

## 146. Research on Youth-Language/Jugendsprach-Forschung

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### 1. Introduction and definitory remarks

Distinctive speech patterns in adolescence received scholarly attention only in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although they have been noted in the past as well (cf. Henne 1986; Eble 1998). Since the 1980s an increasing number of studies on an international scale have addressed a topic which is known as *langue des jeunes* or *parler jeune* in French, *lingua dei giovani* in Italian, *Jugendsprache* in German, *ungdomsspråk* in Swedish, *teenage talk* or *teenage speech* in English, etc. These terms are used not only in academic discourse, but also in popular dictionaries and media reports, where they tend to be biased towards vocabulary and a criticism of 'bad language'. Moreover, they often refer not to the speech of the whole age group, but rather to ways of speaking which are judged 'deviant' and 'exotic' (Albrecht 1993).

This article adopts a broader understanding of 'youth language' in a manner similar to 'child language' or 'media language'. Youth language, then, is taken to refer to all patterns of language use in the social age of adolescence, encompassing all ranges of linguistic description as well as a variety of research questions and topics within sociolinguistics.

The research reviewed in this article comes almost entirely from the 1980s and 1990s. It concentrates mostly on adolescence in a strict sense (i.e. 13 to 19 years of age), but some studies extend the scope into post-adolescence, including speakers in their early twenties (e.g. Pujolar 2001; Auer/Dirim 2000). In what follows, the terms adolescence and youth will be used interchangeably. Studies which compare adolescents to other age groups are only selectively included (cf. Art. 152). Most of the available studies deal with a handful of languages, i.e. German, French, Italian, British and Amer-

ican English, and Scandinavian languages. Other languages and/or regions covered are Spanish, Japanese, Greek, and a number of Eastern European and African countries. The references include collections restricted to one language (e.g. Aitsiselmi 2000; Banfi/Sobrero 1992; Boyer 1997; Rodriguez 1989; Schlobinski/Heins 1998) as well as collections covering several languages (Androutsopoulos/Scholz 1998; Androutsopoulos/Georgakopoulou 2003; Kotsinas et al. 1997; Radtke 1993) and a bibliography (Neuland 1999).

### 2. Some premises

Adolescence is not merely a biological age, but a social institution, which is specific to the modern era, and is usually conceived of as a transition period between childhood and adulthood. Depending on the respective research approach (cf. section 3.), the relevant social units range from small-scale peer groups over youth-cultural scenes to parameters such as gender and class (cf. section 4.3.). Within adolescence, a distinction is frequently drawn between activity spheres controlled by adults, e.g. school, and 'independent' activities based on some form of youth (sub)culture (cf. Art. 59).

Many studies of youth language share an interest in linguistic innovation and change as well as in vernacular speech and in-group interaction. Sociolinguists generally agree that adolescence is the life stage in which language change is most clearly visible (Kerswill 1996). According to Eckert (1997a, 52), "Adolescents are the linguistic movers and shakers, at least in western industrialized societies, and, as such, a prime source of information about linguistic change and the role of language in social practice." Researchers have therefore concentrated on situations in which spontaneous vernacular speech typically occurs, i.e. in-group communication. For instance, Schlobinski et al. (1993) consider a high intimacy in the group, an unstructured situation, and a lively and emotional atmosphere as the main contextual parameters for the development of adolescent speech styles.

A great deal of research has concentrated on linguistic items or variants, which are considered to be specific to (or typical for)

the youth groups under investigation. This holds true for both variationist and vocabulary studies (cf. sections 3.1. and 3.2.). In parts of the (continental European) literature, youth language is conceptualized as a language variety, especially as a sociolect (cf. Art. 21), and is empirically contrasted to an abstract standard language rather than to other local vernaculars (cf. Kotsinas 1994; Androutsopoulos 1998a.). By contrast, interactional approaches (cf. section 3.3.) direct the attention to speech styles of specific peer groups, and attempt at a richer contextualization of particular linguistic features (Schlobinski 1995). However, most empirical studies restrict their scope on one range of description, be it phonology, vocabulary or conversational conduct, while complex co-occurrences of linguistic features are seldom demonstrated in practice (cf. Schwitalla 1994).

Certain aspects of youth language, especially slang innovations, are frequently attributed to mass-media influences; on the other hand, the appearance of youth slang in media discourse is often noted. However, this article restricts the notion of youth language to spoken language and face-to-face interaction, also including individual mediated interactions such as telephone conversations or personal e-mails. By contrast, interrelations between youth language and mass media would require a closer examination of media contexts (cf. also Art. 157).

### 3. Research traditions and methods

#### 3.1. Variationist studies

Variationist research on youth language includes both studies that explore sociolinguistic stratification within adolescence (e.g. Eckert 2000; Laks 1983; Lee 1995; Stenström et al. 2002), and studies that compare adolescents with other age groups (e.g. Dubois 1992; Kerswill 1996; Rickford et al. 1991). Many studies of the second type are concerned with the distinction between age-grading and language change in progress, which will not be discussed in this article (cf. Art. 152; Chambers 1995; Eckert 1997a; Romaine 1984).

The number of investigated speakers is often restricted to small groups (as in Laks 1983) or even to one speaker (as in Cutler 1999; Rickford/McNair-Knox 1994). Some studies follow classic elicitation procedures

with interviews and word lists (e.g. Lee 1995; Pooley 2000; Scholten 1988), others use self-conducted recordings (e.g. Stenström et al. 2002). Still others frame data collection and variation analysis by extensive ethnography (e.g. Eckert 2000; Laks 1983). In addition to widely used social variables (cf. section 4.3.), some studies use school type instead of socio-economic class (e.g. Lee 1995; Stenström 1997), and others introduce factors related to adolescent culture, e.g. loyalty to vernacular culture (Cheshire 1982) or school-based social categories (Eckert 1988; 2000).

The linguistic features investigated are either only phonological (Eckert 2000; Lee 1995; Pooley 2000; Kerswill 1996; Kotsinas 1997) or both phonological and grammatical (e.g. Laks 1983; Scholten 1988; Stenström 1997; Cheshire 1982). Discourse markers are studied by Dailey-O'Cain (2000), Ferrara/Bell (1995), Stenström et al. (2002), Tagliamonte/Hudson (1999). Stenström et al. (2002) compare their data to those of Cheshire (1982), Cutler (1999) to those of Labov (1972).

#### 3.2. Vocabulary studies

Vernacular vocabulary that is habitually used by (groups of) young people (also termed 'youth slang' thereafter), is generally investigated along the lines of slang/argot studies (cf. Art. 28). Research in this area can be divided in questionnaire and lexical studies. Most questionnaire studies elicit lexical items from specific semantic areas, sometimes also including questions on language use and language attitudes (e.g. de Klerk 1997; T. Labov 1992; Walter 1993); other studies elicit the knowledge and use of given lexical items (e.g. Banfi/Sobrero 1992; Neuland/Heinemann 1997).

Lexical analyses are based both on questionnaire data and on otherwise collected material. A first major area is the semantic classification of lexical items. Areas known for their abundance in youth slang are social categorizations, mental and emotional states, sexuality, states of intoxication, evaluative and intensifying vocabulary. A second area concerns processes of slang creation, such as word-formation, semantic shift, and borrowing. Some studies also include discourse items, e.g. greetings, terms of address, response cries, interjections and conversational routines. However, the use of these items (and, in fact, of slang items in general) in conversational interaction is rarely exam-

ined. With regard to analytic typologies, Verdelhan-Bourgade's (1991) classification for French includes semantic change (metaphor, metonymy, etc.), vocabulary structures (composition, clipping etc.) and borrowing. Eble (1996) organizes her description of college slang according to form, meaning, borrowing and use. Androutsopoulos (1998a) proposes a youth slang analysis in terms of four main categories: productive structures in word and idiom formation, lexical semantic fields and functional categories (e.g., intensification), processes of formal variation and synonym creation, and discourse functions of slang items.

In addition, there is a tradition of (partly non-academic) youth slang dictionaries, such as Heinemann (1990) and Ehmann (1996) for German, Goudaillier (1997) and Eliane/Kernel (1996) for French and Liceo di Mendrisio (1998) for Italian (see also reviews and discussion in Eble 1998; Radtke 1998).

### 3.3. Ethnographic and interactional studies

A third stream of research is rooted in the ethnography of communication, conversation analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics (cf. Art. 121, 122, 137). Here, a rich ethnography is seen as a precondition for the understanding of adolescent speech styles, and analysis pays close attention to discursive contexts of linguistic variation in young people's speech (cf. Deppermann in print; Eckert 1997a; Folb 1980; Januschek/Schlobinski 1989; Pujolar 2001; Rampton 1995; Schlobinski et al. 1993).

A central concern in this research is the use of various codes, registers and social voices in everyday interactions. Neuland (1987) extended the concept of *bricolage* from anthropology and cultural studies to the analysis of speech styles in adolescent groups. Schlobinski et al. (1993) describe *bricolage* as the playful combination of various ways of speaking and cultural resources (i.e. fragments of popular culture), and point out its conversation structuring function. The interest in adolescent interaction as a polyphonic discourse is also prominent in work by Pujolar (1997; 2001) on working-class youngsters in Barcelona, and Georgakopoulou (1999) on a female peer group in Greece. Schwitalla (1994) investigates prosodic patterns used by speakers to conceptualize alien social worlds.

Further related research topics include code-switching and style-shifting (cf. sec-

tion 4.4.), the role of sound-words, interjections, and quotations in interaction (Nordberg 1987; Schlobinski et al. 1993), narrative performance (Georgakopoulou 1999), verbal practices such as teasing and dissing (Deppermann/Schmidt 2001; Eder 1993; Schwitalla 1994), ascription of group membership terms (Widdicombe/Wooffitt 1995), and intergenerational communication (Augenstein 1998).

### 3.4. Joining approaches

The three approaches outlined so far are largely pursued independently from one another, and integrating studies are hard to find. Folb (1980) is a rare case of ethnographically founded vocabulary analysis. In research by Kotsinas (1994; 1997) and Stenström et al. (2002) variationist, structural and conversation-analytic methods are applied. Eckert (1995) uses a version of conversation analysis in order to explore the contexts of new variants. Eble (1996) and Androutsopoulos (1998a) combine vocabulary analysis with an examination of the contexts of slang use.

Several studies provide evidence for the fact that youth language features of different kinds co-occur and are interrelated in various ways. A connection between slang items, especially verbs, and non-standard morphological phenomena is observed by Cheshire (1982) and Rampton (1995, 128) for British English and by Conein/Gadet (1998) for French. Relations between slang items and grammaticalization processes are discussed by Androutsopoulos (2000) for German and Stenström et al. (2002) for London English. Relations between innovative phonological variants, slang items and discourse conditions, especially emphatic language use and key cultural topics, are observed by Eckert (1995) for American English and Kotsinas (1997) for Swedish.

## 4. Selected findings

### 4.1. Vernacular use

Virtually all studies on youth language demonstrate adolescence as a phase of heavy vernacular use, whereby the term 'vernacular' refers to phenomena on all ranges of linguistic description.

According to Labov (1972), adolescent speech represents the most stable vernacular system. In subsequent research, adolescents

are repeatedly found to use a higher proportion of vernacular variants in phonology and/or grammar than adult speakers from the same socio-economic background (see Art. 152 and reviews in Romaine 1984; Chambers 1995). Some researchers emphasize adolescents' preference for local varieties and variants (Eckert 1995; 2000; Kerswill 1996). Radtke (1990) suggests that in regions with vital dialects, adolescents might turn to dialectal speech in contrast to parents' standard-oriented (or leveled) varieties (cf. also Schwitalla 1994). Also, a high frequency of colloquial phonological processes such as vowel reductions, assimilations etc. is sometimes regarded as typical for adolescent speech (cf. Stenström 1996; Androutsopoulos 1998b).

On the lexical level, "young people's fondness for slang" has already been noted by Leonard Bloomfield (1984, 49) and repeatedly stated ever since. Lodge (1992) found that younger speakers report the use of non-standard vocabulary in a conversation with a stranger from the same age group more frequently than older speakers. With regard to borrowing, Androutsopoulos (1998a) suggests that young people borrow a great deal of vernacular English words and expressions. Several researchers endorse the view that the heavy use of taboo words (vulgarisms, expletives) is a characteristic of adolescence (Androutsopoulos 1998a, 416–7; Cheshire 1982; de Klerk 1997; Radtke 1990; Stenström et al. 2002). Several vocabulary studies have demonstrated the productivity of certain non-standard word-formation types and procedures of formal modification (such as clipping, redundant suffixes etc.) among (groups of) young people (Androutsopoulos 1998a; Boyer 1997; Demisse/Bender 1983; Eble 1996; François-Geiger/Goudailier 1991; Henne 1986; Walter 1993). A well-known pattern is French *verlan*, which is a systematic transposition of phonemes or syllables, as in *femme* > *meuf* (Méla 1997).

Besides content words, the frequent use of certain discourse markers is often regarded as typical for adolescent speech; evidence includes the items *et tout ça* in Montreal French, *innit*, *yeah* and *like* in English, and *ey* in German (Andersen 1997; Dailey-O'Cain 2000; Dubois 1992; Ferrara/Bell 1995; Schlobinski et al. 1993; Stenström et al. 2002; Tagliamonte/Hudson 1999).

#### 4.2. Linguistic innovation and change

Adolescence is generally seen as a social locus for various types of linguistic innovation and change from below. Kotsinas (1997) divides linguistic innovations in adolescence in four types: new phonological variants, slang, grammaticalization processes, and emergence of new language varieties in contexts of language contact (cf. section 4.4.). Variationist research has stressed that (some groups of) adolescents lead the entire age spectrum in sound change (Eckert 1988; Eckert 1997a; Kerswill 1996). However, awareness of the influence of adolescent speech on the entire speech community is highest with regard to the lexicon. Media reports, popular dictionaries, and professional lexicographers aid this awareness. Neuland (1994) found an increase in the amount of entries marked as 'Jugendsprache' in German dictionaries.

In addition, there is evidence for a number of new discourse items and constructions, which are often connected to processes of grammaticalization. Examples include the novel conjunction *comme quoi* (*que*) in suburban Paris French (Conein/Gadet 1998); the intensifying definite article in Greek (Apostolou-Panara 1994); the particle *ba* in Swedish (Kotsinas 1994; 1997); the invariant tag question *innit*, the tag *yeah* and the pragmatic particle *cos* in London English (Stenström et al. 2002); the quotation marker *be + like* in several varieties of English (Ferrara/Bell 1995; Tagliamonte/Hudson 1999; Macaulay 2001); the negative *null* and a new position of intensifiers in German (Androutsopoulos 2000); evaluative denominal conversions in German and English (Androutsopoulos 2000; Stenström et al. 2002).

Some studies suggest that innovations of various kinds in young people's speech primarily serve expressive and interactive purposes. Kotsinas (1997, 125) suggests that innovative variants "primarily have been used to express some kind of an emotion or attitude, for instance irony, distance, etc., i. e. to attract the attention of the hearer". She also proposes a six-step model that describes the diffusion of linguistic innovations from their original peer-group contexts up to an eventual introduction in adult speech and standard language.

#### 4.3. Effects of social variables

Adolescent speech varies according to a range of social variables, in ways that partly confirm and partly transcend sociolinguistic tenets. Relevant evidence comes both from variationist research and from questionnaire studies on vocabulary.

As for age differences, the dominant assumption is an increase in vernacular variants from (late) childhood to early adolescence, followed by a decrease towards late adolescence and early adulthood. This trend is evidenced by e.g. Scholten (1988) and Armstrong (1998). Within adolescence, Romaine (1984, 106) posits that 'the younger the speaker, the greater the use of the more stigmatised feature'. This holds true for the female speaker studied by Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994), and the male speaker studied by Cutler (1999). In Henne's questionnaire study (1986), the trend was confirmed in the domain of school vocabulary (i.e. older pupils reported less lexical variants than younger ones), but reversed in the case of sound-words and verb stems. In a similar vein, de Klerk (1997) found an increase in the reported use of expletives from the 12–14 to the 15–17 year old group, especially among boys. These findings suggest that the frequency of vernacular features in late adolescence varies in relation to particular areas of vocabulary.

With respect to class (or school type), classic sociolinguistic patterns are confirmed by a number of studies. For instance, Stenström (1997) finds that several grammatical variables in British English as well as the tag *innit* are much more frequent among adolescents that are classified as lower working class. However, other studies stress the sociolinguistic significance of categories rooted in youth culture rather than in parents' status. Labov (1972) and Cheshire (1982) were among the first to state a connection between vernacular use and participation in a vernacular culture. An impressive example is provided by Cutler's (1999) case study of 'Mike', a middle-class white teenager who identified with hip-hop culture, and whose speech "was strongly influenced by [African American] phonology, prosody and hip-hop slang" (Cutler 1999, 429). German data from subcultural groups such as punks and skaters (Androutsopoulos 1998a, Deppermann in press) contains more non-standard patterns and slang items

than data obtained in a church-related youth center (Schlobinski et al. 1993). Eckert (1988; 2000) has repeatedly shown phonological variation to correlate with two opposed social categories, i.e. the school-oriented 'jocks' and the school-rejecting 'burnouts', with the latter leading in the use of vernacular and/or innovative variants. Laks (1983) used ethnographic evidence in order to specify status differences within a peer group, which appeared as highly homogeneous with respect to traditional factors, and demonstrated linguistic correlations of these differences. Scholten (1988) found a correlation between frequency of non-standard features and popularity in the peer group.

As for gender, several studies reproduce the classic pattern, in which boys use vernacular variants more than girls (e.g. Armstrong 1998; Lee 1995; Pooley 2000; Stenström et al. 2002). At the same time, a number of pattern reversals and challenging findings are reported. In Pooley's (2000) study, non-French girls that are accepted by their native peers are much closer to these, and score much higher than non-French boys, in the frequency of a regional phonological variant. Eckert (1988; 1995; 2000) found girls leading in the use of vernacular variants. In lexicon, a number of researchers stress the frequent use of vernacular and/or taboo vocabulary among female youths (Folb 1980; de Klerk 1992; Stenström 1995). According to Dailey-O'Cain's (2000) matched-guise study, young women are perceived as using *like* more often than young men. Woolard (1997) argues that gender differences in adolescent language depend on differences in peer group structure, with boys' networks typically being more loosely knit than girls'. Verbal practices such as dueling and teasing reveal differences in the narrative and interactional construction of masculinity and femininity in adolescence (Deppermann/Schmidt 2001; Eder 1993; Georgakopoulou 1999; Pujolar 2001).

Regional differences in adolescent language are reported in questionnaire studies such as Neuland/Heinemann (1997) for East and West Germany, and T. Labov (1992) for East and West Coast in the USA. Urban vs. rural differences are discussed by Folb (1980) and different articles in Janussek/Schlobinski (1989). Pooley (2000) showed an interplay of ethnic origin and regional loyalty, in which native French youth had a significantly greater awareness and use of

Picard regional French than their classmates from a migrant background.

#### 4.4. Language contact

Recent research on language contact in adolescence is concerned with cases of migration-induced contact in Europe (cf. Art. 144). ‘London Jamaican’ is a Creole-based variety, which youths of Afro-Caribbean origin start using in their adolescent years (Sebba 1993). ‘Rinkeby Swedish’ is used by youth from various ethnic backgrounds in multiethnic suburbs of Stockholm, and is characterized by phonological, prosodic and grammatical simplifications as well as vocabulary from various migrant languages (Kotsinas 1992). Hinnenkamp (2000) and Keim (2001) discuss code-mixing among youths of Turkish descent in Germany, Bierbach/Birken-Silverman (2002) among German-Italian youth.

Other studies are concerned with the impact of immigrant languages on the speech of native youth (cf. Seux 1997 with regard to Arabic loan-words in France), and with multilingual practices in multi-ethnic peer groups. Hewitt (1982) first reported the use of Creole by white adolescents in the UK, and Rampton (1995) expanded this line of research, showing how adolescents engage in ‘language crossing’, i.e. use bits and pieces of languages that ‘belong’ to peers of a different ethnic origin (Creole, Panjabi and stylized Asian English). Similarly, Cutler (1999) describes the use of Afro-American English among white youth. Auer/Dirim (2001) describe the use of Turkish conversational routines by youths from various ethnic backgrounds (including native Germans) in multi-ethnic neighborhoods of Hamburg. Pujolar (2001) and Woolard (1997) describe interactional uses of (varieties of) Spanish and Catalan in Barcelona. Further regions covered in the literature include Alsace (Bister-Broosen 1998), French-speaking African countries (cf. papers in Boyer 1997 and Françoise-Geiger/Goudaillier 1991), and the U.S./Mexican border (Donahue 1995).

#### 4.5. Language attitudes and stereotypes

Youth language is often commented upon by adults, and is a frequent topic in the media. Parents and teachers often have a critical and negative attitude towards adolescent language, judging it as “sloppy” and attempting to correct vernacular features such as local accents, slang words, discourse particles, or

code mixing. Adolescents themselves are quite conscious of these attitudes as well as of generational differences in their speech (Januschek/Schlobinski 1989; Kerswill/Williams 1997; Kotsinas 1992; Kotsinas 1997; Rampton 1995, 129–30; Schlobinski/Heins 1998). According to Schlobinski et al. (1993, 169–203) adolescents evaluate their speech positively, but at the same time hold it to be inappropriate for group-external purposes, e.g. for a job interview. Many media reports on youth language are ambivalent, oscillating between stigmatization and acceptance; moreover, they tend to exaggerate its differences from adult speech. It seems that media attitudes towards youth language have a similar profile in several European countries (Iordanidou/Androutsopoulos 1998).

#### 4.6. Interlinguistic comparisons

A number of studies discuss similarities between youth slang in Indo-European languages (German, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Swedish), and point out common tendencies such as fertility of specific lexical fields, abundance of expressive speech, use of non-standard word-formation types, and identical borrowings from English, which are attributed to the homogenizing influence of global youth cultures (Albrecht 1993; Androutsopoulos 1997; Radtke 1992; Zimmermann 1993). Andersen (1997) compares discourse markers in London teenage speech (i.e. *like*, *yeah* and *immit*) and in three Scandinavian languages. His findings suggest “a certain marker equivalence across languages” and “parallel routinisation tendencies” (Andersen 1997, 84–5). The same holds true for new quotation markers such as English *be + like* (Ferrara/Bell 1995), Swedish *ba* (Kotsinas 1997) and German *so* (Androutsopoulos 1998a). Although comparative studies of interactional phenomena do not yet exist, Georgakopoulou’s (1999) findings on bricolage practices in Greek peer-group narratives are quite similar to findings by Schwitalla (1994) and Schlobinski et al. (1993) for German. Deppermann/Schmidt (2001) point out that verbal dueling is highly typical for male adolescents in various speech communities.

### 5. Social-psychological explanations

Virtually all studies of youth language draw on the notion of identity (cf. Art. 154) in order to explain sociolinguistic differenti-

ation in adolescence. This holds true for both correlative and ethnographic or conversation-analytic studies (e.g. Bucholtz 1999; Deppermann in print; Eckert 2000; Hinnenkamp 2000; Kotsinas 1997; Pooley 2000; Rampton 1995; Rickford 1991). Many researchers regard youth language as a reaction to general conditions of adolescence as a transitional life stage. In comparison to childhood, adolescents are increasingly engaging in social activities, in which group membership and sexuality play a central part. This leads to what Eckert (2000, 14) calls an “explosion of linguistic activity in secondary school”. A latent or explicit opposition to elders and adult authorities is often stressed (e.g. Eckert 1997a), but also criticized as exaggerated (Schlobinski et al. 1993). Other researchers relate particularities of adolescent speech to local social conditions, as in cases of code mixing and language crossing (Hinnenkamp 2000; Auer/Dirim 2000; Rampton 1995; Kotsinas 1992). Studies of youth slang typically refer to the double function of slang/argot as a sign of group membership and a boundary towards other social groups (cf. François-Geiger/Goudaillier 1991; Labov 1992). Some researchers have used the notion of the *linguistic market* in order to refer to the standard language norms adolescent speech is judged against or to standardization pressures in late adolescence (Chambers 1995; 177ff; Laks 1983). Eckert (2000) extends this notion to peer groups and youth cultures as well.

Language use in adolescence is also discussed in terms of the structure of adolescent peer-groups and the communicative demands of peer-group interaction. Adolescence is an age of communicative nearness, in which dense social networks press for linguistic conformism (Chambers 1995). Most interactions take place among friends and acquaintances. Practices such as verbal dueling in adolescent interactions are a means of demonstrating skills and claiming status in the peer-group. Vulgar terms of address and taboo vocabulary can be considered as markers of positive politeness, i.e. they convey friendliness and solidarity. At the same time, adolescent networks are wider than those of children, and therefore more open to external influences. Adolescents’ well-known engagement with pop and media culture means that the resources they draw on in their linguistic identity construction are not only local, but also global, especially on a vocabulary level. Fin-

ally, an expressive and playful use of language has been claimed as a hallmark of adolescence, with regard to some lexical innovations (e.g. proliferation of synonyms, deformations) and bricolage practices.

While all of the above certainly accounts for the use of innovative and non-standard forms, other cases – such as the church-related youth center studied by Schlobinski et al. (1993) or the female nerds discussed by Bucholtz (1999) – are characterized by a smaller presence (or even conscious avoidance) of vernacular and ‘cool’ slang, and therefore seek for alternative explanations.

## 6. Suggestions for further research

In conclusion, youth language has proved to be a fertile field for the development of new concepts in variationist and interactional sociolinguistics. By contrast, the theoretical understanding of the sociolinguistics of adolescence (or of language and age for that matter, cf. Eckert 1997a) still lags behind advances in, for instance, language and gender research. The present article suggested that the ‘youth language’ label could be useful in integrating and interrelating findings from variationist, slang and conversation-analytic studies. On the other side, it can be misleading to the extent that social age is just the background for more complex sociolinguistic differences. Therefore, a better contextualization of adolescent interaction, perhaps in terms of communities of practice (Bucholtz 1999; Eckert 2000), should be of paramount importance in future research. Moreover, this overview makes evident the need to pay closer attention to the plurality and interrelatedness of linguistic features, which co-operate in the construction of young speakers’ sociolinguistic profiles. Finally, the frequency of often fragmentary and even misleading media reports on youth language indicates the social relevance of the phenomenon, and therefore also the necessity to supply, and, at times, to counterbalance public metalinguistic discourse with research findings.

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