

Practices, ethnicity and authenticity: ‘Creole’ and youth language in a British inner-city community

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Introduction

This chapter draws on ethnographic research undertaken in 2004-5 among adolescents in an inner-city area of Manchester, a large city in the northwest of England. Although no linguistic research has previously been undertaken in this area, the fact that it has traditionally been seen as the centre of a ‘Caribbean Community,’ together with knowledge of how Creole has been part of the linguistic repertoire of other inner-city areas in Britain, led us to expect that we would find Creole in some form being used by Caribbean-heritage adolescents there. What we actually found was surprising and in some ways more interesting. Though there were still plenty of ‘Caribbeans’ in the area of Manchester where our research took place, it was hardly possible to find any social networks which were exclusively Caribbean, or even ‘black’. Among the adolescents in our study, none were actively using Creole for everyday communication. However, Creole language forms were being widely used, not just by black adolescents, but by their peers in multi-ethnic social networks. These findings pose challenges for existing sociolinguistic models such as the variationist one which attempt to show correlations between language and ethnicity and/or geographical origin.

‘Creole’ and youth language

Background

Caribbeans have been part of the British linguistic landscape for some centuries, since the slavery period, but the main wave of migration from the Caribbean to Britain took place in the 20 or so years from 1949 onward. During this period, mainly adult migrants came to Britain to take up employment in services and industries where there were labour shortages; once labour was no longer in demand, immigration controls started to be imposed and the stream of migration diminished. Linguistically, the first generation of settlers from the Caribbean reflected the diversity of their region of origin: a majority would have been speakers of a Creole variety, usually a mesolectal one in the case of those from places like Jamaica and Guyana where a continuum exists. In the period following their arrival, these migrants accommodated linguistically to their new environment to varying extents. Wells (1973) shows how Jamaicans variably adapted their pronunciation to match that of London English; we can assume that similar variable adaptation took place in this generation in other places and with respect to other aspects of language such as grammar and discourse.

By the late 1970s there was a second generation, who had been born and/or spent most of their early life in Britain. The evidence suggests that this generation was very different linguistically from their parents, growing up with first-language competence in local varieties of British English. At the same time, this generation had a Caribbean ‘heritage language’ in which they had complete or almost complete passive competence, but active competence which varied greatly from individual to individual. This heritage language was not necessarily the vernacular of their parents, as it was based on Jamaican Creole even for those speakers who did not have Jamaican ancestry. This generation were thus competent and prolific code-switchers between local English and a local variety of Jamaican Creole. Following early reports of a ‘London Jamaican’ variety in the late 1970s, several studies showed similar patterns in different parts of the country: for example Edwards (1986) for the West Midlands, Sebba (1993) for ‘London Jamaican’, Tate (1984) for Bradford in the North of England. Tate’s research showed clearly that Jamaican ancestry was not a prerequisite for using a variety of Jamaican Creole, as her subjects were a reggae bandwho, like most of the Caribbeans in Bradford, were of Dominican descent and

‘Creole’ and youth language

thus the children of French Creole speakers. The members of the band used Jamaican Creole and Bradford English among themselves.

Research carried out during the 1980s indicated that there was a strong link between language use and ethnic identity for this generation of Caribbeans-by-descent. While virtually indistinguishable from other locally-born British people when speaking the local English, they could mark themselves out and show solidarity with other Caribbeans by using the local form of Jamaican Creole. The extent of their use of it could vary, however, from fluent and confident to almost purely symbolic and consisting of common phrases and discourse markers. However, as Hewitt noted, it was a powerful identity marker:

The use of creole by black adolescents is arguably the strongest single marker of black youth culture and it is consistently present throughout the different forms assumed by that culture. (Hewitt 1982:226)

As mentioned above, the available reports suggest that among the second generation of Caribbeans in Britain the patterns of language use were similar in different parts of the country. However, the picture we have from research is only a patchy and partial one. The only areas where fairly extensive research projects were carried out were London (Hewitt 1986, Sebba 1993), the West Midlands (Edwards 1986) and Bedford (Sutcliffe 1982), all in the early 1980s. Some cities with long-established Caribbean communities, like Bristol, had no linguistic research carried out at all. Likewise there was no research done in cities with smaller Caribbean minorities, like Ipswich and Preston, where different patterns of settlement might have led to different outcomes¹. And strikingly, two large cities in the North of England, Leeds and Manchester, each with an identifiable Caribbean community settled in an identifiable area, received no attention from researchers.

At the same time as African-Caribbeans were found to be using Creole and English in urban areas like London, researchers observed that Creole or at least some elements of Creole were being taken up by non-Caribbeans. Thus Roger Hewitt documented the use of Creole by white adolescents who were involved in peer groups with Caribbeans (1982, 1986) but also observed that in London a local ‘multi-ethnic’ vernacular had

‘Creole’ and youth language

emerged, ‘the language of white as well as minority youth’ (1992:193). This included identifiably Creole lexical items and some discourse markers. In an area with a relatively high proportion of Caribbeans he recorded 30 such lexical items in use (1986:129), noting a consistency in the phonological influence of Creole on just a few words (1986:133). However, as Hewitt’s study did not comprehensively address the extent to which the syntax of the ‘multi-ethnic’ vernacular was influenced by Creole we have to assume that this vernacular was essentially recognisable through the occasional use of Creole tokens and formulaic expressions within the syntactic frame of a local British vernacular, to which all speakers had been exposed as small children. Unlike Creole (London Jamaican), this multi-ethnic vernacular did not carry symbolic meaning in terms of race or ethnicity and could be freely used by white or black adolescents without fear of overstepping ethnic boundaries.

In a subsequent study Rampton (1995) described the phenomenon of *crossing*, in which young urban speakers in peer groups used limited amounts of languages or varieties which were spoken locally but which they did not ‘own’, for example, a white child of English-speaking background might use Creole or Panjabi – possibly in a highly restricted or formulaic way - in interaction with peers in an ethnically mixed group.

To summarise, research in the period approximately 1980 to 1990 indicated that local varieties of Caribbean (specifically, Jamaican) Creole had developed in some urban areas of England and were in regular use by young members of the Caribbean community, alongside local varieties of English. At the same time Creole had been taken up in a limited way by non-Caribbean youth, with some Creole vocabulary and discourse markers being used within the ethnically undifferentiated youth language, as well as in ‘crossing’ styles among peer groups. London was probably in the vanguard of both of these trends.

Manchester

Manchester is a city (population just under 400,000 according to the 2001 census) within a much larger conurbation (Greater Manchester, population almost 2.5 million in 2001) in the North-West of England, some 200 miles (320 km) from London.

‘Creole’ and youth language

Manchester followed the familiar pattern of rapid industrial growth (centred around textiles) in the 19th century followed by a slow decline of traditional industries in the 20th century. The areas surrounding the central business district remain (in spite of urban renewal projects) generally areas of low status, with low quality housing occupied largely by low income families, and with social indicators such as health, education and crime all considerably worse than the national average².

Despite its importance as a Northern city with a distinctive character, Manchester has attracted surprisingly little interest from linguistic researchers. Manchester English is poorly described. We were unable to find *any* authoritative description of the phonology or grammar of the English associated with Central Manchester (i.e. the residential districts immediately south of the current central business district). Wells (1982) remarks that Greater Manchester is in an area (the ‘middle north’) characterised by ‘typical’ northern accents (1982:350), but says nothing about Central Manchester specifically. The nearest variety which has been well described is that of the outlying town of Bolton (Shorrocks 1998), which is 15 km or more from our ‘target area’ and which historically has been a separate administrative entity and is not geographically contiguous with the area where we were based. Though the accents, not surprisingly, are similar, Bolton speakers would be heard as coming from outside the area of our research site.

We are therefore not able to say much about the traditional forms of Manchester English, other than that it is a typically northern variety of English, with relatively few highly localised features. However, it is easily distinguishable from Southern British English varieties, from the variety of its large neighbour to the west, Liverpool, and from all the Creoles of the Caribbean³.

Our research site

Manchester was a destination for many new arrivals from the Caribbean who settled in Britain after the Second World War. By the 1980s and 1990s there were several areas of central Manchester that were strongly associated with the Caribbean community. However, at the time of our study in 2005, these areas were no longer predominantly ‘Caribbean’. In the areas covered by this research there was still a

‘Creole’ and youth language

strong ‘Caribbean’ presence, but there was also a large, well-established Asian population, and in one area in particular, a very recent and still continuing influx of new arrivals from Somalia. According to reports from local inhabitants who had witnessed the changes in the local population over the last two decades, the demography of the area began to change significantly following the demolition of several housing blocks during the 1990s. As new migrants arrived from Somalia and elsewhere, so some of the established residents moved out to other areas and were dispersed. Thus by the time of our study, the one-time ‘Caribbean’ districts of Manchester had become a more culturally hybrid, ethnically mixed community in which it was no longer possible to identify a distinct Caribbean community.

As no thorough linguistic study of Manchester has been carried out, there has been no systematic research on its Caribbean inhabitants and their languages. However, we have indirect and anecdotal evidence from Manchester that Jamaican Creole was used there up to the mid-1990s, and furthermore was used in a similar way to how it was used in other British urban communities. We have reports from informants, now adults, who grew up there, that they used Jamaican Creole with their peers when they were teenagers. We also have evidence from a number of ‘Yardie’ novels (crime novels with Caribbean protagonists), set in Manchester and written by black Manchester authors, which appeared in the early to mid-1990s. For example, the following passage gives a literary depiction of the language used by the young Manchester-Caribbean character Teeko and his peers, making it explicit that he has command of two varieties:

"Whe' me deh? I can't concentrate on this with them girls watching," he muttered, shifting his beefy frame uneasily in his seat. Like most of his friends, he spoke in a mixture of Jamaican dialect and English, with a strong Manchester accent. (Smith 1994)

If this is an accurate depiction of the speech of a Manchester-born adolescent ca. 1990 – and it is certainly credible given the author’s local connections – it suggests for Manchester in the late eighties/early nineties exactly what research had shown for London about a decade previously: that young African-Caribbeans were using Creole and English, in a code-mixing mode in everyday conversation among themselves.

‘Creole’ and youth language

Our study and its participants

The original intention of our research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council⁴, reflected in its title ‘Language and literacies of young Caribbeans in Manchester,’ was to look at the language of children and adolescents of Caribbean heritage. But in the area of Central Manchester which was the focus of our interest, immigrant communities from a variety of religions, cultures and races had been living alongside a white British working class population for up to four generations. In 2005 mixed-race families had become commonplace and the corollary of this was that some members of the younger generation were exposed to a variety of cultural influences both at home and in their peer groups. Many had black Caribbean and white British relatives, some of these also had a further influence from an Asian or African parent or grandparent. One teenage participant in the study described himself as “quarter-cast”. Not only did we observe a large proportion of mixed-race young people, we also discovered that some young people (who were not necessarily mixed-race) lived with families of a different ethnic heritage as foster children. The social networks of the participants in the study were therefore noticeably diverse with regard to their contact with people of other ethnicities and ethnic heritages and we were not able to identify any ethnically-exclusive Caribbean social networks of young people.

Given that there were very few young people of exclusively Caribbean descent and even fewer that were not British-born, using ethnicity as a category by which to select participants became problematic. Nevertheless, in order to present the research findings and to support our claim that ethnicity is an inappropriate category to explain language use in this case, we give an indication of the ethnic composition of the sample in the Table 1 below. For ease, the ethnicities of the participants have been described according to their parents’ ethnicity. The ethnicity of their grandparents or of other family members has not been taken into account.

Table 1: Ethnic composition of our sample

| Ethnic description | Male | Female | Total |
|---|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| Black British (all of Caribbean heritage) | 11 | 5 | 16 |
| Mixed heritage with Caribbean parentage | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| Mixed heritage not with Caribbean parentage | 6 | - | 6 |

‘Creole’ and youth language

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| White British | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| British Asian | 3 | - | 3 |
| Unknown | 2 | - | 2 |
| Total | 31 | 9 | 40 |

The total number of participants with Caribbean heritage (Categories 1 and 2) is 22 (55% of the total). Of the ‘mixed race’ and ‘black’ participants (total =28), the mixed heritage group (12/28) accounts for almost 43%. This figure is very close to the proportion of the ‘mixed’ population in the overall ‘black’ (‘mixed’ and ‘black/black British’) group in the 2001 census data for Manchester (41.7%), suggesting that this sample is a fair representation of the local demography.

Of these 40 participants we worked closely with 15 members of a young men’s group and also with 4 families comprising 7 young people in total. The ethnic composition of this core sample was as follows

Young men’s group (13-15 year olds):

- 6 black British (Caribbean heritage);
- 5 mixed heritage (4 black Caribbean/white British & 1 Asian/white British);
- 3 white British;
- 1 Asian.

4 families with children and teenagers of primary and secondary school age (6 girls ages 8-15; 1 boy age 12)

- 6 black British (Caribbean heritage);
- 1 mixed heritage (black Caribbean / white British)

We took an ethnographic approach to data collection. We observed and participated in the activities of the youth club as much as possible, and this was supplemented by video recordings made by a youth worker in our absence. We enlisted the help of a youth worker and a school governor, both of Caribbean heritage, living in the local community and already known to the participants in order to collect naturally occurring spoken language data in authentic and typical settings. The kinds of data we collected included: group interviews with some of the participants, which were facilitated and audio-recorded by the youth worker with whom the participants were

‘Creole’ and youth language

familiar; direct observation of spoken and written language; video recordings of peer-group interactions both in the youth club and whilst undertaking organised activities such as paintballing, football, cycling, trampolining etc; photographs of written language including lyrics and graffiti; and audio recordings of spontaneous spoken interaction in the family setting and in the youth club. The latter were either collected by the youth worker or the school governor, or recorded by the participants themselves. The conversational language data amounted to approximately 19 recorded hours. In addition, in order to contextualise this language data, we conducted 24 interviews with teachers, community workers, youth workers, musicians and ex-gang members.

Linguistic behaviour

As we said above, there is no systematic documentation of the extent to which Creole was used among young people of Caribbean heritage in previous generations in Manchester. As far as we are aware, our research is the first to explore the role of Creole in the language of the younger generation - some of whom have links to the Caribbean through their grandparents or parents, while others, with whom the former are closely networked, have no direct links whatsoever.

To our surprise – as we had come looking for and expecting to find Creole continuing to be used as a heritage language at least to some extent – we found no evidence of a systematic or extended use of Creole in any of the peer-group interactions between the young people in our study. However, there was evidence of the use of Creole *forms* by all the participants. Importantly, some of these forms were used by all peer-group members regardless of their heritage, and these forms did not appear to be seen as ‘Creole’ by the speakers, but rather as a ‘slang’ form of English. Other Creole forms were observed less frequently and appeared to signal a shift in style, indexing more overtly a Black British/Caribbean identity. Such style shifts were not necessarily confined to those with Caribbean heritage.

An example of a Creole form that had become re-appropriated into the everyday linguistic repertoire of the participants was the discourse marker *man*, which was used for emphasis (e.g. “Naa, I don’t play football man, I ain’t playin’ football man.” -

‘Creole’ and youth language

Keith, 14, white British). The realisation of the vowel in *man* varied according to speaker and context. The vowel shifted between the British English realisation [a] and the Black American Vernacular English realisation [ɛ:] and sometimes fell somewhere between the two (e.g. [a:]).

Further examples of Creole-origin forms, occurring several times in the sample data and used by at least three participants were ‘vex’ (to be angry) and ‘mash up’ (destroy, damage, injure etc). Again the application of these forms was variable. Sometimes they were adapted to English rules and inflected (e.g. “The community’s gonna get mashed up” – Harvey, 14, Caribbean heritage), and sometimes, following Jamaican Creole grammar, they were not inflected in the past tense (e.g. “I just get vex” – Nick, 12, Caribbean heritage).

Furthermore, many of the participants had /d/ as the most common realisation of RP /ð/ in word initial position (e.g. *the, there, though*). The frequency and ubiquity of this phenomenon in the local area was observed not only in speech but was consciously reified by some users themselves in their written language, particularly text messages and graffiti, by using the spelling <d> for Standard <th>. However, there was little evidence for /t/, the Creole realisation of RP /θ/, which tended to be realised either by [θ] or by [f]⁵ e.g. “Don’t you think that girl finks she’s bum (i.e. great)” - Daveena, 15, Caribbean heritage)⁶. On only one occasion did we observe the use of Creole [t] in the realisation of the word ‘thick’, and this was by a white adolescent with his friends (of Caribbean heritage). In the example that is given below it is clear that all those involved in the exchange understand the utterance and are familiar enough with it to contribute to the joke that he makes in implying that he has become thickset (‘tick’) from working out in the prison (‘pen’) gym.

Example 1

Lee: [Firing ‘gunshots’ into the air enthusiastically with his fingers]

Youthworker: what’s up with ‘im?

Ben: he’s excited

Youthworker: told you man, you shoulda stayed in Spain for an extra week.

Ben: naa, he’s been in Spain for- he’s been inside for about four weeks

‘Creole’ and youth language

Lee: I’ve just come outa pen [autapen] (.) Tick! [tik]

Andre: your head’s tick [tik]

Lee: so’s your bottom lip!

[Lee, 14, white British, Ben, 14, mixed race (black Jamaican/white British) Andre, 13, mixed race (black Jamaican/white British)]

There is no evidence in the rest of our data to suggest that this is a form the young people would draw on regularly as part of their everyday repertoire, but the fact that it was accepted and understood without comment indicates that it is recognised and understood as a variant of /θ/.

Several participants demonstrated a more active use of a broader set of Creole forms than the rest, but these were nevertheless limited to short phrases (e.g. “(Let’s) catch some joke” - Harvey, 14, Caribbean heritage) and to curse words (e.g. “Ai! You bomba!” - Chris, 13, Caribbean heritage; “rass” - Lee, 14, white British). These young people tended to come from homes where family members used Creole and/or had contact with relatives in the Caribbean, although this was not always the case. From the peer-group interactions we observed, none of the young people could be described as speakers of Creole, nor did they describe themselves as such, and there was a general consensus among them that people from the Caribbean were difficult to understand.

The legacy of Creole

Finding that there was no regular use of Creole as a language among our participants was a genuine surprise. Much of our research was carried out in a young men’s group with a high proportion of Caribbean-heritage members. In London in the 1980s, for example, in such a context it would have been easy to find fluent users of Creole, alongside others with a less active knowledge. However, as we have said, though we found evidence of Creole *forms*, we found no evidence of Creole in use as a language in its own right. What we did find was a number of practices in which language is central, which involved Creole as a frequent (though optional) element, and where the practices themselves appear to have roots in the Caribbean. There is a large body of

‘Creole’ and youth language

linguistic literature relating to verbal rituals, and in particular verbal duelling, among the African diaspora – see for example Mendoza-Denton (2008), Smitherman 1999, Labov 1972. In the next two sections we discuss two of the practices we observed in Manchester, MC-ing and Murking, in more detail. In both of these practices the primary goal is to verbally beat your opponent. MC-ing (i.e. rapping) is a strongly language-based practice, involving spoken and (potentially) written language. It is a part of hip-hop culture, which is international, but has developed local forms reflecting local cultural practices (see Mitchell 2001, Pennycook 2006). Access through the media and new communications technology to the ‘international Hood’ (i.e. traditionally Black (American/British) youth life experience, and cultural forms such as hip-hop) means that the young people in Manchester have alternative linguistic resources to draw on which may encourage linguistic ‘experiments’ - lexically and phonologically. The linguistic styles and strategies drawn on and valued in the MC-ing ‘performance’ are frequently also found in peer-group speech, blurring the boundaries between spontaneous communication and ‘composed’ performance.

The practice known locally as *murking* (?‘mocking’; ?‘murdering’) is variously defined as ‘stealing’, ‘beating someone to death’, ‘to beat someone at rapping by having better lyrics’⁷. Neither the word, nor the practice, is confined to Manchester. We observed murking in its third sense above, as a verbal duelling competition.

The young people’s exchanges are highly intertextual, and often explicitly so. They frequently draw on different voices, and this makes a distinction between ‘natural’ speech and performance difficult to sustain. Performance frequently plays a part in everyday peer-group interaction and thus contributes significantly to the negotiation of individual identities and relationships between group members. Intertextuality is thus a key element of the group’s value system, as it is one linguistic mechanism by which group members are able to signal belonging and achieve status.

Language Practice 1: MC-ing

MC-ing is dominated by males. Perhaps because of this it is a gendered practice in that it is associated with and imbued with the male value-system (sexual prowess, survival, wealth). That said, if a girl does it (and she must be good) she is very highly

'Creole' and youth language

respected by the boys. The problem for the girls is that they don't appear to have the same 'apprenticeship' opportunities as the boys. If they are not good, they won't practice because of the fear of ridicule.

The values that are attached to lyrical ingenuity/innovation in the MC-ing practice spill into 'everyday' communication and result in a view of language that is not that of the 'schooled' standard, but rather one in which non-standard, vernacular forms are equally, if not more, prestigious. Embodied in this 'lyrical prowess' which is found in performance and normal conversation, is a value-system which reflects a lifestyle in which masculinity is constructed as 'survival of the fittest' (as embodied in the title of US rapper 50 Cent's 2003 album *Get Rich Or Die Tryin*). The recurring theme of killing is metaphorically represented in the murking practices (see below) of younger males, who draw on the practice of verbal duelling (a central element of MC-ing performance), in their peer-group interactions.

The extract below, performed by Harvey (14, black British of Caribbean heritage), highlights some of these points. Perhaps most importantly - although it is a performance, it highlights the styles, language forms and combinations found in 'normal' conversations. However, very few Creole forms are actually used - probably only *neck back* (line 3), *run back* (line 5), and */bus/* (line 10).

Example 2 (spoken by Harvey):

1. ...boy, you backstabber
2. all you better get back
3. before you get capped in your neck back
4. (inaudible) if I see gunshot
5. come against me and you will get run back
6. if I take it to violence you will get smacked
7. [...]
8. you should give me an encore
9. you will get dropped to the floor
10. bus your head on the dance floor
11. your spinal cord will get cut
12. (inaudible) better fuck off
13. or you will get hacked off

‘Creole’ and youth language

This extract also demonstrates the focus on 'survival' /killing/dissing. There is potential for another MC to come back at Harvey with a verbal response to his 'death threat' (murking, see below).

Language Practice 2: Murking (verbal duelling)

This is also more of a boys' activity, but not exclusively so. However, there is a gender difference. The girls reported that boys do it with their friends - almost as a way of expressing friendship/intimacy. When girls do it (which is not frequent), they are serious about it. It can get nasty.

In the extract below, Harvey (14, black British of Caribbean heritage) had begun murking Keith (14, white British) whilst he was attempting to video the other boys playing football. Keith moved the camera onto Harvey who apparently scratched Keith with his 'sharp nails' as he pushed Keith away:

Example 3: murking

Harvey: sharp nails!?! [laughs] your ass smells of BO man
Keith: no man
Harvey: you're like a skinny penguin
Keith: no man
Harvey: pigeon ches'
Keith: peppergrain
Harvey: NO. [said with emphasis and finality]
Keith: yeah yeah
Harvey: your skin- tongue looks like off milk
Keith: why, why are you murking me? You want me to get Martin to murk you again?

This is recognisably a version of the African-American practice extensively described by Labov (1972:305-353) and variously named *sounding*, *signifying*, *playing the dozens*. In this extract there are references to physical attributes – body odour, size, hair and colour, which are based on their in-group knowledge of what counts as offensive, and also what counts as acceptable. Harvey appears to be more adept at murking than Keith, whose one attempt at name-calling – ‘peppergrain’- refers to Harvey’s hair and oversteps the line of ‘friendly’ banter. ‘Peppergrain’ is a term used in Jamaica to describe short hair of a bobbly texture and was considered a strong

‘Creole’ and youth language

insult by the participants in this study, as indicated in the extract by Harvey’s definitive response. Keith is unable to find any further come back at Harvey and ends the event by threatening to involve the murking expertise of Martin.

Global, Local and Translocal

In their language practices, young people in Central Manchester can be seen as drawing on both *local* and *global* linguistic repertoires. The majority of their everyday vernacular is ‘local’ in the sense that it is the Manchester variety of English, clearly marked as such by features of accent and (to a lesser extent) grammar. The global aspect of their repertoire is evident in the ways they draw on lexis from the Caribbean and African-American vernacular, as well as other varieties and accents of English (such as RP, for example) for stylistic effects. More importantly, we saw above how the practices of MC-ing and murking, which originated in overseas ‘black’ (African-American and/or Caribbean) culture, are part of the linguistic culture of many of our participants.

A third aspect to the linguistic repertoires of the people in our study is what we might call the *translocal*⁸. By this we mean language forms or practices which are not ‘global’ (in the sense of being widespread around the world) but which are localised in two or more places, and transmitted between them through social networks. For example, a number of distinctively Creole words were in use in this area of Manchester at the time of the study, but with apparently localised meanings different from the ones they would have in the Caribbean or elsewhere. For example, the Jamaican Creole adjective, ‘dutty’ (‘dirty’, JC pronunciation [döti]), was being used by young people in Manchester to mean ‘good’ or ‘cool’: ‘that car’s dutty’. In Manchester, it was pronounced [duti], with the Northern /u/ vowel, while in London, where it appeared to retain only its original meaning, it was being pronounced with the Southern British English /ʌ/ vowel and also reflected the trend for intervocalic t-glottaling amongst young British people, thus [dʌti] or [dʌʔi].

This kind of localised meaning of a word is exemplified in the next extract, in which three people talk explicitly about a culture-specific lexical item. A family consisting

‘Creole’ and youth language

of a mother, her son, Nick (12, Caribbean heritage) and her daughter, Keisha (10, Caribbean heritage) are talking about a homework project (involving choosing between three courses of action, see line 1) when Nick unexpectedly starts rapping and introduces the address term *blood* (line 3). The mother is confused, not because she has never heard the word used in this way (as she explains later, she has) but because of the way her son pronounces it.

Example 4:

1. Mother: I’m sorry Keisha. What were the three choices again?
2. Keisha: pick up the bag and run to the nearest=
3. Nick: ah come on blood [bɫɒd], come on, come on blood [bɫɒd]!
4. Mother: alright alright. Nick. What?
5. Keisha: =no-no-no-no-no. Just wait man!
6. Mother: come on what?
7. Nick: come on blad [bɫɒd]
8. Keisha: blad [bɫɒd]
9. Mother: what’s ‘blad’?
10. Keisha: [gasps]
11. Nick: blood [blʊd]
12. Keisha: blood [blʊd]
13. Nick: blood [blʊd]
14. Mother: oh!
15. Keisha: not the one that comes out=
16. Mother: yeah yeah, as in ‘me blood’ [mɪ blʊd] as ‘me blood [blʊd] brother’
17. Nick: as in blood [bɫɒd] as in family as in respect
18. Keisha: mi blood!
19. Mother: get off Keisha! erm (.) that’s how you greet (***) now?
20. Nick: yeah, ‘Come on blood [bɫɒd]’
21. Mother: Oh god!

The mother’s difficulty is caused by the fact that the word ‘blood’ (the substance in the body), which would be pronounced [blɔ̃d] in Jamaica, is always pronounced [blʊd] in Manchester English, as elsewhere in the North of England. In fact the phoneme /ɒ/ does not occur in ‘normal’ Manchester English, as the *cup/put* distinction is neutralised in Manchester as in other northern dialects⁹. The pronunciation [bɫɒd] (a term of address) uses the vowel characteristic of RP, of London and the South. It

‘Creole’ and youth language

would easily be understood (and recognised as ‘Southern’) by a Manchester native. Nick and Keisha never use /ʌ/ in other words. It is therefore quite remarkable that a vowel ‘alien’ to the Manchester system is being used here to make a distinction which has cultural significance¹⁰.

At this point talk turns temporarily to other topics: the children talk about a style of dancing which is popular in London and begin to compare Manchester unfavourably to London. Nick talks about the fact that he was born there¹¹, after which his mother returns, 22 turns after the last mention, explicitly to the topic of the address term *blood*:

‘Creole’ and youth language

Example 5

43. Mother: the last time I heard that word- erm blood [blʌd]- is when I was down in London and I heard AB saying that=
44. Keisha: ey bloody blood [blʌdɪblʌd]
45. Nick: yeah what’s wrong with that?
46. Mother: no no I just remember them saying that. I didn’t even know you’d heard it
47. Keisha: ey bloody blood [blʌdɪblʌd]
48. Mother: C stop being stupid
49. Nick: ‘ey bloody blood [blʌdɪblʌd]’? What the heck are you talking about?
50. Keisha: Hey bloody blood [blʌdɪblʌd]
51. Nick: How do you- Manch- the proper English (in) Manchester would say=
52. Keisha: = ‘hello blood [blʌd]’

Here, the speakers actively acknowledge that the word in this specialised sense, with its particular pronunciation, is an ‘import’ from London.

Other than in the above example, we did not observe the use of this London form of ‘blood’ amongst the participants, but there were several occasions when the discourse marker ‘*man*’ was, as we have already mentioned, pronounced with a stylised American accent (e.g. [mɛ:n]). We found no evidence of a Caribbean pronunciation of this word. This ‘imported’ form of ‘*man*’ was unique in that unlike other ‘imported’ pronunciations its occurrence was not limited to ‘performance’ genres.

During conversational exchanges, switches between genres such as rap or song or documentary-style commentary were common. For example, Lee (14, white British) was asked to call everyone to the table at the youth club to eat and informed them by shouting out “The food’s ready n-o-o-o-w /na:’/”, singing the last syllable with falling intonation.

The influence of performance styles in everyday interaction also manifested itself in the structures of utterances. In Example 6, Chris, (13, Caribbean heritage) is commenting on a girl’s hair.

‘Creole’ and youth language

Example 6

“Look at that knotty [nɒʔɪ] pick head. That knotty [nɒʔɪ] pick head. Look at that knotty [nɒʔɪ] picky head. U-ugly [ɜ::gɪ] (.) Blap-blap!”

His utterance is structured as a series of repetitions which creates a rhythm, and he reinforces his ‘performed’ point by drawing on a pronunciation of ‘ugly’ [ɜ::gɪ] which resembles an American accent. He ends the turn with a Creole discourse marker (blap-blap) - the onomatopoeic sound of a gun-salute. This expression is commonly recognised and used by dancehall goers in Jamaica and Britain alike to indicate their appreciation of a particular tune.

Furthermore, he draws on Creole, combining two contrasting Jamaican Creole adjectives - ‘knotty’ – which tends to have positive connotations (and usually refers to dreadlocked hair, although not in this case) and ‘picky’ (messy), which has negative connotations. The first of these is uttered with a local British accent ([nɒʔɪ]). With ‘picky’ he drops the final vowel in two of the three occurrences.

Voices representing ‘others’ can be made identifiable by a shift in pronunciation which distances the form from the speaker’s own accent (cf. Goffman’s notion of ‘say-foring’, 1981:150). When this intertextuality occurs and it is not marked by a switch in accent, such forms appear to have become appropriated into the everyday linguistic repertoire of the participants and no longer carry ‘import’ status.

Examples 6 and 7 demonstrate the convergence of linguistic forms that are drawn from the global and/or translocal repertoires available and manipulated within the local context until some of them are no longer explicitly marked as ‘imported’.

The comment in example 7 below was made by Harvey (14, Caribbean heritage) during a trip to an ice skating arena.

Example 7

We’re thuggin’ [fʊɡɪn] it out in Blackburn¹², runnin’ tings [tɪŋz]

‘Creole’ and youth language

The phrases ‘to be thugged out’ (i.e. to identify with the urban/gangsta lifestyle: cf. US rapper Tupac’s 1994 Album entitled *Thug Life*) and *run ting(s)* (i.e. to be in charge) index American hip-hop and Jamaican cultures respectively but have been brought into line with the local vernacular pronunciation ([fʊɡɪn]; [rʊnɪn]) and grammar.

Such ‘reassembled’ forms are not ‘ad hoc’, ‘mixed’ or ‘impure’ in the sense described by Hewitt a generation ago (1992:193), but are localised styles which result from the convergence of local and non-local repertoires and which index membership in the peer-group, and affiliation to the ‘international hood’. Importantly, these styles are not necessarily comprehensible to non-local contemporaries undertaking similar practices elsewhere in Britain or the world. Nor are they necessarily comprehensible to those living locally but outside of the peer-group.

In Example 7 Harvey’s comment is a form of conversational ‘performance’, a verbal claim to superiority in which he distances himself from a ‘Blackburn’ identity, but which is not necessarily intended as a realistic appraisal of the situation. This ‘distance’ reflects the geographical limitation of ‘localness’ for most of the participants in this study whose movements tended to remain within central Manchester. A few of the participants claimed not to have travelled much beyond the boundaries of Greater Manchester. Several had not travelled extensively in the northwest region of England where they lived, but may have been abroad, either on holiday or to visit relatives. Physically then, ‘local’ networks for our participants, tended to be concentrated within Greater Manchester and ‘trans-local’ networks could be, for example, as near as Liverpool (the neighbouring city) or as far as Jamaica.

What is striking is that these globally and translocally informed styles, whether performed or re-appropriated, are legitimate language forms in the contexts of peer group interaction. This suggests that in these social spaces acceptable linguistic behaviour cannot be described by reference to local regional varieties alone, or to ethnicity (cf. Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 2003).. The styles the participants use with each other are more easily associated with young people who have an affiliation with

‘Creole’ and youth language

the ‘international hood’, and for our participants, this affiliation was not a function of an individual’s ethnicity or race, but of their shared lived-experience in the inner-city or the ‘life on the streets’ as some of the participants called it.

Conclusion

The notion of ‘ethnicity-as-a-fixed-and-formative-inheritance’ (Harris and Rampton 2003:5) which informed early variationist studies has, along with other social categories like social class, gender and age, been substantially problematised within linguistics and neighbouring disciplines in recent years. The study of Creole languages has itself been part of this process (e.g. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985, Hewitt 1992/2003). Furthermore, even inherited ethnicity becomes problematic in a situation where social networks are relatively unconstrained and intermarriage is common. To complicate things further, through globalisation, some styles which were once local and ethnically marked, in particular those associated with Creole and African-American Vernacular speakers, are now subject to reappropriation and recontextualisation in many different contexts around the world through hip-hop culture (Pennycook 2006). Example 7, with its incorporation of Hip-Hop and Jamaican Creole phrases into a sentence characterised by strictly local vernacular pronunciations (and a local place reference) suggest that here and elsewhere we may be dealing with what Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (2003) call ‘a broadening of the vernacular base’ in which speakers expand the range of forms to which they have access in their most least self-monitored and most local contexts.

Our research in Manchester shows that the pattern of English/Creole codeswitching reported in England in the 1980s is not part of the behaviour of young people today in Manchester. Creole forms remain in the vocabulary and in traditionally ‘black’ practices like murking and MC-ing (rapping) but they do not constitute ‘switches’ between codes. Rather, they are convergences of globally and translocally available forms which may be re-appropriated into the local vernacular as styles.

Our naturally occurring language data demonstrates that Creole forms and associated practices are not distributed on the basis of ethnicity. Indeed in the research site, where young British people of a variety of ethnicities and mixed heritages live, it

‘Creole’ and youth language

would be impractical and misleading to attempt to account for language behaviour using ethnicity as a category. Speakers are legitimate users of these vernacular styles as a result of their lived experience in the inner city and their interest in and exposure to cultural forms such as the global hip hop culture and its music, from which linguistic forms may be drawn and locally interpreted, reappropriated and valued. This process is enabled through advances in information and communication technologies, as well as through a speaker’s local and translocal social networks.

'Creole' and youth language

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‘Creole’ and youth language

¹ Recent work in Ipswich has redressed this particular omission (Straw, this volume).

² See, e.g. Central Manchester Strategic Regeneration Framework (Manchester City Council n.d.).

³ Several vowel features distinguish Manchester English from RP and Southern varieties of British English, most saliently (1) the lack of a distinction between the vowels of *put* (RP [ʊ]) and *putt* (RP [ʌ]), both [ʌ] in Manchester; (2) the lack of a distinction between the vowels of *trap* (RP [æ]) and *bath* (RP [a:]), both [a] in Manchester; (3) the use in Manchester of a low back rounded vowel [ɒ] in unstressed final syllables where RP would have [ə] (*lettER*); (4) the use in Manchester of a lax vowel [ɪ] or [ɛ] in the final syllable of words like *happY*, where southern varieties have a tense vowel. (Wells 1982:350, Beal 2008:136). In all of these respects, Caribbean creoles (and Jamaican in particular) pattern with RP/ Southern British English, but most of the many other features which differentiate Caribbean accents from those of Southern British English also differentiate Caribbean accents from Manchester English (see Wells 1982, Sebba 1993 for details of these features).

⁴ Reference number RES-000-22-0681. We are grateful to the ESRC for providing funding for this exploratory project. We are also grateful to the editors and the anonymous reviewer of this chapter for their many useful comments.

⁵ /f/ is increasingly a realisation of /θ/ among younger people in most nonstandard varieties of British English in England. See, e.g. Kerswill 2003.

⁶ Irvine (2004) found a similar difference in the use of /d/ and /t/ among speakers in Jamaica, concluding that speakers of Standard Jamaican English would ‘carefully avoid voiceless TH-stopping’ but ‘freely vary [d ~ ð]’ (2004:71) as the latter did not index ‘Creole’ or ‘Bad English’, while using [t] where RP has [θ] did so. The implication is that in Jamaica voiceless TH-stopping is associated with Creole, and stigmatised, while voiced TH-stopping is a variable feature of all types of Jamaican speech.

⁷ See, e.g. entry for ‘Murk’ in Urban Dictionary.

⁸ See Grillo (2007) for a discussion of meanings of this term within the anthropology of transmigration.

⁹ For descriptions of the phonology of Northern (including Manchester) English, see Wells 1982, Beal 2008.

¹⁰ Older boys (14years+) at the youth club reported using this pronunciation ‘for a laugh’- contextualising it as jocular by stylising it. Used in this way it appears to serve a distancing function between the Northern and Southern ‘hoods’.

¹¹ The family have London connections, and the mother was living there when her son was born. However, all three have Manchester accents and Nick has clearly grown up in Manchester.

¹² Blackburn is the town in Lancashire where the skating arena is located.