We often hear the adult lament that adolescents are irresponsible, sloppy, imprecise, faddish, profane and overly-flamboyant speakers of English. Some worry that they may even hurt the language, as though they were tagging the lexicon with graffiti or kicking up the grammar with their Doc Martens.

Adolescents have a special place in American ideology, and it stands to reason that their language would be the object of ideological construction as well. This projection of social stereotypes onto ways of speaking is a common process around the world. Susan Gal and Judith Irvine (1995) have used the term iconization to refer to this projection, which involves stereotyping both the speakers and their speech patterns, and viewing the latter as unfolding naturally from the former. It is traditional to view adolescents in our society as sloppy (they leave their clothes on the floor), rebellious (they don’t do what they’re told) and irresponsible (they forget their pencils). This view of adolescents is visited on their language, which is apparently sloppy in its imprecision, rebellious in its supposed use of slang and profanity, and irresponsible in its greater use of non-standard grammar. Apparently adults put their clothes away, do what they’re told, and always have writing utensils handy. It remains an empirical issue whether any of the popular characterizations of adolescent language are valid. But what is more interesting is their sheer existence. Why does our society focus so much on adolescents, their behavior and their language?

Adolescence is not a natural life stage. It is quite peculiar to industrialized nations, where people approaching adulthood are segregated from the adult world, and confined to schools where they are expected to interact and identify primarily with those their own age. In many ways adolescents’ position in society is similar to that of the aged. One could say that they are an institutionalized population, and much of their care is left to professionals who have

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1 In: Edward Finegan and John Rickford eds. (in press). Language in the USA. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press
come to constitute a major industry in our society. The rest of adult society, “mere amateurs”, look upon adolescents as mysterious and somewhat horrifying. Parents quake as their children approach adolescence, they read self-help books, seek professional advice. One would think that adults had never been adolescents themselves, and this alienation from our own developmental past is one of the most intriguing social-psychological phenomena that our society has to offer.

Adolescents are people who are becoming adult, but they are systematically denied adult roles. Society confines them for long hours to institutions of secondary education, where they are crowded into a small space with hundreds or thousands of age mates, and virtually isolated from the adult sphere. Unable to make their mark in the world of adults, they must make for themselves a world in which they can make a mark. That world is commonly referred to as “teen culture.” “Teen culture” is a response to the opportunities and constraints of the institution that houses it. In some sense, high schools are “holding tanks” for people who aren’t yet “ready” to go out into the adult world. With its close quarters and its isolation, the secondary school serves as a social hothouse, nourishing both friendship and conflict, conformity and differentiation. Groups, cliques, and categories form and re-form, and all kinds of styles emerge as students lay claim to resources, and work to make meaning of their existence and their activities. Adults tend to point to the resulting flamboyance and self-conscious stylistic elaboration as evidence of immaturity. Some professionals are fond of saying that adolescents are ‘trying on’ identities. But is this adolescent identity work qualitatively different from adult activity?

Adults like to think of themselves as having stable identities, and as not being swayed by fads and opinion. In short — of not being subject to “peer pressure”. When businessmen all wear the same suit, tie, white shirt and shoes day after day; when politicians suddenly have to have a red tie; and when we see hordes of people flocking to designers who offer not just an interesting piece of clothing but an entire look—a self embodied in shoes, clothing, furniture, bed linens and other paraphernalia—we’re looking at the adult version of Doc Martens, rock concert tees, and bedroom walls covered with posters. When I hear adults say that they’ve bought a particular designer car because it’s safer, I think of a high school boy in California telling me that he’s only wearing his wild colored shorts because he likes them.

And because the world of teens is set aside from the adult world, not productively engaged in its government or its economy, its pursuits are viewed as trivial. But how else could it be? Adolescents aren’t allowed to save the world. They’re expected to participate in a
special world that adults create for them – a kind of a practice world. In the midst of this practice world, when they manage to create something for themselves, adults trivialize it. And when they reject this practice world, and insist on acting in the adult world, adults feel threatened.

Any generalizations about adolescent use of language will have to be directly related to similarities in the situations in which adolescents use language – similarities that set them off from other age groups. I believe that the relevant similarity is the struggle to define themselves in relation to the world, including both struggling to gain access to the adult world, and struggling to construct a worthy adolescent alternative to the adult world.

**MAKING A WORLD FOR THEMSELVES**

Adolescence is brought into being in discourse, our institutions, our practices. Adolescents constitute an important consumer market, to be exploited by every industry that trades in material for identity: cosmetics, clothing, media, self-help, and paraphernalia of all sorts. So the category “adolescence” has clear utility for many powerful forces in our society. These industries do not simply cater to adolescents; they create adolescence as well, selling adolescence itself to adolescents and to younger children who are moving toward adolescence. The adolescent life stage is so mythologized in our culture that younger children look forward to it with a mixture of anticipation and anxiety. Kids do not all feel equally prepared for this new environment, and status differences begin already in elementary school around this preparedness. “Popular” groups take form, providing their members with a vaster network and hence information, protection and support in a new environment, and fast change and construction of style—including linguistic style—becomes a crucial part of activity.

Because the school is society’s official institution for adolescents, many issues about adolescent identity and civil status have to do with relations to the school. Society rewards people who stay in school and cooperate with its institutional arrangements. It stigmatizes and punishes those who marginalize themselves in school, or who leave school altogether. The kind of social order that arises among adolescents in the high school is related to the structure and practices of the school. The American secondary school is unique in the world by virtue of its comprehensiveness. In most countries, separate schools serve those who are bound for further education and those who are bound directly for the workplace. The US public school system is comprehensive in the sense that the same schools house both of these populations. But furthermore, while schools in most countries focus on
academic or vocational training, US public schools attempt to be comprehensive civic and social institutions as well through elaborated extracurricular programs. Together, these two kinds of comprehensiveness bring a diverse student body into competition for recognition and resources.

The US high school’s vast extracurricular sphere is designed to engage students in varied pursuits: limited self-government, music, art, drama, athletics, journalism, social events, etc. It is this comprehensiveness that makes the US high school a potential total institution (Goffman 1961) – an institution that encompasses people’s lives. For some, this offers an opportunity to prepare an institutional dossier for college admissions. For others, particularly those who do not intend to go to college but intend to seek employment locally, it is an unwelcome alternative to engagement in the world outside of school. Ultimately, the issue is whether to base one’s activities and social networks in the institution, or in the larger community. Those who pursue an institutional life in school gain access to school resources and develop institutionally-based status, while those who do not are increasingly marginalized and consequently increasingly alienated with respect to the institution. There are many reasons why one might choose to reject the institutional life, from feeling that one is already excluded on the basis of, for example, race, class or interests, to feeling that the extracurricular sphere is infantilizing. Whatever the reasons, people of conflicting orientations are nonetheless thrown into competition for resources (such as space and freedom) day after day. Energetic processes of differentiation are an inevitable result, and stylistic production is key to differentiation.

Adding passion to the process of differentiation is the place of adolescence in social development. And by this I do not mean so much the development of the individual, but of the age cohort and the relations among individuals within this cohort. During childhood and elementary school, adults provide norms, sanctions and rewards for behavior. Children relate directly to adults – whether parents or teachers – as figures of authority. As they approach adolescence, the age cohort appropriates much of this authority. Adulthood is not simply an individual state of mind, but a social order, and adolescence represents the transition from childhood into that social order. The adolescent social order is transitional not only from dependence on adults, but from an identity based in the family. This is a scary move for most people, and there are significant differences within the age cohort in the speed and willingness with which people move away from their families and engage on new terms with their peers. This move brings greater freedom and new opportunities on the one hand, and makes new social demands on the other. The adolescent social order, then,
is not just a game that people may opt in or out of; it is the dominant discourse and everyone must deal with it in some way.

The combination of anxiety, close quarters, and ideological conflict makes the high school a very passionate milieu. And the social categories that form in this milieu tend to be intense in their efforts to distinguish themselves from others through activity ranging from the elaboration of styles to claiming territories to physical violence. The elaboration of styles is fundamental identity work, and public high schools foster strikingly diverse stylistic landscapes. These styles affect just about every manipulable resource – clothing, makeup, hair styles, jewelry and other bodily adornment, posture, motion, possessions, food consumption, and on and on. And, finally, language.

THE POWER OF AGE

We tend to notice styles that are unlike our own—we come to see some ways of talking, acting, and looking as “normal,” unremarkable, and others as “different.” The world is full of people who think they don’t have an accent – that everyone else, or certainly every other region, has an accent, but that their own way of speaking is “normal” or “neutral.” But the fact is that everyone has an accent – after all, we all have to pronounce the phonemes of our language some way or another. Some people, however, are in a position to define their own way of pronouncing those phonemes as “normal”. Indeed, part of what constitutes power in society is the ability to define normality—to get others to view one’s own style as unremarkable, as not a style at all. This domination of others by making them complicit in their oppression (rather than by imposing brute force) is what Gramsci (1971) called hegemony. In any community, most middle-aged adults speak somewhat differently from most adolescents. And these differences are not viewed neutrally, but are evaluated in favor of the adults. But what is the real nature of these differences and what is their origin?

Language is not a static resource. We mold it to suit our purposes – to emphasize, to elaborate, to bring new things into being. Speakers—communities of speakers—in the course of mutual engagement in shared enterprise, create innovations in the areas they are engaged in. They develop new ways of doing things, and new ways of talking about what they’re doing—ways that suit their purposes as a group. And the fate of these innovations will depend on the status of the innovators. If the innovators are viewed as doing important things, their innovations will be judged useful; if they are viewed as doing trivial or harmful or dirty things, their innovations will be judged trivial, or harmful, or dirty. Depending on the community and the endeavor, lexical innovations, for example, might be
called “technical terminology,” “jargon,” or “slang.” So what are adolescents and adults doing with language that’s different?

Engaged in a fierce negotiation of the social landscape, social values, differences, tolerances, and meanings, adolescents are continually making new distinctions and evaluations of behavior. In the course of this endeavor they come up with new terms for evaluation and social types (dweeb, homie) as well as for emphasis (hella, totally) Middle class adults, on the other hand, engaged in the negotiation of other space, come up with words like software, Hispanic, throughput. The main difference between these new coinages is in the situations in which they emerge – the landscape that the innovators are negotiating, and the social work that the innovations accomplish. The linguistic and social processes are the same. Lexical innovations mark new distinctions. When a community takes up a new word, it recognizes, ratifies and expands the importance of that new distinction. If the innovating community has sufficient power and influence, that innovation will spread well beyond it. Kids who use words such as dweeb, homie and hella may well at some point come to refer to themselves or others as Hispanic – or at least check a box on a form that says Hispanic. The chances that the people who coined the term Hispanic will also use the term dweeb, homie or hella are fairly small.

I’ve seen any number of media pieces on adolescents’ use of like, as in

> I’m like just standing there, you know, and she like comes up to me and like pushes me like that, you know?

and on rising intonation (heard as question intonation) in clearly affirmative sentences as in my name is Penny Eckert (?). These innovations are touted as evidence of adolescent inarticulateness, sloppiness, vagueness, unwillingness to commit—you name it. But all kinds of innovations come from adult quarters that barely attract the attention of the public. Particularly trendy these days is the spate of denominalizing verbs as in: that should impact the market, please access the mail file, let’s team. I recently accessed my hotel’s messaging service. These snappy turns of phrase seem to tell us that we’re dealing with people of action. I’m willing to bet that if it were adolescents who were introducing these forms, there would be a considerable negative public reaction, with claims that adolescents were unwilling to go to the trouble of using the longer forms have an impact on, gain access to, work as a team. And while I’ve seen many articles on the evils of like, I have yet to see an article on the use of okay with a rising intonation, as in:
We need to prepare a presentation, okay(?), and that will make it absolutely clear, okay(?), that we’re the only people who can do this kind of work. Okay(?).

Like *like* and rising intonation, *okay* is not just a random insertion; it serves to help organize the discourse—to highlight certain things, to guide the listener’s interpretation of the finer points of the speaker’s intent. But it’s used not by teenagers, but by business people, as a way of asserting their authority.

Consider a few crutches for the inarticulate that seem to have become popular in recent years among adults:

*What we have here is a situation where* the market is extremely unpredictable.

*What it is, is that* the market is extremely unpredictable.

One might say that both of these devices allow the speaker to hold the floor without saying "uh", while figuring out what to say or how to say it. (One might also say that both of these devices also reify what follows, elevating it in importance by setting it apart as a thing, a situation, something of note sitting on its little verbal pedestal.) One could dwell on the fact that these devices point to the inarticulateness of the average middle-aged person. Or one might say that they are evidence of speakers’ fluency since the speaker does indeed maintain the floor without a pause. Which evaluation one chooses depends entirely on one’s attitude toward the speakers.

Just a few years ago, people were laughing about kids using *go* (as in *she goes, I go*) as a quotative. What is interesting about *go* is that an entire interaction can be reported, in which action and speech are treated equivalently. Because, of course, *he goes* doesn’t just mean “he says”. You can say, “he goes” and shrug or make a face. This makes for a very lively narration. More recently, attention has been drawn to the new quotative use of *be like* and *be all*, as in “she’s like, ‘go away.’” “He’s like (shake head)”, “I’m all - ‘what?!’” “she’s all ‘yeah right.’” One difference between *go* and *be like* or *be all* is the nuance in reporting. *He goes* reports one of a sequence of actions. *He's like* invites the listener to interpret the slant on the events being reported.

*What like, rising intonation, I’m like, I’m all, and she goes* all have in common is their usefulness in dramatized narration – a genre that is central to adolescent discourse. Narration is a difficult skill to learn, and being able to tell competent narratives, and having an audience actually attend to these narratives is an important sign of growing up and of
social entitlement. Preadolescents engage intensely in narration, and as they move towards an adolescent peer controlled social order, narration becomes an important resource for the construction of this order. In a population that is continually negotiating identity and the social order, narrative is used to go over events in the negotiation of norms, values, and beliefs. Narrative is a means of holding people accountable, and of putting actions on the table for consideration and evaluation. It is central to working out the peer social order.

Linguists are regularly confronted with popular beliefs about language that count certain speakers as “irresponsible,” certain speech varieties as “ungrammatical,” and certain speech practices as “illogical.” These judgments are systematically passed on language spoken by the poor, by minorities, by women, and by children. From a linguist’s point of view, none of these judgments have value. Rather, such beliefs are commonly based on selective observation, and biased judgment of what those observations mean. Adolescents are just going about their business, trying to make the best of a marginalized position in society, and using language to do so. While adults may be concerned about the linguistic products, they should be more concerned with the marginalization that provides the conditions for adolescent linguistic production.

LINGUISTIC MOVERS AND SHAKERS

So far, I have been defending adolescents against common attacks on the way they speak. But in doing this, I run the risk of reifying the notion of “adolescent language”. Before I do so any further, I would like to emphasize that while one might be able to point to certain linguistic features that are currently being used primarily by adolescents, such as the quotative be all, or certain lexical items such as hella., these are relatively fleeting, and have already spread well beyond the age group in which they appear to have originated. At the same time, not all adolescents use them. Like middle aged people, adolescents do not all speak alike.

With the focus on adolescence as a unified life stage, comes an assumption that adolescents are a homogeneous category. Social scientists talk of “teen culture” or “youth culture”, and people of all sorts generalize about the beliefs and behavior of “teenagers.” But adolescents are as diverse as any other age group. First of all, they do not constitute a unified place in the path to adult status. While they all have in common their subjection to the national discourse of adolescence, they vary hugely in the extent to which they fit into this discourse and the ways in which they deal with this subjection. For example, the mythologized “typical” adolescent is fancy free, with no responsibilities such as contributing financially
to their families or caring for children or elders. But in fact, this model of adolescence does not apply to many people in the adolescent age group, for many adolescents have considerable family responsibilities. Nonetheless, it is the standard against which all are compared and it marginalizes those who have such responsibilities. And while adolescents are all subject to the societal norm that they stay in school until they graduate, they differ in their ability and willingness to stay in school, and those who do stay in school differ widely in their orientation to the institution. These differences in orientation to adolescence and to the school institution that defines it in our culture are fundamental to adolescent life, and language is a prime resource for signalling and maintaining these differences.

One of the important properties of language is its potential to convey social meaning somewhat independently of the sentences that are being uttered. As we use language to convey content, our choice of linguistic resources simultaneously signals who we are, what we’re like, where we’re from, what we qualify for, who we hang out with. The resources among which we choose may be words, pronunciations, grammatical constructions, prosody, idioms, etc. Different speakers combine such resources in distinctive ways, and if these combinations come to be associated with particular people or groups of people, one could say that they constitute styles. Style in language, as in dress, home decoration, and demeanor, is one of our most important assets. It represents who we are and how we align ourselves with respect to other styles. Our style can gain us entree, elicit trust, draw people and resources. And just as easily, it can exclude us and frighten or alienate others.

When we speak, we draw on a multitude of resources – not just any resources, but those that are available to us through exposure to people and places. We all have a way of speaking that is centered in a dialect, depending on where we’re from and who we hung out with when we were young. But we also may modify that dialect, for instance if we move away, or if we dis-identify with the locality. In addition to our native dialect, we may draw on pronunciations associated with other regions, countries, ethnic groups, specific localities, sometimes even small groups develop their own special pronunciations. These linguistic resources are not random, but structured

The term *vernacular* has many uses, and is somewhat of a controversial term in sociolinguistics. Here I use it to refer to language that is the most closely associated with – and the product of life in – locally-based communities. It exists in opposition to the *standard* – the language variety that is embraced by and required in globalizing institutions (i.e. financial, business, governmental, educational). The success and credibility of these institutions depends, to some extent, in their ability to appear to transcend the local – to
serve the interests of the more general population. The language that they endorse, therefore, is devoid of obvious local or ethnic features. Standard language is a powerful tool of membership, or at least of commitment to gaining membership, in the halls and homes of global power. Vernaculars, on the other hand, which emphasize local and regional difference, must be learned in the neighborhood, in locally-based families and social networks, hence they are tied up with local flavor and membership. Those whose loyalties and aspirations are tied to this local milieu are the ones most likely to embrace the vernacular, as part of a construction and an expression of local identity and solidarity. And those who orient more towards globalizing institutions are more likely to embrace the standard. The high school is the globalizing institution that dominates the life of most adolescents, and adolescents’ adoption of more standard or more vernacular speech is related, among other things, to their orientation to that institution.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a very important vernacular resource for many adolescents in the US. Mary Bucholtz (1999) has documented the use of AAVE features by White kids in Northern California, as a way of laying claim to coolness. Immigrant teenagers in urban areas often adopt AAVE as their dialect of English, not simply as a matter of exposure but also often as an act of identity. Yuri Kuwahara (1998) has documented the development of English among a group of adolescents in Northern California, showing that as they moved into American adolescence, those who became school-oriented developed standard English, while the speech of those who moved into the street culture showed more AAVE features. The relation between the use of AAVE features and engagement in local street culture is reflected among native speakers of AAVE as well. William Labov (1972), working with a friendship network of preadolescent African American boys in a housing project in New York, found a relation between the use of features of AAVE and the speaker’s place in the peer network. While the group as a whole prided themselves on their engagement in street life, some members were more engaged in school than others. These latter boys were somewhat peripheral in the group, and their peripheral status showed up in their language use. Particularly, their speech showed far fewer occurrences of the AAVE feature zero copula (e.g. he bad), and of more general non-standard American English features such as verbal disagreement (he don’t) than the speech of their peers more centrally engaged in the peer group.

White regional vernaculars play a similar role. In my own work in predominantly white high schools in the Detroit suburban area, I found a repeated opposition between two class-based categories: the “jocks” and the “burnouts”. The jocks (who in an earlier era in the same school were called soc’s) constitute a middle class, school-oriented culture. Planning
to continue to college after graduation, they base their social lives in the school, and in its extracurricular sphere, intertwining their public institutional roles with their identities and their social networks. On the other hand, the burnouts (who in an earlier era were called greasers) are mostly bound for the local work force, and reject the school as their social base. Preferring to function on their own terms in the urban area, they find the school’s practices and activities infantilizing. Differences of this sort cannot be neutral in an environment where the jocks’ way of life is the institutional norm, and where their activities give them institutional status and freedoms denied to others. The opposition between the jocks and the burnouts, therefore, can be an extremely bitter one, and is manifested not only in interpersonal and intergroup conflict, but in stylistic manifestations of every sort. The linguistic styles of the jocks and burnouts reflect their orientations to the globalizing institution of the school, on the one hand, and to the local urban area on the other.

The linguistic variable that most clearly reflects the different stances of jocks and burnouts toward the school and everything it represents is negation. Negation is a powerful sociolinguistic variable throughout the English-speaking world. Negative concord, commonly referred to as “double” or “multiple” negation (as in I didn’t do nothing) is strongly non-standard, and generally evaluated as reflecting lack of education. But this grammatical strategy is as much a device for expressing attitude towards educational institutions and the values associated with them, as a reflection of one’s actual academic background. While there are speakers whose native dialect requires negative concord, and who have not mastered the simple negatives of standard English, far more speakers know both forms and alternate between them. Given their attitude towards school, it is not surprising that the burnouts use more negative concord than the jocks. In fact, overall, the burnouts in this study used negative concord 42% of the time, while the jocks overall used it 13% of the time. This differential use is not a matter of grammatical knowledge: there are no burnouts who made exclusive use of negative concord.

But the difference between jocks and burnouts with respect to negation does not apply across the board. As shown in Table 1, jock girls are the most standard users of negation, while jock boys use negative concord one fifth of the time. Both burnout girls and burnout boys, on the other hand, use negative concord almost half the time. This difference points to the important fact that gender is inseparable from other aspects of social identity. If we

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2 For ease of exposition, the linguistic data in this paper are taken from one of these schools, which I will refer to as “Belten High.” The patterns reflected by these data are not special to this school, but are found across the four other schools as well.
assume that the use of linguistic features is a way of constructing differences between groups, then the difference between jocks and burnouts is far greater among the girls than among the boys. And indeed, the consequences for a jock girl of looking, acting, or talking like a burnout are far greater than for a jock boy. Jock girls are expected to maintain a squeaky-clean image, while burnout girls pride themselves in their disregard for institutional authority and their claim on adult prerogatives (such as controlled substances, sexual activity, and mobility). Because norms of masculinity dictate autonomy, jock boys must maintain a clean-cut image without appearing to be under adult or institutional domination. As a result, the difference between jock and burnout boys, in language as in dress and general behavior, is never as great as that between jock and burnout girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jock Girls</th>
<th>Jock Boys</th>
<th>Burnout Girls</th>
<th>Burnout boys</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percentage use of Negative Concord by jock and burnout girls and boys.

Negative concord has similar social significance around the US. Features of pronunciation, on the other hand, are more regionally specific. In the Detroit area, there are several vowels that have distinctive local and regional pronunciations, and that particularly characterize the dialect of White speakers. Of these, three are clearly new pronunciations, showing up only in the speech of the younger generation. They are:

- The raising of the nucleus in /ay/, so that, for example, buy and rice sound like boy and Royce.
- The backing of /e/ so that, for example, flesh and dell sound like flush and dull.
- The backing of /uh/ so that, for example, but and fun sound like bought and fawn.

The innovative variants of /ay/, /e/ and /uh/ occur more not only in the speech of young Whites, but particularly those living closer to urban Detroit. This reflects the fact that these

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3 For extensive discussion of language variation in the Detroit area high schools, see Eckert (2000).
are actually sound changes in progress, which tend to spread outward from urban centers. While the use of negative concord is associated with education and attitudes towards normative institutions, vowels such as these have a different social significance. As sound changes travelling outward from the city, they have the potential to carry urban significance – to be associated with urban life, and the street smarts and relative autonomy of urban kids. In keeping with this, within schools throughout the suburban area, it is the burnouts who lead their classmates in the use of these innovations. The pattern shown in Table 2, based on speakers in one high school, is repeated in schools across the urban area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Jock Girls</th>
<th>Jock Boys</th>
<th>Burnout Girls</th>
<th>Burnout boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ay</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uh</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Percentage use of innovative vowel variants by jock and burnout girls and boys.

The category differences in Table 2 are statistically significant, but it is important to note that they are far less pronounced than the difference in use of negative concord shown in Table 1. This suggests that the differences in pronunciation are not quite as socially salient as the prominent and well-ensconced negative pattern.

The equivalent of jocks and the burnouts are hegemonic categories in White-dominated schools across the country. While the jocks and the burnouts (or their equivalents) are working to distinguish themselves from each other, other categories arise – among other things, in opposition to the hegemony of the jock-burnout split. Mary Bucholtz studied one such group in a northern California school – a group of girls who embraced a *geek* identity, distancing themselves from their peers’ concerns with coolness, and from what they viewed as demeaning norms of femininity. These girls prided themselves on their intelligence and their freedom from peer-imposed constraints, and based their common practice in intellectual pursuits. They did well in school, but considered their intellectual achievement to be independent of the school, priding themselves in catching their teachers’ errors. Their linguistic style was an important resource for the construction of their more general joint intellectual persona. Two aspects of their linguistic style are particularly...
salient. Living in Northern California, their peers – particularly their “cool” peers – make high stylistic use of current California sound changes – the fronting of back vowels /u/ as in dude (pronounced [dIwd] or [dyd], and /o/ as in no (pronounced [nEw])). These girls use these changes, which seem to convey “cool California”, far less than their peers, preferring to move away from that cool image through the use of more conservative pronunciations of both vowels. Another linguistic feature they exploit is the release of /t/ between vowels and at the ends of words. In general American English, /t/ is pronounced the same as /d/ when it occurs between two vowels as in butter or at a. And at the ends of words before a pause, as in you nut or what’s that?, the /t/ is generally not released at all. In British English, on the other hand, /t/ in both of these environments is generally released or aspirated: [bUth], [nUth]. This aspirated pronunciation of /t/ serves as an important stylistic resource for the geek girls’ style. By aspirating many of their occurrences of /t/, they mark themselves as “articulate”, in keeping with the American stereotype of the British and their speech. The geeks are quite consciously using conservative and prestige features of English to construct a distinctive style – not so much to claim social status within the adolescent cohort as to disassociate themselves from the adolescent status system altogether, and what they clearly see as trivial adolescent concerns.

In immigrant groups, adolescents play an important role in negotiating their community’s transition to life in the new community. Immigrant children divide their lives between the home culture and the Anglo-American school culture. In both cases, they are primarily under the control of adults. But as they move towards adolescence and begin to develop a peer-based culture, the negotiation of home and school cultures is appropriated into the social norms and arrangements of the age group. Issues such as immigrant status, and ethnic and national orientation, become issues of identity and status among adolescents. In her study of adolescent Latinas in California’s Silicon Valley, Norma Mendoza-Denton (1996a) noted ways in which styles of English on the one hand, and choices between English and Spanish on the other, served as resources for constructing and disputing Latina identities. Immigration history and class, among other things, are important terms of difference in a community that is seen as monolithic from the outside. Of particular importance was the differentiation between opposed gangs, the Norteños and the Sureños. These gangs are not based on territory as is common with gangs, but on ideologies with respect to orientations towards Mexico and the US. The Norteños emphasize their American, Chicano, identities, while the Sureños consider themselves Mexicano, emphasizing their ties to Mexico. In extensive ethnographic work with girls affiliating with either of these gangs, Mendoza-Denton found that the two were set apart by subtle and
non-so-subtle differences in the use of stylistic resources. Most striking – and not surprising – is the issue of language choice, the Sureñas making greater use of Spanish in their peer interactions than the Norteñas.

In addition, Mendoza-Denton found interesting linguistic dynamics in the development of styles of English. While linguists tend to focus on the use of the linguistic system strictly defined, Mendoza-Denton (1996b) draws explicit connections between linguistic and bodily style. She shows how a Chicana gang style is constructed through the combination of speech patterns and material resources such as makeup and dress. But she also connects speech to the body through an examination of voice quality, focusing on the girls’ strategic use of “creaky” voice. This style is constructed in distinct opposition to the hegemonic Anglo culture and to the Anglo styles that dominate the high school, as well as to the styles of more assimilated Latinas.

**CONCLUSION: RAGING HORMONES?**

Adolescence is not a natural life stage. Despite all the popular talk about puberty, and “raging hormones,” adolescence is a purely social construction – and much of the flamboyant and frantic behavior attributed to hormones can be directly attributed to the situations that adolescents find themselves in. Placed in the transition between childhood and adulthood, but isolated both from children and adults, adolescents have to construct their own world for this life stage. It is no wonder that they should have passionate disagreements about what that world should be, what they should be doing with their time, and how they should act. And it is no wonder that they should use stylistic resources of all sorts to vivify these disagreements. While people often talk about adolescent speech as if it were a single style, this is anything but true. Adolescents do not all talk alike; on the contrary, differences among adolescents are probably far greater than speech differences among the members of any other age group. And it is this production of difference that defines adolescents linguistically. What unifies adolescents is not their similarities, but their joint participation in a life stage that brings out difference.
REFERENCES


