 2012, 95-97). This concept will be discussed more extensively in Sections 2 and 3. Importantly, this shared repertoire is not simply some ‘off-the-shelf’ collection of pre-existing semiotic resources. Instead, a CofP’s repertoire may be highly heterogeneous, but it is given coherence through the pursuing of a joint enterprise by the CofP, which allows it to become recognised as a distinctive style (Wenger 1998, 82, Eckert 2012, 96).

2. Communities of practice and language variation

2.1 Urban communities of practice in the study of language variation and change

Since Eckert/McConnell-Ginet’s (1992) introduction of the community of practice to sociolinguistics, there has been extensive research into how communities of practice use language variation in urban contexts in order to construct identities and carve out social space. In particular, work on the *social meaning* of variation has looked towards CofPs in order to situate the local meanings of variation as a social practice. Eckert’s (1989, 2000) research in Detroit is perhaps the most prominent example of a variationist CofP study. She focuses on how two broad CofPs – the ‘Jocks’ and the ‘Burnouts’ – participate in the Northern Cities Vowel Shift, which involves the backing of the DRESS and STRUT vowels, as well as the raising and the backing of the nucleus of the PRICE vowel. The Jocks are pro-school, display a middle-class orientation, and uphold the ethos and cultural values of the school via participation in sports and extra-curricular activities. The Burnouts are anti-school, display a stronger orientation to the urban environment, and reject the school’s dominant ideologies surrounding educational aspiration. Whilst Eckert describes the Jocks and Burnouts as having a middle-class and working-class orientation respectively, she stresses that these orientations do not straightforwardly map onto socioeconomic class. Some Burnouts are from middle-class families and some Jocks are from working-class families. However, Eckert finds that the correlation between CofP and linguistic variation is stronger than the correlation between parental socioeconomic class and linguistic variation, with the Burnouts leading the way in the use of the innovative shifted vowel variants (cf. Eckert 2009, 138). This suggests that, in some instances, CofP membership may be a better predictor of linguistic variation than traditional demographic categories, such as age, gender, or socioeconomic class.

One of the reasons why CofPs may correlate with variation better than single demographic categories is that they capture individuals' lived experience of how social categories intersect (Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 1992, 472). Characteristics such as social class, gender and ethnicity are not experienced in isolation, but intersect with one another in often-complex ways. Researchers do not have access to the underlying power structures that underpin these categories, but can instead only observe the effects of such structures in behaviour. However, given that communities of practice are fundamentally sites for action, they afford an insight into how the power relations that emerge from intersecting identities are inscribed in everyday social practices. For example, another of Eckert's (2000) findings is that the most extreme Burnout girls lead in all of the linguistic changes, such as the use of shifted vowel variants and negative concord, whereas the Jock girls are the least advanced in their use of innovative variants. Rather than viewing the Burnout girls as 'trying to sound like boys', Eckert instead proposes that this can be explained with reference to how gendered ideologies intersect with social practice in the school. The status and social capital of girls is generally more dependent upon semiotic displays, such as appearance and linguistic variation, whereas boys are more likely to differentiate themselves via physical activities and sports (Eckert 2000, 122). Therefore, girls may be more likely to use resources such as appearance and linguistic variation in order to distinguish themselves from other groups in the surrounding social matrix, which explains why the girls occupy the extremes of the linguistic continuum in the school. Kirkham (2013) supports this point in his study of a school in Sheffield, UK. He finds large phonetic differences between female CofPs, but much fewer phonetic differences between male CofPs, with the male CofPs also being much larger in number and more distinct in terms of ethnicity, social class, appearance, and so on.

Moore's (2010b) study of adolescent girls in Bolton also demonstrates the complex intersections between CofPs and social categories in urban contexts. For some of the CofPs in her study, the correlation between social class and nonstandard *were* is stronger than the correlation between community of practice and nonstandard *were*. She interprets this in terms of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, claiming that '[s]peakers cannot use language agentively if they are in some way constrained from fully engaging in the contexts in which alternative linguistic practices are acquired' (Moore 2010b, 367). This implies that individuals' use of particular linguistic forms are facilitated by their engagement in particular social practices, but that demographic factors, such as social class, may restrict the extent to which an individual is likely to participate in particular practices. This highlights the fact that CofPs cannot capture all of the social practices in which individuals are engaged, as they may belong to a range of CofPs that have variable relevance across difference contexts. Moore (2010b, 367) concludes that an analysis of social practices outside the school may reveal more about the patterns in her data that could not be explained with reference to school-based CofPs.

Subsequent urban CofP studies have advanced our understanding of the relationship between macro-sociological conceptions of social class and more local CofP-based meanings. Lawson (2009, 2011) examines adolescent Glaswegian males' linguistic and social practices in an urban secondary school. He focuses on four CofPs: (i) the 'Alternatives', who orient towards alternative music, BMX and skateboarding; (ii) the 'Sports' CofP, who create their identities around playing football; (iii) the 'Neds', who engage in more adult social practices, such as underage drinking and smoking; and (iv) the 'Schoolies', who are much

more pro-school than the other CofPs. He finds robust differences between CofPs in the phonetic realisation of the CAT vowel, with the main differences between the Ned and Schoolie CofPs, who represent the extremes of the anti-school/pro-school continuum. Lawson suggests that this correlation between Neds and lower/fronter CAT realisations is indexical of an anti-middle-class and anti-establishment identity. However, Lawson also deploys other approaches, such as discourse analysis, in order to further explore the nature of this relationship. For example, Andrew, one of the Schoolie boys, engages in mock imitation of 'ned' speech, with his CAT vowels being acoustically lower during this episode of performative speech than in his speech elsewhere in the recordings. Lawson links the use of lowered and fronted CAT realisations, as well as the use of other variables such as TH-fronting, to the linguistic construction of a 'hard man' persona, which he describes as an urban working-class male persona in Glasgow (Lawson 2013a, 2013b). Lawson shows that discourses surrounding this persona were most actively reproduced by the 'Neds' CofP and, in doing so, demonstrates that the 'hard man' persona is locally constructed through a series of phonetic, discursive, and narrative practices.

2.2 Style and social meaning

Research on communities of practice has revealed the extent to which variation can be used to express the local social concerns of a community (Eckert 2012, 94). However, variation as a semiotic activity is not independent of other practices and symbolic devices. In Section 1, I mentioned Wenger's (1998, 82) claim that a CofP's repertoire may be heterogeneous but is given coherence through its crystallisation into a distinctive CofP style. Style is sometimes defined as a 'socially meaningful clustering of features within and across linguistic levels and modalities' (Campbell-Kibler et al. 2006), with variation being one social practice amongst others that can comprise a style. In her Detroit study, Eckert identifies a range of non-linguistic stylistic resources that are also used to index social orientations in the urban environment, such as straight-leg jeans versus bell-bottom jeans, dark colours versus pastel colours, and Detroit versus varsity jackets (Eckert 1980). She suggests that the former items listed here index a more urban orientation, being linked to social practices that take place within the surrounding urban environment, and the latter items a more pro-school orientation, which is linked to social practices that are confined to the boundaries of the school. Mendoza-Denton (1996) also identifies interplay between linguistic variation and non-linguistic semiotic resources amongst Latina girls in Northern California, such as the relationship between eyeliner length and gang affiliation. To this end, research on urban CofPs has further advanced the proposal that variation acquires meanings in styles, which are embodied and constructed by CofPs.

Whilst CofP styles involve a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic resources, styles are also linguistically complex. Moore/Podesva (2009) consider how one morphosyntactic construction – the tag question – co-occurs with other linguistic resources, such as the phonetic realisation of word-final /t/, in constructing different social meanings between CofPs. They focus on four CofPs from Moore's ethnographic study: the Townies, Populars, Geeks, and Eden Village girls. All CofPs produce tag questions fairly frequently, but what differs is their grammatical and phonetic make-up, as well as their discourse content. The

Townies use tags with non-standard morphosyntax and glottal realisations of word-final /t/, which tend to occur in narratives about older boys, sex and drugs. The Populars use tags very frequently, which usually feature moderately non-standard morphosyntax and are overwhelmingly used to evaluate other social groups. The Geeks use tags with standard morphosyntax and aspirated word-final /t/, but their tags are rarely used to evaluate others, instead being used to signal knowledge and authority. The Eden Village girls use tags with standard morphosyntax and they generally serve conducive and inclusive interactional ends. Moore/Podesva suggest that an understanding of the social meaning of tag questions amongst the CofPs requires the analyst to look towards the socially and linguistically layered nature of tags, as tags vary in terms of how they are used (e.g. to evaluate others or display knowledge), but also in their grammatical and phonetic composition (see Kirkham & Moore 2016 for a different example of the linguistically-layered nature of social meaning).

2.3 Local and supralocal identities

Much CofP research examines very local instances of language use and often focuses on linguistic variants that may be relatively specific to the community under study. However, the CofP approach is also well equipped to help better understand the social dynamics underlying broader kinds of language change. To return to Eckert's (2000) work in Detroit, she demonstrates how adolescents' participation in the Northern Cities Vowel Shift interacts with locally meaningful social processes that exist in a dialectical relationship with community-wide trends. To briefly re-cap, the Northern Cities Shift involves the backing of the DRESS and STRUT vowels, as well as the raising and the backing of the nucleus of the PRICE vowel, and the urban-oriented Burnouts lead the Jocks in all three sound changes. Eckert explains that the Burnouts may have greater access to these more urban variants through their greater participation in urban neighbourhoods and associated social practices. However, Eckert stresses that the use of these vowel variants is also inherently relational on a more local level, as they serve to phonetically differentiate the Burnouts from the Jocks within the specific context of the school. This suggests that the local social dynamics of urban communities may influence which speakers are likely to participate in a sound change.

Wagner (2013) makes a similar point in her analysis of the raising of PRICE before voiceless consonants amongst high school girls in Philadelphia. She carefully traces the social histories of the Irish-American and Italian-American communities in Philadelphia and shows how these histories are magnified in the school context in order to establish differences between ethnically-stratified CofPs. She argues for subtle differences between the two CofPs, with a more backed PRICE nucleus being associated with the Irish girls and a more centralised or fronter nucleus being associated with Italian girls (Wagner 2013, 371). She draws upon previous work claiming that raised PRICE is indexical of working-class men in Philadelphia (Labov 2001, 203) and also suggests that the raised variant is strongly associated with Irish speakers in the city's 'Second Street' neighbourhood. Based on this, Wagner explores the ways in which these community-level associations impact upon local social meanings in the school, whereby ideological links between working-class masculinity and toughness are linked to local stereotypes of Irishness. This facilitates the Irish girls' CofP rejection of sexualised femininity and, alongside their engagement in traditionally male

working-class social practices such as fighting, serves to differentiate them from the Italian girls' CofP.

Eckert's and Wagner's research highlights the need to examine how social categories and local social meanings interact with language change in the wider speech community. Kirkham (2015) also shows that community-wide social meanings may be reinterpreted in specific contexts, allowing distinctions such as working-class/middle-class to be projected onto more local categories, such as anti-school/pro-school. Both Wagner's and Kirkham's research deal with issues of identity and ethnicity and, to this end, recent research on ethnicity and urban CofPs has increasingly focused on the interplay between different levels of meaning and social structure. Accordingly, the following sections focus more specifically on language and ethnicity in urban CofPs, with a focus on how so-called 'ethnically-marked' variants interact with community sound changes, supralocal ethnic speech varieties, and local CofP identities.

3. Urban communities of practice in multiethnic contexts

3.1 Indexing beyond ethnicity

Early CofP research highlighted that social categories such as gender are not individual attributes or uniform across contexts, but collaboratively constructed through social practices that are embedded in CofPs (Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 1992, 484). Subsequent research has extended this perspective to other social categories, such as ethnicity, in order to better understand the relationship between language and ethnic identities (e.g. Benor 2010). Mendoza-Denton's (1996, 2008) work on Latina girl gangs in California primarily focuses on two CofPs – the Norteñas and the Sureñas. The Norteñas orient towards a bicultural and modern identity, whereas the Sureñas orient towards a more traditionally Mexican identity. Both groups produce raised KIT vowels more frequently than other CofPs, and central CofP members produce the raised variant more frequently than peripheral members. Mendoza-Denton argues that this indexes a broad Latina identity in this school, but that the social meaning of raised KIT varies depending on the style in which it appears. She suggests that the Norteñas and Sureñas exploit different ideological associations of raised KIT, with the Norteñas' use indexing their modern English-speaking identity and the Sureñas use indexing pride in their Mexican roots. In doing so, Mendoza-Denton's work exemplifies the complex nature of social meaning and calls into question assumptions that the same form necessarily indexes the same meaning. It also problematizes straightforward links between variation and ethnicity because, while both CofPs use raised KIT to signal a broader Latina identity, this is clearly not its only indexical value. Eckert (2008a) argues that 'ethnic' variants may often index social characteristics other than ethnicity, which may be ideologically related to ethnic identities, or in other instances may be unconnected to ethnicity. For example, Bucholtz (2011) shows that White American students may use linguistic features and styles of address associated with African American English. However, this practice does not mean that those students are attempting to index

‘African Americanness’. Instead, Bucholtz suggests that they are drawing upon social characteristics that are ideologically associated with African American speakers, such as coolness, toughness, and urbanity (cf. Eckert 2008a, 27). Here, ethnicity is just one potential value in the indexical field of a particular variant (Eckert 2008b). Furthermore, as Mendoza-Denton’s work shows, ‘ethnicity’ may be differently construed by different CofPs within a particular context.

In order to more fully explore the complexity of social meaning associated with so-called ‘ethnic’ variants, I present some case studies that focus on the variety that is sometimes called ‘British Asian English’. In the United Kingdom it is well known that second-generation immigrants of South Asian origin may share some features that belong to the broader repertoire of British Asian English (Sharma 2011). The term ‘British Asian English’ is an abstraction, because, as discussed below, the features of this variety are construed in different ways depending upon the social and linguistic dynamics of the local community (e.g. Alam/Stuart-Smith 2011, Kirkham 2011, 2013, Stuart-Smith et al. 2011). However, the phonetic features most commonly associated with British Asian English include:

- Retracted or retroflex realisation of the coronal stops /t/ and /d/ (Heselwood/McChrystal 2000, Alam 2007, Lambert et al. 2007, Alam/Stuart-Smith 2011, Kirkham 2011, Sharma/Sankaran 2011)
- Shorter voice-onset time in stop consonants (Kirkham 2011, McCarthy et al. 2013)
- Clearer realisations of /l/ (Heselwood/McChrystal 2000, Sharma 2011, Stuart-Smith et al. 2011, Kirkham 2013, Kirkham & Wormald 2015)
- Monophthongal and/or closer realisations of the FACE and GOAT vowels (Sharma 2011, Stuart-Smith et al. 2011, Wormald 2014).
- Lengthening and raising/fronting of the happyY vowel (Heselwood/McChrystal 2000, Kirkham 2015)

As noted earlier, Eckert (2008a) suggests that linguistic features that are typically associated with ethnic groups may be used to index more local conceptions of ethnicity or may index something other than ethnicity altogether. Alam/Stuart-Smith (2011) report an ethnographic study of a group of adolescent Pakistani girls at a secondary school in Glasgow that effectively illustrates Eckert’s point. They focus on the acoustic realisation of syllable-initial /t/, which, as reported above, is commonly described as retroflex or retracted in many varieties of British Asian English. In this study they focus on female Asian speakers, who belong to one of three CofPs – the Conservatives, the Moderns, and the Messabouts. Each CofP differs in terms of its relationship to traditional Pakistani Muslim values in the local community. In order to explore the relationship between CofP membership and phonetic variation, they report a spectral moments analysis of the first ten milliseconds of the stop burst and find a significant effect of CofP for the mean, skew and kurtosis. For example, the Conservatives produce /t/ with a higher mean frequency than the Modern or Messabout girls, which may reflect a phonetic distinction between the girls who strongly adhere to traditional Pakistani cultural values (Conservatives) and those who engage in social practices that are, to varying degrees, more stigmatised by the Glasgow Asian community (Moderns and Messabouts). Alam and Stuart-Smith’s results demonstrate that a feature often considered emblematic of ‘ethnic’ identity – that is, a ‘British Asian’ identity – may be used

to index more local ethnic identities within such a community. This has implications for what whether we can talk of a 'British Asian' accent, given the importance of the local context and the ways in which phonetic features originating in the heritage language interface with the phonetic makeup of the majority language spoken in the local community (Alam/Stuart-Smith 2011, 219).

Kirkham (2013) also demonstrates the importance of accounting for the local nature of variation within British Asian communities. A previous study reported in Kirkham (2011) confirmed predictions in the literature that Pakistani adolescents are more likely to produce word-initial /t/ with acoustic characteristics that infer a more retraced place of articulation. However, a subsequent study of the larger school environment in which these adolescents were involved revealed further patterns. Whilst most studies of British Asian /t/ focus on /t/ retraction or retroflexion, Kirkham (2013) examines /t/ affrication in a multiethnic secondary school in Sheffield, which includes British Asian speakers. The results show that the most striking differences are amongst the female CofPs, whereby two anti-school female CofPs occupy different ends of the /t/ affrication continuum. The Rebellious girls produce highly affricated realisations, whilst the Parkdale girls produce unaffricated (and often unaspirated) realisations. The Twilight girls, an exclusively Pakistani and Somali CofP, and the Ashton girls, an affluent and predominantly White CofP, occupy a phonetic middle ground in-between these groups. Crucially, whilst there may be a link between variation and ethnicity, ethnicity does not determine phonetic realisations in this instance. For example, the speaker with the most affricated realisations is Leila, who is Pakistani, Muslim, and also one of the Rebellious girls, but she remains highly distinct from the larger group of Pakistani and Somali Muslim girls (Twilight girls) who produce less affricated realisations.

Kirkham's study demonstrates that the CofP approach can yield insights that might not always be apparent using other approaches, as the salience of /t/ affrication was only evident via ethnographic observation of communities of practice in the school. For instance, whilst Kirkham (2011) found clear differences in /t/ realisation between White and Pakistani speakers, the subsequent CofP study suggested that affrication may be a more important axis of variation than advancement/retraction in this context. In turn, this shows that it is not only the Pakistani speakers who are doing something different from the canonical aspirated alveolar /t/. Instead, /t/ varies in interesting ways across multiple groups in the school, with the CofPs differing in the degree of affrication of word-initial /t/.

3.2 Multiethnic communities of practice

CofP research on ethnicity has typically focused on variation within speakers who belong to a single ethnic group. This has been invaluable in demonstrating the heterogeneity within such groups and problematising the straightforward use of 'ethnicity' as an explanatory variable in sociolinguistic research. At the same time, much research in European cities focuses on very large multiethnic adolescent networks (Kotsinas 1992, Nortier 2001, Quist 2008, Weise 2009, Quist/Svendsen 2010, Cheshire et al. 2011, Fox et al. 2011). Most work in this area has focused on broader friendship networks rather than CofPs (see Section 4 for more details), but such contexts also present intriguing possibilities for the formation of CofPs.

Quist's (2008) study of a Copenhagen high school focuses on how individuals from different ethnic backgrounds orient towards particular 'style clusters', which entail a collection of linguistic and other semiotic resources, such as clothing style, school orientation, etc. She explains that 'style clusters illustrate that there are regular concurrencies of features that, in the course of time, make it possible to create stylistic meaning' (Quist 2008, 52) and examines how individuals engaged in particular style clusters use or avoid features associated with the Copenhagen 'multiethnolect'. To give a brief example, 'style cluster 1' is embodied by White Danish boys, who are disengaged with school, smoke, and drink alcohol. They avoid the use of multiethnolectal features and instead use 'slang' and phonetic features such as affricated /t/. 'Style cluster 2' is embodied by boys who call themselves 'foreigners', who are primarily ethnic minority students. They are also anti-school, but are linguistically distinct from the White Danish boys in their use of multiethnolectal features. Finally, 'style cluster 3' is embodied by pro-school boys from a range of ethnic backgrounds who actively participate in schooling and avoid more risky social practices. They also avoid the use of multiethnolectal features. Quist's study illustrates the context-dependent nature of so-called 'ethnic' variation. She demonstrates that the ideological cluster of resources that are identified as 'multiethnolect' are best seen as a stylistic practice that is utilised by some speakers in some contexts. This contrasts with a view of multiethnolects as discrete varieties that are spoken by some individuals and not others.

Work in the United Kingdom has also focused on urban multiethnolects, most notably in London. Cheshire et al. (2011) emphasise the stylistic dimension of multiethnolects, describing Multicultural London English as a 'feature pool' from which speakers may select particular variants in the construction of a style. This research is discussed further in Section 4, but for now I focus on Fox's (2007, 2010) research in Tower Hamlets, London, which focuses on the more local social dynamics that might characterise aspects of Multicultural London English. At the time of Fox's fieldwork, over 50 per cent of children in Tower Hamlets were of Bangladeshi origin and, to this end, she studied a group of Bangladeshi, White and 'mixed race' adolescents in a youth club located in the borough. She finds that Bangladeshi boys do not use traditional Cockney variants of FACE and GOAT and that the White and mixed-race boys produce these vowels more like the Bangladeshi boys than the White girls. Importantly, she finds that the boys who engaged in higher levels of inter-ethnic contact were more likely to use the variants associated with Bangladeshi boys, such as the use of [ɐ] for PRICE. These boys were also the ones who most strongly oriented towards urban 'street' culture, which suggests that social practice has a role to play in understanding patterns of variation. In addition to this, there were also differences according to the expressed strength of the Bangladeshi boys' Muslim identity. Boys who expressed a stronger Muslim identity were less likely to use the [ɐ] variant than those with a weaker Muslim identity. In line with the research by Mendoza-Denton (2008) and Alam & Stuart-Smith (2011), Fox's study foregrounds the important interactions between ethnicity and other factors, such as religion and gender.

Kirkham's (2013, 2015, 2016) study of a secondary school in Sheffield, a city of the north of England, further illustrates some of the social dynamics that can accompany multiethnic CoFPs. The school is partly characterised by a sharp socioeconomic divide, with

affluent White teenagers coming into contact with minority ethnic teenagers from more socioeconomically deprived backgrounds. The social composition of CofP in the school is not wholly determined by ethnicity, but CofP membership does interact with ethnicity in various ways. For example, the *Twilight girls* CofP is exclusively made up of Pakistani and Somali girls who actively identify as Muslim. Their positioning is in part due to their relationship to other girls in the school. The Parkdale girls are an anti-school CofP engaged in adult social practices, such as drinking and smoking; the *Rebellious girls* are anti-school CofP who mess about in class; and the *Ashton girls* are a very affluent pro-school CofP who strongly orient towards displays of individuality. The *Twilight girls* are often excluded from the social practices of the other groups, as their religious identification makes them less likely to engage in drinking, smoking or anti-school behaviour, because such practices are strongly frowned upon in their traditional Pakistani and Somali communities (see also Alam 2007, Alam/Stuart-Smith 2011). However, at the same time, they lack the economic and cultural capital of the *Ashton girls*. A phonetic analysis of word-initial /t/ affrication and the realisation of the happy vowel reveal a number of differences between the CofPs. The results for the happy vowel show that the two anti-school CofPs use much laxer realisations, closer to [ɛ̃], whereas the pro-school CofPs use tenser realisations, closer to [i]. The pro-/anti-school distinction broadly maps onto to a middle-class/working-class orientation and, in this sense, these results broadly reflect community-wide associations in Sheffield, whereby working-class speakers use lax realisations more frequently (Finnegan 2005, Beal 2006). However, Kirkham (2015) shows that there are subtle differences between the two anti-school CofPs in terms of how the happy vowel is used in interaction. The *Parkdale girls'* laxer realisations feature in metalinguistic discourse about having a Sheffield accent, serving to construct themselves as 'authentic' and 'local', whereas the *Rebellious girls* draw upon different enregistered associations between the happy vowel and local accents, such as 'rebellious' and 'anti-establishment'.

One of the more unexpected findings of Kirkham's study is that, in contrast to the results for the girls, there were no significant differences between male CofPs in either happy vowel or word-initial /t/. He identified two male CofPs – the *Ashton boys* and *Rebellious boys*. The *Ashton boys* are exclusively White and from very affluent neighbourhoods, whereas the *Rebellious boys* are more ethnically and socioeconomically mixed. The two CofPs are also engaged in symbolically opposed social practices, with the *Ashton boys* actively rejecting the urban 'street' orientation of the *Rebellious boys*. One possible reason why boys may not differentiate themselves through the kinds of variation examined here is that they may not share indexical fields for the 'same' kinds of variation (Eckert 2008b). They experience very little face-to-face contact with each other and, consequently, rarely talk to each other. This suggests that we may need to be attentive to how gender intersects with ethnicity and social practice in interpreting patterns of variation, given the gendered differences in the social composition of peer networks in Kirkham's study. To this end, it seems that the CofP approach may be well suited for understanding patterns of variation in communities that feature tight-knit groups that sharply differentiate themselves from each other. However, it becomes more challenging for communities that do not feature as many tight-knit smaller configurations of individuals, but instead maintain a series of much larger and much more diverse networks. With this in mind, the next section discusses the CofP approach in terms of previous work that has focused on social networks and friendship

networks. I suggest that a combined approach may provide further insights into the different kinds of social organisation that can take place in diverse urban environments.

4. The role of friendship networks in urban spaces

As I briefly mention in Section 3.3, the majority of research on multiethnic varieties in Europe has focused on larger configurations of friendship networks rather than CofPs. Previous work has compared the CofP approach to other social and psychological frameworks, such as social identity theory, the speech community, and social networks (Holmes/Meyerhoff 1999). However, the purpose of this section is to discuss the utility of both approaches in better understanding the social composition and linguistic practices of adolescents in multiethnic urban spaces.

Friendship networks are variably defined in the literature, but most approaches informally treat them as a type of narrow social network, in which an individual provides a list of their friends (Cheshire et al. 2008). A CofP is essentially a small close-knit social network (Mendoza-Denton 2008, 221), but an individual's friendship network may also be composed of multiple and sometimes overlapping CofPs. The advantages of friendship networks are that they can provide a more precise measure of contact between individuals from different ethnic groups, as well as better capture the composition of the networks in which an individual is engaged within and outwith a school context. For example, Cheshire et al. (2008) examine the relationship between the ethnic composition of friendship networks and individuals' use of innovative linguistic variants in London. They capture information on friendship networks using self-reports and categorise each response on a scale from one-to-five, with one indicating 'all friends same ethnicity as self' and five indicating 'up to 80% of a different ethnicity'. Their results show that individuals with a more multiethnic friendship network are more likely to use linguistic innovations in London, such as GOOSE-fronting, TH-fronting, and DH-stopping. The higher levels of inter-ethnic contact in these friendship groups may facilitate individuals' ability to borrow particular linguistic features from ethnic groups to which they do not belong (Rampton 1995). This suggests that ethnicity is an important factor in driving language change, but that the ethnic composition of friendship networks may be an even stronger factor for particular variables.

Friendship networks capture information on a number of ties between individuals. Another example is Sharma/Sankaran's (2011) use of networks in their study of generational change in London Asian English, focusing on the 'Asianness' of each speaker's network. They found that this was not a significant predictor of /t/ retroflexion for first-generation and younger second-generation speakers, but that it did predict variation for the older second-generation speakers. It is clear that networks provide essential information on the connections that speakers have across a community. However, because they generally represent a much broader level of categorisation than CofPs, they may offer less detailed information on the social practices in which people are engaged. Cheshire et al. (2008) do discuss the social practices of the friendship groups in their study, but they define social practices very broadly, primarily focusing on 'common interests in sport, music, fashion' and so on (Cheshire et al. 2008, 4). This is in contrast to CofP studies, where shared interests are

not a sufficient condition for CofP membership. Instead, there must be evidence that people are jointly engaged in doing things around those interests. However, a combined approach that integrates CofPs and friendship networks offers much promise to the study of urban multiethnic CofPs. The CofP approach provides a very detailed account of the nature and community-specific meaning of friendship ties, rather than identifying their mere existence. For example, two individuals may have similar friendship network scores, but this does not tell us what ‘multiethnic’ means in different communities of practice and how this impacts upon the social and linguistic practices of those individuals. However, it is not possible to study every CofP in which an individual is engaged and, therefore, a network approach provides information on the type of connections that an individual has beyond the immediate CofP under study (Eckert 1989, 119-121). Studies that are able to simultaneously capture detail on CofPs and broader networks are likely to be instructive in further understanding the relationship between language, ethnicity and social practice in urban spaces.

5. Summary and future directions

Section 2 highlighted the utility of examining the local meanings of supralocal changes, but what about variation that is not (known to be) a change-in-progress or has no known community-level associations? Eckert (2008b) suggests that most research focuses on variation that is already known to be socially meaningful in some way, which potentially neglects a large amount of socially-relevant behaviour. Uncovering new types of socially meaningful variation is likely to involve ethnography and exploratory analysis, which is time consuming and could lead to a number of dead ends. However, one area for development could be a greater focus on the relationship between variables that are known to vary in the broader community and those that may be highly specific to one particular context. For instance, Kirkham (2013) examines the differences in social meaning between a variable undergoing change in Sheffield (happY-tensing) and one that has not previously been reported (/t/ affrication). He suggests that /t/ affrication is adapted for a much wider range of social meanings than happY variation, perhaps because /t/ is not constrained by more enregistered social meanings that are prevalent in the wider community. Nance (2013) also reports CofP-related variation in a Scottish Gaelic medium school in Glasgow. She finds extensive use of variants that have been described in some varieties of English, such as high rising terminal intonation, but that have not been previously described in other Gaelic communities. Whether these kinds of local features are specific to one particular context or are generalizable to the broader community is an empirical question that should motivate future research on the dialectical relationship between CofP-based variation, regional dialects, and supralocal changes.

Another area that may facilitate better understanding of urban communities of practice is further work on *non-adolescent* and *non-urban* communities of practice (see Eckert 2003, Kirkham/Moore 2013 for a similar point regarding adolescents and linguistic variation). The vast majority of CofP research has focused on adolescent speakers, to the point where Bergvall (1999) claims that the CofP approach may be more suited to adolescents due to the

greater focus on self-identification and differentiation during this life-stage (see Kirkham/Moore 2013). However, Meyerhoff/Strycharz (2013, 430) suggest this may be a coincidence, and that the CofP approach can be suitably extended to non-adolescent communities. Perhaps more radically, a greater investigation of non-urban communities of practice would also tell us more about what is and is not unique to urban spaces in general. There is relatively little research in this area to date, but there are some promising exemplars that should motivate further research (e.g. Rose 2006, Mallinson/Childs 2007).

In summary, this chapter has reviewed some of the research on urban CofPs and explored how this area has contributed to our understanding of social dynamics and language variation and change in a range of urban contexts. In particular, CofP research has provided a vivid insight into language use in its local social context. This has been highly instructive for the study of sociolinguistic meaning, where meaning is located in the styles that are adopted, created and negotiated by CofPs. It has also produced a better understanding of the structure of urban communities and the ways in which this relates to language variation. Given the increased focus on large multiethnic communities in recent years, it is expected that studying local social practices in CofPs will remain an important perspective on the relationship between language and society in contemporary urban contexts.

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