

# Where do ethnolects stop?

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## Abstract

The paper discusses the complex role of ethnicity in the construction of a peer-based social order in preadolescence, and argues that the indexical value of “ethnic” variables is constructed among, rather than simply within, ethnic groups, and hence incorporates concerns that span ethnic boundaries. In Northern California, white Anglo speech is showing a split in /ae/ as it raises before nasals and backs elsewhere, while Chicano speakers commonly back both classes of /ae/. Based on ethnography in two Northern California elementary schools, this paper shows that the Chicano pattern does not simply index ethnicity, but indexes place in the peer-based social order as well, and as such is available to speakers regardless of ethnicity.

## Key words

Chicano English

ethnolects

gender

indexicality

variation

## 1 Introduction

One day, as I was sitting in Ms. Hernandez’s fifth grade classroom at Steps<sup>1</sup> Elementary School, Susan, a European American girl, raised her hand to ask the teacher a question. Carlos, sitting beside me at the next table, turned to me with a look of disgust and said, “I hate her—why can’t she talk normal?” It wasn’t clear which specific feature or features of her speech particularly offended him that morning, but clearly her speech screamed “Valley Girl” to him (as it did to me). At Fields Elementary down the road in a predominantly white Anglo neighborhood, this would not have been remarkable. But at Steps, with its small minority of white Anglos, Susan’s utterance clashed with the kinds of English that dominated the scene. At Fields, her speech would have struck her classmates as affected, as an attempt to sound cool; at Steps it sounded affected and hyperwhite. At Steps, in other words, her speech emerges as an ethnolect.

I recognize that the term *ethnolect* is generally reserved for varieties of a majority language that have been modified through a period of bilingualism in an immigrant community (Clyne, 2000). Leaving aside the fact that white Anglos constitute a minority in California, I would argue that the status of an immigrant community’s speech as an ethnic variety renders the majority language, by virtue of contrast, an ethnic variety as well. I do not say this simply to point to the fact that this terminology marginalizes minority communities, but to raise a more general issue about linguistic variability. In so

<sup>1</sup> All names, of schools as well as of individuals, are pseudonyms.

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doing, I follow Jürgen Jaspers (this volume) in pointing out that not only can the notion of ethnolect serve to reinscribe popular ideologies, it also belies the constructed nature of linguistic varieties and of social (in this case ethnic) categories. The term *ethnolect* (like *sociolect* and the more generic *dialect*) reflects a view of language as a fixed rather than fluid entity, and of identity as compartmentalized, allowing one to think of an ethnolect as a discrete system indexical of ethnicity alone. The emphasis in this paper will be on the fact that speakers of so-called ethnolects do not live or speak in isolation, and even if the ethnolect is highly reified, its existence depends on a fairly restricted set of resources. The linguistic resources that ethnolectal speakers deploy in their day-to-day lives are not all specific to the ethnic category, and those that appear to be specifically ethnic can index far more than ethnicity. By examining one feature of “Chicano” and “Anglo” English among students in two elementary schools in Northern California, I will show how ethnically distinctive ways of speaking emerge out of shared social practices, in interaction with each other, and have indexical values that are associated not simply with ethnicity but with those shared practices as well.

## 2 Variation and Indexicality

The argument in this paper grows out of my more general view of sociolinguistic variation as a structured set of resources that speakers deploy both intentionally and automatically in their day-to-day practice. The traditional emphasis in variation studies has been to correlate linguistic variables with macro-sociological categories (e.g., class, gender, ethnicity), and to take the correlation to be a sufficient characterization of the variable’s social significance. Thus people speak of “working class” features and “female-led” sound changes. However, the statistical finding that, for instance, women lead in a particular sound change, is the outcome of an aggregate pattern, and says nothing about the kinds of behaviors and ideologies that underlie it, or what kinds of meanings the speakers in question attach to the conservative and innovative variants. The aggregate pattern says nothing about language use and gender in everyday life. It also says nothing about why the same generalization may apply to class stratification — not only women, but working class people as well, generally lead in sound change. Quantitative generalizations of this sort are fundamental to the study of variation, but understanding the social meaning of variation requires that we examine what lies beneath those generalizations. The very fact that the same variables may stratify regularly with multiple categories indicates that their meanings are not directly related to these categories, but to something that is related to all of them (Silverstein, 1985). Thus while a phonological feature might correlate with membership in an ethnic category, and be heard as indexing ethnic identity, it may also take on associations with some apparent quality — some aspect of a stereotype — of that category. And if it falls into use to index that quality, it may take on a more general utility beyond the ethnic group itself.

The study of ethnic “markers” runs the gamut from claims of a full-fledged ethnolect to treatment of small probabilistic differences in the use of individual variables in the majority dialect. In Labov’s New York City study (Labov, 1966), for example, Italian, Irish, and Jewish speakers were shown to differ very slightly in their use of certain New York vocalic variables. Latino and African American speakers, on the other hand, are viewed as having dialects that are quite separate from the dialects of coterritorial white

speakers, and their use of features of the white dialect is seen as stepping outside of their dialect — as a sign of ethnic assimilation. But just as there is no way to distinguish between a language and a dialect, there is no obvious way to distinguish between a dialect with ethnic features and an ethnolect. Furthermore, the designation “ethnolect” can be part of a more insidious practice. In the dominant discourse of American dialectology, the white Anglo variety is considered a regional dialect, while African American and Latino varieties are considered ethnic dialects. While these dialects are in fact different from their coterritorial white dialects in ways that Labov’s Italian, Irish, and Jewish<sup>2</sup> varieties of New York English are not, the dichotomy between regional and ethnic varieties and the lack of attention to regional varieties of African American and Latino speech underscores a deterritorializing discourse of subordinated racial groups. And when the white Anglo variety is given the regional designation, allowing its speakers to run the gamut from deep vernacular to hyperstandard, ethnolects are defined as nonstandard, and movement away from ethnolectal features is viewed as a move away from ethnicity. I propose that we consider relations between coterritorial ethnic patterns in different terms. Like Carmen Fought (1999), I would argue that the participation of Latinos (and African Americans) in sound changes associated with the white population should be seen not as assimilation, but as a stylistic move that deserves more careful attention. Studies of white kids using features of African American English (Bucholtz, 1999) do not claim that these kids are trying to assimilate, but that they are trying to borrow specific qualities that they admire in their African American peers. This difference in interpretation lies quite directly in differences in analyses of variation more generally. If a variable is taken to index gender, class or race directly, then one can only view the use of a variable that correlates with one of those categories as constituting a claim to category membership. If, on the other hand, one views variables as indexing these categories indirectly (Ochs, 1991; Silverstein, 1985), by indexing more everyday stances and qualities such as toughness, coolness, sexual prowess, maturity, refinement, then such stylistic moves can be seen in the context of speakers’ more general movement in the social landscape.

Ethnic differentiation in language is a particularly rich place to see indirect indexicality, or the development of multiple orders of indexicality, at work. The fortition of English /th,dh/ to [t,d], often referred to as /th,dh/-stopping, is a common feature of ethnic varieties in English. Since [θ,ð] is a highly marked consonant, /th,dh/-stopping is almost a universal substratum form in English, and occurs as an ethnic feature in a variety of communities in the U.S.-Germans (Rose, 2006), Cajuns (Dubois & Horvath, 1998a; Dubois & Horvath, 1998b), Poles (Edwards & Krakow, 1985), and Latinos (Mendoza-Denton, in press). In all these cases, the feature has taken on social meanings that emerge from ideologies associated with each community. In her study of a farming community in Wisconsin, in which German ancestry is associated with small farming, Mary Rose (2006) argued that this variable indexes the value of hard work associated with small farming. In Louisiana Cajun English (Dubois & Horvath, 1998a), meanwhile, this variable has come to be associated with the prestigious Cajun renaissance, and in the Chicano community in Northern California (Mendoza-Denton, 2008), it has come to be associated

<sup>2</sup> There are varieties of “yeshivish,” used by some Orthodox Jews, that are sufficiently distinctive to qualify as ethnolects (Gold, 1985).

with toughness and gang affiliation. As long as this feature was associated with non-native speech, its use simply indexed immigrant status. This simple association with a category of speakers is what Michael Silverstein (2003) has termed *first order indexicality*. First order indexicality renders the linguistic feature in question available for association with stereotypes associated with the category. The minute such an association materializes in practice — as soon as speakers begin to use a feature to signal something associated with the category — the feature becomes a *second order index*. In the Wisconsin farm, Cajun and Chicano communities, /dh/ stopping is available to all local speakers to index hard work, prestige or gang affiliation respectively, whether or not the speakers are German, Cajun, or Chicano. This process is continual, since one association tends to raise others so that a variable can move through many meanings and come to have a fairly vast indexical field (Eckert, in press).

### 3 Chicano and Anglo-Englishes in California

While ethnolects in the U.S. are commonly viewed as variants on a standard or at least regional variety of English, one can argue that the status of Chicano English is as deep as the white variety that is commonly thought of as “California English.” Spanish has a deeper history in California than English, as California was originally a Spanish colony and from Mexican independence until 1848, it was part of Mexico. Anglo American adventurers began to arrive in the early part of the 19th century, and groups of Anglo American settlers started arriving halfway through the century. Now, 32% of the California population is Latino, and of them, 84% are of Mexican origin. Steady immigration in the 20th century, with a major influx since the 1940s, has yielded several robust generations of American-born Latinos — several robust generations of native speakers of English. These generations are known for their development of a distinctive native dialect of English, Chicano English, and it is over comparable generations that the white Anglo population has become sufficiently settled that a distinctive California Anglo dialect has emerged (Moonwomon, 1992) as well. Thus while people generally think of Chicano English as based on some Anglo dialect, the two actually emerged over the same historical period, and in clear relation to each other.

There are features of Chicano English that are clearly substratal in origin, such as (th,dh) stopping, light /l/, an [ɪn] variant of (ING), and patterns of intonation — particularly the rise-fall in sentence-final contours (Penfield & Ornstein-Galicia, 1985). The segmental variables are quite commonly used by non-Chicanos — light /l/ is a regular feature of AAVE, and often appears in the speech of white Anglo kids, particularly those who hang out with Latino or African American kids. The [ɪn] (as opposed to [ɪn]) pronunciation of the apical variant of (ING) appears to have spread to Anglo dialects of English more generally in California (Fought, 2003). On the other hand, the intonational variant is more restricted to Latino speakers. As a prominent feature of Mock Spanish (Hill, 1993), and a resource commonly used by Latino comedians to mimic a bracero stereotype, the use of this intonation pattern by an Anglo is likely to be heard as racist<sup>3</sup>. In fact, while one might expect to hear a good deal of crossing (Rampton,

<sup>3</sup> This may be similar to the status of distributive (BE) in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Julie Sweetland has noted that white kids who grow up in African American peer groups, and are for all

1995) at Steps, there is very little. While I have heard some instances of Chicano kids using bits of Vietnamese to their Vietnamese peers (and these have always been aggressive incidents), I have not heard a similar use of Spanish. The use of Mock Spanish at the national level, in fact, may well preclude such crossing by making it a potentially racist act. But more important, the status of Chicano English makes its features far more appropriate for affiliative moves.

Features of the California white Anglo dialect have been popularized, gendered, raced, and classed through their media association with the male surfer and the Valley Girl—gendered icons of privilege, materialism, and empty-headedness, but also national trend-setters and the embodiment of white California. I would be inclined to argue that innovations in the white California dialect, which are featured prominently in the media, are part of a setting of California apart from the rest of the country as casual, fun-loving, affluent, free, and white. And at home in California, this is part of staking a claim to California—of establishing California as the property of the casual, fun-loving, affluent, free, and white Californian. This Californian exists only in distinction from Californians of color, most particularly Latino Californians, those who take care of the infrastructure and provide the services so necessary to the exercise of fun, freedom, and affluence. Arising in opposition in this way, both Chicano English and white California speech could be said to constitute ethnolects, were it not for the fact that while white speech no doubt builds upon features brought here from other states, Chicano English builds upon features from another language. Both represent ways of taking possession of the resources of English to construct a linguistic identity, and the features of both index class, ethnicity, and any number of things that emerge through their lives together.

Valley Girl speech in particular is an extreme stereotype involving distinctive lexical, prosodic, and discourse features, some idiosyncratic consonantal realizations, and an exaggerated use of the California vowel shift. This shift, which will be discussed below, is a series of counterclockwise vowel changes. Among them, the most prominently recognized as “California” are the fronting of /uw/ and /ow/. The surfer stereotype involves a regular use of *dude*, featuring a simple fronted variant of /uw/ - [dyd]. The Valley Girl pronunciation of both /uw/ and /ow/ involves diphthongization and fronting of the nucleus ([frwd] for *food*, [gɛwz] for *goes*). These two features are uncommon in Chicano English. Carmen Fought (1999) has shown, however, that resistance to /uw/ fronting is primarily characteristic of young people who affiliate with Latino gangs, while other Chicanos are likely to show some fronting. She argues, as I will, that this is not a sign of assimilation to white Anglo culture, but a way of being Chicano.

#### **4 Susan, Carlos, ethnicity, and the heterosexual market**

Returning to the classroom, Carlos’ reaction to Susan’s utterance was not simply to her speech, but to her as an individual. Susan was a very unpopular girl—unhappy, unattractive, without friends, and sometimes overbearing. Her unpopularity had nothing

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intentions and purposes speakers of AAVE, will use AAVE phonology but not the distributive (BE) on the grounds that it would be presumptuous.

to do with ethnicity—she was equally unpopular with all groups of kids in the school. Nonetheless, she was part of the white minority at Steps, and while some of the other white kids fit in with the diverse student population, their Latino and African American peers generally viewed white kids as privileged in the school and out. For Carlos, Susan's utterance sounded snotty<sup>4</sup>—but white Valley Girl snotty, not Chicano snotty. And as such, it embodied the white claim to favor, approval, and privilege—all important commodities in an elementary school. In this way, societal discourses of race and ethnicity unfold on the ground, in day-to-day practice. Susan's unpopularity, her whiteness, her snotty-sounding use of a Valley Girl feature are inseparable, and this tiny incident contributed to Carlos' participation in discourses of race and ethnicity in the school more generally, and in his life outside of school—in his family, his neighborhood, and the media.

I was sitting with Carlos in the course of my ethnographic study of his age cohort's social and linguistic move from childhood to adolescence. I followed this age cohort in two schools through fifth and sixth grades in elementary school, and into seventh grade in junior high school<sup>5</sup> (roughly from the ages of 10 to 14). In both schools, I watched the cohort develop a peer-based social order, with an emerging popular crowd as its focus. This crowd was a community of practice based in the activity of constructing a heterosexual market. The similarities in the events in both schools are striking, and I will focus in what follows on the ways in which these similarities interact with ethnic difference. In this context, ethnic differences in language are deployed not simply in the service of ethnic differentiation, but in the service of other kinds of social differences within the cohort that crosscut—and interact with—ethnicity.

The two schools are in the same district in Northern California, just a 10mins ride from one another, but they could be in different worlds. Fields Elementary serves a predominantly white Anglo, relatively middle class student population, while Carlos's school, Steps, serves a poor and ethnically heterogeneous population. The ethnic landscape at Steps is complex. Many kids are second generation, and most of these are bilingual. While there are African Americans, Pacific Islanders, East Indians, Eastern Europeans, and White Anglos, the Latinos and Asian Americans tend to dominate in numbers, hence in visibility. Where the student makeup is similar in the three classrooms serving the age cohort at Fields, there are three quite distinct classrooms at Steps—a Spanish bilingual class, a sheltered English class, and a “regular” class. The majority of the Chicano kids are in the bilingual classroom. Since bilingual education is underfunded in the public schools, the bilingual class cannot be a truly bilingual environment, but it provides support to Spanish-speaking kids whose English is not strong, some Spanish literacy to kids who speak Spanish, and a small amount of exposure to Spanish for kids who do not already know the language. The sheltered English class contains many native speakers of English, but also a number of kids who need some extra support in English. The third classroom has no label, and is generally considered to be somewhat accelerated.

<sup>4</sup> This is not simply speculation. Carlos was quite articulate about language and race.

<sup>5</sup> I was accompanied at Fields Elementary by Christi Cervantes, who was at the time a doctoral candidate at the University of California at Santa Cruz and is now on the faculty at California State University at Sacramento. I am grateful to Christi for her very wonderful ethnographic skills, and her excellent company.

With their considerable differences, the kids at Steps and Fields are engaged in a common enterprise—the cohort-wide collaborative move from childhood to adolescence, which involves the construction of a peer-based social order. In childhood, kids belong to friendship groups, they engage in norm enforcement, and some kids are more popular than others. But ultimately, organized social control lies in the hands of adults. In general, friendships are determined by neighborhood and classroom assignment, and it is parents and teachers who discipline kids for social transgressions, enforcing adult norms for the age group. As a cohort approaches adolescence, it appropriates social control from adults and creates norms and a structured social system and norms to support them. This is the first time that kids begin to see themselves as part of a structure beyond the family, and to view themselves as having value on a social market. In both Fields and Steps (as in my own postwar elementary school on the east coast), the social order emerges in the course of fifth and sixth grades in the form of a heterosocial crowd, which is an alliance of smaller friendship groups of kids who have emerged as popular through early elementary school. The crowd brings boys' and girls' networks into a collaboration, combining social status and resources and yielding a sufficiently large social aggregate to dominate the local scene and to contrast with the other kids' small friendship groups. The crowd stands out not simply as popular people, but as above the everyday friendship business of “ordinary” kids. The crowd draws from all classrooms, and while their business unfolds primarily on the playground, they bring crowd business noisily back into their respective classrooms in a constant display of their transcendence of adult arrangements.

Crowd business is above all concerned with building alliances both among girls and between girls and boys, most crucially in the construction of a heterosexual market. Anyone knows that kids experience a good deal of heterosexual boyfriend-girlfriend talk from almost toddlerhood. However, it is in the preadolescent social market that heterosexuality becomes organized, as it underlies the emerging peer social order. It begins in late elementary school (age 10) with a frantic and highly visible activity of pairing up of male-female pairs. The pairs generally last as little as a day or a week, and the boy and girl who make up a pair do not interact much—in fact, mutual avoidance is the norm. This is not just a result of shyness and the newness of the situation, but because the pairing is not about a relationship between a girl and a boy. What is at stake in this activity is the integration of the peer social order. The pairs are negotiated, not by the two individuals involved, but by the crowd as a whole. The short duration of the pairs allows for fast trading and the creation of value both for those who are traded and for those who accumulate the power to do the trading. This process involves a crucial change in the gender order as male and female become complementary constituencies in the heterosexual enterprise. Overwhelmingly, girls decide who should be paired and approach the boys to facilitate with the male side of the pair. The process of negotiation comes to be not only central to their own activity, but the focus of public performances that engage the entire cohort in one way or another. The events in the crowd become news and the actual activities take center stage on school grounds, so that the school becomes a stage for the crowd's public performances. In this way, the crowd gains the power, coherence, and visibility to dominate the social market, giving everyone else the status of onlooker.

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The trading process itself creates a new gender order, as the crowd girls become social engineers, seeking excitement in negotiation, the technology of beauty, the construction of a “cute” personality, and drama. The crowd girls enter into flamboyant stylistic activity, including— even perhaps particularly— speech activity. And it is at this point that the social market spawns a linguistic market. Bourdieu’s notion (e.g., 1977) of the linguistic market is a monolithic market at the national level. Institutions of power are the locus of the construction of legitimacy, including the construction and maintenance of the legitimate linguistic variety. Put quite simply, ideas expressed in the legitimate variety will have greater legitimacy in the social market. In the elementary school, the heterosexual crowd is in the business of constructing local legitimacy. Like a national elite, the crowd generates and commodifies access (e.g., birthday party invitations; participation in games), and knowledge (e.g., who’s who and who’s with whom in the new social order; who’s fighting with whom). Most crucial is knowledge of ever-changing stylistic information of all sorts— new ways of dressing, moving, saying things. It is in this context, I would argue, that gender differences emerge in many aspects of language, as the boys take on ways of moving and speaking that create an appearance of bulk and containment, while the girls become flamboyant in motion, posture, adornment, and speech.

While the bones of these activities are the same at Fields and Steps, there are important differences. The paired girls and boys at Fields show a level of avoidance that one does not find at Steps— while the Steps pairs do not spend time together, there is a discourse of romance that is noticeably absent at Fields. The crowd is quite monolithic at Fields— although there are African Americans and a Latina in the Fields crowd, the crowd is dominated by white Anglos and there is no discourse of diversity. The main crowd at Steps is predominantly Latino. While there is something resembling an Asian American crowd that involves some heterosexual pairing, none of this is done in public to the extent that it is done in the Latino or the Fields Anglo crowd. This means that while it is not the only game in town, the Latino crowd dominates public spaces, and it is the voices of the Latino crowd that get heard on the playground. While this crowd is dominated by Latino kids, it is quite consciously diverse, involving not only Latinos, but a few white Anglos, Asians, and African Americans, and it perceives itself as an alliance of kids of color.

The hub of activity for the crowd is the bilingual classroom, and the classroom buzzes with social activity, almost exclusively in English. There is tremendous class pride, and the students in this classroom express competition with, and contempt for, the sheltered English class, whose students they consider uncool. The relation between ethnicity and coolness is key to social dynamics at Steps. The Chicano community has a deep history in California and in this community, whereas the other populations are relative newcomers. Like the Anglos at Fields, the Chicano kids at Steps have older siblings, and many of them have parents and aunts and uncles who have gone through the American school system. Thus they have a sense of tradition, of following others like them through a time-worn process and into an established adolescent culture. While this adolescent culture is in many ways similar to the adolescent culture that is emerging at Fields, it is also grounded in a strong ethnic community that is solidly based in the area, with family ties and activities that are grounded in the local area. This community is also

steeped in violence — many of the kids at Steps have had relatives who were threatened, injured, or killed, making the danger extremely personal. This violence connects kids to gang orientation — both because the gangs bring violence and because they provide protection in the face of violence. Most of the Chicano kids claim a Norteño identity<sup>6</sup> while entering quite sincerely into school antigang rhetoric. For them, the antigang rhetoric is about gang violence — which they see as separate from the association of ethnic identity with protection, support, and loyalty that are the positive side of gangs. Some of the boys have older siblings, cousins, or uncles who socialize them into gang culture, and in concrete situations, one can see this tutelage emerging as pressure to maintain their pride through violent means. At the same time, kids will entertain themselves by playfully practicing “dogging” each other in preparation for confronting Sureños in public places. This stage, this entrance into adolescence, therefore, is the beginning of the end of innocence. Bravado — like the heterosexual market — becomes a kind of play, but with a clear serious future.

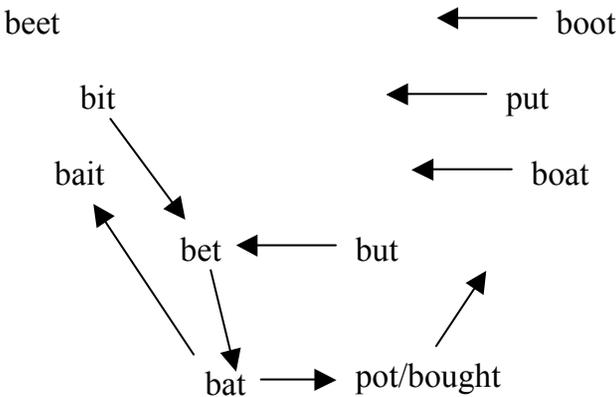
At Fields, there is much talk of gangs, but only a handful of students have had any personal contact with gangs. The kids in Steps and Fields are aware of each other’s schools, and of their ethnic and socioeconomic makeup. And just as the Steps kids are aware of them, the Fields kids are aware of the poor Latino presence around them. To the kids at Fields, Latino means tough, gang, threat, disenfranchisement. It is to a great extent in contrast to the disenfranchisement of the Latino population that the white kid social order achieves local hegemony. At Fields, there is a sense of historical entitlement. They have just walked into a school that was made for them — a school just like the ones their parents and older siblings went to, a school that feels like a smooth extension of home — a school made in their image. The school is there for them to do what they’re going to do. At Steps, the school is preoccupied with the real danger from others that Steps kids face in their neighborhoods, and with the potentially harmful actions of the kids themselves — gang affiliation, sexual activity, violence. As a result, activities that are generally smiled upon at Fields are closely watched at Steps. At Fields, teachers watch the beginnings of heterosexual activity with amusement, while at Steps, teachers watch it with trepidation.

## 5 Linguistic resources

In both schools, the crowds represent social advance, sophistication, coolness. Their activities amount to a production of legitimacy, as they become the arbiters of all things social, including style of all sorts. As they become the stylistic movers and shakers of the cohort, their linguistic practice takes on a particularly public character, and it is their social market that allows for the development of a local, cohort-wide, linguistic market. A discussion of these two linguistic markets begins with the obvious observation that California Anglo English is the symbolic capital of the crowd at Fields, while Chicano English is capital in the crowd at Steps. And while each crowd — and the school it dominates — has a clear ethnic character, the relation between speakers’ ethnicity and place in the social market is not simple.

<sup>6</sup> A U.S. based gang that emerges in opposition to Sureños, who are more oriented to Mexico (see Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

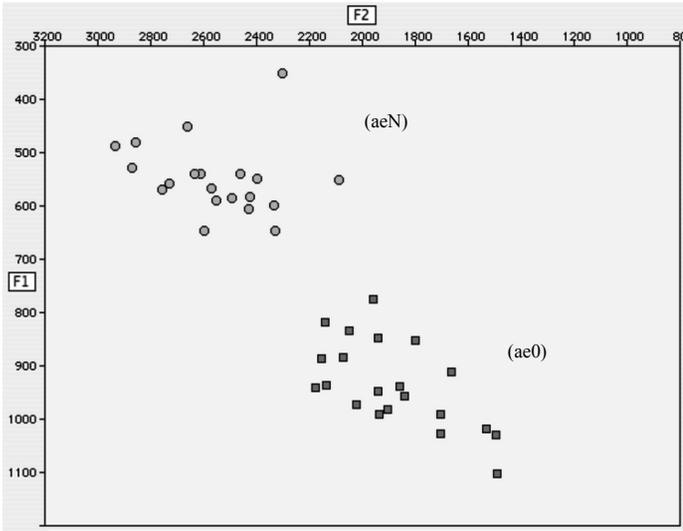
The California vowel shift shown in Figure 1 involves, in addition to the well-known fronting of back vowels, a counterclockwise rotation of the front and low vowels. The lax vowels are lowering, and backing across the bottom of the system: [bɛt] *bit*, [bæ̃t] *bet*, [bat] *bat*. The merged /o/ (*cot*) and /oh/ (*caught*) are moving into the vowel space of /oh/. Finally, /U/ is fronting or lowering to yield [pʊt] or [pʌt] *put* and /ʌ/ is moving slightly forward to yield [bɛt] *but*. A particularly striking difference between Anglo and Chicano speech in California is the treatment of /ae/ (*man*, *cat*). Figure 1 shows /ae/ *bat* both lowering- backing and raising. In all regions across the U.S., in what is commonly referred to as a *nasal pattern*, /ae/ diphthongizes and the nucleus raises before nasals ([me<sup>ə</sup>n] *man*). In the east and midwest, /ae/ raises in other environments as well depending on the region. California shows a pure nasal pattern, in which /ae/ diphthongizes and raises only before nasals. This combines with a more general counterclockwise vowel shift, so that while prenasal occurrences are fronting and raising, other occurrences of /ae/ are lowering and backing ([mat] *mat*). This creates a potential split between the two sets of occurrences, and it is this development that will be of interest in what follows, for Chicano speakers tend not to show the nasal pattern. /ae/ represents a salient point of differentiation between English and Spanish, since orthographic convention links English /ae/ to Spanish /a/, and indeed, an [a] pronunciation for this phoneme is a common feature of non-native accents in English. The low Chicano pronunciation of /ae/, therefore, is commonly heard as Spanish interference. Certainly such a substratum effect in native English can provide a convenient resource for the construction of Chicano identity, analogously to /th,dh/ stopping, and this may well be an important force behind the Chicano feature. But it is now a feature of a native dialect of English, and once part of the dialectal repertoire, it is available to become a second order index, and to be used for social purposes beyond marking ethnicity.



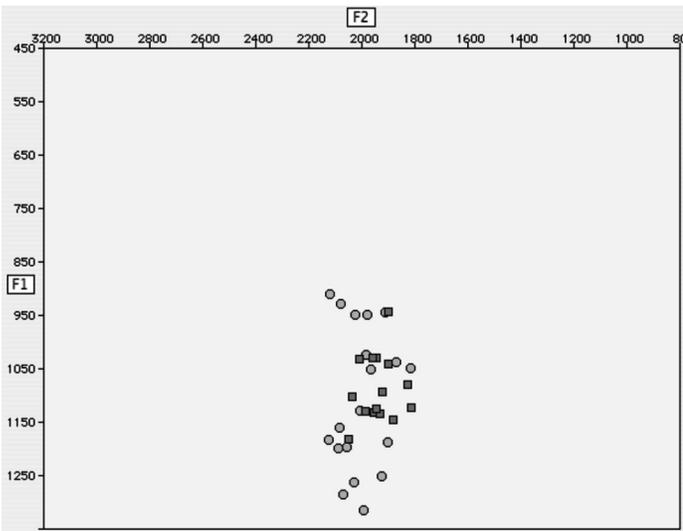
**Figure 1**  
The Northern California  
vowel shift

The domination of Fields and Steps by Anglo and Latino crowds respectively, predicts that the nasal (Anglo) pattern will be the norm in the crowd at Fields, while the Nonraising (Chicano) pattern will be the norm at Steps. Indeed, this is so. Figures 2 and 3 show F1–F2 plots for /ae/ for two extreme speakers of the two patterns, Rachel (from Fields Elementary) and Selena (from Steps Elementary). Rachel and Selena are central

members of the crowd in their respective schools. In Figures 2 and 3<sup>7</sup>, the circles are the prenasal occurrences (aeN), while the squares represent /ae/ before non-nasals (aeO). The difference in the means of the two sets of occurrences is significant at the  $< .001$  level in Rachel's speech, and there is no difference at all in Selena's speech. These two girls' patterns are extreme versions of the nasal and the nonraising pattern — one might say they are the stylistic norms of the two crowds — and the rest of their peers show a range of patterns in between.



**Figure 2**  
/ae/ Nasal pattern  
(Rachel, Fields Elementary)



**Figure 3**  
/ae/ Non-raising pattern  
(Selena, Steps Elementary)

<sup>7</sup> I have not normalized these formant values, because the speakers are prepubescent and show very little difference in F0 range. In the case of (aeN)–(aeO) difference, this is not even an issue since I am comparing within speakers.

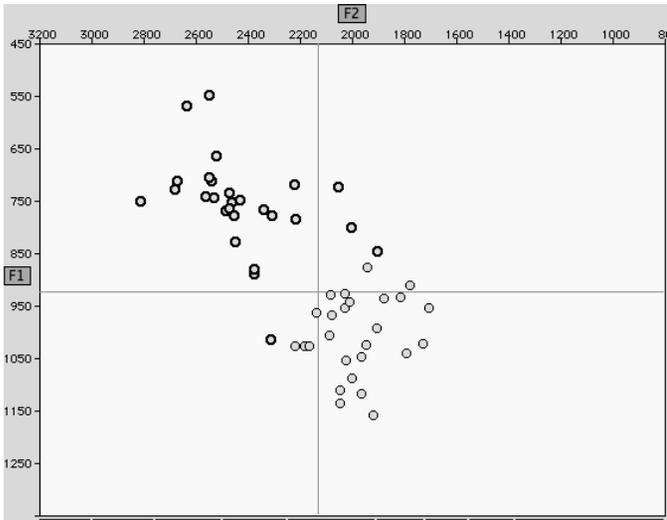
Table 1 shows the range of vowel height, represented by the first formant, for boys and girls at each school. The overall range for all tokens of /ae/ is significantly greater at Fields than at Steps, and in both schools it is greater for girls than for boys. The gender difference in the use of this vowel reflects a generally greater stylistic activity among the girls, and reflects the more general finding that women and girls show a greater range of variation than men and boys, suggesting a gender-based difference in the tendency to use language to signal social difference (Eckert, 2000; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). The evidence (Romaine, 1984) shows that across communities, gender differences in phonological variation appear at about this age, and I would argue that the radical process of change in gender practice taking place in preadolescence is the social power behind this linguistic development.

**Table 1**

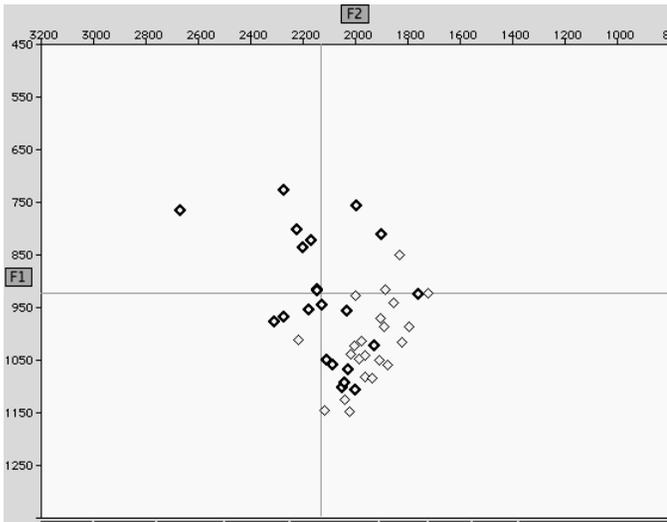
Range of F1 for /ae/ in Hz at Fields and Steps

	Lowest	Highest	Range
Fields Girls	352	1377	1025
Fields Boys	507	1361	854
Steps Girls	575	1368	793
Steps Boys	660	1241	581

Overall, however, the range of variation is considerably smaller at Steps than at Fields. This reflects not a lack of sociolinguistic activity, but diversity of a different kind, as it is the outcome of averaging speakers with and without the nasal pattern. Figures 4 and 5 are F1–F2 plots showing (aeN) (highlighted) and (ae0) for individual Fields and Steps speakers respectively. While the difference between the (aeN) and the (ae0) means is greater at Fields than at Steps, speakers in both schools show a significance of .001 for the overall difference in means between (aeN) and (ae0) in both F1 (which corresponds to vowel height) and F2 (which corresponds to vowel frontness) overall. But at Fields, this overall mean is mirrored in the speech of every individual: half the speakers at Fields show no overlap at all between the tokens of (aeN) and (ae0), and in all cases but one, the difference in the means for (aeN) and (ae0) is significant for both F1 and F2. The only exception is one boy who shows a difference in F2 that is not statistically significant, but he shows a highly significant ( $p < .001$ ) difference in F1. There is far greater diversity in the use of this pattern at Steps. While the difference between the aggregated (aeN) and (ae0) means is significant at the .001 level in both formants for the cohort as a whole, all but two speakers show some overlap between the tokens of (aeN) and (ae0). Half the speakers show a significant difference in F1 and half of them show a significant difference in F2, but only one third of the speakers show a significant difference in both formants, and one third of the speakers show no significant difference in either formant.



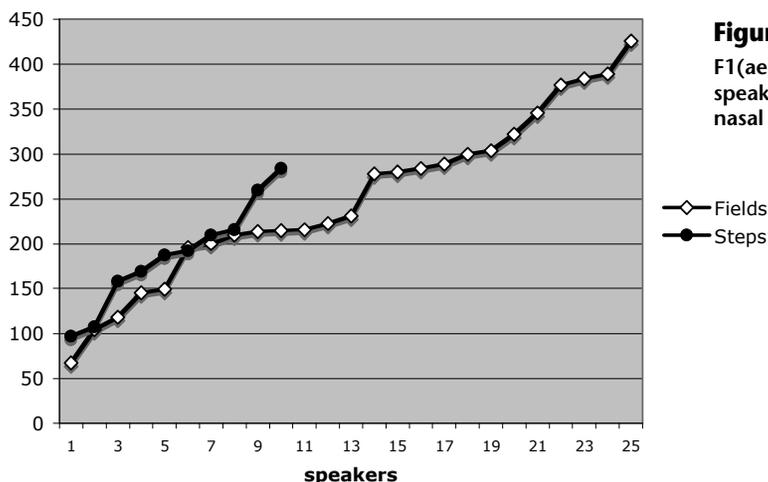
**Figure 4**  
Individual (ae) means at  
Fields Elementary



**Figure 5**  
Individual (ae) means at  
Steps Elementary

The fact that the nasal pattern is the norm at Fields but not at Steps shows up clearly in the weakness of the splits that do occur at Steps. Those people at Steps who do have the nasal pattern have a weaker pattern than is the norm at Fields. Figure 6 plots the values for the difference in F1 between the (ae0) and (aeN) means for students with a statistically significant nasal pattern at Steps ( $n = 10$ ) and Fields ( $n = 25$ ). As this figure shows, the range of values at Steps is at the lower end of the range at Fields.

At Fields, the main social difference in the use of /ae/ is gender—girls overall show a more extreme split than boys. While the most extreme examples of the split show up in the speech of crowd girls, there is no general correlation between crowd membership and the extent of the split. The one Latina in the crowd shows the same pattern as her Anglo peers—in fact, her nasal pattern is the second strongest at Fields. This girl



**Figure 6**  
F1(aeN) – F1(aeO) in Hz for speakers with a significant nasal pattern

is from the Steps catchment area, but attends Fields because her parents consider it a better and safer school. At Steps, the nonraising pattern appears in the speech of all crowd members regardless of ethnicity, while almost all of the noncrowd people show at least some nasal pattern. Table 2 shows 20 speakers from Steps Elementary: 6 boys and 14 girls. Speakers are listed in ascending order of the F1 difference between (aeN) and (ae0). The crowd members cluster at the top of the table, showing no significant difference between (aeN) and (ae0), while with only one exception<sup>8</sup>, the noncrowd members show a significant difference. While the number of speakers analyzed so far (particularly boys) is somewhat small, the data nonetheless show that it is not ethnicity alone that determines whether a kid will have a nasal or a nonraising pattern. While six of the crowd members in this table are Chicano, two of them, Randolph and Trudy, are not. Similarly, two of the noncrowd members showing the nasal pattern are Chicanas. These two girls, Belinda and Carolyn, each have one Anglo parent, and one might reasonably ask if their lack of the nonraising pattern is a result of early exposure to the nasal pattern. But early exposure does not account for several other speakers. Randolph's parents are both native speakers of English, yet he has a pronounced nonraising pattern. And Purnima and Judi, both coming from non-native English speaking homes, show a clear nasal pattern. It appears from these figures that it is crowd participation, which invokes but does not equal ethnicity, that is most salient in the use of the nonraising pattern. It is important to emphasize that ethnicity is simply not a given, but is something that is claimed and contested. Belinda and Carolyn both come from families in which Chicano culture dominates, and both clearly identify as Chicana. However, their status as “on the outs” with the crowd is intimately connected with challenges to their ethnic

<sup>8</sup> Merilee, the one noncrowd member who shows no significant difference is the only exception to this pattern. While she identifies as African American, her speech shows no phonological or morphosyntactic AAVE features. One of her parents is European (hence her bilingualism), and the parent who is African American speaks standard African American English (i.e., some African American phonology and standard syntax and morphology). Thus it would be a mistake to conclude that her nonadoption of the nasal pattern is due to competition from AAVE.

status, which seem to center not around the authenticity of their homes but around their inappropriate behavior as members of the peer social order.

**Table 2**

F1(aeN) – F1(aeO) for 20 kids at Steps Elementary

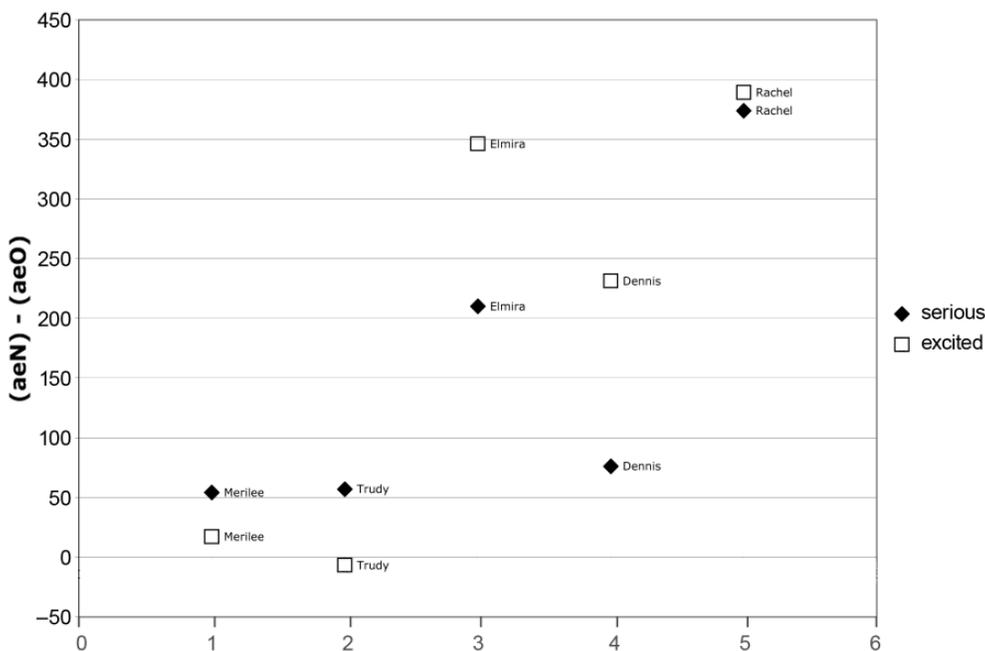
		bilingual	crowd member	F1 Diff. Hz.	sig.
Manny	Chicano	yes	yes	-26	n.s.
Selena	Chicana	yes	yes	-20	n.s.
Carlos	Chicano	yes	yes	1	n.s.
Renata	Chicana	yes	yes	14	n.s.
Randolph	European American	no	yes	35	n.s.
Geneva	Chicana	no	yes	39	n.s.
Marisol	Chicana	yes	yes	47	n.s.
Merilee	African American	yes	no	54	n.s.
Trudy	Asian American	yes	yes	57	n.s.
Adam	European American	yes	no	97	.005
Arthur	Indian American	yes	no	106	.05
Winifred	European American	no	no	107	.025
Jocelyn	European American	no	no	158	.001
Belinda	Chicana	no	no	169	.001
Purnima	Indian American	yes	no	187	.025
Katya	European American	yes	no	192	.001
Judi	Asian American	yes	no	210	.001
Kenneth	European American	no	no	216	.001
Carolyn	Chicana	no	no	260	.005
Leslie	European American	no	no	284	.005

The stylistic use of variables is of course essential to establishing indexical value. If the nasal and the non-nasal patterns are associated with crowd practice at Fields and Steps respectively, then one would expect these patterns to intensify when speakers are engaged in such practice. The beginnings of an examination of stylistic variation supports the claim being made here. Figure 7 shows two points for each of five speakers — one point representing the value of F1(aeN) – F1(aeO) in conversation with me alone (labeled ‘serious’), and one representing the value of F1(aeN) – F1(aeO) in more excited speech with peers about cohort-related topics. The figure shows Merilee in a conversation with me about friends on the one hand, and in an interaction with friends on the playground in which she is complaining about problems in the classroom. The figure also shows Trudy’s speech in a similar conversation about friends with me, and in a gossipy interaction with

a friend and me. Merilee and Trudy, both of whom show the nonraising pattern, show even less raising in more peer-oriented speech. The reverse pattern shows up in Fields. Elmira, who is not part of the crowd, increases the split from 210Hz in an interview with me to 346Hz while discussing her shopping for school clothes. Dennis, a member of the crowd, moves from a difference of 76 in an interview to 231 when he's discussing plans for the big upcoming party (most particularly, who's going to dance with whom). Finally, Rachel, the class drama queen, shows a very slight increase as she moves from talking to me about sixth grade to talking with friends about the same upcoming party that Dennis is discussing. I might note that Rachel's speech with me already shows such an extreme split that it would be difficult for her to increase it. While none of these shifts are large enough to be very significant on their own (particularly Rachel's, who is quite dramatic in all her speech), the fact that they all follow a clear pattern does suggest that these differences are meaningful.

**Figure 7**

Stylistic variation for five kids



## 6 Conclusions

Certainly many features of Chicano and Anglo English are quite distinct, and ethnic distinctness is an important force in the community and in language use. At the same time, in many places, Anglo and Chicano kids attend school together, play together, and ultimately marry each other. And while it is common for there to be ethnic divisions in school and out, these divisions are produced and reproduced in the context of day-to-day contact, and become part and parcel of a broader peer culture, in which social, cultural,

and linguistic resources are on the table for all to interpret, consider, and possibly use. In this context, it becomes a bit odd to view the California shift as propelled by Anglos and resisted by Chicanos; rather, one can view aspects of this shift as being propelled by identity work within and across both communities. California white Anglo English and Chicano English are constructed not simply in opposition to each other, but in conjunction with each other as well. And in communities in which Chicano and white Anglo speakers interact on a day-to-day basis, the meanings of linguistic resources may come to have a very complex relation to ethnicity. The nonraising pattern at Steps is not only associated with ethnicity, but with norms of coolness that emerge within the ethnic group, but which are about the peer-based social order at school, and which are available to those outside the ethnic group as well. If we are to focus only on larger demographic categories, the importance of what is shared across ethnic groups will appear as negligible subtleties, and the speakers whose use of (aeN) does not conform to their ethnic assignment will appear to indicate assimilation to another category. This difference will appear subtle to the sociolinguist seeking the larger patterns, and for whom the distinction between ethnic membership and ethnic practice may be just noise. But if our aim is to understand linguistic competence in practice — to understand how the individual speaker constructs a persona within a landscape in which ethnicity plays a prominent but not determining role — then the subtleties of indexicality take on supreme importance.

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