

Language and street culture in the big city*Eivind Nessa Torgersen*

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Abstract (150-200 words)

This chapter discusses language as part of street culture as perceived and expressed by young speakers themselves. The chapter focuses on different elements of language as part of cultural expression. The data are mainly taken from sociolinguistic interviews with young speakers from London, but will also include findings from investigations in Manchester, Berlin, Paris, New York, Copenhagen and Oslo.

Introduction

Language has several purposes. One of the most important is its ability to refer to a unique cultural and linguistic identity and promote group belonging. That being said various social factors have an effect on language use.

The connection between language and street culture in linguistic research is very much associated with research on the language of groups of young male black speakers in the United States who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Early sociolinguistic work in the United States by William Labov in New York and Philadelphia also specifically refers to street culture. Labov's description of AAVE (1972a, p. xiii) states that its "relatively uniform grammar [is] found in its most consistent form in the speech of the black youth from 8 to 19 years who participate fully in the street culture of the inner cities." Labov thus argues that there is a very close association between participation in street culture and the language of this group of young speakers. AAVE has also been referred to as 'black street speech' by Baugh (1983). In this chapter we will look the purported influence of 'black street speech' on youth language elsewhere. What might be the linguistic outcome of participating in the street culture of the inner city?

Youth language in linguistic research

The data presented in this chapter has been taken from sociolinguistic and ethnographic investigations of adolescents' language use and language practices. Researchers often state

that they are not (just) interested in the study of language, but also of culture. If you let informants know that you are investigating language, speakers will become very aware and may change the way they speak. Labov (1972a, p. 208) states that the analyst is interested in a way of speaking which is adopted in pre-adolescent years and how you speak when you are monitoring your own speech the least. This way of speaking is used and maintained in the adolescent peer group and is considered a special property of the group of speakers (Labov 1972b, p. 257; Milroy 1987, p. 58).

Investigation of youth language has a central place in modern linguistic research. The type of linguistic research discussed in this chapter is part of sociolinguistics which is concerned with examining effects of different social factors on language use. These include factors such as age, gender, level of education, ethnicity, friendship network, multilingualism and religion. This chapter will mainly look at speakers' ethnicity and friendship network and their interactions' effect on language. It is limited to the language of young people. This is due to availability of recent research on language and street culture: existing relevant linguistic research of speakers enmeshed in street culture has typically included young speakers. Indeed, there is very little language variation research looking at older speakers specifically (Pichler et al., 2018).

Speaker age is often associated with social expectations for language use such as in the use of standard and non-standard language forms. Use of standard language forms is often associated with having a high level of education and being an adult. This is known as carrying overt prestige. That means that the forms are part of established language norms, described in grammar books and taught in schools. Conversely, non-standard forms have an expectation that the forms are 'stigmatised' and have 'low prestige'. But non-standard forms may at the same time carry covert prestige (Trudgill 1974): 'prestige that is somehow endorsed below the surface of public discourse, but which leaves their "overt" stigmatisation untouched' (Coupland 2007, p. 43). Coupland argues that this is problematic because these evaluations are linked to speaker prototypes and not the linguistic forms themselves. People may also evaluate the same forms differently. Young speakers evaluate language forms differently from older speakers and youth language may of course also include non-standard forms.

Language use can also be seen in light of social theory. If we assume that the language practices by some groups are in opposition to those of other groups who represent an assumed elite, established power structures, people with high status, a dominant culture and middle class speakers, we can refer to Bourdieu's theory (1991) of cultural capital: the value of different linguistic 'markets'. Consider the latter as adults, ethnic-majority standard language speakers and the former young speakers who represent a subculture associated with street culture, low status and minority-ethnic speakers. Here we are particularly interested in the language elements of speakers who are part of a subculture, who are ethnic-minority speakers, and non-standard language speakers who often are in opposition to the standard language of adults (Mallinson, 2009).

Young speakers and linguistic innovation

Teenagers use language, often most noticeably words, which are different from those of their caregiver generation and they are considered being at “the focal point for linguistic innovation and change” (Tagliamonte 2016, p. 3). Their crucial role in this process is recognised in a theoretical model of language change where teenagers have notably higher frequencies of different linguistic forms compared to their caregivers. When this difference has become stable, it results in language change (Labov, 2001). Part of this process is also linguistic innovation (i.e., when teenagers not just use forms of different frequencies, but also use entirely new forms that have not been described and documented previously). At the end of the adolescent years, teenagers’ linguistic system becomes more stable and the process of incrementation ends and they may keep this use of linguistic forms for the rest of their lives.

Young people are therefore considered drivers of language change (Tagliamonte, 2016). They are frequent and competent users of new forms of electronic communication and social media. They are known for a high level of mobility and have frequent contact with other speakers. The adolescent years are also a period where there is rapid development and innovations in the speakers’ use of language. On one hand there is often increased use of more standard-like and prestige language forms as speakers get older (Milroy, 1987) because of an increased awareness of use of different language forms in particular contexts and awareness of registers (Coupland, 2007). On the other hand, teenagers use more slang and innovative linguistic forms than other age groups (Tagliamonte, 2016).

Tagliamonte (2016, p. 30) also points out that teenagers are extremists in terms of language use and have high frequencies of certain words. They may overuse words that they will use less when they get older. Macaulay (2005) investigated language use among teenagers in Glasgow and found that working-class adolescent speakers use more taboo words than adolescent middle class speakers. Conversely, young female speakers have higher degrees of verbal challenging, such as teasing each other, while young working-class male speakers more use of address terms and references to violence. Lawson (2013) discusses such references to violence and masculinity, such as being a ‘hard man’ or a tough guy in stories told by Glasgow male speakers. Lawson argues that speakers use language to build and maintain an impression or distance themselves from being a ‘hard man’ in interactions with other speakers. Language use is therefore an important strategy in building or maintaining a specific personae.

Linguists sample speakers in groups according to particular demographic characteristics. These groups of speakers can in turn be part of a homogenous speech community with shared linguistic norms where all speakers take part in change process of the type described above (Labov, 1966). However, not all speech communities can be

considered homogenous and that has implications for change processes. In multicultural speech communities, the change processes are much more complex due to high degree of migration and speakers with different ethnic backgrounds. The higher level of available features, which different origins, has been referred to as a feature pool (Mufwene, 2001) from which speakers can select language forms and use them in different contexts depending on their linguistic identity, conversational setting and interlocutors. In London, researchers have used the notion of a feature pool to explain the development of Multicultural London English (MLE), which is a variety used by mainly adolescent speakers of different backgrounds from inner-city areas of the city (Cheshire et al., 2011). Some of the speakers of MLE have additionally been described as linguistic innovators (Cheshire et al., 2008) based on their high frequency of innovative forms not previously documented in the area.

In this chapter we will look at the language of young speakers from London, but also speakers from other cities with a high level of immigration such as Manchester, Oslo and Copenhagen. We will see that cultural issues, including music, are linked to 'black street speech'. One of the findings of studies that have looked at language in multicultural cities is that migration and language contact lead to linguistic innovation. Who are the linguistic innovators?

The role the friendship network in linguistic innovation

The linguistic innovator in the big city is typically an adolescent male aged around 16 who is a member of a dense multicultural friendship network (Cheshire et al., 2008; Fox & Torgersen, 2018). The probable reason is that male speakers have more friends of different backgrounds. However, Cheshire et al. (2008) identified linguistic innovators who were both males and females. The innovators' particular ethnicity is usually of less importance. The most important factor is coming from the inner-city areas and having an ethnically diverse group of friends. The inner city of London has a long history of migration. There are high levels of ethnic diversity and language contact and it has been argued that this is the reason for the innovative linguistic forms that are observed there (Cheshire et al., 2011). It was found that male non-Anglo speakers who are the speakers with short settlement history in the city and Anglo speakers (white British speakers with longer settlement history in the area) in dense multicultural friendship networks had the highest proportion of the innovative features (Cheshire et al., 2008; Torgersen et al., 2011). There is an awareness of language associated with by speakers of other (i.e., 'non-Anglo') ethnicities who are not from there. An Anglo speaker who comes from outside of London says this about his friend Kieran and how listening to music and your friends influence the way you talk:

Derek: Definitely I mean Kieran who was in here earlier. Kieran who's has always been from round these areas and this area does not have the accent that he speaks. But because he likes Drum and Bass and Garage and all that, so do a lot of black people. And because he's

joined that cult and joined the the people involved in it, he has he's created somewhat of a black accent. Erm I don't think he knows he's doing it anymore, but every now and again it sort of slips out and he sort of speaks like dat and it's you know, it's it is strange it does happen erm

It is unusual that there are comments on pronunciation as speakers are rarely aware of how they talk in terms of accent. Here, Derek says that Kieran “talks like dat”, (i.e., with a [d] and not a [ð] which also is found in AAVE, known as TH-stopping) and refers to it as a “black accent”. There are also sometimes comments by the London speakers about the use of vocabulary and how they talk as “slang”, and how the way you talk often is linked to having a specific interest in music and hanging around with a particular group of friends, as we will see below.

Not only do social networks influence teenagers’ dress and music interests, but also their language. In a multicultural friendship group speakers’ ethnicity may have an influence on the choice of linguistic forms, and speakers of other ethnicities in the network may then use these forms too. Hewitt (1986) referred to it as crossing when speakers who are in a close friendship network during interaction use language forms that otherwise are only used by someone of another ethnicity. It can be said that people in these circumstances are borrowing someone else’s linguistic identity and are allowed by their friends to code-switch (switch between languages and mix words from different languages) when in other situations the speaker will not code-switch.

Bucholtz (1999) investigated a narrative by a young white male American speaker. He affiliated with young black American speakers’ cultural identity, and it is interpreted as a display of a form of linguistic masculinity associated with them. The forms he used are also found in hip hop music, and in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The speaker uses AAVE discursive strategies to construct a ‘black’ identity, but also an urban youth identity in general. In a similar vein, Cutler (1999) investigated the speech of a white male speaker, Mike, from New York. He used some speech sounds associated with AAVE but failed to use grammatical forms found used by the black male speakers he wanted to sound like. Mike was attempting to sound like an African American rather than a speaker of his own ethnic background, European American. Mike was not a ‘true’ member of the other group. He wanted to speak like those with which he identified, but was unable to because he was not really part of the group. Mike identified with the group in terms of clothing and interest in music, but he did not have any black friends. He was not part of a friendship group and had not used this way of speaking in interaction. Much of his knowledge about AAVE speech came from movies and listening to rap music. There was a desire to project a particular identity that is associated with toughness, cool urbanness and the big city.

This research shows the importance of the friendship group in language use: just imitating may not be entirely successful in achieving to speak like those you look up to. Interaction with other speakers is needed. Still, parts of your linguistic identity is linked to

people you look up to. But what level of language awareness and knowledge is needed in acquiring a linguistic variety?

Youth language and slang

In 2013, a school in London put up a sign outside of the school with a list of banned words. The banned language consisted of a mixture of words associated with non-standard language, the traditional local accent Cockney, youth language and informal language in general, plus some words that curiously are elements of the standard language. Representatives of the school argued that they banned these words to prepare students for the labour market and mainstream society (Cheshire et al., 2017). This might have happened because there are often negative reactions to youth language (Drummond, 2017) which includes the use of slang, swear words and code-switching from other languages. Words from other languages are rare in MLE instead there is use of English words from varieties of English from outside the United Kingdom. This is different from the youth language varieties in Oslo, Copenhagen and Berlin where there is code-switching (Madsen & Svendsen, 2015; Wiese, 2009). Multicultural London English differs in pronunciation from London Cockney and uses words also found in other varieties of English. The speakers themselves, however, do not react negatively to how they are speaking but may refer to their language as slang and report an association between street language and slang. Cockney is the traditional London English variety and also the label for a person from London who speaks that way. The interviewer, Sue, asks Alan and Dave about their language use:

Sue: Yeah, so you think of Hackney as being east London [Alan: yeah] yeah and what about er your language, would you say you're Cockneys?

Alan: Nah street [Dave: mhm yeah]

Sue: Street? [Alan: yeah just street talk it's just like] What does that mean?

Alan: Slang it's all sort slang when we talk [Sue: mm] that's it [Sue: mm] No, not Cockneys heh

Youth language as expression of identity

A recurrent theme in research on multicultural and multilingual identities and linguistic practices in urban areas is the connection between language use and the language of hip hop and rap (Nortier, 2018; Svendsen & Nortier, 2015). Cutler (2007) discusses hip hop within this context and the close relationship between (English) hip hop language and AAVE where some phonological and grammatical features are shared. There is also a further

development of some grammatical features in hip hop language as markers of cultural identity notably the use of habitual BE with noun phrases and linking verb absence, as in 'He BE the man' (Cutler, 2015, p. 233) and use of discourse markers that is characteristic of hip hop language (Cutler, 2015) but different from AAVE such as 'yo' and 'wassup' (Cutler, 2015, p. 233).

Alim (2004) notes the importance of the street and hip hop language as a way to establish speaker authenticity. Black culture is considered representing something that is not mainstream, unlike white culture, and that includes the use of AAVE linguistic forms that are regarded as urban and cool (Cutler, 2007). A white speaker can pass as an authentic speaker if they are using AAVE features appropriately (Cutler, 2015) or not if they fail to use some features (Cutler, 1999) or overuse some features (Guy & Cutler, 2011). It has therefore been argued that hip hop language is a speech style linked to language practices. The term 'hip hop nation language' (Alim, 2004) refers to this speech style used by speakers from many different countries who perform and participate in rap and hip hop practices. It is used to express a shared cultural identity, including how hip hop language is perceived to represent a masculine, tough and streetwise identity (Cutler, 2015). Immigrant speakers may also find hip hop culturally attractive and be drawn to its symbolism and association with street culture and urban coolness. This means that the use of features is closely associated with the cultural aspects and not 'correct' use of AAVE linguistic forms. Brunstad, Røyneland & Opsahl (2010, p. 240) argue that one explanation for its attractiveness lies "in one of the central characteristics of hip hop: that it allows its practitioners to express and mediate both local and global aspects of cultural identity".

In Oslo we find ethnically mixed hip hop groups. Their lyrics are characterised by a multiethnolectal speech style that includes code-switching and use of different languages. Brunstad et al. (2010, p. 224) argue that adolescents who grow up in multicultural areas in Oslo have an affiliation to hip hop culture and that "hip hop [therefore] has a significant influence on the formation of a Norwegian multiethnolectal speech style". It is also argued that individuals and groups of speakers who affiliate with hip hop possibly play a significant role in creating and spreading the new way of speaking in Oslo (Opsahl & Røyneland, 2008). In the early years of hip hop in Norway, American English had a strong influence. Later there was a shift to more use of Norwegian, but with words from other languages used in the community, and also a multiethnolectal speech style at several linguistic levels. There is a mix of the multilingual communities in the urban centre. The Eastern parts of Oslo also has a higher immigrant population and the multiethnolectal speech is associated with those areas. There is also a perceived toughness and coolness associated with the eastern parts of Oslo, areas which are more industrial and working class than the traditionally middle class and prosperous western part of Oslo.

A change from rapping in standard language to rapping in 'non-standard' language and a multicultural variety has been observed in Copenhagen. It is perhaps a surprising finding that some local rappers were using standard Danish. A possible reason was that the rappers were in contact with mentors who advocated use of rap as part of achieving

progress in education as well as pressure from the local music industry (Madsen & Stæhr, 2015). But later, 'ghetto language' or 'street language' has been used by successful rappers as there had been in a shift in what was considered cool and accepted by the larger society (Stæhr & Madsen 2017). Contemporary urban vernaculars are more accepted, which can be compared to the change in the association of 'Jafaican' (Kerswill, 2014) and Multicultural London English. MLE is now heard on TV and in movies. It may describe language use that is more authentic and it also reflects changes in language ideological beliefs (Stæhr & Madsen, 2017).

In Paris, French is used in rap lyrics and there is code-switching into Arabic (Hassa, 2010). Artists from the *Banlieu*, which are suburbs with high immigrant population, also use Verlan in their lyrics. Verlan includes mixing the order of syllables of French and loanwords from other languages and it has a particular prosody (Doran, 2003). Unlike London, there's not a Paris Multicultural French that can be described (Cheshire & Gardner-Chloros, 2018): the multicultural variety used in Paris is not specific to the city, nor is it specific to speakers who are in multicultural friendship groups. However, there are innovations in prosody/speech rhythm where speakers who are dominant in conversation use them in performative speech (Fagyal & Torgersen, 2018). We will discuss one local form of rap/hip hop and language practices in more detail: grime in the UK context and language practices in London.

Language in London and Manchester

Two studies in London have examined linguistic innovation in inner London and acquisition of Multicultural London English. Set out of test the claim that London is the source of innovation in English (Wells, 1982), Kerswill et al. (2008) recorded the speech of working-class teenagers aged 16-19 of Anglo and non-Anglo backgrounds in inner and outer London. While the speech of adolescents in outer London was largely in line with the rest of south east England, the picture was different in inner London. Adolescents there used some linguistic forms that were different from the rest of the south east (Cheshire et al., 2008). A probable reason is large degree of contact in inner London due to immigration and speakers being in more diverse friendship networks (Cheshire et al., 2011). Speakers only rarely associate themselves with Cockney, the traditional London language variety and an identity marker for someone from (inner) London of working class origin. However, they do identify as Londoners, and being English, sometimes together with another ethnic identity. The line between voice and place were investigated by Torgersen (2012) in a listening test with speech samples. Both black speakers from Birmingham and non-Anglo speakers from London were heard as coming from London by listeners from both London and Birmingham. However, Anglo speakers from London who were in Anglo friendship network were heard as coming from outside of London. This suggests that non-Anglo voices are associated with London which is known as a multicultural city. People's attitudes to MLE are also influenced

by whether you speak it yourself, have frequent contact with MLE speakers and have another first language than English (Kircher & Fox, 2019, p. 14).

Drummond (2018) investigated language use by teenage boys from Manchester. Among the issues he examined was the degree to which there were similarities between youth language in Manchester and London. He found some shared features such as the use of the pragmatic marker 'you get me' and some vocabulary items with origin in Jamaican English creole such as 'bare' and 'mandem'. He also found stopping of /θ/ in 'thing' to /t/ as in 'ting' (Drummond, 2018). TH-stopping is associated with AAVE, and also in hip hop speech style (Cutler 1999, 2003). Drummond found that ethnicity was not a statistically significant factor in use of TH-stopping. A particular conversational context (tough rap/banter), a 'stance of toughness' (2018, p. 190) and involvement in linguistic practices like grime/rap and dance hall music all had an effect on stopping. Drummond argues that by using TH-stopping a speaker "is taking a stance in an attempt to (re) align himself as someone involved in grime and all it represents" (p. 191). He argues further that it indexes a street identity for speakers who are involved in grime. 'Black' sounding speech may just be the speech of teenagers, as in this extract (Drummond, 2017, p. 648):

Lee: They'll just say he [Ryan] thinks he wants to be black

Res: And so people- but anyone who actually works with young people will say that's not true

Lee: But that's just how he speaks cos of his area

Ryan: Yeah not cos of the colour and that, like so if they hear me speaking and they're gonna say that I think I'm black, why would I think I'm black? You get me?

Lee: [laughs]

Ryan: [laughing] You get me

Outsiders associate language use and ethnicity differently from the speakers themselves (Drummond, 2017). While outsiders might associate some linguistic items with a particular ethnicity, the speakers might just associate them with youth language, or slang. Maria who lives in Hackney in inner London is asked if she considers herself a Londoner and a Cockney:

Sue: And you think of yourself as a Londoner do you?

Maria: Definitely [Sue: mm] definitely

Sue: Yeah I mean do you think of yourself as being Cockney?

Maria: Cockney hmmm we didn't talk about that actually Cockney get out of here go away <laughs> erm not really Cockney wow would you say I'm Cockney? Would you say I'm Cockney? I was just I don't know. Erm obviously I live in Hackney and a terrible <laughing> a terrible accent here it's just terrible whereas we we use slang words we use yes we almost emphasise on every little thing that comes out like any little new word or whatever everybody's using it just like "yeah what's going on" and

Maria is aware of how her speech is different from Cockney: she refers to using slang and having a different vocabulary than the Cockney speakers. Similarly, Dom and Rashid claim that they do not speak Cockney, rather in 'all different ways'. They may also use other languages than English, and Dom comments on the effect of your friends' language on how you talk:

Sue: And what about the way eh you speak on the street. Would you not say that that was Cockney?

Dom: No I wouldn't

Rashid: I speak all different ways

Dom: Yeah I speak different ways you get me

Rashid: It depends where I am

Sue: What way do you mean?

Dom: Like the way I speak. It's like I get it off the TV or people that I know. Like because it's it is true when you hang around with someone like things of that person will get stuck to you. And things of you will get stuck to him do you get me like? That's why and and by the way I speak in Spanish just normal slang from my country

These interviews show that young speakers have a quite flexible attitude towards language use and acknowledge that the way you speak is influenced by friends that you hang around with on the streets and elsewhere. Speakers also have labels to describe different types of people: 'safe' which might be the label for those are part of multicultural friendship group as opposed to the 'sweet' which may refer to white Cockney speakers. While both speaker groups are clearly Londoners, 'sweet' is associated with older people from London and white people in general, how they talk and what they do such as going to the pub and also they way they dress. The labels are associated with groups of speakers' cultural identity and the activities they take part in, as well as how you speak. The way you talk is therefore closely associated with who you are:

Alex: No it was like. You got sweet which is like the white boys like with collars up like. They don't wear the clothes we wear like. We got big Air force trainers. They got like low cut Reeboks and all them like [Zack: mm mm] but like they got Reebok

Zack: All the sweet mate wearing their Hackett tops and shit

Alex: Yeah Hackett tops and all that

Sue: Why do you call them sweet?

Alex: Cos they say sweet they say

Zack: Cos they're sweet

Alex: Like we'll come up and we'll say safe [Sue: right] cos we're safe we come from Hackney but they're from (local place) [Zack: (local place)] so they'll go "sweet sweet bruv cool you alright" you know one of them like cockney like

Zack: We're safe like you get me they yeah them Cockney guys

Alex: They're like cockney poshy like

Zack: They go to the pub on a Friday <laughs>

Apart from the labels like 'slang', 'street', 'safe' and 'sweet' the speakers themselves do not have a specific label for their way of speaking. Outsiders do, however, and they can often have rather negative forms of labelling. An example is 'Jafaican' which sometimes is used by the media (Kerswill 2014) and refers to a negative social stereotype. However, Kerswill 2014 (p. 452) argues that there has been a development over the years away from associating 'Jafaican' as something bad and fake. He argues that "the discourse of 'Jafaican' as fashionable or 'cool' is dependent on a number of others: exoticism, oppositionality through its association with subcultures, and youthfulness. It is seen by the media as being freely adopted by people of all classes". Kerswill (2013) investigated use of particular linguistic forms and whether they may represent a particular linguistic identity in London. He examined the speakers' use of vocabulary including address terms, a pragmatic marker, slang words, intensifiers, an evaluative term, or a word used to label people, places or language varieties. This included elements from Jamaican English such as 'blood/blad' as a pragmatic marker, 'bruv' as an address term, 'olders' referring to senior gang members or hip-hop crew members and 'man' as a pronoun (Cheshire 2013). These terms were used in inner city areas by speakers of multicultural background, not used in the outer city.

Speakers also allude to conflicts with young people from other local areas, sometimes referred to as the "postcode war" and Paul talks about what happens when young people are coming in from other areas of the city. He also mentions names of rival gangs in USA as influence and the importance of representing your local area.

Paul: Boy it used to be uh er grow up in Tottenham boy used to used to be actually alright. It used to be alright like used to just be come out every day we'd just meet up and we all used to just ride our bmxes or just like er. I used to love Tottenham really but now as I

started getting older it's like. It's just a lot of beef I'll say like beef all this all this erm beefs going on I don't know if you hear about this [Sue: mm] but it's a lot of beefs going on all postcode [Sue: yeah] cos I used to go

Tanya: Everyone's ready to rep a let a letter [Paul: yeah man] and a number

Paul: Yeah man cos like [Sue: yeah] before I used to be like able to I used to go everywhere. Like I used to go east I used to go south I used to go everywhere on bmx like I used to just ride it there just normal. But now it's a thing where like you can't do that no more like sort of thing innit

Sue: What is this going on with postcodes?

Paul: What is it I think it's just is I think it's just er it's a it's a

Tanya: Kids people are bored

Paul: It's just it's a it's a people just catting like copying like the Americans like all this postcodes bandannas

Tacito: It's like they got something like they got something to protect but they don't really Like if they see some

Paul: All this I just think it's just people just watch too much American stuff like Bloods and Crips and like I think it's all based on that. People just imitate them too much innit like people just take it onto our roads now and it's getting worse. My friend got stabbed the other day he's in hospital like he just got stabbed for being in the wrong area at the wrong time so it's mad

While there appears to be a shared multicultural linguistic identity in the inner city, there are rivalries between different local areas. This rivalry also comes across in performing music. Adams (2018) argues that knowledge about grime is needed to understand the linguistic elements included in multi-ethnic language varieties in the United Kingdom. Grime includes elements from different varieties of English for example address terms to express kinship as we saw in MLE. In this extract, Gary explains what is involved in MC-ing and 'spitting' and taking part in rap battles with other MC crews referred to as 'clashes'. An important element is representing your local area, or 'ends'.

Gary: Yeah cos we spit, like we MC

Sue: Yeah do you? [Gary: yeah] Where?

Gary: Just make dubs and all that make tunes and CDs and all that and send them on internet and all that. And then we make sets like sometimes we clash other crews. We clash them they come over we clash them that's it

Sue: Where does that happen? Tell me about that cos I'm interested in that

Gary: I don't I'm not really sure cos we live like, cos a couple of them live in Stepney some of them live where I live, some of one of them lives in south and then sometimes we clash like by ourselves as well like. I will clash someone from another crew if they wanna clash like if they wanna clash me then we'll clash just battle

Sue: So what do you mean?

Gary: Just battle like cuss like spit [Sue: yeah] it's like rap but it's not rap [Sue: I know] it's faster it's like garage grime

Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed the speech of young people in multicultural areas. We have seen that we sometimes can describe a language variety that is identified by the speakers themselves as 'slang'. In London this is a variety that has multiple sources including the local dialect. Outsiders may react negatively to the multicultural variety. One reason is that it also includes elements from varieties of English associated with black speakers such as Jamaican English and AAVE. However, black culture as associated with rap and hip hop is regarded as a prestige culture in urban areas and language elements from Jamaican English and AAVE might just be considered as unmarked and associated with something urban and with youth speech in general. To understand language use, we therefore need to investigate the origins of linguistic elements that are used, how they are used and how they spread in friendship groups. Friends and your friends' impact on how you speak. Back to AAVE, music etc and youth language elsewhere?

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