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## From ‘Youth Language’ to contemporary urban vernaculars<sup>1</sup>

In what follows I would like to do three things. First, I want to show that what we have been talking about as urban youth language is actually quite durable, both historically and biographically, so something like ‘youth style’ doesn’t really work as a label. Second, I shall argue that we would do better just talking about ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’, though, third, I would like to nest this in a broadly practice-theory perspective that I will elaborate on in the last part of my talk.

I will start with some data.

### 1. The historical and biographical durability of ‘youth language’: Some data

Here is some data from a phone call we recorded a couple of years ago in West London:<sup>2</sup>

#### Extract 1

Anwar (businessman, M, early 40s, born in London, Punjabi background) phoning Ronni (M, early 40s, Punjabi background) on his mobile.

Key: CREOLE; London vernacular; Punjabi

5 ((*ringing tone*))  
6 R: ((*inaudible*))  
7 Anw: ((*in Jamaican accent:*)) WA:APN RA:NNI  
[wa:m][ɑ:]

<sup>1</sup> This is the text of a talk given at “48. Jahrestagung des Instituts für Deutsche Sprache ‘Das Deutsch der Migranten’”, Mannheim 13 March 2012. Fuller and more formal analyses can be found in Rampton (2011a, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> The data come from a 2008–2009 project with Devyani Sharma, Lavanya Sankaran, Pam Knight and Roxy Harris, entitled ‘Dialect Development and Style in a Diaspora Community’, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-23-0604). There were >70 informants with mainly Punjabi ethnic backgrounds, aged between 14 and 65, born both in the UK and abroad (in India, Pakistan, East African, Malaysia and Hong Kong). Fieldwork was conducted by Devyani Sharma and Lavanya Sankaran, and it involved participant observation, interviews and self-recordings conducted by a smallish subset of the informants. This presentation owes a great deal to my colleagues on the project, although the errors are of course my own.



Creole features	Punjabi	Traditional London vernacular
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• line 7: 'waapn' used as a greeting (Hewitt 1986, p. 130)</li> <li>• line 7: fronting of [p] to [a] in the friend's name (Wells 1982, ch. 7; Sebba 1993)</li> <li>• line 75: 'yard' used for 'home'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• line 11 &amp; 73: 'kiddaan', attributed inter-ethnic currency in Extract 2 line 27</li> <li>• line 75: Jamaican 'yard' pronounced with short central vowel [ʌ] and a retroflex D</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lines 8 &amp; 75: zero-TH in 'aa's [ø]ings' (Wells 1982, p. 329)</li> <li>• line 8: H-dropping in 'ow's'</li> <li>• lines 18, 16, 73: TH-fronting in 'bruv' and 'everyfing'</li> <li>• line 73: alveolar – ING in 'goin'</li> <li>• line 73: centring diphthong in 'down' – [dæʊn] (line 73) (Wells 1982, p. 305)</li> </ul>

Table 1: Some of the linguistic resources in play in Extract 1

Of course that is not news: we can see this way of speaking in Roxy Harris' data from the 1990s (Harris 2006), and in public culture, it is evidenced in, for example, the teenage Bhangra Muffins in the BBC's *Goodness Gracious Me* (1996–2001) and in Gautam Malkani's 2006 novel *Londonstani*. But much more significantly, the speaker in Extract 1 is a businessman in his 40s, and there were other indications that it is not just adolescents who talk like this. Here is 23 year old Sameer, explaining that he goes to a pub outside his area to avoid trouble locally:

### Extract 2

Sameer (student, M, 23, Punjabi background) and friend in interview with DS. (Simplified & abbreviated transcript 1120; 46.48)

- 1 Sam: if you go to the one ((the pub)) in your own area  
(.)
- 2 you know you're gonna (.)
- 3 it's jus (.) you're gonna to see the same face:s  
(.)
- 4 and sometimes fights start off:
- 5 cos there are so many Indian people in one area  
(.)

- 6 Sam: so we got out of the area and we go to ((name of  
pub))
- 7 where there's *bunde* ((= 'men' in Punjabi))
- 8 like proper gentlemen that go there
- 9 like men go there (.) and we go there (.)
- 10 the first time they saw us they were like [ yea ]  
((a few moments later:))
- 21 you get *gore* ((= 'white people' in Punjabi))  
there as well
- 22 you get white people there:: (.)
- 23 you get Jamaican people there (.)
- 24 and everyone's alright
- 25 and it's like you even see black people they try  
talk Punjabi-
- 26 DS: really?
- 27 Sam: *kiddan:: kiddan tiikiya yea*  
((= 'what's up? what's up? you okay?' - greeting  
in Punjabi))  
((a little later:))
- 38 probably everyone has problems
- 39 but like they- they ((= older pub-goers))  
probably grown out of all their little fighting or  
whatever
- 40 whereas we might see someone-
- 41 cos we're only twenty-three twenty-four::
- 42 maybe when we're like twenty-six twenty-seven  
everything would have died out

Sameer is referring to language crossing, but instead of being the rather transgressive adolescent practice I have described in the past, it is here linked to 'proper gentlemen' who have grown out of their problems, who understand the ways of Sameer and his friends, and whose multi-ethnic conviviality seems to provide them with a bit of fresh air. In fact we can see that there is not much transgressive messing about if we go back to Anwar, who is using this mixed style to try to counsel Ronni on quite serious personal difficulties:

**Extract 3**

Anwar talking to Ronni on his mobile (02.58)

**Key:** CREOLE; **London vernacular;** *Punjabi*; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP.

- 122 Anw: both of you come home man  
 123 *edda yaar*  
 ((= 'here man' in Punjabi))
- 124 **THA'S I'** man  
 [ðæʊs i? mæn]
- 125 ((*tuts*)) **yer my bruv** man **wha's 'e ma'er wid yiu**  
 [jə mʌ bɹʌv mæn wɔs ə mæ?ə wɪd jɪu]  
 ((*a little later [3.38]:*))
- 145 R: ((*inaudible, but speaking for 1.1 seconds*))
- 146 Anw: **na na na** you can't do **THA'** man  
 [nʌ nʌ nʌ] [ðæ?]
- 147 you can't do **THA'**  
 [ðæ?]
- 148 R: ((*inaudible, but speaking for 1.2 seconds*))
- 149 Anw: yeah lets **LEF I'** man  
 [les lef i?]
- 150 jus' LEAV- le- jus' **LEF I'**  
 [li:v le dʒəs lef i?]
- 150 if she seiys **rih'** (.) 3.48  
 [seiz raɪ?]
- 151 abou' **dis**  
 [əbʌ: dɪs]
- 152 jus give her **wha'** her dues are (.)  
 [hɜ: wɔ? hɜ: dʒuz ɑ:]

Now I should say right away that for a lot of our informants, yes, this kind of speech was linked to youth, and in fact here is 19 year old Ravinder:

**Extract 4**

Ravinder (student, M, 19, born in London, Punjabi background) in interview with DS (simplified transcription 542 21.38)

- 15 Rav: two years ago I:: I used to-I used to think I-  
 I'm I'm acting too black (.)

16 it's getting a bit er- it's getting old now  
 17 everyone will make fun of me cos I'm- not-  
 18 not make fun of me but everyone's saying  
 19 'oh you why you Asian boys acting all black' (.)  
 20 so I started acting like bit more (.) a bit more  
 Asian like (.)  
 21 DS: now?  
 22 Rav: yea (.) yea (.) changed my earrings and um:: (.)  
 23 I don't know (.) basically acting more Asian.

Even so, the Anwar case puts a question mark over the assumption that mixed speech is age-graded adolescents-only, and we need to probe a bit deeper.

Anwar made quite a few recordings for us, and these showed that he had a wide stylistic range. It will help us to understand the significance of the style we have seen in Extracts 1 and 3 if we situate it in a broader view of his speech repertoire. So first of all, here he is talking to a barrister, Bilal, about a matter of business:

### Extract 5

Anwar (businessman, M, early 40s, Punjabi background) phoning Bilal (lawyer, M, late 20s/early 30s, Punjabi background) on his mobile.

Key: CREOLE; London vernacular; Punjabi; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP

1 Anw: ((*phone rings*))  
 2 Lwyr: hello  
 3 Anw: hi Bilal HOW you DOING  
 4 Lwyr: yeah *alhamdulillah* not too bad  
 5 how you doing  
 6 Anw: yeah I'm I'm I'm fine THANK you very much..  
 7 I THOUGH [' -  
 [?]  
 8 Lwyr: [you've caught me at a good moment  
 9 cause I just finished courts  
 10 s[o just going back to chambers  
 11 Anw: [o-  
 12 oh oh OKAY yeah

13 'a's great  
[øæs]  
14 .hh e:::hm Bilal .00.13  
15 THE REASON why I called you is e::h  
16 I jus' WANTED TO LET you KNOW THAT ((X - a name  
pronounced in Punjabi))  
17 He came.. ande::h we DECIDED nottu pursue his case

Although Bilal now lives in another part of London, he grew up in Southall, and Anwar has known him since he was a boy (and comments elsewhere on how hard it was becoming a barrister). So the style here isn't highly impersonal or formal.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the differences from the opening of his conversation with Ronni are very striking:

Conversation with lawyer Lines 3–13 (Ex 5)	Conversation with Ronni Lines 7–18 (Ex 1)	Comment
Line 3: 'hi Bilal HOW you DING' Line 6: 'I'm fine'	Lines 7 & 8: 'WA'APN RANNI ow's 'ings man'	a) greetings in informal Anglo with the lawyer <i>versus</i> Creole with Ronni b) lawyer's name pronounced with Punjabi retroflexion <i>versus</i> Jamaicanisation of Ronni's name
Line 10: 'a's great' Line 6: 'I'm fine'	Line 10: 'nice one' Line 17: 'everyfing cool'	c) Talking to Ronni, D's lexis is more idiomatic ('nice one') and colloquial ('cool' vs 'fine')
Line 6: 'THANK you' Line 7: 'THOUGH'	Lines 17 & 19: 'everyf- ing', 'bruv'	d) Standard pronunciation of TH with the lawyer <i>versus</i> vernacular London with Ronni
Lines 3–13: no vocatives other than the lawyer's name	Lines 8, 10, 16: 'man' Line 18: 'bruv'	

Table 2: Stylistic differences between Extracts 5 & 1

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the shift from 'hello' to 'hi' across lines 2 & 3; Anwar's selection of 'how you doing' rather than 'how are you' in line 3; Bilal's 'yeah' rather than 'yes' in line 4 (as well as the word-final glottal-T in line 7 – 'THOUGH?' – and the word-initial zero TH in line 13).

The contrast is even sharper when we compare the way in which Anwar shifts the topic from business to ask about the family. With the lawyer, he does this as follows:

### Extract 6

Anwar on the phone with Bilal the lawyer (1.17)

- 53 Anw: ((*finishing the business topic:*))  
**bu'** I I I'LL keep you informed in what's happening  
 [bʌ? a: a: a:t] [n] [n] [t] [hæpniŋ]  
 54 HOW's everyTHING ELSE  
 [θɪŋ eɪs]  
 55 THOW's the famili*i*:

With Ronni, it was:

### Extract 7 (taken from Ex 1)

- 73 Anw: *hor kiddan* - wha's **goin down** man everyfing cool  
 [wɒs gəʊn dəʊn]  
 74 R: ((*speaks for 2.3 - inaudible*))  
 75 Anw: how's 'ings a' e YARD  
 [hau s ɪŋz æ ə jɑ:d]

The contrast is very clear – relatively standard with Bilal, and much more mixed with Ronni.

In addition to engaging with the barrister, he also talked to a mechanic, and so here he is, talking to Ishfaq the mechanic, introducing the reason for his call:

### Extract 8

Anwar with Ishfaq the mechanic, turning to the reason for his call.

**Key: Traditional London vernacular; Punjabi; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP.**

- 11 Ish: yeah yeah n' too bad **bruv**  
 12 (.)  
 13 Anw: yeah y' know e::hm e::h  
 14 TH- THIS THESE eh insurance people  
 15 THEY're REALLY me mucking me around **ri:gh?**



- 16 (.)
- 17 [now-
- 18 Ish: [(wha- wha? they sayin
- 19 Anw: **wELL you know wh' I mean**  
[wɑ:lɪ jə nɑ a mi:n]
- 20 THEY're jusə (.) pussyfoo?in about' they are you know  
[ʔɪn]
- 21 (0.5)
- 22 Ish: hhahahahaha [haha
- 23 Anw: [ you **kNOW**  
nə::
- 24 Ish: hehehehe [hehehe
- 25 Anw: [so:: {smiley voice}
- 26 (.)
- 27 So LISTEN
- 28 loo?- 'ow we g'nna ge? dis car sor?ed ou? man
- 29 Ish: **righ?**
- 30 wha? I'm gonna do yeah
- 31 ((continues with a plan of action))

Talking to the barrister, he had introduced the reason for calling as follows:

### Extract 9

Anwar with Bilal the barrister, turning to the reason for his call.

**Key: Traditional London vernacular; Punjabi; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP.**

- 8 Anw: oh oh OKAY yeah
- 9 əa's great'
- 10 .hh e::hm BILAL
- 11 THE reason why I called you is e::h
- 12 I jus' WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT ((X - a name  
pronounced in Punjabi))
- 13 HE came.. and e::h we DECIDED notto pursue his case
- 14 (.)
- 15 Bil: [right

- 16 Anw: [and e::h HE was GOING back AND e::h he was gonna  
get his  
[?]
- 17 work permit visa (.)  
[?]
- 18 so so THAT HE could just e::hm..
- 19 you know DO EVERYTHING above eh eh above board an'  
ehm
- 20 Bil: fair fair enough okay
- 21 Anw: AN' BEING THE CELEBRITY HE IS ..

Plainly, Anwar's lead into the reason-for-calling was less elaborate with the mechanic than the barrister – compare “y' KNOW e::hm e::h TH- THIS THESE eh INSURANCE people ...” (Ex 8 lines 13–14) with “e:::hm BILAL THE REASON WHY I CALLED YOU IS e::h I jus' WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT X ...” (Ex 9 lines 10–12). His lexis was generally more colloquial – “mucking me aroun” and “pussyfoo?in about” (Ex 8 lines 15, 20) *versus* “DECIDED not to pursue HIS case” (Ex 9 line 13). And his pronunciation was also less standard, as shown in Table 3:

		Conversation with the mechanic (Extract 8)	Conversation with the barrister (Extract 9)
T in word medial and word final positions	alveolar [t] (STANDARD BR ENG)	1 (line 20)	5 (lines 9, 12, 12, 18, 21)
	glottal [ʔ] (non-standard London)	5 (lines 15, 20, 28, 28, 28)	2 (lines 16, 17)
	retroflex [ɖ] (Indian)	0	2 (lines 12, 13)
-ING in participial suffixes	velar [ɪŋ] (STANDARD BR ENG)	1 (line 15)	2 (lines 16, 21)
	alveolar [ɪn] (non-standard London)	1 (lines 20)	0
Proportion of STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH features		<b>25%</b> (2 out of 8)	<b>64%</b> (7 out of 11)
Proportion of <b>non-standard London</b> features		<b>75%</b> (6 out of 8)	<b>18%</b> (2 out of 11)

Table 3: Quantitative comparison of two phonological variables in Anwar's pronunciation to the mechanic and barrister in Extracts 8 & 9

Finally, here is one more way of speaking that Anwar used on the phone, this time with a woman from Sri Lanka who didn't know much English:

### Extract 10

Anwar on the phone with a Sri Lankan woman who doesn't speak much English.

Key: **Traditional London vernacular**; *Punjabi*; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP.

- 1    Anw: HELLO: yes e:h (.)  
 2           hello \_\_\_\_\_l  
 3           how are you  
 4           you okay?  
 5    Wom: ((*speaks for 3.0*))  
 6    Anw: ye::s you keeping well?  
 7    Wom: ((*speaks for 5.0*))  
 8    Anw: yeah  
 9    Wom: ((*speaks for 2.0*))  
 10   Anw: yah i need you do job fo:r me

Anwar is hearably the same person across all these extracts, using the same pitch range, the same voice quality, the same pool of linguistic features: Punjabi, London vernacular, standard English, with Creole available too. Even so, (a) he turns *some* of these linguistic elements *up* and *others down* as he moves from one conversation to the next. And (b) he is very reflexive about this: the style he uses with Ronni he calls 'Southallian'; the barrister's speech he describes as 'polished'; he talks about the mechanic as a Cockney, a "thoroughbred east-ender [...] of Pakistani origin"; and with the Sri Lankan woman who doesn't speak much English, he says he talks in a strong Indian accent that his daughter calls 'bud bud'.

In the light of all this variation, we now need to situate the speech we saw in Extracts 1 and 3 in a much broader repertoire. In Anwar's own account of the speech in those extracts, it is how he *always* speaks to his old school-friend Ronni—it's "our- different type of dialect, which is a- a typical Southallian language". In fact, he says in interview,

when we were at school, w- the way we were speaking, Southall had its own language... its own English... you like saying um: ((*in a more Caribbean accent*:)) "w' ya gaing man, w' y' aaff to" you know, "w' y' aaff to" you know and er:: ((*with glottal T in 'laters'*:)) "I see you la'ers" "la'ers" "I see you la'ers" you know, this type of language.

More than this, Anwar says that he loved his schooldays, his “best friends are from ... high school and ... junior school”, and even though they have good jobs in journalism and the civil service, he still greets them like this when he sees them now. So yes, it looks as though the mixed style we started with was forged in youth, but 25 years later, it still has powerful peer group connotations, very much rooted in personal experience in a particular milieu.

Let's now step back into a more analytic idiom.

## 2. What do we call Anwar's Southallian?

What we seem to have here is a way of speaking

- a) that draws on black Caribbean speech, though if you go too far and ‘think you're black’, you're seen as foolish;
- b) that draws on traditional British vernacular forms, and is definitely not the ‘proper version of English’;
- c) that involves some ritualised Punjabi in greetings etc., but doesn't require a Punjabi background or any real ability to speak it;
- d) that shows Punjabi phonological traces like retroflexion.

At the same time, it is also distinctive, and people differentiate it from other named styles of English circulating in this socio-linguistic space: ‘standard English’, ‘proper’ or ‘posh’; ‘bud bud’ or ‘freshie’; ‘black’, ‘kala’ or ‘Jamaican’; and ‘Cockney’, distinct from other traditionally white vernaculars like Geordie, Birmingham, etc.

Now it seems to me that as a way of talking that *recognises* some of these other varieties *but reproduces none*, as a style that is related-but-distinct like this, there is a hybridity here that inevitably complicates the business of labelling, and it is not surprising that there wasn't a consensual term for it in Southall. Indeed, maybe it is this relational identity, connected to ‘all points of the sociolinguistic compass’ but identical to none, which makes ‘youth’ seem a reasonable classification. After all, youth is associated with an intermediate, transitional social positioning, sensitive but not necessarily submissive to governing norms and authorities, and youth has got a strong positivity of its own, linked to intense forms of sociability. Indeed, within the life-span of the individual, it seems to be during school-aged youth that the style first develops.<sup>4</sup> *But* the acts and activities that it articulates may change as people get older, and we have seen that a dense vernacular mix of Creole, Cockney and Punjabi forms can still be a valued and quite flexible

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the sociolinguistic literature itself suggests more generally that the use of a vernacular may be most intense among teenagers (Androutsopoulos/Georgakopoulou 2003, p. 4).

resource in the repertoire of successful middle-aged professionals. So the term 'youth' fails to capture the facts of the social distribution of this way of speaking. Indeed a sociolinguistic phrase like 'youth language' doesn't accurately reflect either

- its users' age-profile,
- its durability,
- its non-standardness or
- its embedding in an area with a 50 year history of immigration.

What about other terms that have been used in this area of sociolinguistics: 'ethnolect', 'multi-ethnolect', 'late modern urban youth style', or 'Multicultural (London) English'? Well descriptively, all of these are better at suggesting something of the socio-historical dynamics giving shape to this way of talking. The mixed speech we have recorded from the 1980s to the present has emerged at the intersection of ethnicity, class, politics, education and popular culture, in an enduring context of immigration from the Indian subcontinent and socio-economic stratification in Britain, and 'youth language' hardly does justice to this (especially with its connotations of messing around, fashion, etc.). But there are several reasons for starting closer to Hewitt's 'local multi-ethnic vernacular' (1986). Just to remind you, Hewitt's local multi-ethnic vernacular involves:

- i) a hybrid combination of linguistic forms – in Harris' resumé, "a bedrock of traditional working class [...] English, elements of language from parental/grandparental 'homelands', elements of Jamaican Creole speech [...] and elements of Standard English" (Harris 2008, p. 14);
- ii) variation from locality to locality, responsive both to differences both in the 'bedrock' of traditional working class English – Cockney, Brummie, Geordie, Glaswegian, etc. – and to differences in the local migrant diaspora/heritage languages (Punjabi, Bengali, Turkish, Polish, etc.);
- iii) social and individual variation involving both 'broad' and 'light' uses and users, as situations and biographical trajectories draw people towards other styles in the polycentric environment to different degrees.

Compared with the terms 'lect', or just 'English',

- iv) the term 'vernacular' gives fuller recognition to the non-standardness and lower class associations of this mixed speech, and it also represents its collective durability better than 'style'.

And in fact, I would replace 'local multi-ethnic' with just:

- v) 'contemporary urban' for two reasons: first, 'local' risks excluding important elements of diasporic and global popular culture that circulate

in the urban linguascape. And second, ‘multi-’ over-emphasises the groups and varieties that these practices draw on, attending more to derivation than hybrid integration. In addition, ‘multi-ethnic’ is in fact very much assumed in ‘urban’ anyway.

So those are my reasons for wanting to talk about ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’.

Now of course, that proposal isn’t going to carry very far if you are working in a language where there is no equivalent term for ‘vernacular’. In addition, the phrase ‘contemporary urban vernacular’ may make more sense in London or Birmingham than in other cities, where the dynamics of class and race may be rather different. So obviously, if we are talking about naming, it is important to be sensitive to the specific options and nuances in different contexts.

However, underpinning my choice of ‘contemporary urban vernacular’ as a phrase to describe Anwar’s speech with Ronni, there is also a theoretical perspective that draws on relatively recent work in North American linguistic anthropology, and I would now like to turn to this, starting with the rejection of Labov.

### **3. Locating contemporary urban vernaculars in a theoretical context**

At least in Anglophone sociolinguistics, there is one major obstacle facing my proposal that we should describe crossing and mixing like Anwar’s as a contemporary urban vernacular.

Sociolinguistics has traditionally worked with a sharp dividing line between stylised and routine uses of language, and following Labov,<sup>5</sup> it has been non-self-conscious, non-stylised speech that sociolinguists have treated as the proper referent for dialect and vernacular labelling. Falling in line with a tradition that includes Saussure and Chomsky, a great deal of sociolinguistics has divided practice and agency from structure, and phenomena like code-switching and reflexive actions like crossing and stylisation have been allocated to pragmatics and interactional sociolinguistics rather than to dialectology and variationism. Indeed in my own references to the ‘local multiracial vernacular’ in the past, I have assumed that this is something distinct from code-switching, crossing and stylisation.

<sup>5</sup> “Not every (speech) style [...] is of equal interest to linguists. Some styles show irregular phonological and grammatical patterns, with a great deal of ‘hypercorrection’. In other styles, we find more systematic speech, where the fundamental relations which determine the course of linguistic evolution can be seen most clearly. This is the ‘vernacular’ – the style in which minimum attention is paid to the monitoring of speech” (Labov 1972, p. 208).

More recently, though, in accounts of register and 'enregisterment', Asif Agha has argued *against* this separation of routine and reflexively styled speech. Agha's 'register' refers to any identifiably distinct way of using language, and it covers the same kinds of things as 'variety' or 'style'. But in contrast to objectivist definitions, which simply describe a 'variety' as "a set of linguistic items with a similar social distribution",<sup>6</sup> Agha insists that reflexive metapragmatic practices play a vital role in the life of a register or style. If we accept this – if we accept that reflexivity and language ideology are built into the very definition of a register/style/variety – then the Labovian objection to my use of 'vernacular' falls away. On Agha's logic, 'vernaculars' simply wouldn't exist as such if it wasn't for stylisation, crossing and all sorts of other commentary, and following this through, we can now suggest that in places like Southall, crossing, stylisation and unself-conscious phonological mixing are all integral facets of the same process – different sides of the same vernacular 'coin'.

So my definition of a contemporary urban vernacular now includes:

vi) stylisation, crossing and a range of meta-pragmatic practices alongside routine speech,

and this means that we end up with 'contemporary urban vernaculars' defined as:

- sets of linguistic forms and enregistering practices (including crossing and stylisation) that
  - have emerged, are sustained and are felt to be distinctive in ethnically mixed urban neighbourhoods shaped by immigration and class stratification,
  - that are seen as connected-but-distinct from the locality's migrant languages, its traditional non-standard dialect, its national standard and its adult second language speaker styles, as well as from the prestige counter-standard styles circulating in (sometimes global) popular culture,

and, we should add,

- that are often widely noted and enregistered beyond their localities of origin, represented in media and popular culture as well as in the informal speech of people outside.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Hudson (1996, p. 22; Holmes 2001, p. 6). This traditional notion of a variety leaves the linguist potentially free to give a name to any bits of language that interest him/her, and it also erases the significant ideological role that linguistics itself plays in this baptism.

With that definition in place, let's just run a little further with the empirical and theoretical implications.

If we are including crossing and stylisation in our account, then we have to say that contemporary urban vernacular speech also incorporates fragmentary appropriations of other registers/styles/languages in the environment, and this takes us into the territory of Jørgensen and Møller's 'poly-lingual languaging' (e.g. Jørgensen 2008; Møller 2009). Jørgensen and Møller's 'poly-lingual languaging' is a sociolinguistic dynamic associated with situations of social change, and in it, people use fragments from differently valued languages that they don't speak proficiently or share with their interlocutors; linguistic forms can be hard to link to designated source languages; minority/majority language interpretations over-simplify; and the linguistic combinations often stand out to participants as non-routine, not just to analysts (Jørgensen 2008, p. 169).

Contemporary urban vernaculars as 'polylingual languaging'?? Is this now all getting a bit out of hand? Am I trying to have it both ways – on the one hand, yes, talking of something identifiable, nameable, determinate, but on the other, emphasising rampant heteroglossic mixing?

To address this, let me clarify the sub-disciplinary positioning of all this.

First, and just to repeat, when I say 'vernacular', I am *not* referring to the traditional object of structuralist sociolinguistic enquiry, the 'authentic, systematic core code' privileged by Labov. Yes, the selective targeting and isolation of particular styles for formal description remains an important task, but it is vital to go beyond the monoscopic scrutiny of one-code-at-a-time. With varying levels of awareness, in communicative practice people are continuously aligning or dissociating themselves from a range of circumambient sociolinguistic images and ideologies, and as Irvine (2001) has emphasised so clearly, if we want to understand the significance of a particular way of speaking, we have to see it alongside its significant others, analysing the relations of contrast and complementarity that give the style its value and distinctiveness.

Second, in talking about urban vernacular speech, I am interested in what Silverstein calls the 'total linguistic fact'.

The total linguistic fact, the datum for a science of language, is irreducibly dialectic in nature. It is an unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualised to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ideology. (Silverstein 1985, p. 220)

Working to the parameters set by Gumperz (1982, p. 29), Silverstein (1985), Hanks (1996, p. 230), Agha (2007), Coupland (2007) and Eckert's 3<sup>rd</sup> wave variationism (2010), the aim is to understand 'vernacular speech' as an interaction of form, practice and ideology.



Third, if you are pursuing the 'total linguistic fact' and you look closely at the pragmatics of polylingual languaging in particular places, the conspicuous incorporation of fragments from different languages may actually be a lot less chaotic than it might seem at first. Certainly, when I looked at crossing and stylisation in the 1980s, there was a great deal of consistency in the way in which adolescents stylised Indian English, Jamaican and Punjabi. With Indian English, for example, the double-voicing was overwhelmingly vari-directional, emphasising the difference between the speaker and the voice they were conjuring, whereas with Jamaican, it was uni-directional, almost invariably intimating the speaker's aspirational affiliation with the persona evoked by the voice (1995/2005, ch. 8.5). In fact, there was a lot of normative regimentation in the way kids discussed and practised crossing and stylisation, and what emerged overall from the continual stance-taking entailed in polylingual speech was a high degree of collective socio-indexical centring within the multilingual speech economy. In fact, as I have argued at some length elsewhere (e.g. Rampton 2011b):

In these polylingual practices, youngsters in this neighbourhood had developed a set of conventionalized interactional procedures that reconciled and reworked their ethnic differences within broadly shared experience of a working class position in British society. Race and ethnicity were very big and controversial issues in the media, education and public discourse generally, but in language crossing and stylisation, kids had found and affirmed enough common ground in the problems, pleasures and expectations of working class adolescent life to navigate or renegotiate the significance, risks and opportunities of ethnic otherness. Through language crossing, adolescents refigured ethnicities within the dynamics of British social class.

In this way, I suggest, rather spectacular polylingual practices have made a significant contribution to the formation of contemporary urban vernacular sensibilities.

'Vernacular *sensibilities*'? Now what kind of a notion is that?

'Sensibilities' is a rough-and-ready term that tries to anchor vernacular speech in the dispositions of its speakers, and remember that we have to find a formulation capable of encompassing the Total Linguistic Fact. Yes, we can describe vernacular speech itself as either a register or a style, but when we do, it is the definitions offered by Agha and Eckert that we are working with. Agha says that registers "establish forms of footing and alignment with [...] the types of persons, real or imagined" "indexed by [the] speech" (2005, p. 38), and according to Eckert, "every stylistic move is the result of an interpretation of the social world and of the meanings of elements within it, as well as a positioning of the stylizer with respect to that world" (2008, p. 456). The notion of competence, or even communicative competence, has too much structuralist baggage for this, and it is too closely tied to rules of language or rules of use (see Hanks 1996, ch. 10 for a critique).

Instead of competence, *habitus* probably presents itself as the most obvious theoretical concept to characterise the sociolinguistic mentality that urban vernacular speech is associated with, especially in the formulations that Hanks has given it:

Grounded in past experience and yet affecting the way that agents act, *habitus* is both a product of history and part of what produces history [...] it consists of what we have called the schematic aspects of practice, both in language and in the social context of practice. Unlike grammar, but much like an ideology, *habitus* is highly differentiated according to the actor's place in society. Not all people who speak the same language share the same routinised dispositions to perceive objects in the same way or to engage in verbal practices the same way. The concept of *habitus*, then, makes three contributions to a description of verbal practice: (1) it incorporates the phenomenon of habituation, which builds regularity at the level of action without relying on conceptual rules; (2) it integrates both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of practice, thereby avoiding the reification of language isolated from context; (3) being dispositional, it is perspectively centered rather than projecting into action the view-from-nowhere common to rule-based systems. (Hanks 1996, p. 239; 2005)

But if we look back at the data from Anwar, there is a problem. *Habitus* tends to be a rather encompassing term, covering the whole "set of enduring perceptual and actional schemes" (Hanks 1996, p. 240) that individuals develop over the life course. In contrast, urban vernacular Southallian is now just one among a number of styles or registers in Anwar's repertoire, and we need less of an all-embracing term to identify the outlook that the Southallian urban vernacular is associated with.

In his book *New Ethnicities & Language Use*, Roxy Harris suggested that we turn to Raymond Williams and his discussion of 'structures of feeling'. So here is some of what Williams says, and indeed, it is linked rather closely to sociolinguistic concerns like ours:

Structures of feeling: "In spite of substantial [...] continuities in grammar and vocabulary, *no generation speaks quite the same language as its predecessors*. The difference can be defined in terms of additions, deletions, and modifications, but these do not exhaust it. What really changes is something quite general, over a wide range, and the description that often fits the change best is the literary term 'style' [...]. Similar kinds of change can be observed in manners, dress, building, and other similar forms of social life [...] *what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period [...]. We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone [...] a specific structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions.*" (Williams 1977, p. 131; Harris 2006, p. 78 [my emphases])

In fact Williams and Harris go further, offering a simple but rather powerful vocabulary for describing how over time, particular styles and structures of feeling wax and wane in their influence. So as well as hegemonic or domi-

nant forms of consciousness, we can also talk about *emergent* and *residual* cultural formations, and if we look back at how Anwar himself talks about Southallian, it looks as though 'residual' could be particularly apt. As we saw, Anwar *still uses* Southallian, but for him, it is now closely tied to his strong continuing friendship with people he first knew at school. Now here is Williams' definition of the residual:

The residual [...] has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation. (Williams 1977, p. 122; Harris 2006, p. 86)

Of course, urban vernaculars like Southallian still have a very great deal of currency among youth, but if we narrow our horizons just to the biography of this middle-aged individual, maybe we can say that Anwar's "hor kiddaa how's ings at a yudd" flows from an urban vernacular structure of feeling that is now rather more residual.

So, let me now recap on the theoretical framework underpinning my use of the term 'contemporary urban vernacular'. In this perspective,

- there is a rejection of the Labovian separation of structure from agentive practice,
- there is a commitment to investigating the TOTAL LINGUISTIC FACT, spanning form, ideology and situated practice,

and

- crossing and stylisation are analysed as processes of socio-indexical centring, valorising the social space in which more routine linguistic practices take shape.

Then turning from speech to speakers

- 'habitus' fits much better than 'competence',

but

- as the urban vernacular may only be one register among a number in someone's repertoire, we need to break this down further. Williams' 'structure of feeling' looks useful, and
- Williams' trichotomy dominant-emergent-residual encourages us to address shifts in the vernacular's influence over biographical and historical time.

### Two points in closing

First, there is no reason for restricting this perspective to studies of the vernacular, and at least in the UK, sociolinguistic research on standard English would benefit very substantially from a linguistic anthropological perspective like this. So in the (re)production of standard styles in different places, we can ask what constellation of styles operate as the most significant ‘others’, appropriated how? Local non-standard vernaculars may be vital, indeed constitutive, points of contrastive reference, but what about migrant, minority and modern foreign languages (French, *Deutsch*) or indeed a school language like Latin? What kinds of relationship between self and voice get projected in the stylisation of standard codes – are these stereotyped or flexible, affiliative or mocking – and how does this differ for people in different social positions? And then of course, how far and in what ways are processes of standard and vernacular reproduction similar or different in the way they acknowledge, ignore or derogate other styles in their environment? How similar or different are the practices that give standards their hegemony and vernaculars their vitality?

Second, finally (and going back to my main focus on contemporary urban vernaculars and the case-study evidence of sociolinguistic durability), here is a simple point that is certainly relevant in the British political landscape. ‘Urban vernacular’ has the obvious advantage of terminological simplicity over complicated formulations like ‘multiethnic adolescent heteroglossia’ or ‘late modern urban youth style’. If we reclaim an accessible and widely known term like ‘vernacular’ from the methodological strictures of structuralist sociolinguistics, then maybe we can also normalise the kind of urban speech we are examining, moving it out of the ‘marked’ margins, not just in sociolinguistic study but maybe also in normative public discourse.

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