The study of teenagers in the classroom, and how they interact with one another and their teachers, can tell us a great deal about late modern (contemporary) society. In this revealing account, Ben Rampton presents the extensive sociolinguistic research he carried out in an inner-city high school. Through his vivid analysis of classroom talk, he offers answers to some important contemporary questions: does social class still count for young people, or is it in demise? Are traditional authority relationships in schools being undermined? How is this affected by popular media culture? His study, which provides numerous transcripts and three extensive case studies, introduces new ways of perceiving established ideas in sociolinguistics, such as identity, insecurity, the orderliness of classroom talk, and the experience of learning at school. In doing so, Rampton shows how work in sociolinguistics can contribute to some major current debates in sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and education.

Ben Rampton is Professor of Applied and Sociolinguistics at King’s College London. His previous publications include Crossing: Language and Ethnicity among Adolescents (2005), and he is a co-author of Researching Language: Issues of Power and Method (1992).
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Language in Late Modernity

Interaction in an Urban School

BEN RAMPTON

King’s College London
For
Amelia
Robert and Silvia
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Transcription conventions

Segmental phonetics

[ ] IPA phonetic transcription (revised to 1979)

The sounds of the phonetic symbols used in transcription can be roughly glossed as follows:

Vowels

[i] as in ‘kit’ [kɪt]
[i] as in ‘fleece’ (but shorter) [flɪs]
[e] as in ‘dress’ [dres]
[e] as in French ‘père’
[a] as in ‘trap’ [træp]
[a] as in French ‘patte’ [pat]
[a] as in ‘start’ (but shorter) [stɑːt]
[a] as in ‘strut’ [stæt]
[a] as in ‘lot’ [lɒt]
[a] as in ‘north’ (but shorter) [nɔːθ]
[o] as in French ‘eau’
[u] as in ‘foot’ [fʊt]
[u] as in ‘goose’ (but shorter) [ɡʊs]
[ə] as in ‘about’, ‘upper’ [əˈbaʊt]
[ɔ] as in ‘nurse’ (but shorter) [naːs]
[eɪ] as in ‘face’ [feɪs]
[ɛɪ] as in ‘price’ [pɹaɪs]
[ɔɪ] as in ‘choice’ [tʃɔɪs]
[əʊ] as in ‘near’ [nɪə]  
[əʊ] as in ‘square’ [skwɛə]
Transcription conventions

[u:] as in ‘cure’ [kju:]
[œu] as in ‘goat’ [goʊt]
[au] as in ‘mouth’ [maʊθ]
[’] nasalisation of a vowel

Consonants

[p] as in ‘pea’ [piː]
[b] as in ‘bee’ [biː]
[t] as in ‘toe’ [təʊ]
[d] as in ‘doe’ [dəʊ]
[k] as in ‘cap’ [kæp]
[g] as in ‘gap’ [gæp]
[x] as in Scottish ‘loch’ [lɔx]
[f] as in ‘fat’ [fæt]
[v] as in ‘vat’ [væt]
[θ] as in ‘thing’ [θɪŋ]
[ð] as in ‘this’ [ðɪs]
[s] as in ‘sip’ [sɪp]
[z] as in ‘zip’ [zɪp]
[ʃ] as in ‘ship’ [ʃɪp]
[ʒ] as in ‘measure’ [meʒə]
[h] as in ‘hat’ [hæt]
[ʔ] glottal stop, as in Cockney ‘butter’ [bʌʔə]
[m] as in ‘map’ [mæp]
[n] as in ‘nap’ [næp]
[ŋ] like [n], but with the tip of the tongue retroflexed
[ŋ] as in ‘hang’ [hæŋ]
[l] as in ‘led’ [led]
[ɬ] like [l], but with the tip of the tongue retroflexed
[ɹ] as in ‘tree’ [rɛɹ]
[ʃ] as in ‘red’ [ʃəd]
[r] like [ɹ], but with the tongue tip tapping once against the teeth ridge (sometimes used in English ‘very’)
[œ] ‘r’ pronounced with a German accent
[j] as in ‘yet’ [jet]
[w] as in ‘wet’ [wet]
Transcription conventions

\[ t\] as in ‘chin’ [tʃin]
\[ dʒ\] as in ‘gin’ [dʒin]

Prosody

\ / low fall
\ / low rise
\ / high fall
\ / high rise
\ / fall rise
\ / rise fall
\ / high stress
\ / very high stress
\ / low stress
\ / very low stress

Conversational features

( ) pause of less than a second
(1.5) approximate length of pause in seconds
[ ] overlapping turns
\ / place in the current turn where the next speaker begins to overlap
CAPITALS loud
> text < more rapid speech
( ) speech inaudible
( text ) speech hard to discern, analyst’s guess
( ( text : ) ) ‘stage directions’
bold words and utterances of particular interest to the analysis
text words and utterances subsequently repeated by someone else in an utterance (in bold) that is of particular analytic interest