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978-1-107-01698-9 - Language, Youth and Identity in the 21st Century: Linguistic Practices  
Across Urban Spaces

Edited by Jacomine Nortier and Bente A. Svendsen

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*Part I*

Content and concepts

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# 1 Language, youth and identity in the 21st century: content and continuations

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*Bente Ailin Svendsen*

This book presents in a joint effort some of the latest research on language, youth and identity in late modern urban contact zones in Europe, Africa, Canada and the US. It explores and compares a wide range of linguistic practices among young people in linguistically and culturally diverse urban spaces, with a view to enhancing our understanding of the changes in the premises for and nature of language and communication in the repercussion of globalization. Increased mobility, tourism, as well as technological advances such as the Internet, mobile phone and new social media have decreased global distance and created an extensive flow of cultural expressions, money, goods and people. Migration is one of the defining global issues of the early 21st century. More people than ever are living abroad. In 2013, 232 million people, or 3.2 per cent of the world's population, were international migrants, compared to 175 million in 2000 and 154 million in 1990 (United Nations 2014). The so-called 'migrant population' in the OECD countries has more than tripled since the 1960s (OECD 2012). Many people migrate voluntarily for reasons such as education, work or marriage; others are forced to migrate by war, persecution, poverty or environmental crises. The increased global mobility is accompanied by a substantial growth in urban agglomerations. According to forecasts, by 2050 nearly 70 per cent of the global population will live in cities, up from around 50 per cent today (United Nations 2014). Hence, there is a need to understand the changes in the premises for and the nature of language and communication in late modern 'super diverse' (Vertovec 2010) urban agglomerates.

The global change in *mediascape*, *technoscape*, *ethnoscape*, *finanscape* and *ideoscapes* (Appadurai 1990) has been accompanied by a substantial change in the global *linguascape*, characterized by processes of linguistic differentiation, homogenization and hybridization (e.g. Blommaert 2010, 2012; Blommaert and Rampton 2011). The language situation has become much more diverse in many countries around the world, especially in Europe. In terms of population, Oslo is, for instance, the

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fastest growing city in Europe (Urban Europe 2014) wherein much of the country's growth stems from immigration (Statistics Norway 2012). The number of spoken languages in the Norwegian primary and secondary schools has increased to around 150 (Svendsen and Quist 2010). Changes in the global *linguandscape* are, on the other hand, characterized by processes of linguistic homogenization in terms of language standardization and the growing prevalence of English – for better or for worse – in globalized business, science, culture and entertainment; and to a certain extent at the expense of the national languages. Finally, we witness ongoing processes of linguistic hybridization, often as a result of language contact (e.g. Hickey 2010; Quist and Svendsen 2010). These processes of hybridization are not a 'new' phenomenon, quite the contrary (e.g. Hickey 2010); but the range and force of potential hybridization processes have grown, driven by increased human mobility and technological innovation, particularly through the Internet. The amateur hip-hop videos on *YouTube* constitute, for instance, excellent sites for exploring how language is used to create and express 'hybrid' and 'glocal' (Robertson 1995) scenes and practices wherein rap, once dominated by English, is now performed in the world's languages and is concurrently influenced by its (African American) English legacy (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2009; Alim, Ibrahim and Pennycook 2009; Chapter 7, this volume). By taking the reader on a journey through several continents, countries, cities and places – Antwerp and Genk in Belgium, Athens in Greece, Amsterdam, Den Haag, Eindhoven, Rotterdam and Utrecht in the Netherlands; Berlin in Germany, Copenhagen and Køge in Denmark, Eskişehir in Turkey, London and Birmingham in England, Nairobi in Kenya, Oslo in Norway, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö in Sweden; South Africa; Toronto in Canada, and the US – this book demonstrates that young people's linguistic practices are rather unsurprisingly locally bound, but at the same time globally contingent in multilayered and comprehensive ways. This volume demonstrates that processes of linguistic and cultural hybridization and homogenization are neither clear-cut nor linear; they are at work simultaneously, intertwined and dependent on each other. Moreover, by focusing on some of the linguistic hybridization processes originated in heterogeneous urban contact zones, the book addresses linguistic practices and developments that might challenge general processes of linguistic homogenization and standardization.

The different chapters in this book present a comparative account of linguistic developments and practices in today's diverse urban spaces, ranging from grammatical to ideological analyses. The book encompasses structural descriptions of linguistic forms and their social

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meaning(s) in context. It provides new insights into the *enregistering* processes of such practices; that is, the processes wherein these practices ‘become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population’ (Agha 2007: 81), such as the role and durability of these historically more recent speech styles over time and the ways these styles or practices are moved from their local origin and recontextualized in media texts. We consider the language use of young people and identity work in interaction, as well as the myriad of ways they align with or challenge traditional ethnic and social categories and hegemonic language ideologies through their use of standard/vernacular, their stylization practices or through global cultural expressions, such as hip hop and other emblems of identities. We focus on the commonalities and differences in young people’s linguistic practices across urban spaces and the ways these styles or practices are connected to local places or neighbourhoods. The chapters present a series of extracts from everyday peer conversations and language in use in a wide range of settings such as in educational settings and in traditional and new mass media, with nuanced descriptions taken from youth cultures across multiple geographies. With this book, we aim to capture how young people in diverse urban spaces – regardless of parental background and immigration legacies – employ their linguistic resources in youth, but also later in life; how their identity work unfolds in language; the societal status of their linguistic practice; and how the young people experience and relate to the contemporary sociolinguistic complexities of the early 21st century.

### **Contemporary urban speech styles: appellatives and approaches**

Since the late 1990s, there has been a great deal of interest within sociolinguistics concerning the linguistic practices or styles that are increasingly recognized as co-occurring in culturally and linguistically diverse city areas (pioneered by Hewitt 1982 and Kotsinas 1988*a*, 1988*b*, 1988*c*; e.g. Kern and Selting 2011; Nortier 2001; Quist 2000; Quist and Svendsen 2010; Rampton 1995, 2006). Such speech styles are also documented in English-speaking cities in North America, Australia and Africa (Hoffman and Walker 2010; Kiesling 2005; see also Chapters 13 and 14, this volume). As this book illustrates, there is an ongoing discussion on the naming or labelling of these linguistic practices. The volume’s authors apply different generic or *etic* (Pike 1954) terms such as ‘multiethnolectal speech style’ (Chapter 7), ‘contemporary urban vernacular’ (Chapter 2), ‘youth vernacular’ (Chapter 3) and ‘urban youth

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speech styles' (Chapter 13). Within the discussion on labelling practices others have argued for a repealing of the very concept of language and other 'lects' as we traditionally know it, emphasizing 'language' as an ideological construct with reference to a view on communication in which language users employ whatever linguistic resources that are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims (e.g. Blommaert 2012; Heller 2007; Jørgensen 2008; Svendsen 2004: 46; Chapters 8 and 11, this volume). *Étic* or professional labels have, like all naming practices (Bourdieu 1991: 239) and as argued in Chapter 3, certain epistemological implications as to how language and communication is conceived. Researchers contribute, moreover, by objectifying linguistic practices to the enregisterment of speech styles and therein potentially influencing the explicit or implicit ideological and symbolic struggle for the legitimate vision of the social world including language hegemonies and hierarchies, as to the symbolic struggle about the values ascribed to these speech styles (*cf.* Bourdieu 1991). The chosen labels in this book in general are framed in each chapter's theoretical and methodological approach.

According to Svendsen and Quist (2010: xv) either one of two general perspectives or analytic practices have often been applied to explore the linguistic practices among adolescents in multilingual urban spaces: (1) a structural variety approach or (2) a stylistic practice approach. These two analytical practices differ theoretically and methodologically. The structural variety approach draws on dialectology and classic Labovian sociolinguistics, as described for instance in Eckert's (2012) so-called 'first wave' of treating social meaning in sociolinguistic variation where linguistic features were correlated with macrosociological categories such as class and gender. Studies within the variety approach have by formal description of speech argued that certain contact-induced linguistic traits are characteristic of historically more recent 'varieties' or 'lects', be it a 'dialect' or a 'sociolect' (Kotsinas 1988*a*, 1988*b*, 1988*c*), a 'multiethnolect' (Quist 2000) or an 'ethnolect' (Cornips 2002; Muysken 2010). The practice approach is generally framed within a social constructivist paradigm within sociolinguistics and studies within this approach argue for an elaborated Labovian speech-style concept more in line with Eckert's (2012) so-called 'third wave' in sociolinguistic variation studies, in which the study of linguistic resources is extended with explorations of verbal and non-verbal practice, agency and ideology (e.g. Bijvoet and Fraurud 2010; Eckert 2008*a*; Maegaard 2007; Quist 2005). Within this paradigm, sociolinguistic variation is not merely a reflection of social identities and categories (as in the 'second wave'; see Eckert 2012: 94), but highlights social agency 'in which speakers place

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themselves in the social landscape through stylistic practice'. Hence, the social meanings of linguistic resources within the practice approach are conceived as neither fixed or static, nor as similarly distributed in specific populations; the social-meaning-making of signs is dynamic and changeable in and by (a) population(s). The social meanings of linguistic resources, such as who or what they are indexing (pointing to), are (re)constructed and reproduced in situated discourse (Agha 2007; Eckert 2012; Jaspers 2008; Quist 2008). Hence, the linguistic resources or variables do not carry a social meaning in themselves; 'they do not come into a style with a specific, fixed meaning, but take on such meaning in the process of construction of the style' (Eckert 2004: 43).

Generally, studies within the two analytical approaches to language use in diverse urban spaces have different aims and methodologies. Studies within the structural variety approach have often explored linguistic features to examine language development and change (e.g. Bodén 2007, 2010; Hansen and Pharao 2010; Kerswill, Torgersen and Fox 2008). Within the practice approach, studies have in general explored how these contemporary urban speech styles are used to position oneself and others in social spaces in situated discourse (e.g. Jaspers 2008; Quist 2005; Rampton 1995, 2006, 2011*a*). They have, moreover, explored the ways values are ascribed to speech styles in a wider societal context, for instance the (re)production of linguistic and social stereotypes in media debates (see e.g. Androutsopoulos 2010*b*; Milani 2010; Milani and Jonsson 2012; Stroud 2004; Svendsen 2014). Methodologically, the two approaches differ in that studies using the structural variety approach describe linguistic features in relation to a 'standard' (e.g. Hansen and Pharao 2010; Kotsinas 1988*a*, 1988*b*, 1988*c*; Nortier 2001; Quist 2000; Wiese 2006) or a regional variety (Christensen 2012). However, studies using the practice approach apply more ethnographic methods to young people's language use in situated discourse (e.g. Jaspers 2008; Maegaard 2007; Quist 2005), as well as to the young people's 'truncated repertoires' (Blommaert 2010) or polylingual language use (Jørgensen 2010; Møller 2010; Chapter 11, this volume).

In addition, the structural variety approach and the practice approach are built on different epistemological premises and thus have different outcomes. One of the most important insights learned from the structural variety approach is that the linguistic features in question are not 'results of poorly acquired skills in the majority language' (Svendsen and Quist 2010: xvi). Instead, they are conceptualized as 'varieties', 'dialects' (Kotsinas 1988*a*, 1988*b*, 1988*c*) or 'multiethnolects' (Quist 2000; Bodén 2007, 2010; Hansen and Pharao 2010) which express one among

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a number in the adolescents' linguistic repertoires. However, by focusing on linguistic features as characteristic of a 'lect' in relation to a 'standard' one might tend to erase or conceal linguistic and social variation or heterogeneity. There is a risk for constructing the 'lect' as too homogeneous, as a whole, as a single, quantifiable entity, as if it is a specific, more or less fixed way of speaking, without variation. Focusing on linguistic features in relation to a 'standard' might, moreover, contribute to the reproduction of ideologies of 'pure' and homogeneous standard languages, as if they constitute some kind of default way of speaking without any variation. The structural variety approach might, furthermore, obscure social diversity and reduce social agency of the individual by constructing a biased social distribution of the linguistic features in ascribing them to young people of a certain background where the alleged users are constructed as a homogeneous group, a kind of pan-ethnic minority group in which linguistic, cultural and social variation is left unexplored (*cf.* e.g. Stroud 2004). The term 'multiethnolect' was introduced *inter alia* to capture ethnic diversity (Clyne 2000; Quist 2000), but there is nothing that indicates that these linguistic practices have 'only' to do with ethnicity (see below). As Jens Normann Jørgensen points out (Kern and Selting 2011: blurb): 'Why are these styles becoming associated with ethnic minorities when their use is not particularly characteristic of minorities?' Hence, labels traditionally anchored in a structural variety approach might contribute to uphold a distinction between 'us' and 'them' wherein the alleged speakers of the purported 'lect' are subjectified in Foucault's (1975) sense, as being the Other, as a speaker of this deviant (from a 'standard') (and exotic?) way of speaking.

However, the division between a structural variety approach and a stylistic practice approach to language use in today's heterogeneous urban spaces, as it is presented here, is rather simplified. It conceals temporal differences between the two approaches where the structural variety approach had its peak in the earliest studies (e.g. Cornips 2002; Kotsinas 1988*a*, 1988*b*, 1988*c*; Quist 2000), although it is still rather influential (e.g. Hansen and Pharao 2010; Kerswill, Torgersen and Fox 2008). The current tendency is that the practice approach supersedes the variety approach (Quist and Svendsen 2010; Chapter 2, this volume). Notwithstanding the division's intriguing attempt to structure a relatively new branch of research within sociolinguistics, there is a need for a more integrative approach that synthetically grasps the linguistic traits, practice and ideology of these speech styles to capture the semiotics of these historically more recent speech styles (see Chapter 2). This book has opted to do that, and in



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Chapter 2 Rampton argues that the label ‘contemporary urban vernacular’ is a notion which can reflect an integrated synthetic approach to these linguistic practices.

The term ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’ is, according to Rampton (Chapter 2, page 39), an overarching term comprising sets of linguistic forms and enregistering practices that are seen as connected-but-distinct from other varieties (such as local, regional, national standards; learner-language and the locality’s migrant languages); fragmentary appropriations of other registers/styles/languages (e.g. polylingual languaging); and the processes of formation and reformation of these semiotic registers’ forms and values (including habitual and non-habitual language use such as crossing and stylization). Hence, the traditional Labovian conception of ‘vernacular’ is broadened by Rampton to encompass more than linguistic systems and codes and he emphasizes that it offers a simpler notion than the alternative terminology that has hitherto been suggested, such as ‘late modern urban youth style’ and ‘multiethnic urban heteroglossia’. Notwithstanding Rampton’s suggestion to broaden the conception of ‘vernacular’, Chapter 3 points out that there is a risk – due to the term’s conventionalized use – that it might contribute to obscure linguistic heterogeneity, and leave an impression of the language users as one homogeneous group, as well as failing to differentiate the neighbourhoods they are living in. By anchoring these ‘vernaculars’ to a certain locality or place there is a risk of constructing a locale as too homogeneous: as an entity wherein the local variation within these neighbourhoods or alleged communities is left unmapped. Such a risk, however, is also present within the practice approach (see Chapter 3). Although many authors in this volume align with and use Rampton’s term ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’ there are, as indicated above, many other terms in use in this volume, reflecting the various chapters’ research questions, scope of study and theoretical and methodological approach. Some chapters are inspired by a variety approach to these linguistic practices, such as Chapter 13 on ‘urban speech styles in Kenya and in the Netherlands’. In this chapter, prosodic, lexical and grammatical features are singled out as characteristics of these varieties, described and compared across the two countries with regard to their function as identity expressions. Most chapters apply an ethnographic and discursive approach to language, youth and identity. Before contextualizing the variety of approaches and research themes found in this book, there is a need to introduce Silverstein’s (1985) ‘total linguistic fact’, a concept built on a theorization possible to capture an integrative and synthetic approach to the semiotics of these contemporary urban speech styles.

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In Chapter 2, Rampton argues for a reconciliation between a structural variety and stylistic practice approach and abandons the division. In congruency with Silverstein (1985), he advocates a synthetic approach through the ‘total linguistic fact’ (hereafter TLF). TLF is dialectic in nature and refers to the dynamic ‘mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms contextualized to situations of interested human use, mediated by the fact of cultural ideology’ (Silverstein 1985: 220). By studying the semiotics of gender with the TLF as a point of departure, Silverstein demonstrates the intertwined and dialectic relations between language structure (*inter alia* he/she pronouns), contextualized usage (e.g. signaling power or intimacy) and ideologies of language associable by a society at large (e.g. stereotypes of how men and women ‘ought’ to speak). The linguistic form and the pragmatic realization of structure in use have multiple indexical values for users, although the users do not have to be conscious of them (Silverstein 1985: 256). According to Silverstein, every linguistic category is ‘related to our ability to refer and predicate, which, carefully examined, [is] situated at such [a] triple intersection’ (p. 221). TLF is congruent with Agha’s (2007: 80) notion of *semiotic register*, which is conceived of as ‘a repertoire of performable signs linked to stereotypic pragmatic effects by sociohistorical process of enregisterment’ (see Agha 2007: 170 where he draws *inter alia* on Silverstein’s (e.g. 2003) work on indexical values (*cf.* Chapter 2, this volume). Systems of semiotic registers are typically found to be ideological formations (Agha 2007: 157), and the social existence of registers depends on the fact that stereotypes make them communicable across large sociodemographic scales and time-spans (p. 279). These stereotypes are typically reflected in metapragmatic typifications of language and their users; positive or negative accounts of typical speakers; in standards of appropriate usage; or in standards of the social worth of a language (p. 150). Literature on contemporary urban speech styles has revealed that these speech styles are ideologically positioned in contrast to the national standard languages within the sociolinguistic economies in the societies in which they develop, and media discourses tend to homogenize both the adolescents and the linguistic practices in question (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2010*b*; Jaspers 2010; Madsen 2013; Milani 2010; Quist and Svendsen 2010; Stroud 2004; Svendsen 2014).

Within the practice approach there has been a tendency to leave aside comprehensive formal descriptions of linguistic resources, for example in the study on non-habitual speech, such as crossing and stylization; that is, ‘exaggerated acts in which speakers shift into styles that are seen as